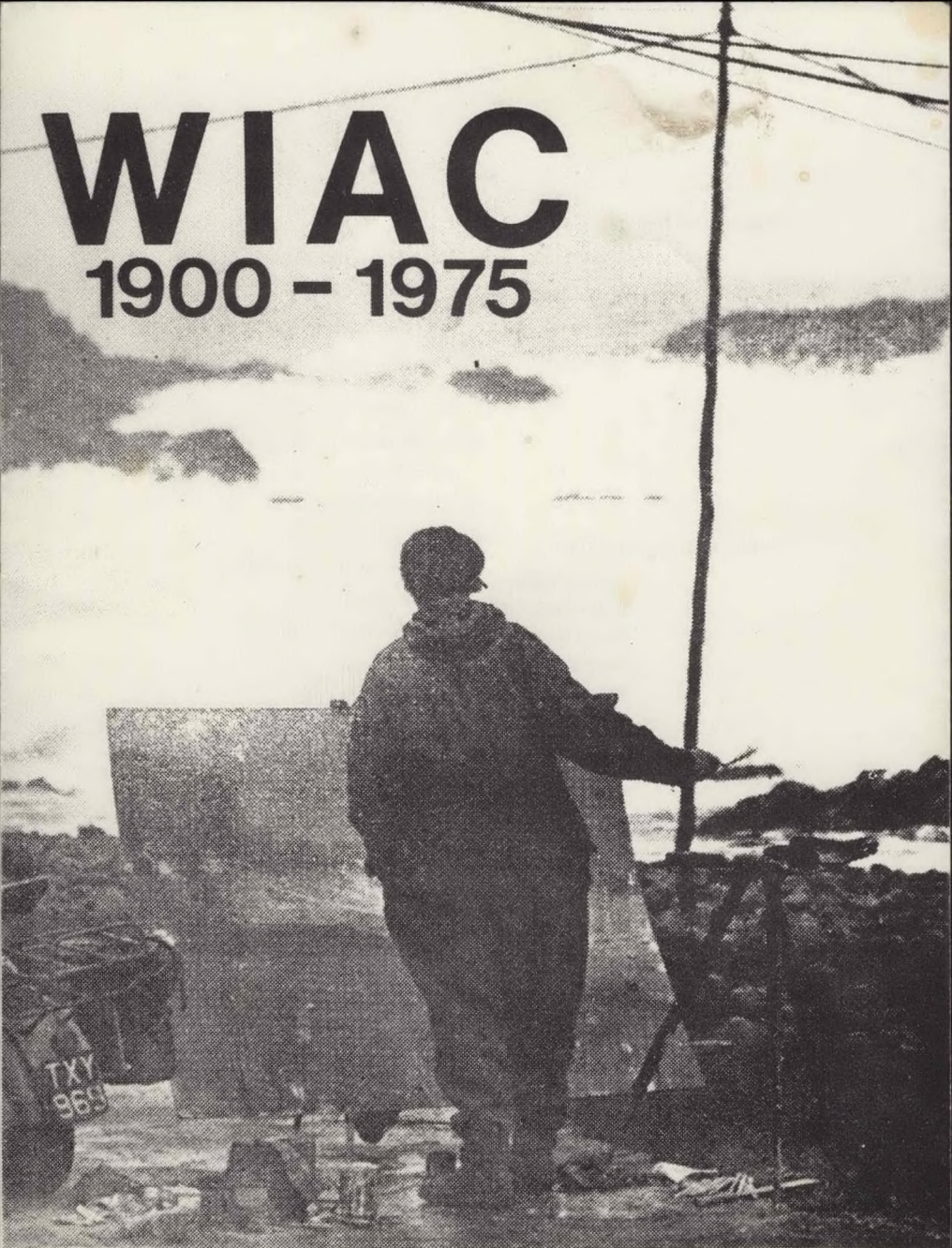


W I A C

1900 - 1975



JOAN EARDLEY, CATTERLINE, APRIL 1960. PHOTOGRAPH, AUDREY WALKER, FROM SCOTTISH ART REVIEW 1964

Camden Art Centre
Arkwright Road N.W.3
Womens International Art Club
January 14 - February 5 1975

Tuesday to Friday 11-8
Saturday 11-6
Sunday 2-6
Closed on Monday
Admission Free

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W.I.A.C.
White House,
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Rickmansworth, Herts.

The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Exhibition of The Women's International Art Club (1900-1975)

This quite singular exhibition of contemporary international artists is unique of its kind. Janus-like it manifestly serves different ends while also provoking a series of apparently equivocal questions.

On the one hand, it is a commemorative event which marks seventy-five years of ceaseless artistic endeavour in a particularly disruptive century. On the other - Janus' other aspect - it singularizes the work executed by a particular sector of artists of our time, whose creativity has been an integral part of every moment of the century to date.

Women artists of the twentieth century - their work, industry and lasting achievements are celebrated at this commemorative occasion, which is a reminder of an all too obvious if seldom appreciated fact, that art is as hard and demanding labour for women artists as for all artists. Although women's artistic achievements are not generally recognized, this cannot, logically, negate their indisputable existence, any more than this lack of recognition detracts from their considerable artistic excellence. What this neglect does reflect is a collective, social "forgetfulness" common to many critics, historians, recorders. It also reveals some of the major lacunae which beggar a good deal of art history. This continuing "forgetfulness" occasions this particular exhibition. It was, in fact, one of the main reasons which originally inspired a group of determined women artists at the turn of the century to found the W.I.A.C.

In a sense, the exhibition therefore commemorates society's constant, traditional disregard of its women's creative contributions. The whole subject of their achievements provokes a number of fundamental questions which some fine day may claim from us the attention they deserve, for they are questions about the nature of art and about the social values which our judgments of it reflect. This exhibition can only provide the visual raw material of an answer.

Women artists, though quickly "forgotten" by subsequent generations, are, and always have been, recognized by their peers. Artists themselves frequently abstain from discriminative blinkers (sexual or racial) since the pursuit of all that is "singular" is part and parcel of their work. The general neglect of women's art owes less to aesthetic cannons than to social values. This raises the wider issue of whether it is society which creates the artists in its own image or the converse.

This century, like the nineteenth, is particularly indebted to the immense creativity of women artists. To be provocative, I can ask, who were Margaret and Frances Macdonald? Who were their collaborating husbands? And what significance did their work have for the major art movements of this century? (The inimitable Glasgow four who fired the Secessionists and turned the Jugendstil into the Modern Movement) Why is it that we "forget" the overwhelming contribution of Jane and Elizabeth Burden, Kay Faulkner, Mrs. Wardle, Mrs. Crampfield, Mrs. Holiday, as well as Jane and May Morris, Lady Georgina Burne-Jones and Lizzie Siddal? Why do we consider the Pre-Raphaelite movement and the Morris & Co. workshops as primarily and fundamentally male achievements?

Our memories suffer a similar "collective repression mechanism" in regard to the Russian Constructivists, despite the fact that the movement benefitted greatly from the artistic drive, innovations, and originality of such women artists as Barbara Stepanova, Elizabeth Kruglikova, Olga Aleksayeva, Lamanova, Vera Mukhina, Natalia Danko, Kanayeva, etc. The list is endless. The Dadaists and the Surrealists existed as social-artistic-units splendidly endowed with major women artists such as Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Emmy Hennings, Sonia Delauney, Suzanne Duchamp, Nelly van Doesburg, the influential Marie Laurencin, Leonor Carrington, Dorothea Tanning, Meret Oppenheim. The Bauhaus was a veritable hive of women's artistic industry! Gunta Stölzl, Anni Albers, Helene Nonne, Monica Bella Broner, Elizabeth Broner, Marianne Brandt, Ilse Fehling, Alma Buscher, Hannah Höch, etc.

Sculpture has been richly endowed with the enormous vitality and creative output of Barbara Hepworth, Louise Nevelson, Goncharova, Elizabeth Frink, Nicola Pisano, Renée Sintenis, Germaine Richier, Bourgeois, Mary Callery, Kathe Kollwitz. Contemporary American art owes much to the great Georgia O'Keefe and Mary Cassat, also to Grace Hartigan, Helen Frankenthaler, Ruth Gikow, Rice Pereira, Joan Mitchell, to mention (unfairly) but a few.

The British scene has been done proud by its women artists, Hepworth, Frink, Riley, Anne Redpath, Vanessa Bell, Gwen John, Eileen Agar, Sandra Blow, Sheila Fell, Elsa Fraenkl, Sue Fuller, Frances Richards, Wendy Pasmore, etc.

A great number of the above named participants in the major artistic movements of the twentieth century have been members of the W.I.A.C. and have contributed annually to the Club's exhibitions. Many artists have been greatly assisted by the facilities the Club has constantly extended to women artists.

It is a sad reflection that many of these artists, once they have gained their reputations, cease to take as active an interest in the club, and even fight shy of it. The reason for this again reverts to the very "forgetfulness" which inspired the creation of the W.I.A.C. and to the reason why it has continued to exist and be of service. For it is almost as hard now as in the past, if not harder in some ways, for women to break into the hallowed precincts of "the established" art world and be recognized as artists, rather than "women-artists"—which is almost synonymous, in some circles, with "housewife's crafts". It is almost a matter of self-preservation that female artists cut themselves away from any organization which emphasizes their womanhood. Paradoxically, it was a woman, Angelica Kauffman, who founded the Royal Academy, which later became a bastion of resistance against women artists.

This collective exhibition is an eclectic assemblage of contemporary women's art. It is, furthermore, but a sample and a sample which is dependant upon the willingness of individual artists to submit their work for selection and hanging. It is the more unusual because lacking the customary subject-cohesion of most exhibitions. The only common denominator between each exhibit is the gender of its creator. Until recognition is given to women's art as an automatic and integral part of our historical awareness of the arts, the need for such exhibitions, however anomalous, and for such organizations as the W.I.A.C. will continue. The W.I.A.C. deserves the unstinting support of public and private sponsors, patrons, contributors and especially of all professional women artists.

Heather Gordon-Cremonesi

Heather Gordon-Cremonesi, Historian, Artist and Film-maker, is currently writing Femina Sapiens, a cultural history of women, is a Cambridge graduate, and M.A. from Yale University.

Photographs of some distinguished women artists who have exhibited with the Society

In the Canteen:—

1. Vanessa Bell
2. Sonia Delaunay
3. Joan Eardley
4. Elizabeth Frink
5. Gertrude Hermes
6. Gwen John
7. Dame Laura Knight
8. Kathe Kollwitz
9. Marie Laurencin
10. Berthe Morisot
11. Winifred Nicholson
12. Ann Redpath

New WIAC Women Photographers

Corinne Courtenay-Bishop

Elizabeth Martin

Anna du Puget

E. Simson

Gwen Tilly

Elizabeth White

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