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(Front cover)
Dorothy Dehner,
Prelude and Fugue (1989),
painted black steel,
99" x 103" x 33".
Photo: Berry Campbell
Gallery, New York.
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Woman's Art Journal was honored to receive many longtime and new friends at the annual College Art Association's onsite book and trade fair in New York. We recently launched our newly revamped website and social media campaign, where readers and contributors can find our updated editorial policies, at <https://womansartjournal.org>. For WAJ's Spring/Summer issue, the editors have assembled articles that retrieve the histories of fiercely ambitious, dedicated women artists. Two contributions probe the epic personal narratives of postwar twentieth-century artists pushing the boundaries of three-dimensional space, an excellent pendant to two incisive, thought-provoking essays on the unorthodox practices of modern and contemporary portraitists.

Our feature article by Sophie Lachowsky explores the connections among women sculptors of the Abstract Expressionist era. Recent publications have granted attention to women painters of the 1950s, however, this generation of women sculptors was relegated primarily to monographic studies. Only a few scholars have proposed the social and artistic interactions of Dorothy Dehner and Louise Nevelson, or the related works, in wood, by Louise Bourgeois. Lachowsky carefully considers the interrelated sculptural experimentations by Dehner, Nevelson, and Bourgeois, three women whose pioneering approaches to art in three dimensions—propelled by the utilization of innovative materials—established original methods and dramatic displays. Nevelson's stacked wood installations, culled from recycled materials, strongly parallel the interior scenes of Bourgeois's *Personages*. Dehner's surprising update to the traditional lost wax process, via the creation of openwork constructions, explains her success in the 1950s and thereafter. All three artists were at the forefront of postwar sculptural installations, but only in recent decades have they received international recognition.

Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarman is presented by Donna Stein as one of the most accomplished multidisciplinary artists of her generation in Iran and the US. An expert on Iranian art, Stein retrieves from her archives an important interview with Monir from 1985, a fascinating recollection that explores the artist's enterprising and ambitious travels to Indigenous communities throughout Iran. Monir developed important relationships with the artisans from nomadic and settled tribes, and she acquired traditional paintings, jewelry, ceramics, textiles, and carpets. Some of these exquisite historical examples impacted the direction of her contemporary work. "In Her Words" is a revelatory encounter that illustrates Monir's indebtedness to the Iranian craftspeople whom she met throughout her singular career, many influencing her technical development of bas-relief constructions, tapestries, and Persian *ayeneh-kari* (mirror work).

A graduate of Rutgers University's Douglass College and MFA program, Frances Kuehn studied with Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Watts, and Geoffrey Hendricks. The progressive curriculum of Black Mountain College was favored by the great artists and teachers then making up the faculty at Rutgers, and Kuehn's exposure to this nonconventional arts education inspired her freedom to explore many new directions. Like George Segal, also then on the Rutgers campus, Kuehn pursued a deeply personal response to the study of the figure. Heather Cammarata-Seale's article begins with Kuehn's images of family members. Her paintings take a different course by 2003. Fabrics

and garments, arranged in grid-like configurations, dominate the canvas and elicit natural, mimetic, and animated bodily and nonhuman forms. Cammarata-Seale calls them *nature vivante* paintings—still lifes-cum-portraits—fabricating a "thing power" from their compositional vitality. Kuehn says "all our possessions speak about us in silent ways."

The portraits of early-twentieth-century painter Romaine Brooks offer sibylline representations of decadent queerness. Drawn to Whistler's subdued color palette and dandy iconography, Brooks utilized an anachronistic Decadent style associated with Symbolism and Aestheticism. Elizabeth Richards Rivenbark argues that Brooks' aesthetic and ideological tendencies align more comfortably with the later postmodern era, a position that advances how the radical gender slippage portrayed by Brooks' portrait sitters transformed the visual and sexual tropes of modern lesbianism.

Our meticulous WAJ book reviews editor, Alison Poe, has brought to fruition an exceptional corpus of criticism. Examining the "place-based strategies of transnational sisterhood and solidarity," Maria Constantino's review on global women artists explores the collective strategies of "belonging" and "unbelonging" that operate from the "in-between" spaces, borders, and geographies of nation states, political structures, and patriarchal institutions. Charlotte Kent's intertwined narratives of art and technology chart the feminist and gender-fluid histories of new media and digital projects, including AI, VR, and AR. Lisa Farrington surveys two book projects: on Bina Butler's exhibition catalogue of quilted portraits, Farrington sumptuously harnesses the artist's capacity to guide, by way of fabric, the viewer's focus beyond race with the "seeming ease of wielding a paintbrush"; and in a separate volume, Faith Ringgold, renowned for her story quilts, is showcased by a lesser-known decade of her political agendas and activities. Joan Marter chronicled the leading women's postwar arts program and exhibition series at Douglass College, reviewed in depth by Heather Cammarata-Seale.

Contextualizing the rich histories of feminism, eroticism, and sexuality in the interwar period, Ashley Busby uncovers the mysterious persona and art of the avant-garde Czech surrealist, Toyen. Andrea Gremels's review likewise unsilences the histories of Germanophone women artists and trauma theory, extending the "palimpsestic" character of surrealism's feminist landscape beyond World War II. Sigourney Schultz unveils the intimate truths and human experiences of Gillian Wearing, a British multidisciplinary artist who "exhorts her audience to be who they would like to be, not what others want them to be." Brigitte Keslinke sheds light on the perpetually marginalized status of ancient Roman women and other communities in the scholarship of the ancient Mediterranean, recuperating the deep silences from the rich archeological bounty of textual and material evidence in the Bay of Naples, and turning an extraordinary volume of female-centric narratives and proposals into an "inclusive toolbox" for examining the Roman world.

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Joan Marter and Aliza Rachel Edelman
Editors, *Woman's Art Journal*

Missing Data Sets (2016) by Mimi Onuoha (b. 1989), which invites viewers to open a physical file cabinet containing empty folders labeled with topics that lack established or publicly available data (e.g., “English language rules internalized by native speakers,” “Cause of June 2015 black church fires”). The chapters “Feminist Artists and the Gaming Industry” and “Japanese Feminism, Video Games, and Anime” are both excellent introductory texts that can serve as memory lists for those familiar with these topics.

The pitfalls of condensing information are evident in the chapter “Artificial Intelligence, Facial Recognition, and Virtual Reality,” which limits its discussion of AI to robotics, ignoring many other important artistic practices involving machine learning and algorithms. This is a shame, as a broader treatment would have brought the book full circle by returning to artists mentioned in the first chapter, like Vera Molnár (b. 1924), whose art practice over the last sixty years has playfully explored the potential of algorithms, and whose work has recently been referenced by numerous contemporary practitioners of generative art. The section on VR makes no mention of Char Davies (b. 1954), whose *Osmose* (1995) responds to users’ breath in their navigation of the virtual space, reinforcing phenomenological relations between the self and the world; it remains one of

the most thought-provoking applications of VR. Brodsky focuses on artists’ use of VR to comment on global sociopolitical issues, but the immersive nature of VR also raises other feminist discourses, particularly that of embodiment, and many artists cultivate this more personal dimension of the medium. Distinguishing VR from Augmented Reality (AR) is increasingly important, and the last chapter’s examination of “Digital Public Art and Augmented Reality” helpfully addresses AR’s greater accessibility, discussing artists who employ smartphone apps to introduce people, landscapes, abstract shapes, sounds, historic landmarks, and/or imagined elements into viewers’ experiences of their environment. The artists are major figures, but the works selected are didactic in a way that does not do justice to their practice. While the emergent medium bears great potential for broadening audience engagement with climate change, community histories, social dynamics, and other issues addressed across Brodsky’s book, it also offers beauty and subtlety that are not conveyed here.

With the explosion of interest in digital art recently, *Dismantling the Patriarchy, Bit by Bit: Art, Feminism, and Digital Technology* provides a needed overview of the creative and critical work that artists in this realm are doing to disrupt hegemonic forces. The faltering discussions of assorted practices in a few

of the chapters disappoint, but such lapses are inevitable in a book that covers so much ground. The feminist critique of dominant social systems expressed by technology is the responsibility not only of artists but of scholars as well. Brodsky’s book is an important survey that can easily be excerpted for particular use in courses on digital culture or gender studies, but much more must still be written about the convergence of art and technology through an intersectional feminist lens. •

Charlotte Kent, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Visual Culture at Montclair State University and an arts writer. She has contributed to numerous magazines and academic journals and is an Editor-at-Large for *The Brooklyn Rail*. She is the co-editor of *Contemporary Absurdities, Existential Crises, and Visual Art* (Intellect Books, forthcoming) with Katherine Guinness.

Notes

1. On approaches to the biological sciences in art, see recently Ellen K. Levy and Charissa N. Terranova, eds., *D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson’s Generative Influences in Art, Design, and Architecture: From Forces to Forms* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), reviewed by Christine Filippone in *Woman’s Art Journal* 43, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2022): 41–44.

Faith Ringgold: Politics Power

By Faith Ringgold, Michele Wallace,
and Kirsten Weiss
Weiss Publications, 2022

Reviewed by Lisa Farrington

Authored by Faith Ringgold (b. 1930), her daughter Michele Wallace, and Kirsten Weiss of Weiss Publications in Berlin and New York, this 104-page volume illustrates and discusses the artist’s works from 1967, when her iconic *Black Light Series* was conceived, to 1981, when Ringgold began to create her story quilts. Linen-

bound with an embossed cover, the book features thirty-two color images and fourteen historic black-and-white photos and documents related to the artist’s political activities. Ideal for a student audience, the book pairs each image with a short essay that discusses the work’s significance or how its iconographic and formal elements communicate the artist’s political agenda. Each page spread is highlighted by a quote from Ringgold that further reveals the meaning of the featured work of art. For example, the painting *Black Light Series #1: Big Black* is heralded with the words “I wanted to paint dark tones ... to create *black light*.”

Ringgold’s words allude to the inherent racism in the classic technique of chiaroscuro, which relegates dark tones (including skin tones) to the background and utilizes light tones to bring forms forward.

The first section of *Politics Power* is devoted to *Black Light Series #1-12* (1967–69; Fig. 1), in which Black figures—mostly heads and busts—or evocative words (e.g., “American,” “Black,” “Art,” and a racist imprecation incorporated into an American flag) occupy canvases either left whole or subdivided using color. Essays are, in some cases, straightforward descriptions of the works. Others offer insights into

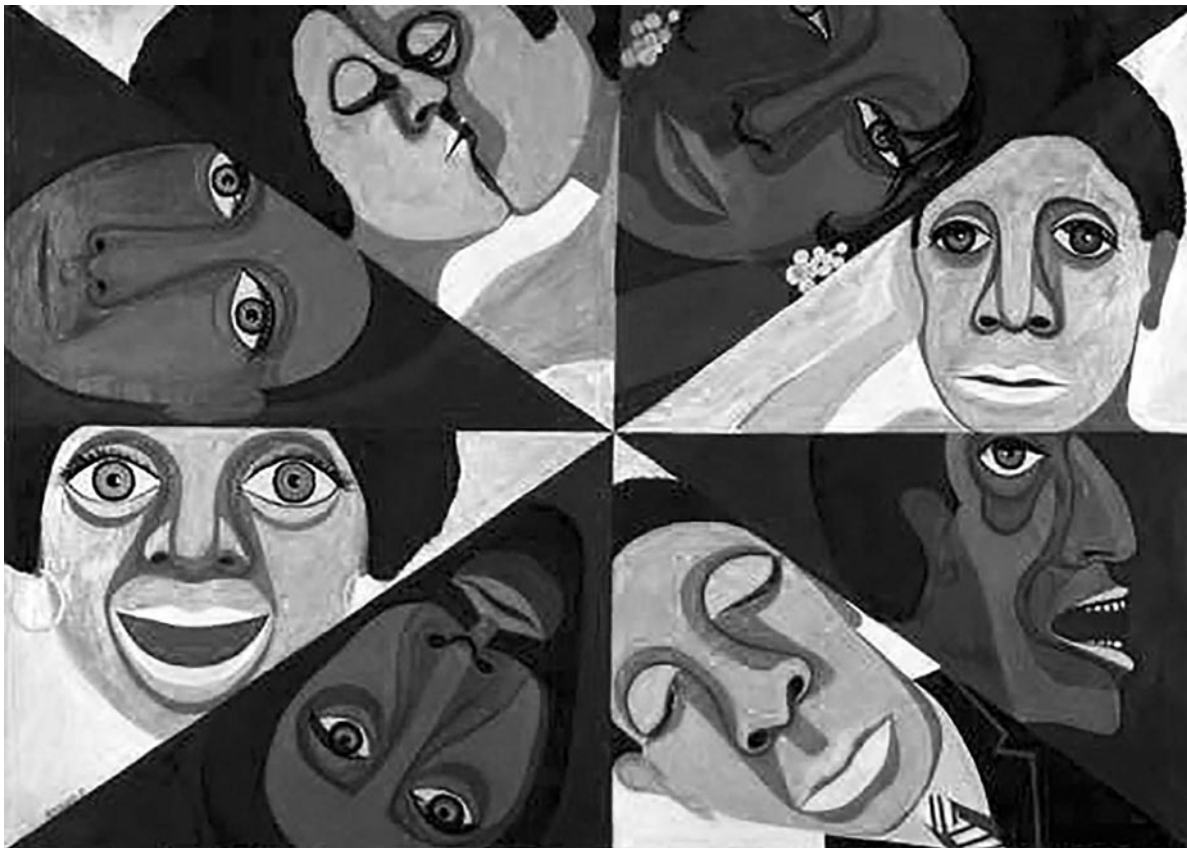


Fig. 1. Faith Ringgold, *Black Light Series #11: US America Black* (1969), oil on canvas, 60" x 84". Private collection.

Ringgold's use of abstract forms derived from African sculpture and textiles; her inclusion of self-portraiture and autobiographical content in the series; her relationship to other artists of the 1960s, such as Jasper Johns; and the importance of poster art as an egalitarian medium—available to a wide public rather than only to the art-world elite. For those who have never seen the original paintings, some reproductions (especially those with figures) give the impression that the entire *Black Light* grouping is comprised of paintings that are quite dark, an element that conveniently jibes with the title of the series and with numerous references in the essays. The fact is that some images are printed darker than the paintings actually are—an aspect of the book that belies the artist's use of vivid reds and electric blues in addition to shades of black and brown. Such vibrant hues are indicative of the artist's search for a new palette with which to replace chiaroscuro and, one might speculate, to express the vivacity of Black people.

In the second half of the book, Ringgold's political posters are featured, as is the 1970 printed manifesto for the women's art group WSABAL (Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation), founded by the artist and her daughters. Posters include those dedicated to the Black Panthers, activist Angela Davis, and the Judson Three (Ringgold and artists Jean Toche and Jon Hendricks, who were arrested for "flag desecration" after organizing a 1970 exhibition of American flag imagery that harshly critiqued American racism and violence). Included as well are selections from the artist's *Feminist* and *Slave Rape* series, in the style of Tibetan *thangka* paintings (cloth-bordered and hung on dowels), her mural *For the Women's House* (dedicated to incarcerated women), and her masks, dolls, installations, and performances that honor the Black family and memorialize Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the more than two dozen Black youths murdered in Atlanta between 1979 and 1981.

Politics Power closes with a brief biography of the artist and a selected bibliography. It is a superb compilation of images from the period, of telling quotes from the artist, and of accessible analyses. Admittedly ideal for neophyte and student audiences, it will likely attract Ringgold devotees as well, due to its emphasis on a heretofore lesser-known decade in the artist's career. •

Lisa Farrington is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the City University of New York and past Associate Dean of Fine Arts at Howard University. She is the author of several books, including *African American Art: A Visual and Cultural History* (Oxford University Press, 2016) and the award-winning *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists* (Oxford University Press, 2005, 2nd ed. 2011).