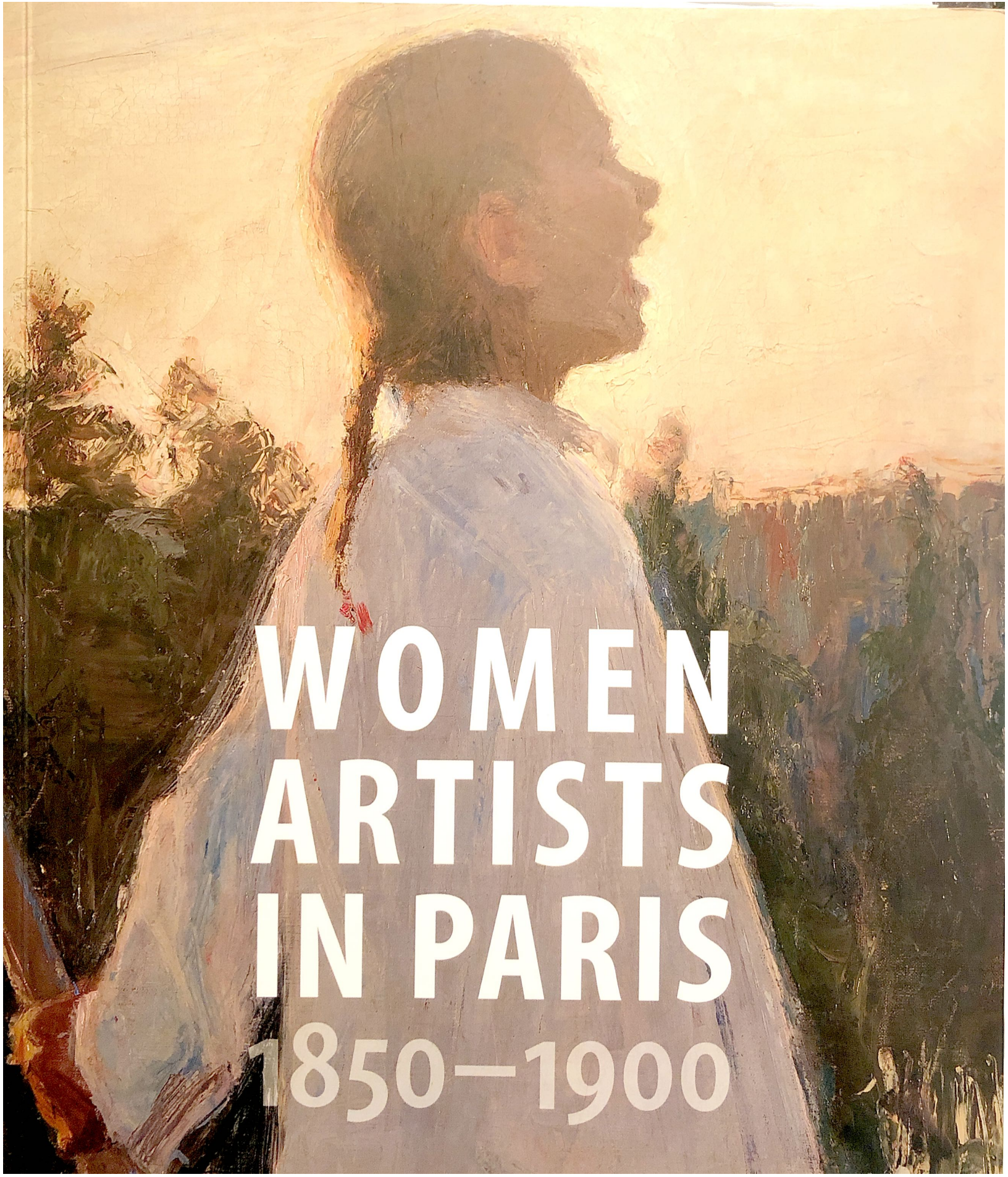

WOMEN ARTISTS IN PARIS

1850–1900

LAURENCE MADELINE

WITH

BRIDGET ALSDORF

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AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS, NEW YORK

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vi **Foreword**
PAULINE WILLIS, DIRECTOR, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS

viii **Lenders to the Exhibition**

ix **Acknowledgments**

1 **Into the Light: Women Artists, 1850–1900**
LAURENCE MADELINE

25 **Painting the *Femme Peintre***
BRIDGET ALSDORF

41 **Women Artists and Impressionism**
RICHARD KENDALL

55 **Marie Bracquemond, Impressionist Innovator: Escaping the Fury**
JANE R. BECKER

69 **Female Artists in the Nordic Countries: Training and Professionalization**
VIBEKE WAALLANN HANSEN

Plates

82 **The Art of Painting**

102 **Lives of Women**

126 ***La toilette***

144 **Picturing Childhood**

168 **A Modern Landscape**

190 **The Question of History**

220 ***Jeunes filles***

240 **Artist Biographies**
JOËLLE BOLLOCH

258 **Female Painters at the Paris Salon**
JOËLLE BOLLOCH

266 **Selected Bibliography**

270 **Index**

277 **Photo Credits**

278 **AFA Trustees**

Consuélo Fould, *Portrait of Rosa Bonheur*, 1892–94 [detail of fig. 11]

BRIDGET ALSDORF

Painting the *Femme Peintre*

"Genius is male," wrote the Goncourt brothers in 1857. The splenetic pair, whose chronicle of the literary and artistic social life of Paris launched the modern genre of malicious celebrity gossip, go on to imagine the autopsies of writers Madame de Staël and George Sand. Suspecting a "hermaphrodite" biology, they assume a physiological foundation for the masculine traits exhibited in these women's life and work.[1] The Goncourts were similarly fascinated by the animal painter Rosa Bonheur, both for her fame and for her rejection of feminine conventions. (Bonheur lived with a woman and had an official permit from the Paris police to dress like a man, allowing her to sketch at the city's slaughterhouses and horse markets without attracting attention.) Desperate to meet her, they finagled an introduction through a mutual friend in 1859. Bonheur dreaded the meeting but felt obliged to do it as a favor. Expressing her dislike for the brothers, she knew "the ways of the world" well enough to be wary and fully on her guard.[2] As expected, they studied her as if she were a circus curiosity, mercilessly dissecting her manners and appearance. They then described her in their *Journal* as a woman with "the head of a little humpbacked Polish Jew," and proceeded to mock her "eternal friend" Nathalie Micas for looking like an old, exhausted mime.[3] The Goncourts reserved their greatest bile for the artists they envied, those whose talent and fame exceeded their own. They were all the more vicious if the artist seemed to them "effeminate" or, even worse, a woman.

The Goncourts' reaction to Bonheur is not exactly typical, but it is certainly telling. It is only a slightly more extreme and rhetorically colorful version of an attitude to women artists than was common among their male peers in nineteenth-century France: a mix of fascination and ridicule, dismissal and disdain. Respect and admiration were rare, and typically expressed in sexist, backhanded terms, lauding women for "painting like a man."[4]

Despite significant progress throughout the nineteenth century in women's access to artistic training and exhibition opportunities, the image of the artist remained

predominantly male. Creative genius, inspiration, and intellectual interpretation were seen as masculine domains, and bohemian rebellion against bourgeois society was far more risky for women artists than for their male peers. There is excellent scholarship on the various associations, schools, and teaching studios that allowed women artists to advance their careers in mid- to late nineteenth-century France, and this research is frank about the social and institutional barriers that remained, well into the twentieth century and beyond.[5] This essay, while drawing upon that scholarship, will focus on how these artists were perceived and positioned by their colleagues *in paint* and, occasionally, how they responded in representations of their own. Shifting between views of women artists (or the notable lack thereof) in works by male painters of the period and representations by women artists themselves, I aim to illuminate an area of women's artistic culture that has received relatively little attention: the ways their identities as artists were contested on canvas, often in relation to the artistic identities of men.

Competition structured virtually every aspect of the art world in late nineteenth-century Paris—the École des Beaux-Arts, the Salon, the press, and the market. The city was flooded with artists, native and foreign, vying for success, a situation that made it especially difficult for women to find support among their male peers. In fact, artists were even less progressive in recognizing

Fig. 1. Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904), *Homage to Delacroix: Cordier, Duranty, Legros, Fantin-Latour, Whistler, Champfleury, Manet, Bracquemond, Baudelaire, A. de Balleroy*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 63 × 98½ in. (160 × 250 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris, RF1664

Fig. 2. Victoria Dubourg Fantin-Latour (French, 1840–1926), *Still Life*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 20⅞ × 24¾ in. (53 × 63 cm). Musée de Grenoble, RF3766

the work of women artists than the French state. When the state transferred control of the Salon to artists in 1881, women artists had even greater difficulty gaining admission to the exhibition. The first Salon organized by artists admitted half as many works by women artists as the state-run jury had the previous year.[6] This led to the formation of the Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs in December 1881, with the aim of forming a separate Salon specifically for the work of women artists. An editorial in the *Gazette des femmes* put it plainly: "Rightly or wrongly, they have judged that at the Salon the male artists falsely claim for themselves the lion's share and treat women's work with excessive disdain."[7] The union gave women artists a regular exhibition venue and a new sense of autonomy over their careers. But although its founders emphasized inclusiveness and mutual support, this association was defined by the same thorny mix of solidarity and rivalry, collectivism and individualism, that defined male artist groups. These tensions were compounded by the added pressure of legitimation: as the main organization representing women artists in France, the union needed to prove that its standards of quality were high.[8] In their struggle to manage their individual and collective reputations as *femmes artistes*, the women of the union disagreed about how to chip away at the pervasive idea of the artist, and of genius, as male.

This idea of the artist was bolstered by painting of the period. Between 1864 and 1885, Henri Fantin-Latour painted five large-scale group portraits of artists, writers, and musicians that forged a new yet still overwhelmingly masculine image of collective artistic identity [fig. 1]. Although their hermetic interior settings suggest a withdrawal from public life, they functioned as painted manifestos at the Salon, announcing a shared aesthetic philosophy as well as a commitment to locating inspiration in mutual admiration and homage. As group portraits, these pictures insisted on the fundamentally collective, reciprocal nature of artistic progress, despite the strain of rivalry and individualism fracturing their forms. But that ideal of collectivity and solidarity hinged in no small part on the exclusion of women, who threatened to disrupt the egalitarian ideal of the homosocial structure.

This exclusion is particularly notable in Fantin's case, since his wife, Victoria Dubourg, was a talented and accomplished artist, known in artistic circles for her intelligence as well as her technical skill.[9] A prolific still-life painter [fig. 2], she regularly exhibited at the Paris Salon and the Royal Academy in London. She shared her husband's devotion to the Old Masters—they were both excellent copyists, and met while painting the same Correggio in the Louvre—as well as his aesthetic commitment to Realism and resistance to Impressionist techniques. She also devoted much of her life to promoting his career and preserving his legacy. And yet there is no indication that Fantin ever considered including her—or any of the other women artists he knew well, such as Berthe Morisot and Marie Bracquemond—in his group portraits. These group portraits track a period of tremendous change in women artists' opportunities in Paris, including the proliferation of private studio schools open to women, their active participation in the Impressionist exhibitions, and the founding of the union. And yet Fantin's image of the artist, and of artistic association, remained adamantly male.

Fig. 3. Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917), *Victoria Dubourg*, ca. 1868–69. Oil on canvas, 32 × 25½ in. (81.3 × 64.8 cm). Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William E. Levis, 1963.45

It is not that Fantin had no interest in painting Dubourg, or that she was unwilling to pose. Fantin painted her reading or simply sitting (never painting) on several occasions, and again in *The Dubourg Family* (1878), where she is defined in relation to her family as a daughter and sister and in relation to Fantin as a wife.[10] Edgar Degas painted her in 1868 or 1869, right around the time of her engagement to Fantin, and his portrait vaguely alludes to Dubourg's vocation in its emphasis on her reddened hands, intelligent eyes, and the bouquet of flowers near her head [fig. 3]. But however arresting this portrait is as an image of unvarnished femininity, engaging candor, and confidence, it is not—at least not explicitly—the portrait of an artist. Degas originally planned to include two paintings on the wall behind Dubourg, more overtly referencing her trade and aesthetic allegiances, but these details were ultimately removed.[11] Dubourg was never painted as a painter, despite her constant presence at the easel both at home and in the Louvre, not to mention the notable success of her work in Paris and London.[12] This fact is all the more remarkable in that Fantin painted two pictures of women artists at work.[13] *The Drawing Lesson* (1879) depicts one of his few students, Louise Riesener, and her friend drawing in his studio, and a study of 1883 depicts another student, the English woman Sarah Budgett, contemplating a blank canvas and a vase of flowers with palette in hand [fig. 4]. Both paintings were highly successful, exhibited internationally to critical acclaim.[14] One can only speculate as to why these women captured Fantin's artistic imagination when Dubourg—at least in her role as a painter—did not. Perhaps he was more comfortable depicting women artists as students. Dubourg was his partner and peer, with a style dangerously close to his own.

Fantin's group portraits never included a female writer or musician, either. *The Toast! Homage to Truth* (1865) featured a nude female model as an allegory of Truth, but the artist destroyed this picture after a disastrous reception at the Salon, due in no small part to the awkward presence of a woman in a room full of men.[15] Victoria Dubourg's absence from *Around the Piano* (1885) is particularly notable, given that she introduced Fantin to the German music—Wagner, Schumann, Brahms—to which this work and so many of his lithographs pay tribute [fig. 5].[16] (She was also an excellent musician. The piano featured in the painting was played primarily by her.) In fact, Fantin initially envisioned a group of women singing around the piano, but abandoned the idea when he could not find enough women to pose.[17] (He did not like to work with professional models, preferring to paint family and friends.) When he sent a sketch of the composition to Ruth Edwards, a close friend and the wife of his dealer in England, he included an explanation as to why there were no women, as originally planned: "I'm not putting in any women. I always paint gatherings of artists, not gatherings of society, which I don't know and which terrify me: you can't do anything with those people these days. They are more and more stupid."[18] A withering and repugnant remark, to be sure, but one whose defensiveness reveals a rare flash of awareness of his group portraits' exclusions. He could not have intended it in reference to his wife or Ruth Edwards, for whom he seems to have had the utmost respect. His association of women with the insipid noise of "society," and his rhetorical separation of this society from the gatherings of "artists" he preferred, make clear that he never had women artists in mind.

Fig. 4. Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904), *Study (Portrait of Sarah Elizabeth Budgett)*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 39⅜ × 52⅜ in. (100 × 133 cm). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Tournai, Belgium

Including Dubourg in his group portraits, or even depicting her singly as a painter, would have required Fantin to negotiate her status as an artist in relation to his own. What's more, it would have required him to publicly recognize her significance to his work. Dubourg was the more educated and intellectual of the two, with particularly deep knowledge of German literature, philosophy, and music. The painter Jacques-Émile Blanche recounts how she regularly shared literary reviews with her husband, entertained visitors at teatime by translating Hegel, Schopenhauer, and the Ring legend, and translated English criticism of her husband's and other artists' work.[19] Her knowledge and her generosity in sharing it did much to define Fantin's aesthetic interests, shape his social life, and advance his career. In particular, she must have been involved in many aspects of the group portraits, hosting the Monday evening salons that brought their artistic and literary milieu into their home, helping to schedule and coordinate sittings, listening and offering counsel when tensions within the group threatened to boil over, and guiding sitters to the subterranean studio beneath their residence on the rue des Beaux-Arts. Dubourg

Fig. 5. Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904), *Around the Piano: Adolphe Julien, Arthur Boisseau, Emmanuel Chabrier, Camille Benoit, Edmond Maître, Antoine Lascoux, Vincent d'Indy, Amédée Pigeon*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 63 × 87⅞ in. (160 × 222 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris, RF2173

had a studio adjacent to Fantin's but also shared his ample, sky-lit space.[20] Photographs of the studio show Fantin's portraits of Dubourg decorating the walls; Dubourg's own portrait of her sister is also prominently displayed.[21] As artists, they worked side-by-side as colleagues, just as they had in the Louvre. They even collaborated on a few canvases, and their work is so close in style and technique that the attribution of several still lifes remains in question. (At least four Dubourg paintings have been sold as Fantins with false signatures. Dubourg was incensed to see this happening even in her lifetime.)[22] No wonder she was "exasperated" by the "unbearable tone" of condescension in Blanche's account of her domestic role.[23] Much more than a great hostess and accommodating translator, Dubourg was a serious artist with a remarkable range of mind.

Fantin was far from alone in relegating women artists to a supporting role outside his paintings. Women rarely appear in nineteenth-century French representations of artistic communities in any medium, visual or literary.[24] It is only slightly more common to find women artists painted singly by male colleagues, and when they are, they are almost always unidentifiable as artists. Degas depicted Dubourg once and Mary Cassatt on several occasions, but never in the act of drawing or painting, although he does depict Cassatt in the Louvre.[25] As far as we know, Dubourg never painted a self-portrait. Cassatt painted two, both on paper in gouache, but only one of them (1878) is finished [fig. 6]. It shows the artist leaning casually on a sofa, capturing her fashionable femininity and determined intensity, but does not show her painting. The other self-portrait (ca. 1880) does depict her in the process of painting, but dissolves into spare, illegible lines around her hands, brush, and paper [see Kendall, fig. 3]. Whether Cassatt abandoned the portrait or chose to leave this area unfinished (more likely the latter, since the work bears her initials), the result is that it comes just shy of making her identity as an artist explicit.

Fig. 6. Mary Cassatt (American, 1844–1926), *Self-Portrait*, 1878. Watercolor, gouache on wove paper laid down to buff-colored wood-pulp paper, 23⅝ × 16⅛ in. (60 × 41.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Edith H. Proskauer, 1975, 1975.319.1

Likewise, Édouard Manet's many paintings of Berthe Morisot show no sign of her vocation. The only woman he—like Fantin—depicted in the role of artist was a student, Eva Gonzalès. His *Portrait of Mlle E.G.* shows her painting a floral still life in Manet's studio, but critics and viewers at the Salon of 1870 judged it awkward and ridiculous [fig. 7]. As Tamar Garb has argued, Gonzalès's "stupefied" expression, wholly impractical white gown, deep décolleté, and unworkmanlike arms made it difficult for the Salon audience to see her as a serious artist. The portrait's harsh reception signaled the difficulty of depicting a woman artist while also satisfying public expectations of feminine refinement, propriety, and charm. Furthermore, Manet's dramatic tonal contrasts and lush, loosely brushed facture insist that Gonzalès's painting is not just indebted to him but is in fact his own.[26] The picture's reappearance in William Orpen's *Homage to Manet*, shown at the New English Art Club in 1909, is perfectly ironic, a further travesty of Gonzalès's already awkward image as a *femme peintre* [fig. 8]. Here that image stands in for Manet's legacy in a room full of men, serving as the backdrop to a group portrait meant to announce the leading artists and critics of British Impressionism.[27]

As these paintings make clear, the status of women artists was contested not only in the realm of social life and institutional politics but also in works of art. When women artists were depicted at work by their male peers, they were usually shown as students following the instruction of a male teacher, or as copyists reproducing an Old Master. An example of the latter, Norbert Goeneutte's *Marcellin Desboutin and His Friends at the Louvre, before a Fresco by Botticelli* (1892) is a playful meditation on the role of women in art, as sources of divine inspiration and diligent reproduction [plate 2]. The painting captures the surge of interest in Botticelli in France during the mid-1880s, following the acquisition of two frescoes by the artist for the Louvre in 1882. Transferred from the Villa Lemmi in Florence, the frescoes were installed at the top of the Daru staircase flanking the entrance to the gallery of large-format French paintings. They quickly became a favorite subject for copyists, especially British and American visitors and women.[28] Goeneutte's scene depicts one of these frescoes, *Venus and the Graces Present Gifts to a Young Girl* (ca. 1483), surrounded by a group of men and a lone female painter, who is working at her easel on what appears to be a full-scale copy. Identified as an English woman,[29] she echoes the slim silhouette of Botticelli's young girl, and the space between her and the group of men—a division made emphatic by her massive canvas—repeats the compositional gap that separates the divine and earthly figures in the fresco.

Fig. 7. Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883), *Portrait of Mlle E.G.*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 75¼ × 52½ in. (191.1 × 133.4 cm). The National Gallery, London, Sir Hugh Lane Bequest, 1917, NG3259

Fig. 8. William Orpen (Irish, 1878–1931), *Homage to Manet*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 64 × 51 in. (162.9 × 130 cm). Manchester Art Gallery, Purchased from the artist, 1910, 1910.9

The painting was exhibited in the Salon of 1892, with the group of men identified as the painter and engraver Marcellin Desboutin; the engraver Henri Guérard (who was married to Eva Gonzalès); the critics Roger Marx and Arsène Alexandre; another painter, Victor Vignon; and Goeneutte himself.[30] The central figure in the group, wearing a red cap and scarf, is Desboutin, now better known for his appearance as an archetypal bohemian in pictures by Manet and Degas than for his own work.[31] But in the 1890s he was a widely respected painter and engraver, and he trained Goeneutte in both media. This painting is an homage to him as much as to Botticelli, layering its allegiances in a way likely inspired by Fantin's groups. The difference is that Goeneutte positions his group in relation to women. Like Fantin, he represents his artistic community as exclusively male, but this exclusivity is called into question by the female figures in their midst. Appearing in ideal, mythological form—distanced by layers of time and the picture-within-a-picture motif—or separated by an enormous canvas wall, Goeneutte's female figures are peripheral to the group. Nonetheless, they are a vivid reminder of the shift from model and muse to student and peer that defined women's progress in the art world of nineteenth-century Paris.

Goeneutte delights in the ironic interplay between Botticelli's lithe mythological figures and his modern Parisians, using richly colored scarves of blue and red to link the two most central men to a corresponding feminine divinity in the fresco. The painting's wit hinges on the shift from divine to earthly, Renaissance to modern, feminine to masculine, in its two representational registers. Goeneutte juxtaposes the ideal beauty, creativity, and love that Venus and her retinue represent to the modern "reality" of the art world in fin-de-siècle Paris, where the iconography of gender is removed from the realm of mythological allegory but appears no less absolute. The segregation of male and female artists is unequivocal—virtually architectural—but this segregation is complicated by Goeneutte's dual relationship to the picture as a presence within it and the artist behind the scenes. Although the woman behind the easel occupies the role of copyist within the narrative space of the painting, and Goeneutte is part of the group of male artists and critics representing a more intellectual engagement with art, it is, in fact, Goeneutte who is the copyist of Botticelli's fresco, subsuming the depicted woman's task into his own original composition. The woman's painting remains invisible to anyone but her; we cannot know whether she is copying the fresco faithfully, translating it loosely, or incorporating it into an original composition à la Goeneutte. Whether or not the artist intended it, the painting plays with our stereotypical assumptions about women as copyists and men as creators by blurring the seemingly impassable boundaries between the two.

The strange orientation of the group—all but one of them are posed in profile, rather than facing the fresco—can be explained by Goeneutte's wish to echo Botticelli's composition with his own. But it also suggests that the men may be looking at the fresco's pendant—*A Young Man Being Introduced to the Seven Liberal Arts*—outside the frame [fig. 9]. Goeneutte's arrangement of artists is a mirror image of this fresco's composition, inverting its depiction of a male figure at left encountering seven female figures at right. By incorporating a copy of Botticelli's *Venus and the Graces* into his composition and flipping the figural arrangement and the gender imbalance of the unseen fresco, Goeneutte makes his painting their modern companion piece, an addendum to Botticelli's pair. In order to align himself with the Old Master, he must take on the subservient (feminine) role of copyist. The painting articulates this age-old conundrum of emulation in knowingly gendered terms.

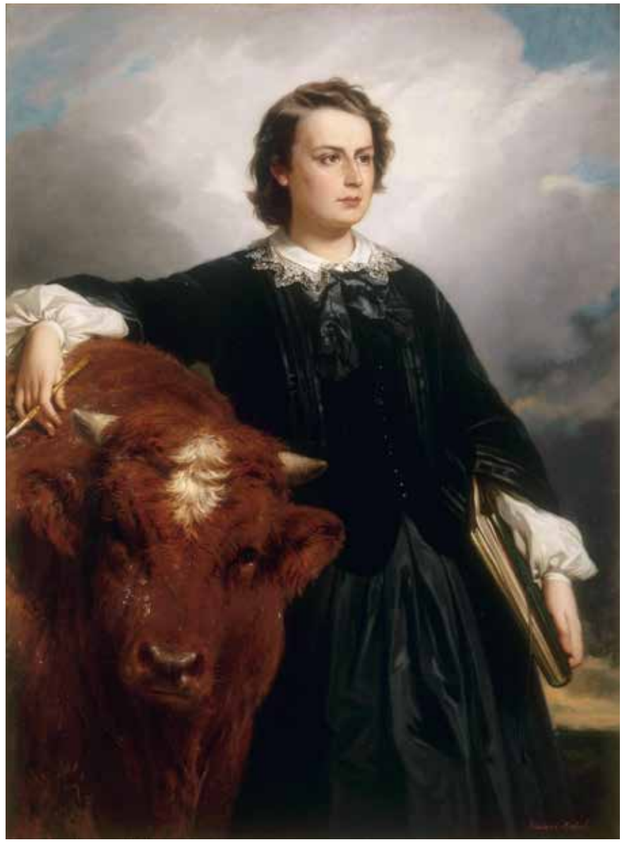
When women artists of this period included themselves in pictures of artistic community, the result tended to revolve less around the hierarchy of homage than around the bonds of friendship essential to their careers. But like Fantin and his colleagues, they used such paintings as an opportunity to define themselves as artists via bonds of association. Although they tended to paint less formalized genre scenes (more like Goeneutte than Fantin) that do not announce themselves as portraits of artist groups, this relative modesty can be deceptive. Louise Abbéma's monumental *Lunch in the Greenhouse* depicts a scene of refined yet relaxed sociability in the winter garden of Sarah Bernhardt's elegant home on the rue Fortuny [plate 24]. Abbéma and Bernhardt were lifelong friends, so close that they were rumored to be lovers, and shared a passion for painting. Abbéma positions her self-portrait behind the fashionable actress, lounging on fur-draped cushions like the mistress of the house. The famous librettist Émile de Najac is seated at left, and Abbéma's parents, along with an unidentified little girl, occupy the center of the painting, further evidence of the intimacy between the artist and her host.[32] Although Abbéma's likeness recedes behind the luminous portrait of Bernhardt in white, and is easy to overlook amid the general profusion of plants, food, and exotic décor, she nonetheless exploits the opportunity to promote her talent by association with Bernhardt, not only Bernhardt's fame, wealth, and cultural sophistication but also the unprecedented respect she had earned as an actress. The painting was not as advantageous for Bernhardt, however, who was skewered in the

Fig. 9. Sandro Botticelli (Italian, 1445–1510), *A Young Man Being Introduced to the Seven Liberal Arts*, 1483–86. Fresco detached and mounted on canvas, 93¼ × 106 in. (237 × 269 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris

press in 1878–79 for the "dispersion" of her talent in painting and sculpture. As a public figure engaged in multiple art forms, she was criticized as an amateur dabbler rather than praised as a Renaissance woman.[33]

Louise Catherine Breslau painted several portraits of artist friends, both male and female, throughout her career. But it is her early work *The Friends*, the only one that shows her painting, that proved to be the most important picture of her career [plate 11]. This intimate group portrait of the twenty-four-year-old artist at her easel alongside her roommates, the painter Sophie Schaeppi and the singer Maria Feller, was Breslau's first big success at the Salon, earning her an honorable mention—quite a coup for a young, unknown artist of any gender. By placing herself modestly off to the side, cropped by the picture's right edge, Breslau emphasizes the intensely thoughtful features of her friends—Feller in profile and Schaeppi in the center *en face*. A virtuosically painted white dog joins them at the table, its muzzle demurely tucked into its fluffy chest, in an equally affecting expression of introversion that echoes Breslau's profile, making the two of them a pair.[34] Breslau's self-portrait, a view from behind, is resolutely drab and withdrawn, as if she were reserving her most vivid brushwork, color, and psychological expression for the dog and the portraits of her friends. Despite this act of modesty, the painting made the artist's reputation practically overnight. But it was also caricatured in the satirical press as a family portrait of female dogs,[35] illustrating a preferred means of ridiculing women artists: domesticating them and comparing them to beasts.

Fig. 10. Édouard Louis Dubufe (French, 1819–1883), *Portrait of Rosa Bonheur*, 1857. Oil on canvas, 51⅝ × 38⅝ in. (131 × 98 cm). Chateaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles, France, MV5799; RF1478



The same year Breslau painted *The Friends*, her rival at the Académie Julian, Marie Bashkirtseff, painted *In the Studio*, a lively and crowded scene of women in Julian's studio school working from a live model [plate 3]. Bashkirtseff makes the competitive yet collaborative atmosphere of the studio apparent and places herself in the center foreground, tipping her palette toward the viewer. The painting is a rare view of the internal dynamics of this crucial training ground for women artists. Although the picture was not Bashkirtseff's idea—Julian ordered her to do it as an advertisement for the studio[36]—it is an important complement to her *Self-Portrait* (ca. 1883), suggesting the close yet fraught web of relationships with both colleagues and teachers that defined her artistic formation [see Madeline, fig. 3]. But by far Bashkirtseff's most vivid picture of the community of women artists in and around the Académie Julian appears in her journal, portions of which were first published in 1887, recounting the rivalry and jealousy, kinship and solidarity, and continual frustration and disappointment that pervaded women's artistic culture in late nineteenth-century Paris. More than her paintings, it is this massive diary full of thwarted ambition, scandalous humor, and feminist rage that made Bashkirtseff a notable figure in the history of nineteenth-century art.[37]

Bashkirtseff's forthright brand of feminism owed a tremendous debt to Rosa Bonheur, the matriarch and role model for all women artists from the mid-nineteenth century forward. Bonheur was an unprecedented and unrepeatable example of critical and financial success, international fame, and freedom from the restrictions of femininity. No woman artist in the nineteenth century or since has managed to do what she did. But as the Goncourts' journal attests, Bonheur too suffered from viciously sexist criticism (especially in France), and she struggled to negotiate her position as an artist and as a woman throughout her career, nowhere more evidently than in her efforts to shape her image as an artist in print and in paint. She collaborated with several of her portraitists, including one who also became her biographer, the American Anna Klumpke, in an effort to take control of her own legacy and mold the public image of the *femme artiste*.[38]

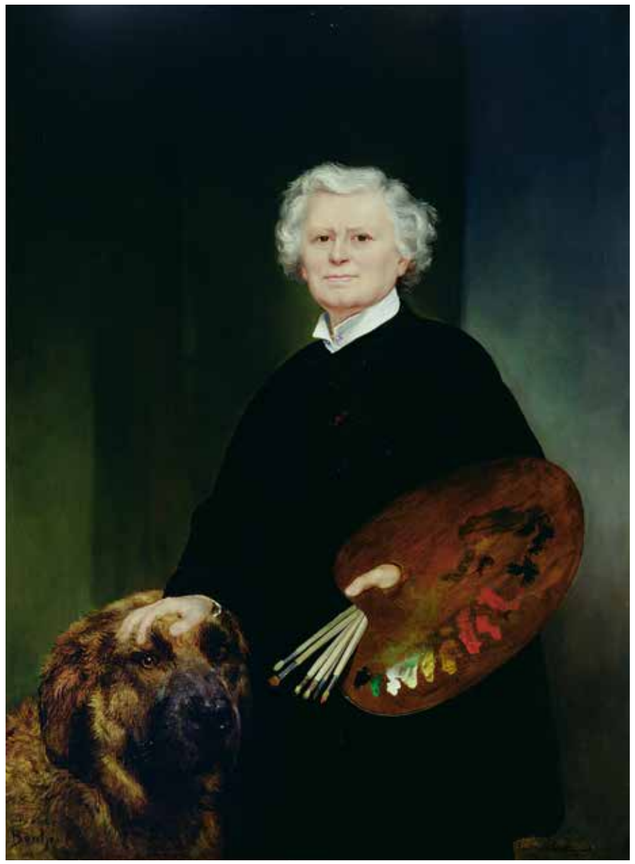
By the mid-1850s, Bonheur was internationally known for monumental works like *Plowing in Nivernais* [plate 72] and *The Horse Fair* (1852–55), both huge successes at the Salon and beyond. She showed the latter painting to Queen Victoria in a private viewing at Buckingham Palace in 1856, and a biography and a monograph were published the same year, when she was only thirty-three.[39] This was also the year that her portrait was painted by Édouard Louis Dubufe, a leading portraitist of high society known especially for his flattering, sentimental depictions of women and children. His *Portrait of Rosa Bonheur*, exhibited at the Salon of 1857, is a striking departure from his usual fare [fig. 10]. Bonheur's stern expression, uncoiffed hair, and funereal black dress already set her apart from the aristocratic women Dubufe typically painted, suggesting that Dubufe had little control over the artist's appearance. But it is the presence of a massive bull next to her that makes her difference wildly clear. As Bonheur recounts in her memoirs, "He started off with me leaning on a table. I began grumbling the second time I posed. That's when he got the idea of having me paint a real live bull's head over the spot where that boring table had been."[40] Bristling at her confinement within stiff portraiture conventions and tired of the monotony of posing, Bonheur leaped at the chance to collaborate with Dubufe and turn her portrait into an animal painting. Taking her image into her own hands, she aligned herself with an animal that epitomized masculine strength and determination. (The artist reportedly said, "In the way of males, I like only the bulls that I paint."[41]) In this way Bonheur became the alpha artist in the portrait transaction, and her bull steals the show. Staring directly out of the picture with the piercing gaze and tilted head of a concerned companion, the animal is a literal bull's-eye that pulls the viewer's attention from Bonheur. Serving as a kind of protector, it seems poised to buffer the artist from public scrutiny, while exemplifying her talents as an *animalier*. Bonheur later reported that Ernest Gambart, her British dealer who commissioned the portrait, was "delighted by the change," especially since it allowed him to sell engravings of it with her signature, increasing their market value (Bonheur's fame far exceeded Dubufe's). This is just one of many instances revealing Bonheur's savvy as a businesswoman, someone who knew how to work with others to manage her image and career.

Decades later, in 1892, when her age made her all the more self-conscious of her image for posterity, Bonheur welcomed the sisters Georges Achille-Fould and Consuélo Fould to her country retreat at By so they could each paint her portrait. Once again, Bonheur collaborated in the construction of her image, painting the dog that her portrait caresses in the bottom left corner of the painting by Consuélo Fould [fig. 11].[42] This time Bonheur cosigned the painting itself:

Fould's signature appears in the lower right-hand corner, while Bonheur's name appears at lower left over the dog's fur, making the collaboration plain. As in Dubufe's portrait, Bonheur places her addition under the protective gesture of her painting arm, claiming the creature as hers, as belonging to her art, while also signaling to the viewer that this part of the painting is *in her hand*.

In these collaborations Bonheur upstages her image-makers with her sensitive, spectacularly realist animals, whose penetrating, empathic gazes make her image look staid in comparison. In doing so, she promotes her talents as an *animalier*, but at the same time necessarily sacrifices her image as a woman. Her public image, her appearance, is juxtaposed to a bull and a dog, with all their connotations of masculinity, incivility, and homeliness. Bonheur jokes about this juxtaposition in a letter to Fould, writing of her effort to make the dog's head "match the calf's head," a self-deprecating allusion to her own image in the painting.[43] By aligning her portrait with an animal, she not only identifies her artistic niche but also plays defiantly with the cruel stereotype of intelligent and talented women as ugly and unfeminine, and makes the most affecting and soulful presence in the picture the animal, rather than herself. In this sense, these pictures are an allegory of the double bind Bonheur had to navigate as a woman artist. Both portrait and self-portrait in one, they indicate how other artists and society at large perceived her—as a woman who, however tremendous her success, still awkwardly occupied the role of artist—while also insisting on how she would like to be perceived, not for her gender or for her appearance but for her *work*.

Fig. 11. Consuélo Fould (French, 1862–1927), *Portrait of Rosa Bonheur*, 1892–94. Oil on canvas, 51½ × 37⅜ in. (131 × 95 cm). Leeds Art Gallery, UK



Anna Klumpke recounts in detail her experience painting Bonheur's portrait in 1898 [plate 9], revealing to what extent Bonheur cared about her portrayal and directed the process from beginning to end. Bonheur was concerned about her appearance, particularly as far as it represented her femininity. Her stated desire to be represented in women's clothes was complicated by her repeated resistance to putting them on, and she complained about the fact that "the great portrait painters never asked [her] to pose for them" even while declaring that she would not have liked "sitting for a man."[44] This conflicted attitude toward her womanhood and the restrictions it placed on her status as an artist shows that Bonheur's fame and success did not alleviate her insecurity about the relationship between her feminine and artistic identities.

Her complaint also shows that she had forgotten or wished to disavow Dubufe's portrait, not to mention Nicaise de Keyser's *Great Artists of the Nineteenth-Century French School* (1878), which features Bonheur in the front row.[45] Otherwise, she only entrusted her painted image to women, and largely dictated the pictures herself. Likewise, she asked Klumpke to write her definitive life story in 1898, making clear that she would have editorial control. According to Klumpke, this biography was "one of [Bonheur's] main preoccupations." Her previous biographers had failed to capture her main sources of inspiration, she felt, and it was because Klumpke was a woman that she could trust her "to interpret [her] life for posterity."[46] Bonheur died less than a year later, in 1899.

In 1900 Maurice Denis painted a Fantin-inspired group portrait titled *Homage to Cézanne*, featuring a gathering of nine artists and writers in the shop of art dealer Ambroise Vollard [fig. 12]. Remarkably, the artist's wife, Marthe, appears on the outer margin of the group, ostensibly assembled to admire a still life by Paul Cézanne. Her head tucked behind a frame and her face looking out through a sheer lace veil, Marthe Denis addresses the viewer as if colluding in some kind of secret, with a white-gloved hand holding a lorgnette peeking out behind Bonnard. Marthe was not an artist, but her presence here at least qualifies her as a viewer and a participating

Fig. 12. Maurice Denis (French, 1870–1943), *Homage to Cézanne*, 1900. Oil on canvas, 42½ × 80¼ in. (108 × 204 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris, RF1977-137

Fig. 13. Maurice Denis (French, 1870–1943), "Histoire de l'art français," detail of the Dutuit Cupola: F section, XIX–XXth centuries, from Monet to Moreau, 1925. Oil on canvas, mounted, diameter: 39 ft. 4 in. (12 m). Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, Petit Palais, DECOP00G01 (F)

(if marginal) member of the artistic community, unlike the women painted by Gauguin and Renoir who appear as framed objects on the wall behind. By featuring his wife, Denis's *Homage to Cézanne* can be read as a gentle riposte to Fantin's masculine image of the modern group. By 1900 women in Paris were studying at the École des Beaux-Arts and had earned the right to practice law. But as far as their broad cultural status as artists, progress was painfully slow.

Twenty-five years later, Denis would complete a more ambitious and much more public group portrait in the Dutuit Cupola of the Petit Palais, representing the history of French art from the Middle Ages to Monet. His composition features thirty-seven of the nation's most illustrious artists alongside figures plucked from celebrated works of art. Although women are amply represented among the latter—the bare-breasted Marianne from Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's portrait of his wife, a buxom Rodin nude—only one female artist, Berthe Morisot, is pictured [fig. 13]. Denis admired Morisot's use of color, and positions her between Renoir and Degas, an indication—however subtle—of the crucial role women played in the Impressionist exhibitions. Still, it is hard to celebrate such a minuscule form of recognition. Barely visible in the distance, Morisot holds a bouquet of flowers and a parasol, smiling at the viewer. Unlike her male colleagues in the foreground, she bears no palette or sketchpad to identify her as an artist.[47] Indeed, without an identifying label, few would ever notice that she is there.

For art criticism, the evidence is similarly grim. In 1932 critics were still praising women artists like Breslau for their "male intelligence."[48] On the bright side, this critic was positively reviewing a pioneering exhibition of art by women who had studied at the Académie Julian, an exhibition that brought these women's collective work to public attention for the first time.[49] Women continued to fight for the education, institutional support, and broad social freedoms necessary to develop their talent as artists, without which it was impossible to overturn the pervasive notion of artistic genius as male.[50] Representations of the *femme peintre*—and their marked absence—in later nineteenth-century French painting show how women's status as artists was contested in the pictorial realm. As Rosa Bonheur and her followers came to learn, if they wanted to appear as equals alongside their male peers, they would have to paint those pictures themselves.

1. "Le génie est male," August 20–26, 1857, in Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, vol. 1, *1851–1865* (Paris: Laffont, 1989), 295.

2. Rosa Bonheur to Louis Passy, Paris, June 1859, quoted in Theodore Stanton, ed., *Reminiscences of Rosa Bonheur* (New York: Appleton, 1910), 393.

3. Goncourt, *Journal*, entry for March 16, 1857, 241.

4. This recurring theme in the reception of women artists is discussed in Gabriel P. Weisberg, "La reception de Louise Breslau, Rosa Bonheur et Amélie Beaury-Saurel à Paris: La différence sexuelle au coeur du discours," in *Louise Breslau: De l'impressionisme aux années folles*, ed. Catherine Lepdor, Anne-Catherine Kruger, and Gabriel P. Weisberg (Lausanne, Switzerland: Musée Cantonale des Beaux-Arts, 2001), 99–115. For a classic sociological study of artists in nineteenth-century France that includes discussion of how "women were not accepted as professional painters," see Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 51.

5. A foundational study is Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). See also Gabriel P. Weisberg and Jane Becker, eds., *Overcoming All Obstacles: The Women of the Académie Julian* (New York: Dahesh Museum; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999); and Charlotte Foucher Zarmanian, *Créatrices en 1900: Femmes artistes en France dans le milieux symbolistes* (Paris: Mare and Martin, 2015). For a broader historical overview, see Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 5th ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012). Séverine Sofio's important study of women artists in Paris from 1750 to 1850, *Artistes femmes: La parenthèse enchantée, XIIIe–XIXe siècles* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2016), appeared after this essay was in press.

6. Tamar Garb, "Revising the Revisionists: The Formation of the Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs," *Art Journal* 48, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 64. See also the text by Joëlle Bolloch in this volume.

7. "Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs," *La gazette des femmes* 2 (January 25, 1882): 1, quoted in Garb, "Revising the Revisionists," 65.

8. Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, 3–18. On rivalry among women artists, see also Jane Becker, "Nothing Like a Rival to Spur One On: Marie Bashkirtseff and Louise Breslau at the Académie Julian," in Weisberg and Becker, *Overcoming All Obstacles*, 69–113.

9. Georges Rivière, *M. Degas, bourgeois de Paris* (Paris: Floury, 1935), 116, 121.

10. Fantin's paintings of his wife, as confirmed by her annotated catalogue raisonné completed in 1911, include *Reading* (1870; Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon), where she appears with her sister, Charlotte Dubourg; *Mlle Victoria Dubourg* (1873; Musée d'Orsay, Paris); *Mme Fantin-Latour* (1877; Musée de Grenoble); and *Mme Fantin-Latour* (1883; Staatliche Museen zu Berlin). Victoria Dubourg Fantin-Latour, *Catalogue de l'oeuvre complet de Fantin-Latour* (1911; New York: Da Capo Press, 1969). There is at least one other portrait by Fantin, dated 1873, that scholars believe to be of Victoria Dubourg, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent. She also appears in *The Dubourg Family* (1878; Musée d'Orsay, Paris).

11. A small, framed picture appears on the wall right behind Dubourg's head in a sketch for the painting, in a composition very similar to Degas's 1867–68 portrait of the artist James Tissot. Degas initially included this detail in the oil painting, but then decided to erase it (a ghost of its presence remains). See Henri Loyrette's entry on the painting in Jean Sutherland Boggs et al., *Degas* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 142–43.

12. In addition to showing her work regularly at the Paris Salon and the Royal Academy, Dubourg sold many paintings to private collectors. During her lifetime, museums in Paris, Tokyo, and Grenoble acquired her work, and she was awarded the Légion d'Honneur in 1920. Elizabeth Kane, "Victoria Dubourg: The Other Fantin-Latour," *Women's Art Journal* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1998–Winter 1999): 17–18.

13. This point is made by Sylvie Patry in "Victoria Dubourg, 'Femme supérieure et peintre de mérite,'" in *Fantin-Latour: De la réalité au rêve* (Lausanne, Switzerland: Fondation de l'Hermitage, 2007), 169.

14. On these pictures, see Douglas Druick and Michel Hoog, *Fantin-Latour* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1983), 252–55, 330–33.

15. For more on this painting and its reception, see my *Fellow Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in Nineteenth-Century French Painting* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 68–104.

16. For a discussion of this painting as a "pictorial document of French Wagnerism" and its relationship to Fantin's Wagner-inspired lithographs, see Anne Leonard, "Picturing Listening in Nineteenth-Century French Painting," *Art Bulletin* 89, no. 2 (June 2007): 267–72.

17. Fantin-Latour to Edwin Edwards, October 3, 1872, in "Copies de lettres de Fantin à ses parents et amis, par Victoria Fantin-Latour," fasc. 2, Bibliothèque Municipale de Grenoble, 184.

18. Fantin-Latour to Mrs. Edwin Edwards, February 25, 1885, in ibid., 207.

19. Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, ed. and trans. Walter Clement (London: Dent, 1937), 41–44, cited in Kane, "Victoria Dubourg," 17.

20. Kane, "Victoria Dubourg," 17.

21. These photographs are reproduced in *Fantin-Latour: De la réalité au rêve*, 178–81. They were taken circa 1901–2, so are not necessarily representative of the studio's decor over time, but the presence of Dubourg's image and work is significant, since the couple knew that these photographs would document the space for posterity.

22. Kane, "Victoria Dubourg," 15, 19n2.

23. Victoria Fantin-Latour to Léonce Bénédite, Buré, May 23 [1919], Fondation Custodia, Frits Lugt collection, inv. 997-A-947, cited in Patry, "Victoria Dubourg," 170. Blanche's anecdotal accounts of his artistic circle were published in 1919 as *Propos de peintre: Première série, de David à Degas* (Paris: Émile-Paul, 1919). His account of Fantin-Latour's home and studio first appeared in an obituary article: "Fantin-Latour," *Revue de Paris*, May 15, 1906, 289–313. Dubourg's "exasperated" reaction was upon her rereading the text when it reappeared in 1919.

24. On the artist as a heroic (and always male) figure in nineteenth-century French literature, see Joy Newton, "The Atelier Novel: Painters as Fictions," in *Impressions of French Modernity*, ed. Richard Hobbs (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1998), 173–89; and, more recently, Eleonora Vratskidou, "L'artiste, héros romanesque de la presse littéraire," in *L'artiste en représentation: Images des artistes dans l'art du XIXe siècle*, ed. Alain Bonnet (Lyon, France: Fage, 2012), 225–35.

25. See Kimberly A. Jones, "'A Much Finer Curve': Identity and Representation in Degas's Depictions of Cassatt," in *Degas / Cassatt* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2014), 86–97. Cassatt also posed for Degas as a model.

26. Tamar Garb, "Framing Femininity in Manet's *Portrait of Mlle E. G.*," in *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France, 1814–1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 59–99. Victor Fournel mentions Gonzalès's "stupefied eyes" in "Le Salon de 1870," *La gazette de France*, June 8, 1870, cited in Garb, *Painted Face*, 73.

27. On this painting, see Kenneth McConkey, *Impressionism in Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 11–13.

28. Gabriel Montua, "Botticelli's Path to Modernity: Continental Reception, 1850–1930," in *Botticelli Reimagined*, ed. Mark Evans and Stefan Weppelman (London: V&A, 2016), 87.

29. A series of verses reproduced with an engraving of the painting identifies the copyist as "une blonde anglaise / Mabel ou Nelly." Fichier Moreau-Nélaton, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

30. These identifications appear in the *Revue encyclopédique* 42 (1892): 1256. They leave one man unaccounted for, and it is not clear who is who, although Desboutin is definitely the figure in red. My thanks to Maud Leyoudec at the Musée Anne-de-Beaujeu for her generosity in sharing documentation on this painting.

31. Manet referred to Desboutin as "le prince des Bohèmes." Maud Leyoudec, "Desboutin à la pointe du portrait," in Bonnet, *L'artiste en représentation*, 71–72.

32. These portrait identifications are drawn from Musée des Beaux-Arts, Pau, *Peintures du XIXème siècle* (Bordeaux, France: Le Festin, 2007), 20.

33. On Bernhardt's "pluridisciplinary" artistic career as an actor, painter, and sculptor, and the sexist criticism she received for this "dispersion" of her talent, see Zarmanian, *Créatrices en 1900*, 158–91.

34. Breslau and the dog are paired looking at the republican newspaper *Le Voltaire* in a preliminary sketch. This sketch also shows an unidentified fourth figure—a man smoking a pipe—seated at the table, but Breslau removed him in the painting to make an all-female group. The sketch, in a private collection, is reproduced in Lepdor, Kruger, and Weisberg, *Louise Breslau*, 42.

35. Stop, "La famille Zoé Chien-Chien," *Le journal amusant*, June 1881.

36. See Becker, "Nothing Like a Rival," 103–5.

37. The full, uncensored text of the journal, covering the years 1860–84, has been available since 2005. Marie Bashkirtseff (transcribed by Ginette Apostolescu), *Mon journal: Texte intégral*, 16 vols. (Paris: Montesson, 2005). During her lifetime, Bashkirtseff published several articles in the feminist journal *La Citoyenne* under the pseudonym Pauline Orell, including "Les Femmes Artistes," March 6, 1881.

38. On Bonheur's self-conscious attention to her artistic legacy, see Francis Ribemont, "Rosa Bonheur, ou les difficiles chemins de la postérité," in *Rosa Bonheur, 1822–1899* (Bordeaux, France: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux, 1997), 127–35.

39. Frédéric Lepelle de Bois-Gallais, *Biographie de Madamoiselle Rosa Bonheur* (Paris: E. Gambart, 1856); Eugène de Mirecourt, *Les contemporains: Rosa Bonheur* (Paris: G. Havard, 1856).

40. Bonheur, quoted in Anna Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur: The Artist's (Auto)biography*, trans. Gretchen van Slyke (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 77.

41. Quoted in Stanton, *Reminiscences of Rosa Bonheur*, 366.

42. For correspondence between Bonheur and Consuélo Fould detailing the genesis of this portrait and Bonheur's contribution, see ibid., 258–64.

43. Quoted in Stanton, *Reminiscences of Rosa Bonheur*, 261.

44. Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur*, 31–62 (quotes on 36–37).

45. This painting was commissioned by Ernest Gambart, so Keyser had no choice but to include Bonheur.

46. Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur*, 63–75 (quotes on 67, 79).

47. Alain Bonnet, *Artistes en groupe: La représentation de la communauté des artistes dans la peinture du XIXe siècle* (Rennes, France: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007), 52–53. Reproductions of the six sections of Denis's designs for the cupola, including captions naming the figures, were reproduced in "La décoration d'une coupole du Petit Palais par Maurice Denis," *La Renaissance de l'art français et des industries de luxe*, September 1925, 408–13. Morisot's name is misspelled as "Morizot," 413.

48. Anonymous, "De Marie Bashkirtseff à Louise Abbéma," *La revue de Paris* 1, no. 39 (1932): 712.

49. "Une manifestation de l'art chez la femme: L'Académie Julian en 1880 et aujourd'hui," Galerie Charpentier, Paris, January 7–21, 1932.

50. This is Linda Nochlin's seminal argument in "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews* 69, no. 9 (January 1971): 22–39, 67–71.