AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROJECTS:
WOMEN ARTISTS AND IDENTITY IN THE
SECOND HALF OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

A Dissertation in
Art History
by
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation presents an in-depth analysis of self-portraits produced by women artists in the latter half of nineteenth-century France. While many women artists of the nineteenth century continue to garner critical attention, no sustained analysis of their self-portraiture yet exists. These portraits, whether traditional or innovative, public or private, present to the viewer rare insight into lives of women artists and emphasize their awareness of and interest in their own subjectivity. In addition to providing a physical likeness, these self-portraits underscore the contemporary interest in selfhood and open exciting avenues of research.

Nineteenth-century notions of the self were highly influenced by a new understanding that the self was something carried within and that it was the locus of identity. As this budding cult of the self was on the rise, women artists entered into the fascinating dialogue of selfhood through the creation of self-portraits. These images reveal not only how they perceived themselves, but also how society at large defined women’s positions and forms of expression.

Rosa Bonheur, Marie Bashkirtseff, Eva Gonzalès, and Louise Breslau are the primary focus of this dissertation. Bonheur, an unconventional artist who wore trousers and painted animals, was the first female to receive a Legion of Honor award. Bashkirtseff was a Ukrainian immigrant who enjoyed high-society life, but secretly wrote letters in support of women’s rights and produced self-portraits exploring her identity in various guises. Eva Gonzalès was the only official pupil of the Edouard Manet. She boldly associated herself with a highly controversial teacher and produced a series of self-portraits that present her serious and introspective personality. Louise Breslau used the genre of self-portraiture to solidify her connections with her female friends and assert her sexual and artistic identity. These images indicate that the central elements of Breslau’s identity were her status as an artist and her female relationships.
This dissertation, the first to focus specifically on women’s self-portraits in the nineteenth century, sheds new light on the careers of these specific artists as well as clarifies the shifting philosophical and psychological beliefs about the self and how they informed women’s lives and perceptions.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................. vi

INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1

CHAPTER ONE

Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century: A Brief Cultural Snapshot ........................................... 12

CHAPTER TWO

“My Feminism and My Clothes Aren’t Meant to Surprise You:” Rosa Bonheur’s Pants, (Self) Portraits and Personas .......................................................... 38

CHAPTER THREE

Rethinking Self: Eva Gonzalès On Her Own ......................................................................................... 89

CHAPTER FOUR

“I am the Famous Man!”: Marie Bashkirtseff, Celebrity and Self-Creation ........................................... 131

CHAPTER FIVE

Women, Social Spaces, and Self-Portraits: Louise Breslau in Paris ...................................................... 171

CONCLUSION ................................................................. 210

APPENDIX: FIGURES ............................................................ 217

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................... 332
List of Figures

Figures from Chapter One:
Fig. 1.1. “Les Annexe-Pianos,” La Vie Parisienne, 1864.

Fig. 1.2. Honoré Daumier, “Un Français peint par lui-même,” Le Charivari, 1849.

Figures from Chapter Two:
Figure 2.1. Rosa Bonheur, Ploughing in the Nivernais, 1849, oil on canvas, 134 x 260 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France.

Figure 2.2. Permission de Travestissement

Figure 2.3. Rosa Bonheur, The Horse Fair, 1853-55, oil on canvas, 244.5 x 406.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 2.4. Auguste Bonheur, Rosa Bonheur, 1845.

Figure 2.5. David d’Angers, Medallion of Rosa Bonheur, 1854.

Figure 2.6. Frederick Goodall, Rosa Bonheur at Work Near Wexham, 1856, oil on canvas, Collection Morton Bradley.

Figure 2.7. Louis-Edouard Dubufe, Rosa Bonheur at Thirty-Four, 1857, Musée de Château de Versailles, France.

Figure 2.8. Franz Winterhalter, Portrait of the Empress Eugénie, 1855.

Figure 2.9. Louis-Edouard Dubufe, Eugenie de Montijo: Empress of the French, c. 1854-55.

Figure 2.10. Caricature of Dubufe’s Portrait of Rosa Bonheur.

Figure 2.11. Raymond Bonheur, Portrait of Rosa at Four, 1826.

Figure 2.12. Male Saint-Simonian costume

Figure 2.13. Female Saint-Simonian costume

Figure 2.14. Retreat at Ménilmontant

Figure 2.15. Caricature of Rosa Bonheur.

Figure 2.16. Rosa Bonheur, Detail of The Horse Fair, 1853-55.

Figure 2.17. Alfred de Dreux, Amazone in the Bois de Boulogne, c. 1845.

Figure 2.18. Alfred de Dreux, Amazone et cavaliers en forêt.
Figure 2.19. Théodore Géricault, Amazone, 1821-21.

Figure 2.20. Gustave Courbet, L'Amazone, 1856, oil on canvas, 115.6 x 89.2 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 2.21. Edouard Manet, Amazone, 1882-83, oil on canvas, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain.

Figure 2.22. Eugénia de Guzman à cheval, c. 1852-1870

Figure 2.23. David Jules, "Sa Majesté l'Impératrice Eugénie en costume d'amazone", c. 1852-1870.

Figure 2.24. André Adolphe Disdéri, Anonymous carte-de-visite of woman in riding habit, 1865

Figure 2.25. Rosa Bonheur, Portrait of Nathalie Micas, c. 1850, watercolor.

Figure 2.26. Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, May 26, 1888.

Figure 2.27. Achille Fould, Rosa Bonheur in Her Studio, 1893, oil on canvas.

Figure 2.28. Consuélo Fould, Marquise de Grasse, Rosa Bonheur, 1894, oil on canvas.

Figure 2.29. Rosa Bonheur, The Marquise de Grasse Painting Rosa Bonheur, illustration from letter to Paul Chardin on Jan. 18, 1894.

Figure 2.30. Rosa Bonheur, Illustration from letter to animal sculptor Pierre-Jules Mène.

Figure 2.31. Anna Klumpke, Portrait of Rosa Bonheur, 1898, oil on canvas, 117.2 x 98.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 2.32. Anna Klumpke, Portrait of Rosa Bonheur with Charley, 1898, oil on canvas, Musée de Fontainebleau, Fontainebleau, France.

Figures from Chapter Three:

Figure 3.1. “L’Exposition d’Eva Gonzalès,” La Vie Moderne, 24 janvier 1885, pg. 60. Illustrated by L. Galice.

Figure 3.2. Edouard Manet, Portrait of Mlle E. G., 1870, oil on canvas, 191.1 x 133.4 cm, The National Gallery, London, England.

Figure 3.3. Eva Gonzalès, Le Thé, 1865-69, oil on canvas, 94 x 60 cm, private collection.

Figure 3.4. Eva Gonzalès, L’Enfant de Troupe, 1869-1870, oil on canvas, 130 x 98 cm, Musée Gaston Rapin, Villeneuve-Sur-Lot, France.
Figure 3.5. Edouard Manet, *Le Fifre*, 1866, oil on canvas, 160 x 98 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France.

Figure 3.6. Edouard Manet, *Eva Gonzalès Painting in Manet’s Studio*, 1870.

Figure 3.7. Cham, « Exposition 1870, » *Le Charivari*, 10 April 1870.

Figure 3.8. Photograph of Henri Guérard and Jeanne Guérard-Gonzalès, 1895.

Figure 3.9. Eva Gonzalès, *La Jeune Élève*, c. 1871-1872, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 cm, private collection, Switzerland.

Figure 3.10. Eva Gonzalès, *La Loge aux Italiens*, 1874, oil on canvas, 98 x 130 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France.

Figure 3.11. Edouard Manet, *Loge sketch*, c. 1873.

Figure 3.12. Photograph of Eva Gonzalès, c. 1874.

Figure 3.13. Henri Guérard, Engraving of Eva Gonzalès’ *La Jeune Élève*, c. 1871-72.


Figure 3.15. Eva Gonzalès, *Autoportrait*, c. 1873-74, oil on canvas, 56 x 46.5 cm, private collection.

Figure 3.16. Eva Gonzalès, *Portrait of Mlle J.G. [Jeanne Gonzalès]*, 1869-70, pastel, 56 x 46 cm, private collection.

Figure 3.17. Eva Gonzalès, *Portrait of Madame E.G. [Emmanuel Gonzalès], Mère de l’artiste*, 1869-70, pastel, 61.5 x 51 cm, private collection.

Figure 3.18. Edouard Manet, *The Music Lesson*, 1870, oil on canvas, 141 x 173.1 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts.

Figure 3.19. Eva Gonzalès, *Dans Les Blés (Dieppe)*, c. 1875-76, oil on canvas, 46 x 54 cm, private collection.

Figure 3.20. Claude Monet, *Les Coquelicots*, 1873, oil on canvas, 50 x 65 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France.

Figure 3.21. Eva Gonzalès, *La Psyche*, c. 1865-1870, oil on canvas, 40 x 27 cm, private collection.
Figure 3.22. Eva Gonzalès, *Le Petit Lever*, c. 1875-76, oil on canvas, 50 x 61 cm, private collection.

Figure 3.23. Eva Gonzalès, *Le Réveil*, c. 1877-78, oil on canvas, 81.5 x 100 cm, Kunsthalle, Breme, Germany.

Figure 3.24. Eva Gonzalès, *Le Sommeil*, c. 1877-78, oil on canvas, 81 x 100 cm, private collection.

Figure 3.25. Eva Gonzalès, *Autoportrait*, c. 1875.


Figure 3.27. Photograph of Jeanne Gonzalès, c. 1874

Figure 3.28. Eva Gonzalès, *Promenade à Âne*, c. 1880-1882, oil on canvas, 81 x 100 cm, Museum & Art Gallery of Bristol, England.

Figure 3.29. Berthe Morisot, *Two Sisters on a Couch*, 1869, oil on canvas, 52 x 81 cm, National Gallery of Art, D.C.

Figure 3.30. Berthe Morisot, *Self-Portrait*, 1885, pastel, 47.5 x 37.5 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL.

Figure 3.31. Berthe Morisot, *Self-Portrait*, 1885, oil on canvas, 61 x 50 cm, Musée Marmottan, Paris, France.

Figure 3.32. Berthe Morisot, *Self-Portrait with Julie*, 1885, oil on canvas, 72 x 91 cm, private collection.

Figure 3.33. Berthe Morisot, *Self-Portrait with Julie Drawing*, 1887, pencil on paper, 26 x 19 cm, private collection.

Figure 3.34. Edgar Degas, *Portrait of Mary Cassatt*, c. 1880-84, oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

Figure 3.35. Mary Cassatt, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1880-1884, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Figure 3.36. Photograph of Eva Gonzalès, undated.

**Figures from Chapter Four:**

Figure 4.1. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph, c. 1876(?)

Figure 4.2. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph as Russian musician with mandolin, c.1877.
Figure 4.3. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph as country peasant with basket, c. 1877.

Figure 4.4. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph in peasant clothes and cap, c. 1877.

Figure 4.5. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph with mirror, c. 1875.

Figure 4.6. André Disdéri, Uncut page of Sarah Bernhardt photographs, c. 1860s.

Figure 4.7. Sarah Bernhardt in coffin, c. 1880.

Figure 4.8. Sarah Bernhardt as sculptor in studio, c. 1880.

Figure 4.9. Sarah Bernhardt, Photograph in role of Leah, n.d.

Figure 4.10. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph, n.d. (c. 1878?).

Figure 4.11. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph Photograph in front of her own tomb, c.1881.

Figure 4.12. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph as Capuchin monk, c. 1876.

Figure 4.13. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph as Capuchin monk, c. 1877.

Figure 4.14. Marie Bashkirtseff, *Le Meeting*, 1884, oil on canvas, 190 x 175 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France.

Figure 4.15. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph, c. 1876.

Figure 4.16. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph, c. 1877.

Figure 4.17. Comtesse de Castiglione, Photograph as nun, c. 1863.

Figure 4.18. Comtesse de Castiglione, Photograph as Normandy peasant, n.d.

Figure 4.19. Marie Bashkirtseff, *Self-Portrait, Standing, (Autoportrait en pied)*, 1879.

Figure 4.20. Marie Bashkirtseff (“Mlle. Andrey”), *Atelier Julian*, 1881, oil on canvas, 145 x 185 cm, Dnepropetrovsk Fine Arts Museum, Ukraine.

Figure 4.21. Marie Bashkirtseff, *Self-Portrait sketch*, c. 1883, Petit Palais, Paris, France.

Figure 4.22. Marie Bashkirtseff, *Self-portrait with a palette*, 1882-1883, oil on canvas, Musée des Beaux-Arts- Jules Chéret, Nice, France.

Figure 4.23. Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Self-Portrait*, 1782, oil on canvas, 97.8 x 70.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, London.
Figure 4.24. Anna Bilinska, *Self-Portrait*, 1887.

Figure 4.25. Milly Childers, *Self-Portrait*, 1889.

**Figures for Chapter Five:**

Figure 5.1. Louise Breslau, *Le Portrait des amis*, 1881, oil on canvas, 84 x 160 cm, Musées d’art et d’histoire, Geneva, Switzerland.

Figure 5.2. Caricature of *Le Portrait des amis*, in *Le Journal amusant*, juin 1881.

Figure 5.3. Louise Breslau, Premier projet pour *Le Portrait des amis*, 1881, black ink over pencil, 8.8 x 19.5 cm, private collection.

Figure 5.4. Frédéric Bazille’s *Painter's Atelier in the Rue La Condamine*, 1870.

Figure 5.5. Henri Fantin-Latour, *A Studio at Batignolles*, 1870.

Figure 5.6. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Artist's Studio, rue St.-Georges*, 1876.

Figure 5.7. Alfred Stevens, *In the Studio*, 1888.

Figure 5.8. Photograph of Louise Breslau, Madeline Zillhardt, Sophie Schaeppi, and another Swedish artist in their apartment, Avenue de Ternes, Paris, 1890.

Figure 5.9. Louise Breslau, *Portrait de l'artiste jeune*, 1882, black and red chalk, pencil, 45.1 x 36.1 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, France.

Figure 5.10. Anonymous caricature of Mlle Louise Breslau, 1878, from album of caricatures Croquis de Mme Geraldi.

Figure 5.11. Leonetto Cappiello, caricature of Louise Breslau and Helene Dufau, appeared in *La Vie parisienne*, 27 mai 1905.

Figure 5.12. Louise Breslau, *Le Sculpteur Jean Carriès dans son atelier*, 1886-1887, oil on canvas, 163 x 135 cm, Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de al Ville de Paris, France.

Figure 5.13. Louise Breslau, *Contre-jour*, 1888, oil on canvas, 113 x 181.5 cm., Kunstmuseum, Berne, Switzerland.

Figure 5.14. Louise Breslau, Sketch for *Contre-jour*, 1888, black and brown ink on paper, 27.3 x 21.1 cm, private collection.

Figure 5.15. Jacques-Louis David, *Self-Portrait*, 1794, oil on canvas, 81 x 64 cm, Louvre, Paris, France.
Figure 5.16. Detail of *Contre-jour*, 1888.

Figure 5.17. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait as a Young Man*, 1629

Figure 5.18. Louise Abbéma, *Le Déjeuner dans la Serre*, 1877, oil on canvas, 194 x 308 cm.

Figure 5.19. Louise Breslau, *Gamines*, 1893, oil on canvas, 110 x 235 cm, Musées de Carpentras, France.

Figure 5.20. Louise Breslau, *Delphiniums et campanules*, 1903, oil on canvas, 88.5 x 42 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts – Jules Chéret, Nice, France.

Figure 5.21. Louise Breslau, *La Petite fille avec chien blanc – Portrait de Mlle Adeline Poznanska*, 1891, pastel on beige paper, 130.5 x 76.5 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France.

Figure 5.22. Louise Breslau, *Le Chapeau aux roses*, 1895, pastel on beige paper, 62 x 46.8 cm, Propriété de la Confédération suisse, Berne, Switzerland.

Figure 5.23. Louise Breslau, *Portrait de Mlle Julie Feurgard – Sous les pommiers*, 1886, oil on canvas, 171.5 x 186.5 cm, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland.

Figure 5.24. Louise Breslau, *Portrait de l’artiste*, 1900, 97.5 x 69.5 cm, gouache and pastel on paper, private collection.

Figure 5.25. J.V. Salgado, *Portrait of Mme Demont-Breton*, c. 1895.

Figure 5.26. Louise Breslau, *Portrait de l’artiste*, 1904, pastel, 106 x 60 cm, Musée des Beaux-Art, Nice, France.

Figure 5.27. Louise Breslau, *La Vie Pensive*, 1908, oil on canvas, 175.5 x 160 cm, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland.
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INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century, numerous women artists engaged in the practice of self-portrayal. These self-portraits, whether traditional or revolutionary, public or private, present to the viewer rare insight into lives of numerous women artists. They range from realistic reproduction to whimsical fantasy, from brutally honest self-exposure to layered masquerade, from conscious self-promotion to curious self-exploration. They can be seen to reveal not only how women artists perceived themselves, but also how society at large defined women’s positions and forms of expression. My dissertation presents an in-depth analysis of self-portraits produced by several women artists in the second half of nineteenth-century France and examines the various ways in which these women promoted their reputations, advertised their skills, consciously cultivated celebrity status, and thought about their identities during this time period. Through an examination of the lives and work, I show how artists of different economic backgrounds, artistic styles, and social classes each used representations of themselves and the tradition of self-portraiture as a means to clarify their concept of self and control their public image. These portraits present to the viewer rare insight into lives of women artists and emphasize their awareness of and interest in their own subjectivity. In addition to providing a physical likeness, these self-portraits underscore the contemporary interest in selfhood and open exciting avenues of research. What did portraying the self mean to these artists? How was female identity and selfhood conceived during this time period? And how was it portrayed visually?

By closely examining the historical implications of selfhood, particularly in terms of women’s ability to articulate the self, the difficulty of asserting a female “moi” will be
appropriately understood. At the outset, it must be stated that such a study, including a wide range of women from various social classes and backgrounds who espoused different artistic styles, has the inherent danger of resulting in overarching conclusions or reductive generalizations that essentialize femininity. Much feminist scholarship has exposed the negative consequences of pigeonholing femininity into specific characteristics and innate interests that are due to biological (and therefore unchangeable) factors. Rather than essentialize and compartmentalize femininity, my purpose in examining various women artist’s forms of self-presentation is not to oversimplify or generalize their efforts but rather to illustrate that their varied forms of self-expression point to a shared objective of conscious subjectivity. This analysis will highlight the differences and similarities between the socially-constructed ideals of femininity and the self-constructed manifestations of identity. The portrayal of the female self will be assessed in order to synthesize the alternate concepts of ‘woman’ and femininity that these women were actively and consciously constructing through their lives and art.

State of Scholarship on Self-Portraiture and Feminist Studies

Self-portraiture has captivated artists and audiences alike for centuries. While there are many examples of self-portraiture dating to antiquity, the majority of these images date from the late fifteenth century to the present day. Several reasons have been suggested for this shift, including the access to flat mirrors, an increasing self-consciousness of identity, and the rising status of the artist, which all occurred in the early decades of the sixteenth century.\(^1\) From the Renaissance to the present day, many artists have turned to their own reflections for subject matter. Occupying the position both of subject and object, the artist oscillates between both, momentarily allowing the viewer to see into the metaphorical mirror of the artist and stand in his or her position. Unmediated by a secondary party, the self-portrait is an image of the artist as he

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or she wished to be seen, as they construct themselves for patrons, friends, family, posterity or a viewing public.

Not surprisingly, the literature addressing issues of self-portraiture and specific artists who practice the genre is vast. Within the past twenty years, the interest in self-portraiture has intensified, resulting in myriad articles and publications. Artists such as Albrecht Dürer, Rembrandt van Rijn, Artemisia Gentileschi, Parmigianino, Jacques-Louis David, Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Egon Schiele, Frida Kahlo, and Andy Warhol, to mention only a few of the most well-known, have all been the focus of self-portrait studies within the past two decades. It perhaps goes without saying that because there have been fewer professional women artists through the centuries than their male counterparts, there are correspondingly fewer female self-portraits. It is significant, however, to note that one of the first recorded self-portraits, as discussed by Pliny and later included in Boccaccio’s Concerning Famous Women, was painted by a woman. Pliny states that she painted a “portrait of herself, executed with the aid of a mirror” and further adds that she “remained single all her life.”

For this pioneering female self-portraitist, the mirror, which often carries negative associations of female narcissism

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and vanity, became an artistic tool that enabled creative expression. Since that time, many women have pursued careers as artists and produced self-portraits. In addition to providing a physical likeness, these images present women as both the subject and the object of the work; their boldness in assuming ownership of both of these roles enriches our understanding of self-portraits. It is perhaps for these reasons that there has been a rising interest in the self-portraits by women artists over the past several years. This burgeoning area of research is easily confirmed by the recent publications of exhibition catalogues, monographs, and articles such as Seeing Ourselves: Women Self-Portraits (1998) by Frances Borzello, Self-Portraits by Women Painters (2000) by Liana De Giralami Cheney, Alicia Craig Faxon, and Kathleen Lucey Russo, and Mirror Mirror: Self-Portraits by Women Artists (2001) by Liz Rideal, Whitney Chadwick, and Borzello.  

In Seeing Ourselves, Borzello presents separate chapters on women’s self-portraits from the sixteenth through the twentieth century. Likewise, but with an even larger scope, Cheney, Faxon, and Russo discuss women’s self-portraits from antiquity through the twentieth century. Both publications clearly illustrate that women have long engaged in self-portraiture and provide a much-needed framework for more research on this intriguing topic. However, because these books are quite comprehensive in nature, the authors were unable to thoroughly delve into any given period, country, artist, or self-portrait. Mirror Mirror: Self-Portraits by Women Artists comes closer to my own research goals by focusing upon the self-portraits of one specific area. Produced in conjunction with an exhibition held at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2001, the work contains short and necessarily brief biographical entries on forty artists working

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in Great Britain from the middle of the seventeenth century through the twenty-first century. Although all three of these publications are invaluable to my research as a foundation upon which to build, by narrowing the topic to a specific country and period, namely France and the second half of the nineteenth century, I hope to contribute to the field by connecting various artists and their self-portraits to their specific historic, artistic, and cultural contexts.

The majority of the scholarship on women artists has appeared within the last thirty years. Galvanized and empowered by the women’s movement of the 1960s, in the early 1970s feminist scholars began to critique and challenge traditional art history, which had marginalized women’s place in that history and neglected their contributions. Linda Nochlin’s landmark essay in 1971, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” asserted that because women were denied opportunities for learning and training, they were consequently unable to meet the masculine standard of ‘greatness.’ Following Nochlin’s article, many other feminists focused on the social institutions of power and ideological apparatuses that had favored male creativity. Utilizing new methodologies such as poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and Marxism, feminists have recovered histories of neglected women artists as well as reanalyzed art history through the lens of gender, paying particular attention to the social constructions of femininity, the power of the gaze, and the objectified female body. By so doing, they have encouraged interdisciplinary approaches to art history that have invigorated the field.

Recently, most of the scholarship on women and self-portraiture has focused on twentieth and twenty-first century artists. For example, Marsha Meskimmon’s *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists’ Self Portraiture in the Twentieth Century*, Joyce Tenneson Cohen’s *In/Sights: Self-Portraits by Women*, and museum exhibitions such as the *Through the Looking Glass*:

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Women and Self-Representation in Contemporary Art, have all investigated the ways in which women artists today explore their own identities through photography, painting, sculpture, and video. Contemporary women artists have addressed the conflicts inherent in social expectations for women and created works of art that explore, and sometimes exploit, current and time-honored myths and realities about the female self. Frequently using their own bodies as a site for examination, artists such as Cindy Sherman, Helen Chadwick, Catherine Opie, Ana Mendieta, Joan Semmel, and others have produced self-representations that consciously critique the performance of gender, challenge the social constructs of beauty, and deconstruct the static concept of identity.

Women artists in the nineteenth century similarly challenged the artistic status quo by seizing opportunities as professional artists and pushing the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Their forms of resistance were often manifest through concealed subversions, masquerades, or private exchanges—all of which may not initially be apparent but nevertheless enabled their actions. As they promoted their artistic success and molded their identities, their accomplishments and struggles eventually led the way for the experimentation and liberation of the twentieth century. In this way, their work and their self-portraits present a significant lineage of women artists who were exploring their subjectivity in relation to the artistic and social constructs around them. While many women artists of the nineteenth century continue to garner critical attention, no sustained analysis of their self-portraiture yet exists. Rather than focus on just one artist or attempt a comprehensive analysis, I am primarily focusing on four artists: Rosa Bonheur, Marie Bashkirtseff, Eva Gonzalès, and Louise Breslau. Other artists, such as Berthe

Morisot, Mary Cassatt, and Louise Abbéma will be considered for comparative purposes. By looking at the self-portraits of several women artists, my dissertation will allow similar and opposing themes to emerge between these self-representations and also generate possible responses as to why these women chose to present themselves as they did.

**Organization of the Chapters**

Chapter One will establish the historical and cultural context within which women artists were working and producing their self-portraits. Social expectations for women in terms of behavior and accomplishments as well as the basic understanding of their role and place in society will be elucidated here to provide the context for understanding the audacity of women who were actively pursuing professional careers as artists. The improved opportunities available to women for artistic training, the rising status of artists, and the renewed interest in self-portraiture during the second half of the century also help explain why more and more women were producing their self-portraits, concerned with their individuality, and interested in their public images. The chapter will conclude with an exploration of some of the ideas about subjectivity and selfhood that were particularly prevalent during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Each of the subsequent chapters will focus on one artist and examine how and why they produced self-portraits, constructed their images of self, and presented elements of their identity to the public. Chapter Two will focus on Rosa Bonheur, an unconventional female artist who wore trousers, painted animals, and was the first female to receive a Legion of Honor award. Although she infrequently turned to self-portraiture, there are several examples within her oeuvre worthy of attention. Her tremendously successful painting *The Horse Fair* and several collaborative portraits indicate that she had given considerable thought to her identity, her
gender, and her public image. She was clearly interested in fashioning a public persona that would enable her to achieve success while still refusing to acquiesce to social expectations for women. As the most celebrated female artist of the nineteenth century, Bonheur was a model for the women who followed her, proving that careful negotiation of social constructs of femininity and masculinity combined with persistent commitment to the profession could result in unprecedented success and artistic renown.

As opposed to Bonheur, who investigated facets of her identity by pushing the boundaries of gender, Eva Gonzalès worked within acceptable domains of femininity and chose to establish her artistic identity by allying herself with a significant avant-garde male artist. The ways in which she maintained her association with Édouard Manet and concurrently developed her own sense of style and self is analyzed in Chapter Three. Gonzalès’ self-portraits and images of women likewise respond to Manet’s portrait of her. They offer subtle correctives to his version and provide her own perception of her subjectivity and identity as a women artist. Additionally, her sense of self was powerfully affected by her close relationship with her sister Jeanne, who was her primary confidante and model. Gonzalès’ efforts at self-portraiture and several of her major paintings produced from 1871 through 1880 confirm a concentrated endeavor to establish an independent voice and explore her individuality like and against both her teacher Manet and her sister Jeanne.

The following chapter concentrates on the photographic and painted self-portraits created by Ukrainian-born, Paris-trained artist Marie Bashkirtseff. During her brief lifetime, Bashkirtseff produced several charcoal sketches of her face, painted a formal self-portrait in 1883, had numerous carte-de-viste photographs taken in the 1870s and 80s, and documented the working environment for women artists at the Académie Julian. Bashkirtseff often went to great efforts to maintain a public image of ideal femininity yet privately she wrote anonymous letters calling for
greater rights for women artists, financially supported some feminist groups, and repeatedly used disguises in public in order to attend feminist meetings or purchase painting supplies.

Bashkirtseff’s photographs, in which she posed as a traveling peasant musician, a simple country girl, a monk, nun, and other figures, suggest that her persona was often a performance. Bashkirtseff’s masquerades reveal her process of experimentation as she explored her identity and role as a professional artist as well as promoted the perception of herself as a celebrity.

Chapter Five explores the way that Louise Breslau used the genre of self-portraiture to solidify her connections with her female friends and assert her sexual and artistic identity. Her conventional self-portraits frequently functioned as personal manifestoes of her commitment to profession and confirmation of their skills. Breslau also produced several self-portraits in which she provides glimpses of her daily life in Paris, surrounded by supportive friends, roommates, and fellow artists. Depicting scenes of work and leisure, these self-portraits reveal Breslau’s social support—women who were similarly pursuing their careers in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. These images are interesting foils to the familiar depictions of Parisian ateliers as male spaces of artistic creativity and production. Like Bonheur, Breslau had a committed relationship with a female partner but, unlike Bonheur, she documented their loving and supportive association in two of her self-portraits. These images indicate that the central elements of Breslau’s identity were her status as an artist and her female relationships.

These four artists were by no means the only women who were interested in self-portrayal and producing self-portraits during this period. In this introduction to my research, it is imperative to communicate that this study is not a comprehensive analysis of all the female self-portraiture that was created in the second half of the nineteenth century. Such a project would be immense and likely too broad for detailed analysis of individual artists. This more focused
approach limits the field by geography and chronology: only artists working in France during the second half of the century. Despite this caveat, the question of why these specific artists were selected as the central focus of this study is a valid one. In truth, any selection process might be seen as arbitrary and capricious. However, I believe that these particular artists show both the breadth and depth of responses to the fascination with identity and image in the second half of the nineteenth century. Each of them engaged in the process of self-portrayal in unique and distinct ways. Whether they molded their public image to placate conservative social ideals like Bonheur, or created a multi-faceted celebrity persona like Bashkirtseff, or clarified their self-concept in reaction to primary relationships like Gonzalès, or documented their social world like Breslau, these women used self-portraiture to investigate their concept of self. They are also from various social and economic backgrounds and even nationalities. Both Gonzalès and Bashkirtseff enjoyed the advantages that the upper-middle and aristocratic classes offered, particularly the wealth that enabled opportunities for study and travel and the freedom to produce artwork without excessive concern about the market, or for that matter, support or survival. Bonheur and Breslau, however, depended upon client commissions to maintain their independence. Both achieved enough success to live comfortably in the later phases of their careers (especially Bonheur), but were familiar with strained economic means before their reputations were firmly established. Also, two were French citizens, and two were long-term imports, attracted to France by the Parisian art scene. Their diversity combined with their repeated interest in their identities makes each of these artists an excellent candidate for this project. That there were other women, both in France and worldwide, who were also producing self-portraits at the same time only strengthens the conclusion that subjectivity and selfhood were extremely appealing to numerous artists and confirms the need for further study. I will
address the possibilities for future research more specifically in the conclusion of this dissertation.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, as more and more women picked up their brushes to become professional artists, they also produced intriguing self-portraits that explored their individuality, advertised their skills, constructed their public images, cultivated celebrity status, and reinforced their status as artists. The various forms of self-presentation by artists as diverse as Bonheur, Gonzalès, Bashkirtseff, and Breslau illustrate that the social, philosophical, psychological transformations both influenced and enabled these women to conceive of and construct their inner selves. This multi-artist approach allows similar and opposing themes to emerge among these self-representations and also illustrates various ways in which women were able to articulate the self in late nineteenth-century France. This dissertation, the first to focus specifically on women’s self-portraits in the nineteenth century, sheds new light on the careers of these specific artists as well as clarifies the shifting philosophical and psychological beliefs about the self and how they informed women’s lives and perceptions.
CHAPTER ONE:

Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century: A Brief Cultural Snapshot

“Elle n’est pas comme tout le monde, elle manque de tenue, elle est trop artiste.”

Description of Nélie Jacquemart

At the end of 1868, Geneviève Bréton, a nineteen-year old young woman from a privileged background, expressed her frustration at her mother’s demand that she terminate her close friendship with society portraitist Nélie Jacquemart. Writing in her journal, Bréton lamented the anticipated loss of this female companion, whom she saw on almost a daily basis. As evidence of their frequent association, Jacquemart had painted a portrait of Bréton and exhibited it at the Paris Salon of 1868. However, by the end of the year, Bréton’s parents began to feel that their daughter’s connection with Jacquemart was not desirable: “She is not like everyone else, she lacks manners, she is too much an artist.”

Here the word ‘artist,’ as used by Bréton’s mother, has a negative connotation and refers not only to vocational skills but is code for someone who is unconventional and unwilling to follow accepted rules of conduct. In response to her parent’s wishes Bréton limited her involvement with Jacquemart, but she did not sever it. A month later, though, her journal entry recounts further frustrations on account of Jacquemart. Their public friendship, combined with the Salon portrait, had apparently led to rumors about the nature of their relationship. She angrily wrote, “That a perverted world would be suspect of the pure friendship of a young man with a young woman, that would be vile but I

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8 Bréton, 82.
would understand it. But of Nel and me!” Bréton’s connection with a female artist led to gossip and rumor about her sexuality as well as the possibility of losing social standing within her community. In a broader sense, the reactions of Bréton’s parents and society at large demonstrate how challenging it was for women in artistic professions to avoid rumor and maintain their reputations. Simply by pursuing the arts beyond an amateur level put women at odds with prescribed social behavior.

This chapter will clarify the social context within which women artists were working and defining themselves. Excerpts from manuals of behavior and conduct, as well as discussions of proper patterns for women’s lives, will elucidate what was expected of women. Selections of advice for women choosing professional lives, frequently counseling women to select vocations that would allow them to preserve their “femininity,” will further explain the connotations of certain careers. Many more women sought formal artistic training in the second half of the nineteenth century and the historical conditions that enabled this increase will be briefly explored. Specifically, more options for artistic training, the ability to exhibit at the Paris Salon, and emergence of women’s unions and journals all contributed to the rising number of successful female artists. Additionally, the improving status of artists within French society and the rising interest in self-portraiture and portraits of artists contributed to significant increase in the number of artists, both men and women, who elected to choose themselves as subject matter. Evidence that this was occurring will be provided here for the principal purpose of confirming that women artists who produced self-portraits were participating in a larger cultural dialogue about self-image, identity, and subjectivity. Evolving concepts of psychology and selfhood had a major impact upon nineteenth-century society at large and the developments leading to this fascination.

9 Bréton, 89. Original French: “Qu’un monde perverti souille d’un doute l’amitié pure d’un jeune homme avec une jeune fille, ce serait infâme mais je comprendrais. Mais de Nel et de moi!”

10 Ibid.
with the self will set the stage for studying the self-portraits in later chapters. Essentially, this chapter will provide the framework from which to understand the specific circumstances, family relationships, artistic associations, and individuality of each of the artists in the subsequent chapters.

**Looking into the Mirror: Behavior, Appearance, and other Social Contracts**

Throughout the nineteenth century, countless conduct manuals were written for bourgeois women clarifying all types of behavior, manners, and attitudes. Many addressed the proper ways in which a mistress of the home should conduct and organize her household, regulate meal times, control visiting hours, supervise her children, and support her husband. That the majority of these conduct manuals were addressed to wives is not remarkable; women were expected to marry and have children as the central purpose of their existence. In his *Histoire Morale des Femmes*, Ernest Legouvé divided his writings according to the three phases of a woman’s life: young girl, wife, mother. Although the author held some liberal views, including his rejection of the mercenary nature of many marriage arrangements and his opinion that divorce should be a

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11 For example, Marie Armand Jeanne Gacon-Dufour’s *Manuel complet de la maîtresse de maison ou la parfaite menagerie* (Paris: Roret, 1826) went through several editions. Also, Mme Pariset’s *Manuel de la maîtresse de maison* (Paris: Audot, 1821) was revised numerous times and eventually republished in 1913 as *Nouveau manuel complet de la maîtresse de maison*. Anne Martin-Fugier discusses the appearance and evolution of these housewives’ manuals in her chapter “Bourgeois Rituals” included in Michelle Perrot, ed., *A History of Private Life: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 268-270.

12 Ernest Legouvé, *Histoire morale des femmes* (Paris: G. Sandré, 1860). Legouvé’s book was reprinted numerous times in the next four decades, the tenth and final edition in 1900. A novelist and playwright, Legouvé became most well known for his lectures delivered at the Collège de France in 1848. He later compiled these ideas into his book *Histoire morale des femmes*, which was widely read and one of several books he wrote on women’s rights, their role in society and their education. I am using Legouvé’s arguments and examples here because his moderate feminist approach appealed to a large group of society. His reforms and reasoning were later used as basis for the organized women’s movement during the Third Republic. Neither the extremely conservative and anti-feminist approach of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon or Jules Michelet nor the strong feminist battle-cries of Jenny P. d’Hericourt or Juliette Adam, Legouvé presented a tempered view that is useful here to show more mainstream ideas about women. For more on Legouvé’s theories, see Karen Offen, “Ernest Legouvé and the Doctrine of ‘Equality in Difference’ for Women: A Case Study of Male Feminism in Nineteenth-Century French Thought,” *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 58, no. 2 (June 1986): 452-484.
legal option for women, he upheld conventional ideals that marriage and motherhood were the ultimate sources of fulfillment and happiness for women.

For women who were unable to marry or were widowed, as well as those forced to help their husbands financially support their families, Legouvé included a small section on professional careers. Before examining these options for employment, Legouvé reminded readers of the dangers of working outside of the home and advised against it unless completely necessary. His objections are grounded in the belief that work will taint women’s purity and lower her from the pedestal upon which she should be placed. He poetically envisions angels sullied by the daily encounters of street life:

Now in demanding for woman professional pursuits, what do we do but tear the wings from our angel, and turn her into the dirty streets of a town—to compel the maiden to descend from her pedestal, and expose her to every coarse gazer—but impose upon the woman the fatigues of life, involve her in the rude conflicts of reality, and thus take away from one her grace, from another her purity, from all that ideal charm of modesty which God seems to have made the distinctive characteristic as well as ornament of women?\(^{13}\)

After voicing these objections, the author observed that the options for women were decidedly limited; women who were forced to work needed to choose very carefully a form of employment that would allow them to maintain their femininity. Teaching in public schools or convents, or becoming seamstresses and governesses were more favorable options than the life of unskilled laborers or idle ladies’ companions. In harmony with his tolerant tone, Legouvé called for women to become professors rather than merely governesses or teachers and advocated for their admittance into medical professions.\(^ {14}\)

\(^{13}\) Legouvé, 310-311.  
\(^{14}\) Legouvé suggested that women would make excellent professors of the liberal arts such as French, English, Italian, history, and music, not subjects such as science, philosophy or math. He supported women in medical professions, however, due to their innate abilities to discern pain and nurture others. The discrepancies between his advocacy for women and his simultaneous protection of long-held beliefs of their innate feminine characteristics reveals underlying anxieties about changes in women’s status and purpose in society.
Although Legouvé does not mention the visual arts as a viable option for women, he does include some cautionary advice about women writers. After noting the increasing number of women taking up the pen, Legouvé commented that the danger faced by artists, of either gender, is to be consumed by vanity, pride, and avarice. This is an even greater temptation for women, according to the author, “whose imagination is so easily excited” and are so naturally susceptible to lure of fame. To overcome this, he urged women to continually remind themselves of their familial obligations and place their career successes in a secondary role:

Sacrifice everything, even fame, to your obligations as daughters, wives, mothers. Remind yourselves constantly that the heart is higher than the thought, devotion than success; that to know is nothing, to shine is nothing; and that the whole life of woman is comprehended in one word—Love. Thus, and thus only, can women be literary without ceasing to be women.

This counsel hardly seems unexpected within such a framework, but the implausibility of reading similar advice directed to men highlights the strict polarities between their expected behaviors. Likewise it underscores the precarious position of professional women artists, either writers or painters, who risked being perceived as “ceasing to be women” through their professional aims.

Instead of actively pursuing careers, women were repeatedly encouraged to commit themselves to domestic accomplishments and follow strict codes of conduct that controlled their dress and proper behavior for all times of the day. The appropriate ways to dress, walk, eat, and converse with others were all highly codified and prescribed. Commenting on clothing, Philippe Perrot has noted that “for a woman, dress was a veritable science to which she devoted a third of her day.”

What she chose to wear reflected her income, social mobility, and even marital

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15 Legouvé, 322.
16 Ibid. Italics mine.
status. Clothes were a legible signifier of status within the social hierarchy and even conveyed social values, education, and income.\textsuperscript{18} Once dressed in the appropriate clothing, women were taught how to carry themselves and move their bodies with proper decorum. Even detailed instructions of how to elegantly walk on cobblestone were not too trivial to be included, as the following excerpt from Mme Celnart’s 1863 guide to behavior indicates. Her advice here suggests women need to preserve their appearance at all costs:

They must carefully step only on the center of the cobblestones and never on the edges, because then they would inevitably slip into the spaces between the stones; they have to put down the ball of the foot before the heel; even when it is quite muddy, the heel should be lowered very rarely…. While she ‘dances lightly over the cobblestones’—this is the customary expression—a lady should raise her dress nicely, slightly above her ankles.”\textsuperscript{19}

Knowledge of how to behave and dress in public situations was crucial for women, as it revealed their social status, sophistication, and class. This emphasis on conduct and appearance underscore the reality that women in public were constantly on view, open to the gaze of any passerby.

Seeing and being seen had significant connotations that were taken very seriously in nineteenth-century society. Haussmannian Paris was replete with spectacles for the roaming flâneur that included elegant vistas, street windows, expensive merchandise, and, of course, women. While men actively took in all the sights, women were cautioned to be careful about where they looked and particularly at whom.\textsuperscript{20} In his research on personal activities of daily life

\textit{selon les convenances et les usages du monde dans toute les circonstances de la vie et dans les diverses regions de la societé} (Paris: Desloges, 1852).
\textsuperscript{19} Mme Celnart [Pseud. Élisabeth-Félicie Bayle-Mouillard], \textit{Nouveau manuel complet de la bonne compagnie, ou guide de la politesse et de la bienséance destiné à tous les âges et à tous les conditions} (Paris: Roret, 1863), 56-57. This was originally published in 1839, under the same title (without the addition of the word “Nouveau”). English quoted from Perrot, \textit{Les dessus et les dessous de la bourgeoisie}, 96.
\textsuperscript{20} Numerous scholars have analyzed the dichotomies between male and female spaces in Paris as well as between the private and public spheres. The existence of the female flâneuse, who actively visits parks, department stores, and theaters, has been the subject of much debate. Although some of these spaces can be seen as catering to the women (particularly department stores), in general urban spaces were still strongly associated with men and private,
in the nineteenth century, Guy Thuillier included a chapter on looking and the commonly held beliefs about vision and gazing at others. He observed that as late as 1889 women were cautioned to be careful about looking at people in public, particularly strangers. “A young girl does not look (at people that she does not know) fixedly and boldly.” Keeping eyes lowered in the streets was suggested and some guide books advised against having one’s photograph taken too frequently.

Even looking at oneself could be dangerous for women. Increasingly available to the public in the nineteenth century, mirrors aided in the formation of individual identity as contemplation of one’s image ceased to be a rare privilege. However, for women, mirrors continued to have associations of vanity and narcissism. They were encouraged to look in mirrors as little as possible and to expressly avoid looking at themselves naked. This became a particular fear with the rising popularity of full-length mirrors for dressing, often placed on the doors of a wardrobe. So, on the one hand, women were discouraged from examining themselves, while on the other they were frequently taught that their value in society depended upon their appearance and they were repeatedly associated with mirrors in both literature and art.


22 Thuillier, 5.


24 Ibid. In rural communities, mirrors were thought to have mystical powers that would inhibit children from growing properly, make them incapable of walking, or give them squinty eyes. See Thuillier, 6.

mirrors in paintings of dancers, Berthe Morisot’s *At the Mirror* and *Psyche*, not to mention countless other images of women at their toilette. Despite the mixed messages and taboos against them, mirrors were a critical part of everyday life and played a key role in developing women’s sense of self and identity.

In literature, women who spent too long at the mirror and strongly identified with the image reflected were often courtesans or prostitutes, dependent upon their physical appearance for their livelihood. Emile Zola’s *Nana* and Valerie Marneffe in Honoré de Balzac’s *La Cousine Bette* create their appearances before the mirror, calculating how to attract male customers. Analyzing Balzac’s use of the mirror with Valerie, Jenijoy La Belle opined that “Valerie becomes herself through what she does before the mirror. Within the context of the novel she can be assumed to have a physical existence outside the glass, but such women have no social and psychological presence outside modes of being established by the mirror.”

Although the mirror momentarily empowered Nana and Valerie, their victories were short-lived; in the end both authors suggest that women too obsessed with themselves and their beauty will eventually find tragedy, if not death. Emma Bovary, for example, in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, asks to see her mirror as her dying request and gazes at herself, prior to her unhappy demise.

These references to mirrors and looking at oneself have particular importance for female artists engaged in self-portrayal. Their self-portraits and indeed their conception of their own identities as women and artists must be viewed within the context of these cultural perceptions and ideologies. Their carefully constructed images of themselves must be seen in some part as subversive attempts to assert their individuality and status as professional artists. For them, mirrors are used as empowering objects that enable them to study their visages and then recreate

27 Ibid.
them according to their own insights and observations. Even self-portraits by women artists that abide by conventional standards for portraiture can be viewed as innovative because they assert women’s ability to powerfully look and control their images, and reject former negative associations of narcissism, vanity, and passivity. While these connotations were still very much a part of nineteenth-century culture, women artists who produced their self-portraits contributed to the formation of an alternative subtext that instead promoted the idea of women as creators and as active agents.

**Professional Artistic Pursuits**

Throughout the majority of the nineteenth century, women were expected to develop their artistic skills primarily as part of their female accomplishments and marriageable appeal. A humorous illustration of this expectation appeared in the journal *La Vie Parisienne* in 1864 (Fig. 1.1). A young woman in a billowing formal dress sits at the piano and with one hand on the keyboard and one hand holding a paintbrush, she plays and paints simultaneously. On the right, above the piano, there is a sewing project waiting for her attention. The caption of the image mockingly suggests that women add the easel, the sewing machine, and even tapestry skills to their musical abilities. The impossibility of doing all of these arts simultaneously creates the humor in the sketch but it does show the widespread belief that women were generally expected to know how to paint, sew, and play the piano. Young bourgeois girls often began drawing and music lessons at a young age and continued to develop these skills through their adolescence and often into their early twenties. These artistic abilities were highly praised if they remained at the amateur level, but threatened to disrupt the male-dominated art world when women sought to seriously pursue them. One of Berthe and Edma Morisot’s early painting teachers, Joseph Benoît Guichard, indicated the grave consequences of such pursuits in an oft-quoted letter to
their mother. He warned, “With characters like your daughters', my teaching will make them painters, not minor amateur talents. Do you really understand what that means? In the world of the grand bourgeoisie in which you move, it would be a revolution, I would even say a catastrophe.” Clearly, honing artistic skills for more than just decorative purposes and pleasurable pastimes was outside the scope of traditionally acceptable behavior for middle and upper-class women.

Despite these limiting expectations, or perhaps even because of them, many women began to devote their lives to their artistic achievements and seek professional status in nineteenth-century France. During the first half of the century, there were a rising number of women participating in exhibitions and an increase in the educational opportunities available to them. One of the reasons for this shift was due to a regulation change regarding Salon exhibition that occurred at the end of the eighteenth century in France. In 1791, the academician’s exclusive right to exhibit in the Salon was abolished. This meant that any artist, no matter their training or experience, could submit works to be exhibited at the Salon. Thus, many artists who were unable to study at the Academy, both men and women, were given the opportunity for exhibition in the well-respected Salon. This more inclusive regulation change was enthusiastically welcomed by women artists who began to actively participate in Salon exhibitions.

The rise in the number of professional women artists is also directly related to the increased availability for art instruction and education. Previous to the nineteenth century, few women were able to attain art instruction unless their fathers or husbands taught and encouraged them. However, in 1803, two women formed the École gratuite de Dessin pour les Jeunes Filles

that would educate young girls, promote their talents, save them from idleness, and give them means to earn a living. Also, in the 1820s several male artists offered organized classes to female students. During the first few decades of the nineteenth century, a few other schools of design were established in other areas of France. For the most part, these schools were somewhat like trade schools that provided students with craft skills; in general, they were not focused on producing fine art or professional female artists.

However, this began to change during the second half of the century. An example of the movement toward more serious curriculum and training can be seen through a change in leadership in the École gratuite de Dessin pour Jeunes Filles. In 1848, Raymond Bonheur was appointed director of the main École gratuite that was located in Paris. He died about a year later, and his daughters Rosa and Juliette Bonheur took over until 1859. Under the Bonheurs’ tutelage, a high standard of art was enforced and fine art was promoted over decorative art. This transformation is typical of a larger shift towards more professional education during this time period. In the 1860s, numerous other schools of design began to appear in Paris and in other more provincial towns. By 1869 there were seven schools of design for men in Paris and as many as twenty for women.

The fewer number of design schools for men indicates their ability to study in other venues. Women who wanted to pursue the artistic achievements beyond design schools had fewer choices than their male counterparts. Many male artists could work in private ateliers to

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30 It was organized by Mme Freer-Montizon and Mme Fanny Beauharnais. They viewed the school as a counterpart to the École gratuite de Dessin for men that was established in 1766. In 1840, the English Female School of Design was formed in London, based on the Paris school. The details involving the tuition, class structure and purpose of these schools are discussed in Charlotte Yeldham’s *Women Artists in Nineteenth-Century France and England* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1984), 42-47.

31 A list of some of the male artists teaching classes for women is also available in Yeldham, 48-49.

32 In her biography on Rosa Bonheur, Dore Ashton discusses Bonheur’s impatience with women enrolled in the school but not committed to the profession. See Dore Ashton, *Rosa Bonheur: A Life and A Legend* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), 99-100.

33 Yeldham, 46.
prepare for admission to L’École des Beaux-Arts or in preparation to compete for the prestigious Prix de Rome. However, neither of these privileges was available to women. Nevertheless, beginning in the 1850s there was an increased number of ateliers specifically for women artists. Charles Chaplin’s atelier was popular in the 1860s and 70s and Eva Gonzalès, Louise Abbéma, Henriette Browne and Mary Cassatt all studied there. Gonzalès’ training at Chaplin’s atelier will be discussed more specifically in Chapter Three. Rodolphe Julian’s academy, founded in 1868 and known as L’Académie Julian, was one of the most popular options for women. Julian prided himself on demanding quality work from both male and female students and initially allowed mixed gender classes. He eventually separated the classes to placate worried parents, but his academy was one of the first to allow women to study from the nude.\textsuperscript{34} Some of his famous students were Madeleine Carpentier, Marie Bashkirtseff, Anna Bilinska, Cecilia Beaux and Amélie Beaury-Saurel.\textsuperscript{35} In addition to the L’Académie Julian and the atelier of Chaplin, a few other popular options included L’Académie Colarossi, which attracted many foreign students, and the ateliers of Leon Cogniet and Jean-Jacques Henner.\textsuperscript{36}

All of these options for serious study and training with respected artists at established studios in Paris made the city a magnet for women who wished to have professional careers as artists. Describing the situation in Paris, Charlotte Yeldham concluded,

Throughout the nineteenth century, Paris was mecca for the aspiring woman art student . . . [it] offered what was, in comparison with systems elsewhere, a stimulating course of instruction. The life of women’s art as an accomplishment did exist in France, but on the whole there was a greater opportunity to mingle in artistic life—due to centralization and the informal atelier system—and therefore less segregation and less danger of being submitted to a separate, lower standard.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{34} Marie Bashkirtseff, \textit{Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff} (Paris: Mazarine, 1908), 314.
\textsuperscript{35} Yeldham, 52.
\textsuperscript{36} For a thorough discussion of these studios, see Denise Noël, \textit{Les femmes peintres au Salon, Paris, 1863-1889} (Thèse de doctorat, Université de Paris, 1997), 75-103.
\textsuperscript{37} Yeldham, 62.
Because of these circumstances, women artists flocked to Paris where they believed they would have more opportunities, better teachers, and less resistance. Two of the main artists in this study, Marie Bashkirtseff and Louise Breslau, both came to Paris for these reasons. Even the Bonheur family, who came from Bordeaux, moved to Paris in order for Raymond to find more art students to teach. This move conveniently put Rosa Bonheur close to the Paris Salon where she would quickly be able to establish herself as a gifted artist.

The ability to exhibit at the Paris Salon and more options for artistic training, followed by emergence of women’s unions and journals all contributed to the rising number of successful female artists in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although it was not until 1897 that women would be permitted to study at the École des Beaux Arts, organizations such as the Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs, founded in 1881 which sponsored an annual Salon des Femmes, and the Journal des Femmes Artistes helped bring women artists together in order to actively campaign for equal attention and education.\(^{38}\) It is within this climate of activism and change that many female artists sought professional status and painted the portraits of themselves that will be the focus of this analysis. Producing their own images in a rapidly changing art world, these women presented themselves as creators, capable of envisioning their own futures and insisting upon their rights to be artists.

The Status of Artists and Self-Portraits (1850-1900)

The first wave of significant female self-portraiture in France appeared at the end of the eighteenth century, roughly from 1770 to 1790. French scholar Marie-Jo Bonnet tallied over sixty self-portraits of women artists or portraits by women of women artists that were exhibited

\(^{38}\) Although still important as a matter of equality, it is a great irony that it was only after L’École des Beaux-Arts ceased to be the central venue for exhibition and acceptance in the art world that women were allowed access.
at the Salon in the fifteen years prior to the French Revolution. Looking specifically at self-portraits by Elisabeth Vigée LeBrun, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, Marie-Suzanne Roslin, and Anne Vallayer-Coster, Bonnet argued that these women used their self-portraits as political manifestoes of their existence as independent subjects and their legitimacy as creators. The blossoming of female self-portraiture during this period parallels the rise of women with political power, specifically Marie-Antoinette and her entourage. This era, sometimes referred to as the “âge d’or” for women, was unfortunately brief, cut short by the Revolution and the subsequent ascent of Napoleon.

After the French Revolution and under the Napoleonic Code, women’s rights were severely limited and the appearance of self-portraits by women artists dramatically decreased. Although women’s opportunities for artistic training were slowly but steadily improving in the first half of the century, very few self-portraits were produced during this period. The moment for self-portraits as political manifestoes of power and independence had quickly been eclipsed by strict laws governing their behavior and limiting their legal and social powers. Not until the second half of the century do women again return to their mirrors and canvases in significant numbers. Thus, the following chapter, which analyzes Rosa Bonheur’s portraits and public image, begins right at the moment when women were returning to the subject of self-portraiture and thinking more seriously and profoundly about their positions in society, their rights as artists and women, and their subjectivity in general. In this way, the time frame of this study corresponds to the moment when women revisited the theme of self-portraiture and were once again interested in visually recording their images on canvases.

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In his characteristically witty fashion, Honoré Daumier captured the vogue for self-portraiture that was emerging mid-century in a *Le Charivari* sketch of 1849 (Fig. 1.2). Published as part of the series on contemporary artists called “Scenes from the Studio,” the drawing shows multiple images of the artist, who looks into a mirror and then paints his face on the canvas. The relative lack of female self-portraits in the early nineteenth century and the renewed interest in them in the second half of the century parallels a similar pattern in male self-portraiture, as Daumier’s drawing indicates. In his 1999 essay on self-portraiture in France in the nineteenth century, François Fossier noted the mounting interest in self-portraiture during the second half of the century. He discovered that of 250 self-portraits found in French museum catalogues from 1800-1914, only about fifty were produced prior to 1850. While this number only allows for those paintings exhibited or owned by museums during that period, it does highlight a difference in self-portraiture production from the first half to the second half of the century. Fossier observed that the students of David, many of whom excelled in the art of portraiture, rarely captured themselves on canvas. Likewise, the new landscape painters in the first few decades of the nineteenth century and Barbizon painters such as Théodore Rousseau, Narcisse-Virgile Diaz de la Pena, Jules Dupré, Charles Jacque, and Constant Troyon very infrequently depicted themselves, the notable exceptions being two self-portraits by Camille Corot and the six self-portraits of Jean-François Millet. Fossier acknowledged that the case of the Romantics is a little more complicated; while Théodore Gericault, Eugène Delacroix, Eugène Deveria, and Ary

40 Daumier seems to be basing this drawing on Johannes Gumpp’s *Triple Self-portrait* image from 1646, which suggests that the rising self-portrait tradition was highly influenced by its historical precedents. For more discussion of this image, see Pierre Georgel and Anne-Marie Lecoq, *La Peinture dans la peinture* (Dijon: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1983), 130, and Mary Gluck, “The Flâneur and The Aesthetic: Appropriation of Urban Culture in Mid-Century Paris,” *Theory, Culture, & Society*, Vol. 20, No. 5, (2003): 53-80.


42 He specifically mentions the absence of self-portraiture by Gérard, Jean-Baptiste Isabey and Gros, while noting that Girodet, Prud’hon, and Boilly did produce them. See Fossier, 44.
Scheffer responded to the call by painting self-portraits, many missed it completely, including Paul Delaroche, Joseph Court, and Eugene Isabey.

A major shift occurred around 1850, however, and Fossier asserts that during the second half of the nineteenth century, the majority of academic painters, including Léon Bonnat, William-Adolphe Bouguereau, Thomas Couture, Jean-Louis Flandrin, and Jean-Jacques Henner, all produced at least one self-portrait and often more than one. Similarly, many artists working on the fringes or outside of the official Academy also created self-portraits frequently. Some of the most well-known include Courbet (14 times), Fantin-Latour (10 times), Degas (7 times), Cézanne (20 times), Van Gogh (41 times), Gauguin (9 times), and Bernard (4 times). The presence of self-portraits both inside and outside of the academic tradition has led various scholars, including Fossier, to group these images into two general groups. The first, commonly produced by academic painters, was the traditional bust view of an artist, depicted professionally without unnecessary emotion, usually between the ages of 50-60, often with a red Légion d’honneur pin attached to their chest and frequently produced to be sent to Rome. The second type of self-portrait was less uniform and characterized by the variety of poses (profile, front, three-quarters), ages (young to old) and the diversity of moods and emotions depicted.

Commenting on this latter element, Fossier asserts that “Never before had self-portraits spoken so much of the intimate lives of the painters, of their hopes and their suffering.”

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43 Fossier, 44. Original French: “les grands maîtres de la peinture officielle dans la seconde moitié du siècle feront presque tous leur autoportrait, jusqu’à dix fois dans le cas de Bonnat par exemple. Couture, Chenavard, Signol, Hippolyte Flandrin, Puvis de Chavannes, Henri Lehmann, Lépine, Ernest Meissonier, Élie Delaunay, Jean-Paul Laurens, Paul Baudry, toute l’Académie est là… Si l’on y ajoute Carolus-Duran, Bouguereau, Cabanel, Daglan-Bougeret, Jules Breton, Jean-Jacques Henner et Chartran, la liste est pratiquement exhaustive et sans exception une version au moins de chacun de ces autoportraits se trouve être un hommage envoyé, selon une tradition remise à l’honneur, au musée des Offices pour le corridoio vasariano.”

44 Fossier, 47. Original French: “Jamais auparavant les autoportraits n’avaient autant parlé de la vie intime du peintre, de ses espoirs et de ses souffrances.”
Particularly in the last decades of the nineteenth century, this more expressive and experimental self-portrait was privileged; self-portraiture was increasingly used as an outlet for personal interrogation and introspection, an instrument for expressing what would today be called an identity crisis. While some reveal traumatic self-exploration, others focus on a moment of meditation and contemplation. In either case, Fossier notes that self-portraits produced at the end of the century are often marked by an absence of superfluous detail or narrative elements. With black, brown, or otherwise neutral backgrounds, these images make it impossible to determine if the artist is inside or outside, painting during the day or evening, or surrounded by any recognizable objects or people. All attention is concentrated on the face and gaze of the artist. Devoid of any distracting elements, self-portraits became the epicenter of psychological exploration in the latter decades of the nineteenth-century.

Another factor that contributed to the increase in the production of self-portraits in the second half of the century was the rising social status of artists and the consequently natural interest in their portraits. Art historian Alain Bonnet has explored this evolution by analyzing the creation of a room for artist’s portraits in the Louvre, inaugurated in 1888, and documenting the rising interest in exhibitions or publications focusing on images of artists (often including writers, actors, as well as visual artists). In 1853, Philippe de Chennevières-Pointel, inspector of the museums and the exhibitions in the provinces of France, published a book with a series of portraits of French artists and proposed the need for an official collection of these portraits to conserve the likenesses of national artists for posterity. Using the collection at the Offices of the

45 Fossier, 50.
46 Ibid.
Uffizi in Florence as a model, Chennevières-Pointel suggested that gathering images of artists would keep them in the public eye and prevent their legacies from being lost.

Although the proposal was not realized at this time, the idea was revived in 1876 when the academic painter Jean-Paul Laurens offered his self-portrait, recently exhibited at the Salon, to the gallery of portraits at the Uffizi. Several articles in *Le Monde Illustré* and the *Chronique des arts* lamented the upcoming loss of this work and resubmitted the idea of a national collection. One writer asks, “Why doesn’t the Beaux-Arts Management establish an institution similar to that of the Offices of the Uffizi [in Florence], not in the general sense—we are too late and the fight is impossible—but in an exclusively French spirit?”

Despite the support of the press, and the available space in the Denon pavilion due to the restoration of Charles Le Brun’s four large canvases of *Les Batailles d’Alexandre*, the project failed again but was frequently resurrected and gained ground in the 1880s.

In 1884, Henry Jouin published the first pages of a book entitled *Le Musée des portraits d’artistes*, the finished volume appeared in 1888. The author presented the book, which included portraits of artists (including both self-portraits and portraits produced by others), as a printed companion to the upcoming national gallery of artists, which he clearly accepted as a reality. Less nationalistic than voices in past decades, Jouin included French artists as well as artists who had lived and worked in France in his collection, resulting in a large volume that listed 3,000 artists. This less xenophobic approach was one promoted by Jules Castagnary, who worked to make the gallery of artists at the Louvre come to fruition during his tenure as Director of the Beaux-Arts from 1883 to 1889. After announcing the upcoming installation, Castagnary

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48 E. Lechevallier-Chevignard, *Chronique des arts*, 3 juin 1876. Also quoted in Bonnet, 58. Original French: “Pourquoi la Direction des beaux-arts ne fonderait-elle pas une institution analogue à celle du musée des Offices, non pas dans un sens général—nous arrivons tard et la lutte est impossible—, mais dans un esprit exclusivement français ?”
expressed his interest in including worthy foreign artists as well as living artists into the collection. Officially opening on February 14th, 1888, the newly gathered collection of paintings and sculpture busts included 104 paintings and 16 sculpture busts. Of the paintings, 96 were French artists and only 8 of foreign origin, 29 were self-portraits and the remaining 75 were artist portraits by other artists. Despite Castagnary’s plan to include contemporary or living artists, only a token three were from the nineteenth century and these were painted by recently deceased artists; the bulk of the collection came from eighteenth century (51 portraits) and the seventeenth century (47 portraits) with the remaining two from the sixteenth century.\(^{49}\)

In his analysis of this new collection in the Louvre, Bonnet concluded that although it was a short-lived experiment, lasting only from 1888 to 1914, it was successful during this period because it capitalized on three areas of public interest. First, it celebrated the “culte des grands hommes” by offering an illustrated pantheon of important artists of the past. Second, it filled the public taste for portraits of celebrities. This served to strengthen public knowledge of artist’s contributions but also solidify national identity and history. And lastly, and perhaps most important for this study, it aided in heightening the social class of artists, even emphasizing a separate and autonomous class to which they belonged.\(^{50}\) Although the new collection clearly did not focus on contemporary artists or include any women, the rising interest in portraits of artists as demonstrated by the eventual creation of this collection highlights the evolution of the status of artists during the second half of the nineteenth century and can also be seen as another reason that more and more artists began to paint their self-portraits. Even if they had not been invited to send their portrait to the offices in Florence or to participate in the Louvre exhibition,

\(^{49}\) Bonnet, 62. The three from the nineteenth century were two self-portraits by Gustave Ricard (1823-1873) and Gustave Courbet’s self-portrait entitled *L’Homme à la ceinture noire*. Both were previously owned by the Luxembourg museum and were given to the Louvre to enhance the new collection.

\(^{50}\) Bonnet, 66.
the repeated attention given to portraits of artists combined with the new emphasis on introspection and experimentation in self-portraiture would have given artists several reasons to think about producing their own portraits.

The Psychology of the Self

This rising interest in the self was not unique to the art world; new research in various academic fields encouraged a greater interest in the individual and the inner psyche. The fascination with subjectivity and interiority was galvanized by new discoveries about the human body and its inner workings as well as connections between the exterior and interior elements of the self. Nineteenth-century notions of the self were highly influenced by a new understanding that the self was something carried within and that it was locus of identity. Scientific progress throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in terms of understanding human anatomy and physiology, reinforced burgeoning ideas about individuality and the unique nature of each person. The numerous publications on physiognomy, the discovery of inimitable markings of identity (such as skeletal measuring and fingerprinting), studies on the development of the physical and mental faculties of humans, and the interest in facial expressions and their relation to emotion and character all underscore the rising interest in the individual and a new compulsion to study its various facets. Intriguingly, although the majority of these studies were based on exterior manifestations of the physical body, the results were deemed valuable not only because they explained components of the human body but also because they seemed intricately connected to functions of the inner soul.

The connections between exterior and interior elements of the self are apparent in physiognomic research, which rose in popularity largely due to research by the Swiss

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philosopher and theologian Johann Casper Lavater (1741-1801) at the end of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{52} Lavater’s work, aimed at establishing connections between the physical and psychological status of his subjects, was frequently reprinted in the first three decades of the nineteenth century and had a considerable impact upon European culture. \textit{L’art de connaître les hommes par la physionomie}, a ten-volume collection of Lavater’s research, published in Paris in 1820 and reprinted in 1835, aptly reveals the underlying premise of his work in the title.\textsuperscript{53} One could, physiognomists asserted, accurately predict the characteristics of a person by his or her physical features. This field of study, emerging simultaneously with the new awareness of the inner self, assuaged anxieties about society; it was possible to quickly discern the moral character and capabilities of fellow associates and even strangers by honing precise skills of reading facial features. Auguste Audibert’s \textit{Essai sur la Physionomie et la Physiognomie: Étude de Psychologie Physiologique} and Eugène Ledos’ \textit{Traité de la Physionomie Humaine}, published in 1892 and 1894 respectively, attest to the lasting popularity of this pseudo-science within the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{54} Indeed, Ledos’ book is addressed to the common man rather than to scientific researchers; it assures the reader that facial expressions are “un sceau de sa personnalité” and the facial features are like a mirror where the moral being is reflected.\textsuperscript{55} This “science merveilleuse” allowed one to study his or herself in order to avoid faults of personal inclination and, when applied to others, “physiognomy helps one discern the virtuous man from the depraved, the sincere friend from the treacherous one who borrows the mask of friendship to

\textsuperscript{52} Physiognomy has roots back to at least the fourteenth century, and some scholars claim it was explored even earlier by the Chinese. In Western Europe, however, it reached the heights of its popularity in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Lavater’s major work, \textit{Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe}, (1775-1778), was initially published in Germany, but later translated and widely read in Germany, France, and England. One of the first French publications was in 1781, \textit{Essai sur la physionomie, destiné à faire connaître l’homme et à le faire aimer} (Paris: Le Haye, 1781).

\textsuperscript{53} Johann Casper Lavater, \textit{L’art de connaître les hommes par la physionomie} (Paris: Depélafl, 1820).

\textsuperscript{54} Auguste Audibert, \textit{Essai sur la Physionomie et la Physiognomie: Étude de Psychologie Physiologique} (Bordeaux: Cadoret, 1892) and Eugène Claude François Ledos, \textit{Traité de la Physionomie Humaine} (Paris: Oudin, 1894).

\textsuperscript{55} Ledos, 16.
better harm and deceive.”

Ledos particularly encourages priests, government officials, and doctors, whose professions frequently require the need to assess the character or inner state of individuals, to use physiognomy on a daily basis.

Concurrent with these physiognomic findings, explorations in phrenology, neurobiology, pathognomy (a field exploring the study of emotions and the facial expression of them), anthropometric measuring, and even less scientifically based fields such as palmistry attest to a belief that physical elements of the body revealed mental processes, moral character, and even future potential of the possessor. Additionally, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s *Philosophie Zoologique* (1809) followed by Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1873) illustrate the early scientific investigations of evolution and the need to understand distinctions not only among different types of individuals but also among humans, animals, and all living organisms. The work of Lamarck, Darwin, and others supported the belief that self-consciousness and the human ability to conceptualize the abstract represented a higher form of ideation.

As the self gained new complexity and depth, greater attention was paid within the French educational system to teaching about selfhood and identity. By the middle of the century, the educational approach to the self was one promoted by the philosopher Victor Cousin. Cousinian philosophy was a *juste milieu* doctrine, eclectically borrowed from various ideologies.

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57 Ibid.


in order to create a moderate approach pleasing to many. It was based on “an a priori belief in a
self, or moi, a repository of self-initiated mental activity and free will. . .”60 This ideology took a
prominent role in the educational system and required courses in ‘psychology’ were added to the
standard lycée curriculum in an effort to encourage students to understand an “interior reality”
(fait intérieur) and learn introspective techniques.

Significantly, these courses were unavailable to women throughout the nineteenth
century. Even with the reorganization of educational curriculum for lycée students in the Third
Republic, female students received a course in morals with a brief discussion of philosophy,
liberty, and personality, but no discussion of the moi or of introspective techniques.61 As
historian Jan Goldstein summarized, “Institutional arrangements thus reflected and actualized the
belief that possession of a moi—a coherent self that could be known through interior observation
and talked about, that was the source of will and willed activity in the world—was a prerogative
of the bourgeois male.”62 For Cousin, a woman should only exercise her mind in an effort to
“enter into a spiritual rapport [with her partner] to understand his work….to feel his sufferings in
order to soothe them.” He further clarified, “I make a sharp distinction between the woman of
wit and learning (femme d’espirit) and the woman author. I infinitely honor the one, and I have
little taste for the other.”63 Clearly, a woman seeking to establish a professional voice or
occupation steps outside the limits of the acceptable achievements for her gender. Thus, under
Cousinian influence, women were not encouraged to be independent subjects and “selfhood
remained an exclusively masculine affair.”64

60 Ibid., 322.
61 Ibid., 333.
62 Ibid., 324.
63 Cousin as quoted in Goldstein, 330.
64 Ibid., 334
Although the spirit of Cousin’s psychological approach to the self continued to impact the second half of century, it gradually became infused with the ideals of Émile Durkheim.

Often referred to as the father of sociology, Durkheim had a significant impact on the reformation of the French school system during the Third Republic and introduced the social sciences in its curriculum. Durkheim strongly espoused the idea that religion, morality, and the basic concepts of individuality were adopted through the influences of social institutions and social interaction. Modern people become aware of themselves only because society has progressed in ways that make individual differentiation possible, mainly through division of labor and specialization of skills. Instead seeing these developments as alienating, Durkheim asserted that these qualities of modern life enable people to excel at specific skills and then depend on society for other skills, fostering dynamic social integration and unique, highly skilled individuals. Prior to this point, the lack of social development corresponded to a lack of self-awareness. “If in lower societies so small a place is given to individual personality that is not because it has been restrained or artificially suppressed….It is simply because, at that moment in history, it did not exist.” Thus, for Durkheim, self-awareness and individuality were not innate human characteristics but rather consequences of highly developed forms of society.

The philosophies of Durkheim and Cousin both emphasize, despite their differences, a need to cultivate subjectivity, either through organized government-sanctioned educational curricula or through less formal but equally social processes. These philosophical approaches to the self are invaluable as evidence of the attention given to individual identity and selfhood.

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66 Durkheim as quoted in Seigel, 486. Italics original.
throughout the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{67} It is perhaps not a coincidence that at the precise moment when psychological and philosophical conceptions of the self were changing, so were the conditions and opportunities for women. Goldstein is certainly correct in her assertion that the self, as defined and discussed in official institutions, was solely a male prerogative, but women were finding ways around this official exclusion in both public and private venues. Publicly, more and more women were lobbying for parity and questioning their individual and collective purpose and place in society. Privately, many women were writing their thoughts, experiences, feelings, and even fantasies in personal journals, diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies. Self-writing flourished in the nineteenth century and the act of composing these texts often encouraged reflection and the development of a conscious self.\textsuperscript{68} These writings certify that women were equally concerned about defining their identities and were very much a part of the fascination with the subject of the “moi” in nineteenth-century life.

Women’s self-portraiture enters into the dialogue about selfhood and autonomy in a similar fashion. Like women’s self-writing that existed as both private and public texts, self-portraits were produced for personal purposes, capturing quiet moments of reflection, or for public venues, such as exhibition at the Paris Salon. These images also confirm that women were fascinated with their own subjectivity and were exploring various ways to document and understand their identity. As verified in this chapter, the evolving concepts of selfhood had a major impact upon nineteenth-century society at large and the social, artistic, philosophical, and

\textsuperscript{67} Indeed, this is the main interest of the protagonist in Maurice Barrès’ fin-de-siècle trilogy \textit{Le Culte du Moi}. Consisting of three novels, the series revolves around Philippe’s struggle to participate in the society while still maintaining his independence and sense of self-sufficiency and identity. Barrès claimed that “the self is not immutable; we must defend it every day and create it every day.” Maurice Barrès, \textit{Le Culte du Moi (Sous l’oeil des barbares, Un Homme libre, Le Jardin de Bérénice)} (Paris: Librarie Plon, 1922). It was originally published separately in 1888, 1889, 1891, respectively.

psychological transformations both influenced and enabled women to conceive of and construct their inner selves. Their work responds to a profound question—how was female identity conceived of and presented?—with aesthetic, intellectual, and emotional strength and close study of their varied responses in the following chapters will aid in understanding nineteenth-century constructions of the self.
CHAPTER TWO:

“My feminism and my clothes aren’t meant to surprise you”:

Rosa Bonheur’s Pants, (Self) Portraits, and Personas

“As a creative artist I place her first among women, living or dead. And if you ask me why she towers above her fellows, by the majesty of her work silencing every detractor, I will say it is because she listens to God and not to man. She is true to self.”

-Victor Hugo on Rosa Bonheur

As one of the most successful female artists of the nineteenth century, Rosa Bonheur has received much attention in the last few decades. Her ability to boldly reject socially-accepted norms for women, but still achieve economic and artistic success makes her a fruitful subject for art historical and feminist research. During her lifetime, she quickly established her reputation as a talented animal painter and financially supported herself with commissions, which enabled her to purchase a beautiful chateau on the edge of the forest of Fontainebleau and work comfortably as an artist. The first woman to be awarded the Legion of Honor, the highest accolade bestowed by the French government, Bonheur epitomized female achievement and triumph. Her phenomenal success, uncommon for women, opened the realm of possibility for later generations of women who viewed Bonheur as a model of accomplishment, worthy of emulation. This chapter will concentrate on understanding the legacy Bonheur left behind, specifically by

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70 Dore Ashton’s book was one of the first monographs that showed the renewed interest in Bonheur’s life and oeuvre since the early 1980s; it is still a standard source for Bonheur research. At the end of the 1990s, several books and exhibitions offered new perspectives and research on Bonheur. Noteworthy examples include: Anna Klumpke’s *Rosa Bonheur: Sa vie, son œuvre*, originally published in Paris in 1908, translated by Gretchen van Slyke into English in 1997 as *Rosa Bonheur: The Artist’s (Auto) Biography*; the exhibition *Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899)*, one of the first retrospective exhibitions of the artist since the early twentieth century, organized by the Bordeaux museum of art in 1997; and *Rosa Bonheur: All Nature’s Children*, an exhibition held at the Dahesh Museum in New York in 1998. Additionally, articles by Albert Boime (1981), Gretchen van Slyke (1991), James Saslow (1992), and Whitney Chadwick (1993), have increased interest in the artist; their specific arguments and contributions will be analyzed later in the chapter.
focusing on her public persona—how she presented herself visually and verbally to the society within which she lived and worked—and attempt to reconcile her outward appearance and habits, typified by her masculine attire and cropped hair, with her more conservative opinions and statements in order to analyze the ways in which she functioned within the socially-coded spaces of femininity and masculinity during her lifetime.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, particularly after the extraordinary success of *The Horse Fair*, several biographies, numerous articles, and other publications on Bonheur were produced which kept the artist in the public eye on a regular basis, even after her self-imposed withdrawal and mainly private life at her Chateau at By after 1860. The tone and content of these commentaries will aid in assessing her legacy and her public face. Additionally, Bonheur collaborated closely with several artists who painted her portrait at various stages of her career; these images facilitate understanding Bonheur’s concept of self and the ways in which she desired to be represented. Bonheur did not produce a large body of self-portraits, but she did repeatedly collaborate with artists producing her portrait and was strongly invested in her public persona and image. This chapter will look at her few self-portraits as well as the large group of images made of her in order to assess how she perceived herself and was presented to the public at large. Numerous other images of Bonheur, including paintings, engravings, and medallions, were made of the artist during her lifetime or shortly thereafter. That so many artists were compelled to create Bonheur’s likeness illustrates a fascination with the artist and provides intriguing visual interpretations of her. These images have never been thoroughly researched. An analysis of these visual records as well as Bonheur’s own comments about herself and her beliefs about women, men, and artists will enable a comparison between the public and private identities of this famous female artist.
Born in 1822 in Bordeaux, Rosa Bonheur was the eldest of four children of Raymond and Sophie Bonheur. Her early childhood was marked by difficulties, stemming largely from the financial instability of her struggling-artist father and then by the unexpected death of her mother when Bonheur was eleven. After sabotaging her brief apprenticeship with a dressmaker and being formally asked to leave an all-girl boarding school, the teenage Bonheur happily took her place beside her father in his studio. Despite his initial reluctance, Raymond quickly recognized his daughter’s ability and encouraged her to develop her talent, inviting her to use the success of Vigée-Lebrun as her model. Bonheur later recalled her father saying “Seek your way, try to surpass Mme. Vigée-Lebrun, whose name is on everyone’s lips these days. She’s a painter’s daughter too, and she did so well that by the age of twenty-eight she got into the Royal Academy…..” Bonheur’s two brothers, Isidore and Auguste, and her youngest sister Juliette, also found their way to the studio, and soon, working side by side on drawings, paintings, and sculptures became a regular family affair.

In 1841 at the age of 19, Bonheur exhibited for the first time at the Salon; her two submissions Goats and Sheep and Two Rabbits Nibbling Carrots were both accepted and are characteristic of her life-long interest in painting animals. She exhibited continuously at the Salon until 1855, winning a third-class medal in 1845 and a gold medal in 1848. Despite the political unrest during 1848, it was a good year for the Bonheur family. The Salon that year provided unparalleled opportunities for artists as it was decreed in February that all submissions would be accepted. There were over 5,000 works exhibited, more than twice the number from

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71 Raymond Bonheur spelled his name “Raimond” until the mid-1830s. See Ashton, 33. Scholars alternately use both spellings. For consistency, I will use his adopted spelling throughout the chapter. Additionally, I refer to Rosa Bonheur by her last name for the majority of the text. There are, however, a few instances where I refer to her by her first name to clearly distinguish her from her father or brothers.

the previous year. The Bonheurs were well represented: Raymond exhibited a landscape, each of his sons exhibited three works, and Rosa exhibited six paintings and two sculptures. After being awarded a gold medal, Bonheur then received a 3,000-franc commission from the government to paint a work with a ploughing theme. Additionally, Raymond was appointed director of the École Gratuite de Dessin des Jeunes Filles. Bonheur and her sister Juliette actively participated in their father’s teaching there, and eventually took over the school after his death.

Buoyed by these achievements, Bonheur rented her own studio space at 56 rue de l’Ouest and began working on a painting that was larger and more ambitious than anything she had thus far attempted. *Ploughing in the Nivernais*, as this work came to be known, depicts two teams of six oxen, yoked two by two (Fig. 2.1). Describing the work, Bonheur explained, “I had in mind… to celebrate with my brush the art of tracing the furrows from which comes the bread that nourishes all humanity.” 73 The oxen move laboriously across the field, the cost of their heavy labor betrayed in their red eyes and drooling mouths. Bonheur began visiting slaughterhouses in the mid-1840s and her awareness of the anatomy of the animals manifests itself through the accurate details of their large bodies. Four farmers keep the oxen in check, prodding them along the deep furrows with long sticks. The subject matter has often been attributed to George Sand’s novel *La Mare au Diable (The Devil’s Pool)*, a short pastoral novel which followed the life of a simple laborer Germain, daily ploughing his fields through trials and triumphs.74 Sand, one of Bonheur’s favorite authors, enjoyed an unconventional life as a writer and celebrity, spurning limitations on women’s behavior and shocking the public by wearing

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73 Quoted in Ashton, 69.
74 Anna Klumpke, who recorded Bonheur’s memoirs, clarified that there is no real proof that Bonheur’s inspiration came from Sand’s novel. Still, Klumpke suggested that their mutual love of nature produced “in different genres a similar interpretation of ploughing a field, an act that is both ordinary and sublime…” Klumpke, *The Artist’s (Auto)Biography*, 134.
pants (among other things). Although Bonheur’s senior by eighteen years, Sand was frequently linked with Bonheur when critics discussed successful artistic women, especially after the success of this painting.

*Ploughing in the Nivernais* took months of preparation for Bonheur, including travel to the Nivernais region with her childhood friend and lifelong companion Nathalie Micas. Working anxiously so as to finish the painting in time for the Salon of 1849, Bonheur achieved her goal but her happiness was tempered by the death of her father on March 23, 1849. A few days before his death, he inspected the painting and approvingly praised her work, concluding that she was “right on the heels of Vigée-Lebrun.” The painting was a sensation, establishing Bonheur’s career with the public and the art world alike. Scenes of rural life and simple peasant labor were popular and encouraged during the Second Republic. In 1848, the year of Bonheur’s gold medal and government commission, more awards went to landscape and animals painters than any other category: 43 prizes for this previously underappreciated group, 36 to genre painters, and only 15 to history painting. It was a promising time to be an *animalier* and the positive reception to Bonheur’s *Ploughing in the Nivernais* ensured her success in the coming years.

**In the Public Eye: Images of Bonheur in 1850s**

In 1851-52, Bonheur began a series of sketches of the horse market at the Boulevard de l’Hôpital, near the Asylum of la Salpêtrière. Visiting twice a week for over a year, she resolved to paint a work “at least eight feet by sixteen, much larger, therefore, than my *Ploughing in the Nivernais*.” Bonheur had consulted Richard du Chantal’s book *Study of the Horse* and wanted to capture a line of horses similar to a Parthenon frieze. By this time, she was quite accustomed to working in unlikely locations and had begun at least by the late 1840s, to regularly apply for

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75 Klumpke, *The Artist’s (Auto)Biography*, 130.
76 Ashton, 64.
77 Klumpke, *The Artist’s (Auto) Biography*, 148. *Ploughing in the Nivernais* measures 5’9” by 8’8.”
permission to appear in public in masculine attire (Fig. 2.2). Granted by the prefecture of the police, the “Permission de Travestissement” allowed Bonheur to “dress as a man” in public (excluding shows, dances, and other public meeting places) for reasons of health and needed to be renewed every six months. Thus, with government approval, Bonheur perfected her knowledge of animal anatomy and movement, which culminated in her masterpiece *The Horse Fair*.

Exhibited at the Salon of 1853, *The Horse Fair* depicts several horsemen struggling to control powerful, unbroken horses and present them to potential buyers. Brimming with vitality and motion, the Percheron horses rear, trot, and gallop, each in a slightly different pose, as their riders struggle to turn them around the ring. Perhaps it was a combination of the enormous size and energy of the painting, its innovative subject matter, the accuracy of the animals depicted and the fact that it was painted by a rising female artist that solidified its appeal at the Salon. The success at the Paris Salon was just the beginning—in the next thirty years the painting would travel extensively, further establishing the artist’s career and reputation, until it was finally donated in 1887 by Cornelius Vanderbilt to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Prior to 1853 Bonheur had worked with the Tedesco brothers in selling her works but *The Horse Fair* prompted Ernest Gambart, a Belgian-born but mainly English art dealer, to promote her art both nationally and internationally. It was under his direction that *The Horse Fair* traveled to Ghent, Bordeaux, England, and eventually the United States. With its spectacular success, the interest in the curious woman behind the painting escalated, resulting in various images and publications in the press.

Although Bonheur’s brother Auguste had exhibited a portrait of her in the Salon of 1848 (Fig. 2.4), one of the first public images of Bonheur after her reputation was established was a
bronze medallion created by the prominent sculptor David d’Angers (1789-1856) in 1854 (Fig. 2.5). The medallion, one of more than six hundred medallions produced from approximately 1827 until David’s death in 1856, was a part of the sculptor’s larger quest to produce mini-homages to venerable individuals, a pantheon of noteworthy national and international figures.78 The medallion of Bonheur is a profile view, which David felt was the most expressive and comprehensive way to portray the individual. Interested in theories of phrenology and physiognomy, David carefully executed the facial features of his models, firmly believing that a well-captured profile revealed their character and would also be morally beneficial and uplifting to the public at large.

One of few medallions of women, the work testifies to Bonheur’s eminence in the mid-1850s.79 She looks resolutely forward, with a calm expression and hair that softly curls around her ears and just above her shoulders. Following tradition, behind her head David has reproduced an imitation of Bonheur’s signature, which adds an almost physical connection to the model as well as an endorsement of the image. Bonheur could not have helped being flattered to join the ranks of Victor Hugo, Delacroix, Balzac, and others in David’s illustrious collection. Additionally, David relinquished rights to the engravings of his medallions, desiring them to be readily copied and available to the wider public as part of his belief in their ability to educate and inspire. It is not precisely clear how much Bonheur’s medallion image was disseminated in the

78 Jacques de Caso, David d’Angers: Sculptural Communication in the Age of Romanticism, Translated by Jacques de Caso and Dorothy Johnson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 173. The official number of David’s medallions differs in various publications. De Caso says that there are more than 700, but other sources claim closer to 500.
79 David’s medallions of women included wives (and sometimes daughters and/or mothers) of famous men, such as Josephine and Leticia Bonaparte, and also significant writers, actresses, and singers. Bonheur was one of very few artists; one of the others was Antoinette Cécile Hortense Haudebourt-Lescot. George Sand and Harriet Beecher Stowe are two other well-known women included in David’s medallion collection.
1850s, but it would have been seen again after a compilation of David’s medallions was published in 1867 and republished in 1883.\footnote{Pierre-Jean David d’Angers, Les Medallions de David d’Angers (Paris : Ch. Lahure et Cie, 1867).}

In 1856 and 1857, Frederick Goodall (1822-1904) and Louis-Edouard Dubufe (1819-1883) both painted portraits of Bonheur, that confirm her rising fame and popularity as an artist (Figs. 2.6 and 2.7).\footnote{Although Louis-Edouard Dubufe is the correct order of his name, he is sometimes referred to as Edouard-Louis Dubufe. In some nineteenth-century references, his last name is spelled Dubuffe.} Goodall was a British artist, a member of the Royal Academy, and known primarily for his landscapes and, particularly after 1858, his paintings of Egypt. The meeting between the two artists occurred while Bonheur was traveling through England and Scotland as part of a publicity tour for The Horse Fair, organized by Gambart, who also represented Goodall. While traveling in the countryside one afternoon, Bonheur stopped to paint cattle grazing on hillside grass; during this pause, Goodall captured her at work on his canvas. In this painting entitled Rosa Bonheur at Work near Wexham, he has created a demure yet intelligent artist actively working and concentrating intently upon her animal subject matter. Notably, Bonheur is dressed in conservative female attire, which was usually her custom when in the company of others.

Though this presentation may be an exaggerated version of Bonheur’s feminine appearance, it does capture Goodall’s assessment of Bonheur as a person and artist. He commented, “It was the opinion of many people who had never met her that she was a masculine woman. I can say that she was quite the reverse. Her hands and feet were petites; her face was not strictly beautiful, or fine, or handsome; but her expression was so vivacious and intelligent that I thought her charming.”\footnote{Ashton, 105. Also in Frederick Goodall, The Reminiscences of Frederick Goodall, R.A. (London: Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1902), 129. Emphasis original.} In many textual and visual references to Bonheur, the authors often felt a need to reinforce or deny her alleged ‘masculinity.’ Following this pattern, Goodall...
painted his portrait to emphasize her charming, feminine attributes. Here the male artist has created a safe and understandable Bonheur. In a portrait such as this, Bonheur’s charm and appeal, socially coded as feminine, are emphasized, while her atypical habits and lifestyle, socially coded as masculine, are underplayed.

The same year as Goodall’s portrait, 1856, Eugène de Mirecourt and Frédéric Lepelle de Bois-Gallais each wrote and published biographies of the now-celebrated animal painter. These publications were the first of several written in the second half of the nineteenth century on the artist. Both follow a simple chronological format, relating the history of Bonheur’s childhood, her early interest in painting, and culminate with the government purchase of *Haymaking*, her 1855 Salon submission, for the Luxembourg museum. Analyzing the language of these early texts is critical because it reveals the ways in which Bonheur was presented to the public in the initial phases of her career. Lepelle de Bois-Gallais’s work is a slim volume which is fairly straightforward, avoiding personal commentary or opinions of the author; approximately 30 pages of biographical summary are followed by 30 pages containing reprints of British articles discussing the reception of *The Horse Fair* in England, which perhaps would have been harder for the French public to access. These articles, and their inclusion in Lepelle’s volume, further validates Bonheur’s success beyond the French borders and demonstrates an interest in her international appeal.

Eugène de Mirecourt’s text, published as one of many “contemporary portraits” of noteworthy individuals, is over a hundred pages and is a blend of biography, anecdote, and commentary. Although they are complimentary, Mirecourt’s praises are frequently patronizing, excusing Bonheur’s mistakes and imperfections as evidence of her inexperience and status as a woman. “It is acceptable for a single woman to be ingenuous enough to be unaware of the
artifices and tricks of painting. This inexperience is charming and Mademoiselle Bonheur makes up for it with feeling, liveliness and an exquisite poetic touch.” Mirecourt also felt a strong need to emphasize her femininity, including a paragraph describing her physical appearance (which he claimed was much “less masculine than many others”) and assert that her “talent is essentially feminine.” Responding to contemporary comparisons with George Sand in terms of masculine attire, Mirecourt firmly renounced these similarities with his simple explanation that Bonheur only wore pants for ease and protection at work, not to make a political statement or attract attention. It took a bit more creativity on his part to elucidate how it was acceptable that Sand was one of Bonheur’s favorite authors. Admitting that it was “trop curieux” not to explain, Mirecourt concluded that Bonheur’s “angelic purity of soul” protected her against the flagrant immorality and poisonous ideas of Sand’s books but warned others against following her example, “[Bonheur] is perhaps the only woman who should be permitted to read them.”

Mirecourt’s text is full of anecdotes intended to give readers a more intimate view of the intriguing artist. One speaks of Bonheur rushing to visit a dying female friend, dressed in pants and amusingly being mistaken for a clandestine lover by the priest. Another details Bonheur’s generosity with two struggling artists by offering money to one and a sketch to the other. Yet another tells a story of Bonheur refusing a large sum of money to paint a small sketch of a wealthy businessman, claiming that she just wasn’t inspired. The stories, which do not appear in other later biographies, create a unique but admirable painter deserving of the public’s attention and respect. In 1897, Venancio Deslandes sent Bonheur a copy of Mirecourt’s text and asked

84 Ibid., 51.
85 Ibid., 71. “Mais elle est la seule femme peut-être à laquelle il soit permis de les lire.”
her to comment on it and add annotations as he was gathering information for a new biography. He died prior to completing this work but Theodore Stanton received the copy with Bonheur’s commentary, which he incorporated into his comprehensive biography published in 1910.

Bonheur made numerous corrections, both for minor details such as locations where she played as a child as well as larger concepts such as denying his claim that Sand’s books were immoral. “I don’t think so,” she wrote between the lines, “I venerate Mme. Sand, and have only one reproach to make against her. She was too womanly, too kind, and dropped the treasures of her noble heart on the dung-heap, where cocks found the pearls and swallowed them without being able to digest them.” 86 At the end of the text, Bonheur summarized, “It’s not bad. M. de Mirecourt is evidently a good sort of man; only he has made the mistake of swallowing a great many fairy-tales.” 87

Somewhat prophetically, Mirecourt finishes his biography with an appeal to decorate Bonheur with the Legion of Honor award. “Why then exclude this same recompense to women artists who have, like our heroine, an incontestable talent and, above all a life so pure, a character so worthy, and a history so rich in noble actions, benevolence, and virtue?” 88 For women, “uncontestable talent” is not enough—their virtuous and benevolent lives “above all” qualify them to be recipients of this highest honor. The irony here is that Mirecourt promoted and embellished stories of compassion and honor, but minimized elements of her life, such as her lesbian lifestyle or unconventional habits such as smoking and cross-dressing, which would have been less palatable to a larger audience, resulting in a sanitized version of the artist or one that

86 Stanton, 38.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 93. Original in Klumpke in French: “Pourquoi donc exclure de la même récompense les femmes artistes qui ont, comme notre héroïne, un talent si incontestable, et surtout une vie si pure, un caractère si digne, une histoire si féconde en nobles actions, en bienfaisance et en vertu ?”
included, in Bonheur’s own words, “fairy-tales.” Through Mirecourt, and others, Bonheur was presented with equal parts facts and fiction, contributing to the mythology of the artist. Even more important, the balance Mirecourt strikes in his biography between Bonheur’s respectability (i.e. ‘femininity’ and feminine behavior) and her deviation from the norms established for women is a precarious one that is repeatedly seen in representations of Bonheur. Mirecourt cautiously offset Bonheur’s exceptional lifestyle with stories of her compassion and ‘pure’ character in a way that would make her readers, both men and women, relate to and admire the artist. This practical, and promotional, stance was one utilized frequently for women artists and became something of a leitmotif that would be used again and again in Bonheur’s life. Indeed, it is crucial to recognize that Bonheur herself successfully employed this tactic throughout her career when presenting herself to the public: she was just daring and different enough to fascinate but not outrageous enough to alienate or create public scandal. This blend of novelty and respectability was critical to her success and allowed both conservatives and liberals alike to applaud her and find in her life and art something to appreciate.

Bonheur carefully constructed and presented this balanced persona to the public through portraits as well as biographies, and the portrait that perhaps best illustrates this amalgam is Louis-Edouard Dubufe’s *Rosa Bonheur at Thirty-Four*, exhibited at the Salon of 1857 (Fig. 2.7). Trained by his father Claude-Marie Dubufe and later by Delaroche, Dubufe won first, second, and third class medals at the Salon for his history paintings but in the early 1850s turned to the more lucrative career of fashionable portraiture, following in the footsteps of his father. Dubufe’s portraits, like those of his contemporary Franz Winterhalter, tended to be idealized and conventional. His desire to paint Bonheur probably stemmed from his aspiration to develop important clientele among popular and rising personalities of the day. At first glance, this
portrait portrays a rather feminine-looking Bonheur, although perhaps to a lesser degree than Goodall’s image. She is dressed in appropriate female attire and her hair, though short, is in perfect order and retains a feminine look through the soft curling waves. Her face does not confront the viewer and she gazes off into the distance with a passive look on her face. Although the presence of the bull adds a distinct tone and vitality to the work, the animal was not part of Dubufe’s initial scheme, which included a small table in the corner in lieu of the bull. Had he continued the work according to plan, the painting would have been a conventional image of a nineteenth-century woman. For example, a comparison of Dubufe’s work to his portrait of the Empress Eugénie and Franz Winterhalter’s portrait of the Empress just two years prior is quite striking (Figs. 2.8 and 2.9). In both, the Empress is fashionably costumed, dressed in corseted and flattering outfits, and appropriately feminine. These are more traditional examples of contemporary conventions of femininity.

Unlike these portraits, Dubufe’s portrayal of the artist visibly illustrates some of Bonheur’s rejections of these conventions. While posing for this portrait, Bonheur became displeased with its flattery and lack of spirit and as a result asked Dubufe if she could alter the portrait by painting a bull on the left side instead of the side table. He consented, and Bonheur then painted the animal on the canvas. The result is an extremely unconventional and unprecedented image of a woman artist resting her arm comfortably upon a large and potentially dangerous male bull that, unlike the image of Bonheur, looks boldly out to the viewer. The peculiar quality of this portrait was not lost on the press; at least one caricaturist punned upon the striking combination with a witty “Dubufe and du boeuf” quip (Fig. 2.10). Bonheur’s desire to change the overall appearance of the painting emphasizes the fact that she wanted her portrait to contain specific and strong connections to the subject matter she depicted, even at the expense of

89 Ashton, 75.
breaking with traditions of portraiture. This portrait, with its juxtapositions of conventionality and unconventionality, becomes an extremely effective presentation of a woman who simultaneously embraced and rejected numerous nineteenth-century conventions about women and artists.

Sometime after the Salon of 1857, Gambart probably purchased Dubufe’s work; it was in his possession, hanging in his apartment in Nice alongside a sketch for *The Horse Fair*, when Bonheur died. It seems safe to assume he acquired it fairly quickly after the Salon exhibition because the portrait began to travel with *The Horse Fair*, reflecting Gambart’s acute skills in promotional strategies. James M. Hoppin, professor of art history at Yale from 1861-1899, wrote about seeing Dubufe’s portrait in New York in the late 1850s. Narrating his visit to an exhibition of French paintings, Hoppin confidently stated that “by far the most interesting picture in the collection, which drew all eyes to it, was the portrait of Rosa Bonheur, by Dubufe, junior, which is now classical.” This assessment underscores not only the public interest which ‘drew all eyes’ but also that in following years the painting would become ‘classical.’ The word here of course is not a reference to style or skill but rather familiarity; the author believed the painting was a classic by the time he wrote about it in 1869. Hoppin carefully describes Bonheur’s face in the painting as being “full of fire,” “noble” and with “great intensity of expression.” He paid close attention to her hair and clothing, betraying his knowledge, though unstated in his article, of her non-traditional habits. “The hair, cut short, is parted like a man’s on one side of the head; and the costume, also, gives the suspicion of something like masculine attire.”

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91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
Hoppin would have found her clothing vaguely masculine had her cross-dressing habits not been of interest to the general public.

As Hoppin noted, Dubufe and Goodall both depict Bonheur in female attire, as was her habit for most public or formal appearances. Bonheur recognized that her masculine attire could potentially alienate her buyers and the public at large. She firmly explained that her clothing was not a political statement, nor an attempt to change women’s clothing in general. She often said, “If you see me dressed this way, it’s not in the least to make myself stand out, as too many women have done, but only for my work.”93 She also denied trying to encourage other women to follow her example when she exclaimed, “I strongly disapprove of women who refuse to wear normal clothes because they want to pass themselves off as men. If I thought trousers suited women, I would have given up skirts altogether, but that’s not the case; so I’ve never advised my sisters of the palette to wear men’s clothes in ordinary circumstances.”94 In another instance, while discussing her artistic habits with Anna Klumpke, she stated,

I was also passionate about horses; and what better place to study them than at horse fairs, mingling with all those traders? Women’s clothes were quite simply always in the way. That’s why I decided to ask the prefect of police for permission to wear men’s clothing. But these are my work clothes and nothing more. I’ve never been upset by jeering idiots. . . Yet, if you’re the least offended, I’m quite ready to put on skirts, all the more since I only have to open a closet to find a whole assortment of women’s clothes. 95

93 Klumpke, The Artist’s (Auto)Biography, 204. Original French citation from Klumpke, Rosa Bonheur, 308. “Si cependant me voyez vêtue comme je le suis, ce n’est pas le moins du monde dans le but de me rendre originale, ainsi que trop de femmes l’ont fait, mais tout simplement pour faciliter mon travail.”
94 Ibid., 204. Original French citation from Klumpke, Rosa Bonheur, 308. “Je blame énergiquement les femmes qui renoncent à leur vêtement habituel dans le désir de se faire passer pour des hommes. Si j’avais trouvé que les pantalons convinssent à mon sexe, j’aurais délaissé complètement les jupes, mais ce n’est pas le cas, aussi n’ai-je jamais conseillé à mes soeurs de la palette de porter des habits d’homme dans les circonstances ordinaires de la vie.”
95 Ibid. Original French citation from Klumpke, Rosa Bonheur, 309. “J’avais aussi la passion des chevaux; or , où peut-on mieux étudier ces animaux que dans les foires et mêlée aux maquignons? Force m’était bien de reconnaître que les vêtements de mon sexe étaient une gêne de tous les instants. C’est pourquoi je me suis décidée à solliciter du préfet de Police l’autorisation de porter des habits masculins. Mais le costume que je porte est ma tenue de travail, et rien autre chose. Les quolibets des imbéciles ne m’ont jamais troublée; . . . mais si vous en êtes offusquée le moins du monde, je suis toute prête à mettre des jupes, d’autant que je n’ai qu’à ouvrir un placard pour trouver tout un assortiment de costumes féminins.”
Though her adamant declarations that the use of masculine attire was a necessity for her work are undoubtedly true, it was also the result of her association with Saint-Simonian beliefs from her childhood. The Saint-Simonian costume, reportedly designed by her father, is strikingly similar to the outfit worn by Bonheur throughout her life (Fig. 2.10).96 Even as a toddler, Bonheur dressed in this outfit, as can be seen in a small portrait done by her father (Fig. 2.11). The Saint-Simonian costume consisted of a tasseled hat, trousers and an exterior cloak that was a cross between a gentlemen’s jacket and a woman’s dress (Figs. 2.12-2.13). The exterior cloak looks suspiciously similar to the common smocks wore by most artists and, since Raymond Bonheur was an artist, they were probably his source of inspiration. For the Saint-Simonians, their costume was one of the ways to equalize the differences between men and women.

In the nineteenth century, other women were beginning to vocalize their objections to standard feminine attire as well. Tight corsets and the multiple layers of fabric in dresses were uncomfortable as well as detrimental to the physical well being of the wearer. During Bonheur’s lifetime and the decades that followed this would become a major issue of the woman question.97 In her article on cross-dressing, Susan Gubar argues, “female modernists escaped the strictures of societally-defined femininity by appropriating the costumes they identified with freedom. By the turn of the century, moreover, many identified male clothing with just such a costume of

96 Though concrete evidence is lacking, most scholars agree that in all likelihood it was Raymond Bonheur who designed the outfit for the Saint-Simonians; see Ashton, 22. Raymond writes a letter to a former teacher explaining the symbolism of the clothing, further underscoring his interest and involvement in the design. “White—the trousers—is to signify love; red—the vest—work; blue-violet—the frock-coat—faith. The whole costume symbolizes therefore that Saint-Simonianism is based on love, is fortified by labor, and is enveloped in faith.”

97 It would not be until the 1880s and 1890s that major changes would take place but as early as the 1850s women were beginning to vocalize the hazards and restrictions of their required attire. In addition, the Saint-Simonian attire previously discussed also illustrates that dress reform was an issue even in the 1830s.
While Bonheur preferred to remain outside the political arena of feminist issues, her adoption of male clothing did provide the freedom she needed to pursue her career and her willingness to do so, under public scrutiny, provided another example to women of how she was expanding the realm of femininity. Thus, Bonheur’s cross-dressing was not only a necessity for her work and a habit fostered from childhood, but also “a way of ad-dressing and re-dressing the inequities of culturally-defined categories of masculinity and femininity.” Indeed, wearing pants gave Bonheur both anonymity and liberty—it enabled her to explore stables and farms with comfort and ease while also revealing a certain amount of rebellion and unwillingness to play by established social rules.

Why did Bonheur continue going back and forth between pants and skirts, or stated another way, between masculine and feminine facades throughout her life? In her well-known 1929 article “Womanliness as Masquerade,” Joan Rivière discussed examples of women who excelled in the professional, male world and noted that many would often simultaneously assert their feminine qualities in order to assuage the castration anxiety in men. This kind of behavior is what Rivière refered to as a “compulsive reversal of her intellectual performance” which is transgressive and masculine. Was Bonheur attempting to mollify anxieties and placate the public through her wardrobe transformations? Perhaps Bonheur’s behavior can be understood as a clever way to pursue her career and still pacify the art critics and public. Her willingness to move between pants and skirts and even her dismissal of women who were trying to “pass as men” or her frequent affirmation of her “perfectly feminine heart” should, I think, not be

99 Gubar, 479.
perceived as contradictions or inconsistent behavior. Rather, it all illustrates her shrewd understanding that by having both masculine and feminine personas she could push social boundaries, which would serve her better than completely ignoring or destroying those boundaries. In other words, Bonheur consciously decided to function within the social system, if on the fringes, and by so doing ensure artistic and economic success. In fact, Bonheur increased her popularity by consistently switching back and forth between pants (the masculine) and skirts (the feminine). Visitors, including the Empress Eugénie, would sometimes arrive unannounced to her chateau at By hoping to catch a glimpse of Bonheur in pants. Bonheur, therefore, used female clothing as a public mask or façade to diminish the shock value of her ‘masculine’ career and habits, but she also used them to capitalize on her status as celebrity and pique public curiosity.

In her now-canonical article, “Why have there been no great women artists?,” Linda Nochlin discussed Rosa Bonheur’s career and considered the various elements that led to her success. She astutely identified the two major elements that contributed to Bonheur’s ascent: namely that her father was an artist, which provided Bonheur with artistic training from a young age, and that genre and animal paintings were in high demand during the Second and Third Republic in France and also in Victorian England. Nochlin regarded Bonheur’s conservative defense of female dress codes and her own femininity as “somewhat pathetic.”

She found it disappointing that, at the same time that she frankly rejected the conventional feminine role of her times, Rosa Bonheur still was drawn in to what Betty Friedan has called the ‘frilly blouse syndrome’, that innocuous version of the feminine protest which even today compels successful women psychiatrists or professors to adopt some ultra-feminine item of clothing or insist on proving their prowess as pie-bakers.

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102 Ibid, 173.
Nochlin interpreted Bonheur’s affirmation of her own femininity as an example of Bonheur’s unease and guilt for not being a ‘womanly’ woman, and concluded that they were not true assessments of Bonheur’s feelings. However, perhaps it is possible to accept both Bonheur’s atypical lifestyle and her conservative statements. Her statements reveal her evolving thought process as she experimented and explored new possibilities for a new expression of femininity within the extremely regulated standards of the nineteenth century. For Bonheur, femininity was not defined by dresses or skirts, or traditional roles of wife and mother. In her view, her unwavering belief in women’s potential in the future and her personal contribution to society through her art qualified her to be ‘perfectly feminine.’ The following section includes careful analysis of Bonheur’s opinions and actions in order to understand her concept of womanhood and femininity.

Bonheur, Gender, and Identity

In order to further clarify Bonheur’s concept of woman, several relationships need to be discussed here to assess their theoretical implications for Bonheur’s definitions of woman, femininity, and her personal identity. First, the contrasting examples of the Saint-Simonian Female Messiah and Bonheur’s mother as presented to her during her early childhood and formative years will be discussed. Second, an analysis of Bonheur’s appraisal of the impact of marriage upon the nineteenth-century woman as well as her own relationships with both men and women can aid in understanding Bonheur’s own construction of the concept of woman. Bonheur’s relationships with women, specifically with her female companions Nathalie Micas and the American Anna Klumpke, have been a topic of interest in recent scholarship and will also be included in this section in an effort to further elucidate Bonheur’s conception of herself and other women.
Shortly after her family moved to Paris when Bonheur was seven, Raymond was captivated by a rising socialist group whose ideas were based upon the ideas of Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint Simon. The group was not officially formed until after his death in 1825 and was mainly lead by Prosper Enfantin, a disciple of Saint Simon. They promoted socialist ideals such as a peaceful, cooperative relationship among the classes, equal value placed on work of industrialists and the proletariat, as well as ideas about public property replacing private ownership. Though it primarily began as a political and philosophical group, it was soon organized into a quasi-religion with mystical and religious overtones. In addition, and most meaningfully for this study, Saint-Simonians promoted the idea of equality for women and believed in a female Messiah that would one day come to solve societal problems and proclaim correct moral laws. As opposed to many women, Bonheur was introduced at an early age to ideas of female equality, androgyny, and other revolutionary concepts relating to philosophy and social problems through her father, who fully embraced the Saint-Simonian creed and participated in their meetings and retreats.

Led, ideally, by the pope-couple as represented by Enfantin and an empty chair beside him reserved for the coming Woman, Saint-Simonians viewed the single person as lacking and incomplete. The coming together of men and women produced an androgynous couple better equipped to serve society. The Saint-Simonian theory of the androgyne was influenced by the

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104 Briefly, the leadership was held jointly between Amand Bazard and Prosper Enfantin. However, Enfantin soon displaced him and took sole leadership. Bazard further broke away from Enfantin’s ideology when he actively fought against Enfantin’s promotion of the new, liberated morality.
writings of the historian-philosopher and social reformer Pierre-Simon Ballanche who used the androgynous image as a positive social symbol.\textsuperscript{105} He foresaw a time when the woman would no longer be dominated by the man and would become his equal. This social equality would rehabilitate both men and women into an androgynous union. Ultimately, then, the only true citizens of society are those who are joined together, either in marriage or some type of partnership. The single, unmarried, or unattached person is incomplete as a social being. The Saint-Simonians accepted these ideals and actively promoted this union of male and female to create one androgynous citizen-member of society. In addition to Ballanche’s philosophy, Enfantin added the idea of the pope-couple, the ruling couple who together form a perfect and complementary whole with both masculine and feminine characteristics and, as such, are able to lead the joined citizen members of the society.

This female, the Messiah figure who would co-rule with Enfantin, gained more and more attention and prominence in Saint-Simonian doctrine. Several wives of Saint-Simonian leaders, such as Claire Bazard and Aglaé Saint-Hilaire, tried to assume this position but were not adequately supported by Enfantin or, as a result, other Saint-Simonians. Suzanne Voilquin lamented, “They believe they see a tendency toward usurpation on our part whenever we dare to express our own will. In general, men, even in the context of the [Saint-Simonian] family are to women as governments are to the people; they are afraid of us. . .”\textsuperscript{106} Cécile Fournel stated,

\textsuperscript{105} A. J. L. Busst, “The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century,” in Romantic Mythologies, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1967), 19. Here Busst also discusses Ballanche’s thought process that led to the idea of the androgyn as a social symbol. Ballanche saw the Fall (referring to the original sin of Adam and Eve) as an example of the differences between passive and active elements of the male and female. The female represents human will and the male, destiny. Will and Destiny must learn to co-exist equally, neither dominating the other. Although Ballanche’s theory subscribed to contemporary beliefs that saw men as active and strong versus women as passive and calm, he continually asserted the need for the balance of the two and optimistically believed that evolutionary progress was slowly moving in this direction. Ballanche also applied his principle of active and passive elements to social classes, caste systems, and larger societies in general, always insisting that progress would only be made when a balance was achieved. \textsuperscript{106} Suzanne Voilquin as quoted in Moses, French Feminism, 59.
“with the exception of this divine being whose prototype is always in his [Enfantin’s] imagination, there is nothing to be found in us.” Thus, as the theoretical power of the elusive Woman was rising within the group, the actual power and position of women was decreasing. In the end, the Female Messiah would never materialize to take the empty chair beside Enfantin.

The Saint-Simonians chased after an imaginary woman who would never appear, while simultaneously keeping actual women from any positions of influence, authority, and power. The paradox here of course is that women associated with the Saint-Simonian group listened to a platform of sexual equality that initially seemed to set the Saint-Simonians far ahead in terms of feminist concerns from any other groups of the time. Despite the fact that the Saint-Simonian promotion of woman was, in many ways, more illusory than real, these ideas were quite revolutionary for their time period. Even their discussion of these ideals was innovative and it was this dialogue that impacted the young Bonheur. Her father expounded this new ideology to his young family with the animated zeal of a new convert. When dictating her memoirs to Anna Klumpke, Bonheur adamantly defended women, saying,

Why shouldn’t I be proud to be a woman? My father, that enthusiastic apostle of humanity, told me again and again that it was woman’s mission to improve the human race, that she was the future Messiah. To his doctrines I owe my great and glorious ambition for the sex to which I proudly belong, whose independence I’ll defend till my dying day.

Bonheur’s more liberal habits and attitudes about women developed out of these Saint-Simonian influences, which, the previous quote reveals, were instrumental in clarifying her own ideology.

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107 Ibid, 255.
108 It is interesting to note that in the early organization of the group, Enfantin approached George Sand about the position of the Female Messiah. However, after her rejection of this offer Enfantin did not verbally endorse any real women for the position.
and were a source of a positive motivation concerning her own potential and the future possibilities for women in general.

In contrast to the exalted, desired Woman Messiah who would save the world from its sorrows and injustices, Bonheur’s mother experienced a life, or at least married life, dominated by sorrow and injustice. Sophie Bonheur came from a comfortable, upper-class bourgeois home but left that lifestyle when she married—despite family protests—her drawing teacher, Raymond Bonheur. After her marriage in 1821 and until her death, she struggled to survive, sometimes living barely above poverty level. In addition to tending to their four children, she taught music to augment her husband’s meager income, earned by giving art lessons. Finances were always tight but a low point arrived when Raymond joined the pseudomonastic Saint-Simonian retreat at Ménilmontant. In 1832, Enfantin, threatened by encroaching government opposition, encouraged the male Saint-Simonians to leave behind worldly responsibilities and live as monks at a retreat called Ménilmontant while they waited for the Woman Messiah to arrive (Fig. 2.14). Unfortunately, many of these men left behind struggling and even starving families, including the Bonheur family. Sophie supported her husband in his decision, despite her limited involvement with the group in general, and worked unceasingly to provide for the family. However, their economic situation was bleak and it was during this time that a cholera epidemic swept through France. The young Rosa, the eldest of the four children, became ill and her mother, already exhausted from overwork, nursed her back to health despite her own weakened state.

It was in these conditions that Raymond found his family after returning from the Ménilmontant retreat. The government intervened and accused the Saint-Simonians of

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110 This included about 40 men, those who were most fiercely loyal and public defenders of the faith. The fact that Raymond Bonheur went is a reflection of his deep involvement with the group.
corrupting society by endorsing loose moral codes and promoting sexual promiscuity. Enfanti and two other leaders were put on trial and given a twelve-month prison sentence. This quickly broke up the Ménilmontant group and, in a broader sense, was the end of Saint-Simonian influence and power in Paris. The rest of the Saint-Simonians left France for Egypt, hoping that there they might find the Woman Messiah as well as establish their utopian society. Due to the lack of finances and his family responsibilities, Raymond was unable to accompany them to Egypt despite his passionate desire to join this foreign adventure. He resented this inability to achieve his dreams and often talked of the supposed joys and freedoms of celibacy. Bonheur records in her biography that his comments were extremely hard for her mother to hear and she would often clutch her eldest daughter and weep. Unfortunately, Sophie died shortly thereafter due to illness and her death was, of course, traumatic and tragic for Bonheur, then eleven years old, and she referred to it many times in her life. She blamed her father for her mother’s early death and was especially hurt that her noble mother, due to economic constraints, was buried in an unmarked grave, which precluded anyone from visiting her grave later.

Although staunchly devoted to her mother’s memory her entire life, Bonheur realized that her mother was pressed with a heavy burden in marriage which limited her abilities to develop her own talents and eventually limited the span of her life. In addition, Sophie’s sacrifices went largely unappreciated. On this subject Bonheur stated, “My mother’s wordless devotion reminds me that it’s men’s nature to speak their minds without worrying about what they may do to their mates.” At an early age, Bonheur firmly resolved that Raymond and Sophie’s marriage was not something Bonheur wished to repeat in her life. Commenting upon marriage to Klumpke,

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Bonheur stated, “A long time ago, I understood that when a girl dons a crown of orange blossoms, she becomes a subordinate, nothing but a pale reflection of what she was before. She’s forever the leader’s companion, not his equal, but his helpmate. No matter how worthy she is, she’ll remain in obscurity.” No doubt this opinion was formed while watching her mother and then seeing her obscurity continue in death with her pauper’s grave. Thus, both her knowledge of her parent’s marriage and her strong desire to continue as an artist made her wary of and resistant to traditional marriage. For Bonheur, the married woman frequently signified suppression, inferiority, and appropriate passivity that lead to unhappiness, discontent, and even, as with her mother, death.

Bonheur opted to reject the powerless position that her mother held and went on to develop qualities typically seen as ‘masculine’ in the nineteenth century. It is not difficult to see why Bonheur would want to adopt characteristics often attributed to men. Strength, intelligence, and artistic genius were all terms associated with male artists and by embracing these qualities, Bonheur ensured greater success. Although she was frequently lampooned in the press for her unfeminine manner (Fig. 2.15), it was precisely the masculine qualities of her work that led to her acceptance in the art world. For example, the Gazette des Beaux-Arts praised one of Bonheur’s works “because of its affirmation of a masterliness of technique, of a virile strength of conception and execution.” In 1847, the art critic Théophile Thoré praised her strength, but lamented that it did not belong to other male artists, saying, “Mlle. Rosa paints almost like a man. What a pity her strong brush is not held also by V. Verboeckenhoven and the other

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112 Ibid. “Depuis longtemps, j’ai compris qu’en mettant sur sa tête la couronne de fleurs d’oranger, la jeune fille se subalternise; elle n’est plus que le pâle reflet de ce qu’elle était avant. Elle devient pour toujours la compagne de chef de la communauté, non pas pour l’égaler, mais pour l’assister dans ses travaux; quelque grande que puisse être sa valeur, elle restera dans l’ombre.”
113 Ashton, 70.
précieux who paint like young ladies.” In the 1860’s, critic Emile Cantrel commended both Rosa Bonheur and George Sand in the magazine L’Artiste for their abilities to listen to the symphonies of creation and render them in art. The wording of his praise is worthy of attention. He states that they are “two superior women that Europe envies us, two serious and committed painters whom France has the right to glorify—two brother geniuses.” As these comments illustrate, despite the fact that her behavior was unconventional, her masculine qualities, which extended from her life into her painting, helped her achieve success in an art world that validated masculine skill and achievements.

In his 1981 article entitled “The Case of Rosa Bonheur: Why Should a Woman Want to be More Like A Man?,” Albert Boime discussed how and why her ‘masculine’ behavior helped her succeed. He asserted that her cross-dressing was more than just a convenience for her work, and suggested that Bonheur’s atypical habits and appearance exposed the fact that she “perceived herself in androgynous terms.” In a society that undeniably privileged male artists, it was a way to claim male prerogatives and power and, more specifically, suggested Boime, to express her androgynous identity. In his article, Boime argued that the prevalence of androgynous themes in the nineteenth century, partially familiar to Bonheur through St. Simonian doctrine, coupled with her upbringing led to her androgynous identity. Ironically, however, rather than simply perceiving and understanding the numerous reasons that Bonheur would to be more like a man in her artistic career, Boime presumed that Bonheur always identified with the masculine position rather than the feminine. In the end, his conclusion is that Bonheur was more like a man than a woman and her ‘androgynous’ existence was a result of assuming a masculine persona.

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114 Ibid., 51.
116 Ibid, 405.
and rejecting the feminine. Boime’s argument, though critically important, pays little attention to her conflicted attitudes towards men nor her defense of femininity and of her role as a woman.

Bonheur’s relationship with her father, the most influential male in her life, was complex, vacillating between devoted gratitude and admiration to distrust and suspicion. She repeatedly gave credit to her father for teaching and encouraging her to become an artist. In fact, throughout her life she called herself her father’s student, considering him to be her only teacher. Although her father did encourage her to paint, he initially preferred her to pursue some other vocation that was more suited to women and he often criticized her “boyish ways.” As her career began to rise, he suggested that she sign his name on her works instead of her own. Was he thinking that her star would rise faster if she was a man, or was he belatedly promoting himself? The purpose of such a ploy could have been self-promotional on his part, and her refusal to fulfill his wishes shows her own strength and individuality. On this topic she stated, “Wouldn’t that be an insult to my mother? I want quite the opposite. My ambition is to make her name famous so that she’ll be associated with any renown that I may gain for myself. She used to call me Rosa in tender moments. I want Rosa Bonheur for my signature.”

Raymond’s frequent periods of absence during her childhood, his request that she sign his name on her works, his desire to have her stay in his studio in order to teach students and financially assist the family, and other such actions led to some feelings of distrust and disapproval of men in general. Once, while hosting a small luncheon for some women friends at her Chateau at By she offered a rare yucca plant to one of them and asked her gardener to dig it up, being careful not to cut the roots. When he returned with the plant that had no roots,

118 Ibid. “Ne serait-ce pas faire injure à ma mère, lui dis-je? Mon ambition est, au contraire, d’illustrer le nom qu’elle a porté, de telle sorte qu’elle se trouve associée à la renommée que je pourrai acquérir. Elle m’appelait Rosa dans ses moments de tendresse, c’est Rosa Bonheur que je veux signer.”
Bonheur responded, “What do you think, ladies? Isn’t that a beautiful example of male intelligence?” Further emphasizing this guarded opinion of men, Bonheur once saucily retorted “In the way of males, I like only the bulls I paint.”

In analyzing her views of men, it seems quite problematic to conclude that she always embraced the masculine point of view. She did not always have a high opinion of men, and it seems this was usually because of their poor treatment of women. However, this is not to say that she always had a high opinion of women either. She had little patience for women who had few opinions or had little self-confidence. She once announced, “at present I detest women folk. I now like only men, because I find them in general so stupid that it flatters me.” This ambiguous statement, flattering to neither sex, highlights her ability to identify foibles in men and women and lends itself well to the idea that she eventually would adopt and adapt both masculine and feminine qualities in forming her own identity. Indeed, she enjoyed the freedom to move back and forth between these supposedly discrete categories according to her needs. In her letters to friends and family, she sometimes referred to herself in male pronouns, signing as “brother” or “grandson” and often enjoyed the confusion that occurred when she was mistaken for a man. This sometimes playful vacillation between genders proved to be useful to Bonheur throughout her life, enabling her to don masculine apparel and assume male prerogatives when needed but take up skirts and affirm her “completely feminine heart” at other times.

The fact that Bonheur was so willing to go back and forth between the appearance of masculine and feminine genders should not discount the sincerity of her conservative statements.

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119 Ashton, 57.
121 Stanton, 257.
122 See, for example, letters published in Stanton, 257, 261.
about her life. Despite her unconventional practices, Bonheur was essentially a private person who disliked being the center of attention and equally disliked being the subject of mockery. Pants and skirts, depending on the situation, enabled her to blend with her environment and work without unwanted attention. On more than one occasion, Bonheur declared that she enjoyed wearing trousers not only to physically facilitate her work but also because it allowed her to blend in with her mostly male surroundings. Thus dressed, she could work undisturbed, as she preferred. In 1992, art historian James Saslow reevaluated The Horse Fair and noted that one figure, blending innocuously with the crowd, was not unlike Bonheur herself. Arguing that Bonheur included a hidden self-portrait among the riders, Saslow declared, “it has not been previously noticed that the central horse tamer, is a self-portrait of Bonheur, who confronts the viewer with the male guise she adopted for her sketching forays in these very stockyards.”

This figure is the only one in the work that looks out at the viewer in a three-quarter pose (often used for self-portraiture) and is one of two that do not have facial hair (Fig. 2.16). In addition, the hair, which protrudes from the rider’s cap, is longer than other male figures but similar to Bonheur’s own short, bobbed hairstyle.

The title of Saslow’s article, “Disagreeably Hidden: Construction and Constriction of the Lesbian Body in Rosa Bonheur’s Horse Fair,” borrows a phrase from the English art critic John Ruskin, a contemporary of Bonheur. In critiquing The Horse Fair, Ruskin commented that “No painter of animals ever yet was entirely great who shrank from painting the human face; and Mdlle. [sic] Bonheur clearly does shrink from it. . . . In the ‘Horse Fair’ the human faces were nearly all dexterously, but disagreeably, hidden, and the one chiefly shown had not the slightest

character.”\textsuperscript{124} While Ruskin’s estimation of Bonheur’s talent must be tempered by his view that no exceptional female painters existed, his observation about the faces within the work is quite accurate. Although the faces of the horse riders are visible, they are not individualized, detailed portraits. They capture the idea of horse riders who parade the unbroken horses around the fair rather than any specific, identifiable person. Indeed, the central figure has a shadowed face and is difficult to see clearly. Although not stated by Saslow, this type of semi-hidden figure, who blends with her surroundings, illustrates the reasons why Bonheur delighted in cross-dressing. Her masculine attire in the slaughterhouses, stables and at the horse fairs can easily be seen as an effective way of exchanging female visibility for masculine anonymity. By going mainly unnoticed, both in life and in this canvas, Bonheur could pursue her interests without strict surveillance. This was also one of Bonheur’s motivations for her exodus from busy Paris to her quiet existence at By—the ability to live privately in pants or skirts as she pleased.

Although Bonheur never acknowledged that this painting included a self-portrait, I believe that Saslow is accurate in identifying this horse rider as a self-portrait. Not only do the features of the figure correctly correspond to Bonheur’s visage but the three-quarter posture, with the figure looking out towards the viewer (or mirror) and the hands slightly raised, mimics the position held by an artist about to paint on a canvas. Additionally, it seems in harmony with her active life that Bonheur would picture herself on horseback, in motion, completely surrounded by the powerful animals she so loved. In almost the middle of the canvas, the central horse rider blends in with the other figures and the dramatic motion, just as Bonheur preferred to blend in with the stockyard crowds and work unnoticed. This strategy of a hidden self-portrait (one practiced by artists for centuries) would have been particularly appealing to Bonheur, as it is a

visual representation of the way she worked partially disguised among the stables. Perhaps Bonheur also felt an affinity for these horse traders and riders who also lived unconventional lives and survived on the fringes of the city. In his book *Paris and its Provinces: 1792-1802*, Richard Cobb explains that stables and horse fairs were often dangerous places with unsavory characters living outside the law and frequently trading stolen horses.\(^{125}\) Although Bonheur was sketching at stables and horse fairs in the 1840s and 50s, their reputations were still tainted by this disreputable past. Horse traders were the nineteenth-century version of the modern used-car salesman; many were viewed with suspicion and often accused of withholding information about horses or disguises sicknesses and ailments. This was compounded by the fact that throughout the nineteenth century many of them were not native to Paris. While many came from Normandy, and thus were French citizens, many traders were foreigners, gathering horses in various places and trading them at horse markets as they traveled across Europe.\(^{126}\) Horse markets were exciting places that attracted men (rarely women) of different backgrounds and nationalities. Bonheur captures the excitement and energy of this market and even joins with them.

In *The Horse Fair*, Bonheur aligned herself with this disparate group of riders who ride in a circle together and try to prove themselves by controlling their spirited animals. Just for a moment, Bonheur looks out and acknowledges the viewers, or juries, who will judge the worth of her work. Bonheur emphasizes the wildness of the market and the unbroken energy of the animals. This is a selective vision of the horse market; some of the horses being sold would have


\(^{126}\) See Graham Robb, *The Discovery of France: A Historical Geography from the Revolution to World War I* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2007). Steven M. Gelber compares horse traders with car salesmen and demonstrates that the bargaining atmosphere, showmanship, and sometimes dishonest culture of the car lot began in the nineteenth century with horse markets. His research is based on American society, but rings true with other descriptions of horse markets in Europe at the time as well. See Steven M. Gelber, *Horse Trading in the Age of Cars: Men in the Marketplace* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2008).
already been broken and not all were young and full of energy. Bonheur, however, creates a horse market teeming with life and, as opposed to the riders who wrangle for control, pulling reins and raising sticks, she shows the central figure in control on the horse who then pauses for a brief glance outside the canvas. In her earlier work, *Ploughing in the Nivernais*, Bonheur constructed a triumphant view of work and country life and glorified the simple farm workers. In *Horse Fair*, by contrast, Bonheur constructed an image of the horse market as an arena that is almost out of control, nicely matching the reputation of the market itself. Here, she glorifies the animals more than their riders, and while the riders are not as detailed as the horses, they are depicted in a fascinating manner. Most are somewhat unkempt in their dress (baggy, dirty, clothes and shirts open almost to their waist), hinting at their slightly disreputable standing, but they are also shown as strong, undaunted by the high energy of the horses or the difficulty of the task at hand, and focused on their work. Perhaps it should not be so surprising that Bonheur found herself at home in such a crowd or that she chose to insert herself into this group. She could be described in almost identical terms to these men. Like them, she was unconcerned about perfect dress and appearance. She was content on the fringes of society (which became even more apparent when she moved to the outskirts of Paris) and she was undaunted by the challenge of being a woman in a male-dominated field.

In this self-portrait, Bonheur is the only woman, albeit well-disguised, among the crowd. The horse markets were not generally places that women visited frequently. However, more and more women were depicted riding horses in the nineteenth century and Bonheur, who actively studied paintings by other animal painters, was undoubtedly familiar with some of these paintings of female equestrians. In fact, her inventory records indicate that she owned several paintings by Alfred de Dreux (1810-1860), including at least one of his *amazone* paintings,
depicting a female equestrian dressed in hat and riding habit. Bonheur later professed her admiration of his paintings, adding that he was “one of my favorite guides. There was a time when I bought everything I could find of his.” Her inventory records are not detailed enough to adequately identify the exact paintings, but they were probably similar to these two paintings (Figures 2.17 and 2.18). Dreux was only one of many artists depicting female horse riders in the nineteenth century. “Amazones” were depicted by Géricault, Courbet, Manet, and others (Figures 2.19, 2.20, 2.21). As an admirer of Géricault, Bonheur may have seen his amazone painting. Several images of the Empress Eugénie en amazone as well as carte de visite photographs of women in riding habits, as one uncut-sheet of an anonymous woman photographed by Disdéri, reveal the wide appeal from royalty to middle-class society of the amazone in the nineteenth century (Figures 2.22, 2.23, 2.24). Part of the fascination with the female equestrian resided in her sexually ambiguous attire that was socially sanctioned. Dreux was obviously only one of many artists intrigued with this new pastime for women.

It is not surprising, knowing Bonheur’s passion for horses and riding, that she owned paintings of female equestrians by Dreux. As a female rider herself and one who owned images of women riding horses, Bonheur had given some thought to the image of women on horseback. In choosing to depict herself in a hidden self-portrait, Bonheur presented an alternative view of women riders and of herself. As opposed to the common images of amazones, where they are clearly differentiated from men through their costume (as in the Dreux) or where they are

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128 Romaine Brooks adopted the clothing of a female equestrian in her well-known self-portrait in the early decades of the twentieth century and used a small sculpture of a horse in the portrait of her partner Nathalie Clifford Barney, entitled *L’Amazone*. Brooks’s use of these equestrian motifs underscores their resonance into the twentieth century and demonstrates that they continued to be associated with women embracing revolutionary and alternative social spaces. A comparison between nineteenth- and twentieth-century images of female equestrians and the social connotations of their clothing and activity would be an interesting future topic. For more on Romaine Brooks, see Whitney Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room: The Art of Romaine Brooks* (Chesterfield, Mass.: Chameleon Books, 2000).
presented alone and out of context (as in Courbet or Manet’s versions), *The Horse Fair* shows Bonheur blending magnificently with her male counterparts. She neither needs nor desires special attention; she is as capable in managing her unruly horse as the other horsemen. Bonheur here seems to be presenting an important message for the attentive viewer: as a painter and horseman, she is as talented as any man. Seen in this light, Bonheur’s inclusion of a hidden self-portrait is a visual manifesto of her verbal assertion of women’s equal talent: “women aren’t any less talented than men, they can be just as good, sometimes even better.”

Although Ruskin dismissed Bonheur’s figures as being “disagreeably hidden,” Bonheur’s self-portrait is not disagreeably hidden but rather carefully hidden, disclosing only to a select crowd her disguised presence. I am supporting Saslow’s identification of Bonheur and would like to further his thesis. Not only is she portraying her “proto-lesbian identity,” but here, in what would become her masterpiece and the painting that would travel extensively throughout Europe and the United States, Bonheur presented herself as an ambitious artist, cross-dressing horse-rider, animal lover, and woman. Although not a conventional self-portrait, it is one of many “autobiographical projects” she produced during her life. I borrow this term from Antoine Compagnon, professor at the Collège de France, who used it in a recent lecture to describe Stendhal’s tendency to explore his life and experiences in autobiographical narrative form. These efforts by the writer were usually episodic, incomplete, and fragmented, but Stendhal repeatedly returned to the endeavor, as if attempting to find a new form of autobiography. Similarly, in the case of Bonheur, there is an absence of conventional self-portraits, but a kind of

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130 Antoine Compagnon, “Ecrire la vie: Montaigne, Stendhal, Proust,” Lecture 9 delivered on 3 March 2009, accessed online from the Collège de France. He discussed Stendhal’s *La Vie de Henri Brulard*, as well as other instances of thinly disguised autobiographical narrative in his writings. Compagnon argues that these efforts were usually failures; Stendhal would abandon incomplete projects or shift to less autobiographical narrative, but was compelled numerous times to return to these attempts at analyzing his life and representing himself in his writing.
multiplication of projects in which an autobiographical element can be seen, or in which the production of self is evident. The Horse Fair is perhaps the pinnacle of these autobiographical projects in Bonheur’s career. The central figure is a mirror of Bonheur’s life, emulating her appearance, her preferred activity of riding, and her habit of attempting to remain anonymous at work, even in a crowd. Bonheur placed herself in plain view in the painting, but kept her identity partially hidden from the viewing public, a parallel of the way she attempted to keep certain elements of her life, such as her preference for male attire and her female partners, hidden and private to avoid public scandal.

In order to fully understand the importance of this self-portrait and its meaning, it is necessary to explore more specifically Bonheur’s private life and the women with whom she surrounded herself. Choosing not to marry and place her career in jeopardy, Bonheur received the emotional support, love, and companionship she needed from a few close relationships with women. During this time in the nineteenth century, homosexuality and lesbianism were seen as deviant and unnatural practices, rather than in terms of identification and orientation used in contemporary parlance. While many unmarried women opted to live with female companions, because of the often negative associations of any practice outside of heterosexual relations, it is often difficult to determine the nature of these relationships. For this study, it seems less important to scour Bonheur’s letters for clues as to whether she literally shared a bed with her

131 To Klumpke, Bonheur related her feelings of annoyance at the “ridiculous” or “dirty” stories that people told describing her relationship to Nathalie. Veiled terms or derogatory comments, such “unnatural affection” were often used to signal “lesbian” in the nineteenth century. There are myriad publications that discuss nineteenth-theories of sexuality. For more thorough analysis of ideas about homosexuality (a term that was not in use until 1892) during this period in France, some excellent sources include: Marie-Jo Bonnet, Un choix sans équivoque : recherches historiques sur les relations amoureuses entre les femmes, XVle-XXe siècle (Paris : Denoël, 1981); Jerry Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan, Jr., eds., Homosexuality in Modern France (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); William A. Peniston, Pederasts and others : urban culture and sexual identity in nineteenth century Paris (New York : Harrington Park Press, 2004); Graham Robb, Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2003). In addition to histories of homosexuality, see Alfred Delvau’s Dictionnaire érotique moderne (Genèse: Slatkine Reprints, 1968). Originally published in the 1860s, Delvau’s work shows the terms and activities relating to homosexuality that were common at the time, despite their liminal space both in the lexicon and the legal system.
female partners (as some have done) but rather to affirm that she repeatedly chose to have her most intimate relationships with women. Her relationships with Nathalie Micas and Anna Klumpke were critically important to her success and happiness.

Her childhood friend and companion at By for more than thirty years, Nathalie Micas, played a large role in Bonheur’s life. They began their friendship in 1836 when Micas’ father, concerned that his sickly daughter might not live long, commissioned Raymond Bonheur to paint her portrait. Though the whereabouts of this portrait are unknown, Bonheur did one of Nathalie in 1850 (Fig. 2.25). Nathalie, pale and sickly as a child, flourished in the countryside and played a significant role at Bonheur’s Chateau at By. She was the caretaker of the animals, often doctoring them when injured or sick. She also kept the household in order, after Mme. Micas, Nathalie’s mother, who also lived with them, died. Bonheur always affirmed the “purity” of their relationship, clearly aware of the unwanted gossip that frequently swirled around lesbian women. While talking with Klumpke about Micas, Bonheur explained, “People looked for something suspicious in the affection we felt for each other. If I had been a man, I would have married her and people couldn’t have invented these ridiculous stories.”

The two lived happily together until Nathalie’s death in 1888.

In the last year of Bonheur’s life, the American artist Anna Klumpke joined the French artist at her chateau, filling the place Nathalie had held nine years earlier and working alongside her in the studio. Klumpke initially met Bonheur while working as a translator for John Arbuckle, an American who had offered Bonheur a horse as a gift. The two artists developed a friendship and later Klumpke would ask permission to paint a portrait of Bonheur, which will be discussed shortly. She would eventually accept the invitation to live at By and a commission by

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Bonheur to write her biography; Klumpke ultimately became the sole heir of Bonheur’s estate. Seeing in Klumpke characteristics of her long-deceased mother and the opportunity to carry on her legacy, Bonheur asked her, “Wouldn’t you like to stay with your old friend? She’ll make you her daughter and help you paint beautiful things.” She reasoned that, “Since we’re both alone in life, wouldn’t it be more pleasant for us to lead a happy life painting together, all the while remaining independent?” And later she stated, “I have a mother’s ambition for you, my child. I think you’ll be the one to carry on for me.” Valuing Klumpke’s freedom, Bonheur assured her saying, “Anna, if you ever fall in love with a man and want to marry, you’re always free to leave. I’d be very sad without you, but I only want you to be happy. You’re free as the air we breathe.” In the end, despite the Klumpke family’s objections, Klumpke stayed.

Although Klumpke would only live with Bonheur for a little over a year, during this time she produced several significant portraits of the aging artist and recorded Bonheur’s story of her life. It is through Klumpke’s biography that many of Bonheur’s opinions and experiences are known; her work represents the closest thing to an autobiography of Bonheur that exists. Despite the fact that several biographies had already been written of her and that Venancio Deslandes, of a major publishing company in Lisbon, was writing yet another biography at that moment, Bonheur insisted that Klumpke write one saying, “Mr. Deslandes is a fine scholar, writer, and

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133 Ibid., 63. Original French version from Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur*, 101. “Ne voudriez-vous pas rester avec votre vieille amie, qui vous adoptera comme si vous étiez son enfant, et qui vous aidera à faire de belles choses en peinture?”

134 Ibid., 72. Original French version from Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur*, 116. “Vivant seules chacune de notre côté, ne serait-il pas plus heureux pour nous de nous réunir, pour mener une heureuse vie; cultivant le même art et ayant chacune notre indépendance.”

135 Ibid., 67. Original French citation from Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur*, 107. “J’ai des ambitions maternelles pour vous, mon enfant; il me semble que vous pourrez devenir la continuateuse de ma vie . . .”

136 Ibid., 69. Original French version from Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur*, 111. “Anna, si jamais vous veniez à aimer un homme et que vous désiriez l’épouser, il vous serait toujours loisible de me quitter. Cela m’attristerait beaucoup de vivre sans vous, mais je ne veux que votre bonheur. Vous êtes libre comme l’air que nous respirons.”

137 Klumpke’s family objected worrying that she would not be able to dedicate enough time to her own career and that she would not come back to the United States. For the best research on Klumpke’s life, see Britta C. Dwyer’s *Anna Klumpke: A Turn-of-the-Century Painter and Her World*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999).
critic. I have great respect for his judgment, but my dear Anna, he’s a man. I could never tell anyone of the male sex how the pieces of my life fit together. . . . .”138 While discussing the future biography with Klumpke, Bonheur spoke of her desire to have her life clarified by a woman interpreter and writer. She declared,

Many fine authors have written loads of stories about me…When they asked me questions, I was always totally sincere. Yet I could never forget that I was talking to men. It’s because you’re a woman, because I can open my heart to you with greater trust that I’ve chosen you to interpret my life for posterity. You’ll understand that Nathalie and my mother were both my guiding stars. You’ll know how to say what I mean with all the subtlety that is the privilege of our sex. You’re also from America. For a long time now women over there have enjoyed the exceptionally favorable circumstances that I’ve always dreamed of for my French sisters. My feminism and my clothes aren’t meant to surprise you.139

This statement elucidates not only the influence of Bonheur’s mother and Nathalie upon her life but clearly establishes her identification with women. Additionally, Klumpke’s (auto)biography of Bonheur, compiled through dictation while talking to the aging artist about her life, can be seen as a literary self-portrait that Bonheur dearly wanted and firmly endorsed. Through Klumpke, Bonheur felt she could present another self-portrait—one that was perhaps less hidden than The Horse Fair and that she could reveal more because it would be completed by a woman she trusted and loved. Bonheur felt confident that her “feminism and … clothes” wouldn’t surprise Klumpke as a liberated American woman who sought for recognition as a professional

139 Ibid., 79. Original French version from Klumpke, Rosa Bonheur, 124. “Bien des auteurs de talent ont écrit à mon sujet une foule d’anecdotes. . . . A ceux que m’interrogeaient, j’ai toujours répondu avec la plus entière bonne foi; cependant, je ne pouvais jamais oublier que je parlais à des hommes. Si je vous ai choisie pour être mon interprète auprès de la postérité, c’est parce que vous êtes une femme et que je puis m’ouvrir à vous avec une confiance entière. Vous comprendrez que Nathalie et ma mère ont formé à elles deux mon étoile polaire. Vous saurez exprimer mes pensées avec toute la délicatesse qui est le privilège de notre sexe. D’autre part, vous apparteniez à la nation américaine. C’est là que la femme occupe depuis longtemps la situation exceptionnellement favorable que j’ai toujours rêvée pour mes sœurs françaises. Mon féminisme et mon costume ne sont pas faits pour vous surprendre.”

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artist as well; Klumpke understood the difficulties faced by women artists and would be able to sensitively portray Bonheur’s life.

Part of the appeal of the new biography for Bonheur was that it would place more emphasis on the importance that her female relationships, particularly that of her mother. Bonheur revealed to Klumpke that the element she disliked most about previous biographies was that they did not convey the significance of her mother.\textsuperscript{140} Despite losing her mother at a young age, Bonheur was determined to keep her memory alive and frequently discussed the powerful impact she had on Bonheur’s creative endeavors. In one of the most compelling evaluations of Rosa Bonheur, Gretchen van Slyke argues that Bonheur’s identification with men and their influence in her life have been repeatedly overstated and she proposes that, “her mother’s soul continued to protect, guide and inspire her throughout her life.”\textsuperscript{141} She contends that Bonheur never let go of her mother’s memory and influence and later created other maternal, sororal, and filial relationships with Mme. Micas, Nathalie, and Anna. Slyke claims that in cloistering herself around these women, Bonheur invented her own kind of ‘matrimony,’ redesigning the word to fit her life and relationships.

While Slyke’s argument is extremely valuable and correctly accentuates the significance of Bonheur’s relationship with women, I believe that Bonheur was less interested in defining her relationships as matrimonies than she was in just having the support and love that Nathalie and Anna provided. Slyke should be applauded as one of the first scholars to adequately focus on the strength that these women gave to Bonheur, but this acknowledgement need not simultaneously minimize the importance of the influence of her father. Neither the overemphasis on her father’s

\textsuperscript{140} Once Bonheur stated to Klumpke that perhaps the thing she disliked most about her previous biographies was that they did not include enough about the importance of her mother and her companion Nathalie in her life. Klumpke, \textit{The Artist’s (Auto)Biography}, 79.

\textsuperscript{141} Gretchen van Slyke, “Reinventing Matrimony: Rosa Bonheur, Her Mother, and Her Friends,” \textit{Women’s Studies Quarterly} vol. 19, (Fall/Winter 1991: 3-4): 64.
role in her life as seen in earlier approaches or the overemphasis of the women surrounding
Bonheur create an accurate evaluation of the artist’s life, art, and personality. Focusing on only
the patriarchal or only the matrilineal factors in her life is one-sided and ineffective. It was the
combination of both of these influences, and her use of qualities deemed masculine and
feminine, that gave Bonheur the freedom to create her unique identity as woman and artist. The
amalgamation of both formed a balance that allowed her to succeed as a professional artist and
come to terms with her own femininity during an era when gender roles were strictly defined.

As seen through her experiences, her relationships and attitudes towards men and women,
and her statements about herself, Bonheur’s calm acceptance of her femininity in spite of her
outwardly ‘masculine’ appearance reveals an identity created by the influence of Saint-Simonian
ideals taught to her as a child, the significant and dual impact of both her mother and father and,
by extension, her relationships with both men and women. Her own version of ‘woman’ is a
tribute to her ability to see through the restrictive sexual polarizations and, instead of quickly
rejecting one set of gender codes only to accept another, Bonheur carefully selected the positive
attributes of both that would enable her to successfully work as an artist throughout her career.
Bonheur’s life well illustrates her belief that if only society would remove its prejudices and
restrictions women could play a great role in making significant contributions to society.

Bonheur’s Legacy: “Sisters of the brush, Colleagues of the palette”

From the early 1850s until her death in 1899, Rosa Bonheur’s unprecedented success was
noticed internationally, and to many, it seemed symbolic of women’s future, a harbinger of
things to come. This last section will analyze the way in which the press, other women artists,
and Bonheur herself promoted her image as a pioneer for her female peers and an artist worthy
of praise. Bonheur’s participation in this publicity (agreeing to portraits by women or visits to
her studio) underscores her acknowledgement of the importance of her public persona and wanted to play a part in molding what that image would look like. As this section will demonstrate, many women did see Bonheur as a model to follow, which also indicates that Bonheur was extremely successful in her marketing strategies. Despite her unconventional life, she was perceived by many as the new standard for women artists. As the most successful female artist in living memory, Bonheur became the yardstick by which all women were measured and judged. Women artists in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century of all nationalities were quickly compared with Bonheur. Dutch artist Marie Collaert, who often painted cows and dogs in landscape settings, was quickly dubbed the “Flemish Rosa Bonheur.” In 1858, a British critic for the Athenaeum referred to the flower and still-life painter Martha Mutrie as the “Rosa Bonheur of azaleas,” underscoring the association of any skilled woman artist with Bonheur, despite differences in style and subject matter. Likewise, Elizabeth Thompson Butler sometimes received the label as the “English Rosa Bonheur,” even though her history painting battle scenes have very little in common with Bonheur’s work except perhaps the horses that her heroic soldiers ride.

Shortly after the success of The Horse Fair, articles began appearing that placed Bonheur on a pedestal for women to emulate. Intriguingly, they usually discussed her paintings very little, but spent the majority of their time honing in on her unprecedented success and the hope that this promised for the women who followed in her footsteps. In 1855, for example, an article in The New York Times called her an “example for artists” and proclaimed “Why should there not be more Rosa Bonheurs? Art is open to women as much as men…Women have an

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142 See one example of this in Clara Erskine Clement’s Women in the Fine Arts From the Seventh Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D., (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1905), 85.
unquestioned right to distinguish themselves in Art…” Likewise, in the 1869 publication *Eminent Women of the Age*, Bonheur is held up as an ensign. “She has shown what women can do. She has asserted her right to follow the free bent of her own genius…and she has thereby said to other women, if you can, do the same.” A visual illustration of this emulation appeared in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* in 1888, in which a young girl sits in front of *The Horse Fair* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and studiously copies the original (Fig. 2.26). Her achievements were particularly appealing to women, as illustrated by the front page and feature article on the artist in the London magazine *Womanhood* just six months after her death. The author of the article, a Miss C.J. Hamilton, wrote, “Her ascent up the ladder of fame was a slow and toilsome one, but it was an ascent of which every woman—no matter of what nationality—must feel proud.”

Several nineteenth-century artists noted the impact of Bonheur’s success upon their own decisions to become artists. In her memoirs entitled *Les maisons que j’ai connues*, Virginie Demont-Breton dedicated a chapter to Bonheur and recounted her admiration for the artist from a young age. Years later, in 1896, shortly after being elected president of the Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs, Demont-Breton sent a letter to Bonheur asking permission to visit her atelier accompanied by the vice president of the society, Pauline Delacroix-Garnier, and both of their husbands. Bonheur graciously invited them to her chateau at By; Demont-Breton discussed this visit, and gave a careful summary of Bonheur’s life in some detail in her memoirs:

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145 *The New York Times*, August 9, 1855, pg. 4. The unnamed male author is highly complimentary of Bonheur and encouraging of women artists in general, while still asserting that it is rare to find any with “sufficient artistic talent.” He also condescendingly suggests that women, who have more time to pursue arts, should try, like Bonheur, to paint their household pets.


The great artist received us in the most cordial and charming manner. She was happy to make our acquaintance… She was dressed like a peasant from Normandy: brown velour pants, a blue cloth smock embroidered with white on the seams. Her vast atelier is extremely interesting. . . There are studies of horses, sheep, cows, bisons of the first class and in the drawings, what rich compositions, what a beautiful and fertile imagination, what a gift for painting developed in nature, simple and free!149

This initial visit would begin a friendship that continued until Bonheur’s death; Demont-Breton visited with Bonheur several times and on occasion corresponded with her, often updating the older artist on the developments in her advocacy for the rights of women artists. In her letters to Demont-Breton, Bonheur referred to fellow women artists as “Sisters of the brush” and “Colleagues of the palette” and expressed her disappointment that many talented women are “slaves to the necessities of existence” and consequently their art suffers.150

Demont-Breton’s chapter on Bonheur, longer than any other chapter in the volume, attests to Bonheur’s singular importance as a model of success. In a tribute written about Bonheur after her death, Demont-Breton pointed out that even though Bonheur was never married nor had children, her strong love and care of animals would have made her an excellent mother.151 In this way, Bonheur was seen not only as an example of a successful artist but also as a paragon of acceptable femininity and motherhood. This argument began early in her career when critics, such as Anatole de LaForge, saw maternal instincts in the animals in Bonheur’s canvases. In his review of contemporary artists in 1856, LaForge noted that her “happy cows” seemed to “have the air of being good mothers of a family.”152 Thus, Bonheur’s appeal to women

149 Ibid., 82-83. Original in French. “La grande artiste nous y reçoit de la façon la plus cordiale et la plus charmante. Elle est heureuse de faire notre connaissance … Elle est vêtue en bon paysan normand : pantalon de velours marron, bourgeron de toile bleue brodée de blanc sur les coutures. Son vaste atelier est fort intéressant….Il y a là des études de chevaux, de moutons, de bœufs, de bisons, de tout premier ordre et, dans les esquisses, quelle richesse de composition, quelle belle imagination féconde, quel don de peintre développé dans la simple et libre nature !”
150 Ibid., 102.
artists was augmented by perceived maternity manifest in her attitudes toward the animal kingdom.

Bonheur’s second companion and legal heir Anna Klumpke also attributed her artistic aspirations to the legendary Bonheur, whom she learned of as a young child. Growing up in San Francisco while The Horse Fair traveled around the United States, Klumpke received a small doll dressed like Rosa Bonheur from her mother. Later, when she moved with her family to Paris, Klumpke visited Bonheur’s Ploughing in the Nivernais and recalled her mother saying “All artists are an honor to their country, and Rosa Bonheur adds to the glory of France.” Shortly thereafter, Klumpke copied the painting and sold it to an American for 1,000 francs. Thus, her first commercial success, indelibly linked to Bonheur, enabled her to pay the tuition to enter the Académie Julian for formal training. Women outside of the visual arts were similarly drawn to Bonheur’s success and frequently used her as an example of independence and autonomy. For example, English activist Edith Craig assumed the role of the legendary animal painter in several performances of the British suffrage drama, A Pageant of Great Women from 1909-1912. The pageant was literally a parade of important women through history, including up to ninety performers, conjured up from the past to confirm the right and worthiness of women to have freedom.

It should not be surprising, understanding Bonheur’s identification with women and her distinct feeling that a female writer could represent her life better than the male biographers, that Bonheur was equally amenable to portrait proposals from women artists in her later years. As

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154 Ibid. Also, Klumpke, The Artist’s (Auto) Biography, 46.
155 Penny Farfan, Women, Modernism and Performance, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 78-84. Farfan suggests that Bonheur also appealed to Craig, daughter of actress Ellen Terry, because of her lesbian lifestyle. Although Craig’s sexuality has not been explicitly documented, she had a lifelong female companion like Bonheur and may have been expressing her sexual dissidence through her portrayal of the artist.
Bonheur’s popularity continued to grow in the late 1880s and 1890s, several artists—this time women—requested permission to paint her. Despite her dislike of posing, Bonheur made herself available to these artists and was strongly involved in the final results of these sessions. As several examples in this chapter have illustrated, her collaboration with other artists’ portraits of her are of interest as they relate to Bonheur’s perception of self as well as other’s perceptions and presentations of her. In 1887, Bonheur declined a request from the Uffizi for a self-portrait to add to their prestigious collection, writing: “I am not a portraitist, I am simply a painter of animals and consequently do not possess a self-portrait.” Although she declined the Uffizi, she did accept several invitations from artists to paint her likeness, and the final examples to be examined in this chapter are portraits of Bonheur painted by women artists and two small sketches by Bonheur herself. The works visually illustrate the important legacy of power, success, and possibility that Bonheur left behind.

In the years that followed Micas’ death in 1889, Bonheur felt the loss keenly and struggled to keep up her spirits. Hearing of her grief, her friend Mme. Simonin Valérie Fould wrote to Bonheur to express her sympathies and proposed a visit with her adult daughters, given the masculine names of Consuélo and Achille. Bonheur was well acquainted with the family and had on occasions in the past advised the daughters, both talented painters, with their paintings. Wanting to alleviate Bonheur’s sorrow, Mme Fould visited several times and eventually suggested an extended visit during which her daughters could paint Bonheur’s portrait. In a cheerful letter written to Mme Fould on June 18, 1892, Bonheur cordially accepts, declaring “I am at your service for Monday, that date chosen by your Excellency. I am quite ready to pose.

156 Notes from the Louis-Edouard Dubufe file at the Chateau de Versailles. “Non sono ritrattista, ma semplicemente pittrice di animali e di conseguenza non posso ritrarre me stessa.” Although she declined, the erroneous idea that a self-portrait of Bonheur exists in the Uffizi collection has persisted. The portrait within their collection, perhaps painted by Landseer or an anonymous artist, is still frequently attributed to Bonheur.
like an angel for the future glory of my Department and France, as well as for Art and the Magistracy, without forgetting the Clergy.” The language attests to Bonheur’s close relationship with the family, one in which she felt comfortable teasing and even exaggerating the importance of her portrait.

Both Consuélo, now married and known as the Marquise de Grasse, and Achille frequently exhibited at the Salon and were eager to paint Bonheur. They stayed with the artist for three weeks at By, working on the portraits each afternoon. Apparently, they decided that only the best of the two paintings should be exhibited at the Salon. Reminiscing about the portraits with Theodore Stanton, Achille wrote that “my sister and myself were both burning with desire to paint Rosa Bonheur’s portrait… Both of us did our very best to produce the true portrait, the one which should go to the Salon. Finally, Rosa Bonheur proposed with a smile that we draw lots for this honour. We did so, and I was the lucky one.”

Achille’s portrait, entitled *Rosa Bonheur in her Studio* was accepted at the Salon of 1893 and later bought by the Museum of Fine Arts in Bordeaux (Fig. 2.27). Bonheur sits in her cluttered and lived-in studio in front of a painting she is currently finishing, dressed in her artist smock and pants. She looks toward the viewer, palette and brushes in hand, as if she has just paused and turned in her chair to greet a visitor. This portrait also gives some insight into Bonheur’s habit of working on a painting until the last possible moment and frequently retouching after she had finished; here the work has already been framed and initially wrapped for transport yet Bonheur still adds some final touches. Mlle Fould returned to Paris after the three-week visit and continued working on the portrait. Prior to the Salon exhibition, she

157 Stanton, 254.
158 Stanton, 251.
159 One account says this was exhibited in the 1893 Salon, but another says it was the 1895 Salon. Unfortunately, the whereabouts of this portrait are currently unknown.
returned to By to show the painting to Bonheur and complete it. At this time, Bonheur continued the collaborative tradition she started with Dubufe and painted elements of the work with her own hand. Mlle Fould explained that “she [Bonheur] herself painted on my canvas the pictures she was engaged upon at the time and which formed a part of my composition.”

Fould was herself a supporter of the Union de Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs and an active promoter of other women artists, which partially explains her initial desire to paint the legendary female artist. Here she presented Bonheur as a serious professional amidst her work. Tamar Garb commented that in this work “none of the conventional trappings of femininity are present. She is shown in complete working gear and in the context of her own studio, filled with allusions to hunting and wild animals deemed far beyond the domestic concerns to which women were destined.”

Here, Bonheur is a confident professional.

As opposed to Achille’s portrait which included the studio and working environment of the artist, her sister’s portrait was a three-quarter view of the artist and was meant as a “pendant to the well-known portrait by Dubufe, done forty years before….” Because Achille exhibited her portrait of Bonheur, Consuélo did not continue with her portrait-sketch after their initial sittings in 1892. However, Bonheur must have mentioned it to her London publisher, Lefevre, because the following year he contacted Consuélo and asked her to finish it. After corresponding with Bonheur, Consuélo returned to By in January of 1894 to complete the work (Fig. 2.28). During these sessions, Bonheur sketched a small image of herself and the portraitist and included it in a letter to her artist friend Paul Chardin (Fig. 2.29). In the sketch Bonheur is sitting rather than the standing position seen in the portrait, but the other elements are there.

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160 Stanton, 251. This is also quoted in Borzello, 114. It is not exactly clear which parts of the painting Bonheur worked on.
161 Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 121.
162 Stanton, xiv.
163 Ibid.
Mme Marquise de Grasse sits with her paints and maulstick, oblivious even to the dog at her skirts, while Bonheur looks stoically forward dressed in her working pants. In several letters to the Marquise, Bonheur offered to paint the dog as soon as the rest of the portrait was finished. In reference to this collaboration, the Marquise later stated “the canvas bear[s] two signatures—hers and my own.”

Bonheur’s inclusion of a quick sketch to her friend Chardin with her letters was not atypical of the artist. She often incorporated impromptu drawings as a complement to her correspondence. In an undated letter written to animal sculptor Pierre-Jules Mène, Bonheur adds a large image of herself, looking out at the reader (presumably Mène), and holding an enormous palette and several brushes (Fig. 2.30). The flowing and curving lines of the text eventually lead to her paintbrush, effectively creating an illusion that the letter was painted, rather than written by the artist. Additionally, the letter discussed exchanging animals for models, a common practice among animaliers.

Klumpke’s portraits of Bonheur were completed from 1898-1899, just prior to Bonheur’s death in May. Bonheur insisted that Klumpke create numerous sketches, approved of the color scheme and gave advice throughout the process. Bonheur loved the company of her young American artist, but admitted that she disliked posing and wondered “if I would have put up with the bother of sitting for a man.” After producing several initial sketches, Klumpke went to Paris to show her work to Tony Robert-Fleury and Jules Lefebvre, her teachers at the Académie Julien. Klumpke later noted that they were duly impressed at her opportunity to paint Bonheur;

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164 Ibid.
165 See Petra ten-Doesschate Chu’s article “Unexpected Pleasures in Artist’s Letters” for a discussion of this letter as well as many other letters with illustrations that are part of the permanent collection of the Fondation Custodia in Paris. See Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, “Unexpected Pleasures in Artist’s Letters,” *Frits Lugts Collection Journal* (October 1976): 62-69. This image of Bonheur is also the cover illustration of their *Inventaire des autographes d’artistes français du XVe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Institut néerlandais and Fondation Custodia, 1988).
Lefebvre observed that she would be “the envy of many artists” and encouraged her to “watch your model carefully, imbue yourself with her traits.”

His comments again illustrate the connection and artistic lineage made between rising women artists and Bonheur.

As the process continued, Klumpke and Bonheur had difficulty deciding which sketch to develop into a full painting. In the end, Klumpke painted two portraits, one with Bonheur and her dog Charley and one with the artist seated at her easel (Figs. 2.31-2.32). The latter was exhibited at the Salon of 1899. One week prior to her death, Bonheur corresponded with Consuélo Fould and mentioned both Klumpke’s and Consuélo’s portraits:

I made it a point of going to see the Salon where my portrait is exhibited, painted by my dear friend Miss Klumpke…. I shall be very glad for you to meet my friend who does not lack talent, as you will have seen. With the portrait you painted of my amiable person, I shall remain, with a few years difference between yours and the present one, a historical character in the world of art; and that thanks to feminine artists….

Klumpke’s Salon portrait depicts the artist seated in front of a canvas. Although she is probably in her studio as in Fould’s work, the background is subdued and secondary compared to the attention given to the artist herself and focusing on her character, strength and intellect. She holds a sketch in one hand and a paintbrush in the other while she looks at the viewer with a calm confidence. It is intriguing to recognize that in both Klumpke and the Fould sisters’ depictions of the artist, and in contrast to early representations such as Goodall’s or Dubufe’s, Bonheur looks out at the viewer. Though she is confrontational in neither, she is unafraid to meet the viewer and in no way becomes objectified for a voyeuristic or disapproving gaze.

Klumpke gives us the image of the woman who managed to blend characteristics of masculinity and femininity to construct her own identity. She shows us the self-assured artist she knew so well, the one who boldly rejected the stifling conventions of femininity in order to forge her own

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167 Ibid, 36.
168 Stanton, 270.
femininity that allowed her to become a professional artist and achieve her success and happiness on her own terms.

Sometime prior to his death in 1885, Victor Hugo affirmed his admiration for Rosa Bonheur, as demonstrated in the quote included at the beginning of this chapter. Hugo’s summation of her character, one who ignored the crowds and was “true to self,” is poignantly relevant to this study of individuality, subjectivity, and self-construction. Bonheur’s integrity, in Hugo’s eyes, translated into a conclusion about her authenticity and commitment to herself and her art. Bonheur’s calm acceptance of a new type of femininity, one that did not exclude cigars, horse-riding and female freedom in general, was one that was fostered from early childhood. Influenced by the Saint-Simonian belief system of her father, Bonheur embraced very unconventional views about men and women that contributed to her construction of her own female identity that had little to do with prevailing ideas about feminine attributes. By adopting certain masculine attributes but continually believing in women’s abilities, Bonheur in a sense redefined her gender without unappealing limitations. She strategically negotiated her way through nineteenth-century concepts of masculinity and femininity in order to achieve economic independence, emotional support, artistic success, and more fame than most women artists. In so doing, she became a model for future women who, despite societal limitations, would similarly forge new territories with equal commitment to women and self.

The following chapters explore the ways in which other women artists defined their public and private identities via self-portraits, sketches, photographs, and writings. All of them have the “streak of rebellion” spoken of by Linda Nochlin as a necessary element for women attempting to become professional artists, but some manifest this rebellion in less obvious ways than Bonheur. However, whether they emulated Bonheur or not, none were unaware of her
unprecedented success; her shadow loomed large throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Bonheur’s thoughtful construction of her public identity and her continual attempt to strike the ideal balance of feminine and masculine characteristics, of innovation and respectability, is a strategy that many women artists will repeat and may be her largest legacy of all.
CHAPTER THREE:
Rethinking Self: Eva Gonzalès (1847-1883) On Her Own

A week after the opening of Eva Gonzalès' retrospective exhibition in 1885, the illustrated newspaper La Vie Moderne printed an article discussing the event, which included a two-page spread with sketches of recognizable attendees (Fig. 3.1). ¹⁶⁹ One can easily identify Émile Zola, Puvis de Chavannes, Léon Leenhoff, Théodore de Banville, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Jean-Jacques Henner, Jean-François Rafaëlli, among many others. Noteworthy visitors not captured visually were mentioned by name in the text, including the widow of Édouard Manet, Berthe Morisot, Edgar Degas, Camille Pissarro, French critic Champfleury, and Stéphane Mallarmé, to mention a few. As the sketches and article indicate, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century Gonzalès was a well-known artist, and many friends and associates paid homage to her at this exhibition held a year and a half after her death. Today, however, the most immediate association with Eva Gonzalès' name may not be her paintings, but Manet's depiction of her as seen in Portrait of Mlle E. G., exhibited in the Salon of 1870 (Fig. 3.2). In an effort to understand how her reputation and identity were mediated by this work, this chapter will assess Manet’s influence upon Gonzalès’ style and compare Manet’s portrait of Gonzalès with several of her own self-portraits and images of women. These images offer thoughtful correctives to her teacher’s vision of her and illustrate the complexities of selfhood that she encountered as she negotiated artistic and familial relationships. Two primary relationships—with her teacher Manet and with her sister Jeanne—powerfully impacted her sense of individuality as well as her artistic output, and the nuances of these associations will be explored in the analysis of several paintings. Additionally, Gonzalès’ self-portraits will be compared with those by fellow female colleagues

Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot, who likewise produced self-portraits in response to portraits created by male colleagues, and who also contemplated and constructed their identities in relationship to their families.

Typically known as one of the female impressionists, Eva Gonzalès has not received as much attention as Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, although still more than the even lesser known Marie Braquemond. Until a catalogue raisonné was written and compiled by Marie-Caroline Sainsaulieu and Jacques de Mons in 1990, the only existing monograph on the artist was Claude Roger-Marx’s small volume written in 1950. This lack of scholarly attention is perhaps due to the relatively brief span of her career, cut prematurely short by her unexpected death in 1883 due to complications of childbirth, as well as the paucity of textual sources such as diaries and letters written by Gonzalès herself. Since Sainsaulieu’s excellent publication, the Musée Marmottan had an exhibition in 1993 on Cassatt, Morisot, and Gonzalès and in 1994, Carol Jane Grant wrote her doctoral dissertation on Gonzalès, focusing on her biography, style, and the paintings of her sister Jeanne. Most recently, in early 2008, the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, Germany organized an exhibition entitled Women Impressionists, focusing on the achievements of Cassatt, Morisot, Gonzalès, and Marie Braquemond, which traveled to San Francisco, Berlin, and London.

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170 One of the first publications to address all four of these artists was Tamar Garb’s Women Impressionists (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1986.) Clement T. Russell’s The Women Impressionists: a sourcebook (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000) provides brief biographical information and references to major monographs and scholarly articles that discuss these four artists or are dedicated to them.


172 The Fondation Custodia in Paris has a handful of Gonzalès’ correspondence and memorabilia including: personal letters to her husband Henri Guérard, receipts for monthly payments to Charles Chaplin’s studio, her father’s business card, a handmade New Year’s Card for her father, and menu cards from her wedding.

Francisco as well. These recent publications and exhibitions are promising as they open doors for further research on Gonzalès and the many facets of her career and life.

Born in Paris on April 19, 1847, Eva Carola Emmanuela Antoinette Gonzalès was the firstborn child of the Gonzalès family, followed three years later by sister Jeanne. Her father, Emmanuel Gonzalès, was a naturalized French citizen whose family heritage had Spanish ties back to the sixteenth century. As a well-known writer, journalist and President of the Comité de la Société des Gens de Lettres, Emmanuel regularly associated with rising literary and artistic figures and frequently invited them into their home. Additionally, Gonzalès’ mother, Marie Céline Ragut Gonzalès, was a musician, excelling in harp and voice. It was in this lively atmosphere of creative and artistic exchange that Gonzalès was encouraged to develop her own artistic skills.

As appropriate for upper middle-class and bourgeois females, the Gonzalès daughters began developing skills of drawing and painting from a young age, albeit informally within their own home. Eva was perceived as the more talented of the two and with the encouragement of two family friends, Philippe Jourde, director of the journal Le Siècle, and the novelist Théodore de Banville, sought formal artistic training at the age of sixteen in 1866. Because women were still not admitted into the École des Beaux-Arts and frequently not welcomed in all-male ateliers, opportunities for women were decidedly limited. Gonzalès began studying with Charles Chaplin, who ran an atelier specifically for women artists that became quite popular in the 1860s and 70s. Mary Cassatt also studied there, as well as Louise Abbéma, Henriette Browne, and other aspiring and ambitious female artists. Discussing this studio, one student stated that “he [Chaplin] had a large following, for his was the only atelier at that time where all the students

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175 Grant, 31.
were women, so that careful mothers could send their daughters there without any fear of complications arising between sexes."

Chaplin received his formal education at the École des Beaux-Arts and specialized in portraits of women and children, which he frequently exhibited at the Salon. He secured his reputation, however, as a popular portrait painter. His traditionally academic style was conservative and conventional, rather than innovative or avant-garde, and in this way his style was deemed as appropriate for emulation by women artists. His influence upon Gonzalès, both in terms of style and subject matter, is evident in her painting Le Thé, of 1865-69 (Fig. 3.3). Afternoon tea time is here depicted as an elegant and solitary affair. Jeanne Gonzalès, who would become Eva’s primary model throughout her career, is depicted here sitting quietly near a fireplace in a tranquil and meditative mood. From the molding on the fireplace and wall, to the designs in the carpet rug to the lace around the Jeanne’s neck and wrist, the painting evokes a refined atmosphere; it is carefully delineated, precisely executed, and depicts subject matter that was typically considered appropriate for women artists.

After a little over a year under Chaplin’s teaching and supervision, Gonzalès became dissatisfied and perhaps restless with his approach and left his studio, as did Mary Cassatt. Gonzalès took a brief respite from painting and when she returned to the canvas, she worked independently. Chaplin wrote several letters to her father during this period, revealing his continued interest in her career and his desire that she still seek his guidance and tutelage. In January 1868, he offered to let her come to the studio three times a week free of charge so she

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176 Louise Jopling-Rowe, *Twenty Years of My Life 1867-1887* (London: John Lane, 1925), 3.
177 Sainsaulieu records the date of this piece as 1865-69. However, Grant proposes that it must have been completed between 1868-69 after she had left the studio of Chaplin: see Grant, 226-227.
would have access to a live model and continue her studies in a concentrated, serious manner.\textsuperscript{178} Despite his proposal, Gonzalès remained without a teacher until she met Edouard Manet in 1869.

The meeting of the two artists was facilitated through another artist, Alfred Stevens. A Belgian painter, Stevens was more akin to Chaplin in style, but counted many Impressionists and avant-garde artists as his friends, including Manet. Paul Bayre, an art critic who wrote several articles on Gonzalès in the first few decades of the twentieth century, suggested that the introduction occurred at Stevens’ home during an evening gathering of friends.\textsuperscript{179} Intrigued by her dark looks and Spanish heritage, Manet sent a letter to Gonzalès and her mother, inviting them to come to his studio so he could paint the young artist. Despite their initial hesitation, her family eventually agreed to the proposal and Gonzalès, with her mother or sister as an accompanying chaperone, began visits to the studio in February.\textsuperscript{180} Though the portrait would take close to a year to complete, within a few months Gonzalès had become Manet’s pupil, the only formal student he would have throughout his career.

Gonzalès’ first submission to the Salon after becoming Manet’s student in 1870 shows her changing style as well as the growing influence of Manet upon her work. \textit{L'Enfant de troupe} is based on Manet’s \textit{Le Fifre} of four years earlier, which had been rejected from the Salon (Figs. 3.4-3.5). The painting was in Manet’s studio during the time Gonzalès was his student, and her decision to produce her own version of this piece pays homage to Manet and demonstrates her respect for his technique and subjects. Placed side by side, a comparison between the two canvases provides a beneficial initiation point for an assessment of Manet’s influence. Both

\textsuperscript{178} See letter of 11 janvier 1868 from Chaplin to Emmanuel Gonzalès, included in Sainsaulieu, 50. “Qu’elle vient 3 fois, une, même par semaine, elle aura toujours le modèle vivant, de cette façon elle se maintiendra toujours avec la nature et l’étude sérieuse.”
\textsuperscript{179} Paul Bayre, “Eva Gonzalès,” \textit{La Renaissance} (June 1932): 112.
\textsuperscript{180} Grant 111. Paul Bayre adds that it was largely due to Philippe Jourde that the Gonzalès consented to this invitation. He writes, “Le peintre de l’Olympia, fasciné par la beauté d’Éva Gonzalès, désirait faire son portrait, et Philippe Jourde, parrain de la jeune fille, travailla longuement à lever les scrupules de la famille qu’apêuraient les audaces artistiques du maître.” Bayre 112.
depict a full-length figure of a young boy, dressed in military garb. Gonzalès’ costume differs slightly from Manet’s, the coat and shoulder guards are more formal in appearance, and her young soldier holds a large bugle instead of playing a fife. The background of Gonzalès’ piece is much darker than Manet’s light green atmosphere, and although Gonzalès has imitated Manet’s blank background, her space is more literal and less ambiguous than her teacher’s. Particularly because the background is darker than Manet’s, it disappears around the soldier and creates a more traditionally illusionistic space than *Le Fifre*. One of the reasons Manet’s canvas had been rejected was precisely because he refused to produce a conventional background that legibly read as “space” in which someone could stand. Instead, Manet creates a surface of paint that surrounds the young boy and vies for equal attention as the figure, frustrating the accepted relationship between the figure and ground. Gonzalès does not appear at all interested in this avant-garde experiment; her painting borrows Manet’s subject matter but rejects his risky approach that was unappreciated by the art critics.

This is not to say that Gonzalès was opposed to risk-taking in general when it came to her oeuvre. In fact, just by adopting Manet’s subject matter in *L’Enfant de Troupe*, Gonzalès aligned herself with the avant-garde artist. Unmistakably inspired by a rejected Manet painting, Gonzalès’ painting was in serious jeopardy of receiving a similar rejection and offending the conservative jury. Although Gonzalès was obviously willing to take this risk to announce her artistic heritage, she safeguarded herself against a backlash from the Salon jury in two ways. First, Gonzalès opted not to implement Manet’s ambiguous background space and therefore solidly placed herself as a traditional, illusionistic painter. Second, in a mark of brilliant strategy she submitted Chaplin’s name as her teacher on the Salon brochure rather than Manet’s.¹¹¹ This

¹¹¹ Sainsaulieu, 12. Grant, 35. Along with *L’Enfant de Troupe*, Gonzalès also exhibited two pastels, a small genre scene entitled *La Passante* and *Portrait of Jeanne Gonzalès*.
decision may have been made upon the advice of Manet in order to shield his student from the negative criticism that frequently dogged him. Additionally, Chaplin was a member of the Salon Jury and could use his influence to aid in the Salon process of acceptance. These strategies obviously worked: *L’Enfant de Troupe* was accepted into the Salon and eventually bought by the state.\(^\text{182}\) The painting did receive some negative press, but overall the reception was positive and optimistic for the future of the young artist. Jules Castagnary commented on the painting and on Gonzalès’ talent: “Mlle Gonzalès, who exhibits for the first time, seems also very happily gifted. She has the sentiment of life and the intuition of what art should be.”\(^\text{183}\) He criticized the awkward attachment of the left arm to the shoulder and the unfinished look of the hands of *L’Enfant de Troupe*, but proposed that time would correct these errors and praised her level of talent at her young age.\(^\text{184}\)

If Gonzalès’ 1870 salon entry served as homage to her teacher, Manet’s portrait of Gonzalès can be seen at least partially as an homage to his young female student. This painting, also exhibited in the Salon of 1870, depicts the artist seated before a canvas daintily holding a maulstick, palette and brush, and daubs at a floral still-life on an easel (Fig. 3.2). Manet’s *Portrait of Eva Gonzalès* has been frequently critiqued in feminist scholarship as an image of an appropriately feminine amateur artist.\(^\text{185}\) Wearing an extremely impractical white dress for the messy and physical activity of painting, Gonzalès has perfectly coiffed hair and her genteel surroundings, including a floor rug, foot rest, and flower at her feet undermine the seriousness of her work. On the easel, the painting is already framed, suggesting that the scene is a staged

\(^\text{182}\) Sainsaulieu, 80. Sainsaulieu suggests that it was due to the influence and connections of Gonzalès’ father that her piece was purchased.


\(^\text{184}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{185}\) For example, see Tamar Garb’s discussion of the painting in “Gender and Representation,” included in *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993): 243.
artifice, not an actual moment of work or creativity. Furthermore, the floral arrangement she paints was considered a suitable subject for women artists, despite the fact that it was not the primary emphasis of Gonzalès’ own work. Ironically, although Manet had painted many still-lifes at this stage in his career, Gonzalès would not begin painting them for another year or two after this painting was completed. Clearly, prominence is given to her beauty as a woman and model rather than a professional status as an artist.

However, one should be wary of such a relentless condemnation of Manet for his appropriation of cultural stereotypes and societal expectations in this work. After all, the work does at least acknowledge her profession, if somewhat superficially, which Manet did not do in his numerous portraits of Berthe Morisot. Intriguingly, during the same year, Manet completed another portrait of Gonzalès, also in the process of painting and here the seriousness of the artist, whose back is to the spectator, is more strongly emphasized (Fig. 3.6). The fact that both of these works establish Gonzalès as an artist, despite the varying levels of professionalism between the two, suggests a certain unwillingness on Manet’s part to present her as other than as an artist. With two canvases of Gonzalès in the process of painting, it seems that Manet is doing more than merely parroting societal norms for amateur female artists. Although the painting clearly minimizes Gonzalès as an aspiring professional, it is significant as a visual document that illustrates the ways in which upper-class women were expected to be presented in public image, even if holding a brush in one hand. Additionally, Manet’s difficulty in completing the painting, particularly in capturing Gonzalès’ face, reveal some of his personal difficulties in reconciling the often mutually exclusive categories of professional artist and woman.

It is to Berthe Morisot, who frequently perceived Gonzalès as a rival for Manet’s approval and attention during this era, to whom we must turn to unveil some of the complexities
of this painting. While Manet was painting Gonzalès and shortly after he had taken her as a pupil, Morisot wrote several letters to her sister Edma, who had recently married, and in the process revealed her own insecurities with respect to Manet’s interest in Gonzalès. Her references to the execution of the Gonzalès portrait are of particular import. She states, “Manet lectures me, and holds up that eternal Mlle Gonzalès as an example; she has poise, perseverance, she is able to carry an undertaking to a successful issue, whereas I am not capable of anything. In the meantime he has begun her portrait over again for the twenty-fifth time. She poses every day, and every night the head is washed out with soft soap. This will scarcely encourage anyone to pose for him.”  

In another letter she adds, “As of now, all his admiration is concentrated on Mlle Gonzalès, but her portrait does not progress; he says that he is at the fortieth sitting and that the head is again effaced…” Morisot closely followed the development of the painting and wrote Edma that it was perhaps the best portrait Manet has thus far completed. Later, however, as Manet struggled endlessly over the face, she changed her mind: “I do not know how to account for the washed out effect of the Portrait of Mlle Gonzalès…. The head remains weak and not pretty at all.”

In her book Manet/Manette, Carol Armstrong has explored the ‘painterly triangle’ of Manet, Morisot and Gonzalès and her comments on their relationships and this painting are insightful. Armstrong notes that both Manet and Morisot were simultaneously painting works

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186 Sainsaulieu, 12. Also quoted and translated in Carol Armstrong, Manet/Manette, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002):184. For the complete letter and the responses from Edma, see Correspondance de Berthe Morisot avec sa famille et ses amis Manet, Puvis de Chavannes, Degas, Monet, Renoir et Mallarmé (Paris: Quatre Chemins-Éditar, 1950), 33-35. “Manet me fait de la morale et m’offre cette éternelle Mlle Gonzalès comme modèle; elle a de la tenue, de la perseverance, elle sait mener une chose à bien, tandis que moi, je ne suis capable de rien. En attendant, il recommence son portrait pour la vingt-cinquième fois; elle pose tous les jours et le soir, sa tête est lavée au savon noir. Voilà qui est encourageant pour demander aux gens de poser.”

187 Ibid. “Pour le quart d’heure, toutes ses admirations sont concentrées sur Mlle Gonzalès, mais son portrait n’avance toujours pas; il me dit être à la quarantième séance et la tête est de nouveau effacée…”

188 Armstrong, 185.

189 Ibid. “Je ne sais à quoi attribuer l’effet décoloré du portrait de Mlle Gonzalès…La tête est toujours restée faible et pas jolie du tout…”
with which they were not satisfied—Manet with his Gonzalès portrait and Morisot with a portrait of her mother and sister—both of which were eventually completed by Manet’s hand. As Manet reworked Gonzalès’ face, he also reworked Morisot’s portrait of her mother and sister, much to Morisot’s dismay. Armstrong proposes therefore that the Portrait of Eva Gonzalès “was at the uneasy center of an uneven exchange between Manet and Morisot, in which the ups and downs of painting and flirting were not clearly distinguished, and in which the symbiotic ties linking mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, friends, and romantic rivals knot themselves around the painters’ duet.” This uneven exchange was clearly one in which Manet has the upper hand, ultimately triumphing in reworking both Gonzalès, on his canvas, and Morisot, on hers.

In her argument, Armstrong focused specifically on the relationship between Manet and Morisot, seeing Gonzalès primarily as a barrier between the two. However, the Manet-Gonzalès relationship merits attention on its own. There is, I believe, an uneasy center between Manet and Gonzalès. What exactly was it about her visage that he was trying repeatedly, albeit unsuccessfully, to capture? As many artists will attest, depicting a face is not a simple task. In addition to recording the specific physiognomy of a person, a portrait presents the facial expressions, personality, intelligence and even mood of the sitter. Of course, Manet was well known for his ability to illustrate nuances of expression and psychological tensions on his canvases. In fact, this is perhaps best illustrated by his numerous portraits of Berthe Morisot, which have been the focus of much scholarship. However, Gonzalès was the only woman he painted as an artist and his struggle to do so suggests his own division between two aspects of her identity: beautiful model and talented artist. The first role typically allows artists to deal with generalities but the latter requires the specificity of the individual. Manet seemed to stumble in

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190 Armstrong, 186.
this particular portrait between capturing the essence of Gonzalès as individual and artist and painting a portrait that objectified his model and represented an allegory of painting rather than a specific person.

Manet’s inability to complete her face suggests his own division between two aspects of her identity: beautiful model and talented female artist. Gonzalès was not a professional, paid model with whom he had a cursory acquaintance; she was a pupil and, by this point, a family friend. The Manet and Gonzalès families regularly met and corresponded, even during the Parisian siege, until both Manet’s and Gonzalès’ deaths.\(^{192}\) Manet seemed to stumble in this particular portrait between capturing the essence of Gonzalès as individual and artist and painting a portrait that objectified his model and represented an allegory of painting rather than a specific person. As the poet and critic Hippolyte Taine observed in 1867, “Woman and the work of art are related creations…. One wants to own them and put them on display.”\(^{193}\)

Often, women depicted on the canvas in the nineteenth century blend with the decorative objects surrounding them; they become one of many beautiful objects to admire and, in Taine’s words, ‘own.’ Manet had difficulty capturing Gonzalès’ accurate physiognomy as he vacillated between painting her face as one object of the decorative whole or portraying her as thinking subject, a woman who sought recognition as an artist in a man’s world. Manet’s inability to allow the two elements—model and artist—to coalesce harmoniously creates a painting that shifts between an homage to Gonzalès or an homage to Manet, ultimately leaning toward the latter, since he was the

\(^{192}\) In the following years, Gonzalès would also correspond with Manet’s wife Suzanne, and Manet frequently wrote to Gonzalès’ husband Henri Guérard, who was an engraver and printmaker. These exchanges reveal the close ties between the two families for over a decade.

mastermind behind the work. In the end, the painting exemplifies, as many feminist scholars have noted, an appropriately feminine amateur artist, rather than the ambitious and professional artist that Gonzalès was. The painting is neither an exceptionally convincing likeness of Gonzalès nor an example of Manet’s best work, but functions as an excellent metaphor for the shifting of subjectivity and objectivity surrounding women artists who consciously sought to become the acting subjects rather than objects.

Perhaps not surprisingly, considering Manet’s record, contemporary critics almost universally disliked the painting. They commented on the dazed expression, the unmodulated skin color, and waxen physiognomy. One critic described Gonzalès’ face as a “plaster doll with stupified eyes and a nose like a parrot's beak.” Another claimed that Manet had converted a beautiful woman into a “monster of a human creature.” One even directed his displeasure at Gonzalès herself: “Saints in the desert or delivered into the hands of their executioners are no more courageous than the young lady who has allowed Manet to represent her life-sized in a rather dirty white dress. And far from expressing her horror she laughs at the torture, she smiles in the midst of her filthiness. . . . .” Many disapproved of her bare arms,

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194 This is perhaps further iterated in Irish artist William Orpen’s 1909 painting Homage to Manet. The painting, now in the Manchester Art Gallery, is Orpen’s acknowledgement of Manet’s influence on his style and career. Orpen was primarily a portrait painter and this work, essentially a group portrait, depicts the members of the New English Art Club sitting around a table with Manet’s Portrait of E.G. hanging behind them on the wall. Orpen expresses his esteem and allegiance to the French master by copying this painting and inserting it into the background of his work. Ironically, it seems here that the image of the work and the identification of the female artist is somewhat irrelevant to Orpen; he honors the painting because it was produced by Manet. This further underlines the point that in the end the painting is a tribute to Manet rather than the woman he was painting.


196 For the best discussion of contemporary reactions to the work, see Tamar Garb, “Framing Femininity in Manet’s Portrait of Mlle E.G.” in Self and History: A Tribute to Linda Nochlin (London: Thames and Hudson: 2001), 77-89.


199 Laurent Pichat, Reveil, 13 mai 1870, as quoted in George Heard Hamilton, Manet and his Critics, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 143.
described as too long, too short, comical or grotesque.\textsuperscript{200} The frequent discussion of her arms reveals a general consensus about the impropriety of a respectable woman to bare her arms for the general public.\textsuperscript{201} Tamar Garb contextualized this reaction and observed that arms, particularly women’s arms, had specific connotations in the spring of 1870. A campaign for smallpox vaccination in Paris led to countless advertisements and subsequent caricatures of women baring their limbs for doctors with syringes. The sexual and erotic overtones of these vaccinations were carried over into Salon images, as illustrated by a caricature in \textit{Le Charivari} of a young woman dressed in a lovely gown for an evening in the theater or at a ball, where revealed arms would be more acceptable (Fig. 3.7). Her arms are swollen and scarred from her recent vaccination and the text explains that the Salon portraits this year are all vaccinated.\textsuperscript{202} Thus, Gonzalès’ bare arms had an unsavory reference that made her portrait seem additionally unacceptable and inappropriate.

Despite the critics’ aversion to the painting, many assessments of Gonzalès focus primarily on this work, rather than her own paintings. Both Charles Bigot and Philippe Burty reviewed her 1885 retrospective and each devoted large portions of their articles to Manet’s painting rather than examples from her oeuvre. Bigot, who is further discussed in Tamar Garb’s \textit{Sisters of the Brush}, was a contemporary critic who applauded liberal efforts that would “free women and permit them to earn an honest living.”\textsuperscript{203} So long, of course, “that women did not stop being women and did not lose their charming ways.”\textsuperscript{204} In his discussion of the recently deceased Gonzalès, Bigot spends a large portion of the article condemning Manet’s portrait of

\textsuperscript{200} Garb, “Framing Femininity in Manet’s Portrait of E.G.,” 80.
\textsuperscript{201} The controversy of Gonzalès’ bare arms sounds uncannily familiar today, considering the enormous amount of debate and attention given to Michelle Obama’s decision to wear sleeveless dresses in public shortly after her husband’s inauguration. Both examples illustrate cultural conceptions about when and where certain types of clothing and fashion are (in)appropriate.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid, 83. Original French text reads: “Les portraits de cette année se ressentent de la vaccine.”
\textsuperscript{203} Garb, \textit{Sisters of the Brush}, 46.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
her which he describes as having ghastly arms and face, vacant eyes, and an incorrect figure—all unworthy of Gonzalès’ beauty and therefore an example of Manet’s weakness as a painter. Bigot uses this painting as a metaphor for Manet’s influence on Gonzalès, which he heartily laments. He suggests that she had proved herself capable of more, and could have achieved it had she not followed Manet’s advice so long. It is interesting, however, that he spends more time discussing Manet’s portrait of her rather than any examples of her own work. Similarly, in a review of a 1950 exhibition of Gonzalès work at the Galerie Daber, Jean Bouret illustrated his article with Manet’s portrait of her, even though it was not a part of the exhibition. These examples demonstrate that Gonzalès’ identity and the critical reception of her oeuvre have been frequently mediated, and at times overshadowed, by Manet’s portrait of her.

What did Gonzalès think of Manet’s portrait of her? While we have no account of her reaction to the work, her husband and father, who organized her retrospective exhibition shortly after her death, displayed it prominently at the entrance to the exhibition and the painting was owned by the Gonzalès family, as illustrated in this 1895 photograph of Gonzalès husband Henri Guérard and Jeanne Guérard-Gonzalès (Fig. 3.8). The Gonzalès family clearly valued the portrait as a memento of Eva’s work and her relationship to Manet, regardless of the critical response or the implications of her status as an amateur artist. How does Manet’s portrait of her compare with her own self-portraits? As Gonzalès posed for Manet, she could not have failed to notice his difficulty in completing her face. It was perhaps during these sessions that she began to ponder how she would present herself on canvas. What would her version of herself look like seated in front of the canvas? In the following several years, Gonzalès would explore her response to this question across several canvases. As the same time, she was also attempting to

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206 The painting is now in the permanent collection of the National Gallery in London.
incorporate Manet’s counsel as her principal artistic advisor but establish her own style through her paintings. Essentially, both her efforts at self-portraiture and several of her major paintings produced from 1875-1883 reveal this endeavor to establish her allegiance to Manet but maintain an independent voice. Too often, Gonzalès’ oeuvre has been seen as derivative of Manet and therefore not worthy of close evaluation. This opinion was voiced during her lifetime and continued into the early twentieth century. Hear, for example, the words of Bernheim-Jeune’s manager in 1914, discussing the works of Gonzalès hanging in his gallery: “We have had our Manet—how can we need this repetition of him, however excellent?” Fortunately, almost a century later, this wholly dismissive view of Gonzalès’ work is no longer tenable. Still, far too few of her paintings are widely recognized and Manet’s portrait of her continues to overshadow her own achievements. In the subsequent pages, analysis of Gonzalès self-portraits and images of women will aid in establishing her own vision, style, and subjectivity as an artist in nineteenth century France. These works will be compared against Manet’s work and also with self-portraits by fellow female colleagues Morisot and Cassatt.

Although it would be three years after Manet’s portrait of her that she would complete her first self-portrait, Gonzalès produced a painting of a woman in front of an easel the following year. La Jeune Élève, from 1871, essentially reverses Manet’s composition, placing the artist on the left and the easel on the right side of the canvas (Fig. 3.9). This would not be the only time that Gonzalès would take an idea from a Manet painting and rearrange the compositional elements in her own version. For example, in 1874, Gonzalès produced a painting based loosely upon a sketch that Manet had completed a year earlier, for which she and Léon Leenhoff had

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207 Anthony M. Ludovici, “Art: Rue Lafitte, the Boulevard, and Elsewhere,” The New Age: A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature, and Art, April 23, 1914, pg. 792. The gallery manager said this to Anthony M. Ludovici, a visiting journalist working for The New Age. Ludovici initially thought that paintings in the gallery were unknown works by Manet; upon learning the name of their creator, Ludovici related his discussion with the gallery manager.
posed. In her version, *La Loge aux Italiens*, the figures are switched and the woman placed in a position of prominence (Fig. 3.10-3.11). Gonzalès’ reversal and reworking of compositional elements was a way for her to ensure ownership of the work and foster her own creativity and vision. The first example of this subtle reworking was seen in *La Jeune Élève*.

Strictly speaking, this is not an official self-portrait of Gonzalès, but the parallel it shares with her life at the time, as a young student, is undeniable. The artist depicted engages in her work upon the canvas, which she controls and the viewer is not allowed to see. Her surroundings are simple and plain, without comforting foot rests, elegant floor rugs, or lovely flowers, and she wears an equally sober gray dress. Sitting alone in a sparse studio setting, she concentrates fully upon her canvas, emphasizing her dedication to work as a chosen profession rather than an amateur amusement to pass time. Her clothes are much more appropriate to the physical and messy process of painting than the white and frilly dress painted by Manet. The darker, somber clothes, which are not unlike the clothes Manet used to depict Gonzalès in his second painting (Fig. 3.6), honestly show a working environment rather than reveal the fashion of the day. Placed almost behind the canvas, the artist works upon a canvas that the viewer cannot see. It is the active gaze of the artist, rather than the spectator, that is empowered here. She sees and objectifies that which is around her, which ultimately includes the space of the viewer. The acute differences between these canvases underscore the difficulties faced by women artists in the nineteenth century and reveals Gonzalès’ own attempt to create a space for herself as a professional artist.

*La Jeune Élève* was listed in an inventory of Gonzalès’ paintings made shortly after the death of her husband in 1897. At this time, it was known as “*L’Artiste occupé à peindre.*”208 If Gonzalès gave the work this title herself, or indicated to her family prior to her death that such a

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208 Sainsaulieu, 120.
title was appropriate, it would solidify the work as one of the first in which Gonzalès attempted to show herself at work. However, even without the title, the painting shows Gonzalès’ daily activity and bears a strong resemblance to her appearance. A comparison with a contemporary photograph, taken around 1874, is beneficial (Fig. 3.12). This photograph, today owned by the Bibliothèque Nationale, was once a part of an album collection belonging to Manet. Dressed in dark clothing, the artist has an impassive facial expression and gazes off to her left. Her body language with folded arms and eyes looking askance suggest that she is lost in her own world, one that is closed off to any uninvited guests. Both the photograph and the painting offer glimpses of the artist but one feels that they are guarded views that refuse to acknowledge any viewer. In both, her dark hair is piled high on her head and small curls frame her forehead. The similarities in facial composition, clothing and even hint of personality in both underscore the possibility that in this work Gonzalès was exploring issues of self-portraiture.

Perhaps most intriguing element of the painting is the face of the student. Painted with quick, broad brushstrokes, its legibility is hindered by a hazy left side. The right side of the face has recognizable facial features of a mouth, nose, eyes, and eyebrow but these features fade almost entirely on the left side. Although there is a slight suggestion of an eye and eyebrow, its contrast to the right side is quite noticeable and also apparent in Henri Guérard's engraving of the work (Fig. 3.13). In general, it leaves the painting looking slightly unfinished. Just as Manet had trouble capturing the face of Gonzalès in his portrait, Gonzalès also struggled to complete the face of her female artist; but instead of removing the paint and attempting the likeness numerous times, Gonzalès opted to leave the face slightly undefined. The lingering questions about her own identity and future as an artist would remain unanswered for the next several years as she
continued to exhibit and develop her style. She would return to this topic two years later, with her first traditional self-portrait.

In the meantime, however, she continued producing paintings, primarily with her sister Jeanne as a model. In a sense, one can follow Jeanne’s life as Eva painted her in a variety of locations, poses, and situations. Because of the interrelated events in their lives and their depictions of each other on their canvases, particularly Jeanne by Eva, it is almost impossible to discuss the elder sister without also discussing her younger sibling. Jeanne seemed content to take a quieter role and enable Eva to progress by frequently posing for her. Jeanne continued to paint, often guided and assisted by her sister, but would not exhibit as frequently nor receive the same amount of critical acclaim. Despite the disparity between their artistic success, the two sisters were exceptionally close and rarely far apart from one another. Like Edma and Berthe Morisot, both were accomplished artists and began pursuing the arts together at a young age; and like the Morisot sisters, the Gonzalès sisters provided for each other an instant confidante, chaperone when necessary, and partner in painting. Jeanne’s continual presence in Gonzalès’ oeuvre testifies to the closeness of the two sisters as well as providing a glimpse of their activities and daily life.

Because both sisters were actively producing art, some of their canvases have been mistakenly associated with the wrong sister. Even more interesting, however, is one canvas that has been variously attributed to both sisters. La Plante Favorite, a pastel depicting a young girl in the process of watering a plant, was exhibited at the Salon of 1872 (Fig. 3.14). The pastel was strangely exhibited under the name “Gonzalès, (Mlle Jeanne-Eva).” Prior to this point Eva exhibited under her name Eva Gonzalès and, although Jeanne had not yet exhibited at the

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209 Sainsaulieu, 45.
210 More often than not, it is Jeanne that has received the slight in these attributions.
211 Sainsaulieu, 45.
Salon, beginning in 1878, she always exhibited under the name of Jeanne Gonzalès or her married name of Jeanne Guérard-Gonzalès. Thus, *La Plante Favorite* is the only instance of this unusual pairing of the sister’s names. In 1874, Jules Claretie cited this pastel in his publication *Peintres et sculpteurs contemporains* and dropped Eva’s name, effectively giving authorship of the work to Jeanne. Yet, in January of 1885, *La Plante Favorite* was exhibited at Eva’s retrospective exhibition and included in the sale of her studio the following month. The alternate attribution of the pastel is intriguing and has led Sainsaulieu to conclude that the work was a mutual production by both sisters, a “Pastel à quatre mains.” Sainsaulieu contends that with this joint submission Eva “offered her sister the joy of sharing with her the Salon honors and the satisfaction of reading her name in the catalogue.” This convincing supposition is in harmony with our knowledge of the sisters’ close relationship, especially because Jeanne could easily have identified the work as uniquely hers at the time of Eva’s retrospective exhibition or atelier sale.

Although not noted explicitly by Sainsaulieu, this cooperative canvas further solidifies not only their working relationship, which here reached an apex as they collaborated, but also establishes their conscious creation of a joint name and identity in “Jeanne-Eva.” This person, who is both painter and painted, artist and model, represents both sisters simultaneously; acting in concert, they become one. In his critique of *La Plante Favorite*, Théodore Duret commended

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212 Ibid. The pastel was sold here, but the archives of the sale have been lost; however, it recently was found in a private collection. The complicated attribution of the work is confused by the existence of another work in Henri Guérard’s inventory after his death in 1897. It was listed as “*Jeune femme arrosant un pot de fleurs*, tableau par Mme Jeanne Gonzalès, requérante.” Perhaps, then, this is the same painting or a copy of the original, but as its whereabouts are unknown, it is difficult to determine.

213 Ibid, 47.

214 Ibid. “Eva offre ainsi à sa sœur la joie de partager avec elle les honneurs du Salon et la satisfaction de lire son prénom dans le catalogue.” In a recent publication, Noëlle Châtelet has accepted this theory and used it as a primary element of her fictional short story about the Gonzalès sisters. See Ingrid Pfeiffer, ed., *Painting in a Man’s World* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), 55-71. This slim volume was published in conjunction with the Women Impressionists exhibition in Frankfurt and contains four chapters with fictional stories about each of the women artists included in the exhibition (Cassatt, Morisot, Gonzalès, and Braquemond.)
the overall excellent execution of the work and admired the expression of the young subject:

“The model is full of life, sensibility, and reserve such that everyone would want such an image
of his wife, daughter, or sister.”\textsuperscript{215} Perhaps it is such an image of a sister, created by two sisters
working companionably as their four hands blended across the canvas, which best reveals the
nature of their sisterly bond and their sense of a shared identity. Jeanne-Eva (they/she) formed
the facial features and body of the refined girl on the canvas with the striking features that
characterized the Gonzalès family (dark hair, fair skin, oblong face, short torso); the figure wears
a white dress accented with purple and blue flowers and a black belt. One can’t help but imagine
what the sisters were thinking as they created this image of a sister/self before them. Working
side by side, the Gonzalès sisters created an image of a simple, daily and rather mundane
domestic task that they each had undoubtedly performed many times before. Although this
seems to be their only collaborative work, their joint effort of \textit{La Plante Favorite} is a beautiful
example of the sisters’ relationship and also a harbinger of the way in which their lives and
identities would blend, blur, and sometimes become one in the future.

During the following year, Gonzalès began her first official self-portrait, completed
between 1873-74 (Fig. 3.15). It was never exhibited publicly during her lifetime but was part of
her 1885 retrospective exhibition. Sometime in the 1920s it was sold by her son into a private
collection and has never been reproduced in color.\textsuperscript{216} The portrait, an oil on canvas, displays a
somber tone, emphasized by the darkened background and pensive facial expression. It is an
intimate, close-up portrait of her head and upper-half of chest and torso area. Depicted in shirt

\textsuperscript{215} Théodore Duret, “Exposition des œuvres d’Eva Gonzalès,” \textit{La chronique des arts et de la curiosité}, 24 janvier
1885, 26. “Le modèle est plein de vie, de sensibilité, de réserve tel que chacun voudrait avoir l’image de sa femme,
de sa fille, ou de sa sœur.”

\textsuperscript{216} I am grateful to Marie-Caroline Sainsaulieu who graciously lent me a color transparency of this painting during
my research. This portrait was once incorrectly identified, probably by her son Jean Gonzalès, as a portrait of
Jeanne Gonzalès. The archival research of Sainsaulieu and Jacques de Mons, however, has aided in identifying this
work as one of her self-portraits.
with a pale lavender coat, she gazes off to the left, not facing the viewer and holds a cylindrical object in her arms, perhaps for holding her sketches. The painting is somewhat similar to two pastel works she completed several years earlier of her sister Jeanne and her mother (Figs. 3.16-3.17). However, her self-portrait lacks the semi-smiles of her family members or their fashionable clothing. In his 1950 publication Claude Roger-Marx reports that family and friends described Gonzalès as independent, reserved and a “sérieuse jeune fille.” The painting provides a rare glimpse of her serious and introspective personality, and subtly points to her artistic skill.

In this painting, she gazes on something off the canvas outside the viewer’s scope of vision, not unlike the glance she assumed for her portrait photograph previously mentioned (Fig. 3.12). Gonzalès’ reticence to acknowledge the spectator is perhaps an indicator of her awareness of social conventions for looking. Baronne Staffe’s numerous books on appropriate female behavior in the nineteenth century include various passages counseling women to keep their eyes downcast as they walk out in public, to avoid looking at strangers, particularly gentlemen, and to avoid visiting photography studios too often. Gonzalès presents herself for a private audience, perhaps only family members, and portrays herself as one who is conscious of the proper rules of decorum for women within her social sphere. Although she pushed the boundaries in her choice of profession, she preferred to work within them in terms of her dress and behavior, and even her choice to continually exhibit at the Salon rather than with independent groups. Gonzalès seems cognizant of how she appears, how others perceive her and how their gazes and hers will be viewed and interpreted. The reserved and circumspect character that she depicts here says as much about the culture in which she lived as it does about her own personality.

Intriguingly, the frontal pose with eyes glancing slightly toward the left is also the pose that Gonzalès gives to the female in most famous painting *La Loge aux Italiens*, created during this same time period (Fig. 3.10). Here Gonzalès presents a woman who looks forward but does not acknowledge the spectator. While her stance may be seen as open to male voyeurism and consumption, a contemporary review of this work by feminist Maria Deraismes interpreted the woman as completely engaged in the music of the performance rather than the dashing gentleman behind her who is more concerned with being seen. Albert Boime, who analyzed Desraismes’ critique of the painting, observed that Desraismes aligned both the woman depicted at the loge and Gonzalès with the feminist cause and the rising independence of women. Indeed, the theater-going woman appears unconcerned with idle spectators, either within the theater or outside of the painting. She is clearly conscious of her situation as object of the gaze of those around her, but Gonzalès chooses to represent her as not coquettish or in any way encouraging this gaze. This can be easily compared to Gonzalès’ own gaze in her self-portrait. Both women turn their gazes to scenes off the canvas and by so doing consciously reject a willing participation in voyeuristic spectatorship.

Comparable to similar theater images by Renoir or Cassatt, *La Loge aux Italiens* was surprisingly rejected from the Salon of 1874. Although it would be accepted into the Salon of 1879 when it was resubmitted under her married name of Mme Henri Guérard, its initial rejection points to the hazards of being Manet’s student. In a letter to Emmanuel Gonzalès, Jules Claretie declared that the rejection was unjustified and only explicable due to the ‘manetophagie’

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of the jury.\textsuperscript{220} Compositionally, \textit{La Loge} recalls Goya’s \textit{Majas on a Balcony}, which had been reproduced in contemporary publications in France and had inspired Manet’s \textit{The Balcony}. The Spanish influence of this painting was also noted by Alexandre Dumas who remarked that “Il y a là les dessous de Velasquez.”\textsuperscript{221} Both Sainsaulieu and Wilson-Bareau suggest that the composition was probably based upon a sketch by Manet, in which the figures are reversed (Fig. 3.11). Though the sketch was never made into a complete work by Manet, his \textit{Music Lesson}, exhibited in the Salon of 1870, would have provided Gonzalès with another example of an image composed of a man and a woman (Fig. 3.18). Manet’s sketch and \textit{Music Lesson}, and Gonzalès’ \textit{La Loge} are all images of couples in close proximity but psychologically separate; in none of the three examples do the women and men acknowledge each other. The similarities between the three confirm the fact that Gonzalès has used Manet’s composition as a foundation for this work. Her appreciation of her teacher is noted in the form of a bouquet of flowers in the left-hand corner, which would have perhaps conjured up memories of a far-more controversial Salon nine years earlier. Though Gonzalès’ fashionable woman of the theater is no Olympia, the bold floral reminder of Manet’s shocking courtesan would not have won her sympathy with the jury. Additionally, the loose handling of the paint and the failure of the figures to connect ‘à la Manet’ may have been the impetus for its rejection from the Salon.

Gonzalès was, naturally, displeased with the jury’s decision to reject \textit{La Loge aux Italiens}, her most ambitious painting thus far in her career. Although she never opted to exhibit on a regular basis outside of the Salon system, she accepted the advice of Manet and several friends and exhibited the painting in her studio at 11 rue Bréda in Paris and then sent it to the

\textsuperscript{220} Quoted in Sainsaulieu, 16. “Le refus de ce tableau n’est explicable que par la ‘manetophagie’ qui s’est emparée du jury, mais ce n’en est pas moins la plus criante des injustices.”

annual exhibition of 1874 in Ghent. These actions demonstrate Gonzalès’ burgeoning confidence in herself as an artist and her increasing commitment to make sure her work was seen by a larger audience. It was an important moment in Gonzalès’ career; from this point on, Gonzalès begins to work more independently as an artist and starts experimenting, slowly changing her style. In the next few years she would lighten her palette, loosen her brushstroke, and devote herself more seriously to subjects often associated with other women Impressionists: interior domestic scenes, outdoor parks, and leisure moments. *Dans Les Blés (Dieppe)*, completed between 1875-1876, shows this transition in Gonzalès’ work (Fig. 3.19). The painting depicts the resort beach town in Normandy where the Gonzalès family frequently vacationed. A young woman with hat, umbrella, and jacket, dressed as if she has just alighted from the train, surveys the distant beach, the line of farms and homes, and the single sail boat in the far left. The scene reenacts the summer arrival of the Gonzalès family, accustomed to city living, formal dress and behavior, and crowded city spaces, to the open country landscape and refreshing beach setting of Dieppe. The solitary woman, a faceless visitor, stands in the middle of a wheat field and her feet and the bottom of her dress disappear into yellow stalks of wheat. Accents of red animate the painting, beginning with the bold red jacket or shawl in almost the center of the painting and then echoed in lighter shades of red seen in the rooftops of the homes on the right and on the side of the sail boat on the left. The rising interest in plein-air painting, adopted by the Impressionists, is manifest here and the visible brushstrokes in the wheat field indicate a shift in Gonzalès’ style and subject matter. It is more than merely a willingness to substitute her tight and careful earlier style for a more relaxed and loose application of paint, Gonzalès is looking beyond Manet and responding to Monet.
Gonzalès commenced working on *Dans Les Blés* in 1875, the year following the first Impressionist exhibition. The color palette, resort leisure location, and the wide-open outdoor space of her painting all indicate an unmistakable awareness of this fresh approach. Held at Nadar’s photographic studios on the boulevard des Capucines, the 1874 exhibition included several paintings by Monet, including *Les Coquelicots* of 1873 (Fig. 3.20). Gonzalès’ *Dans Les Blés* bears remarkable similarities to Monet’s painting and may be her response to his work. Painted while Monet was living in Argenteuil, *Les Coquelicots* depicts a field of poppies on a bright summer day. Two small figures, perhaps Monet’s son and girlfriend Camille Doncieux, walk along the sloping edge of the meadow and another woman and child walk on the upper slope of the hill. As is characteristic of Monet, the figures are not the focal point of the painting and they merge with their environment, their bodies partially disappearing in the tall grass and flowers. Instead, the dazzling splashes of the red poppies command the viewer’s attention and they make a path through the painting from the foreground to the line of trees and house in the far background. It is a scene highlighting the beauties of nature in the French countryside, far from the congested and busy city life of Paris.

Likewise, Gonzalès’ canvas also celebrates the inviting atmosphere of nature and the appeal of French resort towns for rest and relaxation. Both canvases depict bourgeois members of society in a vast open field. Gonzalès’ woman and the women in Monet’s canvas all wear stylish hats and dresses and hold parasols, indicating not only their awareness of contemporary fashion but also their social status and their position as visitors in the countryside. Although Gonzalès’ figure is more of the focal point than Monet’s figures, she also disappears into the wheat stalks in the same way that Monet’s figures fade into the grassy poppy field. Both paintings have signs of civilization in the far distance, with the solitary house from Monet and
the line of beach homes by Gonzalès. Both are one of several works within each of the artist’s oeuvre that record their experiences in small towns (Argenteuil and Dieppe) that provided a welcome escape from Paris. Whether Gonzalès was consciously responding to Monet’s painting or simply experimenting with the innovative tenets of Impressionism, the painting does signal a new direction in her oeuvre and one that was marked by an adoption of principles that Monet had already espoused.

In addition to opening up a new avenue of style and subject matter, Monet may have provided another model from which Gonzalès gleaned. Monet, like Gonzalès, was in the mid-1870s striving to establish his own style and in the process of discerning what he could learn from artists like Manet but retain a sense of originality and authenticity.222 In a letter written from Etretat, Monet confessed to his confidant Frédéric Bazille that one of the things he enjoyed about working away from Paris was the opportunity to produce art that was less influenced by others: “at least what I’ll do here will have the merit of not resembling anyone else, at least I think so, since it will simply be the record of what I’ve felt, me personally.”223 Being in the countryside provided new subject matter for Monet but also freed him from the weighty influence of the art world in Paris. Alongside *Les Coquelicots* at the inaugural exhibition of the Impressionist group, Monet also exhibited *Le Déjeuner*, a painting completed several years earlier and rejected from the Salon of 1870. Monet produced the work while he, Doncieux, and their son were living in Etretat. Initially conceived as an interior scene based around his son, Monet presents a strange grouping of figures: a well-dressed standing woman, a young child and

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222 For further analysis of Monet during this period of his career, see Paul Tucker, *Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

114
mother at the table, and a maid in the doorway. Strangely, he opted to use a neighbor to model
for the mother, rather than Doncieux, who stands apart with hat, veil and gloves still on, as if
poised to leave or not quite invited to participate. The empty chair, closest to the canvas, awaits
the father figure, whose absence gives the viewer a space into the work. In her enlightening
analysis of the multi-figure composition of Le Déjeuner, Anne Wagner has argued that one of the
reasons Monet moved away from the “psychologically-charged interior” stemmed from
unresolved aspects of Monet’s identity.224 His ambivalent feelings about his roles as painter,
father, and husband proved too charged and too present in this painting for Monet’s comfort.
After this, Monet will move further away from figural painting and further away from depicting
complex and enigmatic scenes and relationships that were so characteristic of Manet. In a sense,
Le Déjeuner and Les Coquelicots represent Monet’s past work and his future direction, the old
and the new exhibited side by side. Both of these works exhibited at the show indicate where he
has been – taking the lead from Manet, and where he is going—towards non-figural and natural
imagery.

Of course, Gonzalès was in the same predicament right at this moment as well; she was
trying to establish herself as an artist independent of her teacher and looking for new sources of
inspiration. At the Salon of 1874, her La Loge aux Italiens, highly influenced by Manet’s style
both in paint application and in terms of its modern-life subject matter, was rejected. In the wake
of this rejection, right at the moment when the Impressionists begin exhibiting, Gonzalès began
considering what her next steps would be, how she would achieve the critical acclaim she
desired, and how she would be able to establish herself independently of Manet. I believe that

224 Wagner, 625-626. Wagner argues that the empty chair is Monet’s chair and that his absence here is a part of his
conflict with his family to define his identity and future. Her claim furthers the contention made by William Chapin
Seitz’ that Le Déjeuner is a “self-portrait without a portrait.” See William Chapin Seitz, Claude Monet (New York:
the artists who would eventually become known as the Impressionists, particularly Monet and Morisot, provided the inspiration for her at this critical juncture. Gonzalès did not abandon figure painting in the same way that Monet did, but she did become much more interested in landscapes, outdoor settings, and leisure scenes, particularly those away the busy life of Paris.

Morisot’s example may have similarly provided a model both in terms of subject matter, particularly scenes of women in domestic settings, as well as in her painterly facture and form. Significantly, as Carol Armstrong and others have argued, Morisot’s increasingly loose application of paint and her interest in women at their toilette had a considerable influence on Manet in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Armstrong contends that Morisot was interested in toilette scenes prior to Manet and her paintings such as Young Woman at Her Toilette (c.1875-1880) and Young Woman Putting on her Stocking (1880) indicate “a strong current of borrowing and mutual referencing that flowed both ways between Morisot and Manet at this moment.” Manet’s implementation of Morisotian facture and even subject matter must have further validated Gonzalès’ similar espousal of Impressionist techniques as she sought to move into the next phase of her career. Gonzalès never completely moved away from the figural tradition or modern life scenes like Monet nor was she as interested in extremely loose facture and brushwork as Morisot, but both Morisot and Monet provided inspiration in terms of her next direction and also a kind of model for her of artists that were successfully learning from Manet as well as moving beyond him.

Gonzalès’ greatest similarity to Morisot resides in her sources for subject matter: primarily her family and close circle of intimate friends. Women are the central figures in the

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226 Armstrong, “Fracturing Femininity,” 88. Armstrong differentiates between Morisot’s images of women at their toilette and Manet’s own versions by identifying the privileging of the male gaze, the commodification of the female body, and general feeling of voyeurism that occur to a much higher degree in his canvases.
majority of Gonzalès’ works, usually her sister Jeanne but occasionally a professional model or some children found on the beach or in the streets; men figure less frequently and when they are depicted it is always with a woman, never alone. As Griselda Pollock, Tamar Garb, and others have noted, women artists in the latter decades of the nineteenth century were for the most part unable to visit and therefore record café life or scenes on the streets of Paris like their male counterparts. Instead, they turned to scenes within their respective spheres and as a result, their images are often domestic scenes with close family and friends. Gonzalès offered an inside view of familial scenes in her life through her canvases and also an intimate view of upper-middle class women that has not been adequately analyzed. Scenes in the garden reading, watering plants, secretly reading a novel at the piano, or walking on the beach in Honfleur provide detailed views of daily life in the Gonzalès family and should be more thoroughly discussed in comparison to contemporary images of women at work and leisure. For example, La Psyche and Le Petit Lever belong to the large group of nineteenth-century images of women before mirrors and at their toilette (Figs. 3.21, 3.22).

Even more personal, and perhaps unprecedented, Le Réveil and Le Sommeil, both completed c. 1877-78, depict the very private scenes of a young girl (Jeanne) in bed sleeping and waking, respectively (Figs. 3.23 and 3.24). Although these are intimate scenes, there is no sensuality or sense of voyeurism in these scenes of daily life. Quite similar, they share the same compositional organization and basic color palette. But Le Réveil differs slightly from Le Sommeil due to the inclusion of a small night table rather than a chair and especially in the state of consciousness of the female figure as indicated by the open eyes. In general, Le Réveil has a

more finished feel as seen in the articulation of the arms and face and the inclusion of details such as the notebook and lovely vase of purple violets on the table. Both pieces show Gonzalès’ fascination with various shades of white, as seen in the bed sheets, pillows, nightgown, and canopy drapery. Particularly on the sheets and pillow, one can observe the white brushstrokes, many left deliberately unblended. Her interest in light and shadow is demonstrated by the highlighted area on the figure’s upper arm, echoed by the bright white patch on her lower body. Although the palette is fairly limited, Gonzalès enlivens the composition through a sophisticated use of purple and green. She introduces the colors at the left side of the canvas on the table, and then uses the purple and green unblended highlights, on the edges of the bed sheets and drapery. Similarly, the flesh colors of her skin and coral lips are repeated in the empty wall space above her head and body. Gonzalès learned from Manet how to make blank spaces interesting and even how to play with a sense of depth and flatness that is apparent here, but the color palette and the subject matter show her embrace of techniques employed by Monet, Morisot, and other Impressionists.

Gonzalès’ increasing independence and her desire to establish her own style and reputation can be sensed in these later paintings. This artistic separation from Manet can also be noted in several letters written to her by Manet in the late 1870s. In several, he asks what she is working on and asserts that he is available to aid her if she so desires. Manet is even more specific in a letter dated May 28, 1877, which reads, “It has been a long time since you have called upon me for consultation. Have my recent failures caused your scorn?” Although they maintained a positive and close relationship until their deaths, which occurred within a week of

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228 Sainsaulieu, 17.
229 Édouard Manet, letter to Eva Gonzalès, 28 mai 1877, copy in the Centre de documentation of the Musée d'Orsay. On auction at Hotel Drouot in Paris, March 27, 2003. “Voilà bien longtemps que vous ne m'avez appelé en consultation, est-ce que mes insuccès m'aurient attiré votre mépris?”
each other in April and May of 1883, Manet's words suggest that Gonzalès was working much more independently that she had earlier and not relying on Manet's advice as heavily. This has not often been noted by critics in part because of the repeated emphasis upon Manet’s painting of Gonzalès, which has diverted attention away from her own work and reinforced her connection with Manet. Of course, this is an expected consequence of being associated with an extremely influential artist like Manet; one can hardly overestimate Manet’s impact on the artists around him and it follows that Gonzalès’ connection to Manet would be both an asset and a detriment.

Gonzalès seemed quite adept at negotiating her connection to Manet; as mentioned earlier, for the first two years of her Salon submissions, 1870 and 1872, Gonzalès’ name appeared on the Salon brochure as a student of Charles Chaplin, not of Manet. She recognized that her earlier training with Chaplin could potentially aid her more than her current association with Manet. After working several years with Manet, she included his name as her teacher, but still listed Chaplin as well. Thus, Gonzalès carefully but adeptly placated teachers and juries while quietly exploring her own potential.

It seems entirely fitting that as Gonzalès attempted to establish her own unique style and contribution as an independent artist she would also be occasionally painting a self-portrait, and pondering her own likeness and subjectivity as she progressed in her art. Gonzalès’ second self-portrait was completed in 1875, and may have been painted in Dieppe (Fig. 3.25). It bears some similarities to the Portrait of Eva à Dieppe painted by her sister Jeanne (Fig. 3.26). Gonzalès has her dark hair pulled back high on her head, as was her tradition, and wears loose day dresses in both. The self-portrait has an unfinished look, and the rapid brushstrokes of pink and white for the dress are clearly visible. She has depicted herself in profile view with her arms somewhat raised in front of her body. Though the activity with which her hands are engaged is not
included in the canvas, her gesture and her concentrated attention are both necessary elements of art making. That she may be caught in a moment of artistic creation would not be an impossible speculation, especially because this was the very position she literally assumed to create this painting. One also notes the similarities of posture between this work and Manet’s portrait of Gonzalès. The position of the arms in both paintings is remarkably alike, with the right arm raised slightly higher than the left and both outstretched in front of their bodies. Now though, the bare arms are covered and the white dress has been replaced by light pink fabric, softening the overall effect and eliminating the starkness of the former. Her profile view emphasizes her utter concentration on the object in front of her as opposed to Manet’s Gonzalès who turns slightly away from her canvas in a three-quarter pose.

The profile format is particularly arresting here, perhaps partly because of its contrast to Manet's version but also because it is so infrequently seen in self-portraits. How does one go about painting a self-portrait in profile? One is rarely able to see one's own profile, which would only be possible with the help of mirrors or photographs. While these painting aids may have been available to Gonzalès, her preferred method of painting was with models and she repeatedly used her sister Jeanne in her canvases. Is it possible that she had her sister pose for the initial parts of this painting and later added her particular features such her own darker hair and strong nose? The close resemblance between the two sisters would not make this an incredible supposition, as seen in various period photographs (Fig 3.12 and Fig. 3.27). In fact, the descriptions of their lives are quite similar. Both pursued painting beyond amateur levels, exhibited at the Salon, and used the other as a model. As Eva began to excel beyond her younger sister, Jeanne took a supportive role, frequently posing for her sister and accompanying her when she was sketching outdoors or working in the studio.
The blending of their identities is seen at various points throughout Gonzalès’ life. Perhaps the most extreme example of this occurred in 1879, shortly after Gonzalès’ marriage to the artist and engraver Henri Guérard, when she had her unmarried sister Jeanne pose in her wedding dress for two pastels. This passing of the wedding dress became uncannily prophetic, as Jeanne would eventually marry her brother-in-law after Gonzalès’ unexpected death. Shifting her role from aunt to mother, Jeanne would help raise her sister’s son, Jean-Raymond Guérard.

In at least two oil paintings, La Loge aux Italiens and La Promenade à Âne, (Fig. 3.28). Gonzalès posed her sister and husband as a couple, solidifying this complex twist of familial relationships and identity. Discussing Gonzales’ relationship with her sister, critic Claude Roger-Marx commented, “One could say that she observed and imagined herself through this double of herself, whom she loved, treated harshly, and transformed as she pleased. . . . Transformed is generally a strong word, usually connoting a dramatic change, but Gonzalès’ transformations of her sister were subtle, not involving grand costumes or masquerades. Rather, she repeatedly transformed her sister into herself on the canvas—Jeanne as Eva in her wedding dress, or posing with her husband at the theater, or on the beach or riding a donkey. On the one hand, it was natural and normal for Gonzalès to frequently use her sister in these works. Jeanne was readily available and apparently willing to pose again and again. But, at the same time, there is a something undeniably intriguing about Gonzalès’ persistent use of her sister and her need to pose her sister as herself. This strange fascination with self and other, seen across various canvases, shows how Gonzalès was able to visualize herself through images of her sister. This concept of seeing the self through the face of another is comparable to the...

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way that art historian Nancy Locke interpreted Manet’s portraits of Morisot and this model is particularly relevant here.

In Locke’s *Manet and the Family Romance*, Locke argues that Manet’s numerous portraits of Morisot were not simply about portraying the beautiful and alluring artist on his canvases but also an attempt at a kind of self-portraiture, a way to see himself through the eyes of another. When Manet painted Morisot, he depicted an intelligent, composed woman with a powerful gaze and it was that gaze of interest, admiration, and perhaps desire that Manet captured on his canvas. In essence, Locke proposes that Manet painted Morisot as himself, or he projected her gaze onto himself and thereby gained access to the feminine reflection of the artist. By so doing, Manet could inhabit Morisot’s space momentarily and see himself through her perspective. There is something similar occurring in Gonzalès’ relationship with and images of her sister. They do not have the same kind of romantic tension or the difference of gender. They do, however, reveal a different kind of devotion and love. Gonzalès’ many images of her sister illustrate the strong connection between the sisters and Jeanne’s willingness to promote her sister’s career points to her deep loyalty. I think that it was the strength of their relationship that allowed Eva to depict her sister as herself, to place her alongside her husband, or request that she wear her wedding dress. Just as Manet wanted to imagine himself through the powerful gaze of another, Eva wanted to envision herself as the other. She could do this through her devoted sister, a doppelgänger whose similar features made the mirage that much easier to imagine.

One last example of the intermingling of their identities can also be noted in the page of sketches of her 1885 retrospective exhibition (Fig. 3.1). The central figure, who is drawn with more detail and attention than any of the other figure, is not Eva, but rather her sister Jeanne.

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Her prominence here is slightly puzzling, as she did not organize the exhibition or do anything that might merit this privileging. Her close relationship with her sister and their similar physical resemblance is the only justifiable explanation. Here, she becomes a double of Eva, essentially standing in for her sister as she had in many paintings. Only close looking reveals the identification of Jeanne in this sketched work. The casual journal reader, today or in the nineteenth century, would, I believe, cursorily assume that this lovely figure surrounded by many artists, writers, and other colleagues represented the recently deceased artist herself. But, who better to replace Gonzalès than her younger sister who had remained in her shadow for so long? It is ironic, though, that as Jeanne took center stage, the confusion between the two sisters still remained. Furthermore, it is valuable to observe that this is a unique example in which the merging of their identities was not created by Gonzalès but an outside observer, specifically an illustrator named Louis Gallice who worked for journal La Vie Moderne. Gallice’s illustration provides a case in point that Jeanne’s face, frequently present on her sister’s canvases, had come to represent her sister Eva and her œuvre.

Gonzalès’ unity with her sister and the difficulty in separating their identities was not atypical in the nineteenth century. Gonzalès’ contemporary Berthe Morisot addressed this issue early in her career in Two Sisters on a Couch, 1869 (Fig. 3.29).\textsuperscript{232} The sisters, dressed in matching purple polka-dot dresses and black neck chokers, share a similarly pensive expression as they each gaze off into distance and become lost in their imaginations. Matthew Rohn has proposed that this is a portrait of Berthe (on the right) and her sister Edma (on the left).\textsuperscript{233}

\textsuperscript{232} Another example might include Henri Fantin Latour’s Two Sisters of 1859. Mary Cassatt also explored this motif several times, as Susan Yeh’s research has shown. See Susan F. Yeh, “Mary Cassatt’s Images of Women,” Art Journal (Summer 1976).

\textsuperscript{233} Matthew Rohn, “Berthe Morisot’s Two Sisters on a Couch,” Berkshire Review (Fall 1986): 80-90. Rohn argues that this is “a psychological double-self-portrait of the artist at a moment of crisis, a portrait of her sister and herself, and a more abstract portrayal of female companionship.” Initially Morisot used the Delaroche sisters (friends of the Morisot family) as models, but later decided she did not want to bother with pleasing them or arranging the sittings.
Although a conjectural hypothesis, the portrait of two dark-haired sisters does evoke their close relationship and physical features. Like Eva and Jeanne, Berthe and Edma had a close relationship and were both artists. Together they had studied with various teachers, visited the Louvre, and submitted paintings to the Salon. Both were exceptionally talented artists and both were serious in their pursuit of their talents. This painting, produced in 1869, marked the end of an era for the devoted sisters; Edma had married naval officer Adolphe Pontillon that year and moved away to the port city of Lorient. The pair who sit on the couch, looking like twins in their comportment, clothing, and expressions, no longer are able to work and act in tandem. Edma essentially gave up painting, leaving her sister to continue alone. The separation was extremely hard on both of the sisters and caused Morisot to ponder her future. Although they are depicted almost identically in the painting, their immediate prospects looked quite different. Edma’s decision to marry left her sister Berthe alone to pursue her art professionally and to struggle against her mother’s adamant desires that she marry before her beauty and desirability faded. Berthe remained firm in her convictions to continue painting, but this painting illustrates her endeavor to see herself in relationship to her sister and ponder her individuality. For Morisot, this was her first foray in self-portraiture and it will be more than a decade until she returns to this subject.

Both Morisot and Gonzalès are known for their images of domestic interiors and women’s daily activities in contemporary nineteenth-century life. Neither turned to self-portraiture often, but both begin to explore their own identities on canvas after Manet painted images of them on his canvases. As noted earlier, Gonzalès’ Jeune Élève was the artist’s
response to Manet’s depiction of her and clarifies her view of herself, and women artists in
general, as hard-working professionals. Morisot, likewise, turned to self-portraiture only after
many images of her had been created by Manet. In 1885, at age forty-four, Morisot created
three self-portraits and in the following several years she produced several self-portrait drawings
with her daughter Julie. At this point in her life, she had already established herself as a
remarkable artist and was a key figure of the “New Painting” aesthetic. Earlier in her career, in
the six-year span from 1868-1874, Manet had produced at least eleven different portraits of
Morisot but after her marriage to Eugène Manet, Morisot appropriately no longer posed for
Manet. As Marni Kessler has suggested, it was perhaps because Manet painted her so frequently
that Morisot did not capture herself on canvas until 1885. Lacking the elegant clothing or
interesting postures seen in Manet’s images, Morisot’s self-portraits are simpler in composition
and execution and have an immediacy that suggests that they were quickly dashed off in a
moment of contemplation. Focusing just on her face, or a half-length body pose, they each show
a different element of her identity. In one, she shows herself in a moment of anxiety and
exhaustion (Fig. 3.30). Dark shadows under her eyes, a serious expression, and the agitated
white lines that define and frame her face convey a feeling of unrest and fatigue. This is
 countered by the calm confidence communicated in Morisot’s most well-known self-portrait
(Fig. 3.31). Although the hair and the black collar are the same, the similarities end there. The
agitated lines of the former have been replaced by an animated facture which demonstrates
Morisot’s mastery of the medium and the quick, unblended brushstrokes for which she was
known. In the final work, Morisot expanded the space on the canvas to include her young

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234 For a broader perspective of Morisot’s life and oeuvre, see Anne Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot* (New York: Harper
and Row, 1990); Anne Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot’s Image of Women* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard

235 Kessler, 485.
daughter Julie (Fig. 3.32). It was as if she could not leave the medium of self-portraiture without including a central element of her identity—her role as a mother. In this image, Morisot is both artist and mother; she has finally been able to satisfy her inner desire to create and still fulfill the socially-acceptable position of wife and mother. It seems, as Anne Higonnet aptly expressed, that “maternity has eased the dilemmas of her identity.” 236 The conflict between her professional and personal selves has been resolved as she embraces both roles. In the following years, Morisot will revisit self-portraiture in a series of drawings which all include her daughter; the mother and daughter often are shown working together, looking at drawings or in the process of drawing (Fig. 3.33). In the end, Morisot felt most comfortable picturing herself active in both her professional and personal roles simultaneously. This conscious connection with her daughter creates a sense of shared identity that is similar to the relationship between Gonzalès and her sister Jeanne. Indeed, Morisot’s close bond with her sister Edma anticipated her later unity with her daughter Julie. Both Gonzalès and Morisot relied upon family relationships to support their professional lives and also conceive of themselves.

Mary Cassatt also used self-portraiture as a tool to clarify her own self-image in the early 1880s, around the same time that Degas produced a portrait of her. 237 Much has been written about the interesting relationship between Degas and Cassatt. 238 The two artists became friends and working colleagues in 1877 after Degas invited Cassatt to join the group of independent artists, later known as the Impressionists, exhibiting outside the Salon. Disgruntled with the

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academic stagnation of the Salon jury, Cassatt wholeheartedly accepted this invitation and began an association with Degas that would continue throughout their lives. They admired each others’ work and Degas used Cassatt as a model several times, as is indicated in a series of pastels and prints of Cassatt at the Louvre and his more specific portrait of the artist (Fig. 3.34). Leaning forward holding what has been variously interpreted as playing cards, tarot cards, or carte-de-visite photographs, Cassatt wears a dark outfit, slightly brightened by a dark orange scarf and hat with a matching colored bow. She is portrayed as a woman of thought, even intelligence, but Cassatt herself disliked the work. In 1912, she discussed the work in a letter to Paul Durand-Ruel, one of her dealers. With her usual candid quality, she wrote, “As for the portrait by Degas, I especially desire not to leave it to my family as being me. It has artistic qualities, but is so painful and represents me as a person so repugnant that I would not wish it to be known that I posed for it….If you think the portrait saleable, I should like it to be sold abroad but without my name being attached to it.”

Cassatt’s strong reaction to Degas’ portrait was probably due to a combination of factors: the potential association with card playing, the extremely informal posture, and the disregard for the traditional emphasis on propriety and beauty frequently employed in female portraiture. In fact, perhaps its ‘repugnance’ to Cassatt was because Degas adopted a pose and traits often used in ‘masculine’ portraiture. Cassatt produced her own self-portrait the same year and the similar clothing and hat suggest either a joint painting session or that they were both created at roughly the same time (Fig. 3.35). One identifies the noticeable differences from Degas’ image: she acknowledges the viewer and instead of holding cards, she seems to hold a work of her own art. She is conscious, alert and intelligent—but also follows appropriate social codes of female

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decorum in her posture and behavior. Whether Cassatt produced her watercolor slightly before or after Degas’ portrait, distinctions between the two images are quickly apparent and emphasize that Cassatt was interested in portraying her own image and had a clear idea about how she wanted to be portrayed.

Morisot, Cassatt and Gonzalès are all known for the images of domestic interiors and women’s daily activities in contemporary nineteenth-century life. All three began to explore their own identities on canvas at least partially in response to images made of them by male colleagues. Self-portraiture was a way in which they could clarify their identities and the ways in which they wanted to be viewed and perceived. It is interesting, as well, that for all three artists, self-portraits were primarily private endeavors. These works were mainly seen only by family and close friends until after their deaths. There were, of course, other women in the same era who used their self-portraits for self-promotion or advertisement in more public venues, such as Marie Bashkirtseff, who will be discussed in the next chapter. But, clearly, Gonzalès was not alone in using her self-portraits for more personal ends. Her need to explore her identity on her own despite her allegiance to her mentor Manet and her sister Jeanne has acute parallels to both Cassatt and Morisot’s purposes in their self-portraiture. These similarities illustrate the difficulty women faced in claiming an autonomous identity in the nineteenth century.

I would like to conclude with one final image of Gonzalès. It is a photograph of the artist kneeling on a church prayer stool (Fig. 3.36). One of very few existing photographs of the artist, it shows a prayerful, devout figure, suggesting a religious side of the artist. Of her religious life, we know only that Gonzalès’ family was Catholic and she was baptized and married in the Catholic Church. This image suggests that Gonzalès wanted a visual document of herself in prayer. Gonzalès poses with hands clasped, head bowed, and eyes closed as if she has been

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240 Email correspondence with Marie-Caroline Sainsaulieu on March 7, 2009. See also Sainsaulieu, 17-18.
captured in a moment of private prayer. The feeling of privacy, of course, is illusory—Gonzalès was not alone at this moment and has staged this moment of contemplation with the help of a photographer. It is an aesthetically mesmerizing photograph, visually fascinating from the rare prayer posture to the complete profile view of her body to the interesting folds, pleats, and decorative beading on her dress. The blurred column and patterned floor of the background are vaguely evocative of a church but they are captured in soft focus, forcing the primary attention not on the location but on Gonzalès’ figure in the foreground. Aside from signifying a religious aspect to Gonzalès’ life, the photograph is also indicative of her personality and the ways in which she situated herself as a woman in the nineteenth century. She presents herself as somewhat unconventional, choosing to photograph herself in a posture not commonly seen in nineteenth century photography. However, because the position is prayer, it is perhaps atypical and unusual but not rebellious. This kind of photograph maintains a conservative image while still asserting originality, creativity, and a sense of innovation. Likewise, as Gonzalès pursued a career as a professional artist, she can be seen as bold and unconventional, but her subject matter, her choice to exhibit within established state venues, and her personal comportment lessen the impact of these decisions and firmly align her within acceptable codes of conduct for the nineteenth century. Thus, Gonzalès carefully negotiated her position as a professional artist, choosing at times to assert her independence and at others to maintain the status quo.

In her brief thirty-four years, Gonzalès produced a significant oeuvre and one that is worthy of further study. Like her colleagues, Gonzalès frequently walked a tight rope of artistic acceptability, attempting to placate teachers and juries while quietly exploring her own potential. *La Jeune Élève* and Gonzalès’ self-portraits all suggest that she was exploring her independence and identity as artist and individual and presenting subtle correctives to Manet's version of her.
Her efforts at self-portraiture and several of her major paintings produced from 1875-1883 reveal a concentrated endeavor to establish an independent voice and explore her individuality like and against both her sister Jeanne and her teacher Manet. While her identity has often been influenced by Manet’s representation of her, any attempt to understand her subjectivity should include a discussion of her self-portraits and her later works. They suggest that the artist was intelligently responding to the complex matrix of artistic and familial relationships that surrounded her, using people and artistic styles that would enable her success, and, simultaneously, discovering her own selfhood.
CHAPTER FOUR:

“I am the Famous Man!”:
Marie Bashkirtseff, Celebrity and Self-Creation

“Un jour viendra où par toute la terre,
mon nom s’entendra à l’égal du tonnerre.”
Marie Bashkirtseff, 1874241

“Être célèbre et être aimée, comme écrivait Balzac,
voilà le bonheur ! — Et encore être aimée n’est qu’un
accessoire ou plutôt le résultat naturel d’être célèbre.”
Marie Bashkirtseff, 1882242

Noting the rise in portraiture in the second half of the nineteenth century, the prominent
author and critic Charles Baudelaire attempted to enlighten the public on how to approach
portraits and how to identify excellent examples. In his Salon review of 1846, Baudelaire
claimed that “there are two ways of understanding portraiture—either as history or as fiction.”243
Historical portraits are typified by faithful accuracy and draughtsmanship while fictional types
are transformed from portraits into poetry, charged with atmosphere and imagination.244 While
his opinion, full of praise for the ambition of poetic and imaginative portraits, was not without
personal bias, the statement does foreshadow the way that Marie Bashkirtseff’s self-portraits,
both painted and photographic, can be seen as history or fiction, and sometimes both
simultaneously. Historical documents, they chronicle her life in the second half of the nineteenth
century as well as reveal her ambitions, her playful masquerades, and her carefully constructed
image as artist and celebrity. Bashkirtseff’s self-portraits are valuable particularly as they aid in
understanding her life and generally as they contribute to understanding female identity in the

241 Marie Bashkirtseff, Journal, 23 janvier 1874. As quoted in Colette Cosnier, Marie Bashkirtseff : un portrait sans
243 Charles Baudelaire, “Salon of 1846,” in Art in Paris, 1845-1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions Reviewed by
244 Ibid, 88-89.
nineteenth century. This chapter will focus chiefly on these images as well as her journal writings, which both clarify and complicate the artist’s work and her perception of herself. Grounded in a historical moment, the images and written text reveal the social expectations (both accepted and denied by Bashkirtseff) of nineteenth-century women and more specifically, they display the artist as a performer, assuming various roles and performing creative experiments in a process of self-creation.

After presenting a basic sketch of Bashkirtseff’s life and summarizing the state of scholarship on the artist, I will examine her photographic and painted self-portraits and contend that these images played a key role in Bashkirtseff’s concept of self as celebrity and artist. In her photographic portraits, Bashkirtseff adopted the manner, gesture, and costume of an actress on a stage, performing diverse roles for an audience. Imagining herself as numerous characters, she plays invented parts, using photography as an actress might: to publicize herself in a new role and as evidence of her celebrity status. By contrast, her painted self-portraits are in general more formal and serious in tone. Produced after Bashkirtseff committed herself to her career as an artist and also when she knew her life would be cut short due to tuberculosis, these self-portraits are a confirmation of her profession as painter and artist. The playful exploration of her identity that is played out in her photographs is absent in her painted versions and they illustrate that Bashkirtseff no longer desired to be seen as any kind of celebrity, but as a specific kind of celebrity—a talented and creative artist. Determined to leave her mark on the world, Bashkirtseff wanted to leave images of herself as a visual artist. Her journal confirms that she wanted her paintings and writings to continue creating the celebrity she had carefully constructed during her lifetime. Thus, both her photographic and painted self-portraits are part of an
elaborate performance by Bashkirtseff, one in which she explores various aspects of her identity, promotes a concept of herself as celebrity, and ultimately, embraces her role as artist.

Born in 1858, Bashkirtseff came from an aristocratic family in the Ukraine. Once wealthy and powerful, the Bashkirtseff extended family had been humbled through some financial difficulties and embarrassing scandals that tarnished the family name. Although they were still wealthy and enjoyed a privileged life, their reception among Russian aristocracy (and sometimes European) was decidedly cool and it was probably partially due to this precarious social position that they traveled so frequently. Bashkirtseff spent most of her childhood traveling in Europe and had private lessons in music and drawing from an early age. Convinced of her talent, she decided to pursue her career as a professional artist and persuaded her mother to settle the family permanently in France towards this end. By this point, her parents were separated and Madame Bashkirtseff established Marie and her brother Paul in France, initially in Nice and later in Paris. From 1877 (the year she entered the Académie Julian) to 1884 (the year of her death), Bashkirtseff exhibited frequently at the Paris Salon and both teachers and art critics had acknowledged her talent. Her decision to study at the Académie Julian, rather than continue with private tutors, demonstrates her determination to improve skills as an artist. She recorded her first visit to the Académie Julian in these words: “I found the time

245 The year and date of Bashkirtseff’s birth have been difficult to determine due to several factors. When her journal was initially published, Bashkirtseff’s age was changed (by her mother) to make her two years younger and therefore more of a young martyr and prodigy. Her birth year is still listed as 1860 in many sources, rather than the correct 1858. The date of her birth was probably Nov. 24, 1858 by the Gregorian calendar but Nov. 12 by the Russian calendar, which has been the source of some confusion. Additionally, Bashkirtseff was born 7 months after her parents’ marriage and to avoid gossip about a premarital pregnancy, the family often celebrated her birthday in January. See Cosnier, 27. See also Phyllis Howard Kernberger and Katherine Kernberger, trans., *I am the Most Interesting Book of All: The Diary of Marie Bashkirtseff, Vol 1*, (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1997), 1.

246 In addition to artistic education, Bashkirtseff had a precocious appetite for learning and had various tutors during her childhood. She was, however, mostly self-taught. She could speak and read several languages, such as Russian, French, Italian, Latin and Greek. She was extremely well-read, enjoying many works by contemporary authors such as Zola, Stendhal, George Sand, Ivan Turgenev, the Goncourt brothers, Flaubert and Balzac.

247 In addition to the immediate family, the Bashkirtseff household usually consisted of maternal grandparents, an aunt, and several cousins.
to go to Julian’s studio—the only serious one for women. They work there from eight till twelve and from one till five. A man was posing nude when M. Julian took me into the studio.”

Rodolphe Julian was particularly supportive of women students, who were not allowed into the École des Beaux-Arts until 1897. As explored in chapter one, Julian’s Académie was one of the best options for women who were seriously dedicated to the arts. As an illustration of his liberal policies, Julian initially had mixed classes. A contemporary artist, George Moore, wrote of there being eight or nine women students in his class in 1873. It was, however, segregated by the time Bashkirtseff enrolled in 1877 and women students had to pay twice the tuition in order to study there. Julian tried to keep the expectations of high quality and dedication the same for men and women. To this end, he allowed women to participate with men in monthly competitions—despite the initial skepticism of William-Adolphe Bouguereau, who taught there at the time—and study from nude models. Although some disparaged Julian’s liberal attitudes as merely capitalistic, others lauded his promotion of women and suggested that he “should be honored as a father of the feminist movement.” Whatever the case may have been, Bashkirtseff benefited from these opportunities. She highly esteemed her instructors, earned several awards in the monthly competitions, and relished the working environment and spirit of competition found there.

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250 This made the Académie more accessible to upper-class women and contributed to the perception that the majority of the female students were rich. This, however, was not always the case and wealthy women dabbling with paints, undedicated to professional painting careers, made many self-sacrificing and ambitious female students very annoyed. In fact, several students were extremely suspicious of Bashkirtseff, doubting her dedication to the profession.
251 Fehrer, 757. This was stated by a former student of the Académie, Gabriele Reval.
After her early death of tuberculosis at age twenty-six in 1884, Bashkirtseff’s fame increased due to a retrospective exhibition of her work in 1885 and, more important, to the posthumous publication of her journals, released under the direction of her mother, who honored her daughter’s request to publish them. These writings gave the public access to a woman who, though outwardly appearing to conform to contemporary feminine ideals, actually rejected the stifling restrictions placed on women and frequently expressed her frustrations in her journal. Although still shockingly candid, the journal was heavily edited by Mme. Bashkirtseff, who removed selections referring to feminist activity, her age, male interests, family scandals, and any other material deemed questionable. Regardless, it was widely popular, as illustrated through the various print runs. Originally published in 1887, additional versions, most claiming to have more of the journal or more accurate versions, were published in 1889, 1890, 1891, 1901, 1925, 1955, 1981, 1985, 1999, and 2005.²⁵³ Clearly, it was a popular account to read for late nineteenth-century readers and has continued to fascinate to the present day.

Contemporary Reactions and Further Scholarship

The responses of Bashkirtseff’s contemporaries to her life and journal are significant as their reactions reveal the prevailing standards of the time and Bashkirtseff’s adherence to or rejection of them. In addition, the research and scholarship on Bashkirtseff in the last few decades has had a strong impact on the way she is viewed today. Nineteenth-century reactions base much of their research on the detailed, though incomplete, journal she left behind and the majority of twenty and twenty-first century responses follow suit. The following analysis of some contemporary reactions to her writings and career as well as a summation of the most

²⁵³ These are the years of the major publications of her journal in France. There were numerous other versions being published in other countries. The first complete translation into English was published in 1890.
recent scholarship approaches to Bashkirtseff will establish a framework from which to understand Bashkirtseff’s perception of herself and others’ perceptions of her.

Some readers in the late nineteenth century applauded her refreshing honesty while others uncomfortably struggled to understand her. Capturing both of these sentiments, Englishman William Ewart Gladstone concluded in his 1889 article, “Mlle Bashkirtseff attracts and repels alternately, perhaps repels as much as she attracts.”254 Gladstone seemed to find some comfort in the fact that she died tragically of tuberculosis, a disease often identified with women’s weakness and inferiority in the nineteenth century. He compared her journal to a female body that is pared and exposed through death for the viewer.255 Discussing his article, Griselda Pollock insightfully noted that Gladstone’s references to tuberculosis and his conversion of her journal into a female body are a way for him to return Bashkirtseff to a non-threatening position. His comments take her out of her position of authority and into the position of an objectified woman. While intrigued by her frankness, he was repelled by and uncomfortable with her bold rejections of many societal assumptions about women. His reaction reveals Bashkirtseff’s wisdom in publishing her journals after her death and validates her decision to retain a public image of acceptable femininity during her lifetime.

Not surprisingly, many women, especially artists, were fascinated with her journals. In 1890, relatively soon after the diaries had been published, Marian Hepworth Dixon, an artist and acquaintance of Bashkirtseff, responded to the writings. She commented that the journal contained “a woman self-revealed, a woman who almost for the first time in history has had the courage to present us with a real woman, as distinguished from the sham women of books.”256

255 He also compared it to a Greek temple that is now reduced to a pile of ruins.
Dixon applauded Bashkirtseff’s efforts and added that the Bashkirtseff she knew was actually much more human than the image created by the journal.

Nevertheless, others were disappointed that this image of a real woman somehow did not conform to an idealistic creation of woman. One article, written in 1907 by an English woman, Mary Breakell, who was a fellow Académie student, reflects this disappointment. One major source of Breakell’s disapproval for Bashkirtseff stems from her conclusion that she had no heart, was unable to love anyone, and was undedicated to the cause of women. It seems interesting that not being acquainted with Bashkirtseff beyond studio association she felt qualified to comment on her heart and ability to love. Further, it is ironic that Breakell questions Bashkirtseff’s dedication to feminism since Bashkirtseff was one of the few women bold enough to go to feminist meetings and write articles calling for equality for women artists. Breakell acknowledged that there were rumors that Bashkirtseff attended feminist meetings. However, she concluded that they did not mean much to her since her discussion of them and other women’s issues appear infrequently in her journals. It is this reasoning that causes Breakell to say “the cause of women would in no way be advanced by the social success in art of such a one.” This lack of discussion, however, was due to editing of her journals not because Bashkirtseff did not comment on the intricacies and complexities of the position of women in the late nineteenth century.

Articles such as these catered to the public interest in Bashkirtseff but often promoted an image of a self-centered and prideful artist, fascinating but ultimately not worthy of emulation.

257 Mary L. Breakell, “Marie Bashkirtseff: The Reminiscence of a Fellow Student,” Nineteenth Century 62 (July 1907): 112. She prefaces her comments by saying that the English artists worked harder and sacrificed more than most other artists, recalling that they lived in poor conditions, rose early and dressed with ‘freezing fingers,’ and walked nearly an hour to arrive at the atelier long before other women, like Bashkirtseff, “left their warm nests of homes.” This deep animosity towards other women, especially those with better economic situations, clearly creates an extremely biased and negative lens with which she interpreted Bashkirtseff’s actions and writings.

258 Breakell, 123.
Julie Manet, Berthe Morisot’s daughter, read the journal with her parents and observed with surprise that Bashkirtseff was not as prideful or unpleasant as she had been led to believe. She noted that her mother would have found her ‘extraordinary’ and her father would have found her ‘insupportable.’ Julie Manet’s initial perception of Bashkirtseff, transformed after she actually read her journal, demonstrates the prevalent disapproving view of Bashkirtseff at the end of the nineteenth century. The journal accomplished exactly what Bashkirtseff hoped it would—it gave her fame and name recognition. Indeed, her name was heard all over Europe and in the United States after the publication of her journal. As is often the case with celebrities, however, their actions are easily critiqued and subject to denigration. Bashkirtseff became an artist and writer whom people loved to hate, or if not hate, at least belittle for her vanity and pride. Celebrity had a high price, but one that Bashkirtseff was willing to pay, if ultimately only after her death by leaving a journal that she knew could potentially offend, annoy, and shock.

This critical view of Bashkirtseff continued into the twentieth century, particularly under the scholarship of Simone de Beauvoir. The French feminist discussed Bashkirtseff in her groundbreaking book *The Second Sex* and used her as an example of unchecked narcissism. Constantly the focus of her mother and grandparents’ undivided attention, Bashkirtseff, Beauvoir argued, craved continual admiration from others and honed skills for attracting and holding attention. Discussing her comportment with a certain gentleman at a social event, Bashkirtseff wrote in her journal, “This amuses me. I do not converse with him, I act, and, feeling that I am before an appreciative audience, I am good at childlike and whimsical intonations . . .”

Drawing on performances such as these, Beauvoir examined Bashkirtseff’s narcissism and

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261 Beauvoir, 709. *[Le deuxième sexe]*, II (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 542.]
asserted that this behavior was a result of social systems rather than an innate female characteristic:

This narcissism appears so precociously in the little girl, it will play so fundamental a part in her life as a woman, that it is easy to regard it as arising from a mysterious feminine instinct. But . . . in reality it is not anatomical fate that dictates her attitude. . . . The fact is that in this matter the effect of education and surroundings is immense. All children try to compensate for the separation inflicted through weaning by enticing and show-off behavior; the boy is compelled to go beyond this state; he is rid of narcissism by having his attention directed to his penis; while the little girl is confirmed in the tendency to make herself [an] object . . . .

Thus, the inclination towards objectification is a common trait in women. Seen in this light, Bashkirtseff’s narcissism can also seen as a way in which she identified with prevailing constructs of femininity. Because it is women, not men, that are typically associated with narcissism, this becomes a characteristic that, though simultaneously condemned by some, solidifies her association with femininity.

It must be recognized, however, that Bashkirtseff was consciously using her beauty and femininity, just as she intentionally objectified her body in her photographs and before her admirers. Her cognizance that she was performing and often deliberately assuming the roles for ‘appreciative audiences’ reveals her own criticism of her strictly gendered society and also partially explains her use of masquerades. Today we may find her vanity and self-importance as

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262 Beauvoir, 314-15. This quote in translation, and the one previously cited, comes from the 1953 English translation of The Second Sex by H.M. Parshley, which has come under a considerable amount of critique as of late. Toril Moi has called this translation “deeply flawed,” highlighting the editing of between ten and fifteen percent of the original text as well as Parshley’s lack of training in philosophy and existentialism. Under the criticism of Moi and others, particularly philosophy professor Margaret Simons and French scholar Elizabeth Fallaize, Random House announced in 2007 that it is planning for a new English translation. While I expect a fresh translation will bring new light to the philosophical nuances that are important for feminism, I believe that Beauvoir’s original text still conveys the same vision of Bashkirtseff as a consummate narcissist and evaluates her life through this perceived flaw. See Beauvoir’s original language for this quote in Le deuxième sexe, II (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 28-29. For Toril Moi’s scholarship on Beauvoir, see “While We Wait: The English Translation of The Second Sex,” Signs Vol. 27, No. 4 (Summer, 2002): 1005-1035 and Simone de Beauvoir: The Makings of an Intellectual Woman (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1994).
distasteful, but they were powerful tools that Bashkirtseff wielded to meet her needs and achieve success in the nineteenth century.

Although Bashkirtseff was definitely focused on her own success and life, Beauvoir does not adequately look at other quotes which indicate that her egoism was severely tempered by crippling self-doubt and insecurity. In her first version of her preface to her diary, which she later crossed out and rewrote, Bashkirtseff acknowledged that this diary may seem self-centered, but that it was nevertheless a journal of her life and thoughts. In addition, throughout her journal are comments similar to the following: “I despise and have no faith in myself. . . . I am nothing; I have nothing in my vitals (O Zola!). . . . I am hopeless about myself, and am convinced that if I were to talk to the masters about it, they would come to the same conclusion. But I mean to persist for all that, and to go on with closed eyes and arms stretched out, like one about to be engulfed in an abyss.”

Statements such as these must also be included and evaluated in order to understand Bashkirtseff’s concept of herself. Bashkirtseff’s narcissism was often a façade used to hide her insecurity, her fear of failure, and her deteriorating health condition. From 1880 onward, she began to lose her hearing and hated acknowledging her increasing deafness. At least at home her family helped and covered for her hearing loss, but in the studio she often misunderstood quick-paced banter or words spoken too softly, leading to a general feeling of anxiety and/or paranoia that others were talking about her behind her back. Thus her inflated confidence and superiority was sometimes a pretense to cover her own insecurities. This, of course, does not completely discount Bashkirtseff’s vanity and self-importance, but it does put it in a larger context of her artistic and social anxieties.

Regrettably, much of the scholarship on Bashkirtseff falls into two camps: a non-critical view of Bashkirtseff as an underappreciated female artist who died tragically early, or an overly-dismissive view of her as a woman with a narcissistic flaw. The first position lent itself to feminist rediscovery of the artist but also cultivated a perception of her as a tragic martyr and often led to a focus on her life rather than her art. The second position, fostered in part by edited versions of her journals, encourages an assessment of Bashkirtseff as an unworthy example for women because of her persistent awareness of her appearance and her consistent focus on herself. This narcissicism, seen by Beauvoir and others through a psychoanalytic lens, has overwhelmed many articles on Bashkirtseff and created a view of Bashkirtseff as somehow defective and pitiful. The fact that Beauvoir herself adopted this position shows the remarkable resilience of age-old ideas that women looking at their own images, making images of themselves, or focusing on their appearance should still be coded as negative and viewed as vain and superficial.\textsuperscript{264} And, ultimately, this kind of analysis of Bashkirtseff also moves the discussion away from her art. Although her biography and (unedited) journals should be an important element of any research on Bashkirtseff, they are not the only factors to be considered. This study will move the discussion away from a hagiography of her brief life or an unfair condemnation of her narcissism, which are both incomplete assessments, towards a broader understanding of her art and identity in the cultural context of nineteenth-century France.

Fortunately, recent researchers have consciously attempted to portray a more inclusive and less fragmented version of the artist as well. The most revealing research on Bashkirtseff

\textsuperscript{264} In her essay “With Reluctant Feet: The Meeting of Childhood and Womanhood in Works by Women Artists,” Mara Witzling has also noted Beauvoir’s tendency to frame women’s preoccupation with their images in negative terms and label it as narcissistic. She argues that this is not always the case and uses several examples of artists, such as Mary Cassatt and Suzanne Valadon, who produce images of women engaging in self-reflective postures before mirrors that can be interpreted as empowering and constructive. Witzling also suggests that female sexuality has not been allowed to be voiced or visualized in the public sphere and uses Bashkirtseff as an example of a woman whose sexuality has frequently been marginalized. See Mara Witzling, “With Reluctant Feet,” in Ronald Dotterer and Susan Bowers, eds., Politics, Gender, and the Arts (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1992).
has been done in the last twenty-five years, beginning with Colette Cosnier’s 1985 book *Marie Bashkirtseff: un portrait sans retouches*. Cosnier’s work includes previously edited parts of Bashkirtseff’s journal and thus allowed for a more complete look at the artist. The foremost French scholar on Bashkirtseff, Cosnier expressed her anger at seeing what had been altered from Bashkirtseff’s original journal and endeavored to correct this abuse. Cosnier concluded that Bashkirtseff’s art and journal illustrate women’s long march toward liberation. This “image veritable” of Bashkirtseff displays the conflicts and contradictions she faced and, Cosnier asserts, women of today can still relate to these struggles.²⁶⁵ The only negative was that her work whet the appetite for a complete unedited version of the journal, which was not available until quite recently. In 2005, the Cercle des Amis published the complete journal in sixteen volumes; it is not yet available in English.

Cosnier’s book and a republication of the edited journal with a new introduction by Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker published in the same year promoted a renewed interest in Bashkirtseff. Since that time in the mid-1980s, there has been a steady flow of publications on the artist, the most significant including research produced by Tamar Garb, Louly Peacock Konz, and Jane Becker. Garb’s article, published in 1987, argues that Bashkirtseff repeatedly used disguises to accentuate her femininity. Using the words of French feminist Luce Irigaray, Garb asserts that Bashkirtseff took “pleasure in them [disguises], even gilding the lily further at times.”²⁶⁶ She concludes that Bashkirtseff “veiled her ambition … by living a masquerade.”²⁶⁷

The concept of the masquerade has been widely discussed in feminist literature: of particular note is Joan Rivière’s geminal essay on the masquerade and gender identity which will be

²⁶⁵ Cosnier, 328.
²⁶⁷ Garb, “Unpicking the Seams,” 86.
discussed in some detail in the following section. I believe that Bashkirtseff did ‘gild the lily’ in her photographs and even in her interactions with people, but her cognizance of this masquerade suggests that she was not living a masquerade but rather manipulating the social system to her advantage. This chapter will continue Garb’s research by looking at how Bashkirtseff used various disguises and ‘feminine’ poses in her photography and paintings, and it will propose various cultural meanings of these guises. It enabled Bashkirtseff to investigate various perspectives and, sometimes, use femininity to her advantage.

Louly Peacock Konz’ 2002 book, based on her 1997 doctoral dissertation, is particularly relevant to this study as it was the first investigation of Bashkirtseff’s self-portraits. In her publication and dissertation, Konz examines the cultural context and the numerous themes that fascinated Bashkirtseff in her writings and works. Her work is valuable because Konz disagrees with scholars like Beauvoir, Garb and Pollock who have generally seen Bashkirtseff as a bundle of masks and contradictions resulting from her narcissism. Konz successfully argues that to be an artist, especially a woman artist, and create works of art one must be self-centered and selfish to a degree. This chapter is indebted to much of Konz’ original research because I am also interested in self-portraiture. My focus is slightly more narrow, as I will be primarily investigating celebrity and how Bashkirtseff was using her self-portraits both as self-promotion

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268 The theory of the masquerade has been popular topic among feminists, psychoanalysts, literary scholars, as well as academics of numerous fields. One of the underlying questions of these studies is what it is to be a woman and whether femininity is always already a masquerade, continually masking, concealing, and pretending. See, for example, Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990); Terry Castle, Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century Culture and Fiction (London: Methuen, 1986); Mary Ann Doane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator” Screen 23 (1982): 74-87; Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Mary Anne Schofield, Masquerade and Unmasking the Female Mind: Disguising Romances in Feminine Literature 1713-1799 (Delaware, MD: University of Delaware Press, 1990).


270 Konz, Marie Bashkirtseff (Ph.D. diss.), 331.
and self-exploration. Konz follows Bashkirtseff’s career more completely than I will be able to do here and she also includes discussion of various themes such as her fascination with Ophelia, her personal practice of wearing white, and adoption of a Naturalist agenda.

In the 1999-2000 exhibition catalog of *Overcoming the Obstacles: Women of the Académie Julian*, Jane Becker explores the circumstances and atmosphere of the academy for women, particularly looking at the competitive relationship between Bashkirtseff and Louise Breslau (who will be discussed in-depth in the following chapter). Her well-researched insights are welcome, as they familiarize readers with the accomplishments of women such as these two and others whose talents should be applauded and explored. However, in the end her overall assessment of Bashkirtseff is rather negative: Becker sees Bashkirtseff as jealous and childish and asserts that feminists have honored Bashkirtseff worldwide while Breslau has been practically ignored.\(^{271}\) It seems ironic that our appreciation for Bashkirtseff should still be tempered by the imperfections of her personality. Indeed, while there is a strong need to further investigate artists like Breslau, it should not be done at the expense of others. One would hope that feminism has come far enough to allow for an expansion of the discourse without requiring the rejection of others.

Rather than view Bashkirtseff as a self-centered narcissist who vacillated between different disguises of femininity, this study places Bashkirtseff in a moment when femininity and opportunities for women were in a state of flux. As a result of this changing environment, Bashkirtseff used her writings and her self-portraits as experiments to define herself. As evidenced in her journal, anonymous articles, and some of her private actions, there was much more to Bashkirtseff than a mask of femininity. Publically, Bashkirtseff preserved an

appropriately feminine appearance, embracing clothing and coquettish behavior that was within nineteenth-century social constructs for women. In some ways, she can be interpreted as employing the reverse tactic that Bonheur used. On the exterior, Bonheur eschewed the aspect that Bashkirtseff embodied but she verbally asserted her “perfectly feminine heart,” or interior. Conversely, Bashkirtseff used the exterior trappings to her advantage while privately railing against her circumstances. The disparity between her private and public persona was not always straightforward though. The fact that she planned to make her private writing public, or that she allowed some of her experimental photographs to be distributed suggests that Bashkirtseff wanted to occasionally push the envelope and sometimes used social expectations and her class to her advantage. Specific examples of her photographs in the next section will help elucidate how she did this.

Seeing Herself through the Camera’s Lens

Bashkirtseff’s early fascination with her own likeness and appearance can be seen in a series of photographs taken over the course of about nine years, roughly from 1876 through 1884. Unlike her painted portraits, Bashkirtseff’s photographs are often more experimental and demonstrate an interest in her image outside her role as an artist. A small sampling of these images will demonstrate her use of photography. Photographic portraits left an indelible impact upon the nineteenth century. The carte-de-visite photograph, wildly popular in the late 1850s and 1860s, both offered an inexpensive and relatively quick means to reproduce one’s image. For Bashkirtseff,

\[\text{Photographic portraits left an indelible impact upon the nineteenth century.} \]

\[\text{The carte-de-visite photograph, wildly popular in the late 1850s and 1860s, both offered an inexpensive and relatively quick means to reproduce one’s image.} \]

272 The majority of these photographs are owned by the various libraries in France including the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Bibliothèque de Cessole in Nice, or by Philippe Carrette, a surviving family member. Some of them are in poor condition and others have been lost. In looking at a handful of photographs from the 1870s and 1880s, I hope to provide a general idea of how and why Bashkirtseff used photography, rather than an exhaustive analysis of all of her photographs.

273 For an in-depth study of the rise of the carte-de-visite in the 1850s and 1860s, see Elizabeth Anne McCauley, A.A.E. Disdéri and the Carte de Visite Portrait Photograph (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
photography not only allowed her to explore aspects of herself beyond her role as an artist but also to distribute those images and thereby increase her reputation and popularity.

With the rise of photography, Bashkirtseff was one of many clients using this new medium as a forum for creative self-representation. Elizabeth Anne McCauley has affirmed that by 1860 there were 207 photographic establishments just in the center of Paris. Although the standard portrait photograph was an essential offering of these businesses, celebrity cartes represented a significant part of their sales. Photographs, especially of celebrities, quickly became desired commodities that could be bought, collected, and displayed. Popular entertainers, leaders, writers, and other celebrated personalities could now be a part of personal album collections. Indeed, the emerging culture of celebrity was fostered by the availability of photographs and their relatively inexpensive price. A brief discussion of the history of early photographs and the cultural context in which the fascination with these images and the concept of celebrity flourished will set the foundation for understanding Bashkirtseff’s keen yearning for celebrity status and her use of photography to propagate her image.

In 1854, André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri patented the carte-de-viste, a small photograph six by nine centimeters in size. Created by dividing a glass plate into ten rectangles which could yield ten photographs in the place of one full-plate image, the carte-de-visite was Disdéri’s way to produce more photographs economically. Disdéri originally envisioned that the carte-de-visite would be pasted on the back of a conventional calling card. It is unclear whether this actually happened in the first years of production (there are no extant examples of this pasted carte-de-viste), but by 1858 the carte-de-visite had become a kind of visual calling card with

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274 Primarily in the 1,2,3,9th arrondisements. McCauley, 53. There were only 56 in 1948, showing their meteoric rise in popularity and demand.
275 Disdéri initially used a format with ten photographs, but soon thereafter limited the plate to eight, which became the standard format for carte-de-visite photographs.
merit of its own. Quickly popular, the carte-de-visite dominated the 1860s and the format used by Disdéri, utilizing standardized props such as columns, desks, and backdrops, was adopted by other photographers in France, Western Europe, and the United States.

Part of the appeal of the cartes was that they were a social equalizer, making images of family and close friends as well as famous contemporary figures from various social classes, ranging from rulers to writers and actresses to politicians, familiar and visually accessible. Both men and women delighted in collecting these images and depositing them in personal albums that could be studied and analyzed at leisure. Emile Zola, in his 1872 novel La Curée, has the central characters of Maxime and his mistress Renée ponder the photographs in their albums to pass the time:

He had portraits of actresses in all his pockets, even his cigar case. Sometimes he got rid of them and put these ladies in the album which was tossed on the salon furniture and which already contained the portraits of Renée’s female friends. There were also men’s photographs in it, MM. de Rozan, Simpson, de Chibray, de Mussy, as well as actors, writers, deputies, who somehow came to enlarge the collection. A singularly mixed world, a mishmash of ideas and people who intersected the lives of Renée and Maxime. When it rained [and] they were bored, this album was a great subject of conversation. It ended up always being opened. . . Thus, there were long discussions on the Ecrevisse’s hair, the double chin of Mme de Meinhold, the eyes of Mme de Lauverens…

For Zola, Maxime and Renée’s interest in these cartes is merely one symptom of their decadent lifestyles and superficial interests. In a larger sense, though, this scene marks the pervasive nature of cartes in Parisian society and their ability to trace one’s social network. Indeed, Anne Higonnet has extensively researched women’s albums during this period and asserted that one of their central purposes was to document the owner’s social circles and social experiences. Higonnet discusses photographic albums as well as personal albums that were a compilation of photographs, sketches, drawings, and travel scenes. She describes women’s collections of

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photographs as “microcosmic versions of their social networks.”277 This is undoubtedly true of the images of friends and family, and some albums contained only such images. However, as images of famous personages and celebrities became more readily available, many albums looked more like Maxime and Renée’s—a mishmash of people they knew as well as an ‘imagined’ social network of celebrities that they analyzed. Photographers capitalized on this fascination with celebrities and often sought after high-profile clients so that they could sell prints of their images. Indeed, carte-de-visite photographs often created and confirmed celebrity status by promoting someone as an important personality. Thus, in McCauley’s words, “the carte de visite heralded the triumph of the media-created man.”278

By the 1870s, larger cabinet or ‘album’ photographs replaced cartes in popularity; they were often double the size, thus allowing “a much more gracious effect.”279 In the early years of the 1870s, however, photographic portrait production of all types decreased dramatically due to the Franco-Prussian war and the subsequent Commune. After this period, the carte-de-visite never regained its prominent status, but portrait photography now had a wide appeal and continued to flourish in various forms. In France, photographs of celebrities (both cartes and album size) maintained their popularity in the 1880s and 1890s.280 The fascination with admired members of society was not an impulse unique to the nineteenth century, but the development of photography enabled photographers and their patrons to promote their reputations in way that

278 McCauley, 223-224.
279 These words described the new larger album photographs in the *Bulletin de la Société française de photographie* in 1868. As quoted in McCauley, 209.
280 John Plunkett has recently argued that in England celebrity portraiture was even more popular in these decades than it had been in the 1860s and 1870s. Closely analyzing production records and sales of photographic shops, Plunkett shows that in the 1860s and 1870s images of royalty, politicians, artists, and clergy were the most popular types of carte-de-visites but in the following decades celebrities such as actresses, singers and sportsmen dominated the field. See John Plunkett, “Celebrity and Community: The Poetics of Carte-de-Visite,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 55-79.
had been unparalleled in the past. The photographer Nadar, for example, gathered fellow Bohemian artists and intellectuals at his famous studio on the boulevard des Capucines and photographed them in order to advance his career as well as theirs. In a 1999-2000 exhibition, the J. Paul Getty Museum, in conjunction with the Andy Warhol Museum and the Baltimore Museum of Art, hung an exhibition of photographs by Nadar and Andy Warhol, calling attention to the similarities between these two artists. Both were clever manipulators of the media in their day, both were non-conformists who attracted a charmed circle of famous personalities, and both were initially artists and then photographers. Beyond venerating the individual achievements of both men, the exhibition and catalogue focused on the role of the photographer in the “conscious creation of celebrity and the changing nature of fame.”

In the nineteenth century, Nadar, Disdéri, and other photographers were actively confirming and creating celebrities with their easily accessible images. It was within this context of photographic mania and rising celebrity culture that Bashkirtseff patronized numerous carte-de visite and album photographers in the 1870s and 1880s.

Some of these photographs show Bashkirtseff in traditional poses, appropriately coiffed, demure and feminine, such as seen in Fig. 4.1, while others explore her identity more radically. For example, in one she dresses up as a Russian peasant woman, complete with a traditional costume and an instrument (Fig. 4.2). Though she is invoking traditions of her heritage, the peasant life was not one she was familiar with at all, and so she poses not as an insider into this life, but rather as an experiment, an opportunity to play another role for a moment. Her small dog Pincio appears in double, as he obviously could not hold the pose as long as necessary for the exposure. This photograph was taken in Nice by a photographer named W. Bienmüller, one

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of several Nice photographers whom Bashkirtseff patronized. In a similar fashion, another photograph captures her while dressed in the outfit of a local countrywoman, carrying a basket and looking over her shoulder to catch the eye of the camera (Fig. 4.3). Another, perhaps taken the same day or at least with the same photographer judging by the identical backdrop of a mountainscape with a small city below, Bashkirtseff dons a white peasant cap and clothing that is at best unremarkable and at worst extremely unfashionable (Fig. 4.4). She dresses down in this series of photographs, rather than the traditional method of donning one’s finest for the photographer. In all of these, Bashkirtseff playfully imagines herself in roles far outside her comfortable city lifestyle; she fantasizes about performing with a mandolin or gathering fruit in a basket. Photography provided a means to enact these fantasies by adopting alternate personas and explore lifestyles that were outside her scope of experience.

To what extent can these types of photographs be considered as being authored by Bashkirtseff?282 How much did Bashkirtseff dictate her poses, clothing, and accessories? Although they were taken by a professional photographer, the photographs of the young artist are unique in their creativity and costumes, suggesting that she was actively involved in the final product. We may never know exactly what type of collaboration occurred between Bashkirtseff and her photographers, but her continued interest in photography as an arena for extraordinary experimentation indicates that these images were an integral part of her self-creation. Additionally, these fascinating images in which Bashkirtseff dons guises and assumes alternate personas were taken not just in one atypical photographic session, but over a period of years and with different photographers. This again emphasizes that Bashkirtseff saw photography as a medium through which she could discover herself as image and explore her identity. In this

sense, her photographs need to be considered as an element of her public image and part of her interest in self-portraiture.

Some of her photographs specifically address gender roles and expectations for female behavior. For example, in an undated photograph probably taken around 1875, she wears a white dress and sits at a dressing table with her eyes averted and downcast, with a mirror in hand (Fig. 4.5). She poses here as an appropriately demure, non-threatening female, using both beauty and feminine social codes as cues for viewers to interpret her behavior. Bashkirtseff’s attractive white dress subtly highlights her purity and innocence, while her gestures suggest modesty and refinement. Although Bashkirtseff often rejected social expectations for women in her diaries, she also used femininity to her advantage in certain situations. Privately she confessed, “I grumble at being a woman because there is nothing of the woman about me but the envelope.”

Here, however, she emphasizes that envelope and adopts all of accoutrements of femininity.

In her research on gender and the masquerade, referred to earlier in the chapter on Bonheur, Joan Rivière argued that many women who exhibit masculine characteristics or work in fields previously dominated by men “may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men.” Using numerous case studies, Rivière psychoanalyzed women who felt a need to emphasize their femininity or construct a feminine mask, through clothing, behavior, or verbal exchanges, in order to compensate for their masculine pursuits. Rivière’s work specifically addressed women in the 1920s but her argument equally describes Bashkirtseff’s behavior as she sought to achieve success in the male-dominated art world.

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Bashkirtseff’s choice of career and her dogged determination to succeed as an artist illustrate ambitions and attitudes that were socially constructed as masculine. However, she exhibits what Rivière calls a “compulsive reversal of . . . intellectual performance” in her excessive attention to her appearance, her behavior towards men, and her assessment of other women. Bashkirtseff always appeared in public dressed in appropriately feminine clothing and several entries in her journal mention time spent looking at herself in the mirror. She prided herself on her beauty and often used flirtatious behavior to win male approval or attention. This kind of behavior has led some scholars to conclude Bashkirtseff’s worth was tied to her beauty, appearance, and outward approval. This may be true, but it is tantamount to blaming Bashkirtseff for the system within which she was born. She creatively used the options that were available to her, namely wealth, beauty, and artistic talent, to achieve her objectives. While we may naively wish that Bashkirtseff could have pursued her goals independent of outward approval or valued herself outside of her beauty, these were the social cues for success that Bashkirtseff knew. That she was aware of them and used them to her advantage should elicit our applause rather than disappointment. We could endlessly talk about the restricted position of women during this period, which Bashkirtseff herself acknowledged, but she also acted and worked within her culture, sometimes using performances and guises with certain ends in mind. Photography was a particularly adaptive medium for practicing these performances.

Sarah Bernhardt was one of the most famous celebrities in France (and Western Europe) during these decades, and a brief analysis of some of her carte-de-visite photographs and album prints provides a nice comparison to Bashkirtseff’s images. An uncut page from André Disdéri’s studio of Bernhardt illustrates the kind of cartes Disdéri disseminated of the legendary actress (Fig. 4.6). Bernhardt is here shown in conventional attire and stances, but she also posed in less
typical clothing and positions. For example, a publicity photograph from 1880 shows Bernhardt in a coffin with her arms crossed over her chest and eyes closed as if dead (Fig. 4.7). The actress sometimes did sleep in a coffin, alternately claiming it helped her to better understand her tragic roles or maintaining she was very comfortable in what would become her final resting place. In another photograph, Bernhardt stands in front of a sculpture bust, wearing white pants and low heels (Fig. 4.8). Looking boldly out at the viewer, Bernhardt refuses to accept any censure for her unconventional behavior. Wearing pants was still illegal for women in France in the nineteenth century and sculpting was equally deemed as a physical process best left to men. Unlike Bonheur who applied for government authorization to wear pants publically, Bernhardt boldly displays herself in masculine attire without asking permission. Of course, she is in her private studio, where she could dress as she pleased, but photography makes the private setting now accessible to the public, confusing the boundaries between public and private and acceptable and improper behavior. It is true that Bernhardt’s celebrity status perhaps gave her a little more latitude than most women in pushing social boundaries. Like Bashkirtseff, she used photography as a medium to express her rejection of limitations on female behavior as well as represent various aspects of her personality.

There is no direct evidence that Bashkirtseff was specifically aware of Bernhardt’s photographs, but she did attend at least four of Bernhardt’s performances, commenting on the “silvery cadence” of her voice; the artist was introduced to the actress through Louise Abbéma. Contemporary artists working in France, both used photographic images to counter

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or adopt notions of masculinity, femininity, and appropriate codes of conduct. Additionally, their photographs share a theatrical sensibility; it is as if they are part of a dramatic spectacle unfolding before the photographer. Take for instance, these two photographs of Bernhardt and Bashkirtseff (Figs. 4.9 and 4.10). Bernhardt strikes a melodramatic pose, arms outstretched and eyes looking heavenward, in her role as Leah from the Old Testament. For Bernhardt, of course, drama was her profession and the photograph acts as an advertisement for her play as well as a confirmation of her status as celebrity. Bashkirtseff sits on a large boulder, with the backdrop of an isolated wilderness, and places her hand on her forehead as if she scans the horizon for something or someone. Although there is no narrative, no Old Testament account, within which to place her behavior, her gesture seems similarly to be an excerpt from a larger performance. Like Bernhardt, she is acting, playing an imagined part but it is one that only she knows.

Bashkirtseff’s creative imagination also informed a photograph in which she stands before a funerary monument to herself (Fig. 4.11). The inscription reads “Here lies Marie, 21 years old,” and the artist, dressed in mourning black, clasps her hands and grieves the loss of herself. Bashkirtseff had already been diagnosed with tuberculosis when this photograph was taken in 1881. She struggled through bouts of serious illness and, when well, worked frantically in her studio. This was the same year that she produced the painting of the Académie Julian and wrote several of her impassioned letters highlighting the inadequacies of female artistic training. Privately, however, she pondered her inevitable death and questioned if she would be remembered. Does this photograph relate to those inner struggles? Is she envisioning how others will respond to her death? Or pretending to be a mourner at her own graveside? Her expression is not overly sorrowful; her semi-smile belies the somber nature of the circumstances. The
contrived situation seems more theatrical, and almost playful, than authentic. By creating a funerary photograph, Bashkirtseff can momentarily suppress her own anxieties about her death and transform a tragedy into a performance.

In front of the camera’s lens, Bashkirtseff performed and acted out different ‘selves’, a myriad of fantasies of who she could be or would never be. In a sense, though, Bashkirtseff’s theatrical photographs are just a few of many instances in her life when she was performing. Her coquettish behavior, her disguises to attend feminist meetings or paint outdoors, and even her constant awareness of her appearance are indications that Bashkirtseff frequently adopted roles for a variety of situations and purposes. While some may be tempted to dismiss these performances as evidence that Bashkirtseff craved constant attention and approval, they are also confirmation that Bashkirtseff could cleverly shift her attitude and self-presentation according to the situation at hand. Her performances also indicate that Bashkirtseff was in a process of self-discovery. Her concept of self was fluid and changing, rather than static and fixed, enabling her to don guises of Russian peasants, mourn before imaginary graves, and envision herself as an notable celebrity.

Other women, who lived before and after Bashkirtseff, in nineteenth-century France also saw the advantage of adopting personas and performing roles as part of their continual creation of self. Susan Grogan has argued that social activist Flora Tristan (1803-1844) used melodrama and theatrical performance to claim authority and convince the public of the importance of her issues. In her diaries, Tristan revealed that she saw herself as a performer, alternately assuming roles such as pariah, victim, heroine, and female messiah. In conjunction with the publication of her semiautobiographical book Peregrinations of a Pariah in 1838, Tristan

commissioned a portrait of herself as an innocent victim and emphasized to the artist that the pose and costume must be carefully chosen in order to create the desired effect. And, while visiting London, she dressed up as a male Turkish diplomat in order to attend a session of Parliament, as women were not admitted. Like Bashkirtseff, Tristan created an array of self-images through her various performances.

The founder of La Fronde, a women’s daily newspaper at the end of the century, Marguerite Durand (1864-1935) actually began her career as an actress and later used skills acquired in her acting profession to transgress social expectations. An illegitimate child, former actress, and a divorced owner of an all-women’s newspaper, Durand rejected the conventional path for women but used her beauty and hyper-femininity to assuage male anxieties about her power. Urging women not to “renounce their privileges, elegance of manners and dress, charm, and beauty,” she saw these qualities as essential aesthetically as well as politically. Her saucy quip, “Feminism owes a great deal to my blond hair,” shows her belief that she could “rescue” feminism from ugliness. Dressing in elaborate dresses and hairstyles, she encouraged her staff to similarly embrace beauty and organized fancy all-night soirées (the only occasions when men were allowed into La Fronde offices). Perhaps Bashkirtseff has even more in common with Durand than Tristan as they were both often viewed negatively by fellow female colleagues. Bashkirtseff’s outward narcissism, sense of superiority, and vanity made her less than popular with other women at the Académie Julian, and Durand was similarly disliked by other feminists for being snobbish, worldly, and superficial. Both women embraced an exterior appearance of femininity, which enabled both of them to transgress other gender conventions. As Mary Louise Roberts has concluded, Durand “reenacted traditional notions of femininity within the context of

a very untraditional life,” and the same could also be said of Bashkirtseff.\textsuperscript{289} As these cursory comparisons show, Bashkirtseff, Durand, and Tristan all used theatrical tactics and adopted diverse roles in the hopes that they would prove to be persuasive or advantageous.

Despite Bashkirtseff’s outward embrace of feminine appearance and conventions, she acknowledged that appearance and gender played a significant role in her personal freedom. Photography provided an arena upon which she could visually play with gender roles and sexuality. In 1876 and 1877, Bashkirtseff posed for a series of photographs in which she dressed up in a brown Capuchin monk habit (Figs. 4.12 and 4.13). As a monk, she inhabits a male position that is safely protected from the world, but one which offered access to libraries, knowledge and education. This is not to say that Bashkirtseff wished to be a monk, but rather connects her desire to have male advantages. Several contemporary quotes elucidate this aspiration. In a letter to a friend she wrote, “I know that I could become someone; but with these skirts where can one go?”\textsuperscript{290} She later stated, “a famous man marries, he takes a woman whom he loves, . . . he organizes his house thus, and the woman is him. But me, I don’t want to be that woman, because I am the famous man.”\textsuperscript{291} In declaring herself to be the famous man, Bashkirtseff claims both celebrity and masculinity, two qualities that will enable her freedom. Her bold declaration reinforces her desire for renown and underscores her inner struggle with her position as a woman. At times, she used her journal to vent her anger: “Curse it all, it is this that makes me gnash my teeth to think I am a woman! –I’ll get myself a bourgeois dress and wig, and

\textsuperscript{289} Roberts, 190.
\textsuperscript{290} Bashkirtseff, Journal, Mazarine, 379, 30 septembre 1878. “Je sais que je pourrais devenir quelqu’un; mais avec des jupes où voulez-vous qu’on aille? Le mariage est la seule carrière des femmes; les hommes ont trente-six chances, la femme n’en a qu’une.”
make myself so ugly that I shall be as free as a man . . .” These excerpts reveal Bashkirtseff’s awareness of the importance that gender played in nineteenth-century society and the opportunities that were just out of her reach as a woman. In posing in a monk’s habit, she assumes a male costume and can, for a moment, imagine the autonomy that this role would offer.

Her desire for independence and the freedom to pursue her career were common themes that repeatedly appear in Bashkirtseff’s journal. She was acutely aware that her gender inhibited her ability to enjoy these privileges. Because she could not openly communicate these feelings, many of them are only seen in her photographic play with gendered costumes and in her writings. For example, the following statement comes from a journal entry in 1879,

What I long for, is the liberty to ramble alone, to come and go, to seat myself on the benches in the garden of the Tuileries, and especially of the Luxembourg, to stop at the artistic shop-windows, enter the churches, the museums, to ramble at night in the old streets, that is what I long for, and that is the liberty without which one cannot become a true artist.293

Bashkirtseff wrote of a similar sentiment three years later in 1882. She stated,

Ah! How women are to be pitied; men are at least free. Absolute independence in everyday life, liberty to come and go, or go out, to dine in an inn or at home, to walk to the Bois or the café; this liberty is half the battle in acquiring talent, and three parts of everyday happiness. But you will say, ‘why don’t you, superior woman as you are, seize this liberty?’ It is impossible, for the woman who emancipates herself thus, if young and pretty, is almost taboed; she becomes singular, conspicuous, and cranky; she is censured, and is consequently, less free than when respecting those absurd customs.294

292 Bashkirtseff, Journal, trans. Blind, 347. Original French citation in Cosnier, 181, 2 janvier 1879. “Ah! Cré nom d’un chien, voilà quand je rage d’être une femme! Je vais m’arranger des habits bourgeois et une perruque, je me ferai si laide que je serai libre comme un homme. . . même en me déguisant, en m’enlaidissant, je ne suis qu’à moitié libre et une femme qui rode est une imprudente.”

293 Bashkirtseff, Journal, Mazarine, 393. “Ce que j’envie, c’est la liberté de se promener tout seul, d’aller, de venir, de s’asseoir sur les bancs du jardin des Tuileries et surtout du Luxembourg, de s’arrêter aux vitrines artistiques, d’entrer dans les églises, les musées, de se promener le soir dans les vieilles rues ; voilà ce que j’envie et voilà la liberté sans laquelle on ne peut pas devenir un vrai artiste.” English translation from Heckel, 416.

294 Bashkirtseff, Journal, Mazarine, 594. “Ah! Que les femmes sont à plaindre, les hommes sont libres au moins. L’indépendance absolue dans la vie ordinaire, la liberté d’aller et venir, sortir, dîner au cabaret ou chez soi, aller à pied au Bois ou au café ; cette liberté-là est la moitié du talent et les trois quarts du bonheur ordinaire. Mais, direz-vous, femme supérieure que vous êtes, octroyez vous-la, cette liberté. C’est impossible, car la femme que s’émancipe ainsi, la femme jeune et jolie s’entend, est presque mise à l’index ; elle devient singulière, remarquée, blâmée, toquée et, par conséquent, encore moins libre qu’en ne choquant point les usages idiots.”
Bashkirtseff’s fantasy of wandering alone through the city of Paris, dining in cafés, enjoying the
spectacle of the street windows sounds like a description of the activities of the male flâneur,
Baudelaire’s modern man who walks through the city in order to experience it. Griselda
Pollock’s research on modernity and gendered city spaces confirms Bashkirtseff’s complaints.
Comparing images produced by men such as Manet and Degas with those produced by Morisot,
Cassatt, and others, Pollock concluded that the modern areas of Paris (the cafés, theaters,
boulevards, brothels, etc.) were only available to men (or working women: prostitutes, actresses,
bar maids, and singers), positing modernity and its associations with leisure, consumption, and
spectacle as unsuitable and compromising for respectable women. Bashkirtseff keenly felt
this restriction from city spaces and associated them with true artists. Despite her desire to claim
these spaces and freedoms, she insightfully observed that open rebellion from prevailing
standards of femininity often made a woman “less free than when respecting those absurd
customs.” Thus, fearing the repercussions of unconventional behavior, she carefully preserved
an outward veneer of acceptable femininity in her public life, while privately she expressed her
growing irritation and frustrations with woman’s position in society.

In addition to her longing for freedom to roam freely in Parisian streets and society,
Bashkirtseff also felt strongly about women’s limited access to education and equal rights, which
she felt placed women in a position of ignorance and inferiority. In one entry she wrote,
“supposing they [women] were brought up in the way men are trained, the inequality which I
regret would disappear . . . . I will try to set an example by showing society a woman who shall
have made her mark, in spite of all the disadvantages with which it hampered her.”

296 See Griselda Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,” in *Vision and Difference: Femininity,
297 Ibid, or also, *Voices*, 71-72.
actively involved in feminism and, unbeknownst to her mother, financially supported groups such as *Les Droit des femmes*. Also, her articles in the newspaper *La Citoyenne*, boldly calling for more privileges for woman artists and their admittance into the École des Beaux-Arts, expose these unconventional attitudes. However, she wrote under the pseudonym of Pauline Orell and thus guarded against recriminations that might inhibit her progress at the Salon or at the Académie.

Her strong opinions and lucid questioning of societal standards are characteristics typically associated with men. Several contemporary critics linked her painting skills with masculine attributes, as they had earlier with Rosa Bonheur. One example of this can be seen in the comments of a male critic about one of Bashkirtseff’s most well-known works, *The Meeting*, which she exhibited in the Salon of 1884 and which was later bought by the government (Fig. 4.14). This work was signed with her first initial and last name, which left her gender slightly hidden to those not previously familiar with her work. Upon seeing this painting, one male critic commented, “Yes, he is a very strong man that M. Bashkirtseff.”

Emile Bastien-Lepage, brother of the well-known painter, corrected the man by informing him that Bashkirtseff was actually a young woman and “a pretty one.” This exchange clearly emphasizes that good or “strong” painting was associated with men. Here, adopting masculine attributes of strength and using the only the initial of her first name to conceal her gender aided Bashkirtseff’s success. Their words also indicate that it was not just the artwork of a woman artist that was on display but the woman herself was often objectified for the gaze of art critics.

The same year Bashkirtseff posed as a monk, she also posed as a nun, wearing a flowing white cloak (Figs. 4.15 and 4.16). In these photographs, Bashkirtseff is extremely conscious of

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299 Ibid.
the viewer and performs the role of a virtuous nun as if on a stage. Upon close examination, the photographs are not particularly convincing as images of a nun. She takes the part rather superficially, donning the clothing but not particularly the personality. In the photograph from 1876, her coy glance at the viewer suggests a sensuality that deliberately contradicts the expected disposition of a nun. Perhaps appropriately, in this photograph Bashkirtseff’s outfit is not an actual robe but rather a long piece of fabric that she has pulled up around her head, mimicking the guise of a religious costume. In the image from the following year, Bashkirtseff is completely enclosed in the white mantle, an actual habit with hood this time, and the folds in the clothing seem to mimic the contours of the rocks beside her. It is an aesthetically appealing photograph and her pensive facial expression adds to its allure. The latter image might initially appear more convincing, if not for the dog at her feet and the equally staged setting. Both photographs, again, seem like a theatrical display, an opportunity for Bashkirtseff to observe herself and be observed in an unlikely vocation.

One reason the religious life seems so unlikely for Bashkirtseff is because her journal is regularly peppered with her running commentary on various love interests and admirers, such as her fantasy obsession with the Duke of Hamilton at age fifteen, her courtship with the young Italian Piero Antonelli, or her brief encounters with other suitors. Bashkirtseff may have valued the independent life that a monk or nun enjoyed, but she routinely discussed in her journal the reality of marriage and the conflict she felt between the familial and social pressure to marry and her own desire for a career. In moments of conviction, she writes of her decision to rejection of marriage: “To make me marry like everyone else, it would have been necessary for me to be someone else.”300 However, at various intervals she announces her conclusion that marriage is

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300 Bashkirtseff, *Journal*, Mazarine, 704. Original French: “Pour qu’on eût pu me marier comme tout le monde il aurait fallu que je fusse une autre.”
inevitable. “I will get married. What is the use of putting it off? What do I expect? From the moment I give up painting, the field is vast.”

The connection between getting married and giving up painting reveals the fact that combining professional careers and domestic life was often not possible. In the end, though, she would never give up her painting to marry. Later she stated, “But for Art, one has no need of anyone, one depends only on oneself...”

She was able to secure her independence by her single life. Like Bonheur who stated she married art, Bashkirtseff wrote, “I am willing to give up everything for art. I must remember that art only is life.”

Although Bashkirtseff did not take vows in a convent, she did pledge her life to pursuing her dream of art and fame and in this way her photographs in these religious outfits illustrate her love of disguise and costume as well as her single-minded commitment to the glory of her profession.

Bashkirtseff’s interest in monks and nuns was not uncommon for the time period. Louly Konz, a Bashkirtseff scholar, has noted that in the second half of the nineteenth century there was a particular fascination with the monastic costume, perhaps due to the rising secularization of society and the increasing disparity between modern and monastic life. The Comtesse de Castiglione, mistress to Napoleon III and celebrated Italian beauty during the Second Empire and Third Republic in France, also posed wearing nun’s clothing (Fig. 4.17). Like Bashkirtseff, the Countess posed in conventional studio portraits but also dressed in extravagant outfits and enacted an assorted mix of characters, ranging from the cloistered nun seen here to peasant from

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301 Heckel, 428. Original French translation, Mazarine, 5 mars 1879, 404. “Je vais me marier. A quoi bon retarder ce dénouement ? Qu’est-ce que j’attends? Du moment que je supprime la peinture, le champ est vaste.”

302 Bashkirtseff, Journal, trans. Heckel, 328. Original French, Mazarine, 308. “Mais pour cela [l’art] on n’a besoin de personne, on ne dépend que de soi...”


162
Normandy (Fig. 4.18). Both women liked to dress up in roles that were far removed from their actual daily activities and capture these masquerades in the lasting form of photography. Additionally, these photographs suggest that in their individual efforts to define the boundaries of their experiences and selfhood, exploring what they were *not* was as important as asserting what they were.

The Countess kept many of her photographs, especially the more experimental or risqué images, for her private contemplation. Bashkirtseff, on the other hand, enjoyed distributing these images and gave them to friends and family. Her mother actively continued this tradition after her daughter died, partially as a way to keep Bashkirtseff’s memory alive. Bashkirtseff was as equally willing to share photographs of herself in a stunning ball gown as in a monk’s habit; apparently the photograph as a monk was particularly popular. Two extant letters to Bashkirtseff’s mother, after the artist’s death, request images of Bashkirtseff in the monk’s habit. The body of her photographs, I believe, served the same purpose as Bashkirtseff’s journal; both were a method to promote her reputation and fame. Anxious about dying before achieving success as a painter, Bashkirtseff planned to publish her journal to attain fame after her death. Similarly, her photographs were also a way in which she could publicize her life and achieve celebrity status. By wearing in a variety of costumes, assuming alternate personas, visiting the photographer’s studio frequently, and distributing her photographs, Bashkirtseff mimicked the behavior of celebrities and revealed her belief that she was, indeed, as interesting, worthy, confident, beautiful, and talented as any celebrity.

304 Solomon-Godeau, 73. Perhaps even more captivating and unusual were the Countess’ cropped photographs of her exposed legs or the series holding mirrors or frames. Particularly her images of her legs, feet, and even arms push the boundaries of propriety and risked aligning the Countess with prostitutes or other disreputable women.
Bashkirtseff as Artist

Once Bashkirtseff entered the Académie Julian in 1877, she began to spend increasingly less time in photographic studios. She concentrated primarily on channeling her energy into her art work, at home and at the studio. As she shifted her attention in this direction, Bashkirtseff produced several painted self-portraits that demonstrate her changing perceptions and interests. For the most part, these paintings and sketches are less experimental and playful than her photographs. They often strike a serious tone and forcefully assert her identity as an artist.

Bashkirtseff’s first painted attempt at self-portraiture, produced in 1879, is a small work, slightly over one foot in length (Fig. 4.19). The artist stands with a confident, perhaps even haughty, expression and gazes off towards the distance. She wears a long black dress with white accents at the collar, waist and cuffs. Although it initially looks like a traditional full-length pose, her body is dramatically turned and she leans back in a striking fashion. Describing this work in her journal, Bashkirtseff wrote: “[I am] standing, sharply turning on myself, my long train surrounding and outlining me, in a revolutionary pose, like Robespierre, my head held high as if I were challenging the universe…”305

As a female artist working in the predominately male art world of the nineteenth century, Bashkirtseff was, in a sense, a revolutionary, daily fighting battles for training and recognition. As Linda Nochlin noted in her canonical article, “Why Are There No Great Women Artists?,” to achieve success in the art world required a certain amount of unconventionality and a “good strong streak of rebellion.”306 Furthermore, Nochlin added that success was usually attained by adopting, “however covertly, the ‘masculine’ attributes of single-

305 As quoted in Marie Bashkirtseff (Nice : Musée des beaux-arts de Nice, 2001), 25. Original French from journal, 23 mars 1879, “debout retournée violemment sur moi-même, la traîne longue m’entourant et me dessinant ; mise en Robespierre, en révolutionnaire, la tête haute et l’air de braver l’univers….”
mindedness, concentration, [and] tenaciousness.” Bashkirtseff, I believe, was here associating herself with the revolutionary leader Robespierre as a way to emphasize her strength and determination to pursue her dreams even if it required challenging the universe. The identity association and gender-play at work in this image connects this painting to her photographs. Additionally, the element of guise and unabashed self-promotion evident here also links this work to her experimental photographic poses.

While at the Académie Julian, Bashkirtseff was approached by the founder of the school, Rodolph Julian, who suggested she and another student, Amélie Beaury-Saurel, both produce paintings of the students at work in the studio for their annual Salon submissions (Fig. 4.20). Julian was an astute businessman and probably encouraged the paintings as a publicity stunt: free advertisements for his studio hanging on the walls of the Salon. Nevertheless, Julian’s suggestion flattered the young Bashkirtseff and she accepted the offer, despite her initial misgivings. The result is a rare example of the interior of a women’s studio. Crowded but orderly, the workroom is portrayed as a creative center where women sketch, paint, and study; a model, dressed in a loin cloth and holding a long staff, poses probably as a young John the Baptist, while the women study his figure and capture his likeness on their canvases. As mentioned previously, Julian’s academy was one of the first to allow women to study from the nude, which was happening at least by 1877 according to Bashkirtseff’s journal. Here, however, she wisely covered her young model with a loin cloth and avoided the controversy that the image of a nude male model would present. The female figure on the far right wears a black dress with white accents, not unlike the Robespierre outfit of Bashkirtseff’s earlier portrait. She has inserted herself into the painting, wearing her standard studio attire and with her dark blond

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307 Ibid.
308 Bashkirtseff, Journal, (Mazarine), 314.
hair pulled away from her face. This almost hidden self-portrait, a long-established artistic tradition, shows the artist actively engaged in her work. Sketchbook in hand, she looks out at the model ahead and, not mingling with the other students, concentrates on her project.

Bashkirtseff finished the work in 1881 and submitted it to the Salon under the pseudonym of Mlle. Andrey. Bashkirtseff did not always use a pseudonym when painting, but perhaps because this type of work, a large contemporary composition, wasn’t her regular subject matter, or perhaps because she disliked the work, later stating that it was “unworthy of her,” she opted to use one here. It was around this same time that she invented another pseudonym that she would use to sign her feminist editorials discussing the circumstances of women artists. Under the name Pauline Orell, she wrote an article in La Citoyenne sharply critiquing the restriction of women artists from L’École des Beaux-Arts. Directing her comments to male artists, she wrote,

What we need is the possibility of working like men . . . We are asked with indulgent irony how many women have become great artists. Well! Gentlemen, there have been many, which is amazing, considering the tremendous difficulties they face.309

Using the same pseudonym, Bashkirtseff also wrote an editorial reviewing exhibited works at the Salon of 1881, including her own painting of the Académie Julian. In a game of shifting identities, one invented persona critiques the other, even if both are creations of the same artist. When she arranged a meeting with the prominent suffrage leader Hubertine Auclerc, she used her pseudonym and arrived in disguise, with a wig and darkened eyebrows. Likewise, at least once she disguised herself in a similar costume in order to paint undisturbed on the Island of La Grand Jatte, and once dressed as a boy in order to purchase art supplies. Clearly, she felt that public masks and pseudonyms were necessary to ensure her anonymity and protect her identity when she deemed it necessary.

309 Written under pseudonym Pauline Orell, La Citoyenne, 6 March 1881. Also quoted in Marie Bashkirtseff (Nice: Musée des Beaux Arts, 2005), np.
Some of her lesser known and less formal self-portraits present other sides of
Bashkirtseff’s personality. In a more psychological approach, Bashkirtseff’s close-up sketch of
her face, reveals a perhaps less beautiful face for a more thoughtful, introspective one (Fig. 4.21).
This, unlike the vaunting, self-absorbed image often promoted of Bashkirtseff, gives the viewer a
glimpse at a Bashkirtseff that is lost in inner thought, one who quietly ponders her future or her
past. Perhaps because this is only a sketch, Bashkirtseff is free to portray a side of herself rarely
seen in which she is unaware of her appearance or the viewer. This charcoal sketch places
Bashkirtseff firmly in a group of countless artists who recreate their visages on paper or canvas
as both a means to improve artistic skill and psychologically examine themselves. Probably
completed around 1883, Bashkirtseff may have used this image as a preparatory sketch or
concurrent study produced in conjunction with her larger painted self-portrait of the same year.

In her most ambitious and well-known self-portrait painting, her masks have disappeared
and, with a serious facial expression, she regards the viewer (Fig. 4.22). In the background, the
harp refers to her musical talents, and reminds the viewer of her decision to leave music and
focus primarily on painting. Both her solemn appearance and the presence of her brushes and
large palette promote her dedication to her profession as an artist. It is also in harmony with other
self-portraits of women artists who, more frequently than male artists, show themselves with the
instruments of their trade, as if to further emphasize and validate their profession. For example,
Vigée-Lebrun’s self-portrait of the previous century looks remarkably similar with the emphasis
on her palette and acknowledgement of the viewer (Fig. 4.23). Other contemporaries of
Bashkirtseff such as Anna Bilinska, a Polish artist who was also studying at the Académie Julian
with Bashkirtseff, or Milly Childers, created similar portraits that function as visual manifestoes
of their talent and occupations (Figs. 4.24 and 4.25).
Whether through bold associations with the powerful Robespierre, by showing herself absorbed in a studio commission, or by presenting her tools of the trade, in her painted self-portraits Bashkirtseff repeatedly emphasized her devotion to her chosen profession. As she increasingly committed herself to her profession, her self-portraits (and journal entries) emphasize an increasing passion to succeed as an artist. This fervor precluded the earlier experimental photographs in various guises; Bashkirtseff now firmly identified herself as an artist and no longer needed guises of traveling musicians, idle debutants, or monks to playfully expand her identity. In fact, at the end of 1883, the year she completed both her charcoal sketch and her large self-portrait, she recorded in her journal her feelings of regret at taking so many photographs in various costumes. She writes: “Several years ago I had a mania for being photographed in a thousand different costumes…. my family allowed me… they saw nothing wrong with it, ‘Marie is ravishing, she dresses up and dresses beautifully, it amuses her so let her do it!’ All who see these photographs take them for those of an actress…and the photographer himself must think all sorts of things.”310 Her rejection of these images has more to do with being misperceived as an actress rather than as a visual artist and also seems to signal an older Bashkirtseff regretting her youthful activities. These earlier photographs, however, were part of Bashkirtseff’s process of exploring her identity and helped her eventually get to a place of conviction of her identity as an artist.

But just because Bashkirtseff steered away from the masquerade and playful identity exchanges in her painted self-portraits doesn’t mean she completely abandoned these performances altogether. In the spring of 1884, Bashkirtseff initiated a correspondence with Guy

310 Bashkirtseff, Mon Journal, Cercle des Amis, 29 décembre 1883, 108-109. “Il y a quelques années de cela cette rage que j’ai eu de me photographier en mille costumes différents… Les miens m’ont laissé faire…ils n’y voyaient aucun mal, Marie est ravissante, elle se costume et s’habille à ravir, ça l’amuse et allez donc ! Tous ceux qui voient ces photographies les prennent pour celles d’une actrice…et le photographe lui-même a dû penser de drôles de choses…” Also quoted in Konz, 77.
de Maupassant, one of the authors she admired.\textsuperscript{311} Not disclosing her identity, she engages in a game with Maupassant, one in which she teasingly suggests that she may be a boring old English maid or a knowledgeable male professor. Maupassant joins in the banter, willingly to suspend his disbelief long enough to enter into a literary discussion and even suggest good brothels for his unknown ‘male’ writer. Bashkirtseff clearly can enjoy this play of identity more than Maupassant, as she knows who he is but he has no knowledge of her. Eventually, he even suggests that they meet at a theater or other crowded institution where she could decide whether to introduce herself or not. She ceases correspondence with him, either uninterested in having to take away her protective veil or perhaps beset by her weakened state as tuberculosis increasingly stripped her of energy. She died six months later on October 31, 1884. This final example of identity play illustrates that although Bashkirtseff may have refrained from explicit disguise in her later self-portraits, she was still interested in this pastime and merely channeled it into another medium.

I began this chapter with two quotes, both of which convey Bashkirtseff’s ardent desire for fame and celebrity status. In 1874, as a sixteen-year-old, Bashkirtseff predicted the day when her name would be known all over the world. Then again eight years later, Bashkirtseff expressed her belief that being famous and loved were the two keys to happiness. Contrary to conventional stereotypes of women valuing emotion and relationships above all else, Bashkirtseff deemed fame more worthy than love, having concluded that love would naturally follow fame. Her art and her life confirm this belief; she consistently sought renown and produced her art and her journal in order to achieve this goal. Undaunted by the difficulty of the

\textsuperscript{311} For an English translation of these letters, see Guy de Maupassant, \textit{I Kiss Your Hands: The Letters of Guy de Maupassant and Marie Bashkirtseff} (Emmaus, PA: The Rodale Press, 1954).
path, she forged ahead using tools such as beauty and femininity along with intriguing guises and performances to pave the way. Bashkirtseff was an imperfect heroine, but she was one of few willing to let the world see her weaknesses and limitations along with her strengths. She also was one of few women artists, prior to the twentieth century, so interested in her image. Her recurring need to see herself on a canvas, in a mirror, in a photograph, or described on the pages of her journal emphasizes a continual process of self-creation and a steady refining of her identity throughout her life. Her passionate yearning to be famous and have celebrity status provided the incentive to keep working and striving for success. Despite efforts to mythologize her as a martyr fated to die tragically young or to vilify her as a narcissist, she remains neither hero nor villain. Rather than a woman torn between self-images, she was a woman focused on experimenting and exploring herself and her roles as a female and an artist. In a time known for its strict polarization of gender ideologies, Bashkirtseff actively pursued her desire to become a successful artist and consistently manipulated her image and her career in order to achieve the fame. She would, no doubt, be delighted that her name is still being heard, perhaps as loud as thunder, in the twentieth-first century.
CHAPTER FIVE:

Women, Social Spaces, and Self-Portraits: Louise Breslau in Paris

“Mlle Breslau est notre premier peintre-femme, au moins pour le portrait, la seule, peut-être, qui ne soit pas la réplique d’un talent masculin.”

Critic Emile Hovelacque

“Le nom de Breslau sera dans le bouche de beaucoup.” Rodolphe Julian

Known primarily as a talented portrait painter, Louise C. Breslau often used her portrait skills on herself, producing numerous self-portraits throughout her long artistic career. These images capture her likeness but also share a kinship with earlier self-portraits by women artists that frequently functioned as personal manifestoes of their commitment to their art profession and advertisements of their skills. Like self-portraits by Vigée-Lebrun, Breslau’s images often included the tools of her trade—palette, maulstick, and easel—to confirm her status as a professional artist and also solidify her connection to women artists of the past. Breslau also produced several paintings which provide glimpses of her daily life in Paris, in which she is surrounded by supportive friends, roommates, and fellow artists. Just as Fantin-Latour’s Atelier in the Batignolles or Bazille’s Artist’s Atelier in the Rue La Condamine capture male spaces of artistic production, Breslau’s group images have a parallel purpose of presenting an active artistic space but one that is inhabited by women. Depicting scenes of work and leisure, these self-portraits reveal Breslau’s social support—women who were similarly pursuing their careers in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Breslau’s single and group self-portraits, which

will be examined in this chapter, clarify her identity as an artist and also link her identity to artistic traditions of the past. Breslau repeatedly used self-portraiture as a means to visually preserve her own likeness, solidify her connections with her female friends, and assert her sexual and artistic identity.

**Background and Scholarship**

Breslau is a lesser-known artist today, but in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, she was a popular portraitist. One of many women who immigrated to Paris to participate in the art world, Breslau quickly established herself and won various awards at the Salon. Notably, she received two gold medals, in 1889 and at the 1900 Exposition Universelle. One of her greatest achievements was receiving the Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur award from the French government in 1901. In addition to exhibiting regularly at the Paris Salon and other exhibitions in surrounding European countries, Breslau also was honored with two one-person exhibitions in Paris while she was still alive, in 1904 and 1910. Her paintings were purchased for museums during her lifetime and are still in many national collections in Germany, Switzerland, and France; these three countries all claim some right to Breslau as they are the nations where she was born, grew up, or worked, respectively. Until fairly recently in the last decades of the twentieth century, Breslau slipped out of public view and her oeuvre and contributions in the late nineteenth century were largely forgotten. To help correct this error, the following section will give a brief sketch of her life, training, and the current state of research on the artist.

Born in Munich in 1856, Louise Catherine Breslau was raised in Zurich, Switzerland, where her family moved when she was two years old after her father, Doctor Bernhard Breslau, a renowned doctor of obstetrics and gynecology, accepted a professorship at the University of
Zurich. Her father died unexpectedly in 1866, when Breslau was just ten years old, but the family remained in Switzerland rather than returning to Germany. Although Breslau considered herself Swiss, she would spend the majority of her life in France pursuing her career as an artist. Her penchant for drawing manifested itself early in her childhood. The oldest of four daughters, Breslau had fragile health as a child, suffering especially from a serious asthma condition. To entertain herself while resting alone in her bed, Breslau spent many hours sketching and drawing. She began taking drawing lessons at her convent school and later, as a teenager, studied with Swiss portrait and genre painter Eduard Pfyffer. Recognizing that Paris would provide greater opportunities for study and exhibition, Breslau decided to move to Paris at age nineteen. Although her mother had serious reservations about this plan, Breslau was resolutely determined and allayed her mother’s fears by agreeing to never paint male nudes. Once there, Breslau would remain in France for the rest of her life, returning to Switzerland only periodically to visit family or for exhibitions.

As a young woman artist in Paris, Breslau followed the best course for women at the time and quickly enrolled at the Académie Julian. There she studied under the tutelage of Rodolphe Julian and Tony Robert-Fleury. It was at the Académie that she developed her skills as a portrait painter, for which she is primarily known today. Although later in her career Breslau became a

314 Doctor Bernhard Breslau was the founder of the Zurich Gynecological Clinic and was well known for his advanced research on defining the sex of the fetus. See Karen Santschi-Campbell, “The Swiss Painter Louise Catherine Breslau (1856-1927): ‘It is not allowed for a woman to paint as well as you’”, (Masters thesis, California State University, 2000), 4.

315 Anne-Catherine Krüger, “Louise Breslau: Une artiste entre tradition et émancipation,” Louise Breslau de l’impressionnisme aux années folles (Lausanne, Switzerland: Skira/Seuil Publishers in conjuction with the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, 2001), 137. Pfyffer had trained in both Zurich and Karlsruhe, Germany and then later returned to Zurich to establish his own art school. Little is known about his training and Breslau did not mention it frequently. He did encourage her talent, however, and it may have been under his influence that she first formulated her plan to study in Paris. The Swiss organization for painters and sculptors, founded in 1865 with Ferdinand Hodler as its first president, restricted membership to males and there were far fewer options for women who desired to pursue the arts beyond an amateur capacity than in France. For more on the Swiss art scene during this period, see Santschi-Campbell, 7-10.

316 Madeleine Zillhardt, Louise Breslau et ses amis (Paris: Éditions des Portiques, 1932), 32. This stipulation was imposed by Breslau’s mother as well as their family guardian.
interested in floral still-lifes and some outdoor landscape scenes, her portraits, executed both in oil and in pastel, were the basis for the steady stream of positive critical acclaim and compose the majority of her oeuvre. Portraiture received strong emphasis at the Académie and later provided many women artists, Breslau among them, with the skills to accept private commissions and thereby achieve financial stability from their art.\(^{317}\) In addition to fostering the development of her artistic skills and confidence, the Académie allowed Breslau to meet other women and form important friendships, some that would endure throughout her life. In fact, much of what we know from this period of her life comes from two primary sources written by women she met at the Académie: Bashkirtseff’s journal and Madeleine Zillhardt’s publication *Louise Breslau et ses amis*.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Bashkirtseff saw Breslau as her only serious rival at the Académie, the only artist with equal ambition and more talent. Although their relationship was sometimes rocky, the two actually spent quite a bit of time together, both in the work setting of the studio and in more social settings such as the Louvre or other exhibitions in Paris with fellow colleagues. Bashkirtseff seems to have had less of an impact on Breslau than vice-versa. As Jane Becker reasonably concluded in her essay published in conjunction with the exhibition *Overcoming All Obstacles: Women of the Académie Julian*, Breslau was highly motivated and ambitious, but her competition was largely with herself rather than others.\(^{318}\) Later in her life, Breslau had high praise for Bashkirtseff, noting her tenacity for hard work and claiming she was predestined for success.\(^{319}\) Their rivalry was a little one-sided, it seems. Nevertheless,

\(^{317}\) Breslau’s colleagues Sarah Purser, Amélie Beaury-Saurel, and even American Cecilia Beaux also became well-known portraitists after their training at the Académie Julian. For more information on women at the Académie Julian, see Catherine Fehrer, “Women at the Académie Julian in Paris,” *Burlington Magazine*, vol 136, no. 1100, (November 1994): 752-757.

\(^{318}\) Becker, 91.

\(^{319}\) Breslau as quoted in Zillhardt, 228.
Bashkirtseff’s accounts provide meaningful information about the way Breslau was perceived by at least one of her colleagues and they also relate instances when she won monthly competitions or received constructive praise from the teachers at the Académie. In addition to Bashkirtseff, Breslau frequently associated with other women studying at the studio and formed important friendships that would sustain her. Among these friendships was that made with Madeleine Zillhardt, who would eventually become Breslau’s lifelong companion.

Zillhardt’s account of Breslau’s life was published five years after Breslau’s death in 1932. Initially printed in French, in 1979 it was translated into German, which was Breslau’s maternal language, but has never been published in English. Zillhardt met Breslau through her sister Jenny (both sisters were studying at the Académie Julian at the time) and over several years their friendship deepened. Madeleine moved in with Breslau near the end of 1887 and they remained together until Breslau died in 1927. Although Zillhardt frequently encouraged Breslau to record her experiences in an autobiography, Breslau demurred, insisting that her communication was with her paintbrush and paintings rather than the pen and paper. In the end, Zillhardt wrote her recollections of Breslau’s life in a 250-page volume, which includes a collection of several letters and texts written by Breslau at the end of the publication. Although not as compelling as the first-person narrative of Bashkirtseff’s life—which perhaps provides one reason why it has not been as popular—Zillhardt’s publication presents a broad view of Breslau’s life, beginning with her early childhood, following her studies in Paris, her triumphs, friendships and associations, as well as the impact of political events such as the Dreyfus Affair and World War I, and concludes with her death at the mature age of seventy.

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320 Madeleine Zillhardt, Louise Breslau und Ihre Freunde, German trans. by Ernst v. Bressendorf (Starnberg, Germany: Leopoldstr. 4, 1979).
321 Zillhardt, 7. To Zillhardt, Breslau confessed: “Je n’aime pas écrire, la plume n’est pas mon instrument: ce que j’avais à dire, je l’ai mis dans ma peinture.”
The year after Breslau’s death, L’École des Beaux-Arts in Paris organized a large retrospective of Breslau’s work, commemorating her life and showcasing 195 works from her oeuvre. In conjunction with this retrospective and in an attempt to honor the artist, Arsène Alexandre published the first bibliography on the artist this same year. Alexandre was an art critic for *Le Figaro* and had long been a champion of Breslau’s work. He reviewed her first one-person exhibition in 1904 and frequently discussed her works in exhibitions, culminating in his 1928 volume, which was part of the “Masters of Modern Art” series. This collection included volumes on Édouard Manet, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Henri Fantin-Latour, Auguste Rodin, Jean-François Raffaëlli, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, and, notably, Berthe Morisot. The inclusion of Breslau into this illustrious group indicates her presence as a significant artist at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century, particularly as she was one of very few women included. Alexandre’s volume, which included sixty black and white reproductions of her paintings, is still a principal source of information on the artist.

Like many women artists, shortly after her death, Breslau’s reputation began to wane and for almost fifty years, relatively little scholarly interest (as least as measured in publications and exhibitions) can be seen in Breslau. Even today, her name is unknown to many and few of her works are instantly recognizable. However, probably due to the increasing interest in women’s achievements and histories as part of the feminist movement in the 1970s, a small exhibition of her work was held on the fifty-year anniversary of her death in Switzerland in 1977. The

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323 Santschi-Campbell, 39-40. It was held at the Historisches Museum im Landvogteischloss, Baden, Switzerland.
following decade, German art historian Anne-Catherine Krüger published a four-volume dissertation and catalogue raisonné on the artist.\textsuperscript{324} This thorough work has significantly contributed to the scholarship on the artist and allows scholars access to information on the artist that has been difficult to find.\textsuperscript{325} More recently, in 2001, Krüger collaborated with the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne in organizing the largest Breslau exhibition since the 1928 retrospective. \textit{Louise Breslau de l’Impressionnisme aux année folles} included over a hundred works by the artist, gathered from various museums and private collections all over Europe, and the accompanying exhibition catalogue contains essays by Krüger, curator Catherine Lepdor, and Gabriel Weisberg.\textsuperscript{326} The exhibition and its beautiful catalogue will probably encourage new scholars to continue research on this remarkable artist.

Candidly, it was this publication which introduced me to much of Breslau’s oeuvre; several of her self-portraits were included in this exhibition and deserve greater attention. Thus far, no one has focused specifically on these images or discussed as how they fit into a larger context of women artists and self-portraiture at the end of the nineteenth century. The remainder of this chapter will focus on answering these questions by closely looking at her traditional single self-portraits as well as the self-portraits which include one or two other female figures. I propose that Breslau produced these images to document her social support system and the female spaces that enabled and fostered her artistic activity. They record her physical likeness but more important assert her versatility as an artist (skilled in various media) and her identification of herself as a painter. Like Bashkirtseff’s paintings and sketch at the end of her


\textsuperscript{325} In the catalogue raisonné section of Krüger’s publication, she lists 804 works, including oils, pastels, drawings, and lithographs, completed by the artist.

\textsuperscript{326} Catherine Lepdor, ed., \textit{Louise Breslau de l’impressionnisme aux années folles} (Lausanne, Switzerland: Skira/Seuil Publishers in conjunction with the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, 2001).
career, Breslau’s self-portraits indicate that she was highly conscious of her role in shaping the public’s perception of her and often used various types of self-portraits to construct and control this image.

**Early Self-Portraits in Paris**

One year after moving to Paris and beginning her studies at the Académie, Breslau moved into an apartment with two other women artists, underscoring the importance of these friendships that she had already formed. Sophie Schaeppi, another Swiss artist, and Maria Feller, an Italian singer, lived with Breslau for several years; Schaeppi, Feller, along with Irish artist Sarah Purser and French painter Jenny Zillhardt, the latter colleagues at the studio, and later Jenny’s sister Madeleine Zillhardt were five women who sustained Breslau over the years and often provided the support, both emotional and artistic, that she needed to persevere in her chosen career. Geographically far from her immediate family, she selected a group of women with whom she could relate and created a pseudo-family to support her. These friends appear regularly in her oeuvre; they were available, willing subjects who would pose for free, an obvious economic advantage, but they were also appealing to Breslau as a way to document her daily life and social world. One of her first images of herself in Paris shows the artist surrounded by these women.

*Le Portrait des Amis*, submitted to the 1881 Salon, was one of the first paintings to receive significant attention at the Salon and mark Breslau as a talented artist (Fig. 5.1). The ambitious painting, over five feet in length, depicts an interior with three figures sitting at a table, perhaps after a late-afternoon tea. The three are in close physical proximity but do not engage in

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327 With the encouragement of Tony Robert-Fleury, one of her teachers at the Académie, Breslau first submitted to the Salon in 1879. Her first submission, entitled *Tout Passé*, was a portrait of Maria Feller and was reviewed favorably by several art critics. The following year, Breslau submitted two paintings, a portrait and a genre painting of a shoemaker. Both were accepted, but they were hung high, a little hard to see, and largely ignored by the press. See Krüger, *Louise Breslau de l’impressionnisme aux années folles*, 52.
conversation or interact. Instead, it is a moment of quiet reflection; each of the figures appears to be focused on some individual task and thought. The central figure is Sophie Schaeppi, who looks up from her writing, pausing for a moment between creative bursts. In her preoccupation, she appears to have forgotten about her setting or the two companions that sit on either side. On her right, Maria Feller rests her chin on her hand, seemingly less intellectually engaged than Schaeppi but equally lost in the meanderings of her mind. Slightly slouching and with half-closed eyes, her body conveys a feeling of afternoon fatigue. Like Schaeppi, she doesn’t acknowledge her tablemates. Breslau, however, seated on the far right side of the canvas, does look toward her friends and is much more grounded in the moment than her two companions. With the canvas on an easel in front of her, Breslau may very well be studying her friends, anticipating putting them on her canvas momentarily. With teacup in hand and a cover over her canvas, she enjoys a brief break with her friends but will, undoubtedly, shortly return to her work. Her back is to the viewer and she presents only an almost-lost profile view of her face, providing much less visual information on her visage than that available for both of her friends.

The work received an honorable mention, an especially noteworthy distinction for a young, little-known artist. One anonymous critic heralded the work as “one of the attractions” of the Salon, and Breslau later declared that “artistically, it was the foundation of my career.”

But, despite the popular reviews of her work for the 1881 Salon, the mundane and very casual atmosphere of the painting didn’t escape notice. The inclusion of the dog on the table in particular provoked ridicule in the popular press. *Le Journal Amusant* printed a caricature of the work in which the circle of women has been transformed into a family of dogs (Fig. 5.2). Renaming the work ‘La famille Zoé Chien-Chien’, the caricaturist recognized and capitalized on

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Breslau’s unidealized images of real women, unflatteringly comparing them to dogs. The caricature also, I believe, responds to the unusually relaxed ambiance of three friends together, unconcerned about following appropriate rules of decorum for female conduct. Breslau, in her first public self-portrait, presented herself in an unidealized and casual manner, among equally informal friends and roommates. It is an unusual self-portrait and one that is almost unrecognizable. Examining the painting more closely will aid in understanding Breslau’s self-conception and the female milieu in which she lived and worked.

Breslau’s preliminary drawing for the work reveals several important changes that Breslau made in this work when she put it on canvas (Fig. 5.3). Originally, Breslau reversed the composition, sketched four figures rather than three, included a male friend smoking a pipe on the right, and had the figure on the left reading a paper rather than sitting in front of an easel. By the time she put the image on canvas, the male figure had disappeared completely. Breslau consciously chose to remove the man and create a purely female space. It is important to note that Breslau had a number of close male friends. She frequently associated with Edgar Degas, with whom she discussed art and her work, and the sculptor Jean Carriès, who will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Additionally, painter Jean-Louis Forain and sculptor Paul-Albert Bartholomé regularly visited with Breslau, often stopping by at her studio or inviting her to join them at a nearby café. She was also friends with Henri Fantin-Latour, Puvis de Chavannes, and Jean-François Raffaëlli. Thus, the man comfortably resting a hand on his face and smoking a pipe in Breslau’s sketch could reasonably be any of these friends. Breslau’s deliberate choice to remove the man may have been simply a matter of practical concerns—time constraints or willingness to model, for example—but the resulting painting is quite different.

329 Despite the removal of the male friend, the painting has been consistently referred to as *Le Portrait des Amis* (not *amies*). In the exhibition catalogue of *Overcoming All Obstacles: Women at the Académie Julian* from the Dahesh Museum in 2000, the curators referred to the painting as *Les Amies*. 
than the initial idea; it is a visual representation of her daily home and studio environment. Instead of including a visiting male friend, and even another female friend, Breslau recreates a scene from her intimate daily life by painting the women with whom she regularly interacted and lived.

Within this all-female space, Breslau inserted herself. Rather than the unidentified figure reading the journal, the right side of the canvas now includes the mastermind behind the work. Although she is not in a moment of actual creative production, Breslau depicts herself as an artist. There are obvious references to her work through the included easel and the position of her body, angled toward the painting, rather than toward her friends. Additionally, unlike her roommates who are lost in their own thoughts, Breslau purposefully watches them; she depicts herself as an artist who is continually looking, actively analyzing the visual world around her. Although we do not see the subject matter depicted on the easel in front of the painted Breslau, it is as if she is giving us a private preview of what will appear on her easel. She is studying her roommates, who are her models for the work in front of her. Of course, this is a clever double-play; the painting that Breslau is creating is Le Portrait des Amis. In the painting, Breslau looks at Schaeppi and Feller in preparation for putting them on her canvas; she is the one at work, just as she is actually the one outside the canvas, in the position of the viewer, painting herself, Schaeppi, Feller, and even their loyal dog.

As models for Breslau, Schaeppi and Feller have time to daydream, capture thoughts in their journal (Schaeppi), or even look bored (Feller). It is highly likely that Schaeppi and Feller had a significant amount of time to journal or ponder during the posing sessions for this painting. Throughout her career, Breslau disliked using photography as a painting aid, insisting that the
aims of photography were contrary to that which an artist desires to obtain. As a consequence, her portrait sessions were sometimes lengthy or numerous. It follows then that for *Le Portrait des Amis*, the expressions of Schaeppi and Feller are their natural and unguarded reactions to sitting quietly for this long posing session. This is not, as one might assume at first glance, a depiction of a traditional afternoon tea time. The table is not set for everyone and no one except Breslau is actually holding a teacup. It is, instead, a candid painting of Breslau’s roommates as they posed for her. Avoiding formalities of perfect posture, fashionable clothing, properly coiffed hair or idealized features, Breslau permits them to casually pose in their makeshift studio/dining room space.

Breslau’s image of herself in the painting strongly emphasizes her thinking mind and her facility in looking—both critical skills for an artist. She chose to depict herself in front of the easel, making no mistake about her profession. Intriguingly, Breslau deliberately gives the viewer minimal information about her physical appearance or facial features. Although she has carefully presented elements of her identity—such as her role as an artist and her support group of female friends, one would hardly be able to identify the artist based on such a portrait. Not only does she not acknowledge the viewer, but she places her back to the viewer and gives only a partial profile. In a way, by so doing, she preserves her own privacy and her own social world while presenting it to the public. This was a largely successful strategy because for the most part, the press failed to comment on Breslau’s presence in her painting. Perhaps because the title failed to include mention of this, or perhaps because Breslau’s figure is turned away and the easel is not quite as prominent as it might be, critics commented primarily on the successful integration of the figures, the composition, and the stylistic choices.

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330 Zillhardt, 227.
Le Portrait des Amis belongs to a large group of paintings in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that depict informal studio spaces and artists at work or leisure in these creative spaces. For example, Frédéric Bazille’s Painter’s Atelier in the Rue La Condamine, 1870, depicts several of the artist’s friends, including Monet, Manet, Renoir, Zola, and Bazille himself (painted by Manet) socializing in his studio (Fig. 5.4). The same year, Henri Fantin-Latour produced A Studio at Batignolles, a more formal studio-type image honoring Manet and the generation of artists who followed him (Fig. 5.5). Renoir painted a social gathering at his studio in 1876, conveying the concept of his home as a meeting place of ideas, exchange, and friends (Fig. 5.6). These are just a few of numerous examples from the period that illustrate the studio as a popular trope for artists. While many of these images portray exclusively male spaces, Alfred Stevens’ In the Studio of 1888 depicts a completely female studio space and as such this painting provides an effective point of comparison with Breslau’s Le Portrait des Amis (Fig. 5.7).

Like Breslau’s painting, Stevens’ image also includes three women, but they are not all artists. Instead, each of them engages in different role in the art world: an artist, her model, and a collector. The studio space is elaborately decorated with expensive furniture, an animal-skin rug, framed paintings, a Van Eyckian circular mirror, and exotic foreign objects such as fans, screens, and the Japanese robe that the model wears. The luxury items cater to the contemporary vogue for Orientalism and, combined with the lavish interior and beautiful women, result in a fantasy space overflowing with expensive and unfamiliar objects to please the eye. Although it is a space inhabited and ostensibly controlled by women, the scene was painted by a man and ultimately designed for a male audience. The women are part of the collection of beautiful objects to visually admire and enjoy. Of course, Stevens had the financial means to have a
studio space that looked like this and to engage models to assume these roles. Ironically, this economic stability was established due to the popularity of his images of fashionable bourgeois women and also by teaching women. Few women artists, if any, would have had the money for such opulent surroundings. For the majority of women, their “studio” spaces would look much more like Breslau’s painting—regular domestic spaces doubling as painting areas. Although some women eventually had a studio room specifically for their work, many such as Breslau, Morisot, and Gonzalès primarily painted at home and in whatever space was available. For example, Morisot often used a parlor to paint and would be forced to move her easel and tools or screen them off when visitors arrived. Instead of Stevens’ imagined room of spacious splendor, Breslau grounded her painting firmly in her own reality, insisting upon including identifiable figures and a tight space that resembles their small apartment. A photograph taken in 1890 of Breslau, Zillhardt, Schaeppi, and a visiting Swedish artist in their apartment, located on the avenue des Ternes, shows the women gathered around the dining table, not unlike the scene in the painting (Fig. 5.8). Breslau smokes a cigarette, Zillhardt comfortably drapes her arm around Breslau’s shoulder, and Schaeppi turns to address the other artist entering the room. The hanging paintings around the room verify their professional pursuits. This photograph was taken nine years after Breslau’s Le Portrait des Amis, so many of the paintings and surrounding objects in the apartment may not have been present when the women were still struggling to establish themselves in Paris, but the photograph does confirm the strength of their friendships and the

331 Griselda Pollock has suggested, for example, that the three women in Stevens’ painting may all be facets of the actress Sarah Bernhardt, a woman whose wealth and celebrity would have enabled such a lifestyle and setting. Stevens was Bernhardt’s painting teacher for a short time and he produced several paintings of the famous performer. Pollock argues that the model striking a pose symbolizes Bernhardt’s acting profession, the collector represents her as an art patron, and the woman standing beside the easel confirms her status as artist. For a more detailed explanation of this argument and further discussion of the painting see Griselda Pollock, “Louise Abbéma’s Lunch and Alfred Stevens’s Studio: theatricality, feminine subjectivity and space around Sarah Bernhardt, Paris, 1877-1888,” in Local/Global: Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 99-119. For more information on Stevens’ style and career, see Christiane Lefebvre, Alfred Stevens: 1823-1906 (Paris: Brame & Lorenceau, 2006).
atmosphere within which Breslau worked. It was within this social setting of female support and in her informal dining room studio space that Breslau wished to portray herself with her first self-portrait.

One final but crucial point about *Le Portrait des Amis* is that it shifts effortlessly between genre, portraiture, and self-portraiture, defying easy categorization. A commonplace, modern-life scene, it falls within the definition of a genre painting, but the close attention to the specific physiognomy and expressions of Schaeppi and Feller pull it in the direction of modern portraiture. Of course, Manet, Degas, Morisot, and Monet had led the way in the late 1860s and 1870s for this kind of blurring of hierarchical labeling and genre boundaries. Think, for example, of Manet’s *Young Lady with a Parrot* (1866) and *The Balcony* (1868-1869) or Monet’s *Camille* (*Lady in the Green Dress*) (1866), all of which depict modern life scenes but challenge classification as genre in their size and consciously constructed poses but they are not quite portraiture either.\(^\text{332}\) Degas’ *Carriage at the Races* (1872) and *Sulking* (*La Bouderie*) (c. 1872) also confound conventional sorting; they are at once portraits of families and friends, but their identities and even their relationships to each other are rather ambiguous.\(^\text{333}\) Breslau continues this tradition of a hybridization of genre and portraiture with *Le Portrait des Amis*, but also makes an original contribution by adding her self-portrait into the mix. While all of the previous

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\(^{332}\) Castagnary’s discussion of *Le Balcon* (and *Le Déjeuner dans l’Atelier*) at the Salon of 1869 indicate his confusion at how to respond to these works. His words indicate his inability to read what the narrative is or how to identify the women portrayed. “On the Balcony I see two women, one of them very young. Are they sisters? Is this a mother and a daughter? I don’t know. And the one has seated herself, apparently just to enjoy the view of the street; the other is putting on gloves as if she were just about to go out. This contradictory attitude bewilders me.” From Castagnary, *Salons (1857-70)* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier,1892), Vol 1, 364-5. As quoted in John House, “Degas’ ‘Tableaux de Genre’” in *Dealing with Degas: Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision* (New York: Universe, 1992), 83. For more discussion of genre scenes and their emergence at the end of the Second Empire, see Leila W. Kinney, “Genre: A Social Contract?,”*Art Journal* (Winter 1997): 267-277.

\(^{333}\) John House argues that there are a small group of paintings from 1867-73 within Degas’ oeuvre that can be classified as types of genre paintings. They differ from earlier and later images by the artist in their treatment of gender roles, relationships between men and women, and their depiction of female figures in a more individualized fashion than typical for Degas. He specifically looks at *La Bouderie* and *Interior* as examples of ‘tableaux de genre.” See John House, “Degas’ ‘Tableaux de Genre,”’ 81-94.
examples indicate that the lines between portraiture and genre were being tested and redefined, none of them were also self-portraits. Even Morisot’s *The Cradle* (1872), which is a recognizable portrait of her sister Edma and her newborn child and combines portraiture and genre in a less puzzling manner than her male counterparts, is not a self-portrait. Breslau implemented this modern method of frustrating the distinctions between portraiture and genre, but also added a new dimension of self-portraiture. By inserting herself into this genre setting, she claims ownership of the space and confirms that this is not merely a hypothetical genre scene but an identifiable dining room where she lived and worked with other women; it is, as the title verifies, a portrait of Breslau with friends.

Fantin-Latour similarly described his *Atelier in the Batignolles* as a “gathering of friends.” Breslau’s *Le Portrait des Amis* provides the perfect foil to Fantin’s version and launches a critique against the pervasive perception of a male-centered art world. Breslau greatly admired both Fantin-Latour and Manet and their paintings were among those that Breslau would seek first at the Paris Salon. Here, however, Breslau shows that a productive artistic space can be composed of all women and makes the informal studio space at her dining room table more believable as a real-life scene than Fantin’s painting. Fantin only obliquely refers to himself through the collection of objects on the left side of the table (Fig. 5.5) while Breslau paints herself at work, albeit with her back to the viewer. Additionally, while Fantin asserts that the future of French painting rests in the hands of a select group of friends and disciples of

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335 Zillhardt, 82.
336 Gabriel Weisberg has identified the statue of Athena, small ceramic and other objects depicted on the table as items that were in Fantin’s studio and were emblems of his belief in the unification of the fine and decorative arts as well as his embrace of Japonisme. Weisberg also studied earlier sketches of this painting and proposed that originally there was a woman sketching the gathering on the far left side. Intriguingly, this makes the comparison with Breslau’s painting even more compelling. Both initially planned to include members of opposite sex but opted to paint them out in the end, each producing all-male or all-female spaces. See Gabriel P. Weisberg, “Fantin-Latour and Still Life Symbolism in *Un Atelier aux Batignolles,*” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (December 1977): 205-215.
Manet, Breslau shows that there were others (particularly women) who were also learning from artists like Manet and Fantin, and making their own mark on the art world. Ultimately, Breslau’s *Le Portrait des Amis* is significant in three primary ways: it confirms the existence of an active group of female artists who supported each other in the latter decades of the century, establishes Breslau’s interest in self-portraiture early in her career, and illustrates her clever ability to blur the boundaries between genre and (self) portraiture.

Although *Le Portrait des Amis* presented a self-portrait with a partially concealed body and profile, another work from the following year shows that Breslau also engaged in more traditional forms of self-portraiture, if privately. In 1882, Breslau completed an arresting and remarkable self-portrait drawing that is almost the antithesis of *Le Portrait des Amis*. A small bust sketch rather than a large multi-figure composition, this self-portrait drawing reveals rather than conceals (Fig. 5.9). Sketching only the basic lines of a blouse, Breslau focused her efforts on the face and hair. Using primarily black with subtle contours of red and striking highlights of white, Breslau created an almost perfectly frontal view (her left side is barely shifted so that her right side is slightly more prominent than the left). Although her forehead is not wrinkled in concentration, the slight focus of her eyebrows and even the natural, somewhat untidy, hair indicate her thorough absorption in this study of her features. Unlike in *Le Portrait des Amis*, here Breslau’s full face is depicted and she powerfully gazes at the viewer. This gaze conveys at once both palpable intelligence and clear focus; it is the gaze of an artist, one who is accustomed to looking carefully. Breslau’s contemporaries often noted her intensity and determination, impressively communicated in this self-portrait. For example, Madeleine Zillhardt’s first impression of Breslau, recorded in her memoirs about the artist, could be an almost precise description of Breslau’s countenance in the drawing. Seeing Breslau at work in the studio,
Zillhardt wrote: “Perched high on her stool, palette in one hand, brush in the other, she was painting. Wild locks of her black, curly hair fluttered around her powerful and headstrong face, which encased greenish eyes, mostly open, which [had] a piercing and fixed gaze like that of certain wild birds.” The drawing certainly conveys the fluttering, curly hair and piercing gaze.

Today a part of the permanent collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Dijon, the drawing may not have been exhibited during Breslau’s lifetime. There is no record that it was, and as a drawing, it follows that this would have been meant as a private study piece. It is comparable to Bashkirtseff’s 1883 drawing (Fig. 4.21), which also presents a psychologically searching, unidealized image combined with a penetrating gaze. Breslau avoided idealizing her subjects, and, perhaps because she was not particularly physically attractive, she extended this preference even to images of herself. Despite her endless praise of Breslau’s talent, Bashkirtseff described her thus: “Breslau is skinny, odd, ravaged, and though with an interesting head, no grace, boyish and alone!” Small contemporary sketches confirm this description—thin, somewhat severe and serious looking, and without any exceptionally remarkable features (Figs. 5.10 and 5.11). Of course, in comparison with these caricatures, which typically exaggerate negative features, Breslau’s own sketch is remarkable in terms of its striking intensity but also may be the most attractive of all of her self-portraits.

These two initial self-portraits, one among her friends and one unaccompanied, are representative of the two ways in which Breslau would repeatedly visualize herself on numerous canvases throughout her long career. Breslau’s group self-portraits, like Le Portrait des Amis,

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337 Zillhardt, 34 and also quoted in Lepdor, 11. Original French: “Haut perchée sur un tabouret, la palette d’une main, le pinceau de l’autre, elle était en train de peindre. Les mèches rebelles de ses cheveux noirs et frisés voltigeaient autour d’un front puissant et volontaire, sous lequel étaient enchâssés des yeux verdâtres, largement entr’ouverts, au regard perçant et fixe comme celui de certains oiseaux sauvages....”
provide a detailed blueprint of her emotional and artistic support group. They document the exchanges of her daily life and record the most important female relationships that she had during her career. Her single self-portraits have different purposes. Some, like the 1882 sketch, have both aesthetic and practical functions; they show the artist improving her skill with various media (such as charcoal or pastel) and developing her ability to capture moods and personality. Others respond to specific events of her life and emphasize her profession as an artist. These subsequent self-portraits, both with others and alone, will be closely analyzed in next sections.

**Intimate Relationships and Identity**

After two and half years of study at the Académie, and with the success of *Le Portrait des Amis*, Breslau began working more independently of the studio. From the early 1880s, Breslau regularly received portrait commissions, which helped supplement her meager income and family allowance. Additionally, from 1881-1883, she accepted a job producing illustrations for the journal *La Vie Moderne*, published by the well-known editor, publisher, and patron of the arts, Georges Charpentier. It was also upon the heels of her honorable mention with *Le Portrait des Amis* that the art dealer Louis Martinet offered her a contract of three hundred francs per month for all her work. She agreed to this proposal and for a year, exhibited all her works in his gallery. In 1883, Breslau traveled to the Netherlands and was particularly impressed with Flemish and Dutch art. Despite these positive developments, Breslau suffered a period of discouragement and artistic crisis at the end of 1884 and 1885. Many of her former associates from the Académie Julian had returned to their native countries or had moved back to live with their families. Breslau missed the constant artistic exchange with friends and roommates and began to question her life and her direction as an artist.
It perhaps should not be surprising, considering how much Breslau valued meaningful relationships, particularly with fellow artists, that it would be two artists who would help Breslau regain her confidence in herself and her work. She briefly returned to the Académie Julian during this period of melancholy and it was during this second brief visit that she met Madeleine Zillhardt. As mentioned previously, their relationship developed slowly but was a source of support and encouragement from their initial meeting. The other relationship was an intense affair with sculptor Jean Carriès, to whom Breslau was introduced through Jules Breton at the opening of the Salon of 1886.\textsuperscript{339} This appears to be the only serious heterosexual romantic relationship that Breslau had. Both had strong personalities and were extremely committed to and passionate about their art. Carriès frequently visited her home and the two would discuss some of their shared interests: “Gothic art and cathedrals, Flemish primitives, Holbein, Dürer….\textsuperscript{340} During this period, Carriès requested a portrait in his studio, which Breslau commenced in 1886. The painting is an almost full-length portrait of the artist, in his bohemian studio environment surrounded by all kinds of accessories of the artist’s life (Fig. 5.12). Carriès stands with sculpting tool in hand and to his left is a bust of Frans Hals, upon which the sculptor is apparently working.\textsuperscript{341} Several other busts are behind him, as well as sketch books, empty frames, and bottles, creating a cluttered and busy space. The painting took much longer than Breslau anticipated because Carriès refused to pose on a regular basis. However, she exhibited it in the Salon of 1887 and it is now a part of the permanent collection of the Petit Palais in Paris.

In the early stages of their relationship, Breslau was fascinated by Carriès and described him as “very handsome.” She enjoyed being with him, but acutely felt that they were somehow

\textsuperscript{339} Zillhardt, 12.
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{341} Krüger, \textit{Louise Breslau de l'impressionnisme aux années folles}, 57. The identification and confirmation that the bust is Frans Hals was made by Philippe Durey. See Philippe Durey, “L’Atelier du sculpteur vu par les peintres,” in cat. exp. \textit{La Sculpture française au XIXe siècle} (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1986), 4-5.
mismatched. Confiding her feelings to Sarah Purser, Breslau wrote of her ambivalent reaction to spending time with Carriès: “Sometimes we take long walks in Paris. Or we go to the Louvre. There we are happy, because our souls understand each other. Then, in the street when we see the windows of the shops and we see our reflections side by side, we are surprised at the strangeness of our appearance. This amuses him. It makes me uncomfortable.”342 Their intense passion for art drew them together in places like the Louvre, but somehow seeing herself with Carriès made Breslau distinctly uncomfortable. Perhaps she was self-conscious about her plain appearance next to his “fort beau” looks, or perhaps the malaise stemmed from her own recognition of her sexual identity. In any case, their relationship became somewhat strained due in part to their frustrations over the portrait painting of Carriès. Breslau’s repeated requests for posing sessions and Carriès’ declaration that the work appeared “dirty” and “sad” led to general feelings of annoyance and irritation.

In early 1887, Breslau broke off the relationship with Carriès. She again confided in Purser about the details. Her language disclosed her dissatisfaction with this heterosexual relationship and her belief that it was probably a personal character flaw. She wrote, “I finished my affair with Carriès and I failed to make love with him for good. I love him but I believe that I prefer imagination to reality. An obvious flaw.”343 Breslau’s conclusion that her inability to make love with Carriès was the result of something wrong with her is a consequence of nineteenth-century beliefs about homosexuality as a deviant practice. While she recognized that society did not endorse her homosexual preferences, Breslau felt unable to renounce them, and

342 Letter from Breslau to Sarah Purser, quoted in Krüger, 58. “Quelque fois nous faisons de longues courses dans Paris. Ou nous allons au Louvre. Là nous sommes bien, car nos âmes se comprennent. Alors dans la rue lorsque nous rencontrons une glace de magasin et que nous y voyons mirée notre image côte à côte, nous nous étonnons de l’étrangeté de notre aspect. Lui cela l’amuse. Moi cela me donne un malaise.”
her failed relationship with Carriès confirmed this. In the same letter to Purser, Breslau confessed her distress and shame about her sexuality, but accepted that she could not change it. “To my core, I am ashamed at the mauvaiseté of my instincts, but I feel that conversion will never happen.”\textsuperscript{344} Breslau’s homosexuality was part of the reason she could no longer continue her close association with Carriès.

Although their relationship lasted slightly less than a year, the two would remain friends and Breslau took it very hard when Carriès died of lung cancer eight years later in 1894.

Zillhardt declared that the blow of his death and her mother’s, which had occurred the year before, had a significant impact on Breslau. Discussing these losses, and particularly that of Carriès, Zillhardt explained, “She [Breslau] never recovered her carefree and youthful happiness, nor did she ever forget her young comrade.”\textsuperscript{345} In fact, years later, in 1912, Breslau collected money from friends of Carriès for a tomb statue at Père Lachaise cemetery. Although she halted their romantic relationship, Breslau continued to value Carriès’ friendship and honored his life even years later with the construction of his tomb. Perhaps one of the most valuable consequences of her relationship with Carriès was her complete acknowledgement of her lesbian identity and her resolve not to settle for something less satisfying. Indeed, shortly thereafter Breslau strengthened her ties with Madeleine Zillhardt and wholeheartedly committed herself to this relationship. It is particularly significant then that her next self-portrait, Contre-jour, can be seen as a visual manifesto of her sexuality and her loving relationship with Zillhardt.

Exhibited with Le Portrait des Amis and Le Portrait de Jean Carriès at the Exposition Universelle of 1889, Contre-jour was newly finished and received much critical attention, both

\textsuperscript{344} Letter to Sarah Purser from Breslau, 28 février 1887, quoted in Lepdor, 19. “Au fond je suis honteuse de la mauvaiseté de mes instincts—mais je sens que la conversion ne se fera jamais.”

\textsuperscript{345} Zillhardt, 15. “Jamais elle ne retrouva son insouciante et juvénile gaieté, jamais non plus elle n’oublia son jeune camarade.”
positive and negative (Fig. 5.13). An innovative double portrait, *Contre-jour* depicts Breslau with her companion Zillhardt in their apartment, shortly after the two had moved in together the previous year. Although the subject matter, an interior scene of two women in a domestic setting, was not unusual, the painting is noteworthy because it documents Breslau’s long interest in light and dark, and also because it attests to the importance of the companionship of Zillhardt. Thus, both artistically and personally, it signifies Breslau’s willingness to push acceptable boundaries. Further, together with the two other paintings exhibited at the Exposition Universelle, the three canvases illustrate the changes in Breslau’s social support group.

In the painting, Breslau sits on the window ledge and looks out towards the viewer. The light that comes in from the window illuminates parts of the room but leaves more than half her face in shadow. Intriguingly, this clever technique heightens the interest in her physiognomy and leaves the viewer straining to see through the shadows. Zillhardt sits within touching distance of Breslau and looks intently at her, showing her face in profile view, and confirming her devotion to the artist. Between them, on the window sill, a rose plant blossoms and three pink roses, in various states of bloom, flourish. This not-so-subtle symbol of the developing love between the two women is further emphasized in the fruit on the table and the flowers in a clear glass. Breslau’s white overcoat may be a protective garment for painting, and the pot of paintbrushes at the far right also reminds the viewer of her profession. The book in her hand underscores her intelligence and intellect. Indeed, the different activities of the two women has led Catherine Lepdor to suggest that Breslau presents herself as the intellectual, “cerveau” of the couple and Zillhardt, holding a small cat, acts as the guardian of the home.346

Critics were fascinated with the complicated composition, and particularly with the zones of light and shadow. One reviewer summarized many critics’ comments with these words: “The

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346 Lepdor, 20.
two young ladies of Miss Breslau (*Contre-jour*) created a sensation not only because of the problem, solved here, of the light, but also because of the sumptuousness of this light and the perfect rendering of atmospheric perspective.”347 The painting won a gold medal, but did not avoid some disapproving appraisals. When the city of Berne proposed to purchase the painting, after Breslau exhibited it in 1890 at the Première Exposition nationale Suisse des beaux-arts, the president of the Commission fédérale des beaux-arts adamantly opposed the acquisition. His report maintained that the painting had no composition, the coloring was abominable, and that there was an overall sense of decay and putrification in the room. In the end, his strong opposition swayed the committee and they decided against the purchase. Fortunately, six years later when Breslau exhibited the work in Geneva, the city of Berne reaffirmed its desire to acquire the painting and this time successfully purchased it for the Musée des beaux-arts.

In *Contre-jour*, as with *Le Portrait des Amis*, few critics recognized or commented upon the self-portrait of the artist in the work. Again, the title avoids any obvious identification of the two women, so this is fairly understandable. Even more fascinating than this oversight, though, is the way that Breslau presented herself partially hidden from view in both portraits. The seated stance with back to viewer and the profile view from *Le Portrait des Amis* has been transformed into a frontal standing pose and a full-face view in *Contre-jour*. While this body posture is much more open to the viewer, the shadow over her face obscures a clear examination of her facial features. It is equally challenging to precisely determine her mood. In general, her posture and demeanor convey a confident, calm person, but her exact facial expression is difficult to ascertain. Is it just a dark shadow across her face or are there dark circles under her eyes? A preliminary sketch for

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the painting contains a sense of anxiety as well as a suggestion of sadness to her aloof expression, indicating that there is more than just a game of the light and dark at play in the portrait (Fig. 5.14). Although the lighting is not quite as dramatic in the sketch, the dark, quick contour lines around her cheeks, eyes, and forehead create a sense of agitation and anxiousness. In the final work, however, this anxiousness has been almost eliminated by the shadow, leaving the viewer to read and interpret her face through the dramatic lighting. Arsène Alexandre thought he saw sadness in Breslau’s face in Contre-jour and, not knowing exactly how to explain it, suggested that it was perhaps due to past regrets or anxieties about all that she might not accomplish in the future.348

Quoting Rousseau’s Confessions, T.J. Clark affirmed that self-portraiture in the late eighteenth century was based on self-exposure, on a premise of making “my soul transparent to the reader’s eye.”349 Rousseau insisted that the danger in self-portraiture rests not in saying too much, but in the fear that “I may not say everything, and keep the truth from being spoken.” Clark’s insightful analysis of Jacques-Louis David’s 1794 self-portrait, vis-à-vis Rousseau’s Confessions, provides a valuable model for looking a self-portraiture in general and also for Breslau’s self-portrait in Contre-jour. In fact, I’d like to argue that Breslau’s strategy for self-portraiture here is very similar to what David was doing almost a century earlier. David’s painting, which may have been seen by Breslau in the collection of the Louvre, was created by the artist during a political and personal crisis. Imprisoned at the Hôtel des Fermes days after the demise of Robespierre’s regime, David feared for his life; many Robespierre supporters had already been guillotined and David knew that his fate could easily be the same. At this time of captivity, when his freedom had been taken, his hopes of a new government dashed, and his life

348 Alexandre, 42.
in the balance, David asked one of his pupils to bring him a mirror from which he could paint a self-portrait (Fig. 5.15). This image, then, was produced at a crossroads, a time of personal and political uncertainty for David. The echoes of Rousseau’s writings form an apposite parallel to this painting of a resolute, cool, professional David who, as Clark points out, had nothing to lose and therefore chose to risk everything in the name of honest, even brutal, self-exposure.

What really was at risk in this painting? Certain elements of the portrait—the regal bearing, the elegant clothing, and the palette and brushes—are traditional and even common in self-portraiture, providing an indication of status, class, and profession. These are to be expected and not at all risky. The real intrigue of the work, of course, revolves around David’s face and particularly how the artist depicted his ‘swoln cheek,’ the strange outgrowth or tumor on the left side of his face. On the one hand, David is compelled both by a sense of imminent death and also by Rousseauian sensibilities to bear all, including his imperfection. But it was more than just personal vanity or narcissistic pride that David risked losing by consciously including this deformity. With the popularity of physiognomy in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, physical features had more than purely superficial appeal. One’s countenance, expressions, and especially the size of one’s facial features all had particular meaning and could be read to interpret character, integrity, and temperament. Thus, David’s facial protrusion was seen by some as an exterior symptom of an inner failing or weakness. The words of a Royalist in 1792 confirm this interpretation, “I saw that David, so stupid, so wicked, and so veritably marked with the brand of reprobation. No one could be more hideous, more diabolically ugly. If he is not
hung, there’s no believing in physiognomies.”

Ugliness indicated not just physical deficiency but moral corruption and degeneracy.

For monarchists, or anyone of a different political persuasion, the irregularity of David’s face confirmed his status as a traitor to his country. There were grave consequences for including this as part of his self-portrait. The artist acutely understood his own ability to completely remove this flaw or conceal it with a profile view, but that would be akin to hiding and would be a rejection of self-exposure. David approaches this dilemma with characteristic acumen. He hints of his physical imperfection, but turns his face just slightly so as to shadow that portion of his face rather than highlight it. The edge of his right lip droops slightly and the shadow makes the contours from his jaw and to his upper cheek difficult to determine. The viewer easily perceives that there is something slightly amiss in that region, but we cannot precisely define it. There is an omission or, as Clark puts it, ‘an ellipsis at the heart of things.’ David unmistakably includes this facial feature but does it subtly, so that in the end, there is a greater emphasis on his strong gaze and a de-emphasis on his difference from others.

Breslau’s self-portrait in Contre-jour shares certain elements of David’s self-portrait. Although Breslau did not have any physical facial features that would turn public opinion against her, her sexual identity was not publically acceptable and she wrestled with living with it despite its “mauvaiseté.” This painting links Breslau with Zillhardt and shows them at home together, comfortable with each other and their relationship. Nevertheless, Breslau distances the viewer from the scene by employing the shadow across her face like David (Fig. 5.16). The darkness effectively causes the viewer to strain a bit, wishing to read her face more accurately; it heightens the interest, but simultaneously pushes the viewer away, at least emotionally, from

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350 Quoted in Clark, 257. Original in Journal à Deux Liards, July 1792, “J’ai vu ce David si bête, si méchant, et si véritablement marqué du sceau de la réprobation. On n’est pas plus hideux et plus diaboliquement laid. S’il n’est pas pendu, il ne faut pas croire aux physionomies.”
Breslau. The play of shadows across her face are certainly consequences of Breslau’s aesthetic interest in light and dark, but also representative of her own personal anxieties about how society at large might react to her lesbian lifestyle. Breslau, like David, wanted to boldly show who she is, and in the eight years since she painted *Le Portrait des Amis*, Breslau adopted a more open manner of representing herself that might have pleased even Rousseau. Facing forward and gazing strongly at the viewer, she shows her home, her life, and her companion. And, yet, like in David’s self-portrait, the shadow over her face, the central focus of the painting, effectively shields and distances her from the viewer.

Part of the fascination with self-portraits, for viewers and artists alike, is their claim (authentic or not) to give access to an interiority, an inwardness that is particularly appealing because it is frequently out of reach for those beyond one’s close circle of associations. Self-portraits profess to show what is beyond the surface, behind the eyes. Many artists attempt to do this by using shadows, as Rembrandt’s early self portrait indicates (Fig. 5.17). To quote Clark again, “A large part of self-portraiture’s best efforts therefore go to conjuring up a dimension in which the surface of the face, and particularly the eyes, can register as something to be looked through or behind…. One way of doing that is to put it [the face] partly in shadow, with the shade maybe falling most deeply across the eyes. The shadow is a metaphor for ‘inside.’” Clark, 283. Italics mine.

One would like to look into Breslau’s face in this painting, and the shadow across her eyes heightens the mystery of both the superficial physiognomy of her face and expression, and the deeper emotional or psychological level of the ‘inside.’ If we adopt for a moment this idea of the shadow as a metaphor for Breslau’s inner life, what exactly was she disclosing and what was she concealing with this shadow?

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351 Clark, 283. Italics mine.
Like David, Breslau has been through a crossroads in her life and she similarly elected to produce a self-portrait as she emerges from a period of confusion and discouragement. Also like David, there were elements of her life that were viewed suspiciously. Where David was viewed as a traitor through his political sympathies and physical deformities, Breslau was a radical in terms of her professional career and her sexuality. She had likewise chosen a path that would not always meet with public approval. In *Contre-jour*, she courageously shows both of these facets of her life. Her bold experiments with lighting demonstrate her willingness to adopt ‘modern,’ innovative techniques and the subject matter, depicting her partner, shows the source of her support through a loving female relationship. There is a similar subtlety to Breslau’s disclosure as David’s; both willingly include elements of their identity that might be potentially distressing but make them available only to those who know what to look for (i.e. close associates familiar with artists’ facial features and lives) or especially discerning viewers. There are in particular two ways in which Breslau safeguarded against public exposure. First, Breslau never drew attention to the fact that this was a self-portrait. As mentioned earlier, the title does not give any indication of the identity of the figures and so for those who did not know Breslau or Zillhardt personally, this remained a genre painting. Secondly, the shadows on Breslau’s face work in a similar fashion to those in David’s painting. The artful shadow in her self-portrait suggests “inner life” and simultaneously creates mystery. She hints at the depth of emotion and cogitation stirring inside her; one wants to know more about whom she is and what she is thinking. She emphasizes her individuality and displays her home, partner, and daily life. Blending a kind of traditional genre scene of a domestic interior with portraiture (as she did in *Le Portrait des Amis*), Breslau cleverly creates a self-portrait that proclaims her partnership with Zillhardt without drawing unnecessary attention to her lifestyle.
Breslau was not the only woman to include covert references to her Sapphic identity in paintings. French artist Louise Abbéma (1858-1927) produced a painting that similarly suggests her devoted relationship with Sarah Bernhardt. *Le Déjeuner dans la Serre*, 1877, depicts six figures in a winter garden or conservatory (Fig. 5.18). Previously identified as a painting of the playwright Emile de Najac, Sarah Bernhardt and her sister Jeanne, Louise Abbéma’s parents, and a young unidentified child, the work has recently been analyzed by Griselda Pollock who contends that the two women seating intimately together on the couch are not Bernhardt and her sister but rather a self-portrait of Abbéma and Bernhardt.352 This is only one of many portraits of Bernhardt by Abbéma during their life-long relationship, which began when Abbéma was only thirteen. Analyzing the physical features and clothing of the dark-haired woman next to Bernhardt as well as their physical proximity and intimacy, Pollock concludes that this is a “radical statement of artistic ambition and lesbian desire.”353 The figure was misread as Bernhardt’s sister Jeanne partly because depictions of close family relationships were common and seen as appropriate as opposed to images of female lovers. Neither Abbéma’s nor Breslau’s images of their relationships with their female partners were initially interpreted as visual documents of important female relationships or manifestoes of sexual identity. These connotations with the paintings were misinterpreted or overlooked by contemporary audiences, primarily because they were coded as unacceptable, but today are informative sources of

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353 Ibid, 109. Pollock also contends that Abbéma’s relationship with Bernhardt enabled her to depict the actress not as an icon or celebrity but as a bourgeois hostess comfortably entertaining friends and family. She also suggests it shows Bernhardt as a mother, explaining her attention to the young child who could be Bernhardt’s son Maurice. Pollock acknowledges, however, that the feminine dress, pink bow, and long hair as well as the fact that Maurice would have been about twelve years old at the time make this supposition somewhat problematic.
information on female identity and sexuality. For both of these women, self-portraiture was a means not only of recording their physical features but, more important, of chronicling their intimate associations. These two paintings merit further attention and suggest that perhaps there are other images from this period that likewise have more information about how women lived, loved, worked, and pushed boundaries in the late nineteenth century. More than merely an interior domestic scene, Breslau’s *Contre-jour* is a partially concealed self-portrait that brilliantly preserves her allegiance both to her flowering relationship with Zillhardt and to her identity as an innovative artist in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

**Accolades from the Turn of the Century and Beyond**

The success of *Contre-jour*, particularly the gold medal award, launched Breslau into a new phase of her career. In the 1890s, she was a successful artist who no longer had to prove herself or her talent. During this decade, she focused her efforts on developing her skills as a pastel painter—a medium that she had long admired in eighteenth-century masters and in which she would also excel, increasing the number of her works owned by museums, and improving her reputation in Switzerland. She continued to accept portrait commissions, primarily of children and women, and the majority of these were produced in pastels. Although she still produced oil paintings, several of these also show Breslau’s interest in challenging herself and exploring new styles. For example, *Les Gamines* of 1893 illustrates Breslau’s continued interest in Impressionism, evident here in the lightened palette, outdoor setting, and leisure scene between two young girls (Fig. 5.19). It was during this decade that Breslau would also use oil paints to cultivate her floral still life paintings. The flowers that enhanced the scene in paintings such as *Contre-jour* or *Gamines* would now take center stage and remain a strong interest of Breslau’s until her death (Fig. 5.20).
Breslau’s facility with pastels quickly became a central element of her reputation and part of her appeal for portrait commissions. *La Petite fille avec chien blanc – Portrait de Mlle Adeline Poznanska* (1891) and *Le Chapeau aux roses* (1895) both show Breslau’s ability to use pastel crayons to enliven the paper (Figs. 5.21-5.22). In the portrait of the young Adeline with her dog, now in the permanent collection of the Musée d’Orsay, Breslau captures the openness of childhood with refreshing honesty. Sitting comfortably with her dog, Adeline gazes at the viewer without guile and very much at ease. The white lines in her dress and on the dog are so convincingly rendered that they seem to have become fabric and fur, respectively. Highly praised when exhibited at the Salon of 1892, the painting was described by one critic as being “one of the attractions of the room dedicated to pastels.”³⁵⁴ *Le Chapeau aux roses* conveys quick energy and movement through the rapid lines and various colors, giving a feeling of spontaneity. Largely because of her academic training, Breslau is not usually associated with Impressionism and it is true that she was not a part of the eight Impressionist exhibitions. She was younger than the majority of the Impressionists, but particularly in the late 1880s and 1890s her work indicates that she was highly cognizant of this modern movement. Both the coloring and the quick execution of her pastels as well as the subject matter of her intermittent plein-air oil paintings, such as *Sous les Pommiers – Portrait de Mlle Julie Feurgard*, show both her knowledge and incorporation of some of the principles of Impressionism (Fig. 5.23). Indeed, her friendship with Degas is enough evidence that she would have been aware of “New Painting” and their independent exhibitions. In fact, it may have been through some of her exchanges with Degas, in addition to her study of eighteenth-century pastels at the Louvre, which provided Breslau with the impetus to explore pastels.

Breslau’s willingness to continue to challenge herself by developing her skills as a pastellist and adopting elements of Impressionism into her oil paintings did not go unnoticed by the art world. She continued to receive accolades for her progress. In 1900 she received her second gold medal, this one for *Les Gamines* exhibited at the Universal Exposition in Paris. And, the following year was awarded the Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur award, the highest honor in France. Joining with Bonheur and Virginie Demont-Breton, Breslau was one of only three women to receive the award and the first foreign woman to obtain it. Breslau was delighted and overwhelmed by this mark of distinction. As further confirmation of her achievements, in 1904 the Galerie Georges Petit staged the first one-person exhibition of Breslau’s work and Robert de Montesquiou wrote a long article, titled “Un maître femme, Mademoiselle Breslau,” praising her work. This recognition was extremely welcome and validating for Breslau and during this time, she completed two self-portraits. Both single portraits, unlike the group portraits and self-portraits of the 1880s, these works show Breslau’s competence in media other than oils and seem less advertisements of her profession than composed responses to and continued evidence of her achievements.

Shortly after receiving her second gold medal award in 1900, Breslau produced the most traditional self-portrait in her oeuvre, a gouache and pastel painting roughly three feet by two feet (Fig. 5.24). The artist stands, looking earnestly out at the viewer, with one hand on the hip. Her outfit, composed of blouse, skirt, tie-belt at waist and cape, conveys a professional tone and the muted mauves, purples, blues, and hint of olive in the background preserve this serious

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355 Virginie Demont-Breton received the Légion d’Honneur in 1894. Daughter of Jules Breton, Demont-Breton also specialized in peasant imagery. She was a significant advocate for women artists and became the second president of the Union de Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs. Her detailed account of her visit with Bonheur, whom she admired from a young age, was mentioned earlier in the chapter on Bonheur. For more on her career and art, see Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women’s Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).
atmosphere. The easel and paintbrush in Breslau’s hand attest to her profession, but do not overwhelm the painting. Responding to the positive recognition of the art world, Breslau answers with a time-honored tradition of a self-portrait with tools in hand. Describing J.-V. Salgado’s Portrait of Mme Demont-Breton, reproduced in L’Art Français in 1895, a male critic perceptively discerned that Salgado wanted to present Demont-Breton as an artist, above any other characteristic or personality trait (Fig. 5.25). His words also indicate a sense of distance between the categories of woman and artist: “The artist [Salgado] is less attached to descriptive traits than an intellectual evocation, it is less the woman than the artist that he has pictured.”

This description could equally apply to Breslau’s portrait of herself. She also presents an intellectually serious person who is also “less the woman than the artist.” The intentional quotes here denote a tongue-in-cheek usage of the word woman. Breslau’s had consciously rejected traditional roles for women. Neither wife nor mother, Breslau also rejected the stylish toilette, fashionable clothing, and decorative ornamentation that were considered the proper “palette” and ‘highest of the arts’ for women. Octave Uzanne clarified the appropriate artistic channels for women:

> Dress is…for women, the highest of all arts, the art containing all others. It is not only the expression of characteristic style…but it is her palette, her poem, her theatrical setting, her song of triumph…If a man has the right only to clothe himself, woman has the right to ornament, to embellish herself, and, in the natural adornment of her grace and beauty, to introduce a little brilliance into the dullness of our modern life.

Thus, Breslau’s darker clothing, lacking ornamentation and embellishment, and her slightly eccentric and outmoded cape also indicate another way in which she rejects societal standards and values for women. Her neck brooch, hanging watch, and ring indicate that Breslau now has

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356 F. Javel, “Mme Demont-Breton et les femmes artistes,” L’Art Français, no. 410 (2 March 1895). Quoted in Garb, 148. “Le peintre s’est moins attaché au trait descriptif qu’a l’évocation intellectuelle, c’est moins la femme que l’artiste qu’il a portraituree.”

the means to own jewelry, but she lets these pieces quietly peek out of her clothing rather than being ostentatious decoration. With a hand-on-her-hip gesture, Breslau shows how she wants to be perceived and this image of a woman artist also illustrates the changes that have occurred in the nineteenth century. Vigée-Lebrun, for example, often used her self-portraits to communicate her careful balance of her roles as woman and artist. Depicting herself lovingly caressing her daughter or wearing up-to-date clothing, complete with Uzanne’s type of embellishments and adornments, Vigée-Lebrun brilliantly promoted herself as embracing her ‘natural’ role as well as a professional one. One hundred years later, Breslau no longer feels compelled to justify herself in this same way. Of course, Uzanne’s ideas and many similar to his still represented the dominant mind-set, but Breslau’s rejection of this way of thinking shows that many women were making a chink in the armor of codes for female conduct. Breslau’s 1900 self-portrait is less an exploration of her thoughts or inner psyche than it is an expression of her calm acceptance of herself as a successful female artist moving into the twentieth century.

Even more visually interesting, however, is Breslau’s 1904 self-portrait (Fig. 5.26). The image is an almost full-length view of the artist, with a profile view of her face. It appears that Breslau is dressed for an outing and looking outdoors, in the direction of the light. A pastel masterpiece, the portrait shows Breslau’s sketch-like method of leaving the colors unmixed and loose as she applied them to the paper support. Various shades of brown, yellow, tan, and red create the visual effect of a caramel-colored fur cape and the white and blue strands of hair at Breslau’s temples hint at her age. The multiple-strand gold necklace hanging down her blouse, the only visible jewelry she is wearing, establishes an undeniable connection to celebrated artists
of the distant past such as Rembrandt van Rijn, Titian, and Artemisia Gentileschi who also wore gold chains as a symbol of their status, achievements, and profession.\textsuperscript{358}

With her single self-portraits of 1900 and 1904, Breslau joined a long-standing artistic practice of capturing her own likeness on canvas as an exhibition of her talent and an affirmation of her profession. Both of these portraits emphasize her skill with various media: gouache and pastel, and they also unapologetically convey her long-standing commitment to her vocation as an artist. Neither panders to prevailing assumptions about what women should wear, look like, or do. These are strong social statements for a woman, even at the end of the nineteenth century. It is noteworthy that while Breslau produced her private self-portrait sketch early in her career, she waited until she became an established and respected artist to exhibit these traditional kinds of self-portraits. Her gold medals, Legion of Honor award, and one-person exhibitions gave her the confidence to produce these images of herself and they are her responses, I believe, to her success. They confirm that an essential, if not the essential, part of her identity was her status as an artist.

\textbf{Conclusion: Coming full circle and the ‘cercle feminin’}

If Breslau’s single self-portraits function to assert her status as artist, her group self-portraits indicate the social support she needed and relied upon in order to pursue this profession. Early in her career, this support came through several female friends, but after 1888 it came primarily though the unfailing encouragement and love of Madeleine Zillhardt. \textit{Contre-jour} testifies of this relationship and twenty years after \textit{Contre-jour}, Breslau returned to the subject of

\textsuperscript{358} In 1825, Hortense Haudebourt-Lescot painted a self-portrait with a beret and gold chain that also borrows from this tradition. The image is illustrated in Frances Borzello’s book \textit{Seeing Ourselves: Women’s Self-Portraits} (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998). Technically, gold chains were gifts of royal patrons and the artists who wore them were indicating their connection to court patronage. However, many artists, including Rembrandt and Artemisia, painted gold chains in their self-portraits without such patronage.
her relationship with Zillhardt and their life in her 1908 painting *La Vie Pensive* (Fig. 5.27). Another interior scene, the painting recalls *Le Portrait des Amis*, with friends sitting at a table. Here, Breslau and Zillhardt sit together and there is minimal interaction between the two. Their bodies are slightly angled towards each other and Breslau regards her life-long companion while Zillhardt dreamily looks off to an imaginative distance. Their large greyhound, a gift of a friend, rests his head across Zillhardt’s lap. Zillhardt wears a morning gown, appropriate for an interior, private setting and Breslau, holding a paper in one hand, is clothed in an equally loose-fitting dress. The women of *Contre-jour* have grown older together. According to Zillhardt, *La Vie Pensive* showed the autumn of their lives together, after all the difficulties and sorrows had shadowed their faces.\(^{359}\) She believed that their relationship had grown stronger through difficult experiences lived together.

Described by Gabriel Weisberg as one of the “most profound paintings of Louise Breslau,” *La Vie Pensive* shows Breslau and Zillhardt in the later stages of their life and relationship.\(^{360}\) Comfortably sitting together at the table, this is a couple who has spent a lifetime together and is at ease in each other’s presence. Indeed, the title conveys Breslau’s perception of their life together. It was one of mutual affection and filled with quiet pondering and meditation. Considering the negative critical reaction to the dog included in *Le Portrait des Amis*, one wouldn’t be surprised if Breslau avoided canine subjects in her future self-portraits. She did not, however, shy away from including their greyhound, one of their two dogs.\(^{361}\) Neither does she

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\(^{359}\) Zillhardt, 130.  
\(^{361}\) Bram Dijkstra has used this painting as an example of several fin-de-siècle works which show women with large dogs. Noting the position of the dog across Zillhardt’s lap, Dijkstra asserted that the dog claims ownership over the womb area of her body and suggests that lesbian women and femme-fatale figures were thought to have engaged in sexual acts with large dogs (often with long phallic-looking noses and lean bodies such as greyhounds or wolfhounds) or other animals that also had similarly phallic or evil connotations, such as storks or snakes. While this is a fascinating topic, the other images that Dijkstra analyzed were painted by men, making the argument much
shy away from unidealized features, such as the extremely pallid, slightly greenish tinge of Zillhardt’s skin, or the signs of aging on both of the women. At the Salon of 1908, critics praised the “virile and powerful manner” of the painting, applying the conventional (masculine) code words reserved for admirable work. An artist regularly praised for her ability to visually communicate the psychological character of her subjects, Breslau continued this practice with *La Vie Pensive*; the painting is the ideal counterpoint to *Contre-jour*, illustrating the progress of an intimate relationship over twenty years.

In her later years, Breslau was asked to give a talk at a “cercle féminin” for meeting of women artists. Usually reticent to speak publicly, Breslau agreed on this occasion and her words are a fitting conclusion to this chapter: “I have lived my life practicing the silent arts. I do not have the habit of speaking, and so it is simply and as a friend that I address you. All of us, it seems to me, we live in the honest illusion that someday it will be our art which will speak for us. It will tell our joys and our enchantments with the beauty of life. It will also, perhaps even more, tell our worries, our intimate anguishes, our profound sorrows.”

It is particularly through Breslau’s self-portraits that her art speaks for her. Through them, we see Breslau change from a young foreign painter struggling to survive to a mature established artist whose talent was recognized in several countries in Europe. They show her skill at blending elements of genre and portraiture as well as show the development in her artistic and sexual identity. Her self-

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362 Although Breslau never adopted the modernism of the twentieth century, one wonders if her experimentation with color schemes here was not influenced by Fauvist impulses in Paris as the time.
364 Breslau, text printed in Zillhardt, 243.
portraits attest to her skill and status as a professional artist and her group self-portraits follow the transitions in her support group of women and especially her life-long partner Zillhardt. Breslau was one of few female artists in the nineteenth century who repeatedly captured her likeness on her canvases throughout her long career. She affirmed her identity through her self-portraits, which substantiate her rejection of female norms and heterosexual relationships, and by so doing defied an established system that promoted the self as a male prerogative.
CONCLUSION

Well-behaved women seldom make history, or so this popular saying, coined by Harvard history professor Laurel Thatcher Ulrich in 1976, declares. Originally, Ulrich intended it to mean that many women who live quietly productive yet perhaps not singular lives fall through the cracks of history. The sentence appeared in the opening paragraph of a scholarly article discussing women commemorated in Puritan funeral sermons of colonial New England. The phrase was revived in the 1995, by a journalist writing about remarkable American women, and shortly thereafter the saying took on a life of its own. Appearing on bumper stickers, t-shirts, coffee mugs and quilts, the slogan has been adopted by extremely different women for various purposes. To some, it implies that rules must be broken in order to get any attention or make a difference in the world. To others, it is a reminder that many women of the past have been forgotten; their regular routines of their lives not deemed worthy of much recognition. Still others see it as a battle cry for activism and license to misbehave.

I invoke the aphorism here because it applies on several levels to the women of this study. All of them are remembered today because of their unconventional choices to pursue their artistic careers; they have merited attention precisely because they refused to conform to lifestyles that did not appeal to them. And, the more apparent their rebellion, the more they are celebrated today. Indeed, it is because of Bashkirtseff’s “bad” behavior—her choice to be a professional artist, her desire for fame and celebrity, her belief in equal rights for women, her intriguing performances and guises, and even her fascination with her own likeness—revealed in

365 From the Sweet Potato Queens of Jackson, Mississippi to “Wild Women’s Group” residents of a nursing home in Massachusetts, from activists to quilting clubs, many groups have adopted this motto as their mantra. Ulrich explored the development and various meanings of this slogan in her book of the same title. See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).
her journal, her photographs, and her art, that she is remembered today. Women like Bashkirtseff, who colored outside the lines, tell us much about where those lines were, how women were expected to behave, and how women managed to thrive despite their circumstances. Likewise, Bonheur’s “misbehavior” with her clothing and general appearance, her subject matter, and her preference for female companions has increased her visibility and reputation. Conversely, Eva Gonzalès is somewhat lesser known today, not only because her life was cut short due to complications of childbirth but also because she was more “well-behaved” in the traditional sense of the word. Gonzalès exhibited primarily at the official Salon, she was circumspect and even conservative about her behavior and public image, and she followed the customary path of marriage and motherhood. Breslau is similarly less familiar as a consequence of her status as a portrait painter of mainly women and children and an individual who was not embracing avant-garde art styles or actively advocating women’s rights.

In a broader sense, however, all of them were carefully balancing their “bad” behavior with acceptable social conventions. Bonheur asserted her perfectly feminine heart and Bashkirtseff flaunted her femininity to counter their unconventional comportment and ideas. Gonzalès prudently tempered her connection with the avant-garde Manet by retaining associations with her former, more academically acceptable, teacher. Breslau offset her lesbian lifestyle both by not drawing undue attention to it and also by specializing in portraits of women and children, typically seen appropriate subject matter for women. Each of them were wisely negotiating their reputations and standing in society through their actions and choices. At the same time, they were pondering their individuality and using self-portraiture as a means to record different elements of their identities. My intention in utilizing a multi-artist approach has been to illustrate that while very different, these women were all engaging in the process of self-
analysis and self-portrayal during this period and they were very conscious of their private and public image.

The diversity of these particular four artists is quickly apparent in this study, which makes their lives and self-portraits even more compelling. A few comparisons between these women, highlighting the differences as well as some similarities, will help summarize their circumstances and contributions. Considering the prevailing pattern for women’s lives in the nineteenth century, it is remarkable that only Gonzalès married and had a child. Gonzalès’ life might be considered typical in this fashion, but closer analysis reveals that her marriage occurred later than most nineteenth-century women. She was thirty when she married Henri Guérard, showing a parallel with her would-be rival Morisot, who married at thirty-three. Both married quite late and chose companions that would allow them to continue their work, signifying that neither was willing to follow traditional standards for women at the expense of their own work. Perhaps had Bashkirtseff lived longer, she may have yielded to her family’s desires for her marriage. Such speculation is, of course, futile. But she did postpone her decision and opt to focus on leaving a legacy as an artist rather than focus her efforts on courtship. Both Bonheur and Breslau consciously elected to have female companions for the primary relationships in their lives, despite the taboos that these associations still had.

Two of them, Breslau and Bashkirtseff, used many of their self-portraits openly and explicitly in public venues and exhibitions. Gonzalès, in opposition, employed self-portraiture in a more private fashion. Gonzalès’ self-portraits were primarily private endeavors and responses to her relationship with Manet and her sister. Bonheur used a combination of both private and public images. She did make covert references to herself in *The Horse Fair* but also used portraits by other artists such as Dubufe, Fould, and Klumpke to cultivate her public persona. In
a more pronounced way than with the other artists, Bashkirtseff’s self-portraits show an evolution in her self-perception. Her earlier photographic portraits demonstrate her interest in adopting guises and performing imagined roles while her later painted self-portraits promote the view of Bashkirtseff as an artist. When analyzed as a whole, these images show the trajectory of her self-analysis and the urgency she felt near the end of her life to be remembered and memorialized in her journals and self-portraits as an artist.

A comparison of the artistic training and economic circumstances of these four women also shows a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. While Bonheur was trained by her father, Gonzalès, Bashkirtseff, and Breslau each took advantage of private lessons, personal mentors, and atelier training, indicative of the improving opportunities for training in the nineteenth century. As members of upper-middle class and aristocratic social classes, respectively, Gonzalès and Bashkirtseff initially received encouragement to develop their drawing skills because they were appropriate feminine accomplishments. They were fortunate that their individual ambitions to excel beyond this level were supported by their families. On Gonzalès’ side, this was probably due to the fact that her father was a writer and very supportive of the arts. Bashkirtseff did not meet any resistance from her mother, who usually supported her daughter’s requests. Breslau, on the other hand, had to insist upon her international training and struggled economically for quite a while prior to achieving success. In this way, she is similar to Bonheur—both had to depend upon the success of their sales to survive and both were eventually able to live quite comfortably from their work.

The need to provide for themselves economically is not the only similarity between Bonheur and Breslau. Both also lived long lives and had extremely productive careers, while Bashkirtseff and Gonzalès both experienced early deaths resulting from events or illnesses
common to women (childbearing and tuberculosis). Another parallel between Breslau and Bonheur is seen in their sexual identity and their personal endeavors to surround themselves with positive female support. Bonheur created her own family with Nathalie Micas and Mme. Micas, and later with Anna Klumpke. Breslau encircled herself with like-minded female artists and then comfortably settled with her life-long partner Zillhardt. Perhaps even more intriguing, though, is the fact that Breslau found a way to broach the question of her identity in her paintings. Like Bonheur, Breslau was also a lesbian but unlike Bonheur, who remained a painter of animals, Breslau repeatedly addressed her identity, sexuality, and female support system in her work. In this way, she can also be compared with Gonzalès who was also critically thinking about herself and her individuality in association with those around her, in particular her formative relationships with her sister Jeanne and her teacher Manet.

This dissertation has closely investigated the ways that Rosa Bonheur, Eva Gonzalès, Marie Bashkirtseff, and Louise Breslau each used representations of themselves and the tradition of self-portraiture as a means to clarify their concept of self and create their private and public personas. These particular women are fitting for this project because of their sustained interested in their own images as tools for furthering their reputations as artists, marketing their skills, gathering clientele, cultivating celebrity status, and thinking about their identities during this time period. Many other women working in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth century in France and worldwide were also interested in exploring their identities in their artwork and their self-portraits could be similarly analyzed to enlarge the dialogue about female identity and subjectivity. Artists such as Louise Abbèma, Camille Claudel, Suzanne Valadon, Helene Schjerfbeck, Claude Cahun, Ellen Day Hale, Cecilia Beaux, Anna Bilińska, Asta Nørregaard, and Paula Modersohn-Becker, Käthe Kollwitz, made
significant contributions to the genre of self-portraiture and these works would need to be included in a similarly themed study with a wider scope. Some of their self-portraits, such as those by Claudel and Valadon, have already received considerable scholarly attention but many remain largely unknown.

Themes addressed by Bonheur, Gonzalès, Bashkirtseff and Breslau provide a beginning point from which to examine a larger body of self-portraits. For example, Breslau’s self-portraits that show signs of aging could be compared with several portraits by Helene Schjerfbeck. A Finnish artist who established her reputation in Paris before returning to her homeland, Schjerfbeck painted a compelling series of self-portraits in Paris and Finland that chronicle her emotional state and the aging process, concluding with haunting image of a skeletal face. Bonheur’s adoption of masculine dress can be seen as a prelude to the normalizing of equestrian or masculine clothing seen in Romaine Brooks’ self-portrait and images of women in the early decades of the twentieth century. Likewise, the analysis of Bashkirtseff’s photographic self-portraits could be a springboard to larger discussions on performance, disguise, and masquerade within women’s photography. Images by Frances Benjamin Johnson, Claude Cahun, and Alice Austen, for example, exhibit a performative, staged quality and often play with issues of gender and sexuality.

The theme of Paris as a location that encouraged many artists to explore their identity via self-portraits is another topic for future research. Particularly for women who came from foreign countries to study in the cosmopolitan and artistic city, Paris represented the fulfillment of their aspirations to train in serious schools and achieve recognition as an artist. Both Breslau and Bashkirtseff recognized that Paris would provide the creative atmosphere to hone their skills and foster their talents. While cultivating their artistic identities in their adopted city, they also
developed their concept of self and captured these images on canvases. Paris encouraged similar activities in other foreigners and immigrants training in this cosmopolitan city. American Ellen Day Hale submitted her elegant and androgynous self-portrait to the Salon in her final months of study in Paris in 1885. Ukrainian Anna Bilińska’s powerful self-portrait holding brushes and palette was awarded a silver medal at the Universal Exposition of 1887 in Paris (Fig. 4.24).

Depictions of Parisian studios as female spaces, as promoted in Breslau’s *Le Portrait des Amis*, should also be additionally researched. Self-portrait paintings by Asta Nørregaard, Jeanna Bauck, and Bertha Wegmann, Scandinavian artists working in Paris in the 1880s, depict studio spaces controlled and populated by women and indicate that these creative spaces were a strong component of their sense of self and community. These are, of course, just a sampling of artists and ideas in the sphere of self-portraiture and identity that merit future scholarship.

In this dissertation I have attempted to show that concurrent with the burgeoning fascination with subjectivity and individuality in the latter half of the nineteenth century, women artists entered into the intriguing dialogue of selfhood through the creation of self-portraits or autobiographical projects that explore their identities. The improved opportunities available to women for artistic training, the rising status of artists, and the renewed interest in self-portraiture during the second half of the century also help explain why more and more women were producing their self-portraits, concerned with their individuality, and interested in their public images. Much more than merely descriptions of their physical features, these images reveal not only how women artists perceived themselves, but also how society at large defined women’s positions and forms of expression. This research will encourage further study of female self-portraiture and contribute to a better understanding of subjectivity and selfhood in the nineteenth century.
Fig. 1.1. “Les Annexe-Pianos,” *La Vie Parisienne*, 1864, pg. 125.
Fig. 1.2. Honoré Daumier, “Un Français peint par lui-même,” *Le Charivari*, 1849.
Figure 2.1. Rosa Bonheur, *Ploughing in the Nivernais*, 1849.
Figure 2.2. Permission de Travestissement.
Figure 2.3. Rosa Bonheur, *The Horse Fair*, 1853-55.
Figure 2.4. Auguste Bonheur, *Rosa Bonheur*, 1845.
Figure 2.5. David d’Angers, *Medallion of Rosa Bonheur*, 1854.
Figure 2.6. Frederick Goodall, *Rosa Bonheur at Work Near Wexham*, 1856.
Figure 2.7. Louis-Edouard Dubufe, *Rosa Bonheur at Thirty-Four*, 1857.
Figure 2.8. Franz Winterhalter, *Portrait of the Empress Eugenie surrounded by her Maids of Honor*, 1855.
Figure 2.9. Louis-Edouard Dubufe, *Eugenie de Montijo: Empress of the French*, c. 1854-5.
Figure 2.10. Caricature of Dubufe’s painting of Rosa Bonheur.
Figure 2.11. Raymond Bonheur, *Portrait of Rosa at Four*, 1826.
Figure 2.12. Male Saint-Simonian costume

Figure 2.13. Female Saint Simonian costume
Figure 2.14. Retreat at Ménilmontant. The figure holding a shovel in the right foreground is Raymond Bonheur.
Figure 2.15. Caricature of Rosa Bonheur. This included the caption « Medaille d’Honneur et Bourgereau de vaches. »
Figure 2.16. Rosa Bonheur, Detail of *The Horse Fair*, 1853-55.
Figure 2.17. Alfred de Dreux, *Amazone in the Bois de Boulougne*, c. 1845.
Figure 2.18. Alfred de Dreux, *Amazone et cavaliers en forêt.*
Figure 2.19. Théodore Géricault, *Amazone*, 1821-21.
Figure 2.20. Gustave Courbet, *L’Amazone*, 1856.
Figure 2.21. Edouard Manet, *Amazone*, 1882.
Figure 2.22. Eugénia de Guzman à cheval, c. 1852-1870
Figure 2.23. David Jules, "Sa Majesté l'Impératrice Eugénie en costume d'amazone", c. 1852-1870.
Figure 2.24. André Adolphe Disdéri, Anonymous carte-de-visite of woman in riding habit, 1865.
Figure 2.25. Rosa Bonheur, *Portrait of Nathalie Micas*, c. 1850.
Figure 2.26. *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, May 26, 1888.
Figure 2.27. Achille Fould, *Rosa Bonheur in Her Studio*, 1893.
Figure 2.28. Consuelo Fould, Marquise de Grasse, *Rosa Bonheur*, 1894.
Figure 2.29. Rosa Bonheur, *The Marquise de Grasse Painting Rosa Bonheur*, illustration from letter to Paul Chardin on Jan. 18, 1894.
Figure 2.30. Rosa Bonheur, Illustration from letter to animal sculptor Pierre-Jules Mène, n.d.
Figure 2.31. Anna Klumpke, *Portrait of Rosa Bonheur*, 1898.
Figure 2.32. Anna Klumpke, *Portrait of Rosa Bonheur with Her Dog Charley*, 1898.
Figure 3.1. “L'Exposition d'Eva Gonzalès,” *La Vie Moderne*, 24 janvier 1885, pg. 60. Illustrated by L. Galice.
Figure 3.2. Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Mlle E. G.*, 1870.
Figure 3.3. Eva Gonzalès, *Le Thé*, of 1865-69.
Figure 3.4. Eva Gonzalès, *L’Enfant de Troupe*, 1869-1870.
Figure 3.5. Edouard Manet, *Le Fifre*, 1866.
Figure 3.6. Edouard Manet, *Eva Gonzalès Painting in Manet’s Studio*, 1870.
Figure 3.7. Cham, « Exposition 1870, » *Le Charivari*, 10 April 1870.
Figure 3.8. Photograph of Henri Guérard and Jeanne Guérard-Gonzalès, 1895.
Figure 3.9. Eva Gonzalès, *La Jeune Élève*, c. 1871-1872.
Figure 3.10. Eva Gonzalès, *La Loge aux Italiens*, 1874.
Figure 3.11. Edouard Manet, *Loge sketch*, c. 1873.
Figure 3.12. Photograph of Eva Gonzalès, c. 1874.
Figure 3.13. Henri Guérard, Engraving of Eva Gonzalès’ *La Jeune Élève*, c. 1871-72.
Figure 3.15. Eva Gonzalès, *Autoportrait*, c. 1873-74.
Figure 3.16. Eva Gonzalès, *Portrait of Mlle J.G. [Jeanne Gonzalès]*, 1869-70.
Figure 3.17. Eva Gonzalès, Portrait of Madame E.G. [Emmanuel Gonzalès], Mère de l’artiste, 1869-70, pastel.
Figure 3.18. Edouard Manet, *The Music Lesson*, 1870.
Figure 3.19. Eva Gonzalès, *Dans Les Blés (Dieppe)*, c. 1875-76.
Figure 3.20. Claude Monet, *Les Coquelicots*, 1873.
Figure 3.21. Eva Gonzalès, *La Psyche*, c. 1865-1870.
Figure 3.22. Eva Gonzalès, *Le Petit Lever*, c. 1875-76.
Figure 3.23. Eva Gonzalès, *Le Réveil*, c. 1877-78.
Figure 3.24. Eva Gonzalès, *Le Sommeil*, c. 1877-78.
Figure 3.25. Eva Gonzalès, *Autoportrait*, c. 1875.
Figure 3.26. Jeanne Gonzalès, *Portrait of Eva à Dieppe*, n.d.
Figure 3.12. Photograph of Eva Gonzalès.

Figure 3.27. Photograph of Jeanne Gonzalès, c. 1874
Figure 3.28. Eva Gonzalès, *Promenade à Âne*, c. 1880-1882.
Figure 3.29. Berthe Morisot, *Two Sisters on a Couch*, 1869.

Figure 3.30. Berthe Morisot, *Self-Portrait*, 1885.
Figure 3.31. Berthe Morisot, *Self-Portrait*, 1885.

Figure 3.32. Berthe Morisot, *Self-Portrait with Julie*, 1885.
Figure 3.33. Berthe Morisot, *Self-Portrait with Julie Drawing*, 1887.
Figure 3.34. Edgar Degas, *Portrait of Mary Cassatt*, c. 1880-84.

Figure 3.35. Mary Cassatt, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1880-1884.
Figure 3.36. Photograph of Eva Gonzalès, undated.
Figure 4.1. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph, c. 1876.
Figure 4.2. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph as Russian musician with mandolin, c. 1877.
Figure 4.3. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph as country peasant with basket, c. 1877.
Figure 4.4. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph in peasant clothes and cap, c. 1877.
Figure 4.5. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph with mirror, c. 1875.
Figure 4.6. André Disdéri, Uncut page of Sarah Bernhardt photographs, c. 1860s.
Figure 4.7. Sarah Bernhardt in coffin, c. 1880.
Figure 4.8. Sarah Bernhardt as sculptor in studio, c. 1880.
Figure 4.9. Sarah Bernhardt, Photograph in role of Leah, c. 18xx.
Figure 4.10. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph, n.d (c. 1878?).
Figure 4.11. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph in front of her own tomb, c.1881.
Figure 4.12. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph as Capuchin monk, c. 1876.

Figure 4.13. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph as Capuchin monk, c. 1877.
Figure 4.14. Marie Bashkirtseff, *Le Meeting*, 1884.
Figure 4.15. Marie Baskirtseff, Photograph, c. 1876.
Figure 4.16. Marie Bashkirtseff, Photograph, c. 1877.
Figure 4.17. Comtesse de Castiglione, Photograph as nun, c. 1863.
Figure 4.18. Comtesse de Castiglione, Photograph as Normandy peasant, n.d.
Figure 4.19. Marie Bashkirtseff, *Self-Portrait, Standing, (Autoportrait en pied)*, 1879.
Figure 4.20. Marie Bashkirtseff ("Mlle. Andrey"), Atelier Julian, 1881
Figure 4.21. Marie Bashkirtseff, *Self-Portrait sketch*, charcoal and chalk, c. 1883.
Figure 4.22. Marie Bashkirtseff, *Self-portrait with a palette*, 1882-1883
Figure 4.23. Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Self-Portrait*, 1782.
Figure 4.24. Anna Bilinska, *Self Portrait*, 1887.
Figure 4.25. Milly Childers, *Self-Portrait*, 1889.
Figure 5.1. Louise Breslau, *Le Portrait des amis*, 1881.
Figure 5.2. Caricature of *Le Portrait des amis*, in *Le Journal amusant*, juin 1881.

Figure 5.3. Louise Breslau, *Premier projet pour Le Portrait des amis*, 1881.
Figure 5.4. Frédéric Bazille’s *Painter's Atelier in the Rue La Condamine* painting, 1870.
Figure 5.5. Henri Fantin-Latour, *A Studio at Batignolles*, 1870.
Figure 5.6. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Artist's Studio, rue St.-Georges*, 1876
Figure 5.7. Alfred Stevens, *In the Studio*, 1888.
Figure 5.8. Photograph of Louise Breslau, Madeline Zillhardt, Sophie Schaeppi, and another Swedish artist in their apartment, Avenue de Ternes, Paris, 1890.
Figure 5.9. Louise Breslau, *Portrait de l’artiste jeune*, 1882.
Figure 5.10. Anonymous caricature of Mlle Louise Breslau, 1878, from album of caricatures *Croquis de Mme Geraldi*.

Figure 5.11. Leonetto Cappiello, caricature of Louise Breslau and Helene Dufau, appeared in *La Vie parisienne*, 27 mai 1905.
Figure 5.12. Louise Breslau, *Le Sculpteur Jean Carriès dans son atelier*, 1886-1887.
Figure 5.13. Louise Breslau, *Contre-jour*, 1888.
Figure 5.14. Louise Breslau, Sketch for Contre-jour, 1888.
Figure 5.15. Jacques-Louis David, *Self-Portrait*, 1794.
Figure 5.16. Detail of *Contre-jour*, 1888.
Figure 5.17. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait as a Young Man*, 1629
Figure 5.18. Louise Abbéma, *Le Déjeuner dans la Serre*, 1877.
Figure 5.19. Louise Breslau, *Gamines*, 1893.
Figure 5.20. Louise Breslau, *Delphiniums et campanules*, 1903.
Figure 5.21. Louise Breslau, *La Petite fille avec chien blanc – Portrait de Mlle Adeline Poznanska*, 1891.
Figure 5.22. Louise Breslau, *Le Chapeau aux roses*, 1895.
Figure 5.23. Louise Breslau, *Portrait de Mlle Julie Feurgard – Sous les pommiers*, 1886.
Figure 5.24. Louise Breslau, *Portrait de l’artiste*, 1900.
Figure 5.25. J.V. Salgado, Portrait of Mme Demont-Breton, c. 1895.
Figure 5.26. Louise Breslau, *Porträt de l’artiste*, 1904.
Figure 5.27. Louise Breslau, *La Vie Pensive*, 1908.
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