

Preface

Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson

This book is the first published collection of scholarly essays on women, art, and history in Canada, and the task of introducing it is shaped by the particular circumstances that have made it possible to be writing these words as late as 2012. Books and exhibition catalogues that insist on the importance of writing women into the history of art are now almost four decades old, and feminism's intensive examination of the relationship between culture and identity has had a profound effect, both on the discipline of art history and, indeed, across the humanities more generally. The breadth of this impact, however, has also been accompanied by a change in the focus of disciplinary attention, and the urgency that once accompanied investigations of women artists has now shifted to other arenas in which questions of cultural identity intersect with considerations of power and self-determination. In Canada, for example, the energy currently fuelling the surge of interest in First Nations art and history shares much with the considerations that have motivated the history of women's art.

If feminist art history's moment of historical intensity has passed, however, the need for its historical work has not. This is particularly so in the Canadian context. From its earliest days, Canadian scholars have been active contributors to feminist art history. Indeed, Dorothy Farr and Natalie Luckyj's exhibition *From Women's Eyes: Women Painters in Canada* opened at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Kingston a full year before Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris's paradigm-shifting exhibition *Women Artists: 1550–1950* was held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.¹ But, whereas further study of the European and American women that the Los Angeles exhibition engendered could build on well-developed national legacies of art-historical exploration, the investigation of women artists in Canada proceeded in the context of a comparatively new field of study. The amount of basic research to be undertaken, not only on women

The first page of Michelle Lasnier's article, "Les Femmes peintres du Québec," *Châtelaine*, October 1962.

artists but on the whole social context in which they worked, combined with the reality of fewer art history graduate programs and professional Canadian art historians both to limit the amount and to influence the nature of the scholarship produced. Emphasis was placed on the essential tasks of factual investigation and historical recuperation, with museum and gallery exhibitions driving the work of unearthing women's art, establishing the historical facts of its production, and reconstructing a broad social context for it.² While such research was, and indeed continues to be, foundational for the study of women and art in Canada, it failed to keep pace with the momentum of women's art history as a whole. As feminist scholars elsewhere enthusiastically embraced the insights of Marxist, psychoanalytic, post-structuralist, and post-colonial theory that invigorated art history in the late 1980s and early 1990s, leading authors on Canadian women artists, from Natalie Luckyj to Maria Tippet, found themselves criticized for failing to account for this new methodological sophistication.³

In recent years, concern for theorized analysis, methodological reflection, and deep historical engagement *has* emerged to enrich writing on women and art in Canada. The intersections between women artists and the social formations of colonialism and of modernity have been particularly productive of historically nuanced analysis,⁴ while interest in craft has contributed to a broadening of the very objects considered suitable for art-historical study.⁵ Such writings have brought a welcome depth to the field, but the gain has been won at the cost of a profoundly compartmentalized, even atomized, vision of women's engagement in the national cultural terrain. The tight focus of the monographic framework, so common to gallery exhibitions and catalogues, continues to exert a significant influence, and in recent years individual women artists have also been the subject of sustained biographical writing.⁶ Within this landscape of individuation and specificity, the broad patterns that span the larger context of women's art history remain to be brought into view and assessed. Whereas broad-based scholarly histories exist for women's production in Britain, the United States, France, Australia, and elsewhere, in Canada the need for a critically engaged synthetic look at the significance of women's cultural production remains unmet. If recent interest in imperialism, transculturation, and global art histories *has* created opportunities for Canadian case studies to be included in analyses of the broader international phenomena that structured women's art production, such inclusions, too, have remained largely episodic, lacking the support of a well-developed critical history that would outline the specific national contexts that enhance the significance of individual artists' contributions.⁷

This, then, is the scholarly context for *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850–1970*, a publication organized by the Canadian Women Artists History Initiative. As a collection of essays, the book by no means fills the need for a broad-based history, but in its focus on the widely operative par-

adigm of art-world professionalism it does seek to offer a critical investigation of one of the synthetic trajectories that such a history might ultimately engage.

Two factors have particularly shaped the volume: a recognition of the importance of collaboration, and a conviction in the merit of bringing historical and methodological analysis together. The Canadian Women Artists History Initiative is an open network of scholars who come together to discuss the intersections of our research interests at the point of women's cultural activity.⁸ As collaborators, we recognize that the history of women and art in Canada encompasses a diversity of time, place, language, ethnicity, and visual media that is simply too vast to be grasped from a single vantage point. This book, which is the outcome of the Initiative's inaugural conference in 2008, bears testament to the critical insights that can emerge from shared discussions of such historical richness. If the study of women and art is to continue to be a vital undertaking, it must continually ask the question: What new understandings and perspectives does the examination of women bring to the field of art history? As we assembled and assessed the essays stemming from the conference, the issue of professionalism emerged as our most compelling way to frame a shared response to this question, providing not only a nodal point to unify a variety of disparate papers but a vector for critical analysis of the difference that the study of women can make to our understanding of art history.

The social formation of professionalism has been particularly influential in the cultural field, dividing amateurs from 'serious' artists and underpinning claims for increased status and support for the arts. It is also a formation of special relevance to women. At professionalism's doors may be heaped both the most outrageous discriminatory practices of the past and many of women's most impressive cultural achievements. The chapters collected here address aspects of those struggles and achievements as they affected women working between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries, from Victoria to Saint John, in the fields of painting, photography, craft, architecture, art education, and museum work. Taken together however, the essays also cast into relief both the utility and the limitations of professionalism as a conceptual framework. In this way the book as a whole works to facilitate methodological reflection on the ideas and assumptions that underpin the history of women and art in Canada.

The volume begins with an introductory essay by Kristina Huneault defining artistic professionalism, sketching the broad outlines of its historical development in Canada during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and assessing its historiographical and methodological implications. In exploring women artists' relation to professionalism, the essay interrogates the historical reasons for its ascendancy and its consequences for scholarship. Thereafter, the body of the

book is divided into three parts: “Professionalizing Art,” “Careers for Women,” and “The Limits of Professionalism.”

Part One follows different manifestations of the professionalizing project within Canadian art history. Kirk Niergarth focuses on politicized debates about what it meant to be an artist during the 1930s and 1940s. Contrasting the post-war dominance of a socially stratified and specialized artistic identity with the wide variety of community-based arts activities pursued by women artists in New Brunswick, Niergarth’s essay highlights the gendered ramifications of a professionalizing project that would eventually move the Canadian art world away from the democratizing impetus that characterized discussion of art during the Great Depression and the Second World War. If some of New Brunswick’s most active women artists were wholeheartedly committed to that impetus, however, Lianne McTavish’s chapter reveals that its female museum professionals were not. At the New Brunswick Museum, Alice Lusk Webster sought rather to enlighten what she considered to be the culturally backward citizenry of the province. Situating her analysis against competing visions of professionalization in North American museums, McTavish traces the genesis of Lusk Webster’s specialist persona, drawing out the ways in which it was fashioned in explicit opposition to the cultural practices of the museum’s other female supporters.

The currents of elitism and populism cast into relief by Niergarth and McTavish are also central to Alena Buis’s reading of Anne Savage’s CBC broadcasts on *The Development of Art in Canada*. Through the new mass-communication potential of the national broadcasting network, Savage made the recently established narrative of professional art practice in Canada available to a wide public. However, Buis argues that, in popularizing the canon of Canadian art, Savage unwittingly reinforced a set of art historical constructs that would eventually result in women’s elision from the national art-historical narrative. Taken together, the essays in this part of the book foreground the relation of professionalization to currents of social and artistic stratification, centring on the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that constitute the professional terrain.

The chapters in Part Two, “Careers for Women,” address artists’ experiences as working professionals and the techniques they adopted to facilitate their participation in what continued to be a relatively masculine domain. Examining the potential contradictions between a commercial career and feminine propriety during the nineteenth century, Jennifer Salahub identifies the pictorial language of domestic handcraft as a crucial aspect of Hannah Maynard’s carefully fashioned public persona. Salahub’s argument that female professionals strategically embraced the domestic as an acceptable avenue to professional success is strengthened by the pronounced presence of domesticity in the three subsequent chapters. In her essay on the commercial photographer Margaret Watkins, Mary O’Connor demonstrates that Watkins’s avowedly professional ambitions were furthered by the potential of her iconography to circulate within a visual econ-

omy that increasingly commodified domesticity and female sexuality alike. Domestic spaces and familial relations are equally pronounced in chapters by Cynthia Hammond, on the career of architect and landscape designer Maria Prus, and by Loren Lerner, on the Arctic drawings of painter Kathleen Daly Pepper. Yet these essays also call our awareness to the fractures that attended the increasingly unstable conjuncture of professionalism, femininity, and the domestic. Thus, Cynthia Hammond considers the social unease manifested in the *Canadian Home Journal's* coverage of Prus's winning co-design for an ideal home. Here, in a women's magazine from the 1950s dedicated to domestic adornment, texts by feminist Agnes Macphail worked in tandem with the example of Prus's own career to open a window on – in Hammond's words – “a future in which women choose their lives as well as their furnishings.” The lines of force between domesticity and professionalism also flowed in the opposite direction, and Loren Lerner argues that the personalized nature of Daly's drawings of Inuit mothers and children acted as a counterpoint to other available paradigms for the representation of the Arctic and its inhabitants – notably the dehumanized landscape vocabulary of the Group of Seven and the potentially objectifying idiom of professional ethnography.

The chapters by O'Connor, Hammond, and Lerner also address the relation between women's experiences as professional artists and modernism, and this strand is picked up in the final chapter of the section as Sandra Paikowsky explores the distinctive visual idiom developed by francophone women painters working in the male-dominated avant-garde milieu of Montreal in the 1960s. Looking closely at the paintings of Rita Letendre, Marcelle Maltais, Henriette Fauteux-Massé, and others, Paikowsky proposes the novel figure of the “armature” as an alternative to the pictorial language of the grid dominant in the work of male *plasticiens*. Ranging in scope from Victoria in the 1860s to Montreal in the 1960s, these essays thus explore the various strategies employed by professional women artists to negotiate the sometimes-conflicting forces of gender, work, and art.

The essays of the concluding part of the book, “The Limits of Professionalism,” alert us most acutely to the shortcomings of professionalism as an art-historical framework. Just as professional regulating bodies have historically established barriers to membership, the adoption of a discourse of professionalism by art historians effectively marginalizes certain women, certain kinds of contributions, and certain spheres of practice. Essays by Sherry Farrell Racette and Ruth Phillips draw our attention to the limitations of professionalism for the analysis of art by First Nations and Métis women. Farrell Racette's chapter explicitly points out the rootedness of the concept in the socio-economic structures of Euro-Canadian society, while in Phillips's essay the very *absence* of the term speaks volumes. At the same time, the crucial connections between commercial and amateur art practices that Phillips draws out would be lost to an art-historical vision too narrowly focused on the professional achievement of named individuals. Here,

then, where the address to professionalism might be considered most oblique, the blind spots of the paradigm emerge most clearly.

If it is fair to say that, for Phillips and Farrell Racette, the notion of professionalism is simply not germane, for Anne Whitelaw, by contrast, it is only too relevant. Whitelaw's chapter on the history of women's involvement with the Edmonton Art Gallery highlights the exclusions and elisions effected by the professionalizing project. Demonstrating the significant role played by non-professional female volunteers in the development of Canadian museums, Whitelaw argues for "a frame of analysis that moves beyond [the] narratives of personal achievement and innovative cultural leadership" that are so characteristic of the discourse of professionalism. Finally, Annmarie Adams's chapter on that consummate professional Marjorie Hill explores the way in which Hill's *non-professional* female networks were far more significant to her architectural career than the official associations conventionally considered to be a *sine qua non* of professional activity. Thus, while all of the essays included in this section discuss women whose cultural practices *might* be considered professional, they also call into question key aspects of both the designation and its consequences.

Together, the chapters in the volume work to explore the nature and ramifications of professionalism in order to build a better understanding of women and art in Canada. As photographic historian Colleen Skidmore underlined in her paper at the conference from which this volume stems, such an understanding must be founded on secure methodological premises. That security will come from attentively and openly considering the criteria according to which we undertake our analyses. Collectively, the essays in this book are an attempt to do just that.

NOTES

- 1 Dorothy Farr and Natalie Luckyj, *From Women's Eyes: Women Painters in Canada* (Kingston, ON: Agnes Etherington Art Centre 1975); Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550–1950* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art 1976).
- 2 Some examples of exhibition catalogues from the 1980s include: Mary Sparling, "Nova Scotia Women and the Ornamental Branches," in *Great Expectations: The European Vision in Nova Scotia: 1749–*

1848 (Halifax: Mount Saint Vincent University 1980), 53–72; Natalie Luckyj, *Expressions of Will: The Art of Prudence Heward* (Kingston, ON: Agnes Etherington Art Centre 1986); Christine Boyanoski, *Loring and Wyle: Sculptors' Legacy* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario 1987); and Joyce Zemans, Elizabeth Burrell, and Elizabeth Hunter, *Kathleen Munn, Edna Taçon: New Perspectives on Modernism in Canada = nouveau regard sur le modernisme au Canada* (North York, ON: York University Art Gallery 1988). Please note that the citations included in this and

- subsequent notes are intended to provide examples of representative scholarship, but not to offer a full overview of the field. Melinda Reinhart, visual arts librarian at Concordia University, is currently undertaking such bibliographic research.
- 3 Janice Helland, Review of Maria Tippet's *By a Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women*, in *Journal of Canadian Art History*, 15, no. 1 (1992): 125–33; and Reesa Greenberg, "Further Comments on Natalie Luckyj's Publication," *Journal of Canadian Art History*, 9, no. 2 (1986), 208–9.
 - 4 Some recent examples of writing on Canadian women artists and the colonial encounter include: Gerta Moray, *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr* (Vancouver: UBC Press 2006); Marcia Crosby, "A Chronology of Love's Contingencies," in Ian M. Thom and Charles Hill, eds., *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon* (Vancouver and Ottawa: Vancouver Art Gallery, National Gallery of Canada, and Douglas and McIntyre, 2006); and Kristina Huneault, "Always There: First Peoples and the Consolation of Miniature Portraits in British North America," in Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley, and Doug Fordham, eds., *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press 2007), 288–308. On women artists and modernity, see Patricia Smart, *Les Femmes du Refus global* (Montreal: Éditions du Boréal 1998); Lora Senechal Carney, "Modernism and Folk on the Lower St. Lawrence: 'The Problem of Folk Art,'" in Lynda Jessup, ed., *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2001), 104–16; and Marielle Aylen, "Modern Vision and National Memory: Jori Smith, the Montreal Avant-Garde, and Charlevoix Painters" (phd thesis, York University, 2009).
 - 5 Ellen Easton McLeod, *In Good Hands: The Women of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild* (Montreal and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press for Carleton University Press 1999); Sandra Alföldy, *Crafting Identity: Professional Fine Craft in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press 2005); and Paula Lavery, *Silk Stocking Mats: Hooked Mats of the Grenfell Mission* (Montreal and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press 2005).
 - 6 Examples of writing since 2000 that focus on individual artists include: Brian Foss and Janice Anderson, *Quiet Harmony: The Art of Mary Hiester Reid* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario 2000); Esther Trépanier, *Marian Dale Scott: pionnière de l'art moderne* (Québec City: Musée du Québec 2000); Tobi Bruce and Jennifer C. Watson, *Harriet Ford* (Hamilton, ON: Art Gallery of Hamilton 2001); Joan Murray, *An Extraordinary Life: Isabel McLaughlin* (Oshawa, ON: Robert McLaughlin Gallery 2003); Joan Murray, *Florence Carlyle, 1864–1923: Against All Odds* (London, ON: Museum London 2004); Mora Dianne O'Neill and Caroline Stone, *Two Artists Time Forgot = Deux artistes oubliées par l'histoire / Frances Jones (Bannerman) & Margaret Campbell Macpherson* (Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia 2006); Linda Jansma, *Rody Kenny Courtice: The Pattern of Her Times* (Oshawa, ON: Robert McLaughlin Gallery 2006); and Mary O'Connor and Katherine Tweedie, *Seduced by Modernity: The Photography of Margaret Watkins* (Montreal and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press 2007). Biographies include: Elspeth Cameron, *And Beauty Answers: The Life of Frances Loring and Florence Wyle* (Toronto: Cormorant Books 2007); Laura Brandon, *Pegi by Herself: The Life of Pegi Nicol MacLeod* (Montreal and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press 2005). For an exploration of the biographical framework see Stephanie Kirkwood Walker, *This Woman in Particular: Contexts for the Biographical Image of Emily*

Carr (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press 1996).

- 7 Susan Close, "The Camera and the Contact Zone: Re-envisioning the Representation of Aboriginal Women in the Canadian North," in J. Codell, ed., *The Art of Transculturation* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, forthcoming); Kristina Huneault, "Placing Frances Anne Hopkins," in Deborah Cherry and Janice Helland, eds., *Studio, Space and Sociality: New Narratives of Nineteenth Century Women Artists* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate 2006), 179–98; and Lisa MacFarlane, "Mary Schaffer's 'Comprehending Equal Eyes,'" in Susan Bernardin et al., eds., *Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North Americans, 1880–1940* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press 2003), 109–50. Interest in politicized art has also been productive internationally,

for example: Natalie Luckyj, "Come Out from behind the Pre-Cambrian Shield: The Politics of Memory and Identity in the Art of Paraskeva Clark," in Alejandro Anreus, Diana L. Linden, and Jonathan Weinberg, eds., *The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press 2006), 223–40.

8 In addition to producing new scholarship, the Initiative maintains a documentation centre and develops digital resources relevant to historical Canadian women artists. These currently include its bibliographical artist database as well as *Canadian Exhibition Reviews Online*, a database of published reviews of annual exhibitions from major Canadian exhibiting societies. Visit <http://cwahi.concordia.ca>.