

WILD CREATIONS & WOMEN ARTISTS

self-guided tour

**MUSEUM
OF FINE ARTS
ST. PETERSBURG**

WILD CREATIONS & WOMEN ARTISTS

“I think in these perilous times, a third way is emerging, a kind of escalated passion — a creative energy that comes from giving one’s heart and soul and imagination to the struggle. Not aggression but fierceness. Not hurting but confronting. Not violating but disrupting. This passion has all the ingredients of activism, but is charged with the wild creations of art.”

– activist, feminist, and playwright Eve Ensler

This self-guided tour is an exploration of artwork by women artists, showcasing their powerful contributions to art history and offering an opportunity to reflect on the structural forces that have led to inequality in the art world.



SCAN THIS CODE FOR A MAP IDENTIFYING
THE LOCATIONS OF THE ARTWORKS

THIS DIVINE PASSION

Elisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, *Julie as Flora, Roman Goddess of Flowers*, 1799

FIND THIS IN THE EUROPEAN ART, 13TH-18TH CENTURIES GALLERIES

“The passion for painting was innate in me. This passion has never failed, perhaps because it has always increased with time; even today, I experience all its charm, and I hope that this divine passion ends only with my life.”

Born in Paris in 1755, Elisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun was quite a celebrity of her time. As a painter to Queen Marie Antoinette, and a member of the prestigious Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture (Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture), she challenged gender roles by working in a predominantly male field. Vigée-LeBrun’s livelihood depended on the nobility, and she became an exile after the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. For over a decade, she traveled the continent as an émigré, promoting her talent, and working in some of the greatest courts in Europe. A consideration of her life and work reveals an astute businesswoman who forged her own path despite cultural restrictions, tragedy, and adversity.



Vigée-LeBrun returned to France in 1802, where she predominantly lived until her death in 1842 at the age of 86. Shortly after her death, rumors began to spread that she could not have been the sole artist creating her paintings. Her detractors noted that she must have been aided by a male artist and that she had achieved her success simply by selling herself to men of wealth and power. These allegations have been proven untrue. While history has not always been kind to her memory, she is now considered one of the masters of eighteenth-century portraiture, and her work can be viewed in museum collections around the world.

I KNOW MY WORTH

Berthe Morisot, *La Lecture (Reading)*, 1888

FIND THIS IN THE EUROPEAN ART, 19TH-20TH CENTURIES GALLERIES

"I do not think any man would ever treat a woman as his equal, and it is all I ask because I know my worth."

Despite gender restrictions, Berthe Morisot became one of the most well-known painters of nineteenth-century Europe. She was a skilled draftsman, whose works were held in high regard by her contemporaries. As a founder of the Impressionist movement, Morisot—like her male peers— explored new compositional methods in an attempt to capture the varied colors, textures, and sights of the world around her.



Much of Morisot's imagery centers on scenes of domesticity such as reading, dressing, or entertaining guests. The predominately feminine nature of her compositions hints at the delicate balance she had to maintain between social expectations and career. While her images may reflect traditional female roles, her activities as a professional painter were anything but conventional. Morisot was the first woman to exhibit in the avant-garde Impressionist exhibitions held between 1874 and 1886. The sensational nature of these shows garnered fraught responses and her participation did not go unnoticed as detected by critic Albert Wolff's description of the artists as "five or six lunatics of which one is a woman." Despite this reaction, Morisot continued to garner respect from the art world and, upon her death, the gallery Durand Ruel held a memorial exhibition in her honor featuring over 300 of her paintings, drawings, and sculptures.

ONE OF THE BEST PAINTERS

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Poppy*, 1927

FIND THIS IN THE AMERICAN ART, 19TH-21ST CENTURIES GALLERIES

"Men put me down as the best woman painter. I think I'm one of the best painters."

With her singular style, Georgia O'Keeffe was a founding member of American modernism. Raised on a farm in Wisconsin, O'Keeffe studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, and later the Art Students League in New York. She was one of the first American artists to practice pure abstraction, using charcoal to experiment with line and shape as early as 1915. These works led to her first solo exhibition in New York at photographer and art dealer Alfred Stieglitz's gallery, which was at the forefront of the artistic avant-garde (Pablo Picasso's work made its American debut there in 1911). O'Keeffe would also become the first woman artist to have a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in 1946.



In the mid-1920s, O'Keeffe began to work with close-up and enlarged views of flowers so "even busy New Yorkers" would take time to look at them. Critics were quick to draw conclusions about these paintings being linked to female sexuality, one remarking that her flowers had "the air of self-portraits." Seven paintings of poppies are known. The two other large ones are *Red Poppy* and *Oriental Poppies*. Her husband and dealer, Alfred Stieglitz, referred to this painting in the MFA collection as "that wild red picture." It may serve as her response to traditional flower painting and to critics who interpreted her work narrowly in terms of her sexuality.

NEVER TOO MUCH FOR ME

Marguerite Zorach, *Wash Day*, c. 1925

FIND THIS IN THE AMERICAN ART, 19TH-21ST CENTURIES GALLERIES

"My greatest ability lies in the awareness and use of relationship of form, vision and imagination . . . I have a sensitive appreciation and ability to handle color. I feel complete freedom to take any liberties with form and space. You may find the application of my work overpowering; it is never too much for me."

Marguerite Zorach was an instrumental figure in bringing European avant-garde movements like Cubism, representing multiple planes and perspectives on the canvas, and Fauvism, an intense, non-naturalistic use of color—to the United States.



Zorach was born in Santa Rosa, California, and was one of the first female students to attend Stanford University. She left Stanford, however, to travel to Paris with her aunt, who was friends with Gertrude Stein. Her first day in Paris, Zorach attended the 1908 Salon d'Automne, where she was greatly inspired by the Fauvist works of Matisse and others. She studied at Academie de La Palette, and traveled extensively, not just through Europe, but in India and Pakistan as well. In 1912, she married William Zorach, and together they moved to the United States.

THE ONLY LANGUAGE I KNOW

Perle Fine, *Globe Trottin' Blue*, 1967

FIND THIS IN THE AMERICAN ART, 19TH-21ST CENTURIES GALLERIES

"My paintings speak in the only language I know—color. Its fascination makes me stubborn about expressing myself through the plastic play of these pure means. I like to light up a canvas with color; I like to make it shout or whisper; I like to make it spin... or make forms melt softly over the whole picture."

Perle Fine was one of the few women associated with the first generation of Abstract Expressionists, having studied with Hans Hoffman in the 1930s and joining the American Abstract Artists group in 1945. In 1949, Willem de Kooning invited Fine to join the "8th Street Club," or just "The Club," a collective of artists including Franz Kline, Ad Reinhardt, and Elaine de Kooning who met regularly to organize and discuss philosophies of abstract art. She began exhibiting with Betty Parsons Gallery in 1949 and was included in group exhibitions at major museums in New York. However, in large part due to the gender inequities of the art world, Fine became disillusioned with the city and decided in 1954 to relocate to East Hampton. Her work was included in the groundbreaking 2016 exhibition *Women of Abstract Expressionism* organized by the Denver Art Museum, which sought to highlight the women too often overlooked in art history.



Cover: Perle Fine, *Globe Trottin' Blue* (detail), 1967, Gift of Jean Gollay from the Benjamin Gollay Collection in memory of Benjamin Gollay
Insider: Berthe Morisot, *La Lecture (Reading)* (detail), 1888, Museum purchase in memory of Margaret Acheson Stuart

**MUSEUM
OF FINE ARTS
ST. PETERSBURG**