

WOMEN IN THE ARTS



6. INTIMATE RELATIONS

October 28, 2024

INTIMATE RELATIONS

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TWO CREATIVE ARTISTS are bound to each other emotionally? We have composers who were siblings, sculptors who were lovers, and a variety of marriages. There are some rare examples of harmony: a pair of poets and two couples in the visual arts who succeeded because wife and husband had complementary but not overlapping specialties. We have two painters, very much in love, but where the wife was developing at a very different rate from her husband. We have a pair of poets, both geniuses, but whose combined intensities made a combustible mixture. And finally a young composer whose marriage to an older one meant giving up her own career, with consequences that rippled through the entire century. *rb.*

A. FANNY AND FELIX

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, a composer like her brother **Felix**, and blessed to be married to an artist who encouraged her, writing mainly in small forms intended for performance in house concerts.

- ♪ **Kyra Steckeweh**: *Women Composers*, film (2018)
- ♪ **Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel**: *April* from *Das Jahr* (1841), opening
- ♪ **Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel**: *Italien* (Chen Reiss, soprano)
- ♪ **Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel**: *Overture* (1832), central section

B. BA AND BOB

Though still living with her possessive father, **Elizabeth Barrett** was already a famous poet by the time she met and married Robert Browning, and continued to be productive thereafter. We also glimpse two other successful partnerships, those of **Margaret Macdonald** and **Charles Rennie Mackintosh** and of **Anni and Josef Albers**.

- ♪ **Sidney Franklin** (dir): *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1934), Charles Laughton and Norma Shearer
- Elizabeth Barrett**, from *The Cry of the Children*, 1842

- ♪ **Elizabeth Barrett**: “How do I love thee?” Read by Judi Dench
- ♪ **Elizabeth Barrett Browning**: *Aurora Leigh* (BBC radio, 2017)
- CR and MM Mackintosh**: Ingram Street Tea Room, Glasgow , 1895
- Anni Albers**: textiles (various dates)

C. CAMILLE AND AUGUSTE

The relationship between sculptor **Camille Claudel** and her mentor and lover **Auguste Rodin** was passionate and artistically enhancing, but it could neither last nor prevent her decline into despair.

- Claudel**: *Man Leaning Over* (1886)
- ♪ **Bruno Nuytten** (*dir*): *Camille Claudel* (1988), Isabelle Adjani and Gérard Depardieu (two excerpts)
- Claudel**: *The Waltz* (1885) and other works
- Claudel**: *The Mature Age* (1898)

D. SYLVIA AND TED

English poet **Ted Hughes** must bear some blame for the suicide of his American wife, fellow poet **Sylvia Plath**. Yet their troubled relationship began in joy, and a woman who wrote that she had “mastered the art of dying” would have needed someone of far less energy to calm her.

- ♪ **Plath**: *Mad Girl’s Love Song* (1953), Poetry Channel
- ♪ **BBC Radio**: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes interview, 1961
- ♪ **Plath**: *Lady Lazarus* and *Poppies in October* (read by the author)
- ♪ **Plath**: *Poppies in July* (1962, read by John Gillett)
- Ted Hughes**: *Birthday Letters* (1998)
- ♪ **Frieda Hughes**, video for Sotheby’s sale (2021)

E. PAULA AND OTTO

The innovative German Expressionist painter **Paula Becker** married the older and more conventional **Otto Modersohn**. She could continue her development only by relocating to Paris, but returned to her husband once she felt ready to have a baby.

- Otto Modersohn**: landscapes, 1895 and 1926
- Modersohn-Becker**: *Self Portraits* 1897 and 1905, and other works
- Modersohn-Becker**: *Self Portrait on her 6th Anniversary* (1906)
- ♪ **Christian Schwochow** (*dir*): *Paula*, trailer 2017

F. ALMA AND GUSTAV AND...

Alma Schindler, the “prettiest girl in Vienna,” toyed with Gustav Klimt and Alexander Zemlinsky before marrying **Gustav Mahler**. Even before Mahler’s death, though, she was continuing to inspire (and sleep with) other great artists, and would go on to have two other famous husbands.

- ♪ **Tom Lehrer**: “Alma, tell us” (live concert, 1965)
- Kokoschka**: *Lovers* and *Self Portrait with Alma Mahler*
- Kokoschka**: *Bride of the Wind* (1914, Basel)
- Kokoschka**: *Self Portrait with Doll*
- ♪ **Alma Mahler**: *Laue Sommernacht* (Wiebke Lehmkuhl, mezzo)

Anni Albers (1899–1994, *German textile artist*), **Josef Albers** (1888–1976, *German artist*), **Lili Boulanger** (1893–1918, *French composer*), **Nadia Boulanger** (1887–1979, *French composer and teacher*), **Elizabeth Barrett Browning** (1806–61, *English poet*), **Robert Browning** (1812–89, *English poet*), **Blanche Calloway** (1902–78, *American bandleader*), **Camille Claudel** (1864–1943, *French sculptor*), **Frankie Gershwin** (1906–99, *American singer*), **Wilhelm Hensel** (1794–1861, *German painter*), **Ted Hughes** (1930–98, *English poet*), **Oskar Kokoschka** (1886–1980, *Austrian painter*), **Margaret Macdonald** (1864–1933, *English artist and designer*), **Charles Rennie Mackintosh** (1868–1928, *Scottish architect*), **Alma Mahler** Gropius Werfel (1879–1964, *Austrian composer and muse*), **Gustav Mahler** (1860–1911, *Austrian composer*), **Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel** (1805–47, *German composer*), **Felix Mendelssohn** (1809–47, *German composer*), **Otto Modersohn** (1865–1943, *German painter*), **Paula Modersohn-Becker** (1876–1907, *German painter*), **Sylvia Plath** (1932–63, *American poet*), **Auguste Rodin** (1840–1917, *French sculptor*), **Dorothy Wordsworth** (1771–1855, *English writer*), **William Wordsworth** (1770–1850, *English poet*)

The course website is www.brunyate.com/WomenArts
I will always respond to mail at rogerbrunyate@gmail.com