

CLASS 9 : GROUP DYNAMICS

SIX GROUPS, AND THE WOMEN IN THEM

1. Class title 1 (Morisot and Woolf)
2. Six Movements

As often happens, my plans for the class have focused themselves rather differently from what I had in mind when writing the syllabus. I have done a little already on Impressionist **Berthe Morisot** (1841–94), so will not be coming back to her. But we will still be talking about women as the minority members of artistic groups. I am going to look at six such groups: the **Impressionists**, the **Futurists**, the **Bloomsbury Group**, the **Dadaists**, the French composers' group known as **Les Six**, and the **Abstract Expressionists** in postwar New York. I chose them because all either defined themselves as a group, or accepted a definition proposed by an influential critic.

3. Title transformation
4. Six Artists

But it is not the groups themselves that interest me, so much as the six individual women members shown here: **Marie Bracquemond** (1840–1916), **Benedetta Cappa** (1897–1977), **Virginia Woolf** (1882–1941), **Hannah Höch** (1889–1978), **Germaine Tailleferre** (1892–1983), and **Lee Krasner** (1908–84). With the exception of Virginia Woolf, whose greatness towers above her group membership, I have chosen these five women because of their stories. Not all these stories have to do with the relationship between the individual and male members of the group—three of the six involve husbands—but the group comes into the picture somewhere in each case.

A. MARIE BRACQUEMOND

5. Section title A (the image below)
6. Félix Bracquemond: *Terrace of the Villa Brancas* (etching, 1876)

What do you make of this picture? One woman drawing another, and perhaps about to paint her, in a lush summer setting with something of an Impressionist feel. The artist in the picture is **Marie Bracquemond**, her sister is her model, and the etching itself is the work of her husband, **Félix Bracquemond** (1833–1914). If it has an Impressionist feel, it is because Félix was friends with the Impressionists and showed some of his prints at their first exhibition in 1874. Félix was already well-known as a printmaker and ceramic designer, and even in many ways ahead of his time. Look at the striking informal asymmetry of this etching of *Notre Dame* or either of these two plates.

7. Félix Bracquemond: *Notre Dame* (etching, 1870)

8. Plates by Félix Bracquemond, 1872–80

I find the plate on the left almost modern in its design. I suspect it is influenced by Japanese ceramics. For it was Félix Bracquemond who first discovered prints by the Japanese artist **Hokusai** used as scrap paper to wrap plates imported by the **Sèvres** porcelain factory where he worked, thus triggering the interest in Japanese art that was to bear fruit in the work of **Van Gogh** and **Gauguin** a decade or so later. Anyway, my point is that Félix was no slouch.

9. Marie Bracquemond: *Self Portrait* (1870) and *Pierre Bracquemond* (1878, both Rouen)

But what of Marie? It is hard to speak of her earlier development, since 90% of her work has essentially disappeared. These are two of the earliest I can find, portraits of herself and their son Pierre. Clearly, she was highly competent, though not ground-breaking. She had trained as an apprentice with the old master **Ingres**, expressing dissatisfaction that “*he doubted the courage and perseverance of a woman in the field of painting. He would assign to them only the painting of flowers, of fruits, of still lifes, portraits and genre scenes.*” But she began having paintings accepted by the *Salon*, and got a job as an official copyist at the Louvre, and it was there that she and Félix met and fell in love. Félix taught her the technique of etching, but she felt the medium was too constricting, and produced only a few.

10. Marie Bracquemond: *Woman in the Garden* (1877) and *Afternoon Tea* (1880)

11. Marie Bracquemond: *On the Terrace at Sèvres* (1880, Geneva)

But then, in the later 1870s, something happened. Compare these two pictures of women in a garden. There are only three years between them, but her paint handling has become a whole lot freer and her color far richer. Exhibiting with the **Impressionists**, which had been little more than a gesture of collegial solidarity for him, planted a seed in her. Her mentors were now **Monet**, **Degas**, and **Renoir**. Félix didn’t like this at all, and tried to keep her work hidden. He may have been innovative in his compositions, but his forms were still clear and precise. Marie was throwing away the draughtsmanship that he prized so highly, in favor of brushwork and color. You can see this clearly by comparing their ceramics at the time.

12. Pottery by Félix and Marie Bracquemond

Félix was more true to the ceramic art form, and produced work that was more likely to sell. But it is almost shocking that Marie was using paint and color in a medium where you would never expect it, far more freely than she ever did on canvas. I would not call her a genius; she is probably less important to the history of Impressionism than either **Berthe Morisot** or **Mary Cassatt**, though perhaps on a level with **Eva Gonzalès**. But she had been embraced by the group and seduced by their style, and at her best could produce work that would stand up to any comparison, such as the beautiful smoky atmosphere of this dinner-table scene from 1887.

13. Marie Bracquemond: *Under the Lamp* (1887, p.c.)

B. BENEDETTA CAPPÀ MARINETTI

14. Section title B: Benedetta Cappà

I'm sure you would not be surprised to learn that this painting is by a woman; it has all those traditional "feminine" qualities of grace, order, and calm. It is by an artist you have probably never heard of (at least I hadn't): **Benedetta Cappà** (1897–1977). But before going any further, I am going to shatter that calm: a man declaiming a half-abstract sound poem, and five more paintings by five more artists. How would you describe what you are about to hear and see?

15. Marinetti: *Zang Tumb Tumb* montage

16. Carlo Carrà: *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti* (1911)

What did you see and hear? Those paintings were all about noise and jangle, machines, speed, and war. The man declaiming was the Italian poet **Filippo Tommaso Marinetti** (1876–1944), the founder of the **Futurist Movement** in 1909, and author of the *Futurist Manifesto*. Two of its articles read as follows:

17. Marinetti: *Futurist Manifesto*, articles 9 and 10

18. Carlo Carrà: *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti* (1911)

Note the phrases "contempt for women" and "fight against feminism." Pure misogyny! You could hardly imagine a less inviting invitation for a female woman to join the group. And yet only two years later, Marinetti had fallen under the spell of a woman, and got his friend, the painter **Carlo Carrà** (1883–1966) to do his portrait for her, including a fulsome dedication at bottom left: "*to the great Futurist, Marchesa Casati.*" What exactly made **Luisa, Marchesa Casati**, a Futurist is hard to see; perhaps it is that she was almost masculine in her quest for self-promotion. A socialite, and fabulously rich, she became a fashion icon, and an inspiration for artists and designers for decades to come; Marinetti was far from the only man to worship her.

19. Portraits of Luisa, Marchesa Casati

The First World War seemed the culmination of all the Futurists had been extolling. But several of them lost their lives in it, and by war's end the more strident tone of the survivors had been muted. It was around this time that Marinetti met the young artist **Benedetta Cappà** (1897–1977), who was a student of the Futurist painter **Giacomo Balla** (1871–1958), who painted her in 1924.

20. Giacomo Balla: *Benedetta* (1924), with Benedetta: *Speedboat* (1923)

Benedetta was also a poet, and had published a collection called *Psychology of a Man*; she would go on to write two more books, all of which explore feminine versus masculine qualities. So Marinetti had found someone who could speak his language, but also counter his *machismo* with ideas of his own. He was soon calling her his "*equal, and in no sense a disciple.*" They were married in 1923. Benedetta's *Speedboat* painting from that year shows that she could adopt the old Futurist style of lines of force, and its preoccupation with speed, but apply them to the gentler image of a boat on a sunlit sea.

21. Cappa: *Rhythms of Rocks and the Sea* (1936) and *Peaks of Solitude*

Benedetta might have been an outsider to the super-macho Futurist group, but her continued presence resulted in the transformation of the group from within. Futurist paintings in the interwar years were generally softer than before, and dropped the jagged aggressiveness of the prewar phase.

22. Benedetta Cappa Marinetti: Murals for the Post Office in Palermo (1933)

23. Benedetta Cappa Marinetti: *Vision of the Port* (1933)

Of course it is no surprise that the surviving Futurists saw a brilliant future in the Fascist regime of **Mussolini**, and this affinity brought Benedetta her most important commission yet, a set of murals in the new **Head Post Office in Palermo, Sicily**. They all deal with different forms of communication; the three shown here represent land, sea, and air. And here is an enlargement of the *Air* panel, together with her separate painting, *Vision of the Port*, that she elaborated into the *Sea* panel. Fascist commission though it might be, the vision here is one of energy and hope for a bright future; there is no militarism or even overt nationalism, and the colors of the right-hand panel are simply gorgeous. These compare very well to the many murals being created in this country for the WPA at around the same time.

C. VIRGINIA WOOLF

24. Section title C: Virginia Woolf

The position of **Virginia Stephen** and her elder sister **Vanessa** in the **Bloomsbury Group** was different from that of any of the other women in this class. They were not guests in a group composed mostly of men, but in effect the hostesses of a group that met in their own house, or rather sequence of houses in the Bloomsbury area of London, near the British Museum.

25. Some members of the Bloomsbury Group

The first manifestation of the group, the **Thursday Club**, was founded in 1905 by the sisters' brother **Thoby Stephen**, who gathered together a number of his friends from Cambridge to continue their intellectual exchanges. Here are just a few of the people associated with the group, including writers, painters, two art critics, a political scientist, and an economist. The Stephen sisters would have felt right at home, since their parents were both intellectuals, well connected to London literary and artistic life. Thoby died of typhoid at the age of 26, but the regular meetings continued under different guises, with the addition of occasional others such as **TS Eliot** and **Katharine Mansfield**. Vanessa, who was a painter, married one of the art critics, **Clive Bell**, and Virginia ultimately accepted the proposal of **Leonard Woolf**, the political scientist, and together they set up a publishing enterprise, the **Hogarth Press**.

26. Some paintings by Vanessa Bell

This is mainly about Woolf, but I do want to show a couple of things by her sister **Vanessa Bell** (1879–1961), including her portrait of Virginia. As you see, she painted in a light, luminous style, slightly

abstracted and notably influenced by French Post-Impressionists such as **Gauguin**; after all it was another member of the group, **Roger Fry**, who coined this term.

27. Some books by Virginia Woolf

In other courses, I have presented excerpts from *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf. Given the emphasis in this course on women and gender identity, however, I want to concentrate on two other works: the book-length essay ***A Room of One's Own*** (1929) and the highly experimental novel ***Orlando: a Biography*** (1928). And, for the same reasons as last week, I will present them mainly in videos. So first, the beginning and end of a brief online TED talk by **Iseult Gillespie**. She begins with a description of the essay; I've cut the section where she goes quickly through the other main books, then pick it up with her quick mention of *Orlando* and conclusion.

28. Iseult Gillespie: "Why you should read Virginia Woolf"

29. Quotation from *A Room of One's Own*

Woolf embarks on a highly imaginative survey of the history of literature to develop her thesis that a woman needs a room and money of her own in order to be able to write. Passages like this might almost be an executive summary of this entire course!

30. William Stang: *Vita Sackville-West* (1918, Glasgow)

The Bloomsbury group included a fair share of homosexual artists, and many of the others practiced open marriages. Virginia Woolf herself was bisexual; the great love of her life was a ten-year affair, and even longer friendship, with the aristocrat **Vita Sackville-West** (who was married to the politician and author **Harold Nicholson**). Her novel *Orlando; a Biography* was inspired by her love for Vita and her aristocratic heritage. She wrote in her diary: "*And instantly the usual exciting devices enter my mind: a biography beginning in the year 1500 and continuing to the present day, called **Orlando**: Vita; only with a change about from one sex to the other.*" I shall show a couple of excerpts from the 1992 film by Sally Potter starring Tilda Swinton. Here she is with a description of the story by **Nigel Nicholson**, Vita's son.

31. Tilda Swinton as *Orlando* (1992)

As she was to do in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf turned to history for *Orlando*. The character starts off as a young page in the court of Queen Elizabeth. He survives into the reign of King Charles II, who sends him as Ambassador to Constantinople. There, he falls asleep for several days; he wakes to find he has been transformed into a woman. He will remain biologically female for the rest of the novel, but totally fluid in his amorous inclinations, loving now a man, now another woman. I have chosen scenes that illustrate Orlando's gender fungibility, then two conversations, one with the Enlightenment writers **Swift**, **Pope**, and **Addison**, and one with an American, **Shelmerdine**, whose views turn out to be as fluid as her own.

32. *Orlando*, montage

33. Class title 2

D. HANNAH HÖCH

34. Section title D: Hannah Höch

Hanna Höch (1889–1978) was the only woman among the **Berlin Dada group** in the years immediately following World War One. Before I explain further, let's discuss this picture: what is going on, what are its component parts, and what is its message?

35. Hannah Höch: *Indian Dancer* (1924)

What did you think? It is a collage, combining the head of film star Renée Falconetti (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*), a wooden mask from Cameroon that Höch had seen in an ethnographic museum, and a headdress of cutlery. A woman half hidden behind an unchanging mask, weighted by the commonplace objects of a domestic life. Though not strident, it is clearly a feminist work.

36. Raoul Hausmann: *Self Portrait*

Dada, which sprang up virtually simultaneously in Zurich, Berlin, Paris, and New York, was a medium expanding the boundaries of art to include non-art subjects and materials, including trash, and making use of the absurd as a form of discourse. Its practitioners proclaimed themselves anti-war, anti-government, anti-museums, and pretty much anti-women. Except that **Raoul Hausmann** (1886–1971), who founded the Berlin group in 1919, was already deep in a relationship with Höch. It was a stormy one, even becoming violent. She wanted him to leave his wife and marry her; he refused. Nonetheless, he wanted her to bear his children; she aborted them, twice.

37. Opening of the first Dada exhibition in Berlin

During the planning of the first group exhibition in Berlin in 1920, the other artists objected to the inclusion of Höch, but Hausmann insisted that she participate. Nonetheless, he wrote in his memoir that she “*was never really a member of the club*,” and another artist limited her importance to “*the sandwiches, beer and coffee she managed somehow to conjure up*.” But today we see Höch not as a mere hanger on but as an innovator. While Hausmann and Höch almost certainly invented the technique of **photomontage** together, it was she who made the most of it, and continued working in the medium for her entire career.

38. Höch: *Cut with the Kitchen Knife...* (1919, Berlin)

Her entry for the exhibition was a large montage called *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Epoch of Weimar Beer-Belly Culture in Germany*. It is obviously impossible to explain it from a single view, so I am turning to a rather good video in the SmartHistory series. The speakers are **Juliana Kreinik**, **Steven Zucker**, and **Beth Harris**.

39. Höch: *Cut with a Kitchen Knife...*, SmartHistory video

40. Höch: *High Finance* (1919)

Few Höch photomontages are as complex as this, but many of her works around 1919 or 1920 also have political themes, for example the *High Finance* shown here. At least one of the men has been identified, but as he is a mid-19th-century British scientist (Sir John Herschel), I am not sure that he has any relevance, apart from being an establishment figure, and elderly.

41. Höch: *The Beautiful Girl* (1919) and *The Bride* (1930)

A longer-recurring theme, lasting the rest of her life in fact, is the feminist one, examining the so-called *New Woman* of the 20th century, and asking whether she really was so different from her predecessors. What do you think is her message in these two? *The Lovely Girl* is virtually lost among automotive accessories, and her head is a light bulb. *The Bride (Pandora)*, has become tied to her husband, and encumbered with all sorts of new domestic duties. Höch herself moved to Holland after she had finally broken with Hausmann, and took up a three-year lesbian partnership. But when that ended, she moved back to Germany, and eventually married, but I suspect she did so on her own terms.

42. Höch: *Grotesque* (1963)

Needless to say, Höch's work did not please the Nazis, who labeled it **degenerate**. However, she was not a Jew, so had no reason to fear for her life; she survived by moving to a small house in the country, and staying clear of exhibitions. After the war, though, she returned to her old media and themes, now with a sense of exuberance, even fun, and altogether brighter color.

E. GERMAINE TAILLEFERRE

43. Section title E: Germaine Tailleferre

As you have seen with Virginia Woolf and Hannah Höch at least, a somewhat fluid approach to sex is a common characteristic of many of these New Women. I don't think this is true of my next artist, composer **Germaine Tailleferre** (1892–1983), although she did have a child by a lover a year before she married him. All the same, I can start with one of her songs, which begins “No, fidelity has never been anything but stupidity.” The text is actually by Gabriel-Charles de Lattaignant, an early 18th century poet, but it works well even when the man's voice is taken by a woman. And in this case, the woman is a former student of mine at Peabody, **Noelle McMurtry**.

44. Tailleferre: “Non, la fidélité” (Noelle McMurtry, Jack Dou)

45. Chart of all artists surveyed so far

This is a chart of all five of the artists we have looked at so far, and their relationship to the group that did or did not accept them; the sixth artist, **Lee Krasner**, is in a rather different situation that I'll explain in a few minutes. **Marie Bracquemond** was accepted by her group, the **Impressionists**, but this caused a

rift between her and her husband. **Benedetta Cappa** was introduced to the **Futurists** by her husband; his colleagues resisted at first, but she remained to transform the movement in later years. **Hannah Höch** was also forced upon the group, the **Berlin Dadaists**, by her lover, and she had a lot to bring to it, but she was never fully accepted and went her own way. **Virginia Woolf** did not have to apply for entry to the **Bloomsbury Group**; they were all family friends, and met in her house. And **Germaine Tailleferre** did not have to apply either to be counted among the interwar French composers known as **Les Six**; the names were put together more or less arbitrarily by a critic, **Henri Collet**. So she was one of the gang from the start, but her work was smaller-scale and quieter, and whether from temperament or otherwise, she never attained the success of some of the others. I have included her in the class mainly because I need some music; she does not seem to have a story of acceptance or rejection to match those of the others.

46. Jacques-Émile Blanche: *Le groupe des Six* (1922)

Although titled *The Group of Six*, this painting by **Jacques-Émile Blanche** (1861–1942) is deceptive. The woman front and center is not Tailleferre, but a pianist, **Marcelle Meyer**; Germaine Tailleferre is squatting on the ground behind her. One of the original Six, **Louis Durey**, is not included at all—but I can't remember ever hearing any of his music. Of the others, **Francis Poulenc** turned out to be a major name, **Arthur Honegger** and **Darius Milhaud** somewhat behind him, and **Georges Auric** somewhat behind them. Of the others, I have never heard of **Jean Wiener** (another pianist), but I have very much heard of the poet and artist **Jean Cocteau** (1889–1963). It was he, in fact, who gathered together a number of composers a year before in a group called **Les nouveaux jeunes** (roughly “The New Generation”) so that he could have a group of his own to lead to match the various *avant-garde* groups in the other arts, such as the Cubists and Surrealists; there is a thought that he pushed Collet into publicizing it for him. Tailleferre was not included in his circle.

47. Quote from Darius Milhaud

Darius Milhaud saw it differently, however. I find it interesting that, although he lists Tailleferre, he does not describe her style. It all adds up in my mind to a sort of in-between status: “Yes she is one of us... but not really.”

48. Chagall: *Les mariés de la tour Eiffel* (1913)

Well, what *can* we say about Tailleferre's style? Most of the music I can play comes from later in her career, but there is one significant piece from exactly this period which is actually a collaboration between five of *Les Six* (all except Durey). It is a 1921 ballet with spoken narration by Cocteau called **Les mariés de la tour Eiffel** (The Wedding Party on the Eiffel Tower), one of several works he created at this time in what seems to be a determination to prove himself a member of the *avant garde*. I don't know if it has any relationship to the painting from eight years earlier by **Marc Chagall** (1887–1985); its scenario is totally absurd. Cocteau originally asked Georges Auric to write the music, but he ran out of time and asked his colleagues to help him. I only have it in audio, but a small sample is enough. Hearing this *Quadrille* by Tailleferre, I don't think I could distinguish it from the *jolly-oompah* music that any of the others were writing at around the same time.

49. Tailleferre: *Quadrille* from *Les mariés de la tour Eiffel*, opening
50. *Les Six* LP cover, with Cocteau drawing

Here is an LP cover with a drawing of *Les Six* by Cocteau, who seems to have established himself as more or less their manager; there he is right in the middle of the group. I am beginning to believe the theory that he manipulated the group into existence. Germaine Tailleferre pretty much dropped out after that and went her own way. It was a way that suggested she had never been comfortable with the *avant-garde*, but was more at home with gentler, more pastoral music, including a great deal for piano, harp, and various chamber combinations. And it can be very charming, as the opening of her *Petite suite* (1957) will show you. This is a French orchestra under the Finnish conductor **Mikko Franck**.

51. Tailleferre: *Petite suite*, opening

F. LEE KRASNER

52. Section title F: Lee Krasner

The situation of **Lee Krasner** (1908–84), as I mentioned before, is different. The main story here is her relationship with her damaged-genius husband **Jackson Pollock** (1912–56) and her gradual emergence from his shadow. The fact that both were part of the **Abstract Expressionist** movement in New York after the Second World War is almost incidental. So far from being a label created or at least embraced by the artists themselves, the term “Abstract Expressionism” was the coinage of influential critics such as **Robert Coates** (the first to use it in an American context), **Harold Rosenberg**, and **Clement Greenberg**, each of whom had his own horses in the race, and a rather different vision of what was involved. But the art world is a small place; the artists knew or knew of each other, knew what others were doing, and cannot but have been affected by some spirit of competition.

53. Comparison between Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, and Helen Frankenthaler

There were actually three significant female painters among the group, plus two significant sculptors, **Louise Nevelson** and **Louise Bourgeois**. All three of the painters were married to artists, but their situations were largely different. **Helen Frankenthaler** (1928–2011) was one of the great innovators in the second phase of Abstract Expressionism; during her marriage to **Robert Motherwell**, their two careers continued in parallel without significant overlap, and both continued to enjoy fame after their divorce. Although **Elaine de Kooning** (1918–89) and **Lee Krasner** both continued their own painting throughout their marriages, they both acknowledged their husband as the greater genius and were active in supporting his work. The main difference is that whereas Elaine met **Willem de Kooning** when she was only 20 and in effect became his student, Lee Krasner was 26, four years older than Pollock, and already a somewhat established painter.

54. Lee Krasner: *Still Life* (1938, NY Met)

Krasner trained in New York with **Hans Hoffmann**, which is to say in the European tradition descending from **Cubism**. Her earlier works, such as this *Still Life* painted when she was 30, are clearly in the Cubist tradition, and I would say absolutely gorgeous, with a beautiful grace of color and paint handling set against the geometry of the forms.

55. Lee Krasner: *Untitled* (1942)

By the time she met Pollock in the early 1940s, Krasner had turned her back on this light easy manner, and was now using thicker paint in near-primary colors emphasizing that Cubist geometry, but with an interesting way of setting off straight lines and curves. Pollock, who came from a different tradition, was probably influenced by her emphasis on the flat surface, and her use of thick paint to work against it.

56. Lee Krasner: *Shattered Light* (1954, pc.)

She, for her part, was definitely influenced by his complexity, his sense of scale, and his ability to make the entire canvas into a battlefield, covered with paint marks in vibrant dynamic tumult. This 1954 painting comes from near the end of their life together. Works like this are the reason why Krasner is sometimes thought of as a house-broken Mrs. Jackson Pollock.

57. Lee Krasner: *Palingenesis* (1971, pc.)

After Pollock died in a car crash in 1956, Krasner continued as the keeper of his legacy. But she also broke out with some of the biggest and boldest paintings of her entire career, rejecting the all-over look of her married years for a new version of that old geometry, only now with stronger colors and more daring contrasts.

58. Ed Harris and Marcia Gay Harden in *Pollock* (2000)

All that was to give a background to the montage from the 2000 film *Pollock*, starring and directed by **Ed Harris**, with which I want to end. I had hoped it would show more of Krasner as an artist, rather than just the long-suffering partner, but of course she is not the title character. So just remember Lee Krasner as a painter in her own right, as we watch **Marcia Gay Harden** meeting, loving, and ultimately losing her patience with her alcoholic genius of a husband.

59. Harris: *Pollock* (2000), montage of scenes

60. Class title 3 (Krasner in London)