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Mary E. Hutchinson: The Absence of an Oeuvre

By

Jae Turner

Doctor of Philosophy

Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

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Mary E. Hutchinson: The Absence of an Oeuvre

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An abstract of
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2012

Abstract

Mary E. Hutchinson: The Absence of an Oeuvre
By Jae Turner

This dissertation brings scholarly attention to the artist Mary E. Hutchinson (1906-1970), who is unknown today even though she achieved critical recognition and produced a significant body of work during the mid-twentieth century in the United States. Through a genealogical approach informed by feminist and queer theories, this dissertation excavates the gap between the material traces of Hutchinson's life and the invisibility of her body of work today. That gap emerges, retrospectively, as the space that separates Hutchinson's lived experience from the dominant narratives through which the histories of modern art and feminism are written. This project's interdisciplinary exploration of that space reveals it to be – not a void – but the site of a complex play between intelligibility and unintelligibility. Thus this scholarship not only draws attention to an unknown artist's work and life, but also reshapes our understanding of art and politics in the twentieth century.

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Introduction

The Limits of Gender and Sexuality in Art History and Biography

Mary E. Hutchinson (1906-1970) is a lost woman artist. I first encountered the material traces of her life and work in 2002: letters, paintings, drawings, a few small sculptures, exhibition programs, clipped articles from *Art Digest*, the *New York Times*, the *Atlanta Journal*, and other newspapers. I knew little about art, but Hutchinson's paintings appealed to me, and the raw archival evidence outlined her success as an artist in the mid-twentieth century. During this time, the New York art world of critics, galleries, and other artists recognized her as a professional, as did Atlanta's arts community. Yet Mary E. Hutchinson's work is unknown today. She has no oeuvre – no body of work. A few scattered pieces are beginning to show up on eBay and in exhibitions, but they remain isolated fragments of indeterminable meaning. As a women's, gender, and sexuality studies scholar, I am interested in Hutchinson for two complex reasons which are related, but do not correspond in any direct cause-and-effect relationship: first, she critically engaged gender and sexuality in her work; and second, she *is unknown* today even though she produced more than 250 works and received considerable public attention during her lifetime.

Hutchinson and her work are not only lost, they have become unintelligible. By unintelligible, I mean that her art is now difficult or even impossible to read in meaningful ways. Making sense of Hutchinson's work is particularly hard because her figurative representation appears to be clearly legible. However, as I will show, reading her paintings through available interpretive frameworks produces meanings which are

incongruent with their historic conditions of production. The meanings available make no sense when placed in context with Hutchinson's lived experience and her other work. Understanding her artistic production is more about perception and recognition than it is about legibility. Specifically, available frameworks of interpretation fail to recognize Hutchinson's representation of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, Hutchinson herself became unintelligible as an artist within her own lifetime. Her death certificate recognizes her lifelong profession as "art teacher" rather than artist.[1] This dissertation will show that Hutchinson's status today is produced by a complex dynamic of intelligibility and unintelligibility that has resulted in an "interpretive collapse," to borrow a phrase from Rosemarie Garland-Thomson.[2]

The disconnect between Mary E. Hutchinson's historic identity as an artist and her lack of recognition today is not only a matter of forgotten events, it is also an issue of incongruent epistemologies. It is about the meanings attached to events in Hutchinson's life and the ways in which these meanings changed over time. I will show that for Hutchinson and other women who lived adult lives during the mid-twentieth century, competing ways of knowing "woman" produced contradictions and ambiguities between credible political subjects and troubled psychological subjects. These epistemologies used different standards to measure and define women as subjects through their appearance and behavior, including their achievements and failures. Hutchinson achieved recognition as a professional artist during a particular moment when inconsistent ways of knowing gender and sexuality produced intense epistemological disputes. The lack of correspondence between women as political subjects and

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[1] Certificate of Death, State file no. 22672, Mary E. Hutchinson, Georgia State Office of Vital Records.
[2] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105.

psychological subjects produced incoherent meanings during the mid-twentieth century. I will show that for an independent woman artist like Hutchinson, this incoherence eventually transformed the very concept of "woman artist" into an absolute paradox.

A Genealogical Approach

My aim is to foreground and pay attention to the incoherence in Mary E. Hutchinson's life and work created by incongruent epistemologies rather than resolve it. I do this by not only tracing Hutchinson's life and art through the archival record, but by also drawing attention to the ruptures in art criticism and art history where her oeuvre loses coherence. In a sense, this dissertation has two subjects: Mary E. Hutchinson's historical presence and her persistent absence. An absence is inherently difficult to trace and requires the use of a peripheral vision rather than a direct gaze. Recognizing an absence requires paying attention to limits of intelligibility. If we fail to pay attention to Hutchinson's absence in art history and we focus only on recovering her life and career, we will miss significant epistemological contradictions and impose false continuities on her life as well as the reception of her work.

The dual focus of this dissertation sustains an interdisciplinary engagement with biography, art history, and history. However, the result is not biography, art history, or history in the conventional sense. Rather, Hutchinson's life and work challenges the conventional limits imposed by the methods and assumptions of these overlapping disciplines. Feminist scholarship in each of these three areas has worked to recover, or make visible, the lives of women lost to history. However, the issue of intelligibility complicates Hutchinson's recovery as a feminist project. Recovery and recuperation

have been frequently used interchangeably by a generation of pioneering feminist scholars, but the issue of intelligibility is lost in this conflation. Recovery and recuperation work together to produce intelligibility. Recovery may be best understood as finding someone or something which has been lost and is unknown. Recuperation may be best understood as an act of resignification of meaning or a revised judgment of value attached to someone or something which has been unknown or unappreciated. Recovery and recuperation operate hand-in-hand a bit too seamlessly. Recovery may bring an object to light, but recuperation makes sense of it through the production of new knowledge.

My dissertation explores intelligibility in the field of twentieth-century American art which constitutes the context of Hutchinson's life and work. As I show in Chapter Four, art history which focuses on twentieth-century American art splits over subject matter, methods, and chronology in the production of knowledge about art and artists. This split produces two distinct frameworks for the interpretation of visual culture: modernist and Americanist. "Modernist" scholars favor the dominant narrative of the avant-garde and abstract art beginning in late-nineteenth-century Europe. "Americanist" scholars study art produced in the United States from colonial times to an undefined point in the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries.[3] Art produced in the United States during the mid-twentieth century is situated ambiguously between the two frameworks.

This split has left Mary E. Hutchinson in a precarious position. When I first encountered her work and papers, I believed my project would be one of feminist recovery. Hutchinson's personal papers, which I encountered as an uncatalogued

[3] Elizabeth Johns, "Histories of American Art: The Changing Quest," *Art Journal* 44, no. 4 (1984); and Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23-26.

archive, presented a puzzle with hints of mystery. Each letter, each news article unfolded as a tiny jigsaw piece, a surface image surrounded by irregular edges. I engaged each piece with no idea of how they all might fit together. Even so, at first I believed I could conjure up an image of Hutchinson's life from these fragments at hand, and then match the completed puzzle with the scaffolding of art history. I assumed my task would be to place Hutchinson and her work within an existing framework. Instead, the fragments of her life and work fail to fit into the available categories and narratives. As a result, this dissertation produces both a reading of Hutchinson's life and a new interpretive approach to mid-twentieth-century American art.

The core argument of this dissertation is that Mary E. Hutchinson and her artistic production cannot be coherently recovered through the available frameworks of art history, including feminist art history. While feminist art history has established formidable methods for adding women to art history and challenging the structures of gender bias[4] – women's, gender, and sexuality studies gives me the conceptual tools to engage the epistemological aspects of Hutchinson's story. My work as a women's, gender, and sexuality studies scholar reveals her "absence" as a complex dynamic between intelligibility and unintelligibility operating around gender and sexuality in visual culture. Rather than erasing her absence through recovery, I engage Hutchinson's life and work through a genealogical approach informed by feminist and queer theories.

[4] See for example pioneering works of feminist art history, Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," in *Art and Sexual Politics*, ed. Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth Baker (New York: MacMillian, 1973); Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (London, New York: Routledge, 1988); and Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society* (London, New York: Thames & Hudson, 1990).

As modeled by Michel Foucault, genealogy is not concerned with progress narratives and fixed categories of history.[5] Instead, genealogy follows dead end threads and the ambiguous cracks and crevices obscured by such narratives. Genealogy, or "effective history" as Foucault frequently refers to it, is a method focused on details and the messiness of history, rather than smoothly spun grand narratives. According to Foucault, "Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things. . . [It] does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people."[6] Rather than seeking to bring scattered and fragmented facts and events together into a coherent narrative, genealogy seeks "to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion. . . to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us."[7] It is not about recovery, but rather disturbs the foundations of totalizing grand narratives by fragmenting the illusion of coherent events through a "dissociating view" or "the acuity of a glance that distinguishes, separates, and disperses; that is capable of liberating divergence and marginal elements."[8] As a lost artist, Hutchinson presents a dead end thread and her work remains embedded in the unintelligible cracks of art history. Genealogy provides a creative method through which to find her in the crevices and ruptures of history without displacing them in favor of false continuity.

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[5] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), 369-392.
[6] Foucault, "Genealogy," 374.
[7] Foucault, "Genealogy," 374.
[8] Foucault, "Genealogy," 379.

Foucault's genealogical approach to history in both *History of Madness* and *History of Sexuality, Volume One* tends to confound historians.[9] I admit that my own initial reaction to *Sexuality One* rejected it as "History." At the same time, and like many other scholars, I was fascinated by the little book's ability to turn "History" inside-out. *Sexuality One* and *Madness* historicize as discursively and socially constructed subject matter which is generally perceived to be ahistorical. Foucault brings attention to the production of knowledge and relations of power. In doing so, he uses archival sources to distress totalizing historical narratives.

Archives are also central to my genealogy of Mary E. Hutchinson's life and work. My endeavor emerges from an accidental encounter with Hutchinson's artwork and papers in a private residence associated with her estate. I was in the rural Georgia home of a stranger to offer my expertise in architecture and historic preservation. As usual on such visits, stories emerged in fractured bits and pieces as my host toured me through the house. In this case the story fragments provided confusing segments which refused to fall into the neat piles of "normal" family life. My "queer" antenna stretched out intuitively. Hutchinson's paintings hung from every wall. The characters developed: Dottie, who had owned the house which had been built by her grandfather; and Dottie's artist friend, Mary. They lived here together? No, no, they lived in an apartment in Atlanta, but Mary visited Dottie's family here. When Mary died in 1970, Dottie moved back to the family homeplace which she inherited. Years later when Dottie died she left

[9] For the reactions of historians to *Madness*, see Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press), 25. Huffer also complicates the conventional reading of Foucault's oeuvre into three cleanly divided chronological categories: archeological (1960s), genealogical (1970s), and ethical (1980s).

her estate, which included Mary's things, to her godchild and namesake – another Dottie, my host.

Even the circumstances through which Mary E. Hutchinson's papers and artwork came to my attention frame my project as queer. Hutchinson's archive exists today through complex relationships between sexuality, love, family, and legacy. Queer kinship preserved Hutchinson's art and papers, which make my scholarship possible – not the gestures of art history, good fortune, or simple luck. As Kath Weston explores in *Families We Choose,* family ties may form between lovers, ex-lovers, and friends which function socially in much the same way that biological and legal kinship do in the heteronormative domain.[10] Although Weston's scholarship focuses on the new configuration of the publicly recognized gay family which developed in the 1980s, Hutchinson's network of relationships operated in the same way. An extended family of queer kinship embraced Hutchinson at the time of her death in 1970; it reflects active ties produced through a lifetime of relationships between lovers, ex-lovers, friends, biological family, and a generation of godchildren. Queer inheritance from the artist to Dorothy King to King's god-daughter makes it possible to trace Hutchinson's life and work today. Since my initial encounter, Hutchinson's estate has generously donated her papers to Emory University for preservation.[11]

The archives shape the character of my narrative, including the places where it is thick and thin. At times, personal correspondence provides rich insight into Hutchinson's daily life. However, during her most artistically productive years (1934-1950)

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[10] Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
[11] Mary E. Hutchinson and Dorothy King papers, 1900-1988, Emory University, MARBL, http://pid.emory.edu/ark:/25593/8zgpd.

correspondence is fragmented. Instead, hundreds of news articles trace her work and its reception. Hutchinson's papers include personal correspondence, news clippings, and exhibition checklists. Her lived experience also takes shape between the lines of the archival record through shared connections and the portraits she painted. Her painting and sculpture is documented by snapshots and professional portfolio photographs. Her drawing after circa 1940 is frequently documented by Photostat negatives. Combined, these sources, along with Hutchinson's original artwork preserved by her estate, represent more than 250 works of art. Since Hutchinson's life and work fail to fit available narratives of twentieth-century American art, I have also looked to newspaper archives in contextualizing Hutchinson's lived experience. Digital databases such as ProQuest and digital text-mining methods have made this supplemental research possible.

Thinking Queerly Through *Madness*

Rather than recuperate Hutchinson's work as art, my genealogical approach shifts the focus away from the conventional art history questions of "greatness" and influence to questions of limits and intelligibility. After all, Linda Nochlin already exposed the unbeatable trap posed by the question "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" forty years ago in her pioneering feminist art history essay.[12] My focus is on Hutchinson's visual engagement with gender and sexuality, and I argue that this aspect of her work can be understood only when viewed in context with her lived experience. The recognition of Hutchinson's life and work falls through the ambiguous cracks of available art history frameworks. In *History of Madness*, Foucault associates this unintelligible

[12] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," in *Art and Sexual Politics*, ed. Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth Baker (New York: MacMillian, 1973), 1-39.

"space both empty and peopled at the same time" with "the absence of an oeuvre" or madness. As is typical of Foucault's work, he refuses to pin "the absence of an oeuvre" down to any single clean definition, but rather uses the concept in overlapping gestures which associate intelligibility with the limits of history and the limits of language. The limits of language may also be understood as the limits of art.[13] For Mary E. Hutchinson, a web of discourses around gender and sexuality shaped the limits of art and history during the mid-twentieth century, which eventually eroded her public identification as an artist and rendered her work unrecognizable as art.

Lynne Huffer understands Foucault's *History of Madness* as a story that is as much about sexuality and unreason's queer children as his later, and iconic, *Sexuality One*. In *Mad for Foucault*, Huffer re-conceptualizes the foundations of queer theory through *Madness*. Her work also carries significant implications for queer history which informs my genealogy of Mary E. Hutchinson's life and work. As read by Huffer, Foucault's *History of Madness* releases queer history from a unilinear timeline of events and opens it up to "ethical questions about subjectivity"[14] and games of truth. In other words, thinking queerly through *Madness* extends queer history beyond chronological events into epistemological questions about how knowledge of events and subjects takes shape. Huffer shows that queer theory's overemphasis on Foucault's *Sexuality One*, along with issues of translation and interpretation, has missed "the importance of *History of Madness* as part of Foucault's lifelong project to rethink sexuality as a category of moral and political exclusion."[15] Historians have been particularly enthralled by

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[13] Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), xxvii-xxxvi.
[14] Huffer, *Mad for Foucault*, 41.
[15] Huffer, *Mad for Foucault*, 24-25.

Foucault's declaration in *Sexuality One* that "the homosexual" became "a species" in 1870.[16] This passage has been repeatedly interpreted to mark a progressive development of homosexuality from sexual acts to a sexual identity. As Huffer says, "It would be easy to fill a book with the numerous examples, from historians and nonhistorians alike, of scholarship that captures sexuality in Foucault in this way."[17] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also points out that since *Sexuality One* "the most sophisticated historically oriented work in gay studies has been offering ever more precise datings, ever more nuanced narratives of the development of homosexuality 'as we know it today.'"[18] Sedgwick calls this "the historical search for a Great Paradigm Shift."[19] This type of historical thinking ossifies sexuality into a chronologically progressive story of acts and identities.

History of Madness, as read by Huffer, gives queer theory a way to think about history released from a progressive march of time. This is important not only for thinking about historical lives and events such as Mary E. Hutchinson and her absence of an oeuvre, but also for thinking about gender and sexuality co-extensively. The imposition of conventional historical thinking brings even sophisticated queer thinkers such as Sedgwick to read "Foucault's account [in *Sexuality One*, as] the unidirectional emergence in the late nineteenth century of 'the homosexual' as 'a species,' of homosexuality as a minoritizing identity. . ."[20] But Foucault is not a conventional historian. He approaches history as genealogy. As Huffer explains, "Foucault is not a causal thinker, either historically or conceptually speaking: Foucauldian genealogical

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[16] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books), 43.
[17] Huffer, *Mad for Foucault*, 67.
[18] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 44.
[19] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 44-48.
[20] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 45.

events and concepts have no origin, but repeat themselves in complex doublings and feedback loops."[21] This non-linear understanding of historic events unravels "the queer overreading of sexuality in Foucault through a causal logic that makes gender secondary."[22] Huffer's reconceptualization of queer theory through *Madness* undoes the split perceived to exist between feminist theory and queer theory and facilitates a queer feminist perspective.

Madness is a history of unreason that loops and overlaps through epistemologies rather than a history that marches progressively through time. Huffer's reading of *Madness* gives queer theory and queer history a way to think about sexuality as erotic experience rather than acts and identities. Foucault insists that he traces "rudimentary movements of an experience"[23] in *History of Madness*. Huffer argues that "…the erasure of *Madness* from queer theory produces, out of *Sexuality One*, a sexuality from which the complexity of *experience* has been drained away. Sapped of what we might call the messy thickness of erotic life, *Sexuality One* gives us only the thin abstractions of a dispositif – the webs of power-knowledge that have no contact with the living, breathing world of eros."[24] As Huffer notes, Joan Scott warns against the illusion of transparency associated with invoking experience as historical evidence, but Scott also concedes that "*experience* is not a word we [historians] can do without. . ."[25] This dissertation pushes against notions of transparency in tracing Mary E. Hutchinson's lived experience by raising questions of epistemology.

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[21] Huffer, *Mad for Foucault*, 47.
[22] Huffer, *Mad for Foucault*, 47.
[23] Foucault, *Madness*, xxxii.
[24] Huffer, *Mad for Foucault*, 36.
[25] Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991): 797. Emphasis in original.

Heterography

I argue that Hutchinson's visual engagement with gender and sexuality is intelligible only when viewed in context with her lived experience. Thus, this dissertation is concerned with Hutchinson's "biography" as well as her artistic production. As I discuss below, the advent of Women's Studies and feminist history propelled women into history as legitimate subjects, but biography as a genre continues to resist the narration of women's lives. Mary E. Hutchinson's identification as an artist also presents specific additional problems in relation to the biography of the artist as a specialized sub-genre. In navigating these challenges, my narrative of Hutchinson's life may be better understood as *heterography* rather than biography. Pamela Scully and Clifton Crais developed heterography as a way of narrating the life (or lives) of Sara Baartman who has been better known through the guise of the Hottentot Venus.[26] Baartman lived during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in transatlantic colonial contexts associated with slavery and public exhibition of race, gender and sexuality. Although Hutchinson's and Baartman's lives are vastly different, they do share subject positions marginalized by gender and sexuality in visual culture. Scully and Crais do not invoke Foucault in their formulation of heterography, but I understand this method of life writing as genealogy of a life. Because the intelligibility of Hutchinson's artistic production requires the context of her lived experience, this dissertation as a whole may be understood as her heterography.

[26] Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Pamela Scully, "Peripheral Visions: Heterography and Writing the Transnational Life of Sara Baartman," in *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-present*, eds. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Woollacott (Basingstoke England and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 27-40.

Heterography is a feminist theory of subjectivity as well as a method of life writing. Feminist scholars have repeatedly shown that conventional models of biography assume a particular configuration of the subject as white, male, Western, elite, and coherent.[27] *He* is a unified subject and an autonomous self whose life can be understood as a chronological, and logical, progressive story culminating in "greatness." Biography frames the subject as coherent "by arranging the life of a person absent its strangeness."[28] Sara Baartman fails to fit the prescription of conventional biography, and so does Mary E. Hutchinson. Scully argues that the ways in which the story of the Hottentot Venus have been told since the 1940s limit our ability to understand Baartman as a historical person. Those first mid-twentieth century stories "focused almost exclusively on Sara Baartman's body and the scientific uses to which it was purportedly put, and without much reflection on the self-hood of Sara Baartman."[29] Scully reminds us that biography is as much "a story of ontology: of being," as it is "epistemology: how we know what we know."[30] Similarly, the ways in which art historians have narrated the history of twentieth-century art limits the ways in which Hutchinson may be recognized as a historical person.

In addition to assuming a gendered and unified subject, biography also assumes a narrative of progress which involves a linear chronology culminating in some sort of achievement or extraordinary event. With artists this kind of rendering usually entails an account of the development of their style through phases and periods of heightened

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[27] See Linda Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives: The New Biography* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 64-101; and Scully, "Peripheral Visions."
[28] Crais and Scully, *Sara Baartman*, 5
[29] Scully, "Peripheral Visions," 29.
[30] Scully, "Peripheral Visions," 30.

creativity and success as well as a legacy of influence. Hutchinson's public visibility, along with that of other women artists, including Georgia O'Keeffe, diminished dramatically between 1938 and 1950 until she disappeared altogether from public view. Given her enduring absence from art history today, Hutchinson's story thus fails to fit into a progress narrative unless truncated and limited to her initial success. Rather than establish Hutchinson's "greatness" through this type of narrative, I am also interested in her life after public success. Furthermore, I am interested in her quotidian experience as context of both her initial success and subsequent absence.

Conventional biography also fails to accommodate the stories of historical lives which fluidly crossed boundaries or limits. The most obvious boundaries are geo-political. As Scully points out, Baartman's transnational life is not easily understood through the disciplinary boundaries observed by historians who "are usually trained within geographically and politically defined fields of nation-state and/or continent. . . . It is challenging to render narratives at both the level of the local and the global, to recreate lives lived in transnational ways."[31] Although not transnational, Mary E. Hutchinson's life also exceeds the disciplinary boundaries established by history and art history around geography, including the Americanist/modernist divide. Geographically, she is associated with Atlanta, Georgia; New York City; and Massachusetts. Art history tends to regard events which occurred in New York as most significant and of national importance, whereas artistic production elsewhere during the mid-twentieth century is categorized as "regional." However, from the perspective of Hutchinson's lived experience her initial success in New York recognizes no such geographic boundaries. Geography also complicates Hutchinson as a subject in local history. Art collecting

[31] Scully, "Peripheral Visions," 30.

websites such as AskArt.com record her birthplace as Massachusetts and the place where she lived and worked as New York. She is excluded from local histories of Atlanta where she lived most of her life and participated in the formation of a local arts community around the High Museum.

Biography and the Historical Limits of Agency

The historical limits of agency constructed around gender and sexuality are more problematic than geo-political boundaries in the story of Mary E. Hutchinson's life. These limits are usually understood in relation to the notion of "separate spheres." In *Making Waves*, Marlene LeGates provides a typical summary of separate spheres and the concept's relationship to early-nineteenth-century political ideology:

> Both liberals and conservatives saw the family as a microcosm of society, the model and basis for other social institutions. . . . Superimposed on this division was the ideology of separate spheres, the result of the rapid social changes accompanying the Industrial Revolution and the growth of the middle classes. The public sphere now encompassed business as well as politics, but the private sphere, women's sphere, remained confined to marriage and motherhood. . . . This framework was consistent with the idea of a uniquely female moral contribution to society, articulated in the 1830s and 1840s in the form of the cult of true womanhood.[32]

The framework of separate spheres is integral to histories of feminism as the social structure that excluded women from politics and public life. It has worked well for

[32] Marlene LeGates, *Making Waves: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1996), 149-150.

histories of feminism which focus on white middleclass women and culminate in political liberation through suffrage. However, it becomes problematic in the mid-twentieth century. As I will show in Chapter One, the details of Mary E. Hutchinson's life suggest that the boundaries of separate spheres appear highly permeable during the late 1920s and early1930s. The idea of separate spheres as a political construct loses coherence in the biographies of women who lived adult lives in the mid-twentieth century.

The incoherence of separate spheres during the mid-twentieth century creates problems for narrating women's lives. Although scholars rely heavily on the framework of the "New Woman" to explain the public lives of American women from the late-nineteenth century through World War II, I will approach Hutchinson's lived experience through Simone de Beauvoir's figure of the "independent woman." Before I discuss Beauvoir's independent woman, it is important to understand the flaws of the New Woman as a way to understand Hutchinson's lived experience and artistic production. First, the construct of the New Woman explains the lives of women who transgressed the boundaries of separate spheres ideology. Because it requires the persistence of separate spheres, the New Woman projects a historical continuity to the limits of gender and sexuality inconsistent with Hutchinson's lived experience. Rather than perpetuating a sense of continuity, I am interested in a rupture of limits around gender and sexuality which unfolded at the same time that Hutchinson emerged as a professional artist.

Second, scholars typically invoke the New Woman as a coherent stable historical subject. Change over time is presented as generational between mother and daughter or

between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[33] However, this conceptualization also obscures a significant epistemological shift or rupture which coincides with Mary E. Hutchinson's initial identification as an artist. In an early feminist historiography of the New Woman, Estelle Freedman shows that the figure of the New Woman underwent intense public scrutiny from circa 1927-1933.[34] According to Freedman, at this time popular and scholarly history writers in the United States shifted the conversation away from the politics of suffrage to sexuality:

> women in the 1920s began to be presented as flappers, more concerned with clothing and sex than with politics. Women had by choice, the accounts suggested, rejected political emancipation and found sexual freedom. The term feminism nearly disappeared from historical accounts, except in somewhat pejorative references to the Woman's party. While critics claimed that women had achieved equality with men, they issued subtle warnings of moral and family decay.[35]

For Hutchinson and other young adult women of the time, this epistemological shift would not have manifested as generational change between mother and daughter, but rather as a transformation of "woman" as a discursive subject from a political frame to a psychological one. As I will show, this epistemological shift eventually constricts the limits of Hutchinson's agency as a woman artist.

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[33] Carol Smith-Rosenberg, "Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman, 1870-1936," in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr (New York: New American Library, 1989), 265.
[34] Estelle B. Freedman, "The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s," *The Journal of American History* 61(1974): 374.
[35] Freedman, "New Woman," 379.

Finally, the figure of the New Woman obscures a rupture in the historical limits of agency constructed around gender and sexuality even though historians have invoked her to convey irreconcilable images. In the United States, the New Woman emerged as a popular figure around the turn of the twentieth century and was frequently equated with representations of the "Gibson Girl" produced by illustrator Charles Dana Gibson.[36] According to Ellen Wiley Todd in *The "New Woman" Revised*, a study of gender politics in the paintings of Hutchinson's contemporaries, Keneth Hayes Miller, Reginald Marsh, Raphael Soyer, and Isabel Bishop: "Commentators puzzled over …[the New Woman as Gibson girl's] appeal, and in her heyday one of them named the types: the beauty, the athletic girl, the sentimental girl, the girl with a mind of her own, the ambitious girl, and – the universal favorite among men – the charmer."[37] This is the acceptable New Woman who transgressed the bounds of the domestic sphere for an active public life.

Striking a different chord, pioneering feminist scholars Carol Smith-Rosenberg and Esther Newton have interpreted the figure of the New Woman as a sexual subject equated with the "Mannish Lesbian." I am particularly interested in the implications of the Mannish Lesbian in thinking about the limits of Hutchinson's agency as a woman artist. Esther Newton gives a memorable description of the Mannish Lesbian: "You see her in old photographs or paintings with legs solidly planted, wearing a top hat and a man's jacket, staring defiantly out of the frame. . ."[38] In contrast to the popular illustrations of the Gibson Girl, Romaine Brooks's 1923 *Self-Portrait* iconically

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[36] See for example Caroline Ticknor, "The Steel-Engraving Lady and the Gibson Girl," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1901, 105-108.
[37] Ellen Wiley Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5.
[38] Esther Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman," in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr (New York: New American Library, 1989), 281.

represents the New Woman as Mannish Lesbian in visual culture. My aim here is not to reconcile these two historic visualizations of the New Woman, but rather to stress the problematic contradictions between the popular appeal of the Gibson Girl and perceived deviance of the Mannish Lesbian.

The New Woman and separate spheres as interpretive frameworks allow historians to ask only one question about sexuality: Was she a lesbian? Feminist scholars have passionately debated historic conceptualizations of "lesbian and lesbian-like conduct," to use Martha Vicinus's phrase.[39] This scholarly debate emerged from three influential publications: Carol Smith-Rosenberg's seminal essay on nineteenth-century "romantic friendships" and Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men*, which further explored the idea of loving, committed, but asexual relationships between nineteenth-century women, combined with Adrienne Rich's feminist essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," which suggests a continuum of lesbian identity in political solidarity with all women regardless of sexuality.[40] "As a result of the controversy that has swirled around these works," Leila Rupp explains, "we have no simple answer to the question, asked of a variety of historical figures: Was she a lesbian?"[41] I see this debate as operating around tension between the work of the historian and that of the theorist. In developing a model for using gender as a category of historical analysis, Joan Scott suggests this tension operates between the general and universal terms of theory and the focus of history on "contextual specificity and

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[39] Martha Vicinus, "Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory," *Radical History Review* 60 (1994): 58.
[40] Liela Rupp, "'Imagine My Surprise': Women's Relationships in Mid-Twentieth Century America," in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr (New York: New American Library, 1989), 396-399. Rupp provides a concise explanation of this debate.
[41] Rupp, "Imagine My Surprise," 396.

fundamental change."[42] The controversy over "romantic friendships" and historical "lesbian" identity also bears a strange similarity to the conceptualization of queer (gay male) history as progressive development from sexual acts to a sexual identity. However, "romantic friendship" narratives deny the sexual acts.

Feminist art history scholars continue to grapple with the biographical question of a woman artist's sexuality. Even after decades of feminist, LGBT, and queer scholarship, conceptualizing the limits of agency associated with sexuality and women who lived adult lives in the early- and mid-twentieth century continues to present troubled ground where, to paraphrase Gerda Lerner, biographers may no longer fear to tread, but tread precariously nonetheless.[43] Catherine Lord engages the limits of gender and sexuality in the artistic production of the feminist artist in her 2007 essay in the exhibition catalog for *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*:

> Lesbians vanish not because we lack numbers or talent, but because lesbian visibility is an ontological impossibility. The public sphere cannot register the presence of lesbians because "public," a historical construction serving to naturalize the connections between masculinity and citizenship, functions not by inclusion but by exclusion. Lesbians may be masculine, but they are not men. Neither, as Monique Wittig famously observed, are they women. A meaningless concept in a heterosexual economy, lesbians are ghosted in the public sphere not

[42] Joan Scott, "Gender as a Useful Category of Analysis," in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 33.
[43] Gerda Lerner, "Where Biographers Fear to Tread," *The Women's Review of Books*, 4 (Sept. 1987): 11.

> by consistency but by strategic incoherence. . . . It's impossible to know whether a woman is a lesbian.[44]

A recent special issue of *Lesbian Studies* on lesbian art (2010) builds from Lord's theoretical conception of ghosted lesbians. "In short, every time an art historian or critic begins to research a lesbian subject, any line of inquiry that would account for her sexuality meets a tendentious assertion, couched as common knowledge, which forecloses it."[45] This is precisely the issue identified a quarter of a century ago by Gerda Lerner associated with the new biography of women's lives. According to Lerner, "What it amounts to is that . . . authors seem to have a stereotypical notion of what a 'lesbian' is or must have been and struggle to avoid labeling their subject as such."[46]

In framing the recent issue on lesbian art, Margo Hobbs Thompson draws on the warning issued by historian Martha Vicinus against the literalness of language: "with historical primness, we have refused to call anybody a lesbian before the late nineteenth century, arguing that the word was not used before then."[47] The editors purportedly nullified the "[impossibility of knowing] whether a woman is a lesbian," by using Vicinus's category of "lesbians and lesbian-like women," and soliciting "research on self-identified lesbian artists, who might or might not expressly manifest their sexuality in their art."[48] However, the qualification of self-identification remains problematic for Mary E. Hutchinson and other mid-twentieth-century women artists. Historian and biographer Leila Rupp points out that applying the label "lesbian" to women who lived

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[44] Catherine Lord, "Their Memory is Playing Tricks on Her: Notes Toward a Calligraphy of Rage," in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2007), 443.
[45] Margo Hobbs Thompson, "Introduction: Lesbian Art and Art by Lesbians," *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 14 (2010): 119.
[46] Lerner, "Biographers Fear," 12.
[47] Vicinus, "Lesbian History," 60.
[48] Thompson, "Introduction," 120.

adult lives in the early- and mid-twentieth centuries is far more complex than applying it to women who lived in the distant past. Because "lesbian" developed as an analytic category in the twentieth century, Rupp suggests that "in the simplest terms, we are faced with a choice between labeling women lesbians who might have violently rejected the notion or glossing over the significance of women's relationships by considering them asexual and Victorian."[49] Rupp concludes that the emergence of lesbian identification during the mid-twentieth century, "from both an individual and historical perspective is enormously significant."[50] For Mary E. Hutchinson and her circle of women artists, the issue of what precisely constitutes sexual self-identification is far from transparent. As I show in Chapter Three, sexual self-identification emerges out of a complex network of aesthetic categories and social contexts including family configurations, public institutions and psychological categories.

Margo Thompson and Catherine Lord call for "the *recuperation* of lesbians into histories of feminist and gay art and politics, to generate a 'usable past' that will facilitate the imagining of a 'queer present.'"[51] As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, recuperation creates intelligibility through the production of new knowledge. However, Leila Rupp's attention to the historical development of "lesbian" as an analytic category fits with Joan Scott's advice for negotiating the tension between the work of the historian and that of the theorist. It also provides a warning against rescuing Hutchinson into any particular sexual identification. Scott advises that historians "must become more self-conscious about distinguishing between our analytic vocabulary and the material we want

[49] Rupp, "Imagine My Surprise," 398.
[50] Rupp, "Imagine My Surprise," 408.
[51] Thompson, "Introduction," 119. Thompson cites Lord, "Their Memory," 443. Emphasis mine.

to analyze."[52] This heterography of Mary E. Hutchinson focuses on the *historic* dynamic of intelligibility and unintelligibility associated with her visual engagement of gender and sexuality and her identification as an artist as well as her absence of an oeuvre today. From a genealogical perspective, the meaningful question is: In what ways did the twentieth-century discursive and psychological constructions of the "lesbian" limit the intelligibility of Hutchinson's visual engagement with gender and sexuality, as well as her agency as an artist?

Beauvoir's Independent Woman as Artist

In order to navigate different ways of knowing "woman" prevalent during the twentieth century, I approach Mary E. Hutchinson's heterography through Simone de Beauvoir's model for liberation, the independent woman. Beauvoir's conceptualization of the independent woman facilitates rather than resists the epistemological and ontological perspectives of heterography. It is also historically contemporary with Hutchinson's lived experience during the mid-twentieth century and thus helps answer the contextually specific challenges that Hutchinson's life poses for the historian and interpreter. I focus specifically on Beauvoir's theoretical conception of the independent woman as artist. Her figure is not defined by the notion of separate spheres. Instead, the independent woman challenges the limits of liberation or agency which have been socially constructed in many forms, including history, politics, psychology, and biology.

Beauvoir presents the independent woman at the conclusion of *The Second Sex*, first published in 1949 and released in translation in the United States in 1953. *The Second Sex* is considered a landmark text in feminist theory for the bold declaration that

[52] Scott, "Gender as a Useful Category," 41.

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."[53] Behind this claim is the assertion that "No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature. . ."[54] Beauvoir examines the many ways in which woman is produced and framed as "other" rather than as "subject," including discourses of biology, economics, and psychoanalysis as well as social structures of childhood and motherhood. This approach frames agency in distinctly different terms than the separate spheres model. Beauvoir's independent woman is not a fixed framework, but rather many potential configurations of woman which reside at the limits of agency in viable yet conflicted situations. Because she challenges the limits particularly around economic and sexual freedom, the independent woman inhabits ambiguities. Beauvoir theorizes the independent woman as artist as a particularly vexed configuration.

According to Beauvoir, the independent woman as artist must struggle between economic security and creative risk. The woman artist, she asserts, works from an unstable and tenuous position. She is pulled by two contradictory impulses: the need for social and economic security and the ideal of creative expression. The independent woman artist approaches paradox in the added contradiction between creativity and the perceived limits of femininity. The limits of femininity present two separate but entangled points of tension between art and gender: the limits of acceptable "feminine" behavior and the gendered limits of "genius." First, Beauvoir suggests that in order to act within the bounds of acceptable feminine behavior, the woman artist must compromise her creative expression. The desire for social and economic security motivates her to put

[53] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989 [1949]), 267.
[54] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 267.

on "her best behavior; she is afraid to disarrange, to investigate, to explode," and thus remains aligned with "the bourgeoisie since they represent the most conservative element in this threatened class."[55] In seeking economic security, Beauvoir asserts that women artists tend to "exalt the middle-class ideal of well-being and disguise the interests of their class in poetic colors; they orchestrate the grand mystification intended to persuade women to 'stay womanly.'"[56] The independent woman artist who compromises her creativity in favor of economic stability may indeed achieve the façade of success. But because she is a subject who lives "marginally to the masculine world . . . [who] sees it not in its universal form but from her special point of view,"[57] she "can acquire real competence [technical skill]; but she will be forced to repudiate whatever she has in her that is 'different' [creative]."[58] Second, Beauvoir argues that the independent woman who risks original creative expression is inherently denied access to the category of "genius." Rather than genius, her creativity would be seen as madness since it comes from a marginal position. To return to the language I use to frame this dissertation, her creative originality would be rendered unintelligible from the universal perspective.

Biography of the Artist

Although Beauvoir does not directly engage the biography of the artist, her understanding of the independent woman as artist counters twentieth-century psycho-biography which frames the artist as a special personality type defined by genius. The "artist" as a special type of person is *inherently gendered* as a masculine subject which

[55] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 708.
[56] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 709.
[57] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 704.
[58] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 708.

has been maintained since the classical beginnings of Western Civilization in the biography of the artist as a specialized sub-genre of biography. The biography of the artist not only assumes an elite male subject, but also requires it in order to represent the artist as hero and genius. Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz first singled out the biography of the artist as a distinct form in *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (1934). They argued that certain themes and leitmotifs characterized the biographies of artists continuously since the Renaissance. Although narratives appeared fractured through the Middle Ages and Roman times, Kris and Kurz trace the origins to classical Greece, and contend that "even in the histories of comparatively modern artists we find biographical themes that can be traced back, point by point, to the god- and hero-filled world before the dawn of history."[59]

Repetitive themes in the artist's biography include a significant demonstration of talent during childhood or youth. Kris and Kurz attach the artist's childhood stories to inherent genius, creative imagination, and self-taught beginnings. The youthful autodidactic status is often coupled with the chance discovery of the artist's talent by a mentor-teacher. Together these two themes attribute creativity to an essential nature of the artist as genius while also establishing lines of influence between artists. According to Kris and Kurz, "All the chance events that lead to his discovery, and thus to his brilliant ascension, appear in the biographical presentations as inevitable consequences of his genius."[60] The artist's creativity is also attached to his status as *divino artista*, a divine creator rivaling a god. Kris and Kurz further link the image of the artist to his position as a "status personality." In biography, the artist is perceived as superior to his

[59] Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*, trans. Alastair Laing and Lottie M. Newman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 12.
[60] Kris and Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic*, 38.

contemporaries, including other artists and princes as well as common folk. Frequently he gets the upper-hand through wit and ingenuity rather than artistic production alone. The authors identify additional persistent narrative variations which position the artist as superior to his patrons and his critics.

Legend, Myth, and Magic is important to Mary E. Hutchinson's heterography because it establishes the biography of the artist as a paradigm based on preconceptions and stereotypes. However, rather than unmasking the "artist" as a gendered social construction, the book reifies the artist as a special twentieth-century personality type inherently inaccessible to women. Although the authors focus on the image of the artist as a form of representation through anecdotes and stereotypes rather than empirical history which documents the lives of individual artists, they interpret the anecdotal narratives as psychological and sociological events. Ultimately, *Legend, Myth, and Magic* uses biography as evidence to support the artist as a special psychological subject.

Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz studied at Vienna University with Julius von Schlosser, who pioneered scholarship on the literature of art from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century. Kris also pursued psychoanalysis as part of Sigmund Freud's Vienna circle. He consistently viewed art history through the lens of psychoanalysis beginning with a 1932 study of facial expressions and character types found in the work of Franz Xavier Messerschmidt. As described by E.H. Gombrich, who later worked with Kris,

> The theme [of character types and facial expressions] was popular in the eighteenth century, but it turned out that the version produced by Mersserschmidt could not be explained as a purely intellectual exercise. A psychotic streak was

> apparent in these grimacing heads, and, following up this clue, Kris found indeed that the master had a record of severe mental illness.[61]

Ernst Kris followed up on the image of the artist established by *Legend, Myth, and Magic* through articles published in psychoanalytic journals and the 1952 publication of *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art.* While Kris and Kurz profess to have been cautious in limiting their psychological arguments in favor of sociological arguments relating to society's perception and valuation, the artist emerges as a distinct personality type framed by psychoanalytic theory. In his preface to the 1979 English translation, E.H. Gombrich is clear on this point: "…we must not lose sight of the main aim of the book – the establishment of links between the legend about the artist and certain invariant traits of the human psyche which psychoanalysis had begun to discern."[62]

Kris's theories on the biography of the artist circulated in mid-twentieth century literary circles as well as psychoanalytic and art circles. Again Gombrich makes this point clear when he states, "If proof were needed that Ernst Kris had thus established an important connection between psychological theory and the creative imagination, it can be found in the address *Freud und die Zukunft*, which Thomas Mann delivered on the occasion of Sigmund Freud's eightieth birthday in 1936."[63] Gombrich also asserts that Kris' conceptions of the artist's biography emerge in Mann's novel, *Joseph and His Brothers*. Both Kris and Kurz fled Nazi Germany. Otto Kurz settled in England where he continued his work in art history, and Ernst Kris immigrated to the United States where he became prominent in psychoanalysis.

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[61] E.H. Gombrich, Preface to *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* by Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), xi.
[62] Gombrich, Preface, xiii.
[63] Gombrich, Preface, xiii.

The biography of the artist laid out by Kris and Kurz implicitly excludes Mary E. Hutchinson and all women from the conceptual category of artist as genius. Psychoanalytic theory reinvigorated the ancient myth of the masculine artist just as Hutchinson achieved critical and popular success as an artist. The idea that women are inherently disqualified from the realm of genius was not limited to theoretical texts such as *Legend, Myth, and Magic* during the mid-twentieth century. For example, the influential American artist/writer Walter Pach bluntly claimed creative genius "almost exclusively" for men in his 1938 memoir. According to Pach:

> There are enormous numbers of women artists, and some of them are, of course, of very real merit. To note the average level of ability among art students of both sexes is often to come to the conclusion that women are more gifted than men. But I think that precisely the talent which causes the girl to outstrip the boy when at school, her faculty for accepting instruction and for going on so rapidly under impulsion from a teacher, is what works against her later on. When we look at mature production, it is not the qualities to be learned at school that we seek, but creative genius. And in the arts under discussion this seems to be given by nature to men almost exclusively.[64]

This is the paradox of the woman artist ventriloquized by Simone de Beauvoir as she concludes flatly, "There are women who are mad and there are women of sound method: none has that madness in her method that we call genius."[65]

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[64] Walter Pach, *Queer Thing, Painting: Forty Years in the World of Art* (New York and London: Harper Brothers, 1938), 186.
[65] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 708.

Dissertation Organization and Summary

This dissertation consists of four chapters. Chapters One and Two trace Mary E. Hutchinson's lived experience through the archives of her personal papers and historical newspapers. Framed as heterography, or the genealogy of a life, Hutchinson's initial success as a professional artist challenges conventional narratives of twentieth-century art history, including our understanding of U.S. art and politics associated with the "Great Depression." Read through Beauvoir's concept of the independent woman artist, Hutchinson's life and work before 1939 resist the totalization of categories such as "woman artist" and "New Deal art." Her initial success in paintings such as *Nude* (c.1934) also reveals overlapping contradictory epistemologies operating around gender and sexuality in concepts of art and artist. After 1939, the public exhibition forums available to Hutchinson dwindled to those organized by women artists, and these became increasingly ignored by the news media and art critics. By the time of her death in 1970, the public no longer recognized Hutchinson as an artist.

Chapter Three, "Queering Kitsch," traces the discursive transformation of art and artist from subjects of political relations to psychological ones in mid-twentieth art criticism. Rather than recuperate Hutchinson's artistic production, this chapter argues that the dual discourse of avant-garde and kitsch effectively positioned her work as kitsch. At the same time, complex games of truth about art and artist as psychological genius reconstructed the "woman artist" as a uniquely mid-twentieth century paradox. Then, building from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's queer deconstruction of art/kitsch via camp, I queer kitsch through a series of Hutchinson's pen and ink drawings to trace a historic queer imagination which intersects camp, but at the same time exceeds the

gendered limits of camp. Finally, this chapter explores ways in which this queer imagination operated more broadly within Hutchinson's circle of women artists, but failed to resonate into the "liberated" futures of feminist and lesbian art.

Chapter Four, "Unintelligible Recovery," directly engages the core argument of this dissertation that Hutchinson's artistic production cannot be credibly recovered through available frameworks of art history. It explores the reverberations of avant-garde and kitsch in the structure of American art history split between Americanist and modernist scholars; that split continues to confound interpretations of Hutchinson's visual engagement with gender and sexuality. I then read Hutchinson's recently recovered painting, *Two of Them*, to critique its intelligibility as American Scene painting. Finally, I read a series of Hutchinson's self-portraits to critique the potential recuperation of her work through modernist frameworks.

In the Conclusion, I trace a single event in Hutchinson's life as it loops through epistemological transformations over time, and then perform a close reading of her death certificate. Unlike recovery and recuperation, this artist's anecdote and Hutchinson's certified death show that the difference between intelligibility and unintelligibility is found not only in events, but also in the epistemologies through which the events are understood. A standard archival document and a seemingly trivial event represent a microcosmic view of Mary E. Hutchinson's absence of an oeuvre.

As a whole, my heterography of Mary E. Hutchinson challenges the conventional limits imposed by the methods and assumptions of history, art history and biography. On one level, this dissertation shifts the conversation around twentieth-century women artists from questions of greatness and influence to the intelligible limits of gender and

sexuality. At the level of historical particularity, it brings scholarly attention to a previously unknown artist and her work. This dissertation also makes original contributions to our understanding of twentieth-century art, gender, sexuality, and politics that ripple beyond the particularities of Hutchinson's life. The intersection of Hutchinson's early career with the figure of the "needy artist" reveals a narrative of increased opportunity produced in the destabilization of the art market that has been obscured by conventional narratives of New Deal art and the Great Depression. Similarly, my queer reading of Hutchinson's kitschiest work traces the ghost of a queer imagination that briefly challenged the psychological construction of modern gay identities, but has failed to appear in contemporary queer theory and history. This dissertation looks into the past associated with the life and work of a single woman artist, Mary E. Hutchinson, but it is a history of the present. As such, it seeks to make the present strange.

Chapter 1

"Atlanta Girl" Winning Fame in New York

In this chapter, I will trace Mary E. Hutchinson's initial identification as an artist and her entrée into the professional art world through the archival record. I argue that Hutchinson's visual engagement with gender and sexuality makes little sense unless it is read within the context of gender and sexuality in her lived experience. As Joan Scott argues, access to experience is always fragmented and never transparent. Even so, Scott admits it is a category that historians cannot do without. Experience as a category of analysis "serves as a way of talking about what happened, of establishing difference and similarity"[1] between Hutchinson's life and the familiar stories of twentieth-century art and history.

Like experience, chronology provides a way of talking about what happened. It is a convention that we rely upon to make sense of events. However, my timeline with its seemingly conventional segments is structured around the events of Hutchinson's life itself rather than the ruptures of art, politics, and war which typically control the way history is told. The chronology of Hutchinson's life does not match up perfectly with segments imposed by decades, or broad sweeps of history such as "The Great Depression" and "World War II." Rather, Hutchinson's experience raises questions about how such categories produce ignorance as well as knowledge.

[1] Scott, "Evidence of Experience," 797.

Early Life and Family Background

Mary Elisabeth Hutchinson was born in 1906 in Massachusetts, but grew up in Atlanta, Georgia where her parents actually lived at the time. Both parents came from New England families. Her mother, Minnie Belle Hutchinson, appears to have travelled north to be near her family for the birth, and to have returned to Atlanta shortly afterward. Little information survives regarding Mary Elisabeth's early childhood except for a period of several months that the family spent in Berlin while her father, Merrill M. Hutchinson, studied piano and organ during 1912-1913. While in Europe, Minnie Belle wrote frequent letters back home to her parents in Massachusetts detailing the family's adventure. After the family returned to the United States, someone – most likely Minnie Belle's parents who received the letters – had them typed and hand-bound into a souvenir book of letters. Following this practice, when Mary Elisabeth (as she was known in the family context) and Minnie Belle returned from a 1929 European summer art tour, Minnie Belle had her letters home to Merrill similarly typed and bound into a "modern" three-ring notebook. Minnie Belle then extended the tradition to a collection of Mary Elisabeth's letters written from New York while an art student at the National Academy of Design from 1926 through 1931.[2] It is these letters which provide rich insight into Hutchinson's development as an emerging artist in New York.

The family's Berlin letters establish threads of social context otherwise difficult to access. Hutchinson's first formal education took place in Berlin when she started the first grade in a German speaking classroom. As an adult, she remained fluent in the language. These letters also provide insight into the family's ideas about gender roles. Although she typically worked as a teacher, Minnie Belle did not work while in Berlin, which

[2] MEH papers.

prompted her to occasionally reflect on her own attitudes around working women and the family. She appears to have found routine domestic chores – cleaning and mending – tedious and boring. However, her choice to work also appears to have been motivated by the need for a second income to supplement Merrill's. Overall, these letters point to a family dynamic supportive of Mary Elisabeth's later pursuit of a professional career as an adult.

And finally, these letters provide some insight into the family's religious affiliation with Christian Science. Occasionally, Minnie Belle speaks directly to the challenges of raising a child into the faith. Both Minnie Belle and Merrill became "practitioners" in the church which authorized them to pray for others, and supplemented the family income. A more elusive thread attached to the family's Christian Science affiliation developed through a surprising network of social contacts throughout the United States and abroad.

Both of Mary's parents pursued professional careers in liberal arts education. Merrill Hutchinson taught organ and piano independently, while Minnie Belle taught a mix of oratory, poetry, and interpretive reading at Washington Seminary, Atlanta's elite private school for girls.[3] Minnie Belle's affiliation with the school appears to have opened the door for Mary Elisabeth to attend Washington Seminary even though the Hutchinson family might be better described as middle class. She later attended Agnes Scott, a nearby women's college, from 1923 to 1926. Rather than graduate from college,

[3] For more information about Washington Seminary see Jane Thomas, "Margaret Mitchell (1900-1949)," *The New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed May 17, 2011, http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2566 ; and "The Westminster Schools," Wikipedia, accessed May 17, 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Westminster_Schools .
Re: Washington Seminary – NGE, "Margaret Mitchell"; Wiki, "The Westminster Schools"

Hutchinson accepted a scholarship to study art at the National Academy of Design in New York.

The small bits of information about Hutchinson's studies at Agnes Scott provide two different impressions. One is of a budding young artist, and the other is of an athlete. Hutchinson enrolled in art classes, and she also managed to set up an improvised studio in the library basement.[4] As reported by the *Atlanta Constitution* in 1925, Hutchinson produced pencil portraits, executed on small pieces of white paper "done in black and white, and with subtlety and a feeling for delicacy and subdued charm. The subjects are, for the most part, pretty young girls, classmates of the artist at Agnes Scott."[5]

However, the athlete later "flunked" her college art class. At that particular moment, Hutchinson set her sights on winning the Y.W.C.A. Georgia state tennis championship for the third year in a row, rather than attending her art class. If she lost the tennis tournament, the trophy she had claimed in both 1924 and 1925 would pass to the next champion. But with a third straight victory, the championship cup would be hers forever. She took out her first round opponent 6-0, 6-0, and won the championship by defeating Frances Kern 6-2, 4-6, 6-4.[6] However, she did indeed fail her art class, most likely for lack of attendance.

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[4] Lamar Sparks, "Atlantan Recounts Experiences as Portrait Painter in New York: Mary Elizabeth Hutchinson Exhibits at Biltmore," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 9, 1928. (MEH papers).
[5] "Picture Display of Much Interest," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 22, 1925. (MEH papers).
[6] "Girl Artist Chooses to Paint Youth: Prefers to Read Future of Sitters Rather Than Past," *New York Evening Post*, March 6, 1934; "Girl Who 'Flunked' Art for Tennis Wins Success at New York Exhibit," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 7, 1934; "Y.W. Tennis Tourney On," no date, news clipping; "Miss Hutchinson Wins Y.W.C.A. Tennis Title," no date, news clipping. (MEH papers).

Hutchinson and Atlanta's Arts Community Before 1945

While taking art classes at Agnes Scott, Hutchinson also studied privately with Marion Otis. Very little accessible information documents Marion Otis' life and art. In 1925 the *Atlanta Journal* presents Otis as having "exhibited frequently," including shows associated with the Architectural League of New York, the New York Water-Color Club, the woman's art club of New York, and the Philadelphia Water-Color club.[7] Hutchinson's letters provide glimpses of their student-teacher relationship, but within official census records, Otis' life takes on an ambiguous form which includes no trace of a career as artist or teacher. So long as she remained within her father's home in Chicago, the data surrounding Marion Otis appears to have been handled with precision. In 1900, as the daughter of Ephrim A. Otis, a lawyer, Marion is recorded as thirty-six-years-old, without an occupation, and as having been born in February 1864. However, in 1910 and afterward, as an independent woman living in Atlanta and a boarder within another's household, Marion Otis seems hard to pin down. In 1910 she had her "own income," but afterward appears to have had no occupation at all. Her age regressed to thirty-five in 1910, but jumped to sixty in 1920, and settled at sixty-six in 1930. Her heritage appears to have become a guessing game. Was she born in Canada or Georgia? In 1920 she appears to have been a solid Southerner, born in Georgia to parents who were from Georgia, rather than Michigan and Canada. She is, however, consistently female, white and single.[8] Marion Otis died around 1937, indicated only obliquely by a news article about Atlanta's High Museum:

[7] "Picture Display of Much Interest," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 22, 1925.
[8] See U.S. Census: 1900 (Chicago, Cook Co., Illinois), 1910, 1920, 1930 (Atlanta, Fulton Co., Georgia), ancestry.com.

> Recently added to the museum's permanent collection is a painting by the late Miss Marion Otis, received from her estate as a memorial picture. Although a native of Chicago, Miss Otis lived for many years in Atlanta and was a loyal member of the Atlanta Art Association. The painting, "Spring Street," was awarded the first Foreman prize of $100 several years ago.[9]

In 1925, Hutchinson exhibited her pencil portraits together with Marion Otis' "impressionistic"[10] paintings in the "window on the Cain street side of the Henry Grady hotel."[11] Both the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* covered this joint window exhibition couched within a promotional push to establish an art museum in the city which came to fruition the following year as the High Museum of Art.

Mary E. Hutchinson had already moved to New York to study at the National Academy of Design by the time the High Museum opened in 1926, but she participated in some of the museum's earliest events and exhibitions. In 1932, the High sponsored Hutchinson's first large-scale solo exhibition of professional work. And in 1934, on the eve of her first solo exhibition at New York's Midtown Galleries, the High Museum acquired two of Hutchinson's paintings: *Two of Them* (c.1933) and *Italian Girl* (c.1932). Throughout her career in New York, Hutchinson remained an active participant in Atlanta's arts scene, and the local papers kept the hometown crowd up-to-date regarding her achievements.

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[9] Barbara Baker, "Litaker Pictures at High Museum," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 7, 1937, 7A. ProQuest.
[10] "Picture Display of Much Interest," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 22, 1925.
[11] "Miss Otis and Miss Hutchinson Display Paintings," *Atlanta Journal*, November 22, 1925. (MEH papers).

Studying at the National Academy of Design, 1926-1931

Mary E. Hutchinson studied at the National Academy of Design in New York from 1926 through 1931. The Academy, which continues today, was established in 1826 by a group of New York artists as a peer organization to be governed by artists themselves rather than patrons of the arts.[12] In keeping with the well-established European model of art academies, members elect new members within a hierarchy of membership categories.[13] Hutchinson entered the National Academy in 1926 as a student based upon the recommendation and tuition scholarship granted by Albert Salzbrenner (b. 1865), who specialized in portraiture. Salzbrenner immigrated to the United States circa 1889 and established a more or less itinerant practice of opening studios in cities across the country for two or three years at a time.[14] He encountered Hutchinson's work on a visit to Atlanta, but he appears to have had no direct ties to the Hutchinson family. While Salzbrenner provided Hutchinson with the opportunity to study in New York by way of his referral and scholarship, he did not serve as a mentor or teacher.

In her study of the professionalization of women artists in America, Laura Prieto considers access to formal art education through institutions such as the National Academy of Design as key to the professional status of women artists as a group. According to Prieto, the admittance of women students to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1844 "signaled the beginning of women artists' access to indispensable

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[12] For the institutional history of the National Academy see, Eliot Clark, *History of the National Academy of Design, 1825-1953* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954).
[13] For a typical survey of the history of art academies see, Vernon Hyde Minor, *Art History's History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 7-19.
[14] "Albert Salzbrenner," Ask Art, accessed July 11, 2009, http://www.askart.com/askart/s/albert_salzbrenner/albert_salzbrenner.aspx. Hutchinson's letters indicate Salzbrenner had access and influence at the National Academy of Design, but he is not recorded as a member in Clark's *History*.

professional credentials."[15] The National Academy of Design opened its doors to women students two years later in 1846.[16] By the time Hutchinson began classes in 1926, women had been in the classrooms for eighty years.

Formal education within art academies has been considered particularly significant to the success of women artists because such institutions provided access to live models, particularly nude models, through Life Study classes. As Linda Nochlin reveals in her groundbreaking essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," the representation of the male nude held a prominent position in Western art prior to the twentieth century. That women were institutionally barred from access to nude models excluded them from one of the hallmarks of "greatness."[17] The National Academy began offering Life Study classes for women in 1871 with the stipulation "that the *Male model in the Life School for women* shall in no case stand entirely nude and also that no woman shall be admitted to the life school *under 21 years of age*."[18]

In spite of official policy, Hutchinson remained five months shy of her twenty-first birthday when promoted to the highest level of Life Study classes referred to as "Life in Full." She saw the promotion as acknowledgment of technical proficiency and the opportunity "to branch out as I like, try new ways for new effects, and have quite a glorious time."[19] She did not identify with her classmates who thought the promotion meant the end of pressure to work hard. Instead, Hutchinson believed "there will be more to do now than ever." The promotion also reassured her that she could approach

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[15] Laura Prieto, *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 26-27.
[16] Prieto, *At Home*, 27.
[17] Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"
[18] As cited in Prieto, *At Home*, 91-92. Emphasis in original.
[19] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, February 8, 1927. (MEH papers).

"the fire and spirit of an artist" even though her work seemed "different in a sort of method" of her own. She told her mother that her method "does not at all coincide with the conventions for procedure of most students . . . [and] my methods of working are a great deal harder and require a great deal more concentrated effort than other girls are willing to put out."[20] For Hutchinson, her promotion to Life in Full meant the crossing of a line between technical skill and the opportunity to develop creatively.

Challenging the Limits of Agency

Mary E. Hutchinson most likely produced *Self-Portrait* (c.1927) as a rite-of-passage associated with her promotion to Life in Full.[21] She presents herself confidently as an artist with brushes in hand. Hutchinson's first formal self-portrait marks her success as a student at the National Academy and it also represents an independent woman. The two identifications – independent woman and artist – support each other seamlessly. A year after successfully envisioning herself as an artist in *Self-Portrait* (c.1927), Hutchinson vividly describes her active life as a student artist in New York to her former art teacher in Atlanta, Marion Otis. The life Hutchinson describes fits Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the independent woman. She is active physically and professionally:

> In the morning I paint on a commission from 9 to 12:30. I walk with my things sixteen blocks there and sixteen back. I rush to eat my lunch (I cook all my meals always, except rare occasions [sic.] when my aunts have me out to dinner). I

[20] Series of quotes from Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, February 8, 1927.
[21] For the association of the self-portrait exercise and promotion to Life classes, see Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 111.

Figure 1: Mary E. Hutchinson, *Self-Portrait* (c.1927)

> catch a subway after lunch and go down to 11th Street. I stand all the way (still with my paint box and easel, etc.), then walk eight blocks to the home where I am painting another commission (a little girl four years old). I leave at five, come home in the subway jam, cook dinner and rush over to night school, for my modeling class. All three times I work entirely standing, and I walk over 60 blocks a day.[22]

Hutchinson also challenges the limits of economic freedom by not being "afraid to go after new orders."

> I am making money up here now, and if I can round in enough orders after school I might stay on a bit after school, pay my expenses and make a fair sum on the side. . . I know after a fashion what I can do, and won't be afraid to go after new orders. I have two more semi-prospects up my sleeve when these are done. When I have finished the work on hand, together with what I have made the last month, I will have almost $300.00. I begin to see the coast of Europe draw a little nearer.[23]

At this point in her student career, she managed to make and save enough money through the portrait commissions she describes to Marion Otis to finance a European art tour for herself and her mother during the summer of 1929. However, just as Beauvoir suggests, challenging the limits of agency as an independent woman – economically, physically, sexually – created unstable situations. Hutchinson reflects on an unstable subjective

[22] Mary E. Hutchinson to Marion Otis, March 5, 1928. (MEH papers).
[23] Mary E. Hutchinson to Marion Otis, March 5, 1928.

gender identification in telling Otis, "I seem to be another person, living another life. I guess I am twins without the physical manifestation."[24]

Two years later, her letters reveal an amazing two month crucible of life in which her sense of self as both an artist and a sexual subject appear to have challenged the limits of agency simultaneously. She had been living independently in New York for four years while studying at the National Academy. Her time in the city, which she had come to love, appeared to be drawing to an end as her student years wrapped up. Mary's letters to her mother convey an uncertainty for the future as she made plans to leave New York and return home to her family in Atlanta. Facing this transition, she made bold moves in her art toward a commitment to painting. Her mother may have sensed something was brewing as she read Mary's abrupt declaration: "I have decided to give up sculpture, and not work on the six weeks pose. Rather late to decide, but I just was not born a sculptor, and I must give it up sometime. It is so impractical for a girl with no money."[25] This must have been startling news given that Mary excelled in sculpture and had won honors in the medium, including First Prize for sculpture at the Academy just the year before.[26]

Whatever the practical reasons for giving up sculpture may have been, Hutchinson focused on painting. A week later she told her mother, "I am firm in my decision to give up sculpture . . . I shall draw, paint and sketch at night whatever I can; and paint in the day. I am feeling for something new in painting, with seemingly disastrous results."[27] By the end of the month, Hutchinson felt better about her results. She reports, "In only four hours I stretched a canvas, drew it, and painted it. I don't think

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[24] Mary E. Hutchinson to Marion Otis, March 5, 1928.
[25] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, March 6, 1930. (MEH papers).
[26] Bessie S. Staford, "Atlanta Artist's Picture Wins Praise of New York Critics," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 1, 1933. (MEH papers).
[27] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, March 11, 1930. (MEH papers).

I shall touch it again, quite a high mark. And it has certain elements of what I am striving for – something none of the teachers in school can give me. One of the boys thinks it is the best thing I have ever done."[28]

Hutchinson's reference to "striving for – something none of the teachers in school can give me" distinguishes between a quality which can be taught and one perceived to emerge from within an artist. Hutchinson's reference relates to shifting concepts of genius in contested meanings of truth in art, between mimesis and imagination, coupled with the Fnew alignments of gender and sexuality in psychologized subjects I mentioned in the Introduction. It assumes a special relationship between the biography of the artist and their work that makes genius visible. I will discuss these contested meanings from the perspective of queer theory in Chapter Three. For now, I will focus on them in context with Mary E. Hutchinson's lived experience and Beauvoir's independent woman as artist.

Early twentieth-century art criticism fixed the distinction between art that can be taught as a mechanical process and art that must arise from an essential creativity within the artist to the terms "academic" and "modern" respectively. Hutchinson's initial identification as an artist developed during a moment of passionate conversation around the meaning and future of art polarized through this distinction. Critics, museum curators, artists, and art patrons participated in this conversation through books, newspapers, and art periodicals. These art writers consistently presented the issues in the language of debate and conflict between academic and modern art.[29] Each of these terms

[28]Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, March 28, 1930. (MEH papers).
[29] See for example, "A 'Bi-School' Jury," *Art Digest*, December 15, 1932, 4; "Church Bans Modernism," *Art Digest*, October 15, 1932, 4; "A Debate," *Art Digest*, October 1, 1932, 11; "Philosophical," *Art Digest*

attracted an unstable cluster of associations and values. Advocates of modern art particularly framed the issue as one of truth or purity in art. Art writers such as Walter Pach invested much effort in differentiating the true artist from the false artist. According to Pach, "the artist does not create by means of intellectual logic, such as presides over a mathematical demonstration. . . . A coordination of the brain with the senses (sight, hearing, and touch) is needed, and their meeting involves the whole of the man; we sometimes say he acts by instinct, by inspiration, by intuition."[30] From this perspective, the true artist is genius and the academic artist is a "false artist."

Art writers associated art schools, such as the National Academy of Design, with the technical aspects of art which could be taught through standardized methods. Critics increasingly aligned technical proficiency with academic art and creativity with modern art. However, Hutchinson's letters reveal her experience to have been less clear cut. As we have already seen, she understood her promotion to Life in Full as the opportunity to develop her creativity on the solid foundation of achieved technical proficiency. Later, in the spring of 1930, she begins to differentiate her work from academic art while not adopting an allegiance to modern art. She tells her mother, "I left the painting I wrote you of, as it was – and did another one from another view to see if I could keep hold of the same quality. It is different from my other work – not so academic – a very different handling of paint from what Mr. Dickenson has to give, or any of the other teachers."[31] Hutchinson seems untroubled by the coexistence of different methods and effects, rather than insisting on a single universal standard. She also maintains respect for her

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November 1, 1932, 8; "Vitriol for Murals," *Art Digest*, December 15, 1932; and "With Aristotle," *Art Digest*, October 15, 1932, 9.

[30] Walter Pach, *Ananias; or, the False Artist* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1928), 32.

[31] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, circa March 30, 1930. (MEH papers).

instructors. "It isn't because I am cocky, or disparage his work. . . I have one small painting I did that is a pretty good 'Little Dickenson' – but I shall never juggle paint around in that fashion again. It is his personal taste, but not mine, the same with the other teachers." She insists that her instructors "don't force their technique on you." But, she seeks her own "way of approaching and seeing things" rather than "a master in whose step I want to follow."[32]

At the same time, Hutchinson touches on the complex triangular relationship between the artist, art, and the beholder:

> I am convinced my way of approaching and seeing things must change – not if I should paint commissions, but for myself. In sculpture there is more or less of a set criterion and the same methods of working whether the effect be academic or ultra-modern. But in painting, the road is endless, and the less artistic work is likely to be the most appreciated. . . .[33]

Commissioned work followed a two-way relationship between artist and patron in which the patron's desired outcome might even outweigh the artist's vision. Hutchinson aspired to participate in the speculative art market in which the artist's vision appeared paramount.[34] The artist painted ostensibly for herself. This presented a problem when the buying public failed to appreciate the artist's vision. Hutchinson's notion that the general public appreciates "less artistic work" parallels the distinction between academic and modern art. According to Walter Pach, "The recognition of art is closely akin to the creation of it, and though incomparably more frequent and less intense than the artist's

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[32] Series of quotes from Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, circa March 30, 1930.
[33] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, circa March 30, 1930.
[34] On the emergence of the speculative art market, see Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

experience, that of the appreciator is still near enough . . ."[35] Since the false artist traded in deception, the art critic required a certain expertise marked by the inherent quality of taste akin to the artist's genius. By extension, the ordinary art patron required the advice of the art critic to fully appreciate the most artistic work. As we will see in Chapter Three, the significance of genius and the art critic crystallized in the dual discourse of avant-garde and kitsch.

Over the next few weeks, Hutchinson became more and more confident in her new direction in painting. Her critique of Dickenson says as much about her ideas on art as it does about his work. Again she shares her thoughts with her mother: "Mr. Dickenson painted a whole afternoon for the class last Thursday. . . . There is no subtle working up of a thought or color or idea. Only a high tension, skilful [sic.] juggling of heavy paint on the canvas, gaining a certain effect, but not one which appeals to me."[36] Hutchinson's subjects are subtle thoughts, colors, or ideas conveyed through compositions of people and places. Even though she continues to respect Dickenson and Aitken as instructors, she writes, "I can't work for what they want any more. . . . I felt it wouldn't mean progress to work on the long pose again. It would just be repeating, perhaps a bit more skilfully, my work of last year. . . . In my drawings at night, I have tried for more than just anatomical study (a point of view on which Mr. Aitken would in no way approve)."[37] In pursuing more than an anatomical study, Hutchinson again distances herself from the cluster of values associated with academic art. However, as we will see, contemporary art criticism gendered these values and refused Hutchinson's disassociation as a woman artist.

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[35] Pach, *False Artist*, 32.
[36] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, April 6, 1930. (MEH papers).
[37] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, April 6, 1930.

Hutchinson's agency as a student within the National Academy to pursue her own approach suggests a gap between the rhetoric of art criticism and the actual practices within the Academy. By mid-April, Hutchinson appears to have turned the corner from working towards something new in painting to achieving it. She describes at length her painting of "a young Greek" named Theodore. This letter excerpt is significant not only as a summary of her process, but also as a precursor to her painting *Two of Them* which bears similar characteristics:

> We had a young Greek posing for us in the portrait class this week. I worked only three days on it, as I started one of another model, but was not at all satisfied. I spent one afternoon on the drawing and two on the painting. I don't quite know what you would think of it. It is far from the recipe painting done around here. Somehow I feel I got a grip on something, though. A subtle color study, rather yellow – the boy had very black hair and a black velvet jacket. I made rather strong angles in the back ground. I like the strength it gives, but I know they don't like it here. I built the painting up as I have been trying lately – not just dashing on a lot of paint. I am sure when you see them you will tell the difference. No big canvases – mostly quite small. Just how I am going to keep it up this summer, I don't know. I would have to get someone to pose for me and do the picture just my way, to keep. Then the light, and the back ground. I love the possibilities the walls here at school give. I hardly think anyone would appreciate the work for commissions. Of course, I feel convinced I could still take commissions and try and render satisfaction, but that would be a different

> matter. But a few of the paintings I have would make good exhibition pieces – they really are more art than anything I have done. . . .[38]

Again, Hutchinson distances herself from academic painting, which she refers to, this time derisively, as "the recipe painting done around here." She distinguishes her new work as suitable for exhibition over commission work. She considers it "more art than anything" she had produced before.

Although she distances herself from the methods associated with academic art, she does not adopt the rhetoric of modern art as a universal truth. Instead, she pursues her "own way of approaching and seeing things." This fits with Simone de Beauvoir's theory of the independent woman artist who operates from an unstable subjective position. According to Beauvoir, "Living marginally to the masculine world, she sees it not in its universal form but from her special point of view."[39] This disconnect from the universal or objective perspective positions her work in a vulnerable position. Beauvoir gives us a different sense of imagination than that of art critics. She contends that the woman artist must resort to imagination in her work to "prevent an inner life that has no *useful* purpose from sinking into nothingness, to assert herself against given conditions which she bears rebelliously, to create a world other than that in which she fails to attain her being."[40] Yet the independent woman artist's imagination remains constrained by the need for economic security. Creative imagination risks disturbing and repelling the general public as shocking or even scandalous. Beauvoir contends that the woman artist tends to be "on her best behavior; she is afraid to disarrange, to investigate, to

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[38] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, April 11, 1930. (MEH papers).
[39] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 704.
[40] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 704. Emphasis in original.

explode..."[41] From her marginal position, she may appear to "only stammer."[42] The tenuous position of the independent woman, especially if she comes from a middle class background rather than wealth, makes creative risk a dangerous proposition.

Mary E. Hutchinson appears to have considered and rejected stabilizing her social position through marriage at the same time she made bold moves in painting. Throughout her time as a student at the National Academy, she had gone out with several young men, to dinners and movies, long drives in the country, tennis matches, and football games. None seem particularly serious, including her friendship with the Greek model Theodore. But she had spent a good bit of time with George Castell and Phil Singer. As the closing exercises at the Academy approached in the spring of 1930, Mary's social life became busy: dinner with George one night, dancing with Phil the next. Bits of poetry shared with her mother insinuate a marriage proposal from George and Mary's reaction to it: "You would take me out in your shining car. You would tempt me with baubles of fine dinners and no fatigue. You would have me sit under a dainty brim and a mask of powder, exclaiming to you of the fine air, the sunshine, and the view…. You would set a stage for me. Beautiful, painted scenery; furnishings, every comfort of a proud home;…"[43] Mary concluded this long rambling letter to her mother by saying, "Lest you mistake some things I say, your baby is not in love with any man, so don't worry."[44] Six days after sharing this bit of poetry, Mary wrote her mother the last in a series of rambling poetic letters which clarified her inner turmoil and revealed

[41] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 708.
[42] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 708.
[43] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, May 1, 1930. (MEH papers).
[44] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, May 1, 1930.

where her heart lay. This time the poetry was devoted to a model at school who was definitely not Theodore. At the letter's end she confided to her mother:

> The model. . . is the most beautiful creature one could ever dream of. Her eyes showed sadness of years, yet they could shine. She is only twenty. For some strange reason she sought me out from all the school. She told me all of her life. (You might think she had told many people but not what she told me. Of that I am sure). When the pose was over she asked to see me. She is finer than anyone I have ever known. We were friends for two weeks. She came to see me every day. She came very early one Sunday, and we hiked all day. We came back up here and she cooked supper for me; she was radiant. I had never seen her completely happy before; she told me, too, she had not been so happy, so truly happy, for years and years. She did not have to tell me for me to see and believe. But she had to go back to her city. The next day she told me frankly, it was too much happiness; of its kind, more than she could bear in her life as it was. She choked and held my hand and turned her eyes away. Her eyes have not shone since. Till school was out, I caught glimpses of her sometimes in passing. Often her eyes would not turn. At times they would search mine, and hold for many, many minutes. I have learned to bear their burning pain.[45]

Hutchinson's letters to her mother reveal both a self-awareness as a sexual subject and transparent desire which does not strike me as naiveté. She openly confides her desire for a woman, their shared joy, and her anguish in separation. Hutchinson evokes no shame

[45] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, May 7, 1930. (MEH papers).

or guilt. On the other hand, marriage seems to represent the potentially dangerous situation when Mary tells Minnie Belle not to worry, she "is not in love with any man."

Hutchinson rejects the gendered performance of marriage and maintains her image as an artist on the public stage. At the same time, she speaks as a sexual subject. Her letters present a situation remarkably similar to the one analyzed by Joan Rivière in her 1929 psychoanalytic article, "Womanliness as a Masquerade." While feminist scholars often cite Rivière to support performative theories of gender, I am more interested in the way the author marks the gendering of psychoanalytic theory. Rivière situates her idea of gender performance in a recent moment when "investigation has slowly spread to the development of the sexual life of women. . ."[46] Psychoanalysis draws "woman" into view as a sexual subject around 1927-1930. Rivière responds directly to the categories of female sexuality proposed in 1927 by her colleague Ernst Jones who postulates intermediate sexual types between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Significantly, Rivière is concerned with one of those intermediate types, "a particular type of intellectual woman. . . engaged in professional work to-day."[47] She is concerned with the contradictions between the "masculine" desires of the workplace and the desires associated with "complete feminine development,"[48] including marriage, motherhood and feminine appearance. She argues that "women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men."[49] This is the paradox of Beauvoir's independent woman read through the lens of psychoanalysis. The limits of her agency are transformed from political

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[46] Joan Rivière, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929): 303.
[47] Rivière, "Womanliness," 303-304.
[48] Rivière, "Womanliness," 304.
[49] Rivière, "Womanliness," 303.

boundaries to psychological ones. I will explore the implications of this epistemological transformation for the "woman artist" in Chapter Three.

The New York Art Market and the "Needy Artist," 1931 – 1934

Although Mary Hutchinson believed she would be leaving New York for good in the spring of 1930, she returned to the city in the first days of 1931 committed to pursuing the life of an artist. She continued classes at the National Academy and maneuvered her way into the men's Life Study class with Leon Kroll.[50] She also appears to have reconnected with the model from the previous year whose eyes brought "burning pain." The model may have been Joanna Lanza, who moved in with Mary less than three weeks after her return to New York. Mary kept her mother up to date, "Remember the girl from Brooklyn, Joanna Lanza, who wrote me, and sent me a story she had written? She came up to see me, and is staying for a week or so. . ."[51] The two women stretched the "week or so" into five years.

During their first few weeks together, Mary mentions Joanna directly or indirectly only occasionally in her letters. For example, she concludes the next week by saying, "Joanna is playing the piano as I write. She has a book of Famous Piano Pieces, and she enjoys so much going over them."[52] However, after a few weeks of cohabitation, the room mates appear to have merged their lives and gradually Mary identifies as "we." By mid-February Mary writes, "Tonight I am going out to the theatre with Theodore (the

[50] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, January 21, 1931. (MEH papers).
[51] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, January 23, 1931. (MEH papers). This is the first reference to Joanna Lanza, by name, in Hutchinson's letters.
[52] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, February 2, 1931. (MEH papers).

Greek boy). He came up to dinner with us. . . ."[53] The two of them assumed the attitude of a couple looking out for each other and sharing everyday life. With a hint of spring in late February they "had morning coffee and buns out on our roof. It was so pleasant that later we took out an old quilt, stretched out under our coats, and stayed for a sunning of two hours. Quite a stunt for New York, in February!"[54] But the next week, "Rain all day, so we stayed in. I had a rather severe headache (mostly in my eyes) and Joanna read to me and read to me (the whole chapter on Science and Being). Her thought was so helpful. . . , and I feel much better."[55] Both sunning and reading present intimate experiences with particularly deep meaning for Hutchinson as a Christian Scientist. Both take on the power of spiritual and physical healing in a system that de-emphasizes the Cartesian mind-body split.

After six weeks together, Mary integrates Joanna fully into social and professional aspects of her life. She writes, "Yesterday, I went out to see Beverly Bayne. She asked me to bring my room mate (I had spoken of making a sketch of her during the day)."[56] Hutchinson visited Beverly Bayne a number of times in 1930-31, but does not appear to have painted her portrait. The connection seems to have been through Minnie Belle Hutchinson and mutual membership in the Christian Science Church. Bayne starred in silent films from 1912 to 1925 and later acted on Broadway during the time Hutchinson made her acquaintance. Both Bayne's marriage to (1918) and divorce from (1924) her romantic lead, Francis X. Bushman, surrounded Bayne with controversy.[57]

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[53] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, February 11, 1931. (MEH papers).
[54] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, February 25, 1931. (MEH papers).
[55] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, March 1, 1931. (MEH papers).
[56] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, March 17, 1931. (MEH papers).
[57] For more on Beverly Bayne, see Richard Maturi and Mary Buckingham Maturi, *Beverly Bayne, Queen of the Movies* (Jefferson City, NC: McFarland & Company, 2001); and David W. Menefee, *The First Female Stars: Women of the Silent Era* (Praeger, 2004).

Joanna Lanza supported Hutchinson's long active working days by doing much of the cooking and cleaning. She frequently "had dinner all cooked and ready to serve when [Mary] got in."[58] Joanna pursued her own career as a school teacher, and in general the two shared in domestic tasks and supported each other in their daily endeavors. After almost six months together, it appears to have been taken for granted by all that Joanna would accompany Mary home to Atlanta for the summer. To facilitate the journey, they put their "heads together (to the extent of a little over a hundred dollars) and bought a car."[59] The event of buying their first car together marks a form of commitment to each other through an informal financial contract. The car – a 1926 four-door, "closed car," Dodge sedan which they named "Susie" – comprised significant joint investment beyond the initial one hundred dollars during what was widely recognized as an economic crisis, though not yet christened as "The Great Depression": license plates - $13.00; weekly parking garage fee - $2.50; gasoline – "six to seven gallons for $1.00" at "fifteen to twenty miles a gallon;" "a few extra parts;" and so forth.[60]

Upon return to New York in the fall, Mary and Joanna settled back into daily life together. By this time, Hutchinson appears to have benefitted all she could as a student at the National Academy, and she transitioned into a professional artist pursuing every available avenue to bring her paintings into public view. Rather than hiring models or painting commissioned portraits, she painted the people in her daily life as subjects for the speculative art market. The Greek model, Theodore, who had been a regular visitor the previous year, appears infrequently in Mary's letters after Joanna moved in.

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[58] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, March 19, 1931. (MEH papers).
[59] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, June 22, 1931. (MEH papers).
[60] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, June 22, 1931.

However, Phil Singer becomes a frequent companion for the women together and separately. It is, of course, impossible to know Phil's intentions toward either Mary or Joanna. If he believed he was courting either woman, he later adjusted and married Joanna's younger sister, Rosalie.[61] Hutchinson turned to Joanna and her sisters, particularly Rosalie, as her favorite models over the next four years.

In the fall of 1931, Hutchinson began submitting her work to well established forums such as the annual exhibition of the Chicago Art Institute as well as experimental forums such as Macy's and the Opportunity Gallery. She submitted two paintings, "the big and small paintings of Joanna, to the New York jury for the Art Institute of Chicago exhibition."[62] A week later she reports, "I just got a notice my paintings were both rejected. So I will have to trot down in the car and call for them. Sorry I spent the money on the frame just at this time . . ."[63] Hutchinson frequently details the costs of pursuing the art market in materials, reproductions, and exhibition fees not typically considered in art history. As I will show, the destabilized economics of the art market at this particular moment generated the figure of the "needy artist" and created new opportunities for Hutchinson. Her experience challenges conventional notions of agency during the "hard times" of the Great Depression.

During the 1920s, Macy's gallery expanded the art market for both established and unknown artists to a growing consumer middle class.[64] In December Mary told her mother, "I took two landscapes down to Macys again. Two ladies looked them over, and liked them very much, and were interested to know just where I did them, and where I

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[61] Joanna Lanza to Dorothy King, October 4, 1970. (MEH papers).
[62] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, October 6, 1931. (MEH papers).
[63] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, October 14, 1931. (MEH papers).
[64] See for example Macy's Display Ad, *New York Times*, November 1, 1925, 23, ProQuest.

lived. But their galleries are full till March. If they have any space by then, they will write me. I wonder how long their memory is. They see picture after picture, all afternoon. Well, March will tell."[65]

The Opportunity Gallery of the Art Centre opened in 1927, two years before the stock market crash. In order to promote new art, the gallery selected "a prominent artist or critic" to organize each exhibition with sole authority to choose their artists and works.[66] High profile artists including Walter Pach, John Sloan, Georgia O'Keeffe, Rockwell Kent, Robert Henri, and Charles Demuth directed the first exhibitions during the 1927-1928 art season. Initially, the gallery's efforts to stand apart from other galleries focused on this organizational strategy through which "Each of the jurymen is to be the Czar of the exhibition he selects."[67] Although the name of the gallery along with the exhibition strategy suggest that the goal was to provide opportunity for unknown artists, some included in the first few shows had exhibited their work previously, including A.S. Baylinson who had participated in the Society of Independent Artists' exhibitions since 1919.[68] And by January 1930 *New York Times* art critic Ruth Green Harris is able to point to Joseph Martini, Nathaliel Dirk, Bertram Goodman and Saul as "four artists who have been frequent exhibitors at the Opportunity Gallery."[69] Even so, Hutchinson perceived it to be one of the "*most open galleries.*"[70] However, her paintings "were all rejected. They didn't accept any portraits, only landscapes. They are interested

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[65] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, circa December 10, 1931. (MEH papers).
[66] J.K., "Some of Harold Weston's Pictures Reveal Affinity With Van Gogh, Comment on the Work of Other Artists Now Being Shown," *New York Times*, October, 23, 1927, X12. ProQuest.
[67] J.K., "Some of Harold Weston's Pictures," X12.
[68] "Independent Artists' Exhibition" *New York Times*, February 23, 1919, 18. ProQuest.
[69] Ruth Green Harris, "In Various Galleries," *New York Times*, January 19, 1930, 117. ProQuest.
[70] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, October 31, 1931. (MEH papers). Emphasis mine.

only in prospective sales. So it looks as though my prospects in the smallest and most open galleries are nothing."[71]

After the economic crisis deepened in the early months of 1930, the Opportunity Gallery experienced its own financial problems and a heightened concern for cash sales developed. Although prominent artists such as Alfred Stieglitz and William Zorach continued to act as exhibition czars, the gallery instituted an end-of-season auction to promote sales. *The New York Times* reported:

> . . . a new show in the Opportunity Gallery. . . This is a retrospective exhibition, containing work by thirty-seven artists chosen, with the assistance of George S. Hellman, from the total list of seventy-nine exhibitors who have appeared in the gallery through the season. While some of the present paintings are now making a second appearance, twenty-three never before shown are included. On the evening of April 14 a grand auction is to be held, and a new type of "continuous auction" will be tried out in connection with the succeeding exhibition, scheduled to bring the season to a close. These sales, beneficial to the artists, will also help contribute toward the support of the gallery.[72]

This news brief marks significant changes taking place in the New York art market in response to the economic stress of the global financial crisis. Prior to this report, the *New York Times* coverage regarding the Opportunity Gallery had not mentioned sales or art prices. The gallery planned not only a "grand auction," but "a new type of 'continuous

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[71] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, October 31, 1931.
[72] Edward Alden Jewell, "Burchfield's New Water-Colors," *New York Times*, March 23, 1930, X12. ProQuest.

auction'" which appears to have been the prototype of the silent auction, a familiar fundraising technique used today.[73]

Although news accounts in the spring of 1930 began describing the Opportunity Gallery's mission in relation to the needs of artists as a gallery that "each year offers the opportunity to young and unknown artists to exhibit examples of their work without charge,"[74] the commercial viability of the Opportunity Gallery overshadowed all else. Critic Edward Alden Jewell concludes his gallery brief of March 23, 1930 with an investment pitch:

> That the Opportunity should have to shut up shop because of insufficient resources would be – must be – unthinkable. So if there are any millionaires who haven't time for auctions but who want to invest a bit of capital to artistically profitable advantage, here may perhaps be experienced the thrill that comes "once in a lifetime."[75]

In October 1931 when Mary E. Hutchinson responded to published accounts which portrayed the gallery as "eager to show the work not only from students but also of those who have developed artistically and may not yet have had an opportunity to exhibit,"[76] she found her paintings rejected because as portraits they appeared to lack commercial appeal.

The problem of limited opportunity for "young and unknown artists" attracted much more public concern than the problems of a struggling commercial gallery. The

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[73] See "Opportunity Auctions," *New York Times*, April 27, 1930, 127. ProQuest. "A new kind of auction is being tried in connection with the current show. Under each picture is a little transparent envelope into which, at any time, bids may be slipped."
[74] "Young Artists' Work Brings $1,900," *New York Times*, April 15, 1930, 44. ProQuest.
[75] Edward Alden Jewell, "Burchfield's New Water-Colors," *New York Times*, March 23, 1930, X12. ProQuest.
[76] Ruth Green Harris, "A Round of Galleries," *New York Times*, January 25, 1931, X13, ProQuest.

Opportunity Gallery failed to reopen for the 1932 art season, but before it closed up shop, the Opportunity temporarily joined ranks with the "impromptu Association of Needy Artists"[77] composed of forty to fifty "needy artists [who] have banded together informally and will hold an exhibition of their work for ten days,"[78] followed by nightly auctions in a prominent donated location.[79] The frequently invoked figure of the "young and unknown artist" merged with the newly re-animated figure of the "needy artist."[80]

For a brief period of time between 1931 and 1934, the "needy artist" opened up the U.S. art market. Although the "needy artist" remained a vague amorphous figure who could be young or old, man or woman, previously successful or unacclaimed, economic circumstances removed from personal behavior or moral character defined the figure.[81] The new forums produced by the figure of the "needy artist" included art marts targeting the middle class consumer as well as the collector, and cooperative galleries run by artists. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the economic crisis destabilized the established art market to create opportunities that worked in Mary E. Hutchinson's favor.

The figure of the "needy artist" generated new and alternative forums in the New York art world, many of which would benefit Mary E. Hutchinson. For example, artists organized to help themselves by arranging large open air "art marts" in Greenwich Village's Washington Square. The event was conceived as "an absolutely non-

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[77] Edward Alden Jewell, "Panorama of the Week," *New York Times*, May 10, 1931, X12. ProQuest.
[78] "Needy Artists to Exhibit," *New York Times*, May 1, 1931, 21. ProQuest.
[79] "Sale to Aid Artists Today," *New York Times*, May 2, 1931, 24; Edward Alden Jewell, "Art Exhibitions Merged," *New York Times*, May 6, 1931, 31; and Edward Alden Jewell, "Panorama of the Week," *New York Times*, May 10, 1931, X12. ProQuest.
[80] The figure of the "needy artist" deserves in depth scholarly attention beyond the scope of this project. My preliminary research indicates that the figure has been invoked at least three times during the twentieth century which coincide with moments of change in the art world: 1917, 1931-1933, and 1969-1975.
[81] "Needy Artist Freed in Cigarette Theft," *New York Times*, December 24, 1931, 21; T.C.L. "Art in Review," *New York Times*, December 1, 1932, 19; "Needy Artists' Fund Now Contains Only $6; 240 Painters and Writers Ask for Food," *New York Times*, October 21, 1933, 17; and Edward Alden Jewell, "Salon of American Humorists to Be Opened Dec.4 by College Art Group to Aid Needy Artists," *New York Times*, November 27, 1933, 13. ProQuest.

commercial plan," according to the event organizer, artist Vernon C. Porter. Porter explained to the *New York Times* that the event aimed to profit only "needy artists, and we have no object but to afford aid to those who greatly need it."[82] Hundreds of artists, including Hutchinson, participated in the event held in the spring and fall for the next few years. A description of the 1933 spring show points to the open character of the exhibition regarding not only artistic expression, but also gender, race, and ethnicity:

> . . . the paintings of animals and life on the western ranches, in water-colors, and in oil; done by Walter Rogers, who said he came originally from Portland, Ore.
>
> The slightly modernistic paintings of J.H.D. Robinson, a Negro artist, were near by. Two were symbolic. One was the picture of an old-fashioned coal stove, on the top of which were a prayer book and a cactus. The other contained masks. Ramon Relajes, who asks $500 for his painting done in oil with steel instruments, was selling an explanatory booklet on his art for 10 cents. . . .
>
> A man known as Agnello, who came to this country from Algiers six years ago, had a view in oil of a shack camp that he had made at Seventy-second Street and Riverside Drive. On West Broadway was displayed the sculpture of Miss J. Ruth Nickerson.[83]

For Mary E. Hutchinson the figure of the "needy artist" also created opportunity in March 1932 with the opening of the Times Gallery, which hoped to fill the gap left by the failed Opportunity Gallery. The Times Gallery claimed to focus on "young American artists" who could not "afford to rent an entire gallery for a one-man show."[84] Artists

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[82] "Sidewalk Art Sale Approved by City," *New York Times*, May 21, 1932, 17. ProQuest.
[83] "Outdoor Art Show Viewed by 20,000," *New York Times*, April 30, 1933, N2. ProQuest.
[84] "A New Gallery," *New York Times*, February 21, 1932, X11; Edward Alden Jewell, "A New Gallery Opens," *New York Times*, March 2, 1932, 16, ProQuest.

paid five dollars to have a painting exhibited as part of a group show for two weeks. Hutchinson exhibited *Aria Triste* (c.1930-32) in the opening show and caught the attention of the *New York Times* reviewer as one of the "comparatively new persons" on the scene. Regardless of the gallery's stated mission, the paper reported that the show included "unexpectedly enough, work by such well-known artists as Glenn O. Coleman, Amy Londoner, Stuart Davis, Joseph Pollet, Arnold Friedman, and Agnes Tait," many of whom had exhibited at the Opportunity Gallery.[85]

Two months later, another new forum, the Painters and Sculptors Gallery, gave Hutchinson the chance to show her work to the public.[86] The gallery was founded in 1931 by Margit Varga, who was an artist herself. Varga opened the gallery as a cooperative forum after becoming "frustrated by the indifference of art dealers to works by younger artists."[87] Varga, who was about the same age as Hutchinson, had studied at the National Academy as well as at the Art Students League and likely faced similar challenges within the New York art world. Hutchinson and Varga became casual friends whose circles overlapped, and Hutchinson painted Varga's portrait around 1934.[88] Margit Varga later became the art director for *Life* magazine.[89]

The momentum Hutchinson generated in the spring with exhibitions at the Times Gallery, the Salons of America, and the Painters and Sculptors Gallery led to an

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[85] Jewell, *New York Times*, March 2, 1932.
[86] Hutchinson showed *Palisades* and *Courtyard* at the Painters and Sculptors Gallery in May 1932, both of which remain unlocated works. "Atlanta Artist Recognized," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 1, 1932. (MEH papers).
[87] Finding Aid, Margit Varga papers, Smithsonian AAA. http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/collection/vargmarg.htm. Accessed February 19, 2009. Although the artist coop galleries of this time were not exclusively run by women, the structure was reanimated in the 1970s by the feminist art movement.
[88] "Art Works," *New York World-Telegram*, September 15, 1934. (MEH papers).
[89] See Margit Varga papers, Smithsonian AAA.

invitation from Atlanta's High Museum for a large solo summer show in July 1932.[90] Hutchinson had already left Atlanta to study at the National Academy in New York when the High Museum officially opened in October 1926. As with much of the museum development throughout the nation at the time, the High became a reality through the philanthropy of an influential woman, Harriet Harwell Wilson High, who donated her Peachtree Street residence to the Atlanta Art Association.[91] Prior to the establishment of a museum, Atlanta artists such as Hutchinson had exhibited their work in hotels and storefront windows.[92] The High Museum of Art participated in a boom of community museum development during the 1920s. In 1932 the *Art Digest* reported that museums were no longer big city luxuries, and that 1,400 such institutions had become "regarded as important sources of education."[93] Another significant trend noted by the *Art Digest* around the same time concerned the relationship between art museums and art critics: "American museums no longer depend wholly upon the professional critics for interpretations of their big exhibitions. The tendency is growing to make use of critical analyses by members of the museums' staffs, written for the benefit of the public."[94] In assuming the role of art critic as well as that of art collector, museums consolidated their authority as experts. As a result, exhibition by a museum such as the High significantly enhanced the stature of a contemporary artist.

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[90] "High Museum To Present Works of Mary Hutchinson, of Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 10, 1932; "Atlanta Girl to Exhibit Paintings at Museum," *Atlanta Georgian*, July 11, 1932; "Art Work Wins Fame," *Atlanta Georgian*, July 15, 1932; and "Miss Hutchinson's Art Exhibit at Museum Shows Best Paintings of Atalnta Artist," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 17, 1932. (MEH papers.)

[91] Ralph T. Jones, "Hundreds View Formal Opening of High Museum," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 18, 1926, 1, ProQuest. See also Molly Thomson, "High Museum of Art," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed January 15, 2011, http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1049.

[92] In 1925 Hutchinson exhibited pencil drawings in the window of the Henry Grady Hotel in a joint exhibition with her Atlanta art teacher, Marion Otis. "Miss Otis and Miss Hutchinson Display Paintings," *Atlanta Journal*, November 22, 1925; "Picture Display of Much Interest," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 22, 1925.

[93] "1,400 Museums," *Art Digest*, October 1, 1932, 14.

[94] "Museums as Critics," Art Digest, November 15, 1932, 10.

New York's art critics picked up on Mary E. Hutchinson's work during the early days of the 1933 exhibition season. In February, Hutchinson exhibited two landscapes – *Radio City* and *Rockefeller Center* – and two portraits – *Convalescence* and *Two of Them* – at Margit Varga's cooperative Painters and Sculptors Gallery.[95] Margaret Breuning, the art critic for the *New York Evening Post*, considered the figure of the young woman portrayed in *Convalescence* to have "the relaxed bodily gesture and the mental letdown which the title implies." Breuning noted that Hutchinson's urban landscapes, *Radio City* and *Rockefeller Center*, "may be statements of observed topography, or, again, they may be cynical comment upon our magnificent additions to civic pride." All in all, the art critic believed that "Miss Hutchinson is an artist who has ideas and is gaining the means to say them with conviction and intensity."[96]

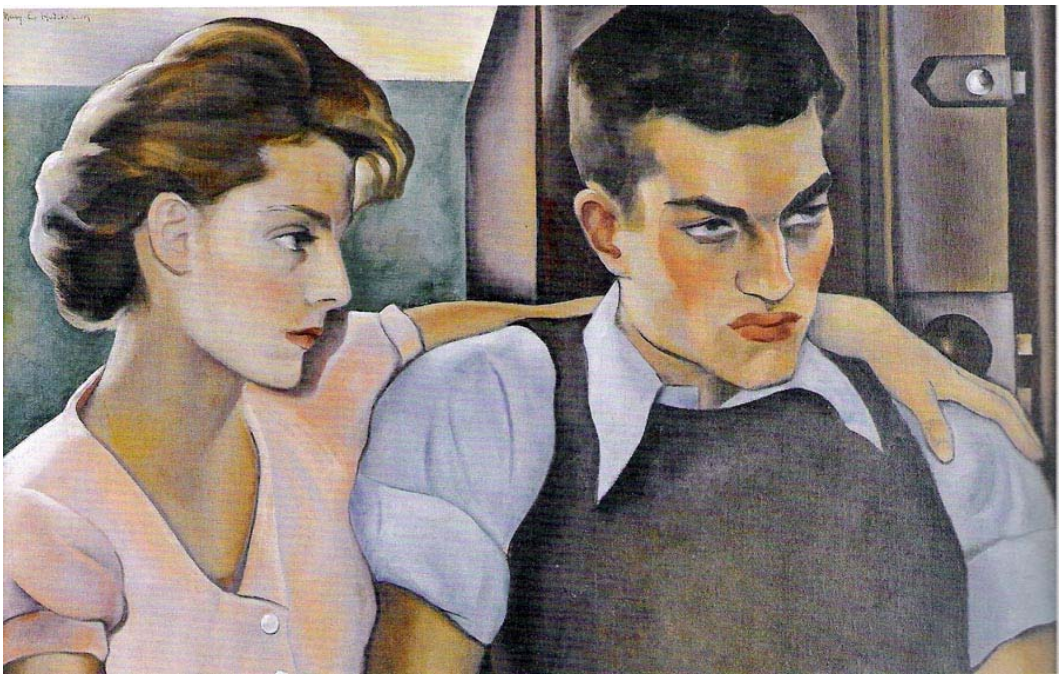

Figure 2: Mary E. Hutchinson, *Two of Them* (c.1933)

[95] "Eloisa Schwab and Mary E. Hutchinson," Painters & Sculptors Gallery (exhibition checklist), February 27, 1933. (MEH papers.)
[96] Margaret Breuning, "Chicago Artists Appear in New York Exhibition at the Whitney Museum," New *York Evening Post*, March 4, 1933. (MEH papers.)

The next day the *New York Times* art critic also noted *Convalescence* and remarked that Hutchinson's portraits as a whole "emerge from her other work. She has infused them with a haunted mood and they are instinct with sympathy."[97] The *New York Herald Tribune*'s critic agreed on the quality of Hutchinson's portraits, but was unimpressed with her landscapes:

> As a portrait painter, Miss Hutchinson is especially suave and skillful. Her heads are designed with decorative simplicity, but are well drawn and have an air of refinement about them. The qualities of clarity and rhythm which distinguish them are quite lost in her landscapes, which are apparently a more recent development.[98]

Margit Varga's Painters and Sculptors Gallery experiment only lasted a few years, but she and Mary E. Hutchinson both became members of the Midtown Galleries, which also began as a cooperative venture in which artists shared the costs and labor of exhibitions.[99] The artists' coops allowed Hutchinson to negotiate the economic realities of breaking into the art market. When she joined the Midtown Galleries, she reported to her mother:

> I am investing in myself as an artist. $5 a month to the Midtown galleries; many dollars for photographs of my paintings; a complete set of fresh tubes of paints and a few new brushes (I got 10% discount at Academy student store); I will buy another roll of canvas soon, around $7; stretcher, beaver board, & lumber &

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[97] Howard Devree, "The Week in the Galleries: Art in Her Infinite Variety," *New York Times*, March 5, 1933. (MEH papers.)
[98] "Mary Hutchinson and Eloisa Schwab," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 12, 1933. (MEH papers.)
[99] Catherine Stover Gaines, "Midtown Galleries: A Finding Aid to the Midtown Galleries Records, 1904-1997, in the Archives of American Art," Smithsonian AAA. http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/midtown-galleries-records-7098/more. Accessed May 29, 2009.

> materials for frames; and I would like to show at the Salons of America again (that is $8 --, and $6 more if I have a reproduction in catalogue). The advantage of the reproduction is that I get the cut, the block made from the photo, just as I did last year.[100]

Hutchinson began participating in group shows at the Midtown Galleries in April 1933. The *Tribune* simply mentions Hutchinson's participation in "A Good Group Exhibition."[101] More significantly, a few months later the *New York Times* highlighted Hutchinson's contribution to the group's summer show, *Young Girl in Blue,* with a reproduction in the newspaper as well as praise.[102] The next issue of *Art Digest* also prominently reproduced *Young Girl in Blue* and singled Hutchinson out of the group:

> The New York Summer season in art has its compensations. Now and then an outstanding picture appears and is hailed by the critics as an accomplishment. This happened at the July exhibition by members of the Midtown Galleries. Mary Hutchinson showed "Young Girl in Blue." The *Times* and the *World-Telegram* voiced similar praise. The *Times*: "Mary Hutchinson is represented by a portrait of a brooding girl in sharp blue - a figure composition of striking angularity of design against the half-barrel chair with its gracious curve. It is Miss Hutchinson's most mature and carefully wrought work to date." The *World-Telegram*: "Possibly the most outstanding canvas in the show is Mary Hutchinson's portrait of a young girl in blue, a handsomely composed and painted picture."[103]

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[100] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, March 5, 1933. (MEH papers.)
[101] "A Good Group Exhibition," *New York Tribune,* April 16, 1933. (MEH papers.)
[102] *New York Times*, July 23, 1933. (MEH papers.)
[103] "Critics Praise A 'Summer Show' Picture," *Art Digest*, August 1, 1933, 18. (MEH papers).

Hutchinson's summer show success with *Young Girl in Blue* prepared the way for her first solo exhibition in New York about six months later.

On the eve of her first solo show at the Midtown Galleries in February 1934, Atlanta's High Museum of Art bought *Two of Them* and a second painting, titled *Italian Girl,* for which Rosalie Lanza posed. In what may have been a strategic move for both museum and artist, the High Museum purchased the two paintings in advance of the exhibition, which allowed the acquisition to become part of the artist's narrative in the exhibition catalogue notes.[104] *Two of Them* had not been exhibited or mentioned in the press for a full year, and was not included in the exhibition catalogue for the February Midtown Galleries show. All recent attention had been reserved for Hutchinson's summer hit, *Young Girl in Blue*.[105] However, the museum acquisition of *Two of Them* catapulted Hutchinson into the public eye. In her hometown, the *Atlanta Constitution* boasted: "Atlanta Girl is Winning Fame in Art Circles of New York."[106] The *New York Evening Post*, the *American Magazine of Art*, and the art periodical *Parnassus* also reported on the museum acquisition.[107] The High Museum's acquisition of *Two of Them*, coupled with Hutchinson's first solo show at the Midtown Galleries, mark the artist's entrée into the professional art world.

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[104] See exhibition checklist, Midtown Galleries, February 1934. (MEH papers).
[105] *Young Girl in Blue* is not mentioned again and the location of the painting is unknown.
[106] Barbara Baker, "Atlanta Girl is Winning Fame in Art Circles of New York," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 11, 1934. This "Atlanta Girl" was twenty-eight years old and living as an independent woman in New York.
[107] "Girl Artist Chooses to Paint Youth: Prefers to Read Future of Sitters, Rather Than Past," *New York Evening Post*, March 6, 1934; "Atlanta Museum Buys Local Artist's Work: Two of Them," *American Magazine of Art*, May 1934, 274; "Some Recent Museum Acquisitions," *Parnassus* 6 no.4 (April 1934): 16, Jstor.

Heterographic Conclusions

Mary E. Hutchinson's lived experience as an emerging artist tells a story about twentieth-century American history as well as a story about the history of twentieth-century American art. It is, however, a different narrative than the ones conventionally told. It is the story of a middle class Atlanta girl raised in the U.S. South by parents who encouraged her to pursue education, a career, and the life of an independent woman. During the 1920s, she participated actively with Atlanta's arts community. Her 1925 joint exhibition with Marion Otis even served to highlight the civic need for a local art museum which came to fruition the next year in the High Museum of Art. For the next twenty-five years, the Atlanta arts community watched and celebrated Hutchinson's achievements as an artist, and the High Museum collected her paintings. However, Mary E. Hutchinson appears nowhere in local histories of Atlanta or its arts community, and the High Museum has removed Hutchinson's paintings from its collection.

Hutchinson studied at the National Academy of Design in New York for five years. She entered the Academy on a scholarship and watched her expenses closely. The Academy provided the conditions of possibility for her to become an independent woman artist. She learned the fundamentals of artistic production in multiple mediums, including sculpture as well as painting and drawing. After her promotion to Life in Full, she felt free to experiment in painting and to develop her own approach even though she knew her instructors might not approve of the results. However, as I will show in Chapter Four, her student association with the National Academy contributes to Hutchinson's ambiguous and unintelligible place in art history narratives.

She challenged the limits of agency around gender and sexuality by rejecting marriage for the intimate companionship of women. Her personal and professional life not only overlapped, but appear to have had no meaningful separation. She painted in her home. Her lovers and friends served as her models. In her final year at the Academy, she crossed over into the boys' classes. She also entered the New York art world as a professional at a moment of perceived equal opportunity for women. In this moment, her lived experience resists notions of separate spheres conventionally used in women's history. At the same time, new psychological epistemologies re-inscribed gendered limits. As we will see in the following chapters, the "woman artist" became an absolute paradox as a new psychological subject. The ambiguity of gender and sexuality in Hutchinson's lived experience defies narratives of women's history and feminism invested in the model of separate spheres.

Hutchinson emerged as a professional artist during the global economic crisis now known as the "Great Depression." The archival record traces her efforts to break into the art market as it intersects with the figure of the "needy artist." Contrary to conventional narratives which depict the "hard times" of the Depression, the economic crisis destabilized the New York art market and the figure of the "needy artist" created new opportunities for Hutchinson to show her work. As we will see, Hutchinson's experience as an artist emerging through new and innovative public forums, as well as her early oeuvre, fail to fit conventional narratives of artistic production during the 1930s.

Chapter 2

An Independent Woman Artist

Mary E. Hutchinson participated with diverse groups simultaneously as a professional artist in New York from 1934-1939. Like many artists, she worked for various New Deal art programs from their inception in 1933 to their dismantling in 1943. She painted two public murals for the nascent Civil Works Administration (CWA) in 1933,[1] and then participated with the more enduring New York Federal Art Project (NYFAP) which was one of the many Works Progress Administration (WPA) sponsored art projects throughout the country.[2] The WPA notably hired women, African Americans, and Native Americans rather than discriminating against minority groups. In some instances women out-numbered men in WPA arts projects.[3] Hutchinson served as a supervisor of teachers for the NYFAP.[4] Because she worked as an artist-teacher-administrator, her artistic production remained her own outside the purview of the WPA, unlike her peers who worked for the easel art division or mural projects.[5] Throughout the duration of the NYFAP, Hutchinson exhibited independently through the Midtown Galleries, and as a member of various artist organizations, including the National Association of Women Artists, the New York Society of Women Artists, the Society of Independent Artists, and the American Artists Congress.

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[1] Barbara Baker, "Atlanta Girl Is Winning Fame In Art Circles of New York," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 11, 1934. (MEH papers).
[2] The Works Progress Administration (WPA) became the Works Project Administration in 1939.
[3] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, third edition (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 316-317.
[4] "How Artist Found Talent in Mother," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 24, 1940; and WPA, "Radio Interview with Mary Hutchinson," transcript, August 12, no year. (MEH papers.)
[5] For example, Alice Neel worked for the easel art division and the government actually owned her paintings. After the NYFAP ended, Neel's paintings were included in the canvases sold by the ton as scrap in 1944. See "Canal Street Salon," *Art Digest*, November 15, 1944, 31.

Hutchinson worked out of the Harlem Community Art Center, which is a little documented WPA project.[6] The Art Center is most closely associated with African American sculptor Augusta Fells Savage. Savage first attracted public attention in 1923 when the French government turned her away from a summer art program because of her race. According to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Savage "brought this issue to the public's attention and caused quite an uproar. She never received the scholarship, but she received an offer to study with the sculptor Herman MacNeil. This incident brought attention to the discrimination African-American artists faced in this country. However, she [Savage] was seen as a trouble maker."[7] Savage directed the Harlem Community Art Center. Given Hutchinson's initial interest in sculpture as a student, I believe the Art Center and her association with Savage provided the opportunity to sculpt most of the small unexhibited pieces which survive in her estate collection. Hutchinson and Savage worked and socialized in overlapping circles and both produced portraits of their mutual friend, Theodore Upshure.[8] This interracial collaboration deserves in depth scholarly attention beyond the scope of this dissertation. As we will see later in this chapter, the American Artists Congress invited similar collaboration and critiqued traditional trans-racial representation. However, conventional narratives of early-twentieth-century art history segregate African American artists by way of the "Harlem Renaissance."

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[6] "How Artist Found Talent in Mother," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 24, 1940.
[7] "Harlem 1900-1940: Augusta Fells Savage (1882-1962)," The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, accessed December 29, 2005, http://www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Harlem/text/asavage.html.
[8] Bibby, Deirdre L., *Augusta Savage and the Art Schools of Harlem* (New York: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Cluture), 15-16; and Theresa Leininger-Miller, *New Negro Artists in Paris: African American Painters and Sculptors in the City of Light, 1922-1934* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

Midtown Galleries

Mary E. Hutchinson's association with the Midtown Galleries provided a powerful forum through which to access the New York art market and gain public visibility. Alan D. Gruskin and Francis C. Healey established the Midtown Galleries in 1932 as a cooperative similar to Margit Varga's Painters and Sculptors Gallery. Healey launched an aggressive public relations campaign that significantly enhanced the public visibility of the Midtown artists, including Hutchinson. Healey's strategy included the new mass media potential of the radio and he developed a program of weekly shows through NBC radio. According to the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, "The 15-minute programs consisted of discussions with museum directors, curators, artists, writers, and musicians about a broad range of cultural topics. Copies of the scripts were offered for a dime..."[9] Hutchinson participated in at least one of these radio broadcasts in 1935-36 to talk about her painting of Theodore Upshure, titled *The Composer*.[10] These radio broadcasts kept the Midtown Galleries and its artists in the public eye not only as art events, but also as entertainment and education events routinely covered by the New York newspapers. While a member of the Midtown Galleries, Hutchinson also had many of her paintings professionally photographed for reproduction in exhibition catalogues, newspapers, and magazines as part of the galleries' publicity program. In many cases, these photographs now provide the only available visual record of Hutchinson's artistic production. Francis Healey left the Midtown Galleries in 1935, and the operation converted from a cooperative to a commercial venture run by Alan Gruskin. The

[9] Gaines, Catherine Stover, "A Finding Aid to the Midtown Galleries Records, 1904-1997, in the Archives of American Art" in Midtown Galleries records, 1904-1997, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[10] Radio transcript, Mary E. Hutchinson interview with Abbott, no date.

Figure 3: Mary E. Hutchinson, *The Composer* (c.1936)

galleries represented around twenty or so artists at a time, and Hutchinson's contemporaries include Isabel Bishop, Paul Cadmus, Gladys Rockmore Davis, and Margit Varga. Many of the Midtown artists, such as Isabel Bishop, remained with the galleries for decades.[11] Hutchinson severed her ties with the galleries around 1938-39, but nothing indicates why or who initiated the separation. The Midtown Galleries operated continuously until 1995.[12]

Hutchinson's 1934 solo show at the Midtown Galleries featured portraits of Joanna Lanza and her sisters, Rosalie and Helen.[13] New York's art critics paid attention to the exhibition. In general the reviews promoted Hutchinson as an emerging artist beginning to prove herself. The reviews produced significant public visibility for Hutchinson and affirmed her credibility as an artist. However, close attention to the critics' language reveals two trends which play out in what I call Hutchinson's absence of an oeuvre today. Hutchinson's gender representation created subtle anxiety and critics persistently described her work through values associated with academic art rather than modern art. As we will see in the next chapter, by 1940 art criticism relegated both academic art and women to kitsch.

Hutchinson portrayed women as serious individuals engaged with literature, music, and thought. The critics perceived morbid unhappy women. For example, the critic for the *Herald Tribune* says Hutchinson "manages to give a good impression of individuality in her different sitters, despite their uniform immobility of expression."[14]

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[11] For more on Isabel Bishop see, Todd, "*New Woman" Revised*; Helen Yglesais, *Isabel Bishop* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989); and Karl Lunde, *Isabel Bishop* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1975).
[12] Stover, Midtown Galleries Finding Aid.
[13] "Exhibition of Paintings Mary E. Hutchinson, Midtown Galleries, exhibition checklist, February 1934. (MEH papers).
[14] Carlyle Burrows, "Portraits in the Decorative Manner," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 11, 1934. (MEH papers.)

The *New York Times* commented on Hutchinson's show twice. The first impression of an unnamed critic was one of "A Developing Talent:"

> The current one-man show of her recent work at the Midtown Galleries furthers the impression of a steadily developing individual talent. . . . Faces of the portrait subjects retain an almost morbidly brooding sensitiveness, as in Miss Hutchinson's first paintings; but her maturing talent has in other respects found expression less introspectively.[15]

A few days later the well-known art critic for the *New York Times*, Howard Devree, also noted the "brooding" quality of her subjects: "Individual without being sensational Miss Hutchinson has, with excellent results, gone quietly on her way toward maturity;" and "The foreshortened 'Dancer and Doll' and certain 'urban landscapes' lend variety to the show; but it is to the brooding, sensitive faces of the portraits that the visitor's gaze returns."[16]

Although the anonymous critic for the *New York Evening Post* considered Hutchinson "a serious artist," he praises her strengths as mimesis rather than imagination:

> . . . exhibition of paintings which affirm the impression that her work seen in various exhibits has made, the impression of a serious artist, who is intent on finding the form of artistic expression most consonant with her endowment. . . . The current paintings are marked by vigor of draftsmanship and explicitness of statement. Many of the figure paintings, mostly portraits, are on an almost heroic scale, carried out with clarity of color in an exaggerated emphasis of objective fidelity. . . . but one hopes that after the artist realizes her desired soundness of

[15] "A Developing Talent," *New York Times*, February 8, 1934. (MEH papers).
[16] Howard Devree, "Current Art," *New York Times*, February 11, 1934. (MEH papers.)

> technical attainment she will interest herself more in the imaginative, subtle transcriptions of subject matter which first distinguished her work.[17]

This critic associates Hutchinson with academic art as "most consonant with her endowment," which I read as an oblique gendering of academic art as appropriate for women. Hutchinson's "vigor of draftsmanship and explicitness of statement" as well as her apparent "soundness of technical attainment" align her with mimesis which, as I explained in the Introduction, was viewed as inferior to the creative work of imagination. It is interesting, however, that he suggests Hutchinson's pursuit of technique which is suitable to her gender has subdued her potential imagination. This fits with the emerging ideas of genius as imagination and the exclusion of women from the psychological category of genius. Within the next three to five years, critics begin to explicitly claim genius and creative imagination for men exclusively.

By Mary E. Hutchinson's 1937 solo exhibition at the Midtown Galleries, the New York art critics considered her to be a familiar presence. According to an unnamed critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, Hutchinson "demonstrates an original decorative style in painting and, though this is her first one-man [sic.] exhibition since 1934, her work has appeared frequently in group shows and has become increasingly familiar."[18] Likewise, the *New York World Telegram* notes that Hutchinson's "technique is comparatively well known around town. Her large, bold, meticulous and almost postery compositions have appeared in frequent group exhibitions as well as in her solo shows."[19] The *New York Times* noted, "A mural decorative quality has grown steadily in Miss Hutchinson's work.

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[17] "Mary E. Hutchinson," *New York Evening Post*, February 10, 1934. (MEH papers).
[18] "Portraits and Compositions," *New York Herald Tribune*, November 28, 1937. (MEH papers.)
[19] "Work of Women Artists Presented in Six Exhibitions," *New York World Telegram*, December 4, 1937. (MEH papers.)

. . . A certain thinness, however, seems to have increased along with the enhanced decorative quality – a tendency not altogether to the artist's advantage."[20]

In a refrain not heard at the time of her first solo exhibition, the *Art Digest* and the *New York World Telegram* both framed Hutchinson as a woman artist in 1937. The *Art Digest* reproduced *Duet* and praised the artist by saying, "Her figures always fill their canvas; her forms, hard and shiny with color have tremendous strength for a woman painter."[21] In an article on the "Work of Women Artists Presented in Six Exhibitions," the *New York World Telegram* considers Hutchinson to be a "robust woman painter, though her strength derives not from subject matter, but from treatment."[22]

Mary E. Hutchinson's separation from the Midtown Galleries is obliquely marked by the venue of her circa 1938-39 retrospective exhibition rather than direct documentation of her departure. Hutchinson staged her retrospective at the Barbizon Hotel for Women over the Midtown Galleries which had contributed so much to her public profile.[23] The Barbizon opened in 1927 – shortly after Hutchinson first came to New York – though she does not appear to have ever resided there. In addition to providing an environment for independent single women in the city regarded as safe and respectable, the Barbizon "was also active in promoting women's organizations, providing meeting space to groups such as the National Junior League, the Arts Council of New York, and the Wellesley College Club."[24] The hotel operated as a space reserved

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[20] "One and a Group," *New York Times*, November 28, 1937. (MEH papers.)
[21] *Art Digest*, December 1, 1937, p.19.
[22] "Work of Women Artists Presented in Six Exhibitions," *New York World Telegram*, December 4, 1937. (MEH papers.)
[23] "Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings by Mary E. Hutchinson at the Barbizon Hotel for Women," exhibition checklist, February, no year. (MEH papers).
[24] "Places Where Women Made History: Barbizon Hotel for Women," National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, accessed March 24, 2011,

for women and restricted men's access to the public lobby. New York's art critics did not report on Hutchinson's retrospective exhibition.

National Association of Women Artists & The New York Society of Women Artists

Following Mary E. Hutchinson's consistent success throughout the 1934 art season, including exhibitions at the National Academy of Design and Atlanta's High Museum as well as the Midtown Galleries, Hutchinson's peers acknowledged her professional status through election into the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors.[25] In 1935, the *New York Times* extensively covered the women's annual exhibition. The newspaper even reprinted the Association's history included in the exhibition catalogue:

> On Jan. 31, 1889, five young women met in a Washington Square studio and * * * agreed that since there was a strong discrimination against the work of women in existing exhibitions, something must be done to secure opportunities for them to show their work under dignified professional auspices. A society should be formed which would give a selected group of women artists exhibition privileges, bring their work to the attention of the public and devote itself to the general development and understanding of art.[26]

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http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/pwwmh/ny25.htm. See also "Barbizon 63," Wikipedia, accessed March 24, 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbizon_Hotel_for_Women.

[25] "Women Artists Elect 31 New Members," *New York Sun*, October 17, 1934. (MEH papers.) The association has been known by several names. It was originally founded as the Woman's Art Club in 1889. In 1912 the title changed to Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, and in 1914 the group added the designation of National to the title. In 1941 the extant title National Association of Women Artists was adopted.

[26] As cited in Edward Alden Jewell, "Women to Exhibit Their Art Today," *New York Times*, January 2, 1935. ProQuest. History attributed to Berta N. Briggs, a former president of the association. Ellipses in original citation. The NAWA web site names the five women as: Grace Fitz-Randolph, Edith Mitchell Prellwitz, Adele Frances Bedell, Anita C. Ashley, and Elizabeth S. Cheever.

According to Berta N. Briggs, a former president of the association who wrote the history for the exhibition catalogue, the art world's attitude toward women had changed considerably since the founding of the association. Briggs considered the contemporary moment in which Mary E. Hutchinson joined the circle of women artists, to be a "day of equal opportunity." The catalogue statement also stressed the point that the women artists expected to be judged not as women, but as artists. At the same time, the group proudly maintained its "identity as a woman's organization" as a cooperative effort "to extend the field of opportunity."[27]

Berta Briggs was not alone in her assessment that women artists had achieved equality. A month later the *New York Times* quoted Sonia Gordon Brown, president of the New York Society of Women Artists as stating:

> Art galleries are at last giving women artists recognition as painters and sculptors and according them the same consideration and encouragement which they once reserved only for men artists. Today even the conservative art groups are opening their exhibitions to women artists who were at one time held as dangerously radical. It seems, then, that women have achieved the place where art is judged by universal values.[28]

The New York Society of Women Artists came together in 1925 as a small group limited to thirty artists, rather than the nearly 800 members of the national association, to provide a more practical exhibition context. A year after her election to the national association, Hutchinson also joined the New York Society. In addition to being a smaller group, the

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[27] As cited in Jewell, *New York Times*, January 2, 1935.
[28] "Women Radicals Open Art Exhibit," *New York Times*, February 3, 1935. ProQuest.

New York Society favored a "progressive character" in art.[29] Critics characterized their exhibitions as "left wing" and "radical."[30] Each of these descriptors refers to what we now call modernism and not to any political affiliation. Many women artists, including Hutchinson, appear to have maintained membership and active participation in both organizations with no public rivalry.

Hutchinson's membership and active participation in the two women's groups make her not only a woman who was an artist, but also an artist who identified with other women. She affirms her identification through collective action. At the time, the women's groups enhanced opportunities to exhibit her work in public forums as an artist who also happened to be a woman. Even so, the idea of equality operated within mixed signals. For example, before controversy around Diego Rivera's mural dominated the art news of Rockefeller Center,[31] the *Art Digest* commented on the status of the women artists commissioned for the project:

> Regarding the presence of Gwen Lux, Georgia O'Keeffe and other women artists among the artists who have received commissions, Mr. Deskey [art project coordinator] says: "We have long since overcome the mid-Victorian notion that women can never be artists of merit, and the International Music Hall will present the work of a number of women whose standing in their special fields is of the highest. . . ."[32]

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[29] "Spring Days in the Art Galleries," *New York Times*, April 25, 1926. ProQuest.
[30] "Women Radicals Open Art Exhibit," *New York Times*, February 3, 1935. ProQuest.
[31] Rivera painted a mural for Rockefeller Center which included a portrait of Lenin. The Rockefeller Center which owned the mural had it destroyed, which provoked public controversy around censorship in art. See Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art*, 102.
[32] "'Moderns' Have Inning at Rockefeller Center," *Art Digest*, October 15, 1932, 11.

Of course, the very fact that Deskey felt compelled to defend the project's women artists reveals the tenuous status of equality. Likewise, the Boston Art Club's decision to admit women in 1932 publicly signaled equal opportunity amid the "tremendous influx of women into painting and sculpture." However, behind the headline the policy change proved to be a change in language only, from admitting women as "guests" to "members" with "no more privileges than these guests of the past." [33]

A persistent notion that a woman artist's work should be judged according to a different standard also complicated the concept of equal opportunity. In 1931, the association went so far as to invite an "outside" jury of men to award exhibition prizes to demonstrate that women artists exhibited "ready to submit to a universal measure of quality."[34] However, the experiment appears to have failed and the next year the *Art Digest* reported that "men just don't understand."[35] Even so, at mid-decade, as Mary E. Hutchinson experienced the height of public attention, *New York Times* art critic Edward Alden Jewell claimed parity between men and women, and he credited the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors for this achievement:

> The emphasis placed on a distinction, in art, between one sex and the other has long ceased to have the grim validity it once possessed. Artists are good, bad or indifferent, as the case may be. There is no urgent reason, unless I have altogether missed the point, why we should ask: Was this art made by a man or by a woman? And whatever distinguishing differences there once arguably were in

[33] "Art Club Admits Women," *Art Digest*, January 1, 1933, 18.
[34] National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, Forty-Fourth Annual Exhibition, exhibition catalog, 1935. (MEH papers.)
[35] "Women Artists, in Their 42nd Annual, Lean to the Traditional,"" *Art Digest*, February 1, 1933, 32. See also "Women Painters' Largest Show," *New York Times*, December 29, 1931. ProQuest.

the work itself, members of the N.A.W.P.S. are seen substantially to have erased them. The era of refined china decoration was long since laid away in lavender.[36] The public perspective represented by Jewell supported the proposition of women artists as equals within the U.S. art world.

However, critics' reviews of the women's exhibitions suggest that gender bias fused with emerging ideas about modern art rather than having been "laid away in lavender." The language of a "feminine stereotype" used to describe the work of women artists has long been critiqued by feminist art historians. Cindy Nemser surveyed the language of gender bias in art writing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to find a persistent legacy in "the attitude implied by such adjectives as *sweet, light, graceful, delicate, nursery oriented,* and so forth."[37] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock further deconstructed the "feminine stereotype" in their groundbreaking work *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981). Parker and Pollock identify the "feminine stereotype" as a "necessary term of difference, the foil against which a never-acknowledged masculine privilege in art can be maintained."[38] I contend that in this particular historical moment, the "feminine stereotype" served to masculinize modern art and feminize academic art as well as to denigrate women artists. As I explain further in the next chapter, discourses of modern art associated genius with imagination as an essential psychological quality inaccessible to women. Conversely, women could acquire technical skills associated with academic art. These discourses eventually relegate

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[36] Edward Alden Jewell, "Two Large Group Shows," *New York Times*, February 2, 1936. ProQuest.
[37] Cindy Nemser, *Art Talk: Conversations with Twelve Women Artists* (New York: Scribner, 1975), 2. Emphasis in original. See also, Cindy Nemser, "Stereotypes and Women Artists," *The Feminist Art Journal*, 1 (April 1972).
[38] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 24.

women artists to "kitsch." Jewell himself participated in the gender bias of modernist discourse even though he simultaneously touted the equality of women artists. For example, Jewel distances the women artists from modernism through highly gendered language in his review of the 1932 N.A.W.P.S. annual show:

> The general tone of the exhibition is colorful and decorative. Most of the work may be described as academic, but always cheerful and seldom pretentious. Some of it is pretty sentimental and a good deal of it is sentimentally pretty. But on the technical side the average holds up very well and a few of the pictures reveal an original imaginative conception well carried out.
>
> There is very little pronounced "modernism" in the show . . .[39]

Although Jewell rated the exhibition to be the "best show ever put on by the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors,"[40] he overtly categorizes the work of the women artists as "academic" and distances them from "modernism." Jewell repetitively describes the work exhibited as "sentimental," a term with strong and negative feminine connotations which I will also explore further in the next chapter. He also concedes "technical" competence to the women as a group, but contends that only "a few" possess creative expression.

Similarly, (although avoiding the language of "academic" and "modern,") the New York *Herald Tribune*'s critic, Royal Cortissoz, distances the women artists from modernism, or in his words the "freakish or fantasticaly experimental:"

> the prevailing mood of the [1933] show as a whole, which is sufficiently animated, but is conservative rather than radical in tendency. Indeed, there is not

[39] Edward A. Jewell, "Art," New York Times, January 21, 1931, 34. ProQuest.
[40] Edward Alden Jewell, "Exhibition of Women Painters and Sculptors Opens…," *New York Times*, January 17, 1931. ProQuest.

> a thing here that could be described as at all freakish or fantasticaly experimental. If women as such have any clearly defined drift, it is toward a sincere adherence to tradition. This brings up of course, the question of craftsmanship, and there is plenty of it here that is sane and competent.[41]

Cortissoz, who generally opposed the trends of modern art, aligns the women artists with the values of academic art: "conservative," "tradition," and "craftsmanship."

The double-edged reception of Mary E. Hutchinson's *Nude* (c.1934) also reveals the subtle operation of gender bias. *Nude* attracted public attention when the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors awarded Hutchinson the Margorie R. Leidy Memorial Prize for Composition for the painting.[42] The *New York Post* judged that "although occupying a point of vantage, [*Nude*] seems rather a clever stunt than a serious work."[43] The *New York Herald* considered the painting to be "soundly drawn, but too livid in tone."[44] The *New York Sun* placed *Nude* within a broader context of "femininity" and "good form:"[45]

> National in scope, as the society's name indicates, it reveals the femininity of this broad land keeping pretty close to the beaten trail, as good form and early training dictate. Not that wild excursions, artistically speaking, appear to be frowned upon, but the inclination doesn't seem to be that way. There is the feeling in the air that certain things are proper and others are not. Take the two nudes, for

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[41] "Women Artists, in Their 42nd Annual, Lean to the Traditional," *Art Digest* February 1, 1933, 32.
[42] "Women Artists Get Awards at 44th Exhibition," *New York Tribune*, January 4, 1935; and "Women Painters and Sculptors," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 5, 1935. (MEH papers.)
[43] "Exhibit of Painting and Sculpture on View at the Fine Arts Galleries," *New York Post*, January 5, 1935. (MEH papers.)
[44] "The Women Painters and Sculptors," *New York Herald*, January 6, 1935. (MEH papers).
[45] "Good form" refers to: "A set method of outward behaviour or procedure in accordance with prescribed usage, etiquette, ritual, etc.; a ceremony or formality. (Often *slightingly*, as implying the absence of intrinsic meaning or reality.)" OED on-line, accessed November 6, 2010.

Figure 4: Mary E. Hutchinson, *Nude* (c.1934)

> example, of Hilde B. Kayn. She reveals in her 'Stephanie' and 'The New Hat' that it is possible to be undressed and retain the aura of a perfect lady. Such a thought would hardly come to one before one of Renoir's nudes - and would be instantly dismissed as irrelevant if it did. The sculpturesquely handled 'Nude' of Mary E. Hutchinson is another matter.[46]

The *Sun*'s critique shows most overtly how gender influenced reception. The critic associates "femininity" with "good form" as well as disciplined conservative behavior, all of which temper the liberty to go off on "wild excursions." This fits Beauvoir's idea of the independent woman artist "on her best behavior . . . afraid to disarrange, to investigate, to explode."[47] Hilde B. Kayn's two nudes stick to the "proper" order of things so that her subjects "retain the aura of a perfect lady" rather than falling prey to the naked taint of sexuality. Hutchinson's *Nude* (c.1934) is, however, "another matter," inferring that the artist transgressed the limits of "good form" and thus "femininity" as well. Significantly, had the artist been a man – say Renoir – the limits of "good form" "would be instantly dismissed as irrelevant."

The commentary of the other critics also reveals the gendering of reception, though in a more subtle fashion. In describing *Nude* (c.1934) as "occupying a point of vantage" the *Post* critic aligns the painting with modernistic trends, but then distances it from modern art as a "clever stunt" and not "serious work." The twentieth-century slang "stunt" conveys an exercise designed to demonstrate technical skill in order to attract attention, and thus associates the painting with academic art.[48] The concession of technical skill also comes through in the *New York Herald* critic's brief remark that *Nude*

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[46] "Women Artists Hold Display," *New York Sun*, January 2, 1935. (MEH papers.)
[47] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 708.
[48] OED on-line, accessed November 7, 2010.

(c.1934) is "soundly drawn, but too livid in tone." Since *Nude* (c.1934) is – at least for the moment – a lost work, and may be known now only through a black and white reproduction, the aspect of the painting "too livid in tone" is also lost. Whatever qualities may have evoked the critic's response, what might it mean for a painting to be "too livid" – too bruised or angry?[49] I imagine *Nude* (c.1934), a painting also perceived to transgress the limits of "good form" and "proper" things associated with "femininity," may well have been judged too bruised or angry to "retain the aura of a perfect lady." It is significant however, that the art critics' reception of *Nude* (c.1934) differs considerably from the women artists' prize jury which rewarded Hutchinson's "wild excursion" away from the representation of "a perfect lady."

Hutchinson turned yet again to Joanna Lanza as her inspiration and model for *Nude* (c.1934). However, this is most likely Hutchinson's final portrait of Joanna. The two separated in 1935. The event is marked only obliquely by a note from Mary's mother. Minnie Belle explains that "knowing that the two girls were no longer together and not knowing the details, save that Mary Elisabeth had suffered intensely, I did not know whether to write Joanna or not. I finally decided to, & sent M.E. a copy."[50]

Because Hutchinson painted those who populated her daily life, her choice of subjects provides insight into her overlapping professional and social circles. While Mary and Joanna shared their lives from 1931-1935, Hutchinson turned repeatedly to Joanna and her sisters as subjects. After their separation, Hutchinson turned to others in her daily life. Her entry for the 1936 annual exhibition of the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, a portrait of *Yun Gee*, suggests a casual friendship with

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[49] OED on-line, accessed November 7, 2010.
[50] Minnie Belle Hutchinson, note attached to letter from Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, circa January 9, 1936. (MEH papers.)

the artist.[51] Yun Gee is most closely associated with San Francisco's Chinatown, but he also lived and worked in New York during the mid-twentieth century. Gee immigrated to the United States in 1921. At least one critic considered his work to be "ultramodernistic" and "ultra-abstract."[52] *New York Times* critic Edward Alden Jewell rated Hutchinson's portrait of *Yun Gee* to be "perhaps her best performance to date"[53] in the same year that he claimed parity between men and women in art.

Along with *Yun Gee*, Hutchinson also exhibited *George Griffiths* (c.1936), " the [portrait] head of a young bootblack acquaintance of Miss Hutchinson's done against a brilliant azure background."[54] Hutchinson most likely knew Griffiths through her Federal Art Project work at the Harlem Community Art Center. This conventional portrait head is the first in a series of at least four paintings of George Griffiths. *George Sleeping* (c.1937) portrays the subject asleep with his head resting on the back of his hand against the arm of a blue wicker chair. The contours of his azure shirt with the sleeves rolled up take on a sculptural depth characteristic of Hutchinson's portraiture. Her portrayal is both intimate and sensual. She also portrayed George Griffiths in a full-length portrait with his shoeshine kit slung over his shoulder. The architectural details of sash window and exterior brick wall suggest the same setting as *George Sleeping*. In this full-length portrait, the title of which is unknown, George looks out through a window as if he is in an upper story room watching the scene below. Hutchinson complicates the image by

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[51] Edward Alden Jewell, "Two Large Group Shows: The Pennsylvania Academy and Women's National Association Hold Annuals," *New York Times*, February 2, 1936; and *New York Herald Tribune*, January 19, 1936. (MEH papers.)
[52] "Two Young Ideas," *Argus*, February 24, 1933 as cited in Anthony W. Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 223. For more on Yun Gee see also, Joyce Brodsky, *Experiences of Passage: The Paintings of Yun Gee & Li-Lan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).
[53] Jewell, "Two Large Group Shows."
[54] Gladys Hart, "Paintings From Atlantan's Brush Command Attention in New York" unidentified newsclipping, December 28, 1936. (MEH papers.)

placing a background portrait within the portrait which is rendered in a more abstract and "primitive" style, referencing a "modern" art aesthetic. The man in the background is bare-chested, with features suggesting African ancestry. The tilt of his head, the curves of his lips, and the interior subject's gaze, which focuses on George, present an uncanny doubling of the subject. Hutchinson turned again to Griffiths in *Duet* (c.1937), which she exhibited in a variety of forums including the 1938 N.A.W.P.S. annual show. I will discuss *Duet* further in Chapter Four in the context of a couple's portrait.

Society of Independent Artists

Mary E. Hutchinson first exhibited with the Society of Independent Artists in 1937.[55] The Independents held their first show in 1917 in a grandiose gesture challenging the dominant power structure of the U.S. art world, epitomized by the National Academy and dictated by exhibition juries, which selected works to be shown as well as prize juries that doled out prestigious awards to exhibited works. Anyone who paid a nominal membership fee could exhibit in the Independents annual show without being filtered through a selection jury, and the organization awarded no prizes. The Independents arranged the works in alphabetical order by the artist's last name in response to the thorny problem of arranging the works within the exhibition space. Usually, a hanging committee handled this task, which was frequently perceived as highly political – especially by artists whose works ended up in unfortunate positions or "skyed." To further mitigate established power structures, embedded even within the

[55] *Art Digest*, April 15, 1937, 21.

hierarchy of the alphabet, the Independents selected the letter of the first position by lottery.[56]

Scholars have limited attention to the Independents' 1917 exhibition. Most recently, queer theorists have focused on Marcel Duchamp's entry to the Independents first show, *Fountain,* for the way it contests canonical notions of identity and authority.[57] Duchamp, who was at the time living in the United States, served on the Independents board of directors as one of the society's founders. He submitted *Fountain*, a prefabricated porcelain urinal, under the alias "R. Mutt" in a gesture which extended the Independents' challenge to power in the art world to the limits of moral and legal authority over art. The Independents board of directors exerted moral authority and excluded *Fountain* from the exhibition. Duchamp resigned his position as director.[58]

Throughout the early-twentieth century, the Society of Independent Artists persistently challenged limits to the questions: "What is art?" and "Who is an artist?" From the beginning, the Independents supported the position of women as artists and the founding board of directors included Katherine S. Dreier, Regina A. Farrelly, and Mary C. Rogers, whose names may not be as easily recognized today as their peers William J. Glackens, Charles E. Prendergast, Walter Pach, George W. Bellows, Marcel Duchamp, Rockwell Kent, John Marin, Maurice B. Prendergast, Man Ray, and Joseph Stella. According to the *New York Times*, "The presence of the women among the Directors is not alone due to the type of art they represent, but to the fact that it was thought proper to

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[56] "Art Notes," *New York Times*, January 20, 1917, 10; and "The Art Exhibitions Open During January," *New York Times*, January 21, 1917, SM7. ProQuest.

[57] See Paul B. Franklin, "Object Choice: Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* and the Art of Queer Art History," *Oxford Art Journal* 23 (2000): 23-50; and Robert Harvey, "Where's Duchamp?: Out Queering the Field," *Yale French Studies*, Surrealism and its Others (2006): 82-97. Jstor.

[58] For a description of the Independents first show see, Francis M. Naumann, "'The Big Show,' The First Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists," *Artforum* 17 (February 1979): 34-39; and Francis M. Naumann, "'The Big Show,'" Part II, *Artforum* 17 (April 1979): 49-53.

give women a voice in the direction of affairs, since they always form a considerable part of the body of exhibitors."[59] Hutchinson served as a Director in 1941.[60] The Independents also promoted the artwork of children, Native Americans, African Americans, and the "asylum art" of artists considered insane.[61] Women comprised 197 of the 500 artists represented in 1937 when Mary E. Hutchinson exhibited *Puppet Family*.[62] However, the contestation of identity and authority represented by Duchamp's founding gesture in *Fountain* failed to resonate in the mid-twentieth-century art world dominated by avant-garde discourse. The Independents appear to have staged their final exhibition in 1944.[63]

1939-1945

By 1939, Mary E. Hutchinson had severed ties with the Midtown Galleries. Even though her retrospective exhibition, staged at the Barbizon Hotel for Women, received no public attention, Hutchinson's work continued to be singled out by the critics when she exhibited with large group shows such as the American Artists' Congress. Established in 1936, the American Artists' Congress brought diverse artists together to facilitate social activism against war and fascism.[64] By 1939, when Hutchinson first participated with the group, it included more than 900 members who believed in "art as a force of

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[59] "The Art Exhibitions Open During January," *New York Times*, January 21, 1917. ProQuest.
[60] "Mary E. Hutchinson Stages Black and White show This Afternoon," *Atlanta Constitution Sunday Magazine*, June 22, 1941. (MEH papers.)
[61] On the scope of the Independents, see for example "Art Notes," *New York Times*, February 4, 1917, E2; "Artists Close Show Tonight," *New York Times*, April 25, 1937, 44. ProQuest; and "Dannemora Gaol," *Art Digest*, February 15, 1933, 15.
[62] "Artists Close Show Tonight," *New York Times*, April 25, 1937. ProQuest.
[63] "28th Annual Exhibition," Society of Independent Artists, exhibition catalogue, 1944. (MEH papers.)
[64] The most detailed source on the American Artists' Congress is Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams, *Artists Against War and Fascism: papers of the First American Artists' Congress* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986).

enlightenment" and the concept of the artist as an engaged social being.[65] Familiar names associated with the organization include Martha Graham, Margaret Bourke-White, Isabel Bishop, Andrée Ruellan, Lewis Mumford, George Biddle, Paul Cadmus, Stuart Davis, Meyer Shapiro, Raphael Soyer, and Max Weber.[66]

Hutchinson exhibited *Night* in the 1939 Artists' Congress show themed "Art in a Skyscraper instead of an Ivory Tower." *Night* portrays an African American woman in an elongated and stylized image. Her face dominates the canvas with a sculptural quality of deep contours and hard edges which accentuate her cheeks, her lips, her nose, and her eyes. Her shrouded head – a statement of black and white contrast framed in burnt sienna – tilts to the left and is slightly bowed. She gazes up and out with bright eyes that attract attention. The *New York Times* reproduced *Night* along with a handful of other works in a prominent full page spread covering the exhibition.[67] The *Atlanta Journal* kept Hutchinson's hometown crowd apprised of the artist's work and described *Night* as "the plaintive face of a negro woman."[68] The exhibition theme reflects the contested status of art and artist as either socially engaged (Skyscaper) or abstractly pure (Ivory Tower). As we will see in the next chapter, art criticism shifted significantly away from social engagement after the publication of Clement Greenberg's essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" later the same year.

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[65] Baigell and Williams, *Artists Against War and Fascism*, 4.
[66] Baigell and Williams, *Artists Against War and Fascism*, 11-12.
[67] "Art in a Skyscraper," *New York Times*, February 5, 1939. (MEH papers.)
[68] "Miss Hutchinson's Painting Exhibited," *Atlanta Journal*, February 14, 1939. (MEH papers.)

Figure 5: Mary E. Hutchinson, *Night* (c.1939). Courtesy of the Georgia Museum of Art.

The American Artists' Congress considered discrimination and oppression of African Americans to be fascism at work within the United States. For example, Aaron Douglas concluded his address to the 1936 Artists' Congress on "The Negro in American Culture" with a powerful appeal to his colleagues to fight discrimination:

> I should like to close this paper with a sincere appeal to every artist of this congress and to every lover of liberty and justice, everywhere, to fight against the rising tide of Fascism. If there is anyone here who does not understand Fascism let him ask the first Negro he sees in the street. . . .
>
> In America, race discrimination is one of the chief props on which Fascism can be built. One of the most vital blows the artists of this congress can deliver to the threat of Fascism is to refuse to discriminate against any man because of nationality, race, or creed.[69]

Douglas also challenged his colleagues – his predominantly white colleagues – to think about how and why they portray African Americans. "Before the beginning of the present century, the negro was rarely considered a serious subject in American art. He was occasionally represented, but quaintness, picturesqueness, or brutishness became the subject rather than the Negro per se. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art there is a room devoted to modern American masters. Not one Negro face is represented."[70] Douglas extended his critique to the contemporary context. "It is when we come to revolutionary art that we find the Negro sincerely represented, but here the portrayal is too frequently

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[69] Aaron Douglas, "The Negro in American Culture," in *Artists Against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Artists' Congress*, ed. Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 84.
[70] Douglas, "The Negro in American Culture," 83-84.

automatic, perfunctory and arbitrary. He becomes a kind of proletarian prop, a symbol, vague, and abstract."[71] *Night* takes on this type of symbolic meaning, but Mary E. Hutchinson represented her friends George Griffiths and Theodore Upshure as serious subjects. Hutchinson's transracial representation deserves scholarly attention which extends beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The next year Hutchinson turned her attention to the exodus of European war refugees in *Flight* (c.1940). The *Art Digest* reproduced Hutchinson's painting without comment in a generally negative review of the show.[72] By 1940, the editor of *Art Digest*, Peyton Boswell, openly supported accusations that the Artists' Congress presented a Communist front. According to Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams, the specter of Communist control, which became even more complicated by world events including the Hitler-Stalin nonaggression pact, fractured the focus of the Artists' Congress. After the 1940 exhibition, the American Artists' Congress no longer functioned as an effective forum in the U.S. art world.[73]

Hutchinson's public profile diminished sharply after 1939. She did however, continue to produce, exhibit, and presumably sell her paintings. Her access to public forums shrank significantly with her withdrawal from the Midtown Galleries and the dissolution of the American Artists' Congress. This time period also coincides with changes in the U.S. art world and American life associated with World War II. The New York Federal Art Project, which had provided Hutchinson with work since 1934, was dismantled in 1943. Although arts project funding through the WPA faced constant challenges through the Congressional appropriation process from its beginnings, the war

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[71] Douglas, "The Negro in American Culture," 84.
[72] "Artists Congress Holds 'Golden Gloves' Show," *Art Digest*, April 15, 1940, 8.
[73] Baigell and Williams, *Artists Against War and Facism*, 28-33.

changed federal fiscal priorities and Roosevelt's New Deal programs ended. Hutchinson continued to participate with the Society of Independent Artists as both an exhibitor and member of the board of directors through 1944 when that group also disbanded. After 1944, the two women's groups became the only public forums available to Hutchinson.

During this time, Hutchinson identified as a couple with her partner Ruth Layton. Hutchinson and Layton appear to have met around the time that Hutchinson and Joanna Lanza ended their relationship in 1935. Ruth Layton begins to appear as a subject in Hutchinson's artwork around 1937 with her painting *Reflection*. In addition to surviving correspondence, Hutchinson's representations of herself and Ruth, including the formal drawing *Two Heads* (c.1944), suggest that the two women strongly identified as a couple. As we will see in the next chapter, the context of World War II significantly changed their daily lives as Hutchinson took on the responsibility of caring for her god daughter with Ruth Layton's support. Mary and Ruth cared for the Breit children together in a shared topsy turvy queer life depicted by Hutchinson in a series of pen and ink drawings.

Figure 6: Mary E. Hutchinson, *Reflection* (c.1937)

Figure 7: Mary E. Hutchinson, *Two Heads* (c.1944)

Atlanta, 1945-1950

Mary Hutchinson returned to Atlanta in April 1945 for personal reasons rather than because of events associated with the end of World War II or factors directly associated with the New York art scene. Her father, Merrill Hutchinson, had died and Mary returned home for an extended visit which eventually became a permanent relocation. Hutchinson's decision to stay in Atlanta appears to have been influenced by a number of situations. First, with her father's death, Mary provided support – emotional and probably financial – for her aging mother, Minnie Belle. In addition, Mary's long-term relationship with Ruth Layton appears to have become strained. Within days of Mary's departure, Ruth began dating Pete Petersen, whom she eventually married. Simultaneously, Mary appears to have sensed the potential for her long-time friendship with Dorothy King to develop into a more intimate relationship.[74] Mary and Dorothy appear to have been friends since girlhood in Atlanta, and Minnie Belle's letters frequently mentioned Dorothy. It is likely that Dorothy studied piano with Mary's father. Mary, Dorothy, and Minnie Belle shared an apartment in Atlanta's Ansley Park until Minnie Belle's death in 1959. Afterward, Mary and Dorothy shared a smaller apartment in the same building until Mary's death in 1970.

At first, Mary Hutchinson's career as a professional artist seems to have been unaffected by her relocation. She continued to produce new work and exhibited with the women's groups in New York.[75] She also quickly joined the faculty of the Atlanta Art

[74] See correspondence from Ruth Layton to Mary E. Hutchinson, October 1945 through March 1946. (MEH papers.)
[75] "23rd Annual Exhibition," New York Society of Women Artists, 1947; "25th Annual Exhibition," New York Society of Women Artists, 1949; and Dorothy Adlow, "Women's Art Exhibition," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 21, 1949. (MEH papers.)

Institute associated with the High Museum.[76] Also consistent with her earlier participation with the American Artists Congress and association with the Harlem Community Art Center, Hutchinson worked with Atlanta's African American arts community. After 1945 she participated as an invited juror for Atlanta University's Art Annual established by Hale Woodruff in 1942.[77] The national exhibition event ran until 1970 and resulted in the significant collection of historic African American art now owned by Clark Atlanta University.[78] Hutchinson, along with her mother, also supported poet Welborn Victor Jenkins' efforts in 1948 to publish an epic poem as a gesture of reconciliation in the aftermath of the 1946 lynching of two married couples – George W. Dorsey, a World War II veteran and Mae Murray Dorsey, and Roger Malcom and Dorothy Malcolm – in rural Georgia just east of Atlanta.[79]

Around 1949-50, Mary Hutchinson appears to have severed ties with Atlanta's official arts community, which was dominated by the High Museum. The circumstances remain unclear. However, Hutchinson left the Art Institute faculty and appears to have had little contact with the High Museum and the Atlanta Art Association after 1950. She also mounted two Atlanta exhibitions in alternative settings in 1950. The Castle Gallery, owned by Hazel Roy Butler, staged the first show in February 1950.[80] Although information about Butler is fragmented, she appears to have pursued a dance career in

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[76] See various documents associated with Atlanta Art Instititue. (MEH papers.)
[77] See publicity photographs associated with exhibition in MEH papers.
[78] Tina Dunkley, "Hale Woodruff, 1900-1980," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed, March 25, 2011, http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1039.
[79] Welborn Victor Jenkins, *The "Incident" at Monroe: A Requiem for the Victims of July 25th, 1946*, (Atlanta, GA: United Negro Youth of America for the Malcolm-Dorsey Memorial Committee, 1948). For a good general account of the lynching see Laura Wexler, *Fire in the Cane Break: The Last Mass Lynching in America* (New York: Scribner, 2003).
[80] "Art," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 12, 1950; "Mary Hutchinson Exhibits: Art Show at Castle," *Atlanta Journal*, February 19, 1950; "Castle Gallery Features 'One-Woman' Art Display," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 19, 1950. (MEH papers.)

New York while Hutchinson also lived there. Hutchinson appears to have turned to her as a subject on at least three occasions: for an undated sketch reproduced by the *Atlanta Journal*, and two oil paintings of *Dancer and Doll* (c.1931-1934). From 1938-1945, Butler appears to have managed a dance company or booking agency to bring touring companies to Atlanta. In 1945, Butler bought the McMillian estate prominently sited on Fifteenth Street, and long referred to as "the Castle." Butler established an art gallery, and offered spaces for studios and art classes independent of the Atlanta Arts Association.[81] Hutchinson staged a second independent show in May and June of 1950 at the West Hunter Street Library which served as Atlanta's African American Carnegie Library.[82]

Art Teacher, 1950-1963

After leaving the Atlanta Art Institute faculty, Hutchinson taught art at Washington Seminary where her mother had taught for many years, and where she herself had gone to school. However, the school closed in 1955 as models of education shifted in the mid-twentieth century. At the time, Hutchinson sought employment as a teacher in Atlanta's public schools, but the Georgia Board of Education denied her certification, a point I will explore further in the conclusion of this dissertation.[83] She did, however, find employment as an art teacher in a private Catholic school. Mary E.

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[81] "Mrs. Butler Plans Party for Dancers," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 21, 1929, ProQuest; "Atlanta Brokers Seek New Use for Midtown's Castle," Gene Kansas Developments, February 16, 2009, accessed June 2, 2009, http://www.genekansas.com/pdf/CastleRelease.pdf; Gertha Coffee, "The Castle in Midtown on Market in Lender Ordered Sale," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 3, 2010, accessed March 25, 2011, http://www.ajc.com/business/the-castle-in-midtown-344688.html.

[82] "Exhibition Mary E. Hutchinson," exhibition checklist; Oziel Fryer Woolcock, "Social Swirl," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 17, 1950; "Fine Arts Festival Offers Lecture on Book Design," *Atlanta Journal*, May 21, 1950; Oziel Fryer Woolcock, "Art Exhibit," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 21, 1950; Oziel Fryer Woolcock, "Art Exhibition Attracts Many," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 24, 1950. (MEH papers.)

[83] Georgia Board of Education to Mary Hutchinson. (MEH papers.)

Hutchinson appears to have stopped painting and exhibiting her work around 1953. Her health appears to have declined, forcing her to give up teaching around 1963.

1963-1970

Before her death in 1970, Hutchinson appears to have reached out to the "official" Atlanta arts community in a gesture of reconciliation. In late 1962, she donated her painting titled *Metamorphosis* (1951) to the Atlanta Art Association and the High Museum. The painting represents "death becoming life" and "a change in structure or design."[84] Hutchinson painted *Metamorphosis* in 1951 and exhibited it in 1953 at the National Association of Women Artists annual in New York.[85] Although initially representative of a political movement to transform atomic energy into a tool for world peace, *Metamorphosis* took on new meaning in the local context of the Atlanta arts community when 106 Atlantans on a tour of European art museums died in a plane crash in Orly, France on June 3, 1962.[86] I believe the timing of Hutchinson's donation as well as the painting's theme link it to the event as a commemorative gesture.

Mary Elisabeth Hutchinson died on July 10, 1970, the day before her sixty-fourth birthday. She is buried with her mother and father in Minnie Belle's family plot in Melrose, Massachusetts.[87]

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[84] "Painting Exhibits Structural Change; Death, Life Dominate Representation," *Golden Lines*, January 11, 1963. (MEH papers.)
[85] "Painting Exhibits Structural Change," *Golden Lines*; "61st Annual Exhibition," National Association of Women Artists, exhibition catalogue, 1953. (MEH papers.)
[86] Many of Atlanta's civic and cultural leaders died in the plane crash. Simply put, the city lost the core of its official art community. After the crash, the arts community regrouped as the Atlanta Arts Alliance. See Donald R. Rooney, "Orly Air Crash of 1962," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed January 10, 2012, http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1103&hl=y.
[87] *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, July 12, 1970. Under funeral notices; and Certificate of Death, State file no. 22672, Mary E. Hutchinson, Georgia State Office of Vital Records.

Heterographic Conclusions

During her most artistically productive years, Hutchinson participated actively with diverse groups of professional artists. She continued to paint the portraits of people in her daily life, including students at the Harlem Community Art Center. The New York Federal Art Project (NYFAP) provided the financial support necessary for economic independence, but her oeuvre remained outside the interpretive frameworks associated with New Deal art.

Hutchinson entered the New York art world at a moment of perceived equal opportunity for women artists. However, at the same time the language of a "feminine stereotype" in art criticism participated in a masculinization of modern art and feminization of academic art. By the end of World War II, her access to public forums dwindled down to the two groups of women artists.

She returned to Atlanta in 1945 and quickly joined the faculty of the Atlanta Art Institute, but around 1949-50 she appears to have had a falling out with the official local arts community. It could be that the Art Institute simply shifted its focus firmly toward abstract expressionism in the same moment that the international art world became enthralled with Jackson Pollock. Or the break could point to a more complicated scenario involving social conscience and race relations. The answer lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, but Hutchinson certainly made a daring social statement in staging what proved to be her final solo exhibition within Atlanta's African American community during a moment of heightened racial tension. As I will show in the following chapters, the dual discourse of avant-garde and kitsch rendered Hutchinson's

engagement with gender, sexuality, and race unintelligible; and her work continues to confound the frameworks of twentieth-century art history.

Chapter 3

Queering Kitsch

As we have seen, Mary E. Hutchinson's public profile diminished sharply after 1939. She left the Midtown Galleries and staged a retrospective exhibition at the Barbizon Hotel for Women which received no critical attention. Hutchinson identified as a woman artist and associated professionally and socially with other women artists. By 1945 her access to the art market narrowed to the exhibitions of women artists through the National Association of Women Artists and the New York Society of Women Artists.

Whereas the previous chapters traced Hutchinson's presence through the archival record, this chapter focuses more on her absence of an oeuvre as a woman artist after 1939. Here I outline a history of lost events which cannot be explained through direct inquiry. Ultimately, my aim in this chapter is to suggest that Hutchinson and her circle of women artists engaged gender and sexuality amidst the shifting norms of the mid-twentieth century through a queer imagination which failed to resonate into the late-twentieth-century "liberated" futures of feminist and lesbian art. Rather than resonating, Hutchinson's engagement with gender and sexuality resides as white background noise, or as Foucault would say – "a dull sound from beneath history, the obstinate murmur of a language talking *to itself*"[1] – in an epistemological rupture that transformed the woman artist from an independent and credible political subject into a paradoxical psychological one. As I said in the Introduction, tracing epistemologies is as important to understanding Hutchinson's absence as tracing events is to recovering her life and work.

[1] Foucault, *Madness*, xxxi. Emphasis in original.

The epistemological twist in this historical narrative derails any *straight* telling of this story. Instead of following a straight path, this chapter loops through three overlapping discursive grids to access a gendered and sexualized rupture produced *obliquely* through shifting concepts of genius and abstraction in art.

The limits of Mary E. Hutchinson's agency as an independent woman artist contracted sharply in the same moment that Clement Greenberg introduced two new terms into art criticism: avant-garde and kitsch. The first discursive grid this chapter follows is this new dual discourse of avant-garde/kitsch as it transformed the subjects of art and the artist from formations of public or political relations to psychological ones. I argue that this transformation played out in what Foucault calls "games of truth" in art which hinged on gendered concepts of genius. This is extremely important for all mid-twentieth century women artists because Greenberg's theory of the avant-garde dominated art criticism for decades.

The second discursive circuit this chapter follows is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's engagement with this rupture in *Epistemology of the Closet.* Sedgwick traces the modern crisis of identity bound up in homosexual/heterosexual definition through a series of dense cultural nodes. These nodes include art/kitsch, a new iteration of avant-garde/kitsch. Sedgwick uses kitsch as the foil for camp and the contestatory power of gay imagination by arguing that camp disrupts the art/kitsch binary from a gay male perspective. However, in doing so she builds on the entrenched position of kitsch as the "other" to art, or simply put, as not-art. I contend that Sedgwick's intervention privileges sexuality at the expense of gender in a way that still leaves Hutchinson's queer imagination inaccessible.

Sedgwick's perspective does however, provide a salient point for my queer feminist genealogy of Hutchinson's absence in that she argues against straightforward recovery. So, following Sedgwick's lead, but in a way which considers gender and sexuality coextensively, this chapter traces a third discursive loop which returns to Mary E. Hutchinson's identification as an artist and her artistic production after 1939. Specifically, I explore the intelligibility of Hutchinson's kitschiest work which is found in a series of pen and ink drawings produced between 1942 and 1945. My aim in queering kitsch through these drawings involves a re-imagination similar to Sedgwick's, but one which precedes the "modern gay identities" which interest her. While camp may indeed have provided a powerful visual language for gay men in the late twentieth century, I argue that the performative discourse of kitsch muted a similarly powerful visual language employed by Mary E. Hutchinson and other women artists. As I will show, Hutchinson's historic queer imagination overlaps the "resistant, oblique, [and] tangential investments" of camp explored by Sedgwick, but also exceeds the gendered limits of camp. These limits replicate those of the avant-garde, producing a gendered essentialism which works *obliquely* through *genius* as a psychological construction rather than in direct relations of men and women. Queering kitsch through Hutchinson's pen and ink drawings brings the rupture between political subjects and psychological subjects produced in avant-garde/kitsch into focus as particularly important to the paradox of the "woman artist" as a uniquely mid-twentieth century construct.

Kitsch: A Discourse and a Dispositif

Clement Greenberg injected kitsch into the lexicon of American visual culture in 1939 through his now canonical essay, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," published in the *Partisan Review*.[2] Since then the two concepts have been inextricably linked to one another in visual culture. Avant-garde and kitsch have presented an enduring and intricately linked asymmetrical, dual discourse. The definition of "avant-garde" depends on the existence of "kitsch" as its "other." Sedgwick explains this asymmetrical relationship operating in a series of binarisms associated with the "enduring chain" of the closet, including art/kitsch as well as heterosexual/homosexual:

> Categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions – heterosexual/homosexual, in this case – actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation according to which, first, term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but second, the ontologically valorized term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B; hence, third, the question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable, an instability caused by the fact that term B is constituted as at once internal and external to term A.[3]

The discourse of kitsch, which is integral to the avant-garde, produces a dispositif or grid of intelligibility available to the avant-garde viewer. This new grid of intelligibility empowers the avant-garde critic, such as Greenberg, to know kitsch from a distance.

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[2] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6 (1939): 34-49.
[3] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 9-10.

Although both terms – avant-garde and kitsch – probably circulated within the American vernacular, Greenberg introduced them into the formal language of American art criticism.[4] Both are terms and concepts that have a history rather than signifying essential or universal truths. The cultural work of this dual discourse during the mid-twentieth century is particularly difficult to trace because both terms have been applied retrospectively to explain historical events. The avant-garde is understood to have originated in the late nineteenth century with the European patriarchs of modern art, and kitsch is similarly associated with nineteenth-century Romanticism.[5] The literature on the avant-garde is immense, but few scholars have focused on it specifically as a twentieth-century historic construct.[6] The literature on kitsch is much more concise and is represented in the English language largely by the 1968 volume edited by Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch: An Anthology of Bad Taste*. Hermann Broch addressed this reticence toward kitsch scholarship in a 1951 lecture at Yale University by explaining that all the open-ended questions generated by "the problem of kitsch" would require "a study of kitsch in three volumes (which I would rather not write anyway)."[7]

In this chapter, I am not particularly concerned with the truth or fiction of the avant-garde and kitsch, but rather with the way this dual discourse worked as a dispositif to render unintelligible Mary E. Hutchinson's life as an artist along with her work. In this regard avant-garde and kitsch begin their cultural work in the United States in 1939. Prior to this time, kitsch appears to have been most closely associated with music in

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[4] Greenberg's recent biographer especially notes his introduction of kitsch into the language of art criticism. See Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Art Czar: The Rise and Fall of Clement Greenberg: A Biography* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2006).
[5] Hermann Broch, "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch," in *Kitsch: An Anthology of Bad Taste*, ed. Gillo Dorfles (London: Studio Vista, 1969), 72-73.
[6] Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, "Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed," *Art History* 3 (September 1981): 305-327.
[7] Broch, "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch," 49.

popular culture. Likewise before 1939, critics occasionally attached the term avant-garde to experimental music and film, rather than art. However, after the publication of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" in the *Partisan Review*, members of the American Abstract Artists group, including G.L.K. Morris who also worked with the *Partisan Review*, referred to themselves as the avant-garde.[8] The term avant-garde soon became synonymous with abstract art. In the polarized language of the dual discourse, everything else fell to kitsch.

Games of Truth

The dual discourse of avant-garde/kitsch locates truth in the process of creation rather than strictly confined to the art object. As opposed to kitsch, the avant-garde process of creation must be considered as distinct from its effect. This enables the avant-garde critic to distinguish parasitic kitsch from genuine modern art. Avant-garde art seeks "an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point" (Greenberg, 36). In other words, the canvas is not the place to critique unstable social or ideological truths, but rather to assert absolute and universal truth about art. According to Greenberg, "It has been in search of the absolute that the avant-garde has arrived at 'abstract' or 'non-objective' art" (36). In seeking the absolute, the artist approaches divine creation and "content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art . . . cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself" (36). The creativity of the avant-garde artist is genius, and it cannot be transferred through mechanical or formulaic imitation.

[8] "Artists Denounce Modern Museum," *New York Times*, April 17, 1940, 23. ProQuest.

The relationship of genius to truth in art introduces a highly gendered limit separating avant-garde from kitsch. By the mid-twentieth century, diverse theories of genius overlapped, but all agreed on one thing: women didn't have it. In her landmark feminist publication, *Gender and Genius* (1989), Christine Battersby explores the repetitive gestures of exclusion produced through notions of genius from its Roman origins to contemporary art criticism. She argues convincingly that "our modern notions of creativity are modelled on notions of a male God creating the universe" which have been recycled and mapped onto new paradigms up to and through nineteenth-century Romanticism.[9] Rather than a coherent continuous lineage, this history of re-working has produced overlapping and contradictory notions of genius and gender operating simultaneously.

As I discussed in the Introduction, by the mid-twentieth century the image of the artist, exemplified by Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, mapped contradictory historic concepts of genius onto a new psychological paradigm.[10] The avant-garde process of creation seeks truth through imagination rather than mimesis, and through interiority rather than exteriority. Imagination is of course an activity associated with the mind rather than the senses which engage the world. As an activity of the mind, twentieth-century imagination belongs to the realm of the psyche. I contend that the mid-twentieth-century avant-garde artist is not really the "Romantic genius" art history talks so much about even though the resemblance is so strong they appear one and the same.[11] He is a specifically

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[9] Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), 8.
[10] Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*, trans. Alastair Laing and Lottie M. Newman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979).
[11] See for example Marsh Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 18-22.

twentieth-century psychological construction that reworks repetitive gestures of gendered exclusion.

The popular and influential mid-twentieth-century theory of "modern woman" as the "lost sex" proposed by best-selling author Ferdinand Lundberg and psychiatrist Marynia Farnham pins the absence of genius in women to the psychic limits of femininity. According to this text which is frequently cited as anti-feminist, genius is marked not only by creativity, intellect, and public achievement, but also by psychic health.[12] The cultivation of intellect and achievement, not to mention a professional career, deviated from psychically healthy femininity. Therefore one could not be both a feminine woman and an artist. To even desire the career of an artist a woman had to be neurotic (that is unfeminine or masculine), and she was assumed to inherently lack the prerequisite of genius to be a *real* artist anyway. Lundberg and Farnham make this point particularly clear in relation to feminist aspirations: "The [nineteenth-century] feminists argued that it was because women had been deprived of sufficient opportunities for such long ages that they had not emerged as geniuses, overlooking the fact that the true genius makes his own opportunity. As soon as women had full opportunity, they said, they would show themselves as geniuses. *The world is still waiting.*"[13]

The twentieth-century psychological reconstruction of genius is important in teasing out the oblique and indirect relations of political subjects and psychological subjects to truth in art. To resolve the modern crisis of truth in art, the dual discourse of

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[12] As an anti-feminist text, see Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, xx, 263; Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, tenth anniversary edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1974), 42, 119-120; LeGates, *Making Waves*, 327; and Elaine Tyler May, "Pushing the Limits," in *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States*, ed. Nancy Cott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 512.

[13] Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 342. Emphasis mine.

avant-garde/kitsch returns to the gendered limits of genius. As we have already seen in the previous chapters, Mary E. Hutchinson entered the New York art world at an open moment of possibility for negotiating the sustained debates over truth in art. The prevailing language of the late 1920s and early 1930s generally situated academic art as dominant over modern art. However, Hutchinson's letters suggest she exercised agency as an artist in negotiating her own position rather than adhering to either academic or modern art discourse as universal truth. This is consistent with Simone de Beauvoir's theory of the independent woman artist who, "living marginally to the masculine world . . . ,sees it not in its universal form but from her special point of view."[14] We have also seen that this was a moment of *perceived* gender parity in which women appeared to be gaining equal opportunity in the New York art world. However, close readings of contemporary criticism of Hutchinson's c.1934 painting *Nude* reveal a subtle and persistent use of the academic/modern divide to distance her work as a woman artist from the category of modern art. In this particular historical moment, configurations of the artist as genius (a psychological subject) eclipsed the perception of women's parity as political subjects in the U.S. art world. Over the course of the next decade, the academic/modern divide assumed sharper gender contrast through new iterations as objective/non-objective art, realism/abstraction, and finally avant-garde/kitsch.

Clement Greenberg's essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" marks a significant paradigm shift in art criticism and it finalized the debate over truth in art during the mid-twentieth century. While this shift manifests itself through a new iteration and an inversion of valorized and subsumed terms in art, it emerged out of complex games of truth constituting new psychological subjects. Foucault explains games of truth as "a set

[14] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 704.

of rules by which truth is produced. It is not a game in the sense of an amusement; it is a set of procedures that lead to a certain result, which, on the basis of its principles and rules of procedure, may be considered valid or invalid, winning or losing."[15] In the words of feminist art historian Linda Nochlin, the epistemological shift which crystallized in twentieth-century notions of the avant-garde produced a "transvaluation" of truth in art. In her early, and perhaps pre-feminist, survey of Realism in art, Nochlin reflects on the disappearance of realism in the face of avant-garde and kitsch:

> Probably the most interesting, and significant, of all these . . . transformations of Realist values, as far as the painting of the future was concerned, was the transformation of the Realist concept of truth or honesty, meaning truth or honesty to one's perception of the external physical or social world, to mean truth or honesty either to the nature of the material – i.e. to the nature of the flat surface – and/or to the demands of one's inner 'subjective' feelings or imagination rather than to some external reality.[16]

The dual discourse of avant-garde/kitsch transformed the subject of art from political configurations to psychological ones. Art and artists became the subjects of psychological grids of intelligibility in games over relationships between human subjects and truth.

Greenberg's theory of the avant-garde dominated art criticism for decades. As we will see in the next chapter, it also shaped the very structure of art history departments which developed in U.S. universities at mid-century. Eventually, Greenberg's former

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[15] Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1977), 297.
[16] Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 236.

student Rosalind Krauss and others challenged his theory of the avant-garde,[17] but his theory of kitsch prevails. Sedgwick uses the theory of kitsch in *Epistemology of the Closet* to "suggest, perhaps, something about how the formation of modern gay identities has intervened to reimagine these potent audience relations" through camp.[18]

Kitsch: Stamped in Indelible Ink

Greenberg situates kitsch as a modern problem of audience relations produced by unstable truths. As we will see, Sedgwick builds on this in her queer deconstruction of the art/kitsch binary via camp. Greenberg deftly shifts responsibility for the modern crisis of culture away from the artist and onto the individual viewer as a problem of audience relations. He pits the viewing experience of "the cultivated spectator" against that of the conditioned masses as different ways of knowing.[19] The cultivated avant-garde spectator must be able to project knowledge into the viewing experience in order to recognize the "'reflected' effect" of the painting.[20] Avant-garde viewing requires a quality of imagination related to the genius of the artist.[21] On the other hand, the mass spectator need only consume a predigested image which requires no effort from the viewer. The kitsch viewer, or the kitsch-man as he comes to be called, is literal and prefers the unimaginative message of realism.[22] As a problem of audience relations, kitsch is also gendered "feminine" as deceitful (prototypically Eve), sentimental,

[17] Marquis, *Art Czar*, 226-229.
[18] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 155.
[19] Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 43.
[20] Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 44.
[21] See also Walter Pach, *Queer Thing, Painting: Forty Years in the World of Art* (New York and London: Harper Bothers, 1938), 186.
[22] "Kitsch-man" is a term introduced by Herman Broch who wrote about kitsch in the German language before Greenberg introduced kitsch to an American audience.

seductive, parasitical (woman as dependent), and as associated with the domestic sphere (the home, crafts, and consumer objects).

Kitsch places the art patron in a precarious position. In order to protect himself (and indeed avant-garde/kitsch produces "the cultivated spectator" as male through the required psychic imagination akin to genius), the viewer must denounce kitsch wherever he suspects it to avoid contamination through association. Any attempt to defend a work which might possibly be considered kitsch only serves to distance the viewer from the authority of the avant-garde and merely implicates him as a kitsch-man. In the expert words of Gillo Dorfles, "If anyone is not satisfied with our choice and finds some of the images artistic which we will present as pseudo-artistic, un-artistic, too bad! To us at least it will mean that our reader is really a 'kitsch-man' of the first water; and that the psychological test has worked properly."[23] Kitsch operates as an irrefutable charge to diminish the value of an aesthetic object.

Sedgwick associates this stigma with the bond between kitsch and the sentimental. In her words, "descriptions [of the sentimental] tend to carry an unappealable authority: the epithet 'sentimental' is *always* stamped in indelible ink."[24] She points to the "unappealable authority" of sentimentality as problematic to feminist rehabilitation of the category in literature. According to Sedgwick, feminist literary criticism, exemplified by Jane P. Tompkins, has resignified the sentimental through a reversal of negative valuation attached to the domestic sphere. Sedgwick explains that in the context of nineteenth-century American fiction, "the sentimental" has conventionally been seen "as a derogatory code name for female bodies" (144) and the domestic sphere:

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[23] Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch: An Anthology of Bad Taste* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), 11. First published in 1968.

[24] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 152. Emphasis in original. Quotations which follow cited parenthetically.

> The devaluation of 'the sentimental,' it is argued, has been of a piece with the devaluation of many aspects of women's characteristic experience and culture: in this view 'the sentimental,' like the very lives of many women, is typically located in the private or domestic realm, has only a tacit or indirect connection with the economic facts of industrial marketplace production, is most visibly tied instead to the 'reproductive' preoccupations of birth, socialization, illness, and death, and is intensively occupied with relational and emotional labor and expression. (144)

We have already seen through an introductory exploration of biography and the historical limits of agency, that feminist biography transformed the activities and experiences of the domestic sphere into legitimate subjects of scholarly inquiry through a resignification of values. Sedgwick concedes that "an attempted reversal of the negative charge attached to 'the sentimental' has been a natural corollary" (144). However, she argues that simple reversal ultimately fails to rehabilitate "the sentimental" and, by implication, kitsch.

Rehabilitation through reversal inverts yet maintains the set of rules or procedures, or rather the game, which produced truth itself. Like avant-garde/kitsch, the sentimental is paired with the antisentimental in an asymmetrical dual discourse. According to Sedgwick:

> The problem [with feminist or queer rehabilitation of the sentimental and by extension kitsch] is not just that the range of discrediting names available for these forms of attention and expression is too subtle, searching, descriptively useful, and rhetorically powerful to be simply jettisoned, though that is true enough. A worse problem is that since antisentimentality itself becomes, in this

> structure, the very engine and expression of modern sentimental relations, to enter into the discourse of sentimentality at any point or with any purpose is almost inevitably to be caught up in a momentum of essentially scapegoating attribution. (154)

In other words, any attempt to defend the sentimental is caught in a trap inherent in the dual discourse. Similarly, art in the avant-garde/kitsch structure generates the grid of intelligibility through which kitsch is known. Like kitsch and the kitsch-man, any attempt to defend the sentimental only reveals the proponent as sentimental.

Unlike rehabilitation through inversion, Sedgwick suggests that camp disrupts the game of truth performed by art/kitsch. She considers the art/kitsch impasse in visual culture, along with abstraction/figuration, and direct/vicarious, in relation to implicit sexual desire in representation of the male body. She refers to this as "the modernist crisis of individual identity and figuration itself" (132), and approaches this crisis through contrasting views of the male body appearing in English literature published in 1891. Specifically, she considers the "brutally thin" "line between any male beauty that's articulated as such and any steaming offal strung up for purchase at the butcher's shop" (131) in the texts of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*. Although Sedgwick is not primarily concerned with questions of history, she focuses on representations of the male body at the end of the nineteenth century as a mark of a historic shift which brings contrasting discursive fields together. These discursive fields have been described in gay history as producing political subjects defined by sexual acts and psychological subjects defined by identity. It is the overlap of contradictions that interests Sedgwick rather than any conventional view of history as

progressive linear development.[25] She argues that these simultaneously held contradictions present an "enduring chain of conceptual impasses" (91) which permeates western life today as an epistemology of the closet.

Sedgwick turns to kitsch and camp to "suggest . . . something about how the formation of modern gay identities has intervened to reimagine those potent audience relations" in an oblique way that escapes "the structure of contagion whereby *it takes one to know one*. . ." (156). She reads camp as a specifically "gay male rehabilitation of the sentimental" (144) which disrupts the games of truth at work in avant-garde/kitsch. For Sedgwick, the queer gay male position is distinctly different from the feminist one because it emerges from "different experiences" (144). The difference manifests in a "homoerotic and homophobic intertextuality" (144) at work in camp performance. Intertextuality invokes two texts operating simultaneously. Sedgwick elaborates by way of a camp favorite in Judy Garland's "Somewhere Over the Rainbow:"

> The kid in Ohio who recognizes in "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" the national anthem of a native country, his own, whose name he's never heard spoken is constructing a new family romance on new terms; and for the adult he becomes, the sense of value attaching to a "private" realm, or indeed to expressive and relational skills, is likely to have to do with a specific history of secrecy, threat, and escape as well as with domesticity. (144)

In contrast to the pre-packaged response of "kitsch-recognition [in which] there is no mediating level of consciousness" (156), camp-recognition operates through projection which resides ambiguously between Clement Greenberg's avant-garde reflected effect

[25] See Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, "Axiom 5: The historical search for a Great Paradigm Shift may obscure the present conditions of sexual identity," 44-48.

and kitsch attribution. The camp performer recognizes his target's kitschiness, and re-appropriates its effect in the creation of a new camp text. According to Sedgwick, "the sensibility of camp-*recognition* always sees that it is dealing in reader relations and in a projective fantasy (projective though not infrequently true) about the spaces and practices of cultural production"(156). Kitsch then requires vicarious and predigested relationships, while camp employs "resistant, oblique, [and] tangential investments" (156) which create a new camp text out of a kitsch background text. As I will show, Mary E. Hutchinson's historic queer imagination overlaps the "resistant, oblique, [and] tangential investments" of camp, but also exceeds the gendered limits of camp.

The Woman Artist in the Queer Closet

I am concerned with the cultural work of the "enduring chain" of the closet in relation to Mary E. Hutchinson's life and work during the mid-twentieth century in the United States. The recent eBay auction listing for one of Hutchinson's c.1927 Life Study drawings tagged for "gay interest" clearly validates Sedgwick's binarisms (art/kitsch, abstraction/figuration) as cultural nodes associated with male homosexuality.[26] As we have seen in the previous chapter, Life Study served as a hallmark of academic art training, and in the words of Clement Greenberg, "all that's academic is kitsch" (40). The untitled drawing depicts an adult white male standing and wearing only a G-string. He gazes directly at the viewer with his torso slightly oblique. His hand is propped upon his hip. Heel and knee are posed slightly raised to enhance his physique.

[26] "Near Nude Man Gay Interest Mary Hutchinson Orgnl," eBay, March 23, 2009.

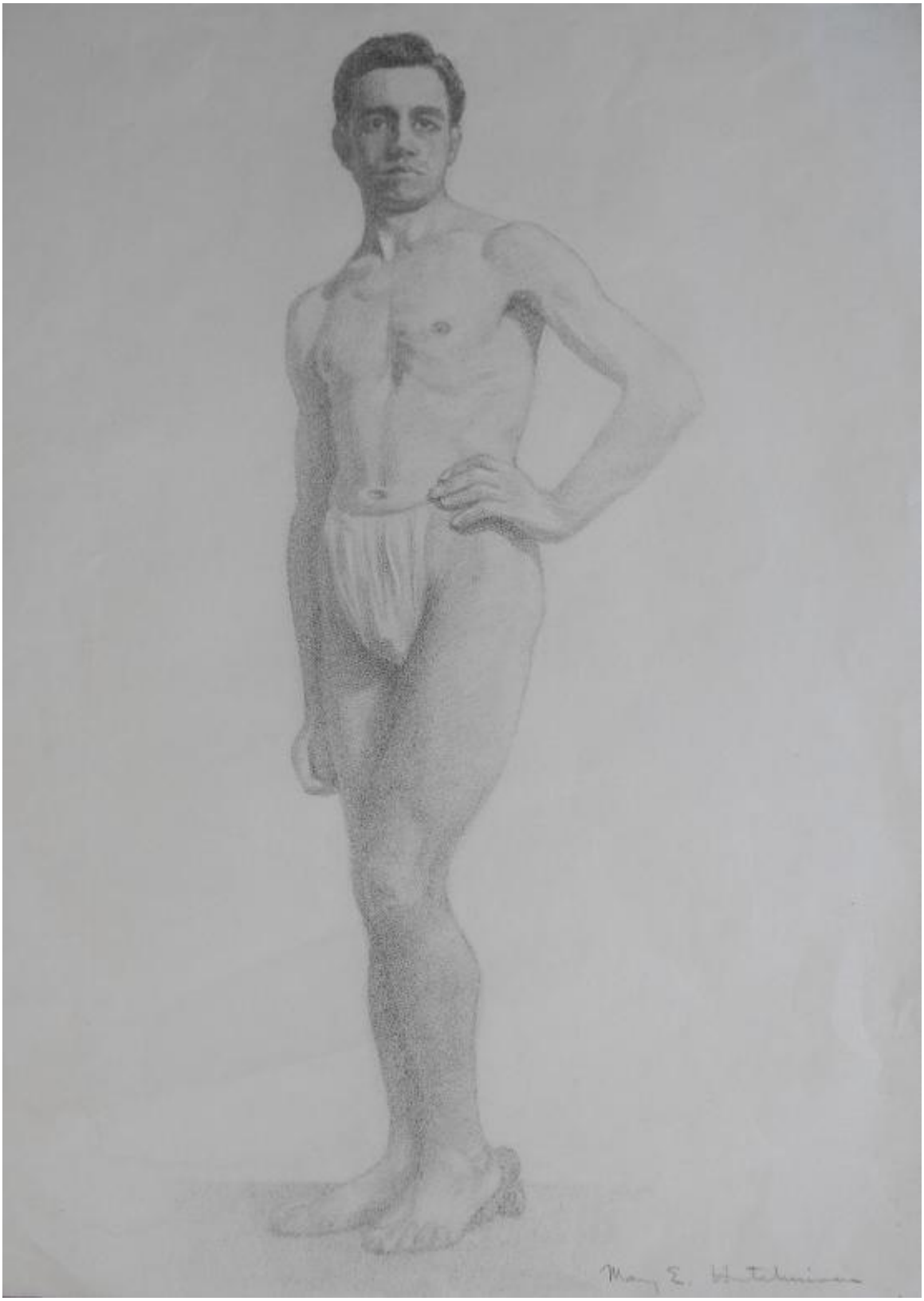

Figure 8: Mary E. Hutchinson, Student Life Study Drawing (c.1927)

In her landmark feminist essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," Linda Nochlin reveals that representation of the male nude presented a key criterion of "greatness" in nineteenth-century art. Following the ideology of separate spheres, art academies prohibited women from gaining access to the male nude, and thus raised an institutionalized barrier to the category of "greatness."[27] Art historian Laura Prieto has demonstrated that access to art education through established institutions such as the National Academy of Design, and thus access to the male nude, proved indispensable to the professionalization of women artists at the threshold of the twentieth century.[28] As we have seen, Hutchinson's lived experience as a student at the Academy suggests permeable separate spheres which allowed her to attend Life Study classes for women before her twenty-first birthday, contrary to official policy. Furthermore, in her final year of study she joined the boy's classes with apparently unrestricted access to the male nude. Just as women artists like Hutchinson gained routine access to nude male models in the twentieth century, the "homophobic economy of the male gaze" (Sedgwick, 142) transformed representation of the nude male from the hallmark of "greatness" into kitsch. Hutchinson thus implicitly falls into the category of kitsch producer rather than artist.

The migration of a Life Study drawing into an object of "gay interest" pivots on abstraction/figuration and art/kitsch as cultural nodes mapping sexuality as a dynamic of secrecy and disclosure explored by Sedgwick. As we have seen, kitsch operates as a grid of intelligibility as well as a discourse juxtaposed with avant-garde or genuine art. As a dispositif, kitsch is a particular way of knowing a visual object rather than a particular

[27] Nochlin, "No Great Women Artists?"
[28] Prieto, *At Home in the Studio*.

type of visual object. Kitsch produces knowledge about art. And though it seems counter-intuitive, this way of knowing is dependent on *not knowing*. Ignorance is produced through games of truth associated with kitsch's co-constitutive partner – art. According to Sedgwick, "these ignorances, far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth" (8). This is the dynamic of the open secret caught up in "the relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit around homo-heterosexual definition" (3). Sedgwick draws our attention to the implications of these tense cultural nodes for not only gay history, but for the way history (and indeed, art history) are written. As Sedgwick puts it, "in the vicinity of the closet, even what *counts* as a speech act is problematized on a perfectly routine basis" (3). The dual discourse of avant-garde/kitsch determines what counts as a speech act in mid-twentieth-century visual culture. As I will show, this way of knowing visual culture historically muted Mary E. Hutchinson's "dangerous" speech engaging gender and sexuality.

Following Sedgwick's lead, I aim to resist the temptation of feminist recovery for Hutchinson that claims her work to have been *really* modern (a.k.a. avant-garde) or even that Hutchinson should be *really* considered an avant-garde feminist artist ahead of her time. Rather, I argue that the dual discourse of avant-garde and kitsch effectively positioned her work produced after 1939 as kitsch. As we will see, the willful unknowing of kitsch reduced Hutchinson's queer imagination to unintelligible realism. It also squelched her options for public exhibition, and thus her access to the art market.

However, Sedgwick's consideration of sexuality divorced from sex and gender provides a limited and even distorted theoretical framework through which to approach

kitsch as well as the life and work of a woman artist. Queer theory which refuses to consider the co-extensive operations of gender and sexuality may be able to explain how the Life Study drawing of a woman artist becomes an object of "gay interest," but it cannot explain what becomes of that woman artist. From a historical perspective, Sedgwick's binarisms (art/kitsch; abstraction/figuration) are new late twentieth-century iterations of early twentieth-century binarisms such as academic/modern, objective/non-objective, and avant-garde/kitsch. As we have seen in the criticism of Hutchinson's paintings such as *Nude* (c.1934), these dense cultural nodes operated around gender as well as sexuality. Gender and sexuality must be considered as co-extensive. The games of truth that transformed the subject of art from political formations to psychological ones similarly transformed both "woman" and "artist" as subjects, and rendered the "woman artist" an absolute paradox. With very few exceptions, women could be kitsch producers extraordinaire, but not artists.[29]

Hutchinson's Queer Imagination

Mary E. Hutchinson produced her kitschiest work, a series of pen and ink drawings (1942-1945), as personal correspondence in an intimate economy of reader relations, rather than as public exhibition pieces exposed to the silencing glare of the universal avant-garde gaze. They portray her topsy-turvy daily family life produced by the social context of World War II. As scholars such as Lillian Faderman have explored, the war produced some queer couples and strange families while the heteronormative

[29] Grandma Moses might be considered one such exception because of the self-taught and "primitive" character of her work which imply an inherent or essential form of creativity and distance her from the Academic tradition.

husbands and fathers fought overseas.[30] Hutchinson became the "head of household" in one such queer family living in a New York apartment on East 58th Street.[31] Her friend, Wilma Breit, experienced severe depression after giving birth to a daughter, Amy Elisabeth. While Wilma's husband was away overseas, she appears to have been unable to care for the new baby as well as her older son, and was probably institutionalized in a psychiatric facility. As Amy Elisabeth's godmother, Hutchinson jumped in to care for the children with the help and support of her partner, Ruth Layton.[32]

My aim in queering kitsch through these drawings involves a re-imagination similar to Sedgwick's queer deconstruction of art/kitsch via camp, but one which precedes her "modern gay identities" that emerge with the gay liberation movement of the late-twentieth century. I am concerned with the intelligibility of Hutchinson's historic engagement with gender and sexuality as an artist during the mid-twentieth century as well as her absence of an oeuvre today. Hutchinson's pen and ink drawings trace an historic queer imagination working tangentially to both kitsch and camp. By queer imagination, I mean that Hutchinson represented gender and sexuality in ways which failed to fit neatly into conventional categories and challenged social truths within her own lifetime. As genealogy, I am concerned with the games of truth and relations of power which made it historically impossible to understand this engagement as art and continues to limit its intelligibility. At the same time, these drawings along with much of

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[30] Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

[31] Hutchinson's queer family is documented by her correspondence with Wilma Breit and her pen and ink drawings. For example, her relationship as Amy Elisabeth's godmother is documented by a drawing labeled "My godchild, Amy Elisabeth, goes rabbit hunting." (MEH papers.)

[32] The spelling of Amy Elisabeth with an "s" rather than the more common "z" suggests that Wilma named the child in part honoring her godmother, Mary Elisabeth Hutchinson.

her other formal work may now also be read to contest the categories of art history.[33] Hutchinson's visual critique may be understood as "queer commentary" as proposed by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner. It "aspires to create publics, publics that can afford sex and intimacy in sustained, unchastening ways; publics that can comprehend their own differences of privilege and struggle; publics whose abstract spaces can also be lived in, remembered, hoped for."[34]

Mary and Ruth, the happy queer couple enjoying ice cream cones at Coney Island, coexists with Ruth as a future wife and mother. Ruth courts – or at least allows herself to be courted – by young men between discourses of motherhood represented by Amy Elisabeth and the gaze of the law marked by symbols of authority (his emblazoned cap) and discipline (his billy club). Ruth's divided attention marked by her achievement or intellect represented in her perpetual gaze into some book, even if just a cookbook, is no more or less split than when cycling, sunning at the beach, or skating at the rink with Mary. In this historical moment between kitsch and camp, Mary and Ruth live a queer life not yet pinned down through an increasingly efficient system of psychological science and bio-power.

Approximately forty of Hutchinson's pen and ink drawings survive. Only one portrays Wilma and it provides significant insight into the doubling parodic effect of Hutchinson's queer imagination. This drawing is a particularly striking example of Hutchinson's frequent use of conventional social and artistic texts to produce queer parodies. On the literal level dictated by kitsch, the drawing depicts a happy family scene

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[33] For an introduction to the ways in which queer contests categories, truths and history, see William B. Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 8-29.
[34] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?," *PMLA* 110 (1995): 344.

– a mother caring for her children while also tending to the cooking and cleaning around the kitchen table. It is a joyful scene celebrated with music and dancing. This is the primal scene of femininity in the domestic sphere. But it is only the background text for Hutchinson's queer imagination. As framed by Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody*, it is the background "against which the new creation is implicitly to be both measured and understood."[35]

The background text is often seen as nothing more than the target of a joke or derision. However, Hutcheon allows the background a more active role in parody. It operates as a full partner and may redirect the parodic charge towards "contemporary customs or practices."[36] The background text operates as a convention, but rather than imitation alone, it provides the focal point for critical distance in the new or doubling text that transgresses by way of irony. According to Hutcheon, the simultaneous work of convention and transgression operates as a "trans-contextualization." She considers parody as "an integrated structural modeling process of revising, replaying, inverting, and 'trans-contextualizing' previous works of art."[37] Works of art may be construed broadly to include artistic conventions and iconic social texts as well.

In her drawing of Wilma playing the broom, Mary E. Hutchinson trans-contextualizes the primal scene of femininity as a scene of madness. Her critical queer imagination gives the literal scene a new and ironic context through the traditional iconography of madness. Hutchinson calls on a system of artistic conventions, and references a combination of well-known works of art rather than a single iconic work.

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[35] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), 31.
[36] Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*, 11.
[37] Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*, 11.

Most notably, Wilma's broom may be read as the "staff of madness." According to Sander Gilman in his groundbreaking interdisciplinary work, *Seeing the Insane*, the staff of madness, in its many varieties, may be the only sign pointing to "deviation." The staff's gendered form as the witch's broomstick is particularly relevant as a sign of mad possession.[38] Wilma playing the broom depicts a mad subject, but in this drawing Hutchinson focuses on the setting of madness rather than its physiognomy.[39] The setting is bedlam, "a scene of mad confusion or uproar."[40] Hutchinson transforms the iconic asylum chains depicted in well-known eighteenth century illustrations of Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* and William Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* into a playful son who literally ties his mother to the kitchen table. The kitchen table is itself more than a literal representation, but serves as an icon of domesticity. The child binds Wilma to gendered norms attached to femininity and the Oedipal family. She cannot escape the children, the dishes, pots, pans, and broom. Amy Elisabeth bangs up an unintelligible symphony and – trapped in the feminine sphere – Wilma joins in dancing to the fantasy (or delusion) and plays her staff of madness. The happy family and the madwoman – or in the language of 1945 – the neurotic – coexist in Hutchinson's drawing. The drawing works through a "double-directed irony."[41] Hutchinson's queer commentary works through the juxtaposition and incongruity of the parodied background text of femininity and the parodic foreground of madness. The ideal scene of femininity and the psychic state of madness are paradoxically the same and different.

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[38] Sander L. Gilman, *Seeing the Insane* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982), 7-11.
[39] In other works, such as the paintings *Reflection* and *Ruth*, Hutchinson uses darkness, disheveled hair, and pose as signs of madness.
[40] "bedlam, n.", OED Online, December 2011, Oxford University Press, accessed December 24, 2011, http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/Entry/16879?redirectedFrom=bedlam.
[41] Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*, 31-32.

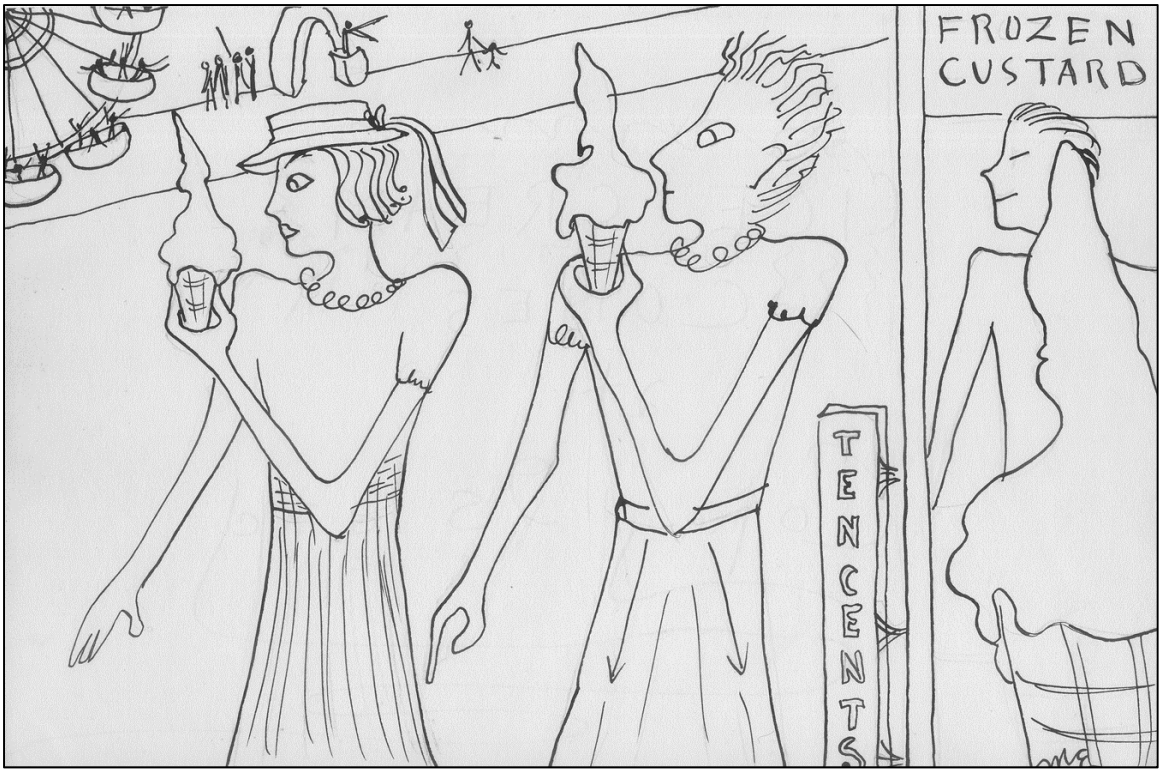

Figure 9: Mary E. Hutchinson, untitled [Ice Cream Cones at Coney Island] (1942-1945)

Figure 10: Mary E. Hutchinson, untitled [Ruth Courting] (1942-1945)

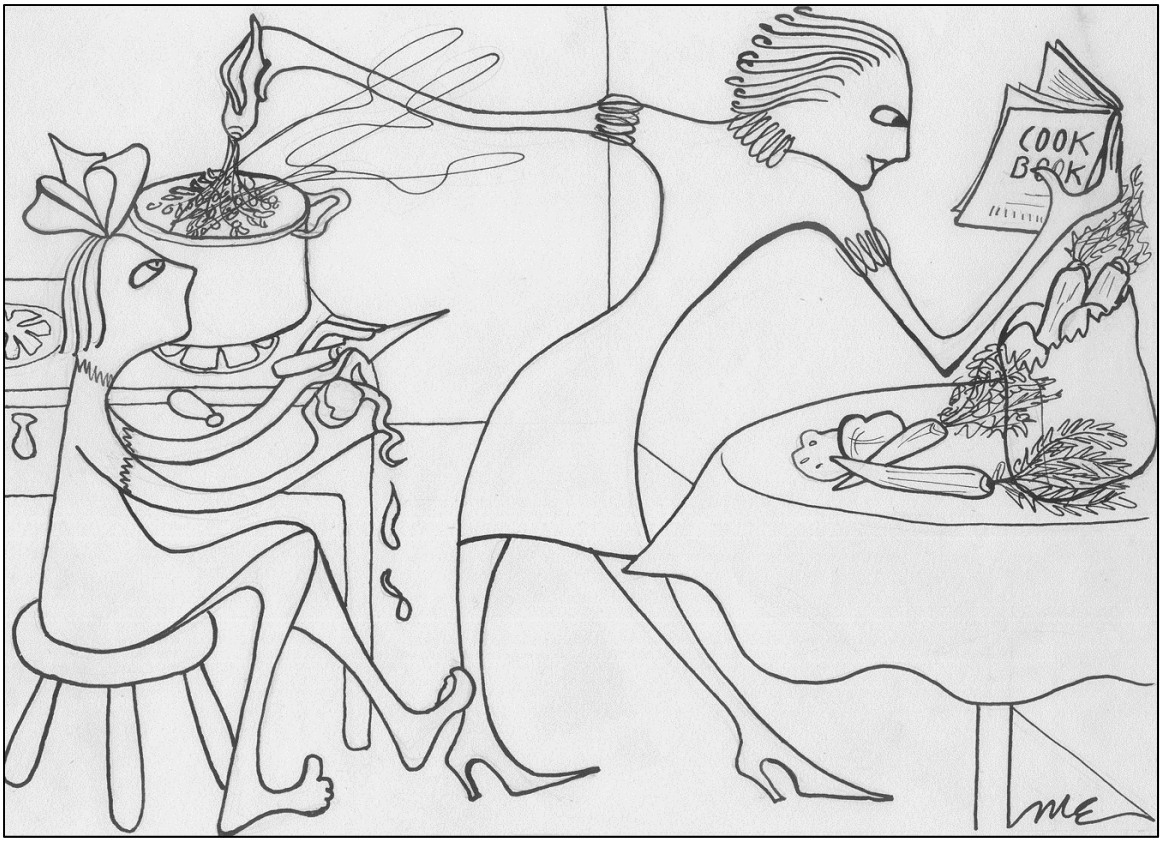

Figure 11: Mary E. Hutchinson, untitled [Ruth Cooking] (1942-1945)

Figure 12: Mary E. Hutchinson, untitled [Ruth Cycling] (1942-1945)

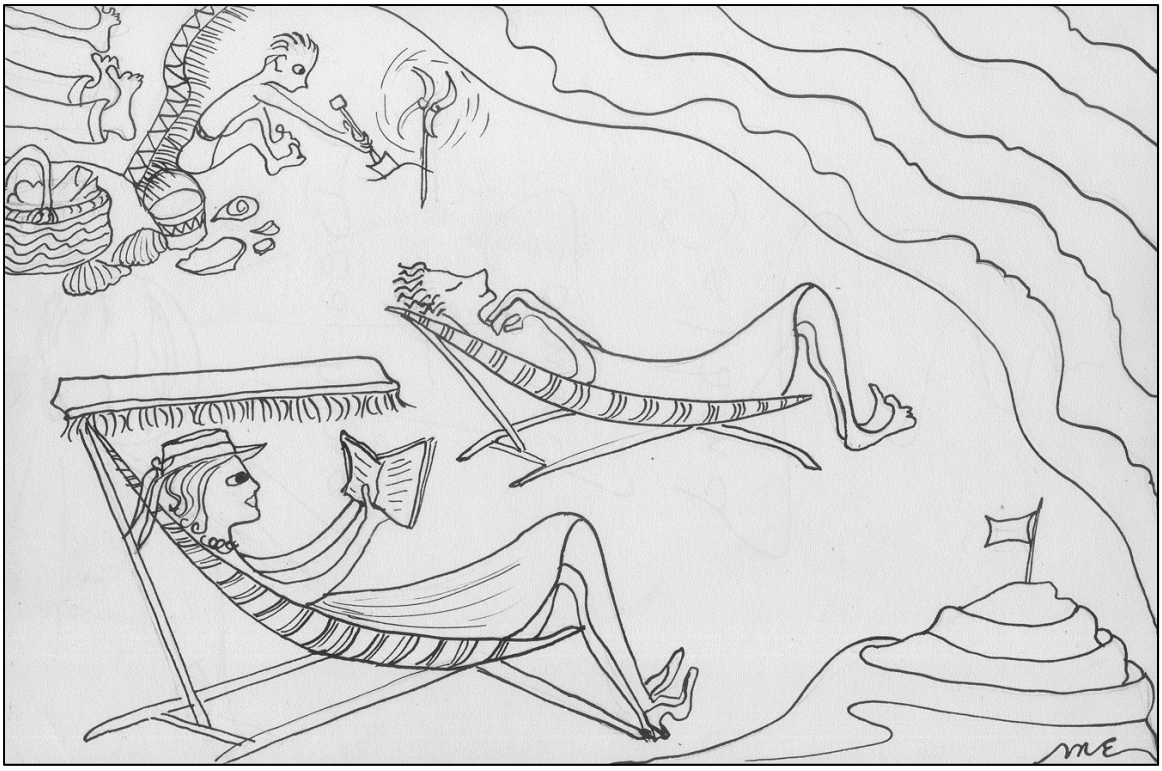

Figure 13: Mary E. Hutchinson, untitled [Beaching at Coney Island] (1942-1945)

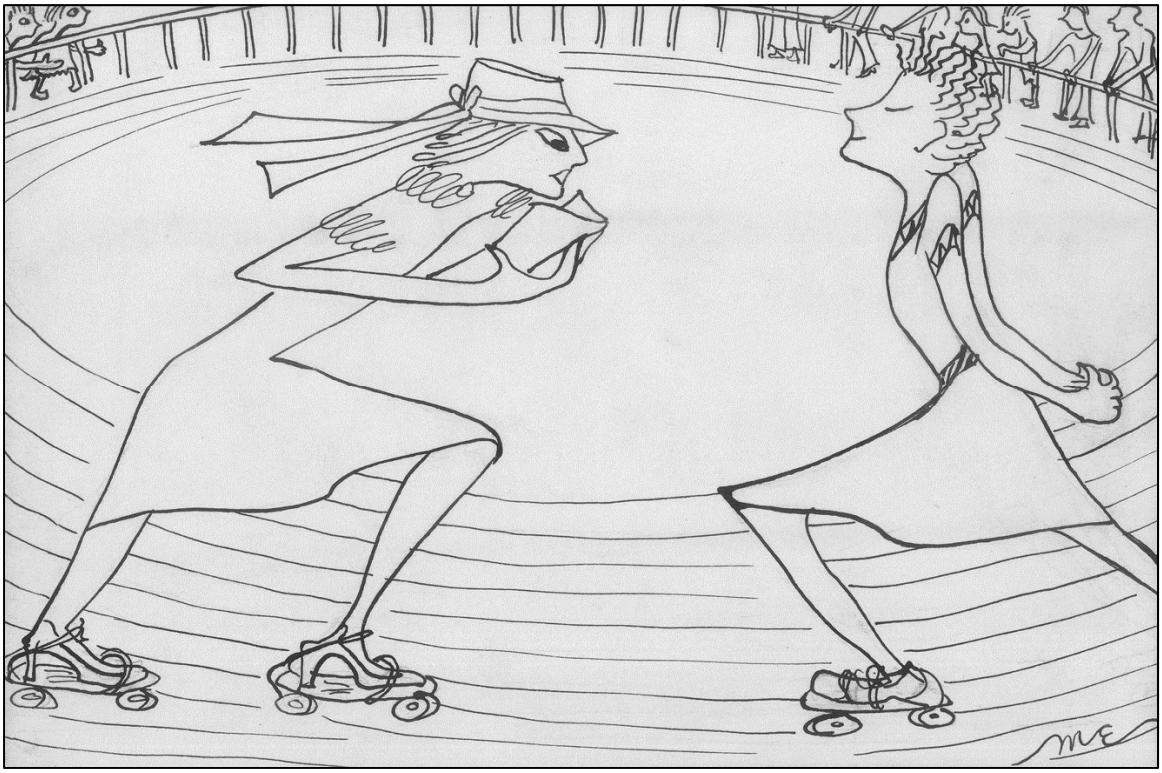

Figure 14: Mary E. Hutchinson, untitled [Mary and Ruth Skating] (1942-1945)

Figure 15: Mary E. Hutchinson, untitled [Wilma Playing the Broom] (1942-1945)

Like camp, parody also works through reader relations and intertextuality. However, notions of genius play no part in Hutcheon's theory of parody which is particularly relevant to my aim in queering kitsch. At the same time, she proposes a system of reader relations that retains the presence of the artist through a dynamic of encoding and decoding. According to Hutcheon, parody works through "intertextuality and intersubjectivity – that is, the complexity of the meeting of two texts combined with the meeting of a painter and a viewer."[42] Parodic coding works through a dynamic of shared knowledge and experience rather than avant-garde projection and reflected effect. To successfully read the code, artist and viewer must share the same relationship to both

[42] Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*, 12.

the conventional background text and the new parodic text.[43] As I will show, Hutchinson's queer imagination intersects camp performance through parody, but at the same time it is denied access to the category of camp through gendered relations of genius.

Bearding Kitsch

Mary E. Hutchinson's pen and ink drawings along with her career after the crystallization of avant-garde/kitsch discourse suggest that she shared queer knowledge and experience with a circle of women artists who have been allowed no intelligible place within art history. As we have seen during the mid-twentieth century, games of truth transformed both "woman" and "artist" from political subjects to psychological ones. As a modern psychological subject, the "woman artist" presents an absolute paradox since the very definition of avant-garde artist requires genius and all theories of genius agreed that women did not have it.

Two of Hutchinson's pen and ink drawings, when read together, strike at the crux of the paradox of the "woman artist" produced by the dual discourse of avant-garde and kitsch. Both are self-portraits of the artist marked by the "tools of the trade." The first may be considered within the kitschy tradition of caricature (Figures 16 and 17). Hutchinson portrays herself as the artist at work. She pokes fun at her own intensity as an artist and her appearance as a woman with spiked ultra-short hair. But she also parodies mimesis in the funny little transactions between her body, her sketchpad, and

[43] Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*, 84-89.

her subject. She is not just drawing Joe.[44] Her sketchpad itself has no definition. Rather, Joe takes shape as she draws. Her arm touches his shoulder. Her pencil reads as his eyes. Her hands cradle his head and contour his face.

And finally, in another drawing, Hutchinson parodies the self-portrait of the woman artist at work (Figures 18 and 19). Here, the artist's palette is replaced by a dinner plate. Her brushes are transformed into knife and fork. She proclaims her meatloaf with all the gusto of a masterpiece. All is couched within a fantasy setting of motherhood as Amy Elisabeth's toy bunny watches and celebrates the meatloaf event. This is the paradox of the woman artist whose engagement with modernism is rendered unintelligible as modernism through the dual modernist discourse of avant-garde and kitsch.

If the "psychically healthy" heterosexual and even married "woman artist" (such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Lee Krasner) struggled in the face of this paradox, how did the woman artist who deviated from the Freudian "normal female attitude" exercise agency as an artist during the mid-twentieth century?[45] Mary E. Hutchinson's pen and ink drawings, along with her participation in the New York Society of Women Artists, suggest that she and the other women artists in her circle confronted the dense cultural node avant-garde/kitsch with an exaggerated, parodic, queer imagination tangential to camp, but *not* camp.

As we have seen, by 1944 the public art forums available to Mary E. Hutchinson diminished to the two organizations founded in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth

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[44] At this time it is unclear whether Joe represents an individual or an anonymous representation along the lines of "Joe Blow" or "G.I. Joe."

[45] Sigmund Freud, "Female Sexuality," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XXI (1927-1931), 229.

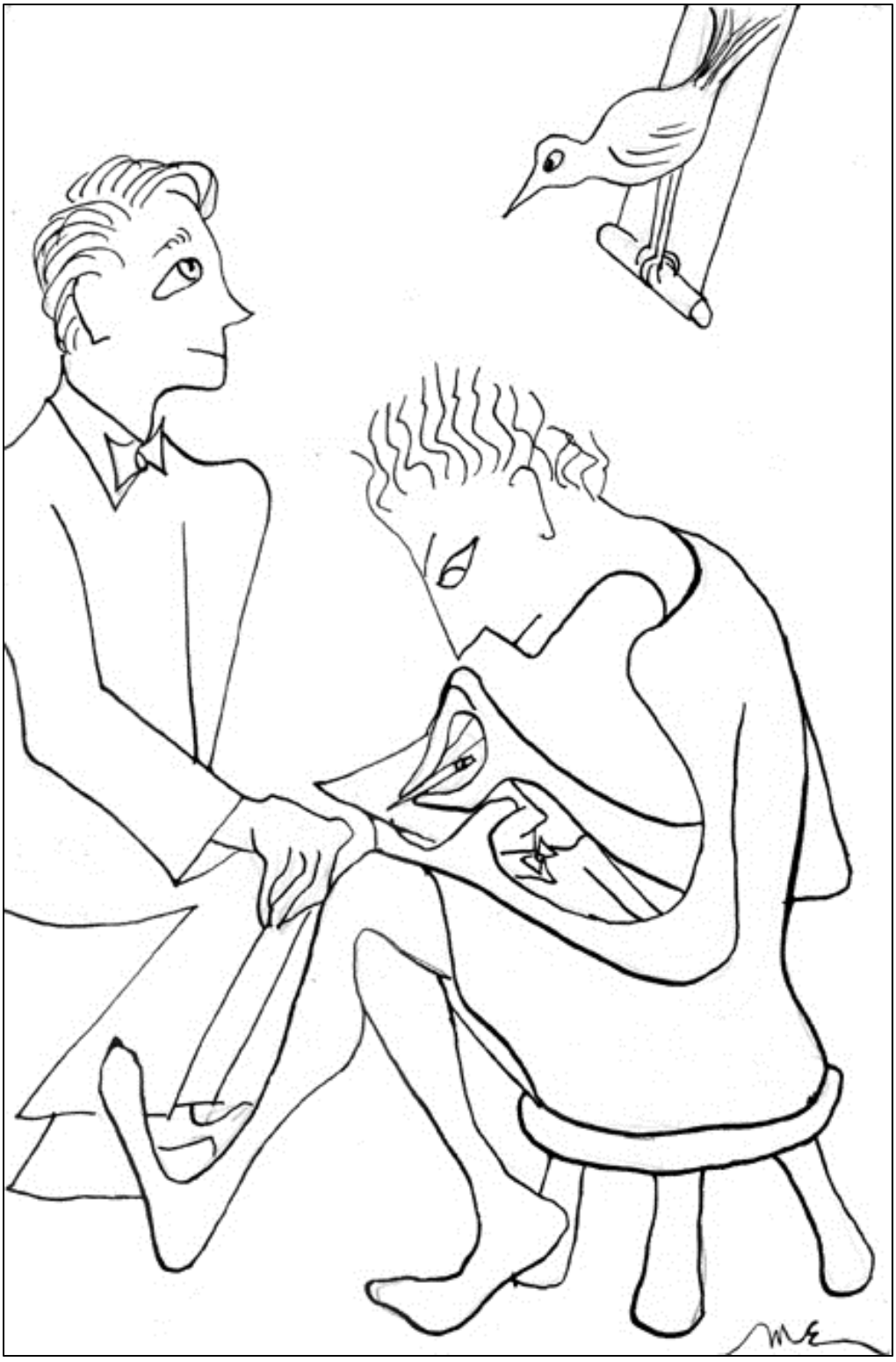

Figure 16: Mary E. Hutchinson, untitled self-portrait [I Make a Drawing of Joe] (1942-1945)

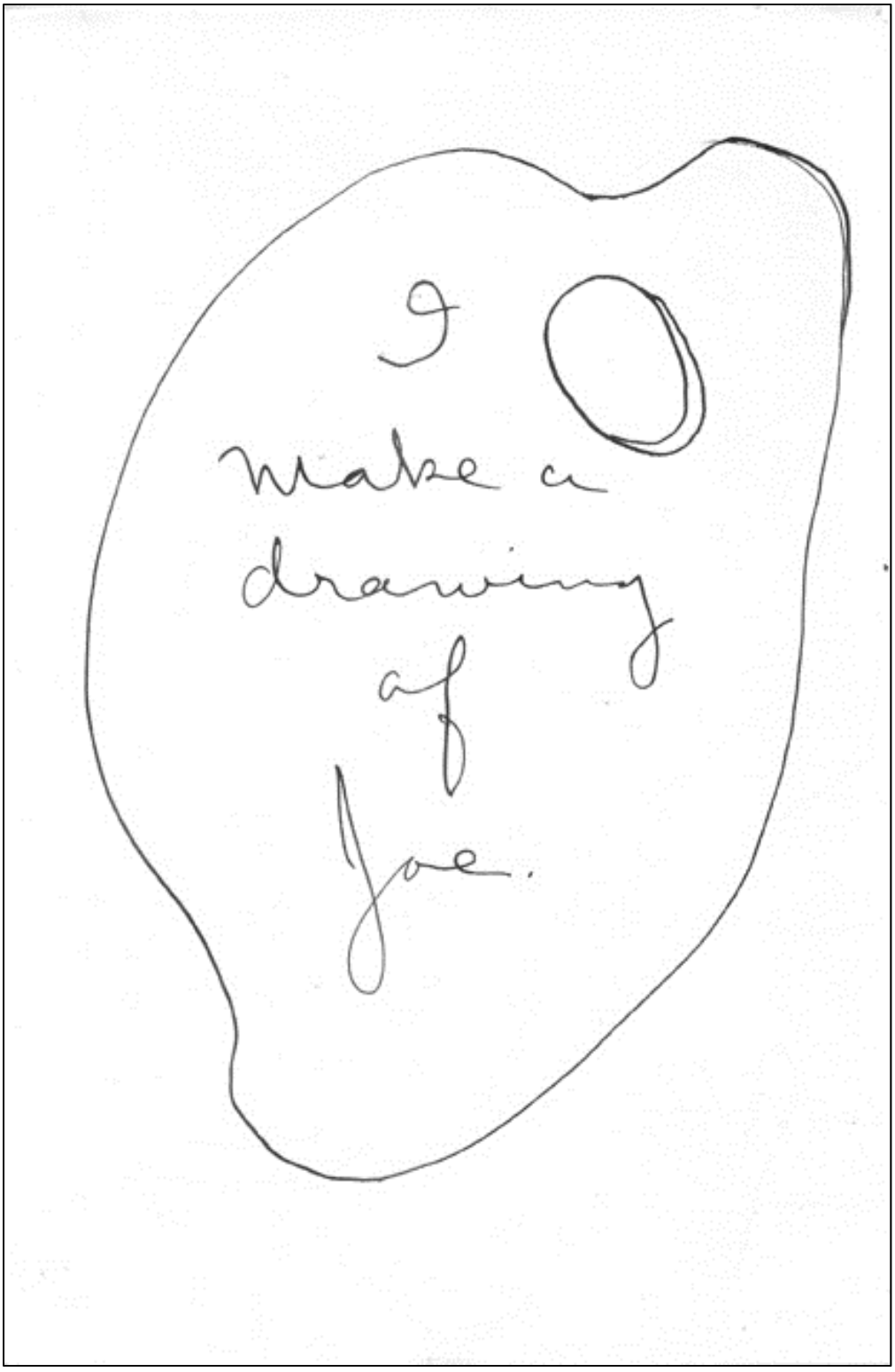

Figure 17: Mary E. Hutchinson, untitled self-portrait, reverse [I Make a Drawing of Joe] (1942-1945)

Figure 18: Mary E. Hutchinson, untitled self-portrait [I Cook a Meatloaf for Dinner] (1942-1945)

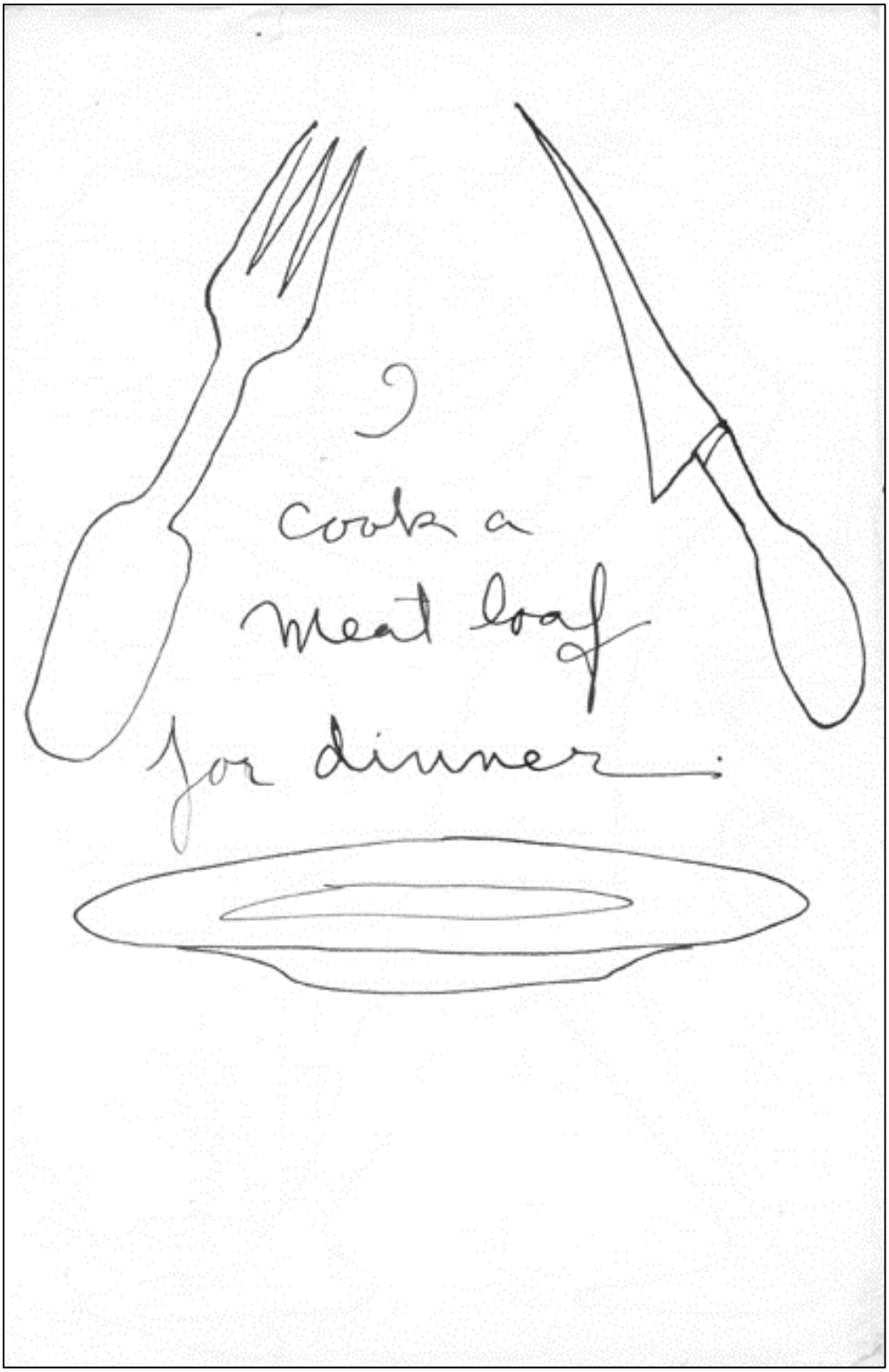

Figure 19: Mary E. Hutchinson, untitled self-portrait, reverse [I Cook a Meatloaf for Dinner] (1942-1945)

centuries as part of the political struggle to gain equal opportunity – the National Association of Women Artists and the New York Society of Women Artists. Hutchinson participated very actively with the New York Society after 1939. In addition to exhibiting with the group, she also served on the board of directors (1940), as recording-secretary (1941), and as vice-president (1945) before relocating to Atlanta in 1945.[46]

The New York Society of Women Artists still exists today and now describes itself as "avant-garde."[47] When Hutchinson joined the group in the mid-1930s, art critics acknowledged the Society's commitment to modern art through terms such as "radical," "left-wing," and "progressive." However, by the mid-1940s the discourse of kitsch made it possible to be modern without being avant-garde. In 1944, *New York Times* critic Edward Alden Jewell criticized the group for pursuing the "effect" of modernism rather than modernism itself:

> The New York Society of Women Artists has continued to be "modern in trend," but often the members have, in their annual exhibitions, seemed to pursue "modernism" doggedly and at a price. That is to say, the society's exhibitions of late have tended to make everything else subservient to the effort of remaining faithful to the phraseology of the platform adopted in the beginning. The effort has frequently amounted to an effect of strain. The present exhibition [1944], if somewhat quieter as a whole, contains plenty of work that puts "modernism" ahead of quality.[48]

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[46] New York Society of Women Artists exhibition programs. (MEH papers.)
[47] "New York Society of Women Artists," accessed December 14, 2005, http://www.anny.org/2/orgs/0188/002p0188.htm.
[48] Edward Alden Jewell, "20th Annual Show by Women Artists," *New York Times*, October 14, 1944, 14. ProQuest.

Hutchinson's three entries in this annual exhibition suggest a queer imagination actively contesting the notions of gender and sexuality operating in kitsch. At this time, I will discuss a kitschy portrait of *Sgt. Virginia Rosekrans* (c.1944), and the critical reaction to a lost work, *Sirènes* (c. 1944). I will take up the third entry, *Mirrors for Reality* (c. 1944) in the next chapter.

After commenting on the generally "doggedly" strained effect of modernism exhibited by the women artists, critic Edward Alden Jewell elaborates on the exhibition of oil paintings as a whole, including Hutchinson's *Sirènes*:

> One large gallery is devoted to oils. Here the impact of "modernism" is most pronounced – sometimes persuasive, often not. Lillian Cotton submits a well-painted portrait entitled "Long After Manet." Edna Perkins' "Still Life With Trap Buoys," too, gives the show a lift. Margaret Huntington's style has changed a little, and for the better, the "Still Life" being well coordinated. Dorothy Lubell Feign's "Accordion on the Beachhead" is of conspicuous merit. Mary Hutchinson in "Sirènes," after Debussy (!), seems to have turned her stylization in the general direction associated with Joseph Stella.[49]

No image of *Sirènes* is available for stylistic comparison to Stella. However, Jewell's cryptic exclamation regarding the relationship between Hutchinson's painting and Debussy appears to convey more than a statement of fact noted in the exhibition check list.[50] Given the context, I read Jewell to convey astonishment rather than admiration at Hutchinson's claim of kinship with Debussy's nocturne. Of course, we have only Hutchinson's statement and Jewell's reaction, but it seems more than coincidental that

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[49] Jewell, "20th Annual Show by Women Artists."
[50] New York Society of Women Artists, Exhibition Catalog, 1944.

the subject of Debussy's "Sirènes" is the mythical and irresistible chorus frequently described as a "wordless women's chorus." In other words, unintelligible women's voices and heteronormative desire. Perhaps someday Hutchinson's *Sirènes* will resurface to reveal her treatment of gender and sexuality which so provoked the art critic.

Digital reversal of an archival photostat of Hutchinson's drawing of *Sgt. Virginia Rosekrans* revives a ghost image of the negative. Hutchinson depicts Rosekrans in a conventional bust portrait with a three-quarters view of the subject's head. She wears a military uniform with "U.S." insignia and ribbons prominently displayed. Rosekrans gazes into the distance rather than confronting the viewer directly. Her lips form neither a smile nor frown, and the overall effect presents a look of focused determination. The radiating aura of a comic book superhero frames Rosekrans' short wavy hair. By this time, the action packed world of superheroes in American popular culture included Wonder Woman as well as Superman.[51] Hutchinson parodies the background text of the fictional superhero to convey Rosekrans' real life heroics. Although documentation is fragmented, Hutchinson's friend, Virginia Rosekrans, was a "woman artist" as well as a WAC (a soldier in the Women's Army Corps). Rosekrans enlisted and appears to have served in the European combat theater even before the U.S. Army officially established the women's branch of service. It appears likely that Rosekrans became one of a handful of women artists who provided invaluable intelligence by flying in bombers on combat missions to map the enemy terrain below.[52]

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[51] "Wonder Woman," Wikipedia, accessed November 28, 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wonder_woman; "Superman (comic book)," Wikipedia, accessed November 28, 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superman_(comic_book).

[52] Anna W. Wilson, "The Story of the WAC in the ETO," publication date unknown, Lone Sentry, accessed January 30, 2005, http://www.lonesentry.com/gi_stories_booklets/wac/. Although undated, this booklet appears to have been written shortly after the end of World War II. See also, E.A.G., "Sgt. Shaft," Blinded American Veterans Foundation (BAVF), accessed October 1, 2006, http://www.bavf.org/shaft/010702.htm;

Hutchinson saved a V-mail letter from Rosekrans which suggests that she was not alone in visually wielding a queer imagination to convey double meanings in an intimate exchange of reader relations. V-mail, or Victory Mail, facilitated communication between U.S. troops and the home front during World War II through a process of microfilming and reproduction. The program officially began operation on June 15, 1942 – one month before the V-mail from Rosekrans to Hutchinson. The microfilm process reduced the bulk of mail to a fraction of its original size and weight for more efficient overseas transport.

Rosekrans chose to use about half of her limited V-mail space for a kitschy cartoon self-portrait. She appears in uniform, including standard uniform trousers rather than WAC skirt, and sits disheveled "seeing stars" which are depicted by looped squiggles. Beside her figure sits a crate of what I read as fireworks and spent casings scattered on the ground. The fireworks interpretation is projected through captions above and below the drawing: "4th of July – Marseilles France;" and "'It made a heluva noise.'" Rosekrans' cartoon conveys information about her daily life in a mode that slipped by the attention of military censors. By this time, France had fallen to the Germans, and the Vichy government, which collaborated with the Axis powers, maintained control in the south of France where Marseilles is located. The only likely way a U.S. soldier would have spent the Fourth of July in Marseilles would have been in aerial combat. The transformation of wartime bombs into Independence Day fireworks also reframes the madness of war into an intelligible and palatable patriotic image.

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and Judith A. Bellafaire, "The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service," U.S. Army Center for Military History, accessed December 27, 2011, http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/WAC/WAC.HTM.

Figure 20: Mary E. Hutchinson, *Sgt. Virginia Rosekrans* (c.1944)

No information is readily available concerning the artistic production of other members of the New York Society of Women Artists during the mid-twentieth century. However, the wisp of a queer imagination at work can be sensed in a peripheral glance at the self-identifications of a few members as artists. Exhibition programs from 1944-1947 suggest particularly intense contestations of the paradox of the "woman artist" operating in the potent symbol of the artist's signature. Two artists exhibited under gender neutral single monikers: Annot and Linton. Nothing more traces Linton's experience as an artist, but Annot immigrated with her artist husband, Rudolf Jacobi, to the United States from Germany sometime before 1936. The practice of gender neutral identification may have been more prevalent among women artists in Europe than in the U.S. For example, Romaine Brooks signed her work simply as Romaine, and London's Hannah Gluckstein exhibited gender bending images in the late 1920s and 1930s as Gluck.[53] However, U.S. art writers felt the need to explain Annot's professional identification:

- Instead of using the name Mrs. Annot Jacobi, Annot being her given name, the wife has used this designation for her independent work.[54]
- A joint exhibition of work by Rudof Jacobi and his wife, whose brush name is the brief and easily remembered Annot, opened yesterday. . .[55]

The U.S. press also represents Rudolf Jacobi as the dominant artist of the husband and wife team, but together they operated the Annot Art School.[56] Their 1936 joint show included "among many other canvases, several portraits from what Annot calls the

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[53] Sherman Reed Anderson, "The Shadowed Self: Androgyny and the Art of Romaine Brooks" (Master's Thesis, University of Washington, 1999); and Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1986), 94-97.
[54] "Jacobis to Exhibit Art," *New York Times*, April 11, 1936. ProQuest.
[55] Edward Alden Jewell, "The Jacobis Give a Joint Art Show," *New York Times*, April 14, 1936. ProQuest.
[56] "Art Notes," *New York Times*, February 18, 1936. ProQuest.

'Independent Women' series – sitters being Emily Nathan, Vera Kelsey, Helen Worden, Dorothy Thompson, Lillian O'Lindsay and Dr. Katharina Rathaus."[57] Except for Dorothy Thompson, these independent women remain ghosts. Thompson appears to be the prominent American journalist expelled from Nazi Germany in 1934.[58]

Annot and Linton were joined by Eleanor Lust and Lesbia Beard in the New York Society of Women Artists between 1944-1947. Eleanor Lust *could* have been a person's legal name, but Lesbia Beard boldly confronted sexual identity. The name appears to be a play on the title character of Swinburne's 1877 novel, *Lesbia Brandon*.[59] Although in use since the late nineteenth century to describe same-sex relationships between women, the term "lesbian" was probably just beginning to work its way into the American vernacular as we recognize the term today. Documenting usage in everyday language and awareness is problematic. "Lesbian" developed into a noun by 1925.[60] About the same time, "lesbian" also appeared in the fiction of African American writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance.[61] However, in the same year "Lesbian" appeared in the *New York Times* meaning wine and associated with drunkards, as it had for many years.[62] During the 1950s, with the help of "modern woman" as the "lost sex" and popular pulp fiction, the term "lesbian" arrived in American awareness with singular meaning.

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[57] Jewell, "The Jacobis Give a Joint Art Show."
[58] "Dorothy Thompson," Wikipedia, accessed November 28, 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorothy_Thompson; "The Press: Without Regrets," *Time*, February 10, 1961, accessed November 28, 2011, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,872141,00.html; see also the cover of *Time*, June 12, 1939, accessed November 28, 2011, http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19390612,00.html.
[59] Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1981), 273.
[60] "Lesbian, adj. and n.," OED Online, Oxford University Press, accessed December 1, 2005, http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/Entry/107453?redirectedFrom=lesbian.
[61] Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 69.
[62] "Decline and Fall?," *New York Times*, August 20, 1925. ProQuest.

Lesbia Beard's queer meanings come through not only in the open play of "lesbian" in her first name, but in conjoining this identifier with "Beard." Far from the impotent contemporary associations of a lesbian beard to mean a lesbian who covers a gay man's queerness, I read Lesbia Beard as a queer confrontation. Just as queers aim to confront and disrupt the heteronormative with "in your face" tactics, this radical artist claimed the verb form of beard: "to oppose openly and resolutely, with daring or with effrontery; to set at defiance, thwart, affront. Esp. in fig. phr. ***to beard the lion in his den*** or ***lair***. [Partly from the idea of taking a lion by the beard, partly from the use of *beard* as = face. . .]"[63] As an example of usage, the OED provides this quotation from 1894: "Nothing less would satisfy her than to beard – if the metaphor applies to ladies – the lion in the den, the arch-accuser, in the very court of judgment."[64] Lesbia Beard was not just a private joke shared by a close-knit group of women artists. She was a public figure noted by the *New York Times* for her "boldly designed and fluent watercolors."[65] Lesbia Beard's appearance as an artist between 1944-1947, though brief, suggests a queer moment in American culture made intelligible only when gender and sexuality are considered co-extensively. The queer imagination of women artists like Mary E. Hutchinson, Annot, and Lesbia Beard had not yet disappeared in the art/kitsch divide. Rather they exercised a powerful contestatory queer imagination that precedes "modern gay identities."

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[63] "beard, v.," OED Online, Oxford University Press, accessed November 28, 2005, http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/Entry/16555?rskey=MtioSv&result=2&isAdvanced=false.
[64] "beard, v.," OED Online.
[65] Howard Devree, "Sculptors and Painters," *New York Times*, January 9, 1944, ProQuest; Howard Devree, "Among the New Exhibitions," *New York Times*, February 25, 1945, ProQuest.

This unnamed powerful visual language overlaps camp, but it also exceeds the gendered limits of camp which are aligned with avant-garde prescriptions of *genius*. Camp scholars struggle with questions of essentialism prevalent in notions of camp. For the most part, camp theorists have attempted to unravel an "essentially gay" way of knowing in favor of a socially constructed mode.[66] Sedgwick argues that "any such adjudication is impossible to the degree that a conceptual deadlock between the two opposing views has by now been built into the very structure of every theoretical tool we have for undertaking it."[67] However, the difference between Hutchinson's queer imagination and camp is a matter of gender, not sexuality. Pamela Robertson acknowledges the dominance of gay men over camp, but challenges gendered exclusivity: "Clearly, it would be foolish to deny camp's affiliation with gay male subculture or to claim that women have exactly the same relation to camp as gay men do. But it seems rash to claim that women have no access to camp."[68] It may seem "rash," but that is precisely my claim. "Lesbian camp" and even "feminist camp" are bound up in the same paradoxical knot as "woman artist." The gendered essentialism at work in camp operates *obliquely* through *genius* rather than in direct relations of men and women. As we have seen, Sedgwick locates the contestatory power of camp-recognition in an awareness of "reader relations and in projective fantasy (projective though not infrequently true) about the spaces and practices of cultural production" (156). This projective fantasy may be, as Sedgwick says, from a "'perverse' angle" (156), but it is nonetheless still the projection of the avant-garde cultivated spectator. Camp-recognition

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[66] See Fabio Cleto, ed., *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).
[67] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 40.
[68] Pamela Robertson, "What Makes the Feminist Camp?," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1999), 269.

works from "resistant, oblique, tangential investments" in the avant-garde viewer's reflected effect as distinct from the predigested effect of kitsch. As we have also seen, the cultivated spectator possesses essentialized psychic *genius* related to that of the avant-garde artist, and inaccessible to women.

To be clear, my point here is not to drain the contestatory power out of camp or to rehabilitate kitsch. Rather, my aim is to show the ways in which games of truth generated by the exponentially increasing authority of psychological science constituted camp, kitsch, woman, lesbian, and the artist as subjects in power relations of truth. These are not just theoretical subjects, but rather, as Lynne Huffer reminds us in rethinking the foundations of queer theory, they are subjects whose lived erotic experience is saturated with "the thick residue of sensations and sensibilities" as well as "forms of relation that cannot be reduced to a binary choice between acts and identities. . ."[69] And their artistic production cannot be reduced to the binary choice between avant-garde and kitsch. The contestatory power of the queer imagination wielded by Mary E. Hutchinson and other women artists in her circle failed to resonate into the "liberated" futures of "modern gay identities," the "lesbian artist," and feminist art history. Rather, it may be glimpsed only in peripheral traces as one of "the *cogito's* ghosts" which Huffer reminds us, "haunt our present, but we can't quite grasp them."[70] Mary E. Hutchinson's queer imagination should not be mistaken as prototypically feminist or lesbian art. After all, she has been forgotten and the queer imagination exercised by her circle of women artists has disappeared into what Foucault calls "the absence of an oeuvre." It is "the space, both

[69] Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 78.
[70] Huffer, *Mad for Foucault*,51.

empty and peopled at the same time," which "indelibly" accompanies "the great *oeuvre* of the history of the world."[71]

[71] Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), xxxi.

Chapter 4

Unintelligible Recovery

In the previous chapter, "Queering Kitsch," I critiqued the role of mid-twentieth-century art criticism in the transformation of the "woman artist" from a credible political subject into a paradoxical psychological subject. The dense cultural node of avant-garde/kitsch squelched Mary E. Hutchinson's engagement with gender and sexuality. Avant-garde/kitsch further excluded Hutchinson and her circle of women artists from the "great oeuvre" of art history. Hutchinson's paintings are now beginning to appear in exhibitions; however, the reverberations of avant-garde/kitsch discourse in histories of twentieth-century American art continue to confound their intelligibility. Engaging her work today is not just a matter of lost and found. The very structure of art history as an academic discipline perpetuates Hutchinson's absence of an oeuvre today.

In this chapter, I return to the core argument of this dissertation. I contend that Mary E. Hutchinson's work cannot be coherently recovered through the available frameworks of art history. My goal is not to offer an alternative framework which sets her up as an exceptional figure, but rather to draw attention to the epistemological rupture folded into the structure of American art history. This rupture produces an incomprehensible space in the history of mid-twentieth century American art occupied by Hutchinson and others. First, this chapter briefly charts the reverberations of avant-garde discourse in the development of modernist art history as an institution as well as the resulting structural split between "modernist" and "Americanist" scholars. I will also explore the role of recovery and recuperation in stretching the limits of modern art which

have positioned Hutchinson and her artistic production within Americanist frameworks. I will then read Hutchinson's painting, *Two of Them,* to critique the unintelligible recovery of this work through the recent Americanist exhibition of American Scene painting. Finally, I will read a series of Hutchinson's self-portraits to critique the potential recuperation of her work through modernist art history frameworks.

Avant-Garde Modernist Art History

As discussed in the previous chapter, Clement Greenberg's 1939 essay, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," marked a paradigm shift in art criticism and finalized debates over truth in art. Greenberg's theory of the avant-garde also fused art criticism to an emerging narrative of the history of modern art. Avant-garde modernist narratives dominate consideration of all twentieth-century art. The relationship of modernist art history to contemporary art also conditions the project of recovering and recuperating artists – both men and women. For this reason, a brief historiography of modernist art history is needed as context for Mary E. Hutchinson's unintelligible recovery.

Modernist or avant-garde narratives generally celebrate the 1913 Armory Show as the pivotal moment of change in the story of twentieth-century American art. The large show held in the alternative setting of a National Guard armory in New York City was officially titled the International Exhibition of Modern Art. Typically the show is explained as having been "organized in opposition to the still-powerful National Academy, to showcase independent and progressive currents in contemporary art."[1] Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), exhibited at the Armory Show,

[1] Erika Lee Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56.

has become an icon not only of modern art, but also of the exhibition for its controversial impact on the American art scene at the time. However, I am interested in the crystallization and institutionalization of modernist art history between 1936-1950 which makes this avant-garde narrative possible.

Alfred H. Barr, Jr. epitomizes the institutionalization of the modernist narrative through his exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1936. Barr did more than simply hold a high profile exhibition within an institution; he actually established a paradigm for representing the history of modern art. First, he created a graphic representation which traced the development of abstract art from 1890 to 1935 for the cover of the exhibition catalogue. The graphic history depicts a progress narrative of art as it advances through a lineage of stylistic movements. Great nineteenth century artists (Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne, Seurat) reign as patriarchs over each lineage in a chain of influence which purifies art toward increasing abstraction over the course of the early-twentieth century. Barr's history resolves in two pure modes of artistic practice by 1935: non-geometrical abstract art and geometrical abstract art.[2]

In addition to this now iconic graphic history, Barr also developed a new exhibition model to match his idea of modern art as a progression toward abstraction. According to the recent text *Art Since 1900*, Barr came up with:

> . . . a well-spaced positioning of objects arranged by subject and style on open walls and floors. The effect was to create an aesthetic dimension that appeared both autonomous and historical: the works were "isolated," in his own words, with "no effort . . . made to suggest a period atmosphere"; at the same time they

[2] For a pioneering feminist critique of Barr's graphic history see Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 50-51.

suggested an "almost perfect chronological sequence." For Barr style was the principal medium of meaning in modern art, and influence was its main motor.[3] Barr institutionalized a compelling and influential narrative of modern art as a progression of style toward abstraction. This is the same narrative Clement Greenberg attributes to the avant-garde.

Art produced in the United States before 1935 has no place in Alfred Barr's modernist story. Importantly, the establishment of 1936 as a "formalizing" moment for modern art created a chronological split in the study of American art at the very moment that art history developed in the U.S. as a scholarly endeavor. Art and art history emerged as specialized studies worthy of their own departments in U.S. universities during the 1930s and 1940s. Elizabeth Johns points to a "complex set of tensions" that developed in the 1950s as the first generation of graduates with doctoral degrees in American art history completed dissertations and filled both university and museum positions. One "tension was created by the apparently wild departure of modern American art from its past" with the so-called triumph of abstract expressionism by American artists around 1950.[4] This divide remains entrenched in the structure of art history departments today. Modernists teach postwar American art beginning with abstract expressionism and preceded by the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century European progenators as charted by Barr. Americanists teach from the colonial period through an ambiguous point which may be as early as 1900, or possibly as late as 1950.[5]

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[3] Hal Foster, et al., *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 221.
[4] Elizabeth Johns, "Histories of American Art: The Changing Quest," *Art Journal* 44, no. 4 (1984): 342.
[5] Johns, "Histories of American Art," 342. See also *Richard Meyer, Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23-26.

Scholars now use Americanist frameworks such as American Scene painting to interpret non-abstract work produced between 1930-1950, but the modernist or avant-garde narrative remained an unchallenged truth throughout the 1950s. Although challenged in later decades, the modernist framework remains firmly in place today, as seen in the structure of the recent text *Art Since 1900* (2004) by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin Buchloh, a work the *Art Bulletin* describes as a "textbook as well as a major statement and summa by four leading scholars of modern and contemporary art. . ."[6] The text's structure of events before World War II diverges very little from Alfred Barr's 1936 schema including the 1903 death of Gauguin and 1906 death of Cézanne. *Art Since 1900*, and modernist art history in general, extends Barr's lineage of influence and style to contemporary art after 1970.

Stretching the Limits of Modern Art

This review of the institutionalization of perceptions of modern American art suggests that recovery and recuperation have not been limited to feminist art history alone. The Americanist/modernist divide demands polarization between a nationalist past which lies outside the framework of the avant-garde, or a credible link to the avant-garde family tree. Anything unrelated to the avant-garde, such as the American Scene, becomes a dead-end in the history of art. On the other hand, a credible tie to the avant-garde means relevance for the progressive development of art. This vital tie of modern art to the present has produced histories of twentieth-century American art that expand the lineage of the avant-garde to a uniquely American branch of the family tree. For example, in the survey *Twentieth Century American Art*, Erika Doss positions Robert

[6] "Reviews Editor's Note," *Art Bulletin* 88 (June 2006): 373.

Henri and John Sloan as well as the other members of "The Eight" as "the first among many in the twentieth century – to make modern American art for a public audience." Doss elaborates, "In February 1908, a group of American artists joined forces in a landmark independent exhibition that challenged Gilded Age cultural authority and set the twentieth century on a course of modern art."[7] Such accounts emphasize the artists' rebellious character and influence as the patriarchs of the future American avant-garde.

William Innes Homer first recuperated Robert Henri through association with the avant-garde in *Robert Henri and His Circle* (1969). In the opening lines of his preface, Homer sets Henri up as the American patriarch of the future avant-garde:

> Robert Henri was regarded by many of his contemporaries as the most influential single force affecting the development of American art in the generation preceding the Armory Show of 1913. He was a prolific painter, teacher, and author; he organized exhibitions of progressive art; and he was the leader of the group of painters known as 'the Eight." But a mere listing of his activities cannot convey the extent of his influence upon the young avant-garde artists of his time.[8]

The recuperation of Robert Henri expanded the narrative of the avant-garde in art history by establishing a uniquely American lineage within the existing framework of modernist art history.

This context is important for understanding Mary E. Hutchinson's absence from the history of modern American art. While this alternate American lineage has supported the recuperation of Hutchinson's contemporary Isabel Bishop, who studied under Henri

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[7] Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art*, 35.
[8] William Innes Homer, *Robert Henri and His Circle* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), vii.

at the Art Students League,[9] it distances Hutchinson from the avant-garde because she studied exclusively at the rival National Academy of Design. The prescription of modernist art history privileges Henri's rebellion against authority, and sets up the National Academy as the antithesis of the avant-garde. As Erika Doss explains:

> By staging their independent exhibition at Macbeth Gallery in 1908, The Eight especially defied abiding American reliance on official academies and societies which held annual exhibitions, awarded prizes for art, and perpetuated conservative Gilded Age styles of classically flavoured and cloying art.
>
> At the turn of the century, the National Academy of Design and the Society of American Artists largely dictated the course of American art. . . . The National Academy's authority lay especially in its art school and its annual juried exhibitions . . .[10]

This typical account of American art history is consistent with the mid-twentieth century debates around "academic" and "modern" art. However, positioning the Academy as the antithesis or "other" to the avant-garde creates an impossible situation for Hutchinson's intelligible recovery as an independent woman artist working in the United States during the mid-twentieth century. Hutchinson studied exclusively at the National Academy and remains linked to the "Academy's authority." Her later work also fails the test of rebellion through abstraction.

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[9] Todd, *"New Woman" Revised*, 57-58.
[10] Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art*, 40-41.

Two of Them and Unintelligible Americanist Recovery

As we have seen, the "hard times" of the "Great Depression" destabilized the speculative art market and generated new forums which gave Mary E. Hutchinson access to the New York art scene.[11] Hutchinson first exhibited *Two of Them* in Margit Varga's cooperative Painters and Sculptors Gallery in February 1933. *Two of Them* marks Hutchinson's entrée into the professional art world because of its acquisition by Atlanta's High Museum of Art and the national attention it drew. In 1938, the painting hung prominently in the entryway of the High Museum.[12] Sixty years later, the museum deaccessioned Hutchinson's work after many years in storage. A collector, Jason Schoen, then purchased *Two of Them* at auction. As a result, *Two of Them* gained new life and the opportunity to be seen in public after decades of invisibility. In 2005, the Georgia Museum of Art and the Mobile Museum of Art included *Two of Them* in a major exhibition entitled: "Coming Home: American Paintings 1930-1950 from the Schoen Collection."[13]

Schoen identifies as a collector of American Scene painting.[14] The category "American Scene painting" has become an amorphous catch-all for any canvas painted in the U.S. from 1930-1950 that references American subjects (landscapes and citizens) through representation that is not abstract. However, as suggested above, the category is far from value neutral. American Scene painting lies outside the avant-garde lineage of modern art. While the amorphous character of the American Scene embraces a few

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[11] For an example of how artists are typically portrayed as succeeding in spite of hard times, see "Hard Times, 1929-1939," Smithsonian AAA, accessed July 23, 2011, http://www.aaa.si.edu/exhibitions/hard-times.

[12] Ellen S. John Barnwell, "Mary Hutchinson, Atlanta Artist, Wins Prize at National Exhibition," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 9, 1938.

[13] *Coming Home: American Paintings 1930-1950 from the Schoen Collection* (Athens, GA: Georgia Museum of Art, 2003).

[14] Jason Schoen, "Notes from a Collector," in *Coming Home*, 14-17.

abstract artists such as Stuart Davis, figurative work falls into the category by default. As the "other" to abstraction – the thing abstraction is constructed in opposition to – the American Scene denotes realism, and interpretation leans toward literal meaning. This Americanist art history category is also constrained by the limits of nationalism. In art history scholarship, the American Scene meshes with the multitude of New Deal art programs which operated from 1933-1943. The category is used almost interchangeably with the New Deal and the Great Depression.[15]

While these frameworks (American Paintings 1930-1950, American Scene, New Deal, and Great Depression) certainly share overlapping chronologies and characteristics, the context of production associated with *Two of Them* is completely obscured in their conflation. Hutchinson painted and exhibited *Two of Them* at the Painters and Sculptors Gallery before Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in March 1933 and initiated the New Deal. *Two of Them* is not New Deal art. Furthermore, reading the painting through the lens of the American Scene limits interpretation as nationalist and normative.

Feminist art historian Barbara Melosh critiques this potent combination of nationalism and gender normativity in public art associated with the American Scene. She argues in her frequently cited study *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater* that a "marked shift in visual representation of women," evident in the images produced by two New Deal public art programs, operated co-constitutively with "the containment of feminism that had begun

[15] Matthew Baigell appears to have first framed the American Scene as an interpretive art history category. See Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene: American Painting of the 1930s* (New York and Washington: Reaeger Publishers, 1974).

after the winning of suffrage."[16] She also credibly establishes the "comradely ideal" as a "recurring configuration [which] showed men and women side by side, working together or fighting for a common goal" in New Deal public art.[17] However, because Melosh provides the only significant scholarship on gender associated with New Deal art, her analysis of two specific public art programs has been stretched by many scholars into a paradigm for not only all New Deal art, but that of the American Scene as well.

In an introductory essay on American Scene painting for the *Coming Home* exhibition catalogue, Erika Doss, who is a leading authority on early twentieth-century American art, interprets *Two of Them* as:

> . . . a typical 1930s couple, the sort of man and woman, side by side, working together, who were seen again and again in New Deal art. As historian Barbara Melosh explains, this image of the "comradely ideal" challenged feminist aspirations and upheld beliefs in heterosexuality, making marriage and male-female companionship 'a trope for citizenship.'[18]

In all fairness to Erika Doss, this may be the only possible reading of *Two of Them* as American Scene painting. As such, Doss' interpretation may be valid, but it remains incongruous with the painting's conditions of production and Hutchinson's other work. Recovery via the framework of American Scene painting reduces *Two of Them* to a patriotic engagement with nationalism and forecloses non-normative engagement with gender and sexuality.

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[16] Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 1. Melosh specifically examines the representation of gender through the Federal Theatre Project and the Treasury Section of Fine Arts.
[17] Melosh, *Engendering Culture*, 4.
[18] Erika Doss, "Coming Home to the American Scene: Realist Paintings, 1930-1950 in the Schoen Collection," in *Coming Home: American Paintings 1930-1950 from the Schoen Collection* (Athens, GA: Georgia Museum of Art, 2003).

Richard Meyer extricates Hutchinson's contemporary, Paul Cadmus, from the American Scene box by suggesting "A Different American Scene" portrayed through satire of male sexuality by Cadmus in *The Fleet's In!* (1934). Cadmus produced this painting while working for the short-lived initial New Deal arts program called the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). Unlike Hutchinson's easel paintings of the same general time period, *The Fleet's In!* belonged to the federal government. Richard Meyer points out that unlike conventional representations of sailors on shore leave which tended to portray a single heterosexual couple, Cadmus depicted a satiric chaotic cluster of fourteen figures. As read by Meyer, "*The Fleet's In!* compresses its figures into an uncomfortably shallow space while emphasizing the cling of their clothing and the torsion of their postures. These are bodies that do not behave, figures who seem to pop out from beneath overly tight uniforms and dresses."[19] The painting soon appeared in an exhibition of PWAP art sponsored by the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. It immediately touched off a storm of controversy when the assistant secretary of the navy confiscated the painting and removed it from public view. Rather than suppressing the image, this act of public censorship encouraged the widespread reproduction of the painting in newspapers and art publications nationwide.

Even though Cadmus painted *The Fleet's In!* for the federal government as official New Deal art, it fails to fit the patriotic normative frame of American Scene painting. Meyer sets Cadmus up as an exception "unlike virtually *every* other American artist of the 1930s."[20] However, Hutchinson and Cadmus shared very similar career paths during the 1930s. They both participated with New Deal art programs from their

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[19] Meyer, *Outlaw Representation* , 40.
[20] Meyer, *Outlaw Representation*, 33. Emphasis in original.

inception, and they both exhibited through the Midtown Galleries. Both held major solo exhibitions as Midtown artists in 1937. As we have seen in tracing Hutchinson's life and work, her public profile diminished after 1939. Similarly, according to Meyer, "Cadmus's career . . . declined sharply after the Second World War. Marginalized to the point of near eclipse by the rise of abstract expressionist painting and the corresponding preeminence of modernist art criticism, Cadmus's work came increasingly to be regarded as kitsch. . ."[21] Rather than exceptions, in Foucauldian terms Hutchinson and Cadmus occupy an unintelligible "space both empty and peopled at the same time"[22] produced by the American Scene. Rather than being "caught between hope and helplessness"[23] in the economic crisis now known as the Great Depression, Hutchinson participated in a burst of innovative new ways to access the art market. Rather than a period of containment, censorship, or repression of feminism and sexual satire, *Two of Them* participates in a critique of normative gender and sexuality, though with significantly greater subtlety than Paul Cadmus' *The Fleet's In!*.

Queer Couples

Two of Them portrays a young man and woman together, but I read the conventional couple's pose as the background text for a subtle and early demonstration of Hutchinson's queer parody. The figures appear seated on unseen furniture which may, perhaps, be a loveseat. The young woman is shown in profile gazing intently at her partner. Her arm drapes over his shoulders. He is portrayed in a three-quarters pose, but gazes away from both the viewer and the woman. He broods angrily and she gazes

[21] Meyer, *Outlaw Representation*, 34.
[22] Foucault, *Madness*, xxxi.
[23] Schoen, *Coming Home*, 14.

calmly at his face. The couple sits before a background of strong angular planes. Hutchinson foregrounds gender not only in the dual portrait of man and woman, but also in the use of highly gendered colors – pink and blue. But she reverses conventional gestures and expressions of the couples portrait. Instead of the gestures of possession in which the husband conventionally stands over the wife, the young woman drapes her arm over the brooding fellow's shoulders. Rather than a romantic couple, the pose alludes to the dynamic of mother and child.

Hutchinson personally rejected the domestic performance of marriage integral to the "comradely ideal" associated with American Scene painting. The historic contexts of production associated with *Two of Them*, including not only the destabilized art market but also Hutchinson's erotic lived experience, open up potential readings outside the constraints of patriotism or the demise of feminism arm in arm with a celebration of heterosexuality. Rather than an image of the comradely ideal, *Two of Them* may be read as a canvas filled with tension associated with gender and sexuality – tension between her pink and his blue, between light and dark, between her soothing comfort and his brooding anger. Given Hutchinson's poetic reflections regarding the domestic stage of marriage and the performance of womanliness, the setting portrayed in *Two of Them* may be read as a stage.[24] A 1934 *New York Evening Post* article, which featured a reproduction of the painting, titled "Girl Artist Chooses to Paint Youth: Prefers to Read Future of Sitters, Rather Than Past" suggests a scene far from the comradely ideal. Perhaps Hutchinson portrays the girl's future in the painting's seemingly insignificant background. In other words, the background is the performance. A door stands ajar representing a future still

[24] A contemporary view of gender performance is found in Joan Rivière, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929): 303-313, PEP Web, accessed January 9, 2011.

open, but the locks are already set. The girl's future is already locked into a heteronormative performance.

Finally, *Two of Them* must be considered within the context of Mary E. Hutchinson's other known couples portraits. Hutchinson's engagement with gender, sexuality, and race place her other couples unambiguously outside the lines of the American Scene and the comradely ideal. Out of more than 250 works I have documented, Hutchinson turns to the couple as a subject in only a handful of paintings and drawings. Many of these are also self-portraits. Although no image is available, in 1931 Mary Elisabeth tells her mother that she has "*started a picture of Joanna and myself at the table. . .*"[25] More than a decade later she portrays herself in a couple's pose with Ruth Layton in *Two Heads* (c.1944). This unexhibited formal drawing portrays Mary and Ruth in an integrally composed dual portrait. Similar to *Two of Them*, Hutchinson depicts Ruth in profile and herself in a three-quarters bust pose. However, in contrast to the painting, Mary seeks her partner's face through a peripheral vision. At first glance, Ruth appears to occupy the foreground and Mary the background, but their figures intertwine rather than flatly overlap. The drawing conveys an intricate and intimate social relation not only in the artistic convention of the dual portrait, but in the artist's gaze as well. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Hutchinson explored this queer relationship repeatedly in a series of pen and ink drawings from 1942-1945 while she and Ruth cared for Wilma Breit's children.

Hutchinson's self-portraits with her partners are easily understood as queer when the category stands in for a homosexual identity. However, Hutchinson's engagement with gender and sexuality in her portraits of couples occupies a much more expansive,

[25] Mary E. Hutchinson to Minnie Belle Hutchinson, November 17, 1931. (MEH papers.)

ambiguous, and amorphous quality than that. Hutchinson's queer couples resist the normative impulse of mid-twentieth century categories of gender and sexuality. As Barbara Melosh suggests and as I also explored in queering kitsch, the limits of gender and sexuality did contract during this historical moment. But contrary to the assumptions of art history, artists like Hutchinson and Cadmus countered with a critical queer commentary. In *Two of Them*, Hutchinson portrays a heterosexual couple. However, when extricated from the confines of the American Scene and considered within the context of the artist's life and work, the painting may be read as a historic critique of the heteronormative performance rather than as a re-inscription of the comradely ideal.

Hutchinson presents similar "queer commentary" on gender and sexuality in *Duet* (c.1937), which also portrays a heterosexual couple. This time race participates in queering the couples portrait. Throughout her career, Hutchinson looked to the people and places of her daily life as subjects. *Duet* (c.1937) portrays a young man and woman intimately engaged with a musical composition, most likely within the context of the Harlem Community Art Center where Hutchinson worked as a NYFAP supervisor of teachers. The couple contemplates sheet music held by the young woman as though working out a complicated series of notes and rhythms. He holds his violin at rest with his left hand, fingering a chord on the instrument's neck while the bow, held lightly in his other hand, drapes out of the frame. He wears a richly hued blue shirt with rolled up sleeves, and she wears a white dress with pleats, belt, and exaggerated collar. The couple rests against a suggested bench or pew in an ambiguous interior setting conveyed simply by a background wall and chair rail.

Figure 21: Mary E. Hutchinson, *Duet* (c.1937). Source of color image: *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, May 15, 1938.

Duet's sensual intimacy flows obliquely from the couple's shared relationship through music. Their attention is not on each other, but rather on the sheet music she holds. Yet an intimacy prevails between the two expressed in the ease with which they share space. Their bodies overlap within the picture frame as they lean close to one another to study the music centered between them. Their heads tilt close. Perhaps she presses gently into his shoulder. Surely they touch as forearms cross and the back of her hand brushes against his wrist. If they do, it is the viewer's projection alone which brings the couple together in the ambiguity of the painted canvas. Within the image itself, sheet music covers the shared space in which exposed flesh might meet like an open secret.

Duet received considerable national attention, and Hutchinson exhibited the painting four times. She first showed it in her 1937 solo show at the Midtown Galleries and featured it on the catalogue cover.[26] Shortly afterward, the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors selected the painting for the Marcia Brady Tucker award which carried a $100 prize during one of the harshest years of the economic crisis. Hutchinson later exhibited *Duet* in the Society of Independent Artists annual exhibition, and then in an exhibition in Chicago.[27] The painting was reproduced in the *Art Digest*, *Art News*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, and in color by the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*.[28] However, New York's art critics had very little to say about the

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[26] "Exhibition of Paintings Mary E. Hutchinson," Midtown Galleries, exhibition checklist, February 1934. (MEH papers.)

[27] "$1,300 Prizes Given to Women Artists," *New York Times*, January 4, 1938; Ellen Barnwell, "Mary Hutchinson, Atlanta Artist, Wins Prize at National Exhibition," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 9 1938; "Miss Hutchinson, Former Atlantian Awarded Marcia Tucker Art Prize," *Atlanta Journal*, January 9, 1938; Robert Sell, "Art Show - 'Catch as Catch Can' Style," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, May 15, 1938. (MEH papers.)

[28] *Art Digest*, December 1, 1937; *Art News*, January 8, 1938, 13; *New York Herald Tribune*, January 2, 1938; "How Artist Found Talent in Mother," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 24, 1940; Robert Sell, "Art Show – 'Catch As Catch Can' Style," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, May 15, 1938.

painting. Margaret Breuning, a well-established critic, provides the most direct statement on the painting in a biting back-handed review of the women's exhibition:

> While there are no outstanding works of originality or imaginative inspiration, there are many rewarding ones which a leisurely survey of the galleries will reveal. In fact, one of the few startling canvases, Duet, by Mary E. Hutchinson, is one of the least commendable, for it hits you between the eyes at first viewing, but has nothing to say after this first violence of onslaught.[29]

Breuning found Hutchinson's harmonious scene to be "startling" and violent. This certainly seems a queer reaction to the image of a young couple who are in fact portrayed "side by side, working together. . . for a common goal," as Barbara Melosh says of the comradely ideal. However, Melosh also points out that the comradely ideal was reserved for whiteness.[30]

Hutchinson turns to Adam and Eve as models for her queerest couple. *In The Beginning* (c.1940-1945), a painting with no exhibition history, engages the social construction of gender and sexuality in a way that implicates both religion and psychiatric power. The composition depicts three discreet figures imposed over a blue background and the partial orb of the rising sun. A cone of light shines on the central figure of the serpent which rises from the lower rim of the canvas as a sinuous green ribbon. The serpent's head lacks naturalistic detail in favor of geometric abstraction resembling a bud. The snake's tongue extends as a tiny red flame upward toward the sun and tilting only slightly toward Eve. The figure of Eve is represented to the left and Adam to the right. Both are portrayed nude/naked in a partial bust pose revealing one

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[29] Margaret Breuning, "Art in New York," *Parnassus* 10 (February 1938): 24.
[30] Melosh, *Engendering Culture*, 67.

Figure 22: Mary E. Hutchinson, *In The Beginning* (c.1940-1945)

shoulder, their faces turned toward the serpent, and hands raised in the reverent gesture of prayer directed again toward the serpent. All attention, including the viewer's, is drawn to the serpent.

The two figures appear almost genderless . . . but not quite. Hutchinson represents gender difference symbolically through light (woman) and dark (man) tones, and through subtle points of corporeal particularity including the lips, cheeks, and eyebrows. Eve's gender is represented with a softening of line which adds a few sinuous (or serpentine) curves. The original man and woman are stripped of gendered material culture in their nakedness. Unlike most representations of Adam and Eve in the garden, Hutchinson leaves the couple's sexual anatomy off canvas. The sexed body is not even a covered illusion. It is unseen and irrelevant. Even so, the serpent as phallus rises from below to fully captivate and divide in a thoroughly twentieth-century nod to the pervasive presence of the psychological. Within psychoanalytic theory, the phallus is the quintessential icon of masculine power. Hutchinson complicates the gender binary in her representation of phallus as serpent through a few sinuous or feminine curves. Her schema of gendered curves creates an impossibly feminine, and thus queer, phallus.

Unintelligible Modernist Recovery

As Mary E. Hutchinson's queer couples suggest, she engaged gender and sexuality as modernist psychological constructs. However, the normative impulse of the American Scene as an art history framework renders that engagement unintelligible. Feminist art history offers two strategies for approaching Hutchinson's work in relation to modernism. The first may be thought of as "subversive" and is represented by the

work of Marsha Meskimmon on twentieth-century women's self-portraiture as a genre. Anne E. Wagner provides a counter-argument in her work on gender and the art of Georgia O'Keeffe, Lee Krasner, and Eva Hesse, which I consider as "engagement" with modernism. Neither strategy successfully navigates the contradictions produced through a web of modernist discourses to offer coherent readings of both Hutchinson's early and late work. As we have seen in the previous chapter, modernist contradictions of gender and genius transformed the "woman artist" from a credible political subject into a paradoxical psychological subject. My aim in this section is to engage these historical contradictions through Hutchinson's self-representation as an artist, rather than to resolve them by recuperating Hutchinson as a "modern artist" or even as a subversive feminist artist.

Subversive of Modernism

Mary E. Hutchison produced multiple images of the independent woman artist. As we have seen in tracing her early career, her initial identification as "artist" and "independent woman" is represented by her c.1927 *Self-Portrait,* painted as a student rite-of-passage at the National Academy of Design. *Self-Portrait* (c.1927) presents Mary E. Hutchinson as an artist marked by the tools of the trade in the brief moment of closure before an unseen canvas still wet with paint – a decisive moment of knowing when a work is complete. The moment of closure is implied by the way she holds her artist's tools – paint-smeared palette and brushes withdrawn from the act of painting, in hand but not at rest. Her hair is neatly pulled back, yet a few strands have worked free as a telling sign of recent activity. The artist's canvas lies outside the picture frame of the self-

portrait while at the same time the image presented to the viewer denotes the artist's canvas. The painting and the act of painting reference each other through color. The light blue of the artist's smock remains fresh on her brush, as does the red of her lips, while the third brush blends diffusely into the background.

In *The Art of Reflection*, Marsha Meskimmon argues that all self-portraiture by twentieth-century women artists is subversive. According to Meskimmon, "the very presence of women as artists was and still is a challenge to common assumptions about the sex of cultural producers. The vast number of self-portraits by male artists in their studios or with their trade tools have come to seem natural, and women at easels or holding brushes, cameras or chisels may still seem a startling inversion of the norm."[31] The point I wish to emphasize here is that the "common assumptions" referred to by Meskimmon are those produced by modernist art history. These assumptions lead Meskimmon to conclude that, "in the early part of this [twentieth] century, just representing oneself as an artist was a subversive statement for a woman and she would not have needed to have included or surrounded herself with the tropes of bohemianism to seem extraordinary."[32] However, Hutchinson's production of *Self-Portrait* (c.1927) cannot be reconciled with these modernist assumptions as either up-holding or subverting the precepts of modern art.

As we have seen, Mary E. Hutchinson successfully represented herself, in the eyes of her instructors at the National Academy of Design, as an artist "holding brushes." The painting is directly tied to the source of the Academy's "authority" through its art

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[31] Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press), 28.
[32] Meskimmon, *Art of Reflection*, 28.

school.[33] Hutchinson convincingly portrays herself as an artist within academic conventions. We have also seen that throughout the early-twentieth century women artists successfully revised the limits of gender in their Academy portraits to produce credible images of the woman artist. However, Hutchinson's initial identification as an independent woman artist fails to resonate within narratives of twentieth-century art dominated by modernist art history. In fact, the painting is in every sense of the word academic art and thus the polar opposite of modern art. Hutchinson's *Self-Portrait* (c.1927) positions her (and her work) as the "other" to the avant-garde. This modernist production of alterity must not be resignified as a subversive act. To do so obscures the process of marginalization or "othering" produced by modernism in discourses of art rather than deconstructs it. *Self-Portrait* (c.1927) does, however, challenge the truth claims of modernist art history.

Engagement with Modernism

Anne M. Wagner counters the widely accepted feminist strategy of recuperating women artists and their work as subversive of modernism, with a performative view of women's artistic production as a "kind of dialogue or counterpoint with a fictional norm."[34] Rather than taking on "modernism as an enemy, perhaps *the* enemy,"[35] Wagner suggests "that modernism was what many of the most ambitious artists (male and female) of the last hundred years or so found they had to work with."[36] Women artists worked

[33] Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art*, 40-41.
[34] Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 20.
[35] Wagner, *Three Artists*, 14. Emphasis in original
[36] Wagner, *Three Artists*, 20.

from positions dictated by modernism whether they wanted to or not. But Wagner argues this has been a good thing for artistic production:

> What have women had to make art about, in the twentieth century? Most efforts at protest or utopianism, most attempts to imagine a world outside the body or to describe its interior or to invent another body entirely, most efforts to express presence or absence, voice or voicelessness, have had to reside somewhere in the modernist mansion (or make clear their refusal to do so), however uncomfortably, whatever the price. Consider the alternative.
>
> Modernism provided a better alternative because for much of its history it was one. . .[37]

Wagner's argument is compelling, but it fails to consider the intersection of gender and art in the historical moment, or perhaps the glory days, of the "modernist mansion." As we have seen, the dual discourse of avant-garde and kitsch refused to grant most women even the possibility of an artistic voice for almost three decades. When the walls began to crumble in the late-twentieth century, pioneering feminist artists such as Judy Chicago still had to contend with the public epithet of kitsch.[38]

While Wagner's formulation works quite well for her three (now canonical) women artists – O'Keeffe, Krasner, and Hesse – it does not bode well for the recovery of Mary E. Hutchinson as a modern artist. First, Wagner maintains the academic/modern or avant-garde/kitsch divide which is indelibly engraved in modernist art history. Second, Wagner's three artists (three women) performed gender and sexuality in a generally normative way which enabled them to negotiate the web of modernism sufficiently to

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[37] Wagner, *Three Artists*, 21.
[38] Hilton Kramer, "Art: Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party' Comes to Brooklyn Museum," *New York Times*, October 17, 1980, C1. ProQuest.

remain intelligible as modern artists long enough for feminist recovery to begin. Hutchinson's performance of gender and sexuality produced strikingly different results. She most certainly "engaged" modernism, but this engagement transformed her into a subject who was no longer intelligible as an artist and rendered her work unintelligible as art through the dominant modernist lens.

Wagner maintains the avant-garde/kitsch divide when she positions modern art as a better alternative because "it described and endorsed the representational effects to which artists turned as a means of investigating the relationship of their imagery to *other visual forms*. . ."[39] She delineates modernism's visual other as "commercial imagery," "advertising," "tradition," "painterly routine," and "nationalisms."[40] With this language, Wagner invokes the well-worn traits associated with academic art and kitsch including the nationalism of American Scene painting.

Wagner's "other visual forms" present a problem for Hutchinson's modernist recovery. While she allows for continuity in modernist engagement via "links to . . . tradition and its various reinventions," modernism as a better alternative also requires "distance from" tradition.[41] In general, Mary E. Hutchinson's figurative engagement with gender and sexuality fails to distance her sufficiently from the traditions of "academic art" for modernist recovery. She chose to forego abstraction (which becomes an avant-garde prerequisite) not because she lacked ambition, but because it disavowed her artistic dialogue with the social world. Late in her life, Hutchinson reflected privately on her relationship to art, abstraction, and communication: "I even have something to say in my paintings, - an admission no success-minded artist would admit, these days. I don't

[39] Wagner, *Three Artists*, 21. Emphasis mine.
[40] Wagner, *Three Artists*, 21.
[41] Wagner, *Three Artists*, 21.

mean a literary illustrative something to say, but I still mean a something to say, vaguely tied up with my personal philosophy."[42] While Hutchinson's reflections may now be heard as a conscious refusal of the "modernist mansion," she paid the price with the very intelligibility of her identity as an artist.

Within Wagner's formula of engagement, Hutchinson's *Self-Portrait* (c.1927), for example, fails to distance her from the Academy's authority because it proved to be a *successful* rite-of-passage. However, in direct contrast to Hutchinson's story traced through her student letters, Lee Krasner remembers the same student self-portrait exercise in a way that distances her from the National Academy. Krasner, who is now known for her abstract expressionist work, studied at the Academy at the same time as Hutchinson, but Krasner's narrative takes on the familiar trajectory of rebellion against academic authority and a progression toward abstraction. Krasner herself performs this modernist narrative in an interview first published in Cindy Nemser's *Art Talk* (1975):

> I spent that whole summer out in Huntington, Long Island, where my family lived then, with a mirror nailed to a tree doing a self-portrait. I submitted it in the fall to the committee so that I could get promoted to Life and I made it, but only "on probation." Then my new instructor accused me of playing a dirty trick by pretending to have painted the picture outdoors when I had really done it inside. No amount of explanation helped.[43]

Krasner's recollection of the exercise, which must also be understood as a product of modernism removed from the original event, disparages her academic instructors who failed to immediately recognize the talent of an emerging modern artist. Her story also

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[42] Mary E. Hutchinson, memoir fragment, 2nd draft, c.1960-1970. (MEH papers.)
[43] Cindy Nemser, *Art Talk: Conversations with Twelve Women Artists* (New York: Scribner, 1975), 84.

problematizes conceptions of realism. Krasner played by the academic rules of mimesis, but the Academicians failed to comprehend the gendered reality of the painting's production. I suspect her instructors failed to understand why anyone would choose to paint a self-portrait from a mirror nailed to a tree. However, in the same contemporary moment, Virginia Woolf highlights the struggle for women to carve out a private space for creative production in *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

Anne M. Wagner invokes Krasner's recollection for the distance it creates between the early self-portrait and the authority of the Academy. Wagner emphasizes the position of the Academicians as dupes deceived by the unconventional realism of an outdoor setting and the complexity of Krasner's perspective which "involves the erosion of boundaries between painter and spectator."[44] I contend Hutchinson complicates these boundaries even further by revealing the act of painting only through the colors saturating her palette and brushes. Wagner's reading hinges on placing distance between Krasner and the Academy by framing the painting as less than successful in the eyes of her instructors. Krasner's later rejection of figuration and her embrace of abstract expressionism authorizes her student *Self-Portrait* to be read as an engagement with modernism that provides critical distance from tradition. On the other hand, Hutchinson's student self-portrait appears to embrace tradition since she chose not to pursue abstraction.

Modern Contradictions

After painting her student self-portrait, Hutchinson left the image of the woman artist unexamined during her most productive and publicly visible years as an artist.

[44] Wagner, *Three Artists*, 111.

However, after circa 1939 she returned to the image of the independent woman artist again and again through self-portraits. As we have seen in queering kitsch, Hutchinson parodied the image of the woman artist marked by the "tools of the trade" in two of her kitschy pen and ink drawings. Her parody of the artist as a woman who makes a meatloaf epitomizes the paradox of the woman artist whose engagement with modernist constructs of gender and sexuality is rendered unintelligible as modernism through the dual modernist discourse of avant-garde and kitsch.

As we have also seen in the previous chapter, the "woman artist" with agency to speak and be heard occupied a very narrow spectrum of heternormativity by 1950. Hutchinson's queer commentary, along with that of Lesbia Beard, failed to resonate into the late-twentieth century. Anne M. Wagner's use of O'Keeffe, Krasner, and Hesse as "paradigmatic or exemplary" though not "entirely representative" because of "the sheer measure of success,"[45] considers only what counted as a speech act and only who could be heard in the vicinity of the closet. "Their lives and art... [*do not* – as Wagner claims] outline a social history of the twentieth-century female artist ([*even*] when she is white..."[46] All three worked within heteronormativity marked by marriage, and what's more, marriage to men who were artists![47] It is also easy to forget that even O'Keeffe practically disappeared from public view for a while before her feminist recovery in the 1970s. O'Keeffe was not the most talked about woman artist in 1950. Grandma Moses was.[48]

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[45] Wagner, *Three Artists,*10.
[46] Wagner, *Three Artists,*10.
[47] For the significance of the artist husband, see Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979).
[48] This statement is based on text-mining references made to each artist (Georgia O'Keeffe and Grandma Moses) in the *New York Times* from 1940-1990 produced through a ProQuest database search.

Hutchinson engages the psychological construction of woman as a non-normative sexual subject in her c.1942 self-portrait *Dream of Violets*. This formal work has no exhibition history and remains in the artist's estate. The painting depicts Hutchinson's exaggerated surreal head resting on the iconic scrolled headrest of the psychoanalyst's couch. The background is framed by two fluted classical columns of western civilization. One column stands erect, but the other is fractured and beginning to tumble. Two hands stretch towards one another from behind the columns with an array of violets between them.

Hutchinson portrays herself as nothing but a head within a psychological paradigm. She is only a giant psyche and her dreams are positioned for analysis. She dreams of violets. The flower stands in as an icon for woman and the gendering of colors marks these particular flowers as a blend of pink (femininity) and blue (masculinity). Hutchinson notably invokes gender in color through the pink and blue of her early painting *Two of Them*. I believe she also invokes shades of purple and lavender consistent with our contemporary association of the color with lesbian identity. In addition to *Dream of Violets,* Hutchinson portrays these colors prominently in her c.1934 profile portrait of her partner Joanna Lanza. In *Dream of Violets*, Hutchinson represents herself as a woman whose dream, her sexual desire, threatens the very structure of civilization from the perspective of psychoanalytic theory.

In her final self-portrait, *Mirrors for Reality* (c.1944), Hutchinson critiques the position of modern woman as artist. Although the location of the painting is unknown, Hutchinson retained a professionally produced, eight-by-ten, black and white photograph through which it may be read. In the image, the artist confronts herself through a multi-

Figure 23: Mary E. Hutchinson, *Dream of Violets* (c.1942)

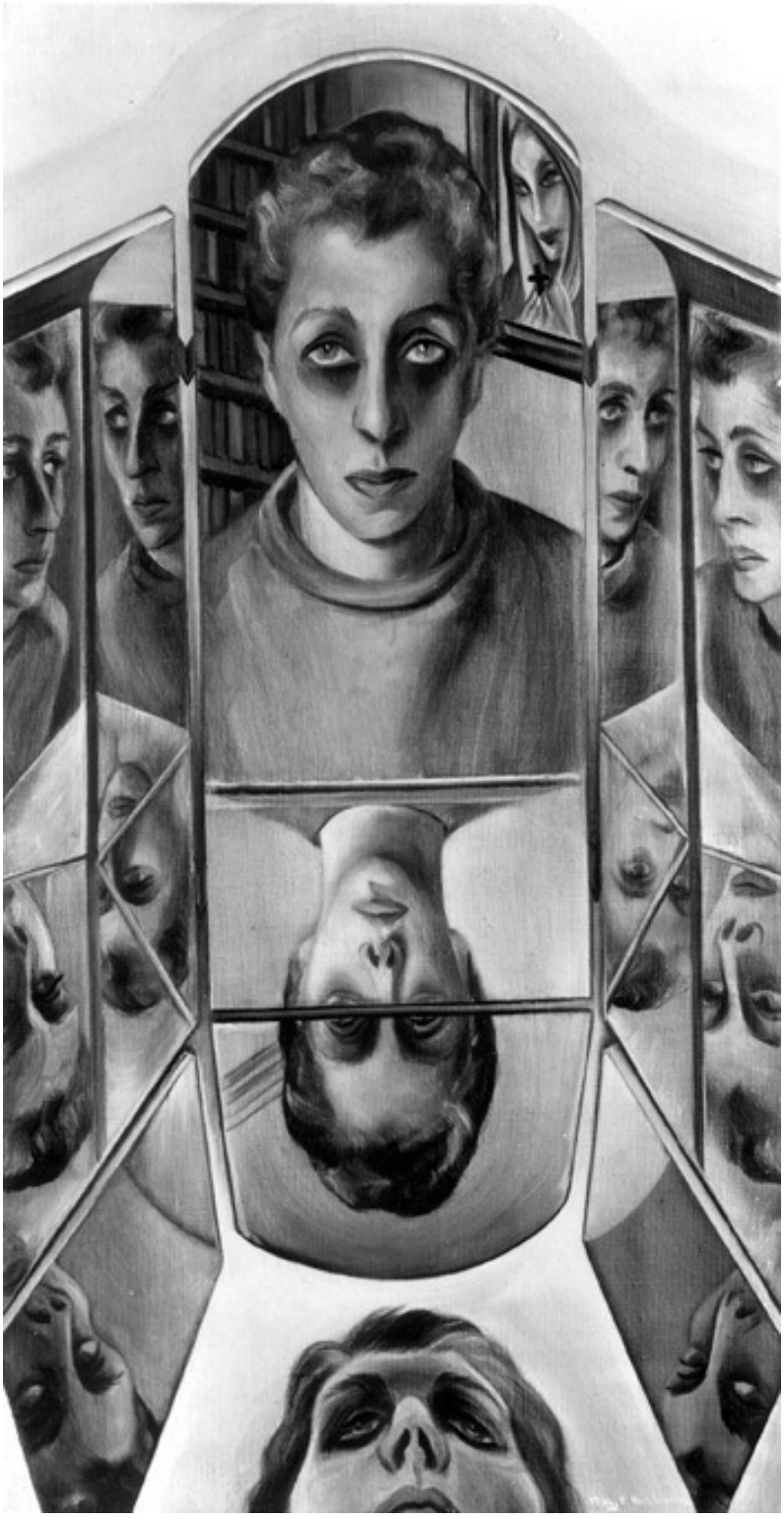

Figure 24: Mary E. Hutchinson, *Mirrors for Reality* (c.1944)

faceted hinged mirror which resembles that of a dressing table, but which produces multiple reflected and refracted images of herself. Hutchinson confronts not one image of herself, but rather many inflected images of images. A central mirror image is positioned as the focal point which suggests it to be the primary subject of the work. Within this frame Hutchinson's reflection dominates the foreground. The artist looks out from the center mirror frame in a conventional bust pose with her head and shoulders squarely facing forward. Her hair is short and wavy showing highlights, perhaps the first maturing shades of grey. Her lips hold a neutral position and form neither a smile nor frown. Though she holds her head straight forward, she gazes upward, which seems to accentuate deep shadows beneath her eyes. Her blouse is an unadorned pullover with a simple round collar. Behind Hutchinson's figure, a bookcase covers one wall as a symbol of intellect and education. From the other wall, a single painting of a shrouded woman holding a cross in the gesture of prayer watches over Hutchinson's shoulder. The painting depicted within *Mirrors for Reality* is one of Mary E. Hutchinson's own, entitled *Prayer* (c.1940). Its presence within the self-portrait signals an overt engagement with her relationship to the realm of art.

The hinged, oblique and faceted mirrors refract Hutchinson's central reflection into multiple images of herself gazing back at herself. The symbols of her intellect and profession fail to survive this process of refraction and replication. None of the refracted images flawlessly replicates another, but rather create multiple variations of the subject watching herself. Only an inverted reflected figure blinded by the mirror's limits fails to gaze back upon herself. Hutchinson's signature appears at the bottom edge of the canvas

like a white ghost beside her disembodied face – the one image of the artist which lies outside the mirror's frame.

Mirrors for Reality may be read, as Marsha Meskimmon suggests for all twentieth-century women's self-representation, as a subversive engagement with the dominant language of modern art or the avant-garde. Unlike *Self-Portrait* (c.1927) which historically marked Hutchinson's successful identification as an artist, this self-portrait fractures that identification. It asks which version of Mary E. Hutchinson is "real" and provides no clear answer. Hutchinson further complicates the subject with questions of epistemology by way of the mirror's frame. As Meskimmon suggests, the mirror operates simultaneously at multiple levels in women's self-portraiture.[49] First, the mirror, particularly in the guise of the dressing table, is a highly gendered frame associated with women. Although the mirror is a tool employed in the production of most self-representation, it appears on canvas as a device of representation much more frequently in the self-portraiture of women than men.[50] Beauvoir also associates the scene of the mirror with sexual self-awareness or "erotic transcendence" in which the young girl discovers herself as an "object." According to Beauvoir, "it seems to her that she has been doubled; instead of coinciding exactly with herself, she now begins to exist *outside*."[51] Hutchinson complicates replication and questions of inside and outside. Her fractured mirror not only doubles the subject but doubles her again and again until the original is hard to find and ambiguous even then. A single distorted disembodied face lies outside the frame of mirrors. Juxtaposed with the iconic artist's signature, Hutchinson's strange face gazes down like the mythical god-like artist who reproduces

[49] Meskimmon, *Art of Reflection*, 1-10.
[50] Frances Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self Portraits* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998).
[51] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 337. Emphasis in original.

nature with perfection. As we have seen, this alludes to the artist as genius which persistently excludes women. Hutchinson as an independent woman artist has become fractured and distorted between gendered epistemologies of political subjects and psychological ones.

The mirror is also conventionally associated with an objective way of knowing the world and mimesis in the representation of that knowledge. As we have seen, art criticism participated in games of truth during the mid-twentieth century with significant implications for "realism" in art. Realism as a mode of representation implied mimesis of nature which could be known objectively through science. Realism became equated with academic art, objective art, and finally kitsch. In other words, realism became the antithesis of modern art, abstraction, and the avant-garde. Hutchinson's many versions of herself question the notion of any one objective reality. Furthermore, *Mirrors for Reality* challenges the binary construction of truth in art through the interjection of a third epistemology. Her painting within the painting, *Prayer*, brings a spiritual way of knowing the world into the frame. Late in her life when Hutchinson reflected on the relationship of art and communication, she also thought about her epistemological position. "I understand and admire good abstract art, -- but I am not an abstractionist myself. I could fake it jolly well, and convincingly if I wanted to, -- but I would not want to. . . . Now don't get me wrong. I am not an academic painter. . . . I am millions of miles away from being a human color camera."[52] With *Mirrors for Reality*, Hutchinson positions herself as an artist in a highly gendered ambiguous space outside the limits of abstraction, realism, genius, and the avant-garde.

[52] Mary E. Hutchinson, memoir fragment, First draft, c.1960-1970. (MEH papers.)

The contradictions operating between modernist discourses of gender and art complicate recovery of Mary E. Hutchinson and her work through conventional narratives of twentieth-century American art. Hutchinson's devotion to figuration over abstraction disqualify her from the trajectory of the avant-garde which dominates interpretations of twentieth-century art. Likewise, her engagement with gender and sexuality confounds normative Americanist frameworks like the American Scene. It would be easy to position Hutchinson as an exception who engages "A Different American Scene," as Richard Meyer does with Paul Cadmus. But the more difficult task is to allow Hutchinson's story to challenge what we think we know about twentieth-century American art. Hutchinson's self-portraits tell the story of an independent woman artist who first succeeded as a subject seeking political equality, but later fractured and eventually disappeared in the paradox of the woman artist as a psychological subject. This epistemological shift created an unintelligible space which appears to contain absolutely nothing in narratives of twentieth-century art. However, Hutchinson's heterography suggests that she shared this space with a multitude, including Paul Cadmus, Lesbia Beard, and Marion Otis who first taught Hutchison art in Atlanta. Their lives contest not only the categories of art history, but the very notion of history. Hutchinson's absence of an oeuvre, which persists as what Foucault calls an "obstinate murmur,"[53] asks what is lost in the writing of history.

[53] Foucault, *Madness*, xxxi.

Conclusion

An Artist's Anecdote and a Death Without Cause

In the Introduction, we saw how Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz used the anecdote of the artist to construct a universal, psychological, male subject. In the same historical moment, Mary E. Hutchinson achieved public recognition and critical acclaim as an independent woman artist. The contradiction between these two simultaneous historical events is irreconcilable. Feminist recovery as a method of both women's history and art history is compelled to resolve this type of paradox. Feminist and queer theories and methods deconstruct the "truth" of the artist as male genius and expose the socio-economic contexts of oppression. They reveal essentialist notions of artist to be gendered social constructions. These are important scholarly endeavors. But resolving the paradox can also gloss over aspects of the contradiction that deserve our attention. The paradox also tells a story about "games of truth," epistemologies, and the lived experience of human subjects that are worth considering further. In the case of Hutchinson, the paradox between lived experience and the image of the artist presented by Kris and Kurz entails an epistemological rupture which gets lost in the recovery of subjects previously "hidden from history."[1] A seemingly trivial event in Mary E. Hutchinson's life traces the epistemological rupture between her lived experience as a credible subject and her transformation into an irrecuperable paradox. As I will show, the event occurs in 1926 and loops through history to reappear in 1934 as an artist's anecdote, and resurfaces in

[1] Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr., eds. *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: New American Library, 1989).

1955 as an empirical fact. The "fact" of the event remains stable, but its meaning changes over time and has real-life consequences for Hutchinson. Early in her life this event substantiates her status as a champion and an artist. Two decades later it disqualifies her as a credentialed professional.

In tracing Hutchinson's life through the archive, I briefly recounted her athletic achievement as the Y.W.C.A. Georgia state tennis champion for three consecutive years in the 1920s. Her third win in 1926 carried the extra high stakes of permanent possession of the championship cup. This appears to have motivated her to focus on tennis more than her studies at Agnes Scott College. She won the championship but failed her art class. At the time, her college art class appears to have mattered very little. By this time in her development as an artist, I suspect that her college art class failed to challenge her abilities. It is also very likely that she had already been admitted to the National Academy and knew that she would be leaving for New York in the fall. Hutchinson completed three years at Agnes Scott, but pursued her art career rather than college graduation. In 1926, the value of a college diploma also remained ambiguous for a woman.

In 1934, as Hutchinson first achieved recognition as a professional artist, the *Atlanta Constitution* framed the event as an artist's anecdote headlined: "Girl Who 'Flunked' Art for Tennis Wins Success at New York Exhibit." In response to her recent success, Hutchinson is reported as saying, "I guess they have forgotten that I flunked art at college. . . . But it wasn't really because I didn't like the work. You see, I was very much interested in tennis at the time and playing in tournaments didn't do my scholastic

record any good."[2] The artist's anecdote is a success story. Ultimately, Hutchinson succeeds at both art and tennis. In light of her success as an artist in New York, her scholastic record provides the punch line as an irrelevant quirk. Ironically, the anecdote may also be read as participating in the devaluation of art education in the games of truth which eventually privilege the artist as an exclusively male creative genius.

The event took on an entirely new meaning in 1955 when Hutchinson applied for a license to teach art in Atlanta's public schools. The state board of education turned her down. She held no college degree and although she did have three years of higher education, her grade point average fell below the state's threshold because she had "flunked" art in 1926.[3] Modernism brought new objective or scientific standards into play for public education.[4] Hutchinson had served as a supervisor of teachers for the Federal Art Project and on the faculty of the Atlanta Art Institute. After 1950 she taught art at the Washington Seminary where she herself had gone to school when it had been considered an elite institution. However, the modernization of education changed its structure and the Washington Seminary closed its doors in 1955. At the same time that avant-garde criticism transformed Hutchinson from artist to kitsch producer, the standardized modern grid of intelligibility used by the state board of education disqualified her as a teacher.

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[2] "Girl Who "Flunked" Art for Tennis Wins Success at New York Exhibit," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 7, 1934. (MEH papers).

[3] Georgia Board of Education to Mary Hutchinson, 1957. (MEH papers).

[4] Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I also suspect that racism played a strong role in the new standardization of teacher qualifications. In the wake of the 1954 Brown v. The Board of Education Supreme Court decision, the integration of Georgia schools and especially those in the urban center of Atlanta became a ferocious political issue. I suspect that the same standards which refused to recognize Hutchinson's five years of professional training at the National Academy as well as her professional experience, also refused to recognize the professional credentials of many African-American teachers.

This artist's anecdote reveals a complicated and non-linear web of historical events that produce subjects and make others disappear below the horizon of history. Hutchinson's flunked art experience shows that archived events are hardly transparent or self-evident. The values assigned to her experience change over time and are incommensurable with each other. The 1926 event repeats itself through different grids of intelligibility. Each repetition is "true," but each carries a different meaning. The difference between the intelligibility and unintelligibility of Mary E. Hutchinson's life and work is not *only* in the events traced through the archive. The difference is also in the epistemologies through which the events are known. The epistemological rupture which transformed Hutchinson from an emerging artist to an unqualified teacher participates in her absence of an oeuvre.

As discussed in the Introduction, Foucault traces the experience of madness in the absence of an oeuvre through overlapping gestures which associate the limits of language and history with the limits of intelligibility. He brings us to the artist and madness through Nietzsche, Van Gogh and Artaud.[5] Even though Foucault cautions against the lure "of the emotional appeal of the accursed artist" (M, 537), he points toward the "accursed artist" with the absence of an oeuvre. Unlike the leper and the libertine, Foucault does not hold the artist up as a figure of madness. Instead, he presents these specific artists as subjects on the edge of madness in the modern world to suggest a recurring theme in the space between intelligibility and unintelligibility, between sense and nonsense, and I suggest between art and kitsch. Foucault argues that, as examples, these oeuvres which disappear into unintelligibility are not historical evidence of any movement or grand event. "The frequency in the modern world of these oeuvres that

[5] Foucault, *Madness*, 535-538. Citations following appear parenthetically.

explode into madness no doubt proves nothing about the reason of this world, the meaning of these oeuvres, nor even about the relationships that are made and unmade between the real world and the artists who produce such oeuvre" (M, 536). Yet he urges that they be taken seriously, not because of an emotional appeal or through "the inverse and symmetrical danger of psychoanalysis" (M, 537), but because of "the constantly repeated presence of that absence" (M, 536).

Foucault contends that artists – "writers, painters and musicians" (M, 536) – fell into madness more frequently in the modern world through an epistemological split between the tragic and the critical. Foucault traces the split as:

> The paths taken by the figure of the cosmic vision and the incisive movement that is moral reflection, between the *tragic* and the *critical* elements, now constantly diverge, creating a gap in the fabric of the experience of madness that will never be repaired. On the one side is the ship of fools, where mad faces slowly slip away into the night of the world, in landscapes that speak of strange alchemies of knowledge, of the dark menace of bestiality, and the end of time. On the other is the ship of fools that is merely there for the instruction of the wise, an exemplary, didactic odyssey whose purpose is to highlight faults in the human character. (M, 26)

He describes the silhouette of the same ship of fools as it simultaneously diverges in two different ethical universes rather than progressing over linear time. The "gap in the fabric of the experience of madness that will never be repaired" (M, 26) is intelligible as neither wholly tragic nor critical and becomes lost in "the great *oeuvre* of the history of the world [which] is indelibly accompanied by the absence of an *oeuvre*" (M, xxxi).

What signals "the point at which it [oeuvre] becomes impossible, and where it must begin to silence itself" (M, 536)? How is an oeuvre unmade, abolished, annulled, done away with, destroyed? Perhaps for Mary E. Hutchinson it unraveled when the language of art turned in upon itself as though reason and unreason folded inside-out in a transvaluation of truth, as Linda Nochlin suggests, or in games of truth as Foucault would say. In Hutchinson's way of thinking, "To make a painting that only says something about paint, seems to me a waste of time and paint."[6] She stopped painting long before her death. And perhaps too, her oeuvre became impossible in the paradox of the "woman artist" produced in the dual discourse of avant-garde and kitsch. Hutchinson's oeuvre silenced itself.

The silence resonated with Hutchinson's death administrator who made her contribution to society intelligible in the process of certifying her death.[7] Even though the state school board failed to recognize her as a teacher, when asked in Section 11, USUAL OCCUPATION to "give kind of work done during most of working life, even if retired," the form grid declares not artist, but "art teacher." With this stroke of classification, Section 11 silences Mary E. Hutchinson's oeuvre in death. In order to produce an intelligible life in 1970, Hutchinson's death certificate codifies and archives silences which challenged the limits of gender, sexuality, art, and agency. These silences form an integral part of her absence of an oeuvre.

Foucault pays attention to the work of silence, and the subject dominates the opening questions of an interview with Stephen Riggins (1982). "One of the many things that a reader can unexpectedly learn from your work is to appreciate silence," Riggins

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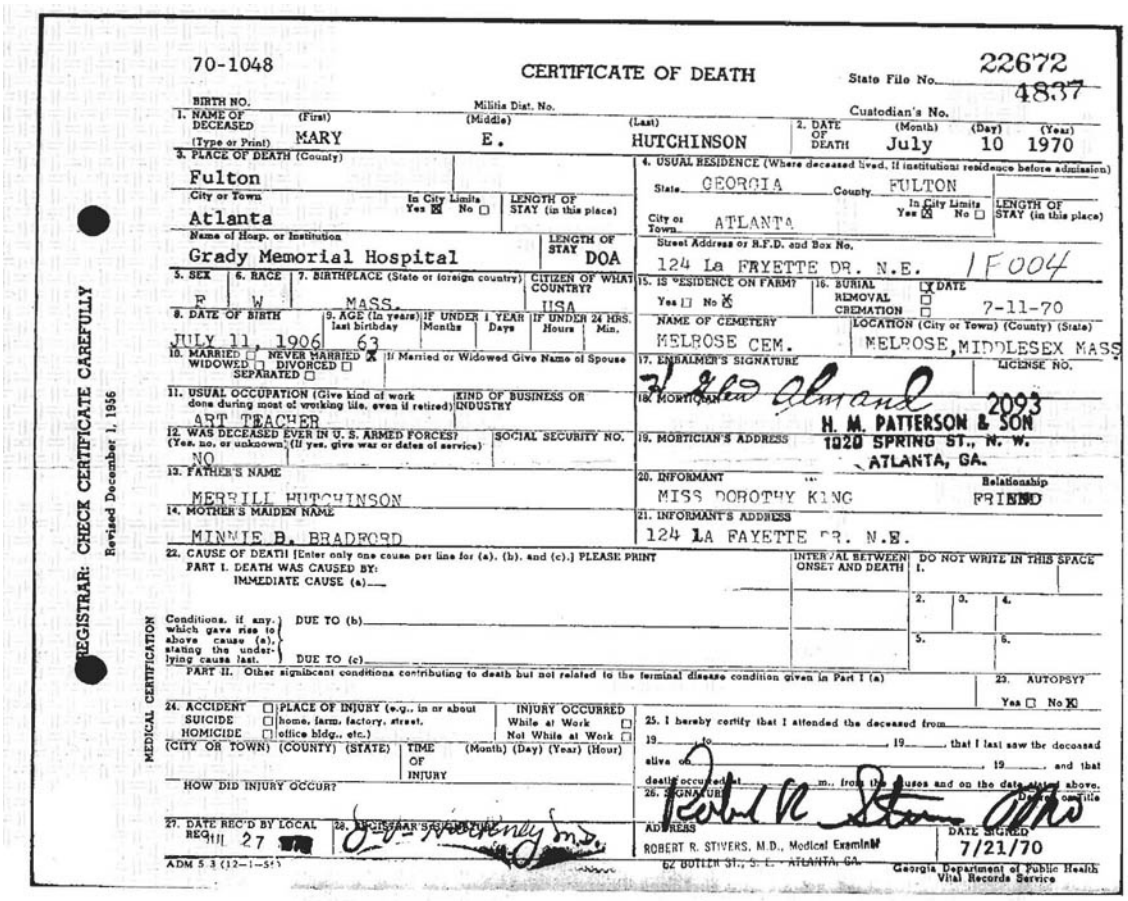
[6] Hutchinson, memoir fragment second draft.
[7] Certificate of Death, State file no. 22672, Mary E. Hutchinson, Georgia State Office of Vital Records.



70-1048

CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

State File No. 22672 4837

REGISTRAR: CHECK CERTIFICATE CAREFULLY

Revised December 1, 1956

BIRTH NO. | Militia Dist. No. | Custodian's No.

1. NAME OF DECEASED (Type or Print): (First) MARY (Middle) E. (Last) HUTCHINSON

2. DATE OF DEATH: (Month) July (Day) 10 (Year) 1970

3. PLACE OF DEATH (County): Fulton
City or Town: Atlanta — In City Limits Yes ☒ No ☐ — LENGTH OF STAY (in this place)
Name of Hosp. or Institution: Grady Memorial Hospital — LENGTH OF STAY: DOA

4. USUAL RESIDENCE (Where deceased lived, if institutional residence before admission)
State: GEORGIA County: FULTON
City or Town: ATLANTA — In City Limits Yes ☒ No ☐ — LENGTH OF STAY (in this place)
Street Address or R.F.D. and Box No.: 124 La FAYETTE DR. N.E. IF004

5. SEX: F | 6. RACE: W | 7. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country): MASS. | CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY? USA

8. DATE OF BIRTH: JULY 11, 1906 | 9. AGE (In years) last birthday: 63 | IF UNDER 1 YEAR: Months / Days | IF UNDER 24 HRS.: Hours / Min.

10. MARRIED ☐ NEVER MARRIED ☒ WIDOWED ☐ DIVORCED ☐ SEPARATED ☐ | If Married or Widowed Give Name of Spouse

11. USUAL OCCUPATION (Give kind of work done during most of working life, even if retired): ART TEACHER | KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY

12. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U. S. ARMED FORCES? (Yes, no, or unknown. If yes, give war or dates of service): NO | SOCIAL SECURITY NO.

13. FATHER'S NAME: MERRILL HUTCHINSON

14. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME: MINNIE B. BRADFORD

15. IS RESIDENCE ON FARM? Yes ☐ No ☒

16. BURIAL ☒ REMOVAL ☐ CREMATION ☐ | DATE: 7-11-70

NAME OF CEMETERY: MELROSE CEM. | LOCATION (City or Town) (County) (State): MELROSE, MIDDLESEX MASS

17. EMBALMER'S SIGNATURE: Fred Almand | LICENSE NO. 2093

18. MORTICIAN: H. M. PATTERSON & SON

19. MORTICIAN'S ADDRESS: 1020 SPRING ST., N. W. ATLANTA, GA.

20. INFORMANT: MISS DOROTHY KING | Relationship: FRIEND

21. INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: 124 LA FAYETTE DR. N.E.

22. CAUSE OF DEATH [Enter only one cause per line for (a), (b), and (c).] PLEASE PRINT

PART I. DEATH WAS CAUSED BY:
IMMEDIATE CAUSE (a)
Conditions, if any, which gave rise to above cause (a), stating the underlying cause last. DUE TO (b)
DUE TO (c)

INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH | DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.

PART II. Other significant conditions contributing to death but not related to the terminal disease condition given in Part I (a)

23. AUTOPSY? Yes ☐ No ☒

MEDICAL CERTIFICATION

24. ACCIDENT ☐ SUICIDE ☐ HOMICIDE ☐ | PLACE OF INJURY (e.g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.) | INJURY OCCURRED While at Work ☐ Not While at Work ☐
(CITY OR TOWN) (COUNTY) (STATE) | TIME OF INJURY (Month) (Day) (Year) (Hour)
HOW DID INJURY OCCUR?

25. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from 19__ to 19__, that I last saw the deceased alive on 19__, and that death occurred at __ m., from the causes and on the date stated above.

26. SIGNATURE: Robert R. Stivers M.D. | Degree or title
ADDRESS: ROBERT R. STIVERS, M.D., Medical Examiner, 62 BUTLER ST., S. E., ATLANTA, GA. | DATE SIGNED: 7/21/70

27. DATE REC'D BY LOCAL REG. JUL 27 1970

28. REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE

ADM 5 3 (12-1-5?)

Georgia Department of Public Health Vital Records Service

Figure 25: Death Certificate for Mary E. Hutchinson, 1970.

begins.[8] Foucault responds at length in appreciation of a kind of silence "which meant deep friendship, emotional admiration, even love" (ISR, 121). He elaborates on the potential of silence in personal relationships, and goes so far as to endorse cultivation of this personal form of "silence as a cultural ethos" (ISR, 122). However, he also acknowledges the experience of "some kinds of silence which implied very sharp hostility" (ISR, 121). The many silences which play out in Foucault's *Sexuality One* assume this hostility enacted in the public relationship between individuals and the state. Foucault suggests that hostile silence shadowed sexuality in a grid of intelligibility as "sex became an issue [between the state and the individual], and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it."[9]

The forms of silence imposed on and around sexuality which interest Foucault in *Sexuality One* were not always as obvious as the stifled laughter of boisterous and precocious children:

> Rather, it was a new regime of discourses. Not any less was said about it; on the contrary. But things were said in a different way; it was different people who said them, from different points of view, and in order to obtain different results. Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what

[8] Michel Foucault, "Michel Foucault: An Interview by Stephen Riggins," in *Michel Foucault Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984 (New York: The New Press, 1997), 121. Citations following appear parenthetically.
[9] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978, 1990), 26. Citations following appear parenthetically.

> one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (HS1, 27)

The new regime of discourses included "an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population*" (HS1, 138) Bodies, life, and death became subject to administration and management through new tools of statistics. Population and reproduction had to be captured by vital statistics of the social body. Life and death had to become certified events publicly and legally recorded. Birth and death certificates began systematically normalizing natality and mortality around the same time that Foucault suggests the homosexual became "a species," along with "all those minor perverts whom nineteenth-century psychiatrists entomologized by giving them strange baptismal names" (HS1, 43) These new discursive productions administered many forms of silence alongside captured data (HS1, 12).

Mary E. Hutchinson's death (and life) are captured and coded by her "Certificate of Death" authorized on July 21, 1970 by the Fulton County (Atlanta) Medical Examiner. The limits of discourse silenced sexuality in certifying her death; section 20 documents INFORMANT – Miss Dorothy King; RELATIONSHIP – friend. Alongside what is said – "friend" – are "the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name" (HS1, 27). Here "deep friendship, emotional admiration, [and] even love" (ISR, 121) vanish in the indifferent silence of bio-power.

"I have been unrestrained in my grief…," Dorothy King begins a letter to herself in the wake of Mary Elisabeth's death. "I have been unrestrained in my grief – and I know that the loss of my beloved friend is beyond measure of words – but somehow – the words have been an outlet – a release – which I have seemed to depend upon for some kind of comfort – talking – talking – talking – thinking – re-living – longing . . ."[10] The stated – "friend" – is not in opposition to the silence of sexuality. The relationship is not false. "There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say" (HS1, 27) – lover, partner of twenty-five years.

Little love notes shared through slips of paper and left on kitchen counters, tucked into pockets, or laid softly on pillows murmur through the silence of history as a persistent white noise:

- Cheers, darling! See you early Sat. aft. – Love ME Love to your Mother
- Remember darling that love heals, and love is accumulative, and I love you more than ever – ME
- D Smell the rose, darling, and look deep under the petal. It will tell you, tonight will unfold for us as sweetly and richly as the rose petal unfolds – ME[11]

Three casual notes – never intended for public eyes, never meant for my eyes – ink the contours of RELATIONSHIP. Tiny slips of paper folded, saved and cherished, not to be discarded. Moments of absence anticipating presence infused with emotion, memory, metaphor, layers of living, injury, imagination, and desire.

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[10] Dorothy King, "A Letter to Myself" July 30, 1970. (MEH papers.)
[11] Mary E. Hutchinson to Dorothy King, undated notes. (MEH papers.)

Section 20 INFORMANT – Miss Dorothy King; RELATIONSHIP – friend. Grief overflows Section 20's grid. Dorothy, or rather Dottie to her friends, reminds herself, "my continued lack of restraint could be so easily misunderstood – as indeed it might well already have been – so I must guard my words zealously – and in so doing – I will protect my love and devotion."[12] Danger is present. The administrative gaze remains vigilant against any signs of deviance to ensure the health of the social body.

Section 20 exerts positive concepts of power and techniques of normalization through a dispositif that Foucault describes as the plague model of quarantine and surveillance. The quarantine model worked on the assumption that the individual exposed to plague might survive and be recovered into the community. Rather than exclusion, the neighborhood partitioning of quarantine facilitated continuous surveillance and administrative control by summoning the healthy to appear at their windows.[13] The plague model seeks to "maximize the health, life, longevity, and strength of individuals" (Lectures, 46) within the community in order to produce a "healthy population" (Lectures, 46) by recovering or re-qualifying questionable individuals. The plague model creates a standard of health, a "norm of health" (Lectures, 47), and demands conformity through constant processes of observation and analysis. The "norm of health" required Miss Dorothy King (Section 20 INFORMANT) to publicly conform to the limits of her window labeled "friend." She and the DECEASED (Section 1) Mary E. Hutchinson, NEVER MARRIED (Section 10), a statement which marked them publicly as questionable individuals who failed to contribute (and had *never* contributed) to the production of a

[12] King, "A Letter to Myself."
[13] Michel Foucault, *Lectures at the Collège De France, 1974-1975*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003), 45-46. Citations following appear parenthetically.

"healthy population" (Lectures, 46) through the institution of marriage. Dorothy "must guard . . . [her] words zealously. . ."[14]

Dorothy's compelled discretion scrapes against a grievable life. Judith Butler asks in *Precarious Life*, "What *makes for a grievable life*?" and reminds us of the social hierarchy of grief.[15] She says, "We have seen it already in the genre of the obituary, where lives are quickly tidied up and summarized, humanized, usually married, or on the way to be, heterosexual, happy, monogamous."[16] In my research, I read through scrolls of microfilm looking for that humanized, summarized portrait of Mary Elisabeth Hutchinson's grievable life in her obituary. I found only a terse report of her death in the public record:

> HUTCHINSON – Miss Mary E. of 124 LaFayette Dr. NE died July 10, 1970. Surviving is a cousin, Miss Geraldine Andrews, DeWitt, N.Y. Private services were held Saturday July 11, at Spring Hill. The remains were taken to Melrose, Mass. for interment.[17]

Sexuality haunts the limit of discourse as "something akin to a secret whose discovery is imperative, a thing abusively reduced to silence" (HS1, 34).

On Hutchinson's death certificate, the cause of death remains blank. Foucault suggests that "death is power's limit" (HS1, 138). What limits of discourse and power did Robert R. Stivers, M.D. bump against to reduce CAUSE OF DEATH (Section 22) to a silence? In fact left blank. Hutchinson's death is a death without cause.[18]

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[14] King, "A Letter to Myself."
[15] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 20. Emphasis in original.
[16] Butler, *Precarious Life*, 32.
[17] *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, July 12, 1970. Under funeral notices.
[18] My "receipt of services" from "Vital Records" which accompanied the requested copy of Hutchinson's Certificate of Death, State file no. 22672, includes the clerical notation by SR of "Death w/o Cause."

Section 22, CAUSE OF DEATH, opens the MEDICAL CERTIFICATION of death. Robert R. Stivers, M.D. is after all the Medical Examiner. Death becomes a medical matter folded forcefully back into health though paradoxically "separated by a strict boundary" (HS1, 27) from life. A paradox only in relation to a single life, such as Mary E. Hutchinson's life, but not a contradiction at all in relation to the life of a population, the subject of bio-power. CAUSE OF DEATH, PART I and PART II produces a two-part death with sub-sections (a), (b), and (c) including strict instructions to "Enter only one cause per line." What was the IMMEDIATE CAUSE (a) and what were the "Conditions, if any, which gave rise to above cause (a), stating the underlying cause last." If three causes still leave death incomplete, list in PART II "Other significant conditions contributing to death but not related to the terminal disease condition." It is all about disease made intelligible within the rigidly enforced confines of carefully measured boxes (or windows) within the grid of a form (or the form of a grid).

Section 24 takes up the social side of death: ACCIDENT, SUICIDE, HOMICIDE. Just check the appropriate box. If as Foucault claims, "death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most 'private'" (HS1, 138), then the death certificate seeks to reclaim for society that moment of escape, the event of death. It stabilizes silences at the limits of discourse in the archive in much the same way that Foucault's notion of "the absence of an oeuvre" stabilizes the limits of history. What CAUSE OF DEATH pushes beyond "the absolute limit of discourse" (HS1, 27)? Even in certified death, Mary E. Hutchinson hovers on the edge of undecidability, the edge of intelligibility, perhaps even queer.

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