



At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America

Laura R. Prieto

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This engaging cultural history examines the emergence of a professional identity for American women artists. By focusing on individual sculptors, painters, and illustrators, Laura Prieto gives us a compelling picture of the prospects and constraints faced by women artists in the United States from the late eighteenth century through the 1930s.

Prieto tracks the transformation from female artisans and ladies with genteel "artistic accomplishments" to middle-class professional artists. Domestic spaces and familial metaphors helped legitimate the production of art by women. Expression of sexuality and representation of the nude body, on the other hand, posed problems for these artists. Women artists at first worked within their separate sphere, but by the end of the nineteenth century "New Women" grew increasingly uncomfortable with separatism, wanting ungendered recognition. With the twentieth century came striking attempts to reconcile domestic lives and careers with new expectations; these decades also ruptured the women's earlier sense of community with amateur women artists in favor of specifically professional allegiances. This study of a diverse group of women artists--diverse in critical reception, geographic location, race, and social background--reveals a forgotten aspect of art history and women's history.

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