

lands, Jacobsen-Konefall retrospectively asks how the show “figures computation as responsive to the culturally and materially configured animacies that power it” (211). Noting that the exhibition, like the entire urban centre of Winnipeg, was powered by hydroelectric dams with devastating ecological effects on rivers that sustained Indigenous ways of life, Jacobsen-Konefall asks how we might “care about Ininev rivers while apprehending these works of electronic and computer art” (206).

The third and final section of *Variable Conditions* comprises nine original interviews with artists, researchers, and curators who appear in the previous chapters. The interviews further flesh out the network of para-computational experimentation that the book seeks to define, although it bears noting that Frenkel and Zainub Verjee, media artist and former executive director of Vancouver artist-run-centre Western Front, stand out as exceptions to the otherwise exclusively white and male canon assembled in this section. Given the capaciousness of the term para-computational, one might have expected greater diversity among the artists interviewed. Cree-Métis artist Cheryl L'Hirondelle, whose reflections on digital infrastructures and Indigenous lifeworlds are integral to the line of argumentation pursued in Jacobsen-Konefall's chapter, would seem an obvious choice. Likewise, Kanien'kehá:ka artist Skawennati work's *Cyber PowWow* (1997–2004) also receives a passing reference in the book, but her contributions to computational art merit more attention.

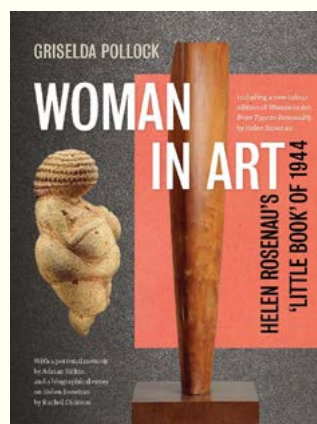
Lauder's editorial decision to dedicate such a significant swathe of the book to allowing practitioners to speak in their own words suggests that *Variable Conditions* not only provides a critical contribution to the under-explored arena of Canadian media arts, but itself operates as an archive. Indeed, the book provides an invaluable corrective to the insufficient recognition of twentieth-century computational art practices within arts institutions, as well as the ongoing challenges associated with exhibiting and preserving these pioneering art works.

*Variable Conditions* collects and crystallizes traces of this important history in the face of the technical obsolescence that threatens the memory of these innovative art practices. The book offers important reflections on the institutional and industrial

underpinning of computational art, as well as how these entanglements informed creative imaginings and modes of resistance. Indeed, Mezei refers to his own practice as “sort of dreaming out loud” (236). Given the aggressive future-oriented-ness of contemporary tech discourse, revisiting the dreams of the past is a necessary critical intervention.

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- 1 These include *White Heat, Cold Logic: British Computer Art 1960–1980*, ed. Paul Brown et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); *Mainframe Experimentalism: Early Computing and the Foundations of Digital Art*, ed. Hannah B. Higgins and Douglas Kahn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); and Zabet Patterson, *Peripheral Vision: Bell Labs, the S-C 4020, and the Origins of Computer Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023).



Griselda Pollock with Adrian Rifkin and Rachel Dickson  
*Woman in Art: Helen Rosenau's "Little Book" of 1944*

New Haven & London: Yale University Press; Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2023  
400 pp., 140 colour & b/w illus.  
\$61.95 (hardcover)  
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/Nicholas Chare/

In 1944, a small English avant-garde press established by Anthony Froshaug, Isomorph, published Jewish refugee art historian Helen Rosenau's *Woman in Art: From Type to Personality*. In a letter, Rosenau would later modestly refer to the monograph as a “little book.” Now,

nearly eighty years later, *Woman in Art* has been reissued alongside critical essays by Griselda Pollock, a personal memoir by Adrian Rifkin, and a biographical essay by Rachel Dickson. The elegant 100-page coil-bound original with its fifty-five black-and-white illustrations has been supplanted by a hefty hardback, lavishly illustrated in colour, the sheer scale of which works to physically affirm the substantial intellectual import of Rosenau's original text.<sup>1</sup> This is a "big book" in multiple senses. The cover of the republication marks it as in homage to the original but also distinctive from it. Froshaug's original design combined the paleolithic statuette known as the "Venus of Willendorf" with Barbara Hepworth's 1937 modernist sculpture *Single Form*. It used three views of the figurine (dorsal, in profile, frontal) with the final, frontal view overlaid by Hepworth's sculpture.<sup>2</sup> Both artworks were reproduced in monochrome, Hepworth's in grey and the Willendorf figure in red.<sup>3</sup> The new cover again includes the paleolithic figurine and Hepworth's sculpture, but the former is reproduced only in profile and sidelined, positioned to the left of the modernist sculpture, as if admiring it. The cover features a granite-grey backdrop overlaid with a red rectangle, retaining something of the monochromaticity of the original and establishing a complex interplay between past and present. In her commentary on *Woman in Art*, Pollock echoes this relationship, taking pains to emphasize the contemporary cultural significance of Rosenau's intellectually challenging feminist intervention in art's histories (337). The 1944 book signals its wartime moment of production but, as Pollock emphasizes, it possesses continuing relevance as an effort to think *with* rather than simply *about* art, respecting art's own capacity for reflection (345).

Rosenau's name is unfamiliar to many of today's art historians. Under the tutelage of Erwin Panofsky, she completed her first doctorate in 1930 in Hamburg on the topic of Cologne Cathedral. She was subsequently forced to flee Nazi Germany for Switzerland and then London, where she arrived in autumn 1933. In London, Rosenau studied for a second doctorate (awarded in 1940) relating to synagogue architecture. By 1939 she was already engaged in a third major project, guided by the Hungarian cultural sociologist Karl Mannheim, also a Jewish

refugee. This project, spanning prehistory to the contemporary, employed a historical-sociological hermeneutics to examine what art revealed about shifts in the social conception of Woman through time. For Rosenau, Woman as figure in aesthetic practices such as art provided both a means by which ideology (in the Mannheimian sense of a fixed, outmoded, but not necessarily dominant way of thinking) was instantiated and a resource for formulating utopian notions or ways of imagining the world that looked beyond the constraining framework of a given historical moment. Mannheim thought of utopias as "ideas and values in which are contained in condensed form the unrealized and the unfulfilled tendencies which represent the needs of each age."<sup>4</sup> Within the context of art, Rosenau seems to detect utopian aspirations in, for example, a self-portrait by Renée Sintenis identified as exhibiting "almost masculine appeal" and an absence of "distinct feminine traits" (154–55).<sup>5</sup> Rosenau here gestures to Sintenis's gender non-conformity, recognizing in her work a novel effort to break with sexually-determined "attitude" (155). Sintenis's portrait almost defies Rosenau's efforts to describe and account for it, this very resistance demonstrating its utopian character, indicating how it looks ahead to what would nowadays be called a non-binary aesthetic. Rosenau combined a sociological framework with an aesthetic sensibility inspired by Warburgian approaches to art history, attending to affective continuities in representations of women across time while remaining sensitive to Mannheimian moments of rupture and innovation. One of the outcomes of the project was *Woman in Art*, which sold out soon after publication. Isomorph unfortunately ceased operating shortly afterwards and Rosenau's volume faded from view.

The new edition of *Woman in Art* provides a crucial corrective to feminist histories of art that still identify the beginnings of feminism in art history in the early 1970s, frequently namechecking Linda Nochlin as originator.<sup>6</sup> Nochlin herself viewed feminist art history as "embryonic" in 1970.<sup>7</sup> There is also a tendency to view feminism as in hiatus between the campaigns for women's suffrage of the 1880s–1920s and the second-wave feminism that emerged in the 1960s. Pollock, however, complexifies this historical narrative and develops a

compelling argument for viewing Rosenau, working in the 1940s, as an unjustly neglected but pioneering feminist social historian of art. During the 1940s, when Rosenau was seeking to establish herself, women pursuing careers in art history were rare, yet she was far from alone. In London, Gertrud Bing, Margot Eates, Hartley Ramsden, and fellow refugee art historians Adelheid Heimann and Erna Mandowsky, for example, were active in the field. Within a francophone context, Agnès Humbert (a social historian who, like Rosenau, published a monograph on Jacques-Louis David), Hanna Levy (another refugee art historian), and Rose Valland immediately come to mind. There were also many women working in art history outside Europe.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Francesco Ventrella's important ongoing historical reappraisal of British connoisseurs such as Maud Cruttwell, Constance Jocelyn Ffoulkes, and, most notably, Vernon Lee, demonstrates that women were shaping the discipline in important ways earlier in the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> What sets Rosenau apart from such trailblazing scholars is her attention to Woman (as a concept and a way of being in the world) in art, a sustained engagement motivated by feminist politics that involves considerable analysis of art by women (making up about a third of the artworks discussed).

Pollock's essays bookending the new edition of *Woman in Art* deftly outline the intellectual traditions from which Rosenau's research emerged and provide an inspiring close reading of the book's form and content. Chapters address aspects such as the significance of the cover and title, the use of images in the book (they are not simply illustrative but make arguments), and the absent bibliography (here reconstructed). Pollock explains that Rosenau's Woman as "type" manifests through history in recurring, if changing, formulations such as "mother" or "wife." Through social processes of "typecasting," she is sometimes reduced to generalized categories, deprived of individuality. "Personality," by contrast, equates to individualization. In art, it emerges through self-imaging (such as the self-portrait) or distinctive aesthetic practices (a personal style) that can be abstract or figurative. Pollock emphasizes that Rosenau had a complex understanding of temporality and did not view the move from "type" to "personality" as neatly linear. Instances of "personality"

historically sometimes occurred alongside art reinforcing visions of "type." The self-portraits of Renaissance artist Sophonisba Anguissola, for example, communicate her personality rather than merely stressing what Rosenau refers to elsewhere as "sex charm" or physical attractiveness.<sup>10</sup> Despite eschewing a straightforward linear, evolutive narrative, Rosenau clearly believed the twentieth century was a key juncture for Woman in art (and, by extension, society). She writes of the "present transitional moment" in which, by "transforming necessary limitations into means of self-expression, by transcending from the concept of procreation to creation, woman is developing from Type to Personality" (158). This moment is one of immense possibilities and, due to the rise of totalitarianism, of alarming menace.

In an essay published in 1942, Rosenau wrote about the "Nazi crushing of individuality" and of women's independence.<sup>11</sup> *Woman in Art* clearly responds to totalitarianism's assault on the rights of women. Pollock argues that it is an "anti-fascist statement" (37), reaffirming feminism in the shadow of Nazism's attacks on women's emancipation. In Nazi Germany, the role of Woman was motherhood and women were depersonalized, reduced to "breeding machines for 'warriors.'"<sup>12</sup> Exiled in London, Rosenau refused to conform to "type," enacting resistance to Nazi gender ideology through her scholarship with *Woman in Art* (written in her third language, that of the country that had granted her refuge) forming an important expression of her personality. The book is, however, more than a feminist statement. Pollock's intersectional approach is also attentive to its status as an assertion of Jewish resilience by a victim of antisemitism. Personality, in this context, becomes a concept that is crucial to opposing not just the limiting violence of categorization as it relates to Woman but also the dehumanization that accompanies categorizing people into racial "types." *Woman in Art*, through its very existence, gestures to how processes of self-representation and affirmations of personality can act to contest such dehumanization. The book is therefore of considerable interest to historians examining modes of Jewish intellectual resistance during the Holocaust.

While Rosenau clearly has current historical and intellectual relevance, Dickson, Pollock and Rifkin are principally

engaged in a work of remembrance and, particularly through Pollock's contribution, an act of restitution, according a pathbreaking feminist art historian the belated recognition she is clearly due. This recognition has been made possible, in no small part, by Rifkin, undoubtedly Rosenau's most distinguished student, who has continually championed her work (it was he who introduced Pollock to it). The "portrait" he provides of Rosenau in *Woman in Art* is not a work of intellectual hagiography but is, rather, intended to communicate something of his mentor's haute bourgeois personality: she was a committed leftwing intellectual, highly cultured, with an unashamed appreciation for the finer things in life. The memoir adds little to our knowledge of Rosenau as a thinker of social relations but does give a poignant feel for her as a person: erudite, engaged, generous and witty. Dickson's chapter supplements Rifkin's touching recollections with important facts about Rosenau's academic career and her many scholarly achievements. Pollock's critical engagement constructs a crucial historical intellectual context for understanding *Woman in Art*. It is remarkable for its deference and self-effacement. Pollock largely sets aside the theoretical frameworks that have contributed to her own ground-breaking work as a feminist art historian, enabling her the better to foreground Rosenau's singular contribution. Her ability to shift register in her writing, to find the right tenor for a given subject, is truly extraordinary as the distinct styles of her three most recent major publications attest: the commentary chapters in *Woman in Art*; *Charlotte Salomon and the Theatre of Memory* (2018); and *Killing Men & Dying Women* (2022). Dickson, Pollock and Rifkin are each sensitive to their roles as guardians of the legacy of a particular personality and together they have provided Rosenau with an eloquent and fitting memorial.

As a work of memory, *Woman in Art* does, nevertheless, have some limitations. A fuller engagement with the reviews (of which there are at least three) Rosenau's book garnered in 1944 would have enhanced understanding of the hostile reception her research initially received. A critic for *The Contemporary Review* who published their assessment of *Woman in Art* under the initials S.H.S. (conceivably Stephen Spender, who has matching initials and was a regular

contributor to the publication), for instance, observed in their analysis of the book that Rosenau was a "noted controversialist on feminism."<sup>13</sup> Although recognizing her learnedness as it showed in the book's "critical apparatus" and describing her survey as "bold," the writer ultimately criticizes Rosenau's sociological approach, espousing instead the benefits of a purely iconographic method and opining that the volume "does not always avoid the sweeping generalizations and far-fetched analogies so dear to German sociologists." The review gives a strong sense of the British conservatism against which Rosenau struggled to make herself heard. An equally critical appraisal of the book appeared in *Horizon*, in which Hartley Ramsden, although affirming Rosenau's erudition, is unable to reconcile her sociologically informed approach with the analysis of art and unsure "whether it is the portrayal of women or the execution of work by women that is thought to be significant" (her emphasis), as if a study cannot do both.<sup>14</sup> More damagingly, Ramsden misreads Rosenau as essentializing, suggesting *Woman in Art* views "sexual distinctions [as] decisive" and that the book is, therefore, by implication, retrograde at a moment when "women are being conscripted on an equal basis with men." Ramsden's review is probably inflected by her sensitivity to being defined by assumptions about gender (the review, like most of her writings, is published using the gender indeterminate first initials E.H. and her surname). It nonetheless gives a powerful indication that *Woman in Art* was a book ahead of its time, with readers such as Ramsden incapable of grasping the aims and consequence of a sociologically informed history of art. The 2023 reissue leaves the impression the publication of *Woman in Art* passed unnoted, but this is clearly not the case. It attracted a readership in art circles in the late 1940s although its reception was sometimes unfavorable.

Pollock's critical essays do not shy away from identifying gaps in Rosenau's knowledge of some of her case studies (such as limitations of the reading she offers of Paula Modersohn-Becker) or from drawing attention to the problematic vocabulary employed by her to discuss non-European art (297). Pollock's engagement with Rosenau's readings of the paleolithic figurine historically referred to as the "Venus of Willendorf" is, however, disappointing as, while recognizing

its limitations, it still attributes the origin of the “Venus” designation to the influence of Western classicism (284). Rosenau, who engages with the statuette twice, is clearly skeptical of the term “Venus” because she views it as symptomatic of sexualized understandings of the carving (113). It is now known that, in the specific case of the Willendorf figure, the name “Venus” was not inspired by the Roman goddess of love and sexuality but rather derived from the racist beliefs of the archaeologists Josef Bayer and Josef Szombathy, who interpreted it as depicting a woman of a “lower race.”<sup>15</sup> Subsequent Nazi ideas of racial hygiene originate in the same pseudoscientific framework, identifying Black and Jewish people as racially inferior.<sup>16</sup> Rosenau’s decision to refer to “Venus” using scare quotes indexes her wish to free the sculpture from sexist stereotyping, but the gesture now gains additional gravitas when viewed through the prism of the racism underpinning the “Venus” label.

The Willendorf figure is currently perceived very differently from when it was discovered in 1908, with the race theories that shaped how it was then interpreted long discredited. The statuette physically remains the same, but society has changed. These changes extend to feminism, the republication of *Woman in Art* emerging at a time when feminist politics are engaging with the implications of posthumanism. In this context, perhaps the physical changes to the format of the book seem irrelevant but I want to conclude this review by taking them into consideration. Rifkin, for example, has always been sensitive to how different editions of a specific book can have a major impact on its reception and the kinds of arguments it is able to make.<sup>17</sup> As Pollock emphasizes repeatedly, the physical design of the 1944 version of *Woman in Art* added significantly to its message. The book originally cost a relatively cheap five shillings (about \$25 CAD today) so as to appeal to a broad readership and because it was shorter than originally intended (105; 199). Few readers today, however, will have the opportunity to consult the first edition.<sup>18</sup> A damaged copy that once belonged to Lawrence Gowing was recently on the market for £1030 (\$1800 CAD). The high price attests to both the rarity and desirability of the avant-garde original.

The Paul Mellon Centre book is also aesthetically pleasing, embodying

high production values, such as a stitched binding and thick, glossy pages. It nonetheless seems far removed physically from its predecessor. Rosenau praised the “care and taste” with which Froshaug gave her study “its external form” (105). The designer was sensitive to the complex relationship that exists between a text being set and the choice of type, with typographic language conceived as an element that should resonate with the meaning of the text it is intended to transmit.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, the subtitle of Rosenau’s work—“from *type* to personality”—probably spoke differently to Froshaug the typographer, encouraging him to develop a design that echoed Rosenau’s outlook. Future Isomorph books were intended to employ the same binding and typography, but it is clear this was conceived while working on Rosenau’s text. Is there an argument that the form as well as the content of the 1944 version of *Woman in Art* contributes to its message? The 2023 reissue readily stands erect, tall and thick, whereas the 1944 coil-bound *Woman in Art*, less rigid in conception, lays flat with relative ease. It can be held and read with comfort, whereas the 2023 tome weighs on the reader and is literally harder to get to grips with. The original favours the horizontal over the vertical, a horizontality that facilitates the paralleling of images and of text and image (fostering conversations across both). At no point in the original is one image placed above another and most are reproduced at a similar height. This is not the case in the reissue. Pollock argues that the 1944 format enabled “the running visual track to perform its own unspoken relays of meaning and difference” (199). The reference to a running track implies something of a cinematic quality to the image arrangement, yet the 2023 republication opts to read the use of images as comparable to Warburg’s *Bilderatlas*, a method of displaying multiple images on panels that has been read retrospectively as rhizomatic. Rosenau’s links with Warburg lend powerful support to this interpretation but her sociological framework makes it seem as likely that she was seeking to trace a succession of examples of “type” and “personality” across time as instances of ideology and utopia in the Mannheimian sense. This visual dimension to her argument, employing a linear but not teleological method, is severely impaired by the physical design of the 2023 version of *Woman in Art*.

As a work of memory, the republication also replaces the fragile beauty of the original with a robust grandeur, the triumph against adversity of the Isomorph edition, marked as it is by wartime conditions, somewhat lost. It is clear, nonetheless, that this substantial book will make Rosenau's stunning contribution to art history and, particularly, feminist art history, that much harder to ignore, finally laying to rest the Nochlin origin myth that is so pervasive. The Paul Mellon imprimatur coupled with Pollock's sophisticated positioning of Rosenau's work will hopefully render it permissible, even obligatory, to look beyond the 1970s when tracing feminist art history's complex past.

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- 1 Eckart Marchand of the Warburg Institute has made remarkable efforts to track down the images used by Rosenau but there are, of necessity, some replacements in the reissue. There are also additions, such as the portrait of Vera Mukhina by Mikhail Nesterov (129).
- 2 The overlay can be interpreted metaphorically but the abstract form also literally obscures the figurine's carefully modeled labia majora, probably reflecting contemporary ideas about propriety. Although Froshaug's cover design is discussed at length in the republication, the "censorship" at work in the original passes unmentioned.
- 3 As the paleolithic statuette bears traces of red ochre (a substance often symbolically linked with menstruation and sometimes employed practically to control menorrhagia), the colour Froshaug uses is coincidentally in keeping with its original appearance.
- 4 Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1936), 179 (§76).
- 5 Rosenau is describing a 1923 terracotta self-portrait that is reproduced in profile in the 1944 text. The sculpture appears far more craggy and rough-hewn than the 1933 version reproduced in colour in the reissue.
- 6 See, for example, Paris Spies-Gans's recent reference to Nochlin's foundational status in "Why Do We Think There Have Been No Great Women Artists? Revisiting Linda Nochlin and the Archive," *The Art Bulletin* 104, no. 44 (2022): 70–94; 71. Katy Hessel suggests art by women was only acknowledged historically after Nochlin's and Ann Sutherland Harris's 1976 exhibition *Women Artists: 1550–1950*. See Hessel, *The Story of Art Without Men* (London: Hutchison Heinemann, 2022), 16. Nochlin is also viewed as having pioneered feminist art history by franco-phone scholars such as Anne Lafont: see Linda Nochlin, Anne Lafont and Todd Porterfield, "Entretien avec Linda Nochlin," *Perspective* 1 (2015): 63–76; 67.
- 7 Linda Nochlin, "Starting from Scratch: Linda Nochlin Traces the Beginnings of Feminist Art History," *Women's Art Magazine* 61 (1994): 6–11; 6.
- 8 See, for instance, the recent research by Paula Ferreira Vermeersch regarding mid-century Brazilian art historians who were women. Vermeersch, "As Minas setecentistas e autorias femininas na história e crítica de arte," *Revista Do Instituto De Estudos Brasileiros* 1, no. 87 (2024): 1–11. Elsewhere, in the 1950s, Adelaida de Juan Seiller (in Cuba) and Marta Traba Tain (in Colombia) began to establish themselves in the field. I am grateful to Analays Alvarez Hernandez and Camila de Oliveira Savoi for sharing their insights regarding the historical importance of women in Cuban and Brazilian art history respectively.
- 9 Jeremy Melius has also argued for Lee's important contribution to art history and aesthetic theory. See Melius, "Connoisseurship, Painting and Personhood," *Art History* 34, no. 2 (2011): 288–309; 299–301.
- 10 Helen Rosenau, "Women's Portraiture," *Contemporary Review* 155 (1939): 480–84; 482.
- 11 Helen Rosenau, "Changing Attitudes towards Women," in *Women Under the Swastika* (London: Free German League of Culture in Great Britain, 1942), 26–27; 27.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 S.H.S., "Woman in Art," *The Contemporary Review* 165 (1944): 381.
- 14 E.H. Ramsden, "Selected Notice," *Horizon* 9 (June 1944): 359–60; 360.
- 15 See Nicholas Chare and Nathanael Price, "The Dagenham Idol," in *On the Nude: Looking Anew at the Naked Body in Art*, ed. Nicholas Chare and Ery Contogouris (New York: Routledge, 2021), 23–40; 26–27. Price and I also offer a reading of the 1944 cover of *Woman in Art* in this essay.
- 16 For a discussion of the historical pseudoscientific roots of Nazi racial police, see François Haas, "German Science and Black Racism – Roots of the Nazi Holocaust," *The FASEB Journal* 22, no. 2 (2008): 332–37.
- 17 See Adrian Rifkin's discussion of Patrick Boucheron's *Conjurer la peur* in "'The Answers are the Question' in *History and Art History*", ed. Nicholas Chare and Mitchell Frank (New York: Routledge, 2020), 213–36; 223.
- 18 Inspired by Pollock's 2014 talk at University College London about *Woman in Art*, I was fortunate to source a copy via interlibrary loan in 2017.
- 19 See Anthony Froshaug, "Typography is a Grid," *The Designer* 167 (1967): 4–5.