

*American Women Modernists: The Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910–1945*, edited by Marian Wardle (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Museum of Art; New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005)

Robert Henri (1865–1929), painter and teacher, left a legacy of adventurous individualism. His women students carefully heeded his prescient and courageous advice to interpret the experiences of their personal lives in a national and characteristically American art. After studying with Henri, these women scattered away from his Philadelphia and New York City art schools to experiment. They filled canvases, sculpted clay, wove textiles, etched, printed, built furniture, and made photographs. They carved frames for their work, set tiles into haunting imagery, and designed sets and costumes, all the while grappling with the early-twentieth-century limitations placed on women. Through a series of seven essays and expansive illustrations, *American Women Modernists* illuminates the social and artistic challenges these pioneering women faced in a male-dominated art world and explains how the artists influenced modernism's evolution.

Painting their experiences in the West—in California, Utah, and Washington, for example—Henrietta Shore, Minerva Teichert, and Helen Loggie typified artists whose distinctive work honored Henri's philosophy. Henrietta Shore's stylized subjects—large cactuses and succulents filling a canvas, farm workers whose rhythmic picking appears animated—documented a colorful and vibrant West. Henri's prophetic advice to Minerva Teichert to paint her "'birthright'—the story of her Mormon west" (7) resulted in a treasured record revering the West's

strength and wildness. Helen Loggie etched her connection to the natural world in northwestern Washington in such detail that Henri's influence, as with so many of the artists represented here, sings in her renderings.

A charismatic and talented instructor who was gifted in stirring the imagination of his mostly women students, Robert Henri encouraged them at a time when other male artists and instructors disdained and marginalized them. He advised his students to pursue any subject they wished and pointed out that "it is not the subject that counts; but what you bring to it" (108), giving these women critical license to respect themselves and their individuality.

*American Women Modernists* fills a critical gap in early-twentieth-century American art history by crediting women artists whose bold, experimental industry has largely gone unrecorded until now. The book redefines the traditional characterization of modernism and in so doing clarifies its meaning to include more of the diversity it originally claimed. In her essay "Modernizing Women," Lois Palken Rudnick explains that these women artists, through their dedication to their work and their often independent lifestyles, "made themselves felt and heard by both working with and against male hegemony" (166). Continuously challenged with narrow definitions of "feminine" and "masculine" subjects, modern women artists took to heart Henri's instruction to "go down to the docks, to prize fights, to the slums, and paint what [you see] there" (118). In complying with Henri's direction, the women shaped and advanced American culture with lyricism, daring assertion, and confidence.

—Kathryn J. Abajian