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MARIE LAURENCIN'S FAME

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ABSTRACT
MARIE LAURENCIN'S FAME
INTRODUCTION

What kind of talent or skills would be required of a woman painting in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century, not only to permit her entrée into the predominantly male enclave of the School of Paris, but to allow her to become famous? During Marie Laurencin's lifetime (1883-1956), she was generally considered a celebrity, the most famous woman avant-garde artist. Her artistic debut was in the Salon des Indépendents in 1907 and she exhibited regularly thereafter. In 1908, Gertrude Stein became her first client, purchasing *Apollinaire et ses amis*, painted in the same year. In 1911, two of her paintings, *Portrait of Mme Fernanade X* and *Jeunes Filles*, hung in the Salon in the famous Cubist Exhibition Room 41. In 1914, Laurencin's paintings outsold those of Maurice de Vlaminck (1876-1958), Raoul Dufy (1877-1953), Jean Metzinger (1883-1956), Maurice Utrillo (1883-1955), and André Derain (1880-1954) at the Cubist auction in the Hôtel Drouot. From approximately the same time (until 1940), Paul Rosenberg, a leading Parisian art dealer, represented Laurencin. Through Rosenberg, Laurencin regularly exhibited not only in Paris, but also in London, Düsseldorf, and New York. Although an unprecedented number of women were painting professionally in Paris at the time, it was Laurencin who became famous. Laurencin was instinctively an artist. But this paper is not primarily about her art. It is not about her style, her technique, or her artistic innovations. It is simply an exploration of her path to celebrity. I will argue that Laurencin's position in the annals of the avant-garde resulted not primarily from her talent, but from her cunning use of the contemporary conventions of self-imaging, publicity, and networking.

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PREFACE

Nearly two years ago, during a brief hiatus from a busy career and with the energy that comes from the anticipation of an unencumbered schedule, I decided to return to school to learn about art. Like Edith Wharton, I have a really big crush on the French. My choice of study was a natural. As the only daughter in a family of five children, I am instinctively interested in the ways *femininity* is different from *masculinity*. I've often discussed how the differences played out in my own life. I've considered myself more of a humanist than a feminist, but I had concerns. I had never even heard of Linda Nochlin, much less of her 1971 essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" I was surprised that she'd say such a thing.

Subconsciously, I substituted the word *great* for the word *famous*. I don't know why. Surely I know by now that fame and merit are not the same. At a fancy cocktail party, networking with the city's who's who, I spoke to Cincinnati art educator, Laura Chapman, and told her some of my problems. She said to me, "Fame is simply the result of publicity."

I looked back on my own career as the Director of Fashion and Public Relations for Saks Fifth Avenue. It was a career that I loved and one that changed my life. I spent my days there surrounded by beautiful things, and working hard to secure publicity for the store. Each month I was required to carefully measure every line of press that I had garnered, inch by inch, categorize the articles by topic, and send the results to the flagship store in New York. My own success (and my raises) was carefully calibrated to some degree on these "inches" of publicity. The obvious assumption was that the more press I could commandeer for the store, the more commercially successful it would be. It was natural that I began to think about how a woman artist in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century could achieve fame (not talent, greatness, or merit) through publicity.

Compulsively, I started to haunt local bookstores, search the Internet (especially Amazon.com), and travel to Paris in search of the most famous woman artist in the early twentieth-century. I went again and again to the bookshops of every single art museum in that beautiful city. I visited every major museum many times. With great disappointment, I found that the French still don't seem to care much about their modern women artists. Today, little of their art hangs in their museums. I found no composite texts. I found monographs only on Berthe Morisot, Suzanne Valadon, and Marie Laurencin.

Morisot's (1841-1895) fame came a little too early for my purposes. I had seen a book in the Cincinnati library about Suzanne Valadon (1865-1938). It was titled, "Mistress of Montmartre," so I (rather unfairly, at first, I must say), surmised how she became famous. Lastly, I looked at the lovely pastel women in the Laurencin (1883-1954) book, *Marie Laurencin: Cent Oeuvres des Collections du Musée Marie Laurencin au Japon* (1994), and purchased it for a French translation requirement. In the introduction, Masahiro Takano, the President of the Marie Laurencin Museum in Tateshina, Japan, stated "*Bien qu'influencée par Picasso, Braque, Rousseau, et Apollinaire, elle se créa, par son sens esthétique original, son proper style et elle obtiendra une place très assurée dans le milieu de l'art, celle d'une des rare femmes painters que la France moderne ait connues.*" I found my artist. I set out to discover how Laurencin became famous.

I understood that a large part of Laurencin's fame relied on publicity, but as I began researching I realized that this was only one of the facets of her celebrity. Quickly I learned that her publicity was almost unerringly built around a very clear and consistent image. Again, I thought back to my own experience. Midway though my career at Saks Fifth Avenue, in the

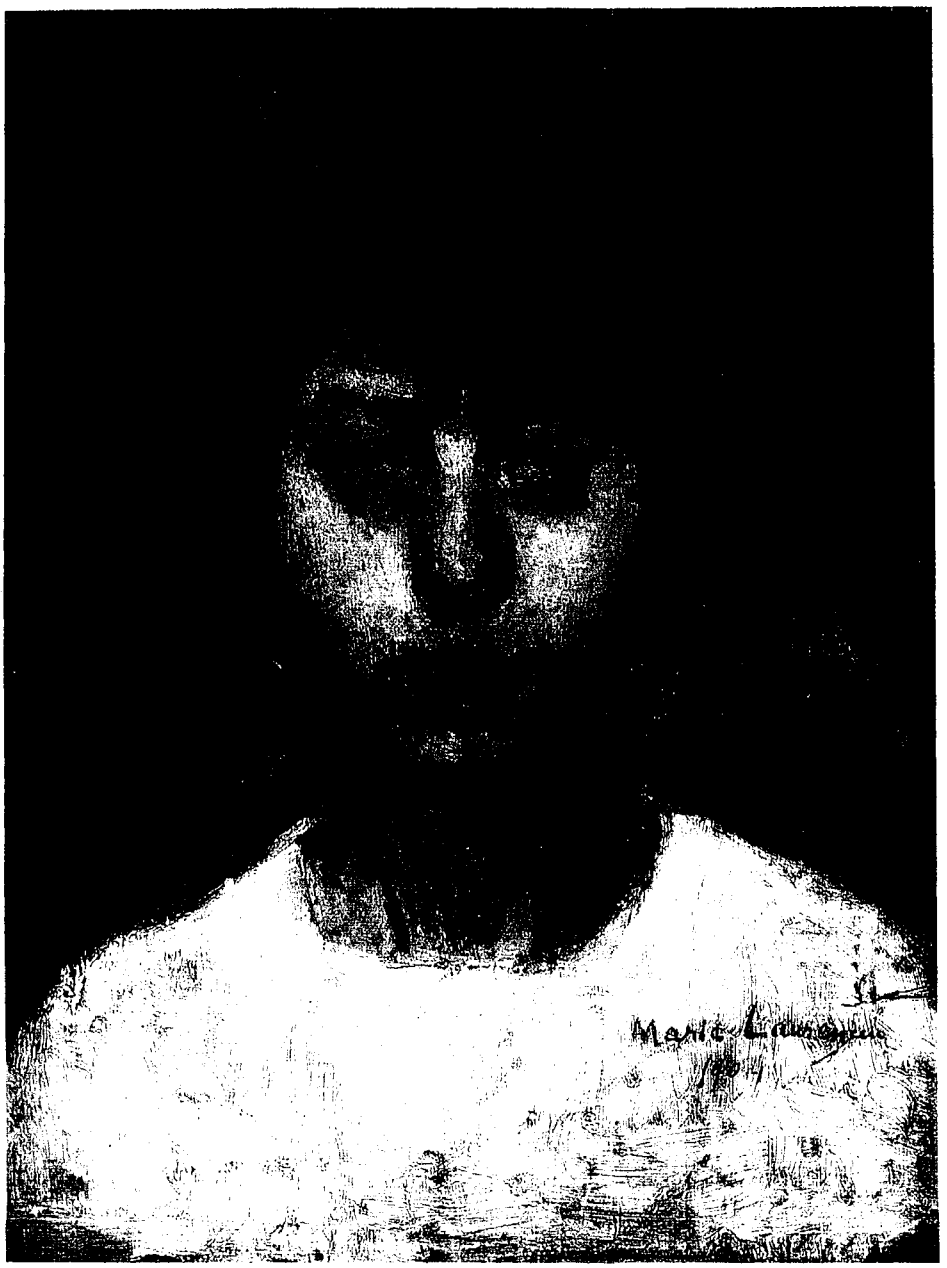
early 1990s, I became painfully involved with the New York marketing department's new branding strategy. At the time, there were approximately forty Saks Fifth Avenue stores around the country. Each store had a Director of Fashion and Public Relations. At forty different locations, forty very different women and men of various styles and taste levels were creating the store's image. Those creative days came to an end as management realized that the image of Saks was diluted. Quickly, they insisted that the image of the New Orleans store should look exactly like the image of the Houston store, and on and on. We were herded into conformity. Before we could put a flower on a table, New York had to see its picture. Linens must be white. Flowers must be white or ivory, and on and on. Eventually, the goal was to have a national and international audience immediately recognize what Saks looked like. When the word Saks was uttered, the same picture would appear in the collective mind of the world. I realized that the very same image of Laurencin was presented again and again in the press. As I continued to read about her life, I understood that she had created her own image, and that the image was a bit of a masquerade. Yet, it was so beautifully crafted and perfectly polished, that the name *Laurencin* actually became the brand of femininity.

As I continued reading about Laurencin, I was introduced or reintroduced to literally hundreds of insiders in the avant-garde art world. I began to understand the breadth of her extraordinary connections. Again, I thought about the importance of networking in my career at Saks Fifth Avenue. I was constantly encouraged to meet the right people and to treat them well. The hope, o--f course, was that those friends would become customers and assure the store's commercial success. The network grew and grew over the fifteen years I spent there.

These areas of similarity formed my thesis. I worked to understand how the three most important components of my career, spent trying to build Saks Fifth Avenue's visibility and

commercial success, might have played out in the life of an artist and business woman in Paris in the first part of the last century. I ordered the topics according to what I felt were their importance in the overall creation of Laurencin's fame: image transformation (or branding), publicity, and networking.

I realize that I have only begun to refine this research. After hundreds of hours digging in to Laurencin's life, however, I think I have at least uncovered the bones of her strategy. I know why she was famous, and I understand that the methods she employed were the very same as the ones that I used to be successful in my own career. She was a pioneer in the marketing game and she played the game extremely well.



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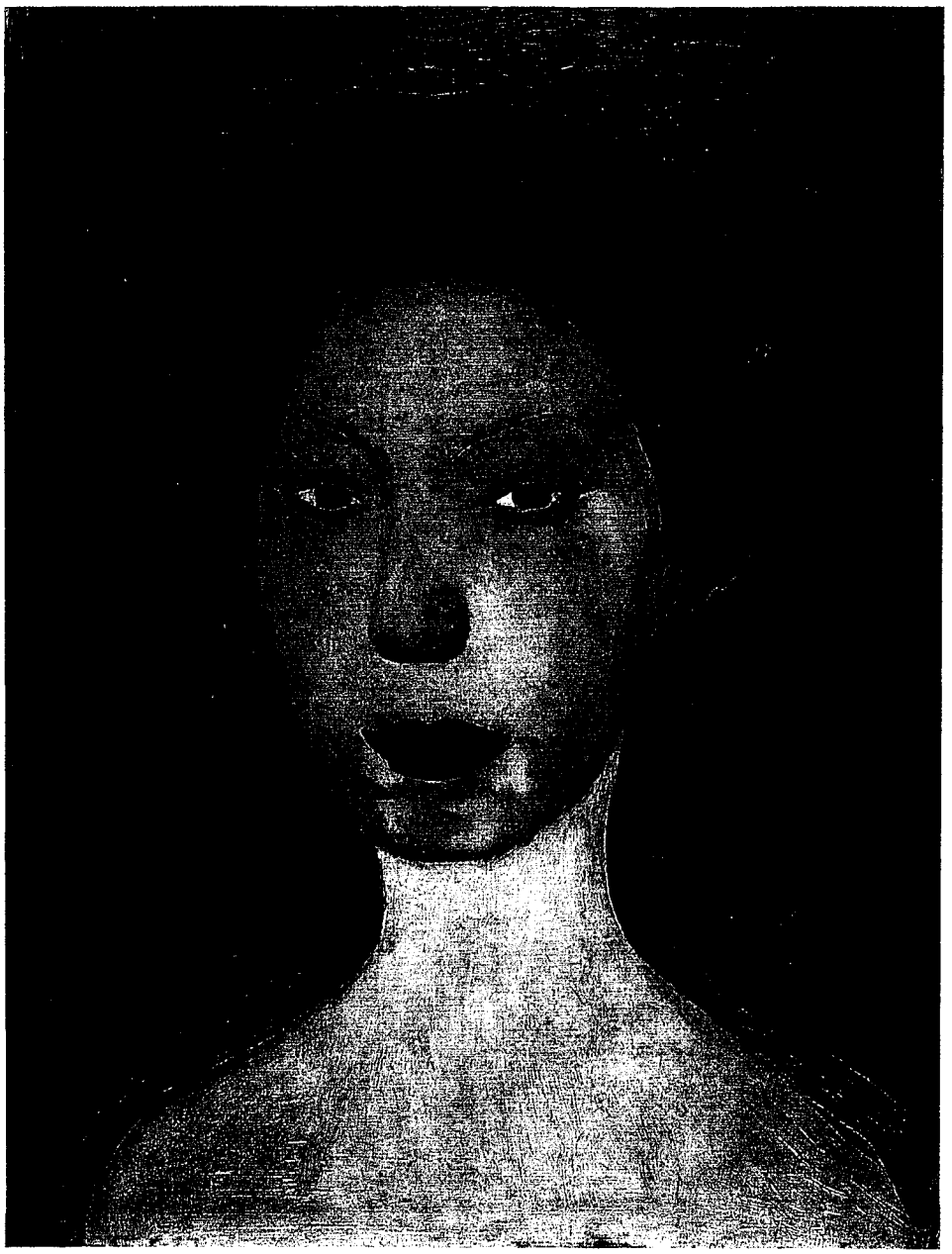

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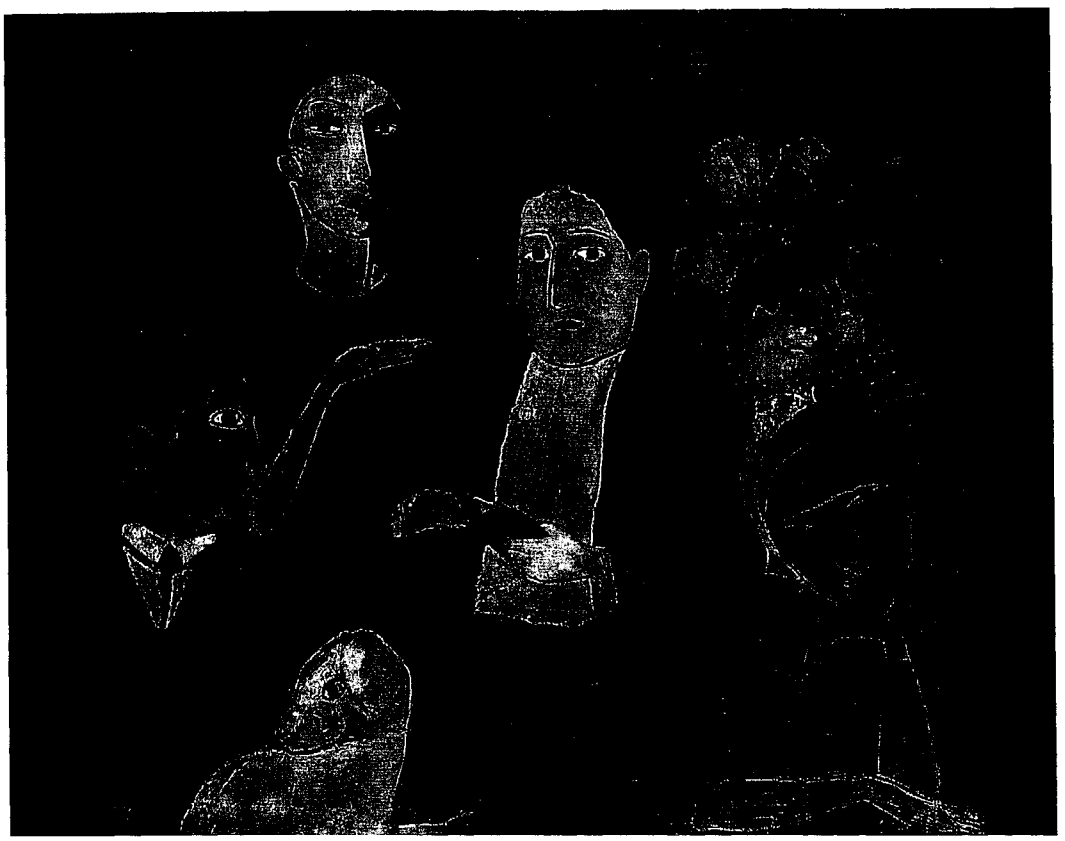

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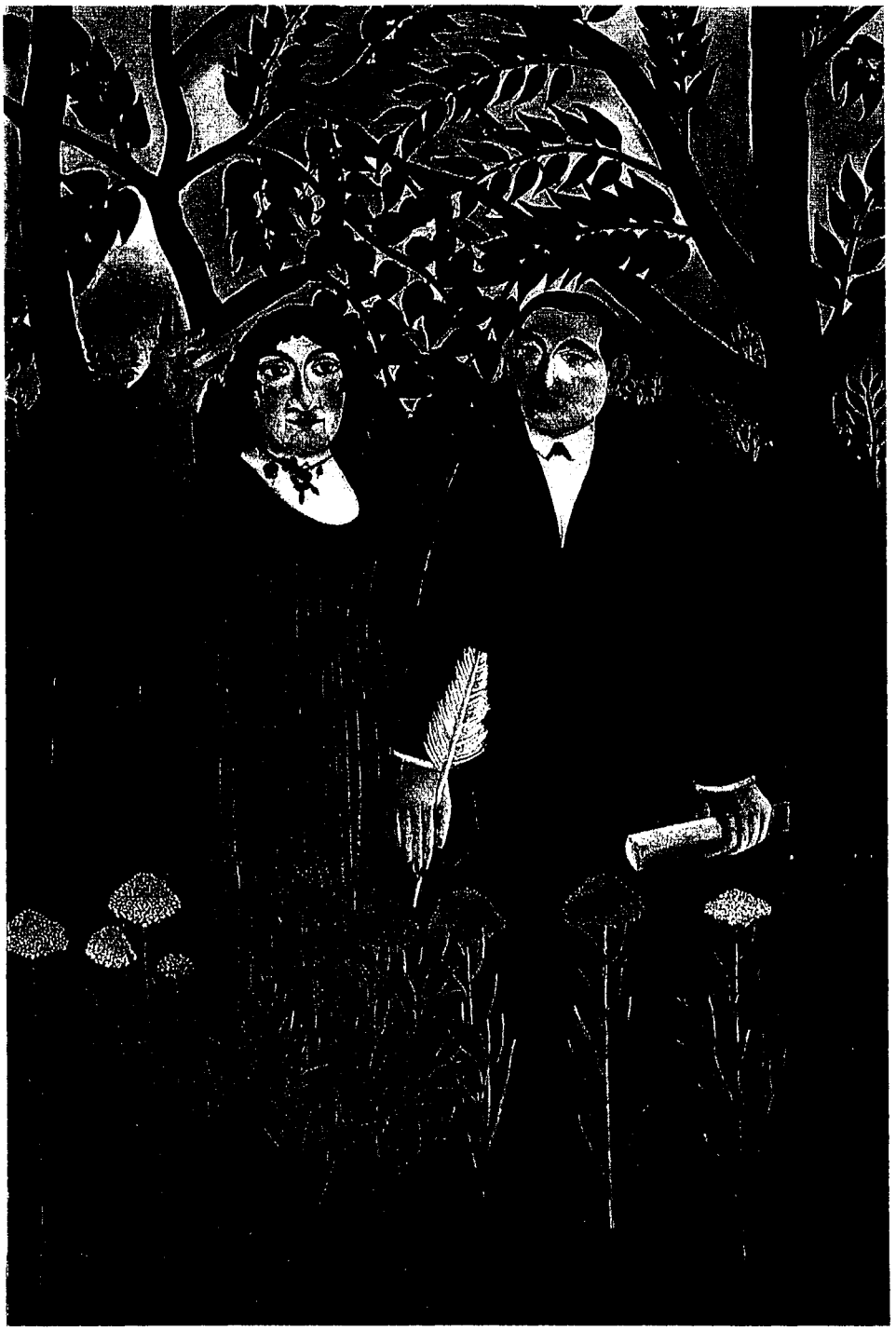

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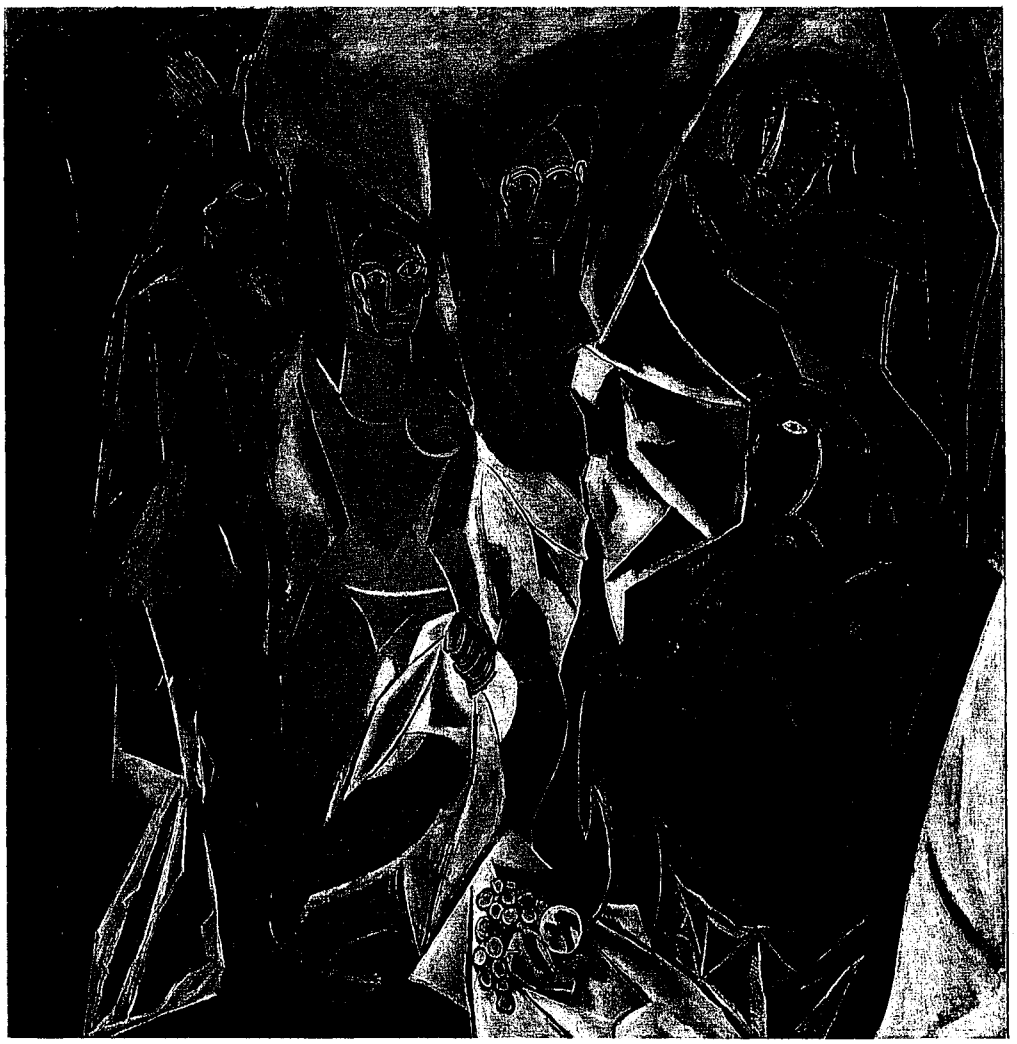

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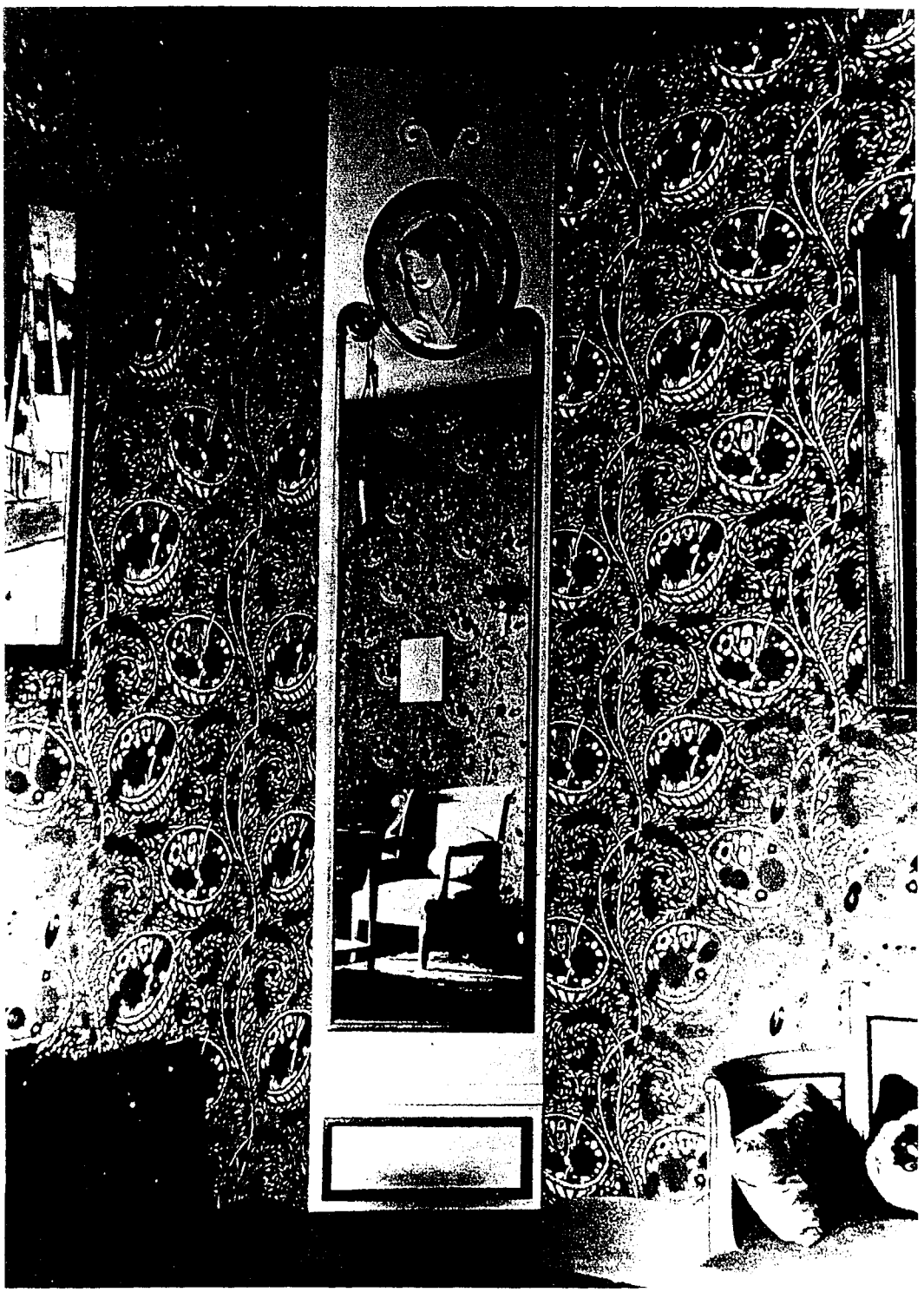

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MARIE LAURENCIN'S FAME
INTRODUCTION

What kind of talent or skills would be required of a woman painting in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century, not only to permit her entrée into the predominantly male enclave of the School of Paris, but to allow her to become famous? During Marie Laurencin's lifetime (1883-1956), she was generally considered a celebrity, the most famous woman avant-garde artist. Her artistic debut was in the Salon des Indépendents in 1907 and she exhibited regularly thereafter. In 1908, Gertrude Stein became her first client, purchasing *Apollinaire et ses amis*, painted in the same year. In 1911, two of her paintings, *Portrait of Mme Fernanade X* and *Jeunes Filles*, hung in the Salon in the famous Cubist Exhibition Room 41. In 1914, Laurencin's paintings outsold those of Maurice de Vlaminck (1876-1958), Raoul Dufy (1877-1953), Jean Metzinger (1883-1956), Maurice Utrillo (1883-1955), and André Derain (1880-1954) at the Cubist auction in the Hôtel Drouot. From approximately the same time (until 1940), Paul Rosenberg, a leading Parisian art dealer, represented Laurencin. Through Rosenberg, Laurencin regularly exhibited not only in Paris, but also in London, Düsseldorf, and New York. Although an unprecedented number of women were painting professionally in Paris at the time, it was Laurencin who became famous.

Laurencin was not born into the life. She came from a non-traditional and inauspicious household. She was the illegitimate child of Pauline Laurencin, the daughter of a Norwegian blacksmith, employed in the service at the home of Alfred Toulet, a public official who was twenty-two years her senior. Toulet was Laurencin's

father, but his paternity was never officially acknowledged during his life. Laurencin's relationship with her mother was perhaps the strongest determinant of her life. Mother and daughter lived in a cloistered atmosphere – relatively free from the company of men. From her mother, Laurencin learned how to combine the typically feminine characteristics of elegance and grace with traits that were commonly referred to as masculine – cunning, intelligence, independence, and strength of purpose.[1]

Laurencin was instinctively an artist.[2] But this paper is not primarily about her art. It is not about her style, her technique, or her artistic innovations. It is simply an exploration of her path to celebrity. I will argue that Laurencin's position in the annals of the avant-garde resulted not primarily from her talent, but from her cunning use of the contemporary conventions of self-imaging, publicity, and networking.

Chapter 1, "Self-Imaging," deals with the mechanics of the creation of fame. Laurencin developed a specific image that was extremely marketable. Her persona, one that had its roots in traditional Victorian notions of femininity, was so well conceived that the name *Laurencin* began to represent a commoditization of the female gender. The sheer strength of her execution lies in the fact that Laurencin's life was very untraditional and that she constantly painted and lived on the far side of convention. Her lesbian proclivities and homoerotic production were largely overlooked by her ardent male admirers and critics. One particularly astute female observer, Fernande Olivier, Picasso's mistress from 1904-1912, recorded the masquerade in her private journals. Laurencin's transformation is also subtly revealed in a series of Laurencin's progressive self-portraits. Essentially, the image was so consistent and well-crafted that it sold.

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[1] Daniel Marchesseau, "*Marie Laurencin: Cent Oeuvres des Collections du Musée Marie Laurencin au Japon*, (Martigy, Switzerland: Foundation Pierre Gianadda, 1994), 15.

[2] Ibid.

Chapter 2, "Publicity Campaign," shows how that image was disseminated to the public. The French press had become a powerful communication tool during the early years of Laurencin's life, and the transformations inherent in the modern art world produced powerful criticism that was eagerly consumed by an educated French readership. From 1907 until 1913, Laurencin happened to have the clear advantage of being the mistress of Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918), arguably the most influential art critic of the pre-war period. Through him, she found a voice. He repeatedly paid homage to her both in his art criticism and his poetry, constantly reiterating her virtues as the quintessential *femme peintre*. Apollinaire's writings firmly ensconced the image in the minds of his public. His criticism was so revered that this singular image persisted throughout the rest of her career. Following her break-up with Apollinaire and his early death in 1918, Laurencin's chief critics largely echoed his words. Additionally, Laurencin cunningly made use of interviews and personal writings to reassert her sublime femininity. She ran a publicity campaign that was as effective as any the modern world had ever seen, or has seen since.

Lastly, Chapter 3, "Networking," deals with the channels of personal communications and connections that fortified the image, supported the artist, and guaranteed her fame. The pages of her history literally record hundreds of important connections. Laurencin maneuvered through her contacts in such a way as to eventually become so well-known and so financially independent that she could live the life of her own choosing.

Laurencin's path is a remarkable one. Her strategy for success incorporated techniques that were largely unknown in the beginning of the twentieth-century. She was a master at the marketing game, well before her contemporaries. Her methods are the

ones used by today's savvy image-makers leading to the creation of stars. In her time, that is just what Marie Laurencin was.

CHAPTER 1
SELF-IMAGING

> Aspirants need to undertake considerable work
> to develop and retain a fully believable character.
> They must understand the role, choose the most
> fitting type of person to project, and distinguish
> themselves from competitors by developing
> convincing character through the choice of signs,
> name, appearance, voice, movement, and materials.
>
> *-High Visibility*
> Irving Rein, Philip Kotler, Martin Stoller

Marie Laurencin carefully scripted a role for her own life and cautiously played it. Her star performance resulted in her celebrity. For the first fifty years of the twentieth century, she was the most visible female member of the avant-garde.[3] Her fame was heralded both in artistic and popular circles. By 1925, she was named one of the top ten artists in France in *L'Art vivant's Enquête* (a published survey indicating the results of voting by opinion-makers in the art world).[4] In 1930, the chic Parisian publication, *Vu,* published a photograph of Laurencin with the writers Colette (1873-1954) and Mme. Anna de Noailles (1876-1933) underscored with the caption, "the three most famous women in France."[5] Laurencin was an agent of her own fame, working hard to craft a saleable image of herself as the quintessential French female. The image was a product of her invention resulting from a series of style and personality manipulations and from an astute awareness of just what it would take to become famous.

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[3] Bridget Elliott, "The ' Strength of the Weak' " in *On Your Left: The New Historical Materialism*, eds., Ann Kibbey, et. al. (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), 70.

[4] Christopher Green, *Art in France: 1900 to 1940* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 65.

[5] Douglas K. S. Hyland and Heather McPherson, *Marie Laurencin: Artist and Muse* (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1989), 72.

Creating Fame

In *Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1961), social historian, Daniel Boorstein distinguishes a hero from a celebrity. His position is that heroes are known by their achievements, but celebrities are known by their images (or trademarks).[6] According to Boorstein, an image is carefully constructed to serve a specific purpose.[7] This relatively simple theory of image-making is quite consistent with the notion that Laurencin invented a particular personal image for the purpose of achieving commercial success.

Capitalism is built upon the ideological and intellectual concept of fame.[8] Culturally, we understand that images are created for the marketability of fame-seeking individuals. [9] The process by which a person is synthesized into an image that in turn becomes a commodity is familiar to Americans and is embedded into modern psychology. We understand that a *person* may virtually become a *product,* and that products are distributed by sophisticated communication and marketing tools. Those who are successful become famous. Persons working within our society have the ability to create, in Boorstein's vernacular, well-knownness (or fame), "...and to blanket the world with it."[10]

Fame comes most often as a result of some type of conscious personality manipulation for public consumption. Image transformation is not necessarily a modern notion. The concept dates back to antiquity. In Ovid's (43 B.C.-17 A.D.) ancient myth, Pygmalion

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[6]Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Random House, 1992), 61.

[7]Ibid., 198.

[8] Tyler Cowen, *What Price Fame?* (Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 2000), 8

[9] Ibid.

[10]Irving Rein, Philip Kotler, and Martin Stoller, *High Visibility: The Making and Marketing of Professionals into Celebrities* (Chicago: Contemporary Publishing Company, 1997), 7.

set out to sculpt the perfect woman, a mythical figure who would be worthy of a man's love.[11] The process of self-invention and promotion for commercial success, however, and the manufacturing of fame for fortune is a more recent concept. In the early 1900s a systematic approach to marketing oneself, to assessing the best positioning concept, was not yet widely known or understood.[12] This is precisely what makes Laurencin's personal strategy so remarkable.

Laurencin's Transformation

Laurencin promoted a public person and her artistic identity "by engaging in explicit self-imaging."[13] Most female artists of the time worked in obscurity. That was not an option for Laurencin. She instinctively understood that market viability would involve a certain acceptable image. Femininity was palatable so the choice to cultivate a gendered style was tactical.[14] Laurencin was so adept at the image-making game that the name *Laurencin* eventually became a kind of household word that represented a commod-ification of the feminine to a certain cultured public.[15]

An understanding of Laurencin's need for self-transformation requires a knowledge of the conditions of her market. Gill Perry's book, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (1995), is one of only a very few texts dedicated to female modernists working in Paris in the early years of the last century. Perry acknowledges that during the first three decades of the twentieth-century the work of women was repeatedly viewed and

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[11]Rein, Kotler, and Stoller , 5 – 6.
[12]Ibid. , 66.
[13]Ibid.
[14]Elliott , 90.
[15]Paula J. Birnbaum, "Femmes Artistes Modernes: Women Art and Modern Identity in Interwar France" (Ph.D.diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1996) , 244.

discussed in gendered terms.[16] Perry defines gender as "the cultural construction of femininity and masculinity, as opposed to the biological sex (male or female) which we are born with."[17] In Laurencin's time the whole process of creating and viewing art was delineated into clear spheres of masculinity and femininity. The image represented a natural or staged gendered relationship. The work was produced in an essentially gendered culture. The act of painting itself was seen as a gendered (masculine) activity. Ultimately, the work was viewed by a gendered audience.[18]

The nineteenth-century French art world was rigidly and instinctively delineated by gender. Men entered rigorous training in state-funded art schools. Women entered fashionable private academies with the expected result of becoming accomplished amateur artists. Men discussed art and politics within café society. Women embroidered at home. Men were encouraged to rise through the ranks of a competitive marketplace. Women were taught to temper ambition.[19] Although there were unprecedented numbers of women artists working in France at the end of the century, none "could escape from the conflict, internal and external, which the tension between her aspirations as a professional artist, and the 'feminine' ideal entailed."[20]

When women did paint there were certain acceptable artistic attributes, including color, fluidity, and decorative surface. Linear constructions, rational planning, and a

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[16]Gill Perry, Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 2.

[17]Gill Perry, Introduction to *Gender and Art*, ed. Gill Perry (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with The Open University, 1999), 8.

[18]Tamar Garb, "Gender and Representation," in *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with The Open University, 1993), 230.

[19]Ibid., 230-1.

[20]Ibid., 240.

cerebral organization of elements were alternately masculine.[21] The overbearing assumption at the dawn of the twentieth-century was that a woman simply and instinctively painted differently from a man. Subject matter, as well as technique, was clearly gendered. Historians, both feminist and social, have already contributed sufficient materials to demonstrate how the ideals of bourgeois femininity, as demonstrated in written and visual culture, revolved around prettified images of domesticity, passivity, and decoration.[22] Gifted, independent women artists had a difficult terrain to navigate. Those seeking fame or financial security had to negotiate a seemingly impossible position.[23]

One survivalist tactic may have been to "absorb and represent the conventionally accepted themes like a ventriloquist's dummy."[24] To many critics, this is exactly the path taken by Laurencin. She did, in fact, insist on an essential division of all ideas and subjects in her life into clear distinctions of masculine or feminine.[25] Everything about her, "...her artistic practices, her temperament, her appearance, and even her voice-had been saturated with signs of femininity: grace and charm rather than genius, narcissistic self-absorption, surface without substance."[26]

Laurencin needed to support herself and wanted her career to flourish quickly.[27] She saw that a certain niche existed in the market. She inserted herself into that space so that she could appear, even if in the margins, of the central core of early twentieth-century

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[21]Ibid. ,285.
[22]Perry, *Gender and Art,* 17.
[23] Wallace and Elliott, 8.
[24]Garb , 263.
[25]Birnbaum , 263.
[26]Elliott , 69.
[27]Susan Waller, *Women Artists in the Modern Era: A Documentary History* (Metuchen, New Jersey and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1991) , 116.

modernism.[28] To that end, she appropriated the popular ideals of femininity.[29] She deliberately chose to marginalize herself as a painter. Laurencin was entrenched in a society where masculinity implied genius, so she deliberately placed herself below the genius of male innovators.[30] She articulated her separation from the male world in these words published in 1942 in her memoir, *Carnet des nuits:*

> If I feel myself so different from painters, it is because they are men - and because men seem to me difficult problems to resolve. Their discussions, their inquiries, their genius has always amazed me.

Laurencin, however, exhibited her own kind of genius in the creation of this image. The strength of her image-making tactic lies in the fact that Laurencin appropriated and sold the traditional feminine ideal while living a life that was untraditional by all bourgeois standards.

Fame is often the result of illusions based on a certain type of deception whether it is in the mind of the creator or in the mind of the audience.[31] Laurencin was a master of illusion. She "played her game with the gendered discourse of femininity almost without a hitch."[32] The advantages to this strategy were clear. She "easily gained marketability, secured a firm gallery contract, worked the feminine tropes of visual representation, even as they shifted from the 1910s *femme-enfant* to the 1920s fashionable woman."[33] She carried this public image throughout her artistic career which spanned nearly a half a decade.

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[28]Birnbaum , 257.
[29]Ibid. , 231.
[30]Ibid.
[31]T. J. Clarke, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in he Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964) , 83.
[32]Elizabeth Louise Kahn, *Marie Laurencin: Une femme inadaptee in feminist histories of art* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2003) , 74.
[33]Ibid. , 79.

Although the business of image-making was in its incubation stages in the beginning of the twentieth century, Laurencin was in good company. In *Frenzy of Renown* (1997), Leo Braudy discusses the image-making techniques of two of Laurencin's illustrious contemporaries working within the Parisian avant-garde, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961). Each deployed a different method. Braudy believes that Hemingway's method was quite pure; that is, that he honed "a personal style until it gleamed with seamless perfection."[34] According to Braudy, Picasso, on the other hand, carried out a series of impeccable impersonations in a truly virtuoso performance. Picasso defined himself as much by "his ability to parody as his ability to create."[35] His life and his art were only a series of impersonations and "none of them were the man who wielded them..."[36] As did Hemingway, Laurencin created a pure image. This image, however, like Picasso's, was a mere impersonation of the woman who wielded it. First I will examine the purity of Laurencin's style, and then examine its irony.

Witnessing the Transformation

To visually explore Laurencin's path, a purposeful yet artificial one, I will examine a series of portraits. These works of art are either self portraits or those that I believe are self-referential although not labeled as auto-portraits. Laurencin painted the first of these portraits, *Autoportrait*, in 1904, the year she entered the Académie Humbert (Figure 1). In this painting Laurencin situated herself against a somber, academically brown background. Her heavy-lidded eyes reflect her myopic vision. Her features are dour, roughly rendered, and asymmetrical. Her brows are heavy and unkempt. Her white complexion is blotched with red, brown, and yellow and punctuated with an oversized

[34]Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown* (New York: Random House, 1997) , 546.
[35]Ibid.
[36]Ibid.

nose and ill-defined mouth. A black shadow covers the right side of her muscular, yet gaunt neck. Her plain white dress is scratched through with a rough brush.

Four years later, shortly after her introduction to poet and critic, Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) and subsequently her initiation into the circle of painters of the Bateau Lavoir, Laurencin painted an entirely different woman (Figure 2). Although her features are flat, the frankness has been replaced with grace. Laurencin positioned herself against an aqua background. Her eyebrows are arched with a thin stroke of the brush. Her complexion is even and modulated with pink tones and the smoothness of her brush. The mouth is full, yet this time it is lined, curved, and softened.

By 1909, in one of her best-known paintings, *Réunion de la campagne* (Figure 3), Laurencin's transformation into the artistic, yet feminine sphere, is highly evolved. The softness of her flesh is outlined beneath the folds of a full-skirted dress with a scalloped hem. Her figure seems nearly to float from the right side of the picture. The curvilinear lines, arabesques, and slightly softened palette are beginning to show the signs of the ultra-feminine productions of Laurencin's mature years.

The transformation continued over a series of portraits painted over the next fifteen years. Although the 1911 portrait, *L'éventail* (Figure 4) is not identified as a self-portrait, the features are quite self-referential, especially the almond-shaped eyes and heavy braid. Here we see the emergence of the *Laurencin* woman. She is a series of curves, a softness of form. She holds what comes to be a Laurencin trademark, a fan. In *Nu au miroir* (Figure 5) of 1916, the color palette that will come to define Laurencin's mature style is apparent: yellow, aqua, pink, white, and blue are softly applied in a watercolor- like

wash. The long soft tresses are crowned with flowers. Another Laurencin trademark, the mirror, is suspended from a graceful hand that barely has the strength to contain it. By 1924, the transformation is complete. The soft face framed in curls and flowers in *Mon Portrait* (Figure 6) is the quintessentially feminine Laurencin image. Robin's egg blue, grey, beige, and pink surround her in a cashmere-like atmosphere. Although Laurencin was by this time forty-one years old, she painted herself as an eternal child-woman.

The path that Laurencin took on this journey of self-creation is not only recorded through her evolving self-portraiture, but is documented in the journals of two contemporary female artists who observed the young Laurencin, Fernande Olivier (1881-1966) and Gertrude Stein (1874-1946). From the year 1907 until the beginning of the World War I, Laurencin was a frequent companion of the Picasso enclave. Olivier, Picasso's mistress from approximately 1904-1912, recalled her in these early days:

> We found the fact that she never behaved naturally but always seemed to be posing rather silly and forced. She seemed to be chiefly interested in the effect she was creating and would listen to herself speaking, and watch her own, quite intentionally childish gestures in the mirror all the time.[37]

Although Olivier's words may be jealously jaded since she, too, was an artist and was never admitted professionally into Picasso's league, I believe that her observations of Laurencin were both accurate and insightful. She witnessed a woman whom she found to be awkward, short-sighted and "goat-like" playing a masquerade that involved a cultivation of the appearance of extreme naiveté.[38] Olivier found it "impossible to get to the true personality or evaluate the real intelligence of such a pretentious little person."[39]

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[37]Elaine M. Stainton, ed., *Loving Picasso: the Private Journal of Fernande Olivier*, trans. Christine Baker and Michael Raeburn (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 2001), 207.
[38]Ibid.
[39]Ibid., 209.

Olivier held Laurencin to very rigorous standards. Others found her charm to be more palatable. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (originally published in 1933), Gertrude Stein tells of being warned in advance of Laurencin by Olivier:

> Then she told me about a mysterious horrible woman called Marie Laurencin who made noise like an animal and annoyed Picasso. I thought of her as a horrible old woman and was delighted when I met the young chic Marie who looked like a Clouet.[40]

Stein speaks of Laurencin as having "the thin square build of the mediaeval French woman" and a "high pitched beautifully modulated voice."[41] Olivier watched Laurencin suspiciously as she donned the cloak of femininity. Stein observed the outcome.

Believability through Consistency

A believable and saleable image requires consistency. Effort must be directed to overcoming the type of unnaturalness that Olivier noticed in Laurencin's early years. Irving Rein, Philip Kotler, and Martin Stoller, the editors of *High Visibility*, caution those who seek celebrity status with the following words:

> Aspirants need to undertake considerable work to develop and retain a fully believable character. They must understand the role, choose the most fitting type of person to project, and distinguish themselves from competitors by developing a convincing character through the choice of signs, name, appearance, voice, movement and materials.[42]

In *What Price Fame?* (2000), Tyler Cowan speaks of this consistency in terms of "obviousness" for the market. The celebrity must not step too far outside of the defined "persona." Staying in character is safer and relatively easy to manage.[43]

It is important to evaluate how consistently Laurencin controlled her carefully gendered plan. Her feminization was encapsulated not only in her art, but also in her

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[40]Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (London: Penguin Classics, 2001) , 32.
[41]Ibid. , 68.
[42]Rein, Kotler, and Stoller, 217.
[43]Cowan, 18.

appearance and her surroundings. We have already seen the evolution of her appearance as recorded in her series of self portraits. Laurencin integrated this personal aura into her living spaces to present an "amazingly consistent image of femininity."[44]

A photograph (Figure 7) of Laurencin at home in 1922 is compelling evidence of this essence. The line of her body nearly melts into the dressing table. Her dress is soft and floral. She holds the trademark fan. In another photo, possibly taken the same day, she is pictured in a delicately accessorized room examining a strand of pearls (Figure 8). In a 1925 article in *L'Art Vivant*, "Chez Marie Laurencin," a journalist describes the artist's home as a continuum of her art:

> The room is a poem by Francis James. It has the same freshness, the same purity with all the peaceful and assured naïveté of Marie Laurencin's art...two pink ceramic deer lying down on the drawing room mantle seem like the graceful symbol of their mistress.[45]

Laurencin's aura extended beyond her appearance, her home, and her art. She was able to communicate her aura through a wide range of expressive activity. She was an illustrator of books by some of the best-known authors of her time. She was a writer and a poet. She designed costumes and set designs. Her work for the theatre not only extended her visibility but also enhanced her fashionable female presence.[46] In 1923, Serge Diaghilev (1872 - 1929) commissioned Laurencin to design costumes and set for a performance of *Les Biches* by the Ballet Russe. An art-dealer and acquaintance of Laurencin's, René Gimbel, recalled, "In the corridor I heard a woman say to a man: 'Look around the house, all the women look as through they were by Marie Laurencin;' she had fashioned a type just as Boldini (Giovanni, 1842 – 1931) created the eel look

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[44]Elliott, 78.
[45]Ibid.
[46]Ibid., 84.

fifteen years ago."[47] The consistency and the power of this "look" in the creation of a feminine image is underscored by a Reuters press release that was issued on January 22, 2002, nearly fifty years after Laurencin's death:

> German designer Karl Lagerfeld paid homage to Marie Laurencin on Tuesday with a haute-couture collection of demure outfits in shades of pink, yellow, and grey...
>
> Models inched across the catwalk like geishas in long narrow skirts with fishtail trains edged in ragged tulle. Others appeared to float in broad tutu dresses worn with matching gossamer-like chiffon veil coats. Feet appeared magically suspended in stilettos...[48]

For nearly fifty years of Laurencin's life (1907-1956) and nearly fifty years following her death (1956-2002), she cultivated an image so pure, so distilled, that the word *Laurencin* conjured a vision of traditional femininity. In modern jargon, Laurencin created a pure brand; that is, the word (Laurencin) produced the picture (femininity).

Playing the Role

The tenacity and endurance of Laurencin's public image is magnified by the inconsistencies between the artist's public perception and her private life. Her personal life choices indicate a clear resistance to the traditional roles of femininity.[49] This duality is not unknown to those involved in producing celebrities for public consumption. In fact, "The public presentation of self is always a staged activity in which the human actor presents a 'front' or 'face' to others while keeping a significant portion of self in reserve."[50] For sophisticated twenty-first century consumers, the confusion between real life and "role" life is a given.[51] We are aware that agents, stylists, and the public relations

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[47]Ibid., 85.

[48] Joelle Diderich, "Lagerfeld Nods to Art with Demure Chanel Show, [press release on line] Reutgers, 22 January 2002; accessed 3 March 2003; available from http://ask.library.com.

[49]Birnbaum, 212.

[50]Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 2001), 11.

[51]Rein, Kotler, and Stoller, 26.

machine craft an image that the educated public knows may be a "bewildering barrage of illusion making and transformation."[52] It is not surprising that in the process one might lose control of her personal identity.

The distance between Laurencin's "role life" and her real one was vast. Even her childhood was unconventional. She was the illegitimate daughter of socialist député, Alfred Toulet. His parentage was not revealed to her until her adulthood. Her mother, Pauline, was a handsome, yet dour, role model. Pauline encouraged her daughter's reverence for art and literature, but instilled in her a deep distrust for men.[53] From her adolescence she yearned for an alternative lifestyle. Before she was twenty, she confessed to art dealer, Berthe Weill (1877-1959) that she yearned to "know a lesbian."[54] In 1904, Laurencin produced her first historically recognized work of art, a print, *Chanson de Bilitis* (Figure 9). The work, two nude females embracing, refers directly to Pierre Loüys' (1870-1965) nineteenth-century poetic text of ancient lesbian romance.[55]

Historians continue to document her untraditional sexual relationships. Picasso scholar, John Richardson, records the correspondence of Laurencin's life-time confidante and first lover, Henri Pierre Roché (1879-1959), author of *Jules and Jim* (1953), as rather clear evidence of a promiscuous lifestyle, clearly deviant from traditional bourgeois values. Roché was already Laurencin's lover when she met Apollinaire. He not only doted on her but shared her sexual favors with his German accomplice, the flâneur Franz

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[52]Ibid.

[53]John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso 1907-1917: A Painter of Modern Life* (New York, Random House, 1996), 61.

[54]Kahn, 287.

[55]Kahn, 127.

Hessel. This arrangement allowed Roché to bond with a man through the "medium of his mistress, un ménage à trois."[56]

By the time Apollinaire met Laurencin, in fact, she had three lovers. The first was a man we simply know from Roché as Brète. The second was Hessell. The third was Roché. Finally, Roché, who also reported to being compliant to Laurencin's desire to be roughly treated, extricated himself from the trio, finding that "...Marie disgusted him by shrieking with laughter as she squatted shamelessly on the bidet" in front of both Roché and Hessel.[57]

In addition to this sexual "misconduct," there is evidence that Laurencin continued to be drawn to women. On April 12, 1906, she wrote to Roché, "I've been grouchy and disagreeable for four days. Braque (Georges, 1882-1946) thinks I'm a lesbian."[58] Later in her life, Laurencin's love for Nicole Groult, wife of artist André Groult (1884-1946), is frequently documented. Her letters to Roché at the time often repeated the refrain, "*Ce 'est Nicole que j 'aime le plus.*"[59] Similarly Groult wrote to Roché in 1917, "...Marie and I are going to marry after the war because our love is becoming delirious. You'll be the witness."[60]

The intent of this discussion is not to prove or disprove Laurencin's sexual preferences, but only to reinforce the power of her self-created traditional image in light of a life that was quite untraditional by early twentieth-century values. She had a series of lovers, both male and female. The most celebrated was Apollinaire. Although it seems probable that the French public cast this great love affair in a shroud of heterosexual

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[56]Ibid., 61.
[57]Ibid., 63.
[58]Ibid., 62.
[59]Birnbaum, 332.
[60]Richardson, 332.

passion, their relationship was far from the norm. Richardson details the state of the affair:

> Apollinaire's bed was sacrosanct-nobody was ever allowed to sit on it, or otherwise define it. Marie confirmed this to Nicole Groult, Poiret's sister, and subsequently her lover. She liked to play with his collar stud, she said. Marie apparently shared Apollinaire's sadomasochistic tastes.[61]

She was, however, the love of his life. She inspired his poetry both during and after their affair. "Mon destin" (1913) is a *cri du coeur* addressed to her. She is the painter Tristouze Ballerinette in "La Poète assassiné" (1916). The booklet, *Vitam Impendere Amori* (1917) was a tribute to their love.[62] Apollinaire's love was not unrequited. In Laurencin's grave, her head rests on a pillow of his love letters.[63]

Apollinaire himself was an unconventional man. His literary pursuits were extremely provocative. For several years he worked as the editor of a series of pornographic books, the *Editions Briffaut* where he provided "appreciative introductions to the scatological masterpieces of the past."[64] It was Apollinaire who "resurrected the Marquis de Sade from the bowels of the Bibliothèque Nationale, producing the first anthology of the author's works in 1909 and prophesizing a new future for the old pornographer."[65] He became a "polemicist for free exotic experience, that is to say, the greatest range of erotic possibilities within and between the two separate eternities of male and female."[66] Apollinaire's play, *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* (1917), is just one particularly representative example of the limits of his gender bending. In the play, he "created

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[61]Ibid., 65.
[62]Gere, 11-12.
[63]Richardson, 65.
[64]James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein & Company* (New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 12.
[65]Ibid.
[66]Scott Bates, *Guillaume Apollinaire* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1967), 133.

characters of startling power whose sexual high jinks galvanized issues of artistic and social liberation."[67] The female protagonist Thérèse grows a beard and transforms into a virile man. Her husband becomes the ultimate earth mother, giving birth to forty thousand children.[68]

His personal sexual affairs were convoluted and obsessive.[69] Richardson speaks of Apollinaire as a regular of the *mauvais lieux*, "pick-up places" that he "frequented in his quest for offbeat sex."[70] He demanded unquestioning obedience from all of his lovers and had a passionate desire to make "of love a master-slave relationship."[71]

But it was clearly Apollinaire who sanctified Laurencin's femininity. His strength as a leading literary persona and art critic mobilized a perception that persisted throughout her life.[72] In Apollinaire, she found the most exceptional mouthpiece to create public perception and artistic identity, and from the time she met him, Laurencin strongly engaged in explicitly traditional self-imaging.[73]

Her private life, however, continued down an untraditional path. Only eighteen months after her break with Apollinaire, on June 14, 1914, Laurencin married Baron Otto van Wätjen, a suitor personally selected by Roché. Kahn refers to her marriage as a testing ground for a pursuit of a "heterosexual identity."[74] Richardson, however, tells a different story. He speaks of Laurencin's delight with her title and her nonchalant

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[67]Michael Fitzgerald, *Making Modernism: Picasso and the Creation of the Market for Twentieth-century Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 175.
[68]Ibid.
[69]Richardson, 203.
[70]Ibid., 21.
[71]Roger Little, *Guillaume Apollinaire* (London: The Athlone Press, 1977), 4.
[72]Elliott, 72.
[73]Birnbaum, 182.
[74]Kahn, 28.

attitude about Wätjen's bi-sexuality in light of her own homosexual proclivities.[75] He quotes Laurencin as saying, "Pederasts make the best friends in the world and the best husbands in the world, for they don't pester their wives."[76] During the war, the artist and her baron lived in exile in Spain. Her intimate correspondences with Groult reflect her state of mind. Kahn argues that it was during these years that the artist settled in to a "full-blown construction of a lesbian identity," albeit one that remained "accompanied by a pictorial tension of its encoded masquerading femininity."[77]

By 1921, Laurencin had divorced Wätjen and returned to Paris. In 1922, to celebrate her return, publisher Gaston Gallimard (1881-1975), issued *L'eventail de Marie Laurencin.* The book, edited by Roger Allard, featured ten Laurencin engravings accompanied by love poetry written to her by a cast of France's most prominent literary names, including (but not limited to) André Breton (surrealist and writer, 1895-1966), Francis Carco (poet, 1886-1958), Jean Cocteau (poet and artist, 1889-1963), Maurice Cremnitz (poet and publicist, 1975-1935), Fernand Fleuret (poet, 1883-1945), Max Jacob (poet, 1876-1914), Jean Moréas (symbolist poet, 1856-1910), Jean Pellerin (poet, 1885-1921), and André Salmon (writer and critic, 1881-1961). In most of these texts, Laurencin is held up as a woman straight out of her art, a "muse who flaunts her femininity before an audience of admiring male poet acquaintances."[78]

It must be stated that I do not believe that a lesbian identity or an affinity for the company of women precludes a typically feminine persona, but only that it is ironic that Laurencin would become the national symbol of a femininity that was deeply embodied

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[75]Richardson, 65.
[76]Ibid.
[77]Kahn, 33.
[78]Birnbaum, 225.

in the stereotypical values of women's maternity, domesticity and dependence on men. Her art, and her persona, provided a model of femininity against which other representations of women were measured. What art critic Louis Vauxcelles (1870-1943) called *un Marie Laurencin* in his section on her in *L'Histoire générale de l'art française, de la Révolution à nos jours* (1922) was the ideal *forme féminine*:

> This adolescent, repeated in scores of images yet never boringly the same, looks at herself in the glass, combs her hair, plays the mandolin, embroiders, dreams, strolls about, goes to the circus, strokes a horse that looks more like a unicorn, or a tame doe that has strayed out of an Indo-Persian miniature rather than a thicket; she dances, flirts, flourishes her tennis-racket.[79]

There are clearly obvious inconsistencies between the practices of Laurencin both as a professional artist and an independent woman and the bourgeois feminine attributes that emanate from her oeuvre.[80] Following her divorce from Wätjen and her return to Paris, Laurencin lived a life that may be seen as an ultimate paradox. She was financially independent, divorced, and childless.[81] She preferred the intimate company of women. Her art frequently featured women loving women. Furthermore, she was "capable of suddenly uttering remarks that unsettled the image of feminine conformity which writers and readers anticipated."[82]

It was not that these inconsistencies were completely overlooked. From the beginning, Olivier noted the masquerade, finding that "her pictures always suggest a combination of cunning and false naivety..."[83] In 1920, Pierre-Gustave van Hecke, a Belgian critic, reviewed the Laurencin type as "not at all the product of traditional

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[79]Ibid.
[80]Ibid., 238.
[81]Ibid., 230.
[82]Elliott, 92.
[83]Stainton, 209.

European values of femininity, finding the images to be simultaneously sterile and sexually strange.[84]

Two particularly provocative images of that period (1919) are *Les femmes à la Colombo ou Marie Laurencin and Nicole Groult* (Figure 10) and *La danse* of the same year. *Les Femmes* shows the two friends in a loving private moment. Groult is painted in an elaborately feminine costume, wearing a soft dove-like cloche and boa painted in feathery brushstrokes. She appears waiflike and nearly weak with love as she rests her head on Laurencin's shoulder. Laurencin's pink-sashed waist, hand gestures, and arched brows relay a certain femininity, but essentially she is dressed like a man. Groult's deformed long arms hang uselessly, perhaps indicating their inability to encircle Laurencin because of the constraints enacted upon the lovers by traditional bourgeois values. A photograph taken of Laurencin and Groult in 1922 is illustrative of their seductive intimacy (Figure 11). *La danse* (Figure 12) shows four little women, all clad or wrapped in soft, sheer garments. The two women to the right of the frame touch seductively. The woman behind the curtain glances furtively at the scene, reluctant to reveal herself. The overall effect is soft, fluid and sensual, stopping somewhere short of carnal. It is at the very least subtly homoerotic.

It is not that Laurencin's critics ignored these images. They simply treated the pictures of women adoring other women as expressions of narcissism, an attribute comfortably aligned in the male mind with femininity. In her article, "The 'Strength of the Weak'", Bridget Elliott suggests that this type of discussion perhaps displaced the more sensitive one for Laurencin's male admirers, that of the potential erotic bond

[84]Birnbaum, 228.

between Laurencin and women.[85] Because the women who indulged in the homoerotic pleasures of each other's company bear facial resemblances to Laurencin, she provides a "way out" for the suspicious heterosexual critic or collector. The *La prisonnière* of 1917 (Figure 13), however, perhaps indicates that there was no "way out" by this time for the artist.

Even the ballet performance, *Les Biches*, whose audience (as we have seen) was full of beautiful "Laurencin women," was a controversial production. *Les Biches* premiered in Monte Carlo in 1923/24 and played to much critical acclaim in London in 1925 and Berlin in 1926. Each production added to Laurencin's international celebrity. Despite its public reception, some detractors found its unmistakable suggestions of homosexuality to be "unsavory."[86] Its message, at least in part, was centered on lesbian themes.[87] As costume and set designer, she was able to clothe the dancers in the seductive beauty of femininity, causing even the most bourgeois French woman to aspire to that image.

It could easily be argued that Laurencin boldly appropriated the masculine gaze and derived voyeuristic pleasure from painting women. Her personal relationships with her models preoccupied her throughout her career.[88] A striking visual representation of the painter's seduction by her model is *Femme peintre et son modele* of 1912 (Figure 14). Twenty-five years later, a "carefully controlled desire that borders on the erotic and voyeuristic" surfaced in an article, "My Model," contributed by Laurencin to *The Listener* in 1937.[89] In the article, Laurencin spoke of her beloved model of the past ten years, Julia, in adulatory terms, "Mysterious Julia! I know nothing of where you sleep or

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[85]Ibid., 96.
[86]Gere, 23.
[87]Birnbaum, 336.
[88]Elliott, 92.
[89]Ibid., 98.

how you spend your days."[90] Laurencin referred to her model as "a living lamp which only exists in my presence."[91] She appeared to be in the throes of puppy-love as she traveled to Julia's house three or four times a year, never invited to enter, only to stare at it intently.[92]

Perhaps, as Elliott suggests, individuals simply saw in the paintings what they wished to see, either "essential femininity or lesbian eroticism."[93] At the time, Laurencin was producing images in a surprisingly consistent style that appealed to an extremely diverse group of patrons whose tastes ranged from the American collector, John Quinn, to those artists who traveled in lesbian circles, including Natalie Barney (1876-1972).[94] But if an untraditional, even feminist reading, existed in Laurencin's lifetime, it was overridden by the consistency of Laurencin's chosen image. Even when she slipped in clues to that were contrary to the role she scripted for her life, the sheer strength of her image as the *forme féminine* persisted.

Laurencin dressed her women in the acceptable garb of femininity and painted them in pastel colors. She adorned her "dancers, playmates, sisters, and lovers" with the female accoutrements of "hats, scarves, fluffy skirts, flimsy negligees, neckpieces and ribbons."[95] The Marie Laurencin woman became "the fabric, costume, and set design that real women emulated in their own physical appearances to signify a kind of commodified femininity that held popular currency in France during the period between the two world wars."[96] Like Laurencin herself, they performed a feminine spectacle.[97]

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[90]Ibid., 98.
[91]Ibid.
[92]Ibid., 99.
[93]Ibid.
[94]Ibid.
[95]Kahn, 146-8.
[96]Birnbaum, 244.

Why did her fans and collectors (as well as most modern feminist art historians) overlook the subversive content of the physically intimate lesbian behavior in Laurencin's art?[98] It is my contention that their willingness to see Laurencin as purely feminine is due to the sheer strength of her transformative image campaign. While others were held strictly accountable for the same type of communication, Laurencin escaped harsh notice. In 1922 Victor Margeritte's novel, *La Garçonne*, introduced a liberated woman who was determined to enjoy a broad range of sexual experiences, both heterosexual and homosexual. Margueritte challenged gender stereotypes to show that happiness was available outside of a bourgeois marriage and family. The public found the novel so shocking that it was banned from Parisian bookshops. Margueritte was stripped of the Légion d'honneur.[99]

Laurencin eluded such public disdain, proudly being named Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur in 1937. Her "self-constructed elusiveness" is still posthumously active. Her estate, either through her own wishes or those of Suzanne Moreau, her adopted daughter, lover, and executor, has placed severe restrictions on prospective authors.[100] In *Marie Laurencin: Artist and Muse,* published in 1989, Douglas Hyland and Heather McPherson suggest that "Laurencin's feminine focus should not be viewed as a mark of sexual deviance, but rather as a natural extension of her personality and reaffirmation of her own femininity."[101] The secrets, perhaps, are interred with Laurencin in the letters of Apollinaire resting under her head.

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[97]Kahn, 148.
[98]Ibid., 149.
[99]Green, 167.
[100]Kahn, xvii-xviii.
[101]Hyland and McPherson, 30.

CHAPTER 2
PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN

> When an image designed to meet an audience's expectations is properly crafted, it can be picked up by the media and driven through culture with terrifying velocity.
>
> -*High Visibility*
> Irving Rein, Philip Kotler, Martin Stoller

Laurencin took part in the creation of her fame via methods that were well ahead of her time. Now there is a broad-based understanding of what it takes to become famous. We understand that a celebrity attains public recognition through the work of cultural intermediaries, who may include publicists, marketing personnel, photographers, press agents, etc. These intermediaries work together to craft and to promote a personality that will appeal to a particular audience.[102]

In the beginning of the twentieth-century, however, Laurencin had none of the benefits of a public relations team to craft her image and push it to the public, yet her premier ranking in the world of art was largely a part of a public relations tactic. It was a brilliant campaign. Chapter 1 demonstrated how Laurencin carefully formed an image by appropriating the essential early twentieth-century elements of femininity, and consistently put that image in front of the public. This chapter deals with the mechanics

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[102]Rojek, 11.

by which Laurencin's image was supported by the media. It was precisely this characterization of Laurencin as the quintessential *femme peintre* by art critics, scholarly publications, and the popular press that allowed her to fit into a carefully-selected market niche where she could appear, even in the margins, within the core of early twentieth century modernism in France.[103]

The Precedent: Modernism and the French Press

It is important to understand the relationship between the modern artist and the art critic to appreciate the power of the press in the creation of Laurencin's fame. As art became increasingly non-representational, the need to explain it grew proportionately. In *The Popular Culture of Modern Art* (1994), Jeffrey Weiss cuts to the heart of the matter by stating that the primary experience of looking at modern art, especially in the case of the French avant-garde, was one of incomprehension.[104] From the time modern art began to appear in the Salons, the prodigious amount of ink spilled over it included a wide range of criticism from scholarly treatises and professional journalism (informed and un-informed) to the satirical French cartoon.

Regardless of their media, or if they were respectful of orthodox categories and hierarchies or not, modern artists in search of a reputation needed the press.[105] Parisian readers were especially interested in Salon reviews. An example of the most extreme criticism dates back to 1865, the "birth" of modernism, when Edouard Manet's (1832-1883) *Olympia* hung in the Salon. That year there were over seventy pieces written about *Olympia*. Most were scathing. *Olympia*, now widely heralded as the first truly "modern"

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[103] Birnbaum, 257.

[104] Jeffrey Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), xv.

[105] Green, 50.

painting, did not fare well with the press. Art critic Louis Auvray in *La Revue Artistique et Litéraire* reported "never has a painting excited so much laughter, mockery and catcalls as this *Olympia.*"[106]

There was a significant change in the French press just a few years before Laurencin went public. A law passed on July 29, 1888, removed all government restrictions from journalism and provided the press with a liberal framework. Between the 1890s and the 1900s, there was a great expansion in the number, circulation, and the diversity of newspapers, journals, and periodicals. With the Dreyfus Affair at the turn of the century, the press became an influential political force, capable of forming public opinion. The rise of the profession of art criticism was concurrent with the expansion of the journalism industry. The press's persuasiveness applied to the art world as well as to the political one. [107]

The press was not soon to change its impression of modernism. Forty years after the *Olympia* debacle, Henri Matisse (1869-1954) suffered similar cruelty at the hands of French journalists when *La Femme au Chapeau* (1905), another watershed of modernism, appeared in Room VII in the Salon d'Automne. One critic went as far as to suggest that Matisse might as well have hung his paint palette on the wall.[108] This kind of publicity was read by a broad spectrum of educated Parisians. By 1910, Louis Vauxcelles had front page coverage for all four major salons in the newspaper, *Gil Blas*. The strength of newspaper journalism in the early twentieth century is evidenced by its use in the papier-collés of 1912-1914 produced by Picasso, Braque, and Juan Gris (1887-

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[106]Clarke, 83.
[107]Green, 50.
[108]Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 18.

1927).[109] Artists looking for recognition needed the press since writers, now even more than state patronage, created reputations for artists and especially modernists.[110]

Although Manet's criticism appeared forty years before the appearance of Laurencin in the press and Matisse's *Femme au Chapeau* was overtly more radical than her production, she, too, was operating in a precarious position in the modern art movement. Women had not been admitted into the École des Beaux Arts until 1893, so those painting at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century were functioning as pioneers. They were in essence performing a public role that was largely seen as unsuitable. Women artists had to negotiate an impossible situation. They were caught between conflicting discourses of gender and genius. Laurencin recognized the importance of the press in finding a resolution to this conflict that would permit her critical engagement with the public as an artist.

Apollinaire: Laurencin's Critic

Laurencin had the clear advantage of being the mistress and muse of Guillaume Apollinaire, the "main impresario of the avant-garde."[111] The artist and her critic worked together to secure her public recognition. Apollinaire's art critical commentary was pervasive. During the sixteen years of his tenure as an art critic, he published hundreds of articles, most prominently in *L'Intransigeant,* a major newspaper. His column, "La vie artisque," ran from February 28, 1910 to March 5, 1914. He reported almost daily during the most critical years of modern art. He also contributed to *Le Mecure de France*,

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[109]Green, 50.

[110]Ibid., 50-51.

[111]Roger Shattuck, Foreword in *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews1912-1918*, ed. Leroy C. Breunig (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), xvii.

Paris- Journal, *Le Petit Bleu*, and *Les Soirées de Paris*, among other major and minor publications.[112]

Apollinaire's reputation as an art critic was debatable. Even his friend and contemporary, Braque said, "Apollinaire [was] a great poet and a man to whom I was deeply attached but, let's face it, he couldn't tell the difference between a Raphael and a Rubens."[113] But this type of insider gossip did not diminish Apollinaire's strength as perhaps the most important of all opinion makers among French intellectual society.

Often those who dispense the type of criticism that results in significant commercial promotion are not particularly discerning critics. In fact, it is not uncommon for the most influential critics to be famous for other reasons.[114] Those with more general talents have greater alternative opportunities and are comfortable taking chances and acting entrepreneurially.[115] This was the case for Apollinaire. His taste in art was clearly "undogmatic and eclectic."[116] He was first and foremost a poet. Art, however, constantly vied with literature for his attention. He loved artists' studios and galleries as much as he loved *bouquinistes* and libraries.[117]

His accomplishments in the early twentieth-century reception of modern art are legendary, including the introduction of Picasso to Braque, the organization of the famous Cubist room 41 in the Salon des Indépendants in 1911, the coordination of the Montmartre and Puteaux Cubists, the seminal lecture at Section d'Or in 1912, the "baptism" and celebration of Orphism, the organization and direction of the Soirées de

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[112]Leroy C. Breunig, ed., *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 517-518.
[113]Little, 95.
[114]Cowen, 91.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Peter Read, *Apollinaire and Cubism* (Forest Row, East Sussex, England: Artists Bookworks, 2002), 12.
[117]Ibid., 5.

Paris, the issuance of the manifesto on futurism, and the origination of the term, "surrealism."[118]

Clearly Apollinaire had the uncanny ability to recognize greatness. Although Picasso did not show his early Cubist work publicly until 1914, it was through Apollinaire's columns that the public became aware of the existence of this genius who was destined to alter the course of modern art.[119] Apollinaire introduced the unknown Braque to the public and "consolidated the careers" of Matisse, André Derain (1880-1954), and Maurice de Vlaminck (1876-1958).[120] It was this skill along with his innate taste, flair, and absolute belief in the nobility of art that earned him the title of "prophet of the modern movement."[121] In *Visions of the Modern*, art historian John Golding maintains that Apollinaire helped and encouraged more impressive, gifted, and for the most part, unknown young painters than any other critic."[122]

Not the least of which was Laurencin. Golding, in fact, claims that Apollinaire "invented" Laurencin.[123] In 1907, only two years after Matisse's debacle with *La Femme Au Chapeau*, Laurencin first exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants. It was in the same year at the gallery of art dealer Clovis Sagot that Picasso introduced her to Apollinaire with the words, "I have a fiancée for you."[124] Picasso intuitively recognized the possibilities of the liaison. In Laurencin, Apollinaire found his second half, [she is] "bright, witty, kind-hearted and very talented...a feminine version of myself. She is a

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[118] Shattuck, xv.
[119] John Golding, *Visions of the Modern* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 12.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Stattuck, xvii.
[122] Golding, 12.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Waller, 303.

true Parisian with all the adorable ways of a Parisian child."[125] Laurencin not only accepted her place as Apollinaire's female double and his muse, she promoted it. She realized the commercial and critical advantage of this role and pushed the constructed identity to its limits.[126]

Apollinaire's devotion to Laurencin translated itself into writing. By 1907, at the age of twenty-seven, he was already a literary presence.[127] Apollinaire not only paid homage to Laurencin in his poetry, but also lavishly praised her work in his art critical commentary placing her "in the constellation" of Braque, Picasso, Gris, and Gleizes (Albert, 1881-1953)..." [128] One need not look further than Leroy C. Bruenig's, *Apollinaire on Art*, a compilation of art criticism from 1908 to 1918, to see Apollinaire's devotion to Laurencin. In the text, there are thirty-six positive recommendations for Laurencin's art. As a method of comparison, Apollinaire mentioned contemporary artist Suzanne Valadon (1865-1938) only three times and Gabriele Münter (1877-1962) and Sonia Terk Delaunay (1885 – 1979) only once.

As her publicist, Apollinaire crystallized Laurencin's feminine image for public consumption. He first mentioned her work in 1908 and frequently thereafter in terms of adulation.[129] One of his early references to her work was a critical review of the 1908 Salon des Indépendants:

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[125]Ibid.
[126]Birnbaum, 183.
[127]Gere, 11
[128]Hyland and McPherson, 54.
[129]Gere, 14.

> I find no words adequate to define the totally French grace of Mlle. Marie Laurencin. She is endowed with the greatest possible number of feminine qualities and is free of all masculine shortcomings. Perhaps the greatest error of most women artists is that they want to surpass their male colleagues, and in attempting to do so, they lose their feminine taste and gracefulness. The case of Mlle. Laurencin is very different. She is aware of the profound differences that exist between men and women: difference in origin, difference in ideals. Mlle. Laurencin's personality vibrates with joyfulness. Purity is her natural sphere; she breathes in it freely. Woman has created many myths and many divinities that are not explained by euhemerism. *Diana at the Hunt*, *Allegory*, and *Artemis* their faces wet with tears of happiness, are the tender manifestations of this childlike and fabulous aspect of the feminine mind.

In Laurencin, Apollinaire found his female counterpart and the ultimate source of femininity in painting. By 1908 he initiated Laurencin into the enclave of the masters of the modernist movement, "Success has already rewarded the Picassos, the Matisses, the Derains, the Vlamincks, the Frieszes (Orthon, 1879-1949), the Marquets (Albert, 1875-1947), and the Van Dongens (Kees, 1877-1968). It should equally crown the works of a Marie Laurencin..."[130] Her inclusion in this list essentially depends on her exclusion from the gendered group of masculine geniuses operating in the cycles of modernism. It is precisely the image that Laurencin crafted and insisted upon.

Two years later, over six thousand paintings were exhibited in the 1910 Salon des Indépendants. Laurencin exhibited three works, *The Dressing Table*, *Study*, and *Still Life.* In his critical review of the Salon, Apollinaire addressed these works of Laurencin with the words, "...she has a self-assured command of her craft and an imagination imbued with a very decorative plastic lyricism. The purity of such art constitutes the honor of an age."[131] Again, he positioned her value in alignment with feminine signs: décor, lyricism, and purity. In the same year, he was severely critical of the Salon

[130]Breunig, 51.
[131]Ibid., 67.

d'Automne, diminishing its importance because of the *absence* of some very important artists, including Derain, Puy (Jean, 1876-1960), and of course, Laurencin.

In 1911, Apollinaire organized the famed Room 41 in the Salon des Indépendants. That year marked a critical shift in modern art, with the avant-garde moving from Impressionism to an increasingly non-representational painting. In Apollinaire's words, "A striving for composition has now taken precedent over Impressionist efforts, and hardly a trace of Impressionism remains in Rooms 41 and 43 which contain all that is energetic and new in this year's Salon.[132] He included Laurencin in his list of those leading the way by referring to the most important works in the Salon, including those by Fernand Léger (1881-1955), Vlaminck, Robert Delaunay (1885-1941), and Laurencin. He celebrated her two entries, *Portraits* and *Young Girls,* with reference to their gracefulness and nobility of her work. He reported that "for the sureness" of her taste, Laurencin is only equaled by Picasso.[133] Again, he found her distinction to reside in her femininity.

Five years into their affair, Apollinaire continued to uplift Laurencin in his writing. In March of 1912, in an article for *L'Intransigeant*, Apollinaire praised Laurencin's exhibition at the Barbazanges Gallery. He compared the feelings and taste that inspired Laurencin to that of the French artists of the Renaissance, claiming that her "refined and elegant art" was "the most strikingly original" of the time.[134] In his review of the 1912 Salon des Indépendents, he referred to Laurencin's *Women and Fans* as "a gracious composition, personal and original in its arrangement of line and choice of colors." In

[132]Ibid., 149.
[133]Ibid., 151.
[134]Ibid., 206-207.

fact, he prized the painting as the best picture in Room 19 and one of the best in the entire Salon.[135]

In "Art News: Women Painters," published by *Le Petite Blue* on April 5th of the same year, Apollinaire praised the efforts of women artists in general, and singled Laurencin out for exemplary achievement. He suggested in the article that women had a singular contribution to art. He believed that women, although not qualified to be technical innovators, could bring taste, intuition, and a joyous vision of the universe to art.[136]

> Grace is the thoroughly French artistic quality that women like Mme. Marval and Mlle. Marie Laurencin have maintained in art, even when, as in the last few years, art became severe, and painters, engrossed in new technical experiments that involved mathematics, chemistry, and cinematography no longer cared about charming their audiences.[137]

In Laurencin, Apollinaire found a truly original art that owed "nothing to any other kind of painting, ancient or modern."[138] He thought that her portraits of women characterized the feminine style of the time and believed that people would begin to define femininity in relationship to a Laurencin painting. In this same article, Apollinaire noted Laurencin's involvement with the two great artistic movements of the years 1910 to 1912, fauvism and cubism:

> But among the wild fauves, she was the *fauvette*; and if an Italian art critic, chose to call her Our Lady of the Cubists, M. Fernand Fleuret, who wrote the preface to the catalogue of her exhibition, riposted with an homage that gave that appellation its true meaning: "Hail, Marie, full of grace."[139]

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[135]Ibid., 215.
[136]Waller, 303.
[137]Breuning, 229.
[138]Ibid.
[139]Ibid.

Again, his emphasis was on the supremely feminine qualities that positioned her as a smaller artist, as a fauvette, and as a graceful woman who was actually deified through her identification with the Virgin Mary, the most miraculous of all women.

Apollinaire capitalized on sculptor Auguste Rodin's (1840-1919) appraisal of Laurencin. In the same article, he recounted a story told by Rodin's secretary, M. Mario Meunieu. Upon examining some works by Laurencin, Rodin declared: "Here, now is a woman who is neither futurist nor cubist. She knows what gracefulness is; it is serpentine."[140] Apollinaire commented on the essentially feminine qualities of curvilinear, serpentine forms in Laurencin's art and compared this aspect to the line and color of Loïe Fuller, a popular French dancer, who complemented feminine visual art forms with invention of "the serpentine dance," a brilliant mingling of painting, dance, drawing, and coquetry.[141]

Following the end of their relationship in 1912, Apollinaire continued to defend Laurencin. In 1913, he reviewed her painting *La bal élegant* (Figure 15) in the Salon des Indépendants as "a charming work" that is "among the most powerful and freest" works in the Salon.[142] In a later review, referring to the same work, he glowed with praise and pride, "One would have to write a poem to express the grace of its composition, the delicacy and depth of its feminine coloring; we are dealing here with a totally original artist."[143] The same year in response to an article in *L'Effort Libre* by critic M. Thiesson, Apollinaire once again placed Laurencin in upper echelons of the avant-garde, "Everyone is free not to like Matisse, Picasso, Derain, Braque, Léger, Marie Laurencin, etc. but no

[140]Ibid.
[141]Ibid., 230.
[142]Ibid., 284.
[143]Ibid., 291-292.

one can deny that they have been the most important painters of their time--and that I have defended them."[144]

Perhaps most significantly, in 1913, shortly after their split, Apollinaire situated Laurencin in the category of scientific cubists in the only book of criticism that was published in his lifetime, *Méditations esthétiques: Les Peintres cubists.*[145] He devoted an entire section to Laurencin, the only woman he considered in his treatise. His argument was once again that Laurencin expressed through the medium of painting an "entirely feminine aesthetic," usually reserved for decorative arts.[146] He deliberately placed her "somewhere between Picasso and Rousseau," capable of inspiring future women artists that he projects would eventually begin to utilize Laurencin's expressions of the "feminine aspects of the universe."[147] Critical discourse on Laurencin continued to reflect Apollinaire's early appraisal of her work, echoing his endorsement of her as France's leading proponent of France's feminine aesthetic characteristic, one that was full of joy, purity, naïveté, expressiveness of emotion, and a sense of the lyrically decorative. Apollinaire's criticism essentialized Laurencin's femininity and inspired the conflation of her life and her work in art critical terms.[148]

Beyond Apollinaire

In the United States, even more so than in France, the preferences of critics were extremely consequential because they not only taught the public how to look at but also how to value modern art as a commodity.[149] In 1913, fortified by critical acclaim,

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[144]Ibid., 373.
[145]Little, 96.
[146]Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Peintres Cubistes: Méditations Esthétiques* (Paris: E. Figuiere, 1913), 38.
[147]Ibid., 39.
[148]Birnbaum, 199.
[149]Hyland and McPherson, 51.

Laurencin exhibited seven works in the New York Armory Show, including *Young Girl, Girl with a Fan, Poetess, The Toilet of Young Girls*, and *Still Life* (dates, media, and years unavailable).[150] She and Emilie Charmy (1878-1974) were the only contemporary French woman artists to be included in the exhibition.[151]

Quickly Laurencin found her place in American journalism. By 1917 the climate for modern art had improved significantly in the United States. That year Laurencin had her first one person exhibition. Marius de Zayas, a major proponent of modern art, presented a collection of her drawings and watercolors in the Modern Gallery in New York. The exhibition received critical attention in both the *New York Sun* and the *New York Post*.[152] On May 6, 1917, the *Sun* reported:

> Marie Laurencin is one of the most conspicuous personalities of modern painting. An adventuress of thought, imbued with the essenially modernist, she has apprehended that in the life of the times there is an interloping, complex interweaving. With the manifestations of all new races, forming new adjustments every instant, she realizes that there is no possible saturation of spirit that could in a final way express that flowering of life that is called art. Derain chose the Italian and Spanish primitives as the medium of expression. Picasso found in the African art the means by which to render plastically his sensorality. Marie Laurencin has found the terms that express her femininity and sensibility as an artist... [153]

The review published in the *Post* was also highly complimentary, calling Laurencin an alluring and tantalizing feminine artist of exceptional sensitivity.[154]

By the following year, Apollinaire was gone. He died in 1918 of complications from an injury received in the First World War. Laurencin was left to manage her career without her most ardent fan and publicist. Laurencin had lived in exile during the War

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[150]Ibid., 57.
[151]Altshuler, 60.
[152]Hyland and McPherson, 60-61.
[153]Ibid.
[154]Ibid., 28.

and returned to Paris in 1921, three years after Apollinaire's death. Upon her return, Laurencin again began to capitalize on her image. The 1920s and '30s were decades of artistic fulfillment and critical and popular acclaim.[155] Her increasingly feminine art, largely dedicated to society portraiture, was now largely devoid of its experimental edge characteristic of her time among the Bateau Lavoir artists. Again, however, she was embraced by both serious journalists and authors and became the darling of the popular press.

Laurencin's post-war success was marked by the publication of the first monograph devoted to her (1921) and written by Allard.[156] He reasserted the popular assumption that Laurencin was indeed the "most famous of all contemporary women painters."[157] The focus of Allard's work was on Laurencin's narcissistic tendencies as displayed in obsessive renderings of self-portraiture. Allard, however, did not find this to be a negative quality, but a natural proclivity of women, creatures marked with a tendency to introspection. Another critic, André Suarès (1868-1948), concurred with Allard. Both Suarès and Allard believed that Laurencin's self portraits were evidence of her self-indulgence as a woman artist.[158] In their writings, she remained the archetypal female: this time self-loving, but still supporting her chosen role as the ultimate *femme peintre*.

An influential American art critic, Clarence J. Bulliet, of the *Chicago Evening Post,* wrote about Laurencin in *Apples and Madonnas* in 1930. He represented her as an artist who had developed the "most original and delicately feminine art the world had ever known." Bulliet identified her feminine touch as a continuation of the tradition of Vigée

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[155]Ibid., 30.
[156]Birnbaum, 222,
[157]Ibid.
[158]Ibid., 226.

le Brun (1755-1842) and Berthe Morisot. According to Bulliet, Valadon did not compare favorably to Laurencin, nor did Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986). He found O'Keeffe "vaguely sexless," but "Laurencin like Sappho" to be "the quintessence of sex."[159] Furthermore, he dismissed those who criticized her delicacy and reasserted Apollinaire's position that it was this feminine quality that was the source of pure originality.[160]

Eventually Laurencin benefited from the growing recognition of modern art that came with its exposure in the popular press, including the American magazines *The Dial* and *Vanity Fair* and the French publication, *La Vu*.[161] Influential tastemakers, including Frank Crowninshield, the publisher of Condé Nast magazines, not only wrote about Laurencin's work but collected it. He helped establish her reputation and her position as the only woman included in the company of the avant-garde.[162] In 1914, Crowninshield became the editor of *Vanity Fair* and redirected the magazine to cover the issues that "people talked about."[163] His twenty-two years of editorship are said to have brought about a cultural revolution by establishing a linkage between the art and entertainment worlds. As the "high priest of fashion," he had a particular interest in European élan, especially the style and culture of the French.[164] Through the years, his words were widely influential making many converts to French art through the pages of both *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* magazines. Frequently, he singled out Laurencin and emphasized that her femininity distanced her not only from men but from other celebrated women artists.

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[159]Hyland and McPherson, 70.
[160]Ibid.
[161]Ibid.
[162]Ibid., 51.
[163]Ibid., 67.
[164] Ibid., 66.

> ...she is the only considerable figure in the annals of art who has painted like a woman; who has, following instinctively the impulses of an undividedly feminine psyche, refused to join the prodigious army of the epicene painters – talents that are neither male or female-such amorphous figures of Vigée Lebrun Rosa Bonheur, Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt.[165]

In 1927, Crowninshield nominated her for the magazine's Hall of Fame, placing her in the ranks of the composer, Maurice Ravel; Colonel Thomas E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia); Governor Alfred E. Smith; and others. She was nominated, because he found her to be at once the most sophisticated and the most naïve of living women painters, the founder of a new school of French art whose art influenced not only the world of fashion, but the world of the galleries. [166]

The Ruse of the Interview

Laurencin extensively participated in media interviews.[167] She gave journalists and writers free access to her physical space. These interviews gave writers the opportunity to scrutinize her appearance, her studio, and her home. Laurencin made herself available, and took this as another opportunity to assert her femininity. Photos published with an interview that appeared in 1925 for *L'Art Vivant* entitled "Chez Marie Laurencin" give visual support to the article's theme which weaves "the artist, her model, and her variously displayed paintings and furnishings into "an amazingly consistent mage of femininity.[168] She supported the visual elements of the interview with strong verbal affiliation to all that was female. Laurencin frankly encouraged her interviewers to "wax lyrical" about her feminine manner of painting, her domestic studio, her cleanliness, and

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[165]Elliott, 76.
[166]Hyland and McPherson, 67.
[167]Elliott, 77.
[168]Ibid., 78.

her decorative apartment.[169] In her interviews, she marginalized her art to a place below the genius associated with the male avant-garde:

> Generally I paint to calm my nerves, and that is no easy task. I am always in a bad humor; I am somber and unsociable. I love the detail of life. I attach great importance to costumes, to hats, to all that is suitable to woman and beautifies her. A fashionable woman is one of the greatest works of art. I love feminine appearance. The hands of women, their feet are my greatest preoccupation. I dislike the nude. Women's breasts frighten me. I love clothes. Music charms me. I need a melody of a rhythm to bring out of me the composition and even the subject of my pictures.[170]

Here we see her keen insistence on separating herself from her male counterparts, using the interview as both a visual and a verbal invitation to view her primarily for her ability to behave and to paint like a woman.

Carnet des Nuits: In her own words

In her own public statements and retrospective memoirs, Laurencin emphatically belittled the seriousness of her entrée into the avant-garde, insisting that as a woman she was largely unable to perform Cubist experimentations.[171] Nowhere in writing is this drive clearer than in the writing of her hand, *Carnet des Nuits*, a journal of her poetical jottings and notes published in 1942:

> But if the masculine genius intimidates me, I feel perfectly at ease With everything feminine: when I was small I loved silk threads, and I stole pearls and spools of colored thread which I hid carefully and I would look at when I was alone. I would have liked to have had many children to comb their hair and dress it with ribbons. I loved to hear mothers sing. The most beautiful days were those when I was taken into a small community of nuns: the sisters would take me in their arms, show me picture books, and let me play the harmonium.[172]

The often repeated line, "the genius of men intimidates me," had been the mantra of Laurencin for over thirty years.

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[169]Ibid. , 74.
[170]Ibid.
[171]Birnbaum, 220.
[172]Waller, 305.

Until her death in 1956, Laurencin put a single face before her public, that of an essentially female painter. It was her insistence on one single quality that enabled her to manipulate her image and focus her career in acceptable terms. She had a front for her audience and devised a publicity campaign to push that image into the public sphere. It was a brilliant maneuver that positioned her for commercial success.

CHAPTER 3
NETWORKING

> With the mushroom-fertility of all pseudo-events, celebrities tend to breed more celebrities. They help make and celebrate and publicize each another. Being known primarily for their well-knownness, celebrities intensify their celebrity images simply by becoming widely known for relations among themselves. By a kind of symbiosis, celebrities live off one another.
>
> *-The Image*
> Daniel J. Boorstin

The term networking is now a cliché. In contemporary society, the process of networking is inextricably linked with social, political, and professional success. Moving ahead is deemed a result of not what we know, but of whom we know. Those wishing to advance themselves in competitive arenas are encouraged to join the right groups and clubs, attend the right business meetings or parties, and mingle with influential persons who may in return connect them to others of influence. The network must be constantly expanded with the hopeful end result of upward mobility (position), increased visibility (fame), and commercial success (fortune). Laurencin was an early master of the system. With an intelligent strategy employed from the very beginning of adulthood, she managed to move within areas of influence. Her early maneuvers and intimacies formed a permanent web of lifetime connections that assured her fame and her fortune. Laurencin's life story reads like a "who's who" of early twentieth-century insiders in the worlds of art, literature, business and fashion. This chapter will focus only on those connections that I believe were the key agents in the creation of Laurencin's celebrity. These were the associations that wrote her history. Most of the names have appeared in previous chapters, but here I will address the advantages given to Laurencin through their

connections. The divisions of this chapter are delineated by the three eras most widely acknowledged as the key stages of Laurencin's career.[173]

In the Pre-Apollinaire Era of Academicism (1903-1907)

In a 1928 interview with Dorothy Todd, the editor of British *Vogue*, Laurencin said:

> I am not interested in masculine activities in any description. Not any more in the "schools" of painting, in contemporary theorists than in engineering, politics, or finance. I watch the results of masculine energy and resources as a very detached onlooker.[174]

By mid-life, it appears Laurencin had tired of the gender game, but from the onset of her career, she depended on male contacts to introduce her into circles that would assure her celebrity. Laurencin made two of her most critical connections, Roché and Braque, when she was just twenty years old.

Roché was a modern flaneur, the consummate man about town. His eventual usefulness in her life far exceeded his earliest role as her lover. Roché "knew everybody worth knowing in Paris."[175] In fact, he introduced Picasso to Leo and Gertrude Stein. Leo, himself a very well-connected man, dubbed Roché "the great liaison officer" because of his wide circle of international contacts.[176]

Roché connected very well for Laurencin. He introduced her to her husband, Wätjen; her friend, patron and lover, Groult; and to John Quinn, one of the most notable American collectors of modern art in the early twentieth-century. These relationships were all intricate, multi-faceted, and very complicated. A brief statement about each is probably insufficient, but will serve simply to illustrate the possibilities afforded to Laurencin through these key connections.

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[173]Birnbaum, 242.
[174]Ibid., 237.
[175]Mellow, 86.
[176]Ibid.

Aside from Laurencin's obvious distaste for Wätjen, she found him useful. His noble heritage provided her a title and refuge during the First World War. Although her flight from Paris to Spain with her German baron had a "particularly bad odor" for Picasso, Braque, and Apollinaire, she spent her time in exile "prettifying her style and dallying, like her husband, with Spanish ladies and gentleman, hanging out with the Picabias (Francis and Gabrielle Buffet), Gleizes, and other refuges from the war."[177] Although Laurencin was only very superficially linked to the Dadaism, her association with Picabia in Spain spun another filament in her artistic web. Later he asked her to collaborate with him on the Dada periodical, *391*.

Similarly, Groult had much to offer Laurencin. As wife of a prominent decorator, André Groult, and sister to Paul Poiret (1879-1944), leading avant-garde couturier and a dedicated patron of modern art, Groult connected Laurencin within the decorative realm of artistic production. The affiliation with the decorative movement served Laurencin well in the second half of her career as she increasingly participated in lucrative engagements within these spheres. Groult also provided both practical and emotional support for Laurencin, helping her through financial and emotional issues that resulted from marital disentanglement and national estrangement.[178] Later, Groult dabbled in the art market and heavily promoted her lover's work.[179]

Finally, it was Roché who sold Laurencin to Quinn, one of the very few Americans eagerly accumulating twentieth-century art in the teens and twenties.[180] Quinn commissioned Roché as an agent in 1919, and by 1920 Roché had convinced him to

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[177]Richardson, 349.
[178]Stein, 70.
[179]Richardson, 305.
[180]Fitzgerald, 212.

purchase three key Laurencin compositions, including one of her best recent paintings, *Les femmes à la forêt* (Figure 16).[181]

Laurencin's second key network connection in 1904 was with Braque who studied with her at the Académie Humbert. The origin of the origin of the Laurencin/ Braque / Apollinaire network is the subject of a rather folkloric tradition. Legend has it that Laurencin reconnected Braque with Apollinaire, and the poet brought the painter to Picasso's studio.[182] History books give various accounts of these introductions, reintroductions, and associations, but the power of the resultant network is obvious. This circle of encounters apparently renewed, or at least strengthened, the connection between Braque and Picasso. This extraordinary relationship engendered Cubism, "the most influential art-movement of the twentieth century.[183] Although Picasso and Braque knew each other a few years earlier, their early association was apparently so unremarkable that neither could remember their first encounter.[184] By the spring of 1907, their relationship was reignited. Adjunctly, Laurencin officially became a member of Picasso's entourage. She was the only professional female artist to claim such distinction.[185]

In the Period of Cubist Association and Experimentation (1907-1921)

Laurencin's acceptance was a coup. The Bateau Lavoir was a dilapidated building serving as an artist's studio at 13 rue Ravignon at the top of Butte Montmartre in Paris. The studio was a hotbed of political, literary, and artistic invention, a place where the avant-garde pushed aside convention to make way for new methods of thinking, seeing,

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[181]Judith Zilczer, *The Noble Buyer: John Quinn, Patron of the Avant-Garde* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978), 111.
[182]Mellow, 95.
[183]Richardson, 67
[184]Ibid.
[185]Ibid. , 9.

and representing. Its habitués included a roster of insiders, including Rousseau, Braque, and Apollinaire; as well as Derain, Gris, the poet, Max Jacob, and others hand-picked by Picasso. Richardson refers to the entourage as a "tight little group of friends," *la bande à Picasso*. It was not only exclusive and disdainful of outsiders, but as much "a law unto itself as any aristocratic coterie."[186]

A woman was admitted only on the arm of a man – as a lover, wife, muse, or in the case of Gertrude Stein, as a patron. Apollinaire was insistent that Laurencin be accepted not only as his muse, but as one of the privileged circle of poets and painters of the Bateau Lavoir.[187] Olivier recorded Laurencin's alacrity in seizing the opportunity afforded her by this membership, "She quickly realized how she could profit from such an original and progressive entourage, and since her own temperament and instincts tended toward originality, she was soon successful.[188] The ever-ambitious Laurencin used her new connections to promote herself.[189]

In brilliant strokes, Laurencin immortalized her inclusion in the most auspicious artistic conclave of twentieth century by painting herself twice in its midst. Laurencin was the first woman to include herself into a group portrait of artists.[190] The first of these paintings, *Apollinaire et ses amis* (Figure 17) was painted in 1908. It features from left to right: Picasso with his dog, Frida; Laurencin centrally situated between the great artist and the great writer; Apollinaire; and Olivier spouting a wild arabesque of flowers from her head. The second painting, *Réunion à la campagne* (Figure 3), has been previously discussed. Its importance here is not necessarily how Laurencin looks, but her place

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[186]Richardson, 3.
[187]Stainton, 207.
[188]Ibid., 209.
[189]Richardson, 65.
[190]Frances Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves* (New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), 127.

within this esteemed network of painters and poets. This painting includes eight figures, from right to left: the three graces personified by Gertrude Stein, Olivier, and the poetess, Marguerite Gilot; Apollinaire with Picasso beside him; an unknown woman often identified as Laurencin's mother, Pauline; the poet Maurice Cremnitz, who dedicated his *Eclogues* to her; and Laurencin.[191] These two beautiful canvases, probably the most masterful of Laurencin's career, exude the confidence that comes from belonging. The paintings are characterized by "flat areas of colour, shallow space and reference to African masks," perhaps justifying Laurencin's inclusion in the circles of both Picasso and Rousseau.[192]

These two group portraits are excellent examples of marketing bravado. Laurencin not only managed to paint herself within the circle, but as both paintings hung in prestigious locations she was further situated into the midst of the great artists of the time. Laurencin gave *Réunion* to Apollinaire. It hung above the bed in his apartment on the boulevard Saint-Germain. Over and over it appears in photographs of the poet's well-documented living space. Gertrude Stein purchased the *Group of Artists*. It took its place prominently on the wall of 27, rue de Fleurus, the apartment of Leo and Gertrude Stein. The portrait could not have appeared in a more visible location. A visitor to the Stein salon in the "early years of the twentieth-century might well have believe he had been admitted to an entirely new form of institution – a ministry for the propaganda for modern art."[193] A painting could receive international distinction through its place at the Stein's home since a constant stream of curious art aficionados from around the globe migrated to their salon. The Steins "could easily have claimed the distinction of having instituted the first

[191]Richardson, 67
[192]Read, 81.
[193]Mellow, 3.

museum of modern art" since their entourage included eager young students from Germany, visiting Swedes and Hungarians, and most importantly, wealthy American tourists.[194]

Group of Artists was situated on the white-washed walls of the Salon with masterpieces of modern art hanging from floor to ceiling. It hung among the likes of "stunning Cézanne (Paul, 1839-1906) oils and watercolors, with the brilliant smears of Matisse's Fauve landscapes, with the somber, brooding nudes and acrobats of Picasso's Blue and Rose Period..."[195] In the Stein salon, there were also Renoirs (Pierre-Auguste, 1841-1919) and Gauguins (Paul, 1848-1903), as wells as a work by Delacroix (Eugène, 1798-1863) and El Greco (1541-1614).[196]

It is at least a practical consideration that Laurencin's liaison with Apollinaire allowed her inclusion among the Steins' select artists. Gertrude Stein, herself a writer and poet, found Apollinaire to be a most formidable presence:

> Guillaume was extraordinarily brilliant and no matter what subject was started, if he knew anything about it or not, he quickly saw the whole meaning of the thing and elaborated it by his wit and fancy carrying it further than anybody knowing anything about it could have done, and oddly enough generally correctly.[197]

Although one might assume that Stein herself may have been sympathetic to the struggle of female artists working in such gendered territory, such was not the case. Women artists did not fare well in the Stein's salon.[198] So, it was even more fortuitous that a Laurencin hung with the modern masters of the male art world.

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[194]Mellow, 4.
[195]Ibid.
[196]Stein, 14.
[197]Ibid., 66
[198]Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 183.

Laurencin's general acceptance into this "enclosed and jealously guarded world was confirmed by her inclusion in the list of guests who attended the banquet given for Henri Rousseau in 1908."[199] The stories surrounding this celebration cast her in a most unfavorable light. Stein's personal account touches on Laurencin's drunkenness and even Apollinaire's physical abuse of his mistress.[200] Nonetheless, as long as she was with Apollinaire, Laurencin's inclusion was secure. Rousseau further situated Laurencin within this esteemed company in 1909 by painting her alongside Apollinaire in *The Muse Inspiring the Poet* (Figure 18).

Laurencin's later accounts include references to the spitefulness and decadence of Picasso's gang, and as a woman she was often forced to contend with the "macho condescension and beastliness in this phallocentric group."[201] Yet during these years as Laurencin worked to secure market visibility, she seemed to clearly understand the need to align herself with them.

Picasso himself was a key player in Laurencin's negotiations. Laurencin claimed that Picasso used her for one of the nude models posing for *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (Figure 19), and he at least placed her there anecdotally.[202] Laurencin's works are frequently discussed as parodies of masculine masterpieces, and *Reunion* (Figure 3) slyly travesties *Les Demoiselles*, with the presence of the three graces to the left and a squatting woman (in Picasso's case) and a bending woman (in Laurencin's case) to the extreme right.[203] After studying Laurencin's tactics, it is difficult not to make this

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[199]Gere, 10.
[200]Stein, 116.
[201]Richardson, 8.
[202]Julia Fagan-King, "United on the Threshold of the Twentieth-century Mystic Idea: Marie Laurencin's Integral Involvement with Guillaume Apollinaire and the Inmates of the beateau Lavoir, " *Art History* 2 (1998): 104.
[203]Hyland, 23.

comparison. Picasso was at least sufficiently enough attracted to Laurencin's work. He purchased *La songeuse* (Figure 20) for his private collection. As long as this association continued to serve her, Laurencin remained within his arena.

It is critically important in this discussion to consider Laurencin's early willingness to associate herself with Cubism. Although her presence among the Cubists did not always serve her well, her connections with the group brought her great visibility and notoriety. Inclusion within an established canon, with a sector that is "thick with achievement" can easily produce fame through "complementaries and collective fame packaging."[204] Such was certainly the case with Laurencin and Cubism. Her links with the movement are tenuous at best, but she is the only woman attributed any role in Cubism's formation.[205] Significantly, at the insistence of Apollinaire, Laurencin's work was exhibited in the famous Room 41 in the twenty-seventh exhibition of the Salon des Indépendents.[206] Most art historians take her inclusion lightly. In *The Cubist Epoch* (1970), Douglas Cooper claims that "Marie was pushed into the Cubist group because she was the mistress of Apollinaire. Her paintings were not Cubist in any way whatever."[207] Her early willingness, however, to be placed inside a group that she later admitted to disdaining, allowed her at the time to situate herself within a group that was attracting phenomenal attention.

It is interesting to consider how Laurencin would have fared if she had operated independently of the Cubist canon. Scholars of group dynamics understand that leaders who often labor insignificantly in isolation are able to achieve renown by participating in

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[204]Cowan, 129.
[205]Perry, *Gender and Art*, 222.
[206]Golding, 24.
[207]Douglas Cooper, *The Cubist Epoch* (London: Phaidon Press, 1970) , 100.

collective trends or movements.[208] The Spanish artist, Maria Blanchard (1881-1932); the Russian artist, Marvena (Maria Vorobev, 1892-1974); and the Polish artist, Alice Halicka (1895-1972) were all working in Paris at the same time as Laurencin and producing art more aligned with the aesthetic and technical concerns of Cubism.[209] It was Laurencin, however, who saw her way out of oblivion with a series of connections that even survived a split with Apollinaire.

As Laurencin began to separate from Apollinaire and *la bande à Picasso*, she made a key connection with another male artist, André Mare (1885-1932). Mare solicited a diverse group of modernist artists to collaborate on the Cubist House for the 1912 Salon d'Automne (Figure 21).[210] Laurencin contributed a porcelain vase and four oval portraits to the project.[211] The four paintings bore both facial and iconographical resemblances to Laurencin.[212] While this exhibition was labeled decisively as another Cubist venture, it was a bridge for Laurencin. Through her participation in The Cubist House, she maintained her linkage to the earlier connections while forging a relationship with an up and coming group firmly ensconced in the decorative arts. Through considerable strategic alliances, Laurencin managed to situate herself within two distinct circles of the avant-garde.

The activities of both groups outraged the bourgeois Parisian mentality, but ironically Laurencin was a survivor and a player. She bridged both worlds. As a *femme peintre*, she remained palatable to the gendered art-world. As an artist, she shared the spotlight with

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[208]Cowan, 123.
[209]Perry, *Gender and Art*, 222.
[210]Kahn, 60-1.
[211]Gere, 15.
[212]Kahn, 65.

avant-garde groups that received great media attention. As the world became acutely aware of radical new waves of art-making, Laurencin was involved, even if marginally. She was poised for celebrity.

Commercial value is the core essence of celebrity.[213] Modernity brought forth a "diverse and plentiful array of achievements" in part "through greasing the wheels of approbational exchange."[214] And through the exchange for profit, an artist could achieve fortune and fame. Both Laurencin's femininity and her connectedness stood to serve her well commercially. She found herself in need of the right dealer to manage her market by further situating her work within influential private and public collections.

By this stage of artistic productivity, the artist's relationship with a dealer was the only route to commerciality. French Salon tradition had long boasted an Academy that positioned artistic practice in opposition to self-promotion.[215] By 1861, however, there were 104 art dealers in Paris indicating a large increase in the amount of work being produced outside of the Salon for commercial sale. By the end of the century, commercial success rivaled stuffy institutional honors. It was the Impressionists who established the basic model of the modern art market. The artists of the early twentieth century, including Laurencin, reaped the benefits. The "dynamism of the dealers was the engine of modernism."[216]

There is a false, though prevalent, assumption that artists of the avant-garde, because of their rejection of traditional rules and values, stood in opposition to the conventional

[213]Rein, Kotler, and Stoller, 14.
[214]Cowan 163.
[215]Fitzgerald, 6-7.
[216]Green, 52.

systems of consumption that generate wealth and fame. [217] Many of its leaders were deeply involved in the art market. Beginning in the fledgling galleries of Berthe Weill and Ambroise Vollard (1865-1939), the avant-garde found exhibition venues totally outside of the Salons.[218]

Picasso's acceptance of art as a commercial vehicle placed the avant-garde artist clearly within the traditions of entrepreneurship.[219] Compared to the women of her generation, Laurencin was ambitious for critical recognition and commercial success, but certainly no more than the men, especially Picasso.[220] For the first time in 1912, Laurencin connected with a dealer. She negotiated a handsome arrangement with Paul Rosenberg, a leading Parisian art impresario, who occasionally handled Matisse, Braque, and most especially, Picasso. Her relationship with Rosenberg lasted, on and off, until 1940 – nearly half of her career. Rosenberg heavily promoted her works, arranging exhibitions not only in Paris, but eventually in London, Düsseldorf, and New York.[221] Laurencin understood the handsome benefits of this artist/dealer connection:

> The new dealer was an inventor of talent, a partner to creators and a mediator whose influence was enhanced by the lack of receptivity to modern art displayed by the traditional arbiters: museums and the official Salons. He inspired to be a genuine "cultural player," participating in the artist's reflections, offering them moral support and making it his business to defend and explain their work.[222]

Additionally, Laurencin found herself firmly connected and marketed through her inclusion in the influential sale of La Peau d'Ours collection. The growing strength of the

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[217]Fitzgerald, 4.
[218]Green, 53.
[219]Fitzgerald, 28.
[220]Elliott, 89.
[221]Ibid. , 70.
[222]Pierre Georgel, *From Renoir to Picasso: Masterpieces from the Musée de l'Orangerie* (Montreal: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2000) , 18.

market for modern art and Laurencin's singular position within that market were further evidenced on March 2, 1914 at the Parisian Hôtel Drouot. It was the first time that the art of the Fauves and the Cubists had been tested in the public marketplace.[223] Forty-five lots of art sold for 116,454 francs, an amount that quadrupled the investments over ten years of a savvy group of entrepreneurial investors led by businessman, André Level. The newsworthiness of the sale on both sides of the Atlantic and the ensuing prices for modern art demonstrated the interdependence between critical and commercial acclaim and the role of market success in securing artistic reputation.[224]

The sale clearly demonstrated the value of strong connections and a public relations campaign. La Peau de L'Ours sale was a social event. The mood was enhanced with festive décor. The organizers secured advance publicity in several newspapers and published a lavish exhibition catalogue. The room was filled with Paris' elite, including dealers, collectors, a large press corps, artists, and critics. The event laid the groundwork for a public relations channel that united the avant-garde with the haute mode.[225]

In the Post-War Phase to the end of her Life: 1920 – 1956

During the four years of the First World War, the art market dissipated, but revived in the 1920s, maturing into the model for the network of relationships that we understand as the modern art world.[226] Laurencin crafted a plan to insert herself into a renewed, but changed, market. She proceeded with confidence. She refused contracts from certain galleries, including those of Paul Guillaume and Bernheim. In 1920, she renegotiated a

[223]Fitzgerald, 115.
[224]Ibid., 118.
[225]Ibid., 39-40.
[226]Ibid., 11.

contract with Rosenberg. Just a few months earlier, he had signed Picasso.[227] Rosenberg provided both Laurencin and Picasso with financial resources, social entrée, and the opportunity to be exhibited as avant-garde artists, yet within the framework of traditional French seventeenth to nineteenth-century French masters.[228] Rosenberg built the modern market and the reputation of Picasso and Laurencin by connecting the modernists with the masters.[229] He stocked only a few twentieth-century artists, most notably Picasso and Laurencin whom he considered to have the most commercial potential.[230]

Paris in the 1920s was the scene of an explosion of conspicuous consumption. Modernity was the rage both in painting and in decorative arts.[231] Laurencin was comfortably connected in both worlds. Rosenberg encouraged her to focus on the aspects of her painting that would be the most commercially successful.[232] She chose artistically and commercially to "hedge her bets" by working in an accessible hybrid style allowing her to move between both constituencies, skillfully playing one against the other.[233] Laurencin's selection of Rosenberg for her dealer was astute. In the fall of 1923, he made inter-continental arrangements with the Chicago Arts Club. The works of three of his artists – Picasso, Braque, and Laurencin – were exhibited at the Art Institute, establishing a network that linked the commercial gallery to the public institution. This coup built Laurencin's market by elevating her to a museum-worthy status.[234]

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[227]Birnbaum, 220.
[228]Fitzgerald, 82.
[229]Ibid. , 122
[230]Green, 55.
[231]Valérie Bougault, *Paris Montparnasse: The Heyday of Modern Art 1910-1940* (Paris: Terrail, 1997) , 142.
[232]Gere, 8.
[233]Elliott, 87.
[234]Fitzgerald, 122.

Her marketability flourished. Laurencin's stubborn persistence in painting instinctive and curious pictures of young girls and mythic animals, instead of keeping up with the Cubists, paid off.[235] Her Parisian contract with Rosenberg was supported with contracts in Germany with Flechteim and with Quinn in New York.[236]

In an interview with Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia published in *Arts* in June 1923, Laurencin distanced herself from her old network:

> Cubism has poisoned three years of my life, preventing me from doing any work. I never understood it. I get from Cubism the same feeling that a book on philosophy of mathematics gives me. Aesthetic problems make me shiver. As long as I was influenced by the great men surrounding me I could do nothing.[237]

While the avant-garde Picasso appeared to exercise greater artistic license, the à la mode Laurencin was critical of how he "toadied" to the dealers. In 1933 she remarked to René Gimpel, "He [Rosenberg] doesn't have a hold over me as he has over Picasso and Braque. Picasso fills me with pity, he is like a child."[238] The Cubist association, however avant-garde and important to the history of modern art, no longer served her well. Laurencin was "lured by the financial prospect of extending her market beyond the rather limited confines of the avant-garde."[239] She was happy to have her work exhibited by interior decorators in the Exposition of Arts Décoratifs in 1925.[240]

By then Rosenberg was paying Laurencin 50,000 francs per year. She was the most sought-after portraitist of socialite collectors, including Helena Rubenstein and Coco Chanel.[241] By connecting with relevant opinion-makers, Laurencin was able to promote

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[235]Gere, 7.
[236]Kahn, xxi.
[237]Elliott, 74.
[238]Ibid., 87.
[239]Ibid., 74.
[240]Ibid.
[241]Green, 65.

her fame (and long-run income) by selling her work to elites.[242] Additionally, her popular female figures and ornamental designs were in demand for graphic accompaniment to books by well-known authors, including André Gide (1869-1951), René Crevel (1900-1935), and Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), and theatrical designs for the Comte de Beaumot's Soirées (*Les Roses*, 1924) and the Comédie-Française (*A quoi revent les jeunes filles*, 1928).[243]

At this stage of her life, Laurencin found her fame and her fortune within a new market that was comprised more of the haut-monde than the avant-garde. She was not concerned with defending a reputation for making difficult and challenging art, but was happy to execute paintings for commercial use.[244] Picasso secured higher prices from Rosenberg but he seldom attracted or encouraged clients like Helena Rubenstein and Chanel whose exhibition vehicles were too fashionable to be considered prestigious.[245] She was a single woman and had to sell a substantial amount of art to support herself. Laurencin knew her audience. During the '30s and '40s, on the eve of the political crisis of the Second World War, a disaster that could shut down the career of any artist, Laurencin sustained herself with fashionable commissions.[246]

Laurencin's lifetime strategy paid off. Her freedom allowed her a humorous arrogance. She protected herself at the end of her career from unwanted commissions by manipulating her own market. She charged more for work that she found boring. She

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[242]Cowen, 33.
[243]Georgel, 225.
[244]Elliott, 87.
[245]Ibid., 86.
[246]Kahn, xxi.

doubled her fee when requested to paint men. She upped the ante for brunettes, who inspired her less than pale blondes. She painted only the children that she liked.[247] Her network included those within her level of comfort. As she became financially secure, she settled more and more into intimate seclusion with Suzanne Moreau, who entered her household in 1925, first as a domestic, then as an adopted daughter, and eventually quite possibly a lover.[248]

In her public statements and retrospective memoirs, Laurencin emphatically denied the seriousness of her entrée into the avant-garde, insisting that as a woman she was incapable of intellectual art.[249] The transparency of her words is belied by the complex strategy that she executed over a lifetime. The avant-garde simply no longer suited her.

Marie Laurencin had an unusually long and lucrative career. She achieved celebrity status by serving as an agent of her own fame. She transformed her image from a *jolie laide* school girl to a feminine icon. She deftly sold the image through the media, first through the agent Apollinaire, and then from a series of art critics and popular writers. She associated with the right people at the right time, forming a large network of connections that she used to her purpose. Essentially, she served as the agent of her own fame. In the end, she did exactly what she wanted. She died a success. During her life, she was the most celebrated of all female artists. She played her game well.

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[247]Gere, 9.
[248]Kahn, 149.
[249]Birnbaum, 220.

Conclusion

Laurencin was a master of the market. By 1925, she had a well-appointed Parisian apartment on the rue Savoran and a country house at Champrosay.[250] Her fame encompassed the *avant-garde* and the *haut-mode*. During her life, her name was included in the roll call of modernist masters known for their originality including, Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Gris, Friesz, Delaunay (Robert), and Marcoussis (Louis, 1878-1941).[251] In 1930, the writer Albert Flamant organized a luncheon in honor of the "four queens of French culture." His guests were Colette in literature, Valerie Tessier (1892-1989) in theatre, CoCo Chanel (1993-1971) in fashion, and Marie Laurencin in painting.[252]

But what has happened to Marie Laurencin's fame? When I am asked the subject of my thesis, I receive only quizzical looks when I answer, "Marie Laurencin." I begin my litany. "She was Apollinaire's mistress..." Heads begin to nod. "If I showed you her work, you'd recognize it, but you see more of it in poster shops than in museums."

The impressive volume, *Women Artists in the 20th and 21st Century* (2001), "showcases ninety-three women artists of the Western world, placing women whose art has brought them global fame alongside women whose careers in art have only just begun."[253] It was the only text on women artists to be found in the comprehensive book-shop of the Centre Pompidou et du Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne in Paris. It does not showcase Laurencin.

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[250]Elliott, 70.
[251]Gere, 7.
[252]Ibid.
[253] Uta Grosenick, ed., *Women Artists in the 20th and 21st Century* (Köln: Taschen, 2001), 5.

So, what is to be said about the fame that comes principally as a result of brilliant marketing? Why was Laurencin's fame short-lived? Is this the fate of fame that is achieved in the absence of talent, or merit?

Although Laurencin's name is no longer mentioned in the same breath as that of Picasso and Braque, the remnants of her reputation as an artist of merit remain. Lot 1021 of the April 1996 auction of the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis estate was Laurencin's *Femme au Cheval.* The painting, valued at $60,000 to $80,000, sold for $112,500. [254] But the success of this sale may rest more on the legend that is Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis than the legend that is Marie Laurencin.

There are many valid explanations for Laurencin's slip into obscurity. It may just be her inclusion in the canons of Cubism that led circuitously to her extinction. Although this association originally served her well, we have seen that eventually Laurencin herself tried to distance herself from the movement. Her constantly shifting and ambivalent relationship with the Cubists "was both enabling and alienating."[255] Perhaps Apollinaire's extravagant praise ironically "contributed to the denigration of Laurencin's oeuvre."[256]

As her art became more commercial and formulaic, she was increasingly dismissed as a serious artist. Although the writer, Somerset Maugham (1874-1965), purchased four of her paintings between 1923 and 1927, following her death, he said, "She was not a great artist, far from it, but a pleasing one."[257]

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[254]Anne Willette, "Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Auction," *USA Today*, 29 April 1996, 4 (D).
[255]Elliott, 72.
[256]Hyland and McPherson, 20.
[257]Gere, 7.

But this is the painter Laurencin chose to be. She could have chosen a far different path that very possibly would have resulted in a longer-lasting critical acclaim, but most certainly would not have resulted in financial security. At the onset of her professional training at the Académie Humbert, Georges Lepape (1874-1971) introduced his best friend Georges Braque to Laurencin, calling her "prodigiously gifted."[258] We have seen the fruits of this talent in the intensely bold painterly style of Laurencin's 1904 self-portrait and the brilliant group portraits of 1908 and 1909.

Perhaps if Laurencin had continued in this direction, painting in innovative milieus, not necessarily Cubist, but certainly primitive, she would not have been dismissed by the insistent voices of the feminists in the 1970s. She has received very little attention in recent feminist analysis of the modernist avant-garde. Perhaps she is too difficult to categorize. Some say that she appropriated gendered attributes in retribution for her alleged deficiency as an artist.[259] Others say that her embrace of the decorative and fanciful allowed her to be heard, but forbade her from being taken seriously.[260]

And, what is it exactly that constitutes a serious artist? When art or skill simply cannot be measured by quantifiable attributes, when message often supersedes media, when "outsiders" become "insiders," who becomes the judge of talent, the arbiter of taste, the determinate of fame? And how do we account for those artists whose paths evolved in a direction diametrically opposed to that of Laurencin? Vincent Van Gogh received virtually no public recognition during his life, but posthumously, he is arguably the most famous (greatest?) artist of all. His *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* sold for $82,000,000 on May 15, 1990 at Christie's New York.

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[258]Richardson, 61.
[259]Birnbaum, 5.
[260]Elliott, 76.

Perhaps it is because Van Gogh was not properly marketed until after his death. It has been said that even a masterpiece needs marketing.[261] Ultimately, an artist's fate, during his life and after his death, "rests on a complex, historically determined sequence of events, the participation of various historical agencies (people, institutions, processes) working in largely unplanned or unconscious manner for different ends."[262] And when this measure of uncertainty exists, when an artist cannot depend on his own talent to create his fame, he may simply chose to capitalize on the market. Although value questions remain and additional research is required to untangle the difference between Laurencin's critical and commercial success, one thing appears obvious. Laurencin earned her fame through a brilliant marketing strategy and she lived to enjoy the fruits of her labor.

[261]Donald Sasson, *Mona Lisa: The History of the World's Most Famous Painting* (London: HarpersCollins Publishers, 2001) , 6.
[262]Ibid.

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