

## FINE ARTS

# Class at BBAA to trace 'Herstory of Art'

BY LINDA ANN CHUMIN  
STAFF WRITER

Deborah Lubera-Kawsky challenges men and women alike to look through any art history textbook for images created by or for women.

"Although women's contributions to the arts have been significant throughout history," explains Lubera-Kawsky, "that has not been reflected in the teaching of art history. The majority of photographs found in the textbooks are representations of women."

Lubera-Kawsky, a Plymouth resident who graduated with a doctorate in art history from Princeton University, is about to change that. She will teach a new class, "The Herstory of Art: Women and the Visual Arts," beginning Wednesday, Jan. 7 at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, 1516 South Cranbrook Road, Birmingham. For more information, or to register, call (248) 644-0866.

"How many women artists can you name?" asked Lubera-Kawsky. "In the art history textbooks you see more images of women, than created by women. In Renaissance times, women were more to be seen than heard. Women were considered

more objects than subjects. Elaborate dresses in the portraits represented importance of the family not the woman."

According to Lubera-Kawsky, the lack of images by or for women is an oversight often explained by the lesser social and economic status of women, by the perishable nature of the arts frequently practiced by women such as textiles and ceramics, and by the categorization of these arts as "minor arts."

Slides shown during the classes will document the history of women in art while examining a range of topics from portraits of women in Italian Renaissance art to contemporary art as political statement. She will also cover the achievements of women in the arts from the prehistoric era to the present time, highlighting women as subjects, patrons and artists. For the final session, Lubera-Kawsky plans to bring in a contemporary woman artist for her perspective on the state of women artists today. The class will also take a trip to the Detroit Institute of Arts to view works.

"Up until our own century, there were so many rules placed on women in society," Lubera-Kawsky. "It's inspiring to see how many obstacles they over-

came."

Investigating the topic has been illuminating for Lubera-Kawsky. "I wanted to do the class because I wanted to know about this myself. I ended up doing a lot of research on not only artists but historical background and placing the works in historical context. You need to know the history of how and why things were represented."

Some of the earliest self-portraits were created in the Middle Ages by women artists who were transcribing manuscripts. "In the Middle Ages you either got married or joined the convent, and if women wanted to be artists, the monastery was the main center of learning where they could be trained and receive education."

Up until the Middle Ages, there is not much documentation of women creating art except for textiles.

"During the Renaissance and Middle Ages, we first started knowing the names of artists, but women weren't major figures in influencing the art of the day," said Lubera-Kawsky. "During the Renaissance, women were primarily portrait artists then started moving into history painting. Male artists resented the move."

In the Baroque era, Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) was probably the most significant woman artist and one of the first to move into the male dominated area of history painting. Her oil on canvas "Judith and Holofernes" (c. 1625) is one of the paintings the class will visit at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The painting shows Judith of the Old Testament, Judith liberated her people from an advancing army by seducing and then beheading the general of the army.

"Artemisia's own experiences affected what she represented in her art," said Lubera-Kawsky. "She was raped by one of her instructors so she often represented women being wronged."

In the 18th century, the Age of Enlightenment did not filter down to women like Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842), the official portrait painter of Marie Antoinette to her the French Revolution. However, women artists did play a role in influencing politics. Even though some of them almost lost their heads doing it.

"At the time, artists were political propagandists," said Lubera-Kawsky. "During the revolution Marie Antoinette was criticized for saying 'let them eat cake' in reference to her subjects so Vigée-Lebrun painted Marie

Antoinette with her children to try to change her image. After the family was executed, Vigée-Lebrun fled the country fearing for her life."

In the late 19th century, Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), was one of the most influential female artists. She painted primarily women and children.

"We know a lot about her art, but she was important in promoting the French Impressionists," said Lubera-Kawsky. "At the time, French Impressionism was very revolutionary and people didn't like it."

Women artists, such as Cassatt, could not take a life drawing class with nude female models until the 19th century, nor with male nudes until the 20th century.

"It wasn't considered proper," said Lubera-Kawsky. "Now it

seems silly for us to think a woman couldn't go to a life drawing class to study from a male nude."

One of the most important women artists in the last half of the 20th century is Judy Chicago (b. 1934) who relays feminist issues in her work. The class will also cover African American artists such as Faith Ringgold.

"I wanted to do the class because I wanted to know about this myself," said Lubera-Kawsky. "I ended up doing a lot of research on not only artists but historical background and placing the works in historical context. You need to know the history of how and why things were represented."

A mother of an 18-month-old and a 4-year-old, Lubera-Kawsky would like to offer an art history class for children at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association

in the future. Unlike the art history classes Lubera-Kawsky taught at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, the BBAA offers her the freedom to design courses.

"I was so impressed by the depth of the appreciation of the arts at the BBAA, and I like being involved with the community," said Lubera-Kawsky. "I like to bring art to life, to discuss the function of art, how it was used to save your soul during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Those paintings of objects were part of daily life."

Linda Ann Chumin is an art reporter for the Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers. If you have an interesting idea for a story involving the visual or performing arts, call her at (313) 953-2145.



Self portrait: The age of enlightenment did not filter down to women like Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, the official portrait painter to Marie Antoinette.

## Group launches petition drive to 'Restore Detroit Classical FM Radio'

A group of Oakland County residents reeling from the sudden loss of the classical music format at WQRS-FM 105.1 have started a petition drive with the hope of creating a new classical music format station.

The Southfield-based station, owned by Greater Media of New Jersey, changed to a "cutting edge" rock format in late November. The new format was greeted by widespread displeasure among classical music listeners.

Known as "Restore Detroit Classical FM-Radio, 1998," the grassroots movement is intended to show the outraged faces overlooked in the amorphous radio "ratings" system.

Greater Media pointed to WQRS' low ratings and inability to attract a broader base of advertisers as reasons for the format change.

"Praying for miracles often bears results, but it is also necessary to initiate an organized movement fast," said Nina Stoddard of Bloomfield Hills, who's spearheading the drive in southeastern Michigan.

In addition to accumulating names on petitions, the group plans to hold a public meeting so former WQRS listeners can formally register their opposition to the format change.

The effect of the organized opposition, however, is unclear. While the objective of the peti-

tion drive is to force a radio station to adopt a new classical format, there are no legal remedies in industry precedent favoring the group of disgruntled listeners.

Nearly all radio stations are commercial enterprises, regulated by the Federal Communications Commission. Stations are not required to maintain any particular format. Currently, only CBC-FM (89.9) offers a full-time classical music format in the metro region.

Many believe the only legitimate way to expand classical music on the radio is at public radio stations. However, WDET-FM, owned by Wayne State University, and WUOM-FM, owned by the University of Michigan, have scaled back on their classical music programs.

Neither station has announced plans to add classical music to their programming, which is largely intended to attract sponsors and donations from listeners.

With its recent decision to redefine its programming and broaden its appeal, WDET-FM, owned by the Detroit Board of Education, appears as the logical choice as the new home for classical music listeners.

Within the next several weeks, format changes at the Detroit-based station will be made public. Rumors persist that WDET will include a regular bloc of

classical music in its daily programming.

For information on "Restore Detroit Classical FM-Radio, 1998," write: OCUNA for Classical Music, P.O. Box 1132, Birmingham, MI 48012-1132.

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