

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

ONLINE COURSE

From Invisibility to the Spotlight: Female Artists from the 20th and 21st Century You Need to Know

INTRODUCTION

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is offering its first online course, focusing on the role played by women in the various art movements in the 20th and 21st centuries. With a few rare exceptions, female artists would remain in the shadows in the past. It was only in the late 19th century, with the emergence of Impressionism, that they took a step forward and began to show what they could do.

In the early 20th century, there were many relevant female representatives of Cubism and Futurism, as well as abstraction. To them we should add the young female students of the Bauhaus, who stood out in fields like weaving, photography, and painting.

The interwar period (1918–39) was really fruitful in terms of the role of women in different artistic fields, including painting, sculpture, and photography. They would play a particularly relevant role within Parisian Surrealism, in the development of new artistic languages.

After the World War II, Peggy Guggenheim, who had moved to America from Britain during the war, and art critic Clement Greenberg promoted Abstract Expressionism, the American art movement whose leading members included Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, and Robert Motherwell. Female artists like Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, and Helen Frankenthaler produced expressive works and introduced technical innovations as part of this movement.

The year 1947 marks the shift in the center of the art world from Paris to New York, along with the emergence of a uniquely American art. After the death of Jackson Pollock in 1956, Pop Art, a movement imbued with realism, drew a high number of artists in the 1960s. They were of course led by multifaceted, fame-hungry Andy Warhol, who supported all manner of artists, including musicians and bands like The Velvet Underground and German singer Nico.

In those years, New York was a festive city drawing merrymakers, pacifists, and hippies, who gathered in happenings that had their roots in the performances put up by John Cage, musician, and Merce Cunningham, choreographer, at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in the late 1940s.

Performances typically took place in an environment or installation created within a gallery, or otherwise in far-off, desert locations. Body language played an increasingly prominent role, as shown in Ana Mendieta's "earth-body" artwork. Many women used their bodies in interventions in nature, and this gave rise to new forms of art.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, computers found their way into art, paving the way for new technologies, video creations, and digital world—a broad, variegated path which has become commonplace in art.

The latest development is the world wide web. Much of today's art is purely virtual in that it will never have a material medium. We could be at the dawn of a new era of artistic creation—a spectacular age, full of exciting possibilities for both artists and viewers.

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

COURSE SYLLABUS

Module I: Abstraction and the Bauhaus

The year 1906 marks the emergence of abstract painting, with Swedish artist Hilma af Klint. Soon enough, abstraction found its place among avant-garde movements, with many female representatives in Russia and Germany, at the Bauhaus School. The *Bauhausmädels*, or Bauhaus girls—a rather disdainful term to use, in fact—stood out for their tapestries and carpets, whose geometric patterns bore the influence of Vasily Kandinsky, as well as for their photographs.

Video 1: The beginnings of abstraction

Video 2: Natalia Goncharova, Alexandra Exter, Liubov Popova, and Nina Kogan

Video 3: Gunta Stölzl's leading role at the Bauhaus School in Germany

Video 4: The *Bauhausmädels*

Module II: Women Artists Between the Wars

In the 1920s and 1930s, women began to play a more prominent role in a variety of fields. Many did important work, with a huge impact. Dora Maar's photographs, for instance, recorded the various creative stages of Picasso's *Guernica*.

Video 1: Dora Maar

Video 2: Surrealist painters (Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo)

Video 3: Maria Martins, the Brazilian sculptor who inspired Marcel Duchamp

Video 4: Frida Kahlo, the women who painted her "reality"

Module III: Abstract Expressionism in America, Pop Art, and Nouveau Réalisme

The emergence of Abstract Expressionism in America is associated with the role played by art collector and patron Peggy Guggenheim. In 1942, she opened her gallery Art of this Century, which showcased works by young artists like Jackson Pollock. As of 1947, American art severed ties with Europe, a trend that led to the development of Pop Art. Meanwhile, in France, Nouveau Réalisme, led by artists like Yves Klein, was gaining ground.

Video 1: Two key women in American Abstract Expressionism: Lee Krasner and Helen Frankenthaler

Video 2: Pop Art and Marisol Escobar's sculptures

Video 3: Nouveau Réalisme and Niki de Saint Phalle's sculptures

Video 4: French-born American artist Louise Bourgeois and a language of her own

Module IV: From Performance to New Technologies in the Art World. Other Challenges: Race and Sexuality

The last years of the 20th century showed a growing number of female artists gaining visibility and finding their places in museums and galleries—places that would have been unthinkable a few decades earlier.

Women artists like Yoko Ono have done interesting work in the field of performance art, while photographers and videomakers have used the latest technology to spur their bountiful creativity.

New perspectives, like race or sexuality, are also being taken into account. The work of Kara Walker is a fine example of this.

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Video 1: Artists and performers: Atsuko Tanaka, Gutai Art Association, Yoko Ono. Ana Mendieta and the body as a medium

Video 2: Creators and new technologies: Itziar Okariz and Eugènia Balcells

Video 3: Photography in today's world: Annie Leibovitz

Video 4: Race and sexuality as key subjects: The work of Kara Walker