

anonymous external review and when commissioning endorsements for the jacket. Fortunately, Brandt's study does not need special treatment; it easily stands on its own merits as one of the most impressive recent publications in the field of Japanese history.

Avantgarde Mönnersache? Künstlerinnen im Japan der 50er und 60er Jahre des 20. Jahrhunderts. By Maren Godzik. Iudicium Verlag, München, 2006. 255 pages. €25.00, paper.

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Japanese avant-garde art is in the air. If, until recently, avant-garde artists of the 1950s and 1960s had garnered little serious academic interest, they are now the subject of three new studies, each from a different perspective. The Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles produced an exhibition and accompanying catalogue of its own collection of postwar Japanese avant-garde art entitled *Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere in Postwar Japan 1950–1970* (Getty Publications, 2007). The accomplished historian Thomas Havens turned his pen to the cultural politics of “the avant-garde rejection of modernism” in his latest book, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts* (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006). The same year, the Japanologist Maren Godzik presented her sociological study of female avant-garde artists in Japan and their reception by the art establishment. With a title roughly translatable as “Avant-garde: A Male Matter?” the book was written as a doctoral dissertation at Bonn University and secured publication with Germany’s foremost academic press in Japan studies.

All three books cover the same time span (from postwar reconstruction to 1970), examine the same genre of avant-garde art (the visual as opposed to the literary arts, although Havens also includes music), and focus on the same main groups of artists, in particular Jikken Kōbō, Gutai, Kyūshū-ha, Mono-ha, Zero-kai, and Neo-Dada. All seem to have been inspired, in part, by a series of avant-garde retrospectives that colored Japan’s art world in the 1990s. It is therefore surprising that none of the books seriously engages the latter historical moment to interrogate why the early postwar art movements came to be of considerable public interest at the turn of the millennium. These works instead set out to recover the dynamism and diversity of the avant-garde art world as a response to war and postwar reconstruction. Godzik’s *Avantgarde Mönnersache?* distinguishes itself by its explicit focus on female artists and the gendered nature of the modern art establishment.

Indeed, Godzik uses the careers of a handful of prominent female avant-garde painters and their reception as women within the art world as a lens for viewing the gendered landscape of postwar Japan. Her larger framework, moreover, is a feminist reading of the institutional and social norms that governed the reception of professional artists in the modern age by way of a “sociology of art” (*Kunstsoziologie*).

The book is structured into four substantive chapters. The first three chapters frame the subject matter theoretically and historically based on extensive readings in recent Japanese, American, and German art criticism, gender theory, and historical sociology. The fourth chapter, which is almost equal in length to the foregoing three, presents Godzik’s primary research on five selected female artists in the form of case studies, which are subsequently analyzed from a sociological perspective. A long glossary lists art institutions and artist groups (in German and Japanese) and serves as a reference tool for avant-garde artists’ names, exhibitions, and selected works. The extensive bibliography is particularly useful for its references to art catalogues in various languages, both contemporary and recent art criticism, and the latest writings on gender and art.

Godzik’s analysis, in the first chapters, of how female artists built their careers revolves around historically specific conceptualizations of women’s legal and social rights, the place of art in public life, and the relationship between women and art in society (p. 14). More concretely, she is interested in women within an established network of artists, art schools, museums, critics, and art dealers: in other words, within “art” as a set of interrelated institutions first invented in the European Enlightenment and (re)created in Japan during the Meiji period. In Japan as in the West, Godzik finds, the modern invention of an art “system” granted women more structured opportunities to become professional artists, but it simultaneously forced them into specific niches typically known as “women’s art,” which effectively excluded them from what was considered “real art” by modern (read: male) standards. For example, while women became acknowledged artists in handicraft-oriented art, such as textile design, they made few inroads in painting in the prewar period. Godzik’s contribution here is to trace the articulation of art (from education to competitions and exhibition spaces) as a contingent process at the core of which lay an unquestioned adherence to gender inequality.

Against this background, Godzik examines avant-garde art movements, understood as self-conscious critics of the modern art “system,” in terms of their ability to overcome institutionalized discrimination against female artists. The prewar avant-garde in the 1920s was, predictably, a failure in this regard. “Avant-garde art is a male matter,” was the laconic comment of a male artist in 1938 about the work of a female colleague. Unlike their male counterparts, female artists were not able to take advantage of new avenues of growth, such as study abroad and competition for prizes, and they faced

resounding rejection within the art world on account of their gender. Tellingly, no retrospective of prewar avant-garde art includes a woman among the artists it highlights, according to Godzik. The postwar avant-garde, in contrast, made use of unprecedented institutional opportunities for women after the postwar reforms, while defining itself in opposition to the conservative, consumerist, and socially complacent environment of the 1950s that Ozu Yasuhiro so aptly portrayed in his films. Female artists did, finally, achieve recognition and success in the art world, but their number remained small and their fame proved short-lived. Godzik credits significant institutional changes in the art world—from artists' organizations to the rise of independent galleries and the importance of art critics and journalists—with having expanded women's visibility and appreciation as professional artists. And yet, societal pressures of having to choose between family and work as well as the persistence of highly gendered criteria in evaluating art continued to limit recognition of female avant-garde artists.

In the last chapter, Godzik sets out to resolve this apparent paradox in the reception of female avant-garde artists who made their careers in Japan in the 1950s and 1960s (artists who established their careers abroad, such as Yoko Ono, are excluded from this study). She presents case studies of five female artists (Fukushima Hideko, Tanaka Atsuko, Yamazaki Tsuruko, Tabe Mitsuko, and Kishimoto Sayako) and the four avant-garde art groups with which they were affiliated (Jikken Kōbō, Gutai, Kyūshū-ha, and Neo-Dada). Her primary materials are interviews with the artists themselves or people who knew them well in addition to published art criticism and art exhibitions. The chapter culminates in a sociological analysis of these women's family backgrounds, education, place in professional artist groups, and self-identity in order to draw conclusions about the factors that influenced female artists' reception as professionals. Although no unified picture of these professional artists emerges, it is clear that the originality of their works was underscored by highly individualistic careers, most of which lacked, perhaps surprisingly, an articulated feminist consciousness. Indeed, Godzik argues that "most female artists at the time did not entertain the possibilities of a feminist avant-garde art in the sense of an explicit confronting of the artist's own experience, neither in Japan nor in Europe or the United States" (p. 181). While art critics consistently forefronted the artist's gender in their evaluation of women's avant-garde art, the artists themselves rarely explained their works in terms of their identity as women.

In the end, however, the artists' biographies suggest the primacy of personality in negotiating the various social and professional parameters of career-building as avant-garde artists, just as in other professions that were once seen as male domains. In this respect, the story of female avant-garde artists reads like yet another example of persistent gender inequalities in modern societies. But this case is particularly interesting because of the changing temporality of women's reception in the art world: their double

marginalization may indeed have earned them greater visibility in the short run but rarely resulted in lasting careers. Today's retrospectives of postwar avant-garde art are again heavily tilted toward male artists, even though there are now many women among the most successful contemporary artists. This active "forgetting" of once prominent avant-garde artists has a dynamic of its own, this reader suspects, and requires an examination of the specific historical context of the 1970s and 1980s, which unfortunately lies outside the present study. Furthermore, it seems artificial to separate the sociological meaning of avant-garde art from the art-historical. Descriptions, interpretations, and critiques of the art works themselves remain entirely in the background in this book; indeed, the only visual evidence consists of ten black-and-white photographs clustered on five consecutive pages that show each of the five artists and one each of their most famous works. Much more could be said about the works of art themselves in relation to the sociological circumstances of their creation.

Be that as it may, a particularly refreshing feature of the book is that it steers clear of the usual tendency to explain what about the artists discussed here makes them particularly "Japanese." Godzik does a solid job laying out the historical development of the modern art world in Japan and the situation of women in postwar Japan, but rather than declaring either texts or contexts as uniquely Japanese, she is intent on showing both the cross-cultural and comparative aspects of the avant-garde within established art systems. Indeed, she shows more compelling similarities than differences, in part because Japan adopted a European-style organization of art in the Meiji era, and in part because modern art systems develop a dynamic of their own that are not necessarily culturally specific. That this dynamic was highly gendered is not a new insight in itself. This study, which combines theoretical synthesis with empirical detail, nevertheless goes a long way in exploring just how ubiquitous and tenacious is the primacy of gender differences that underlie modern society, in Japan as elsewhere.