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Women's Studies

Representing Women
Linda Nochlin
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A leading critic and art historian, Nochlin has contributed to the fields of feminism and art theory with previous books like Women, Art and Power and Other Essays and The Politics of Vision. In this work, she again raises the level of the debate by presenting insightful and original thoughts on how women have been represented in art by acknowledged masters such as Millet, Delacroix, Courbet, Degas, Seurat and Cassatt.

Nochlin divides the artworks in terms of how their female subjects are portrayed: warriors, workers, sensual objects and mothers. Even “absent women” come under her penetrating view as she cites Géricault’s lack of women in his paintings, as compared to works of the same period by other artists. It is observations such as these, combined with her remarkable scholarship and graceful writing, that make the author distinctive in the field. Rejecting traditional methodology, she calls instead for a more personal investigation by observers of art, gently reminding readers to look at artistic details that inform viewers about different periods and artists rather than entering a museum with a mind full of presuppositions and assumptions.

In her lively, autobiographical introduction, Nochlin writes of her attraction to the art history field, and of becoming politically aware in 1969, when she found herself at the intersection of self-realization and history. While reading this stunning example of intellectual acumen, it’s difficult not to feel as enriched and liberated by art as the fledgling Nochlin of thirty years ago, whose contagious passion still shines through today.

Elizabeth Millard