

**Art History:** Mistress, Muse, Mentor, Maker: Women's Roles Throughout Art History

**Faculty:** Nancy Green, Gale & Ira Drukier Curator, Johnson Museum of Art (retired)

**Faculty:** Maryterese Pasquale-Bowen, Assistant for School Programs, Johnson Museum of Art

**Week One:** July 6 – 12, 2025

**Schedule:** Monday - Friday, 9-12 and 1:30-3:30, except Wednesday afternoon.

**Location:** The Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art

We are so excited about teaching this course on the topic of Mistress, Muse, Mentor, Maker, which examines the various roles that women over the centuries have played in the life of male painters. All of these roles have been vitally important to the creation of masterpieces by both sexes and though some of the women will be familiar names to you, our hope is to bring others out of the shadows and give them their due.

We begin in the Renaissance with Da Vinci and his famous muse, the Mona Lisa. For many years her identity was elusive but one of the ultimate mysteries is why did da Vinci retain this commissioned painting until his death. Artemisia Gentileschi has far outstripped the reputation of her father, Orazio, from whom she learned her craft, but also that of her rapist, artist Agostino Tassi, whom she bravely took to court for his act of violence.

Bernini was among the best known of Italian architects but when he took Costanza Piccolomini, the wife of one of his workers, as his mistress and portrayed her in a famous sculpture, the secret was out and it destroyed her life. Rembrandt fell for his model Saskia and married her, continuing to lovingly portray her until her early death. In France, Fragonard taught his young sister-in-law to paint and she had a successful career, working in a style that was similar but not imitative of her mentor.

Goya is known for his fiery response to the Inquisition in his famous sets of prints condemning the brutality of life in Spain during his lifetime. But he could also be tender and his portraits of his muse, the Duchess of Alba, remind us that artists are rarely one-sided in their pursuit of their goals.

Mary Cassatt and Edgar Degas were famous as friends and colleagues in Impressionist Paris. Though their subject matter differed, they respected and championed one another throughout their careers. Auguste Rodin can be seen as more ruthless. A master sculptor, he had many mistresses including the talented Camille Claudel and English artist Gwen John. Their tales are complicated but the women never gave up their art.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time when women were actively making their own mark. Art schools were open to them and we will see in the relationships of photographers Man Ray and Lee Miller and Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keeffe, a meeting of equal talent as well as equal achievement in the art world. Max Ernst, like Pablo Picasso, also had multiple mistresses over a period of years but their partners, Leonora Carrington and Dorothy Tanning in Ernst's case and Dora Maar and Françoise Gilot in Picasso's, were not easily cast aside and are at the forefront in museum collecting women artists today.

Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo are household names but their relationship roller-coastered from supportive to antagonistic. Jacob Lawrence, one of the most respected artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, trained in Harlem alongside his future wife, Gwendolyn Knight, and their work forged a place for African American art in this country. And lastly, we will look at two

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couples with Cornell connections: modernist Arthur Dove who graduated in the early 1900s, and his partner and wife, Helen Torr, and Susan Rothenburg, class of 1966, and her husband, Bruce Nauman.

Along the way, we will visit other departments on campus to round out our knowledge of the times in which these artists worked. And along with the insights and learning, we promise buckets of laughter and fun!

We look forward to seeing you all in July!

Nancy Green and Maryterese Pasquale-Bowen