

# Women of Distinction



**T**he youthful, idealized female nude captivated artists as far back as ancient Greece, and interest in the subject continues to the present day. Other artists, particularly by the mid-nineteenth century, rejected tradition and turned their attentions to a beauty beyond the classical ideal.

This exhibition highlights portraits of nine women, both in print and photograph, dating from the 16<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with subjects ranging from young to mature, from humble to affluent, from famous to anonymous. All are linked by the emphasis on the character of the subjects, rather than unrealistic fantasies of idealized beauty. The emphasis thus becomes the beauty reflected in their maturity, wisdom, and life experience.





Jean-Baptiste Isabey (French, 1767–1855)  
*Woman in a Riding Habit*, 1792  
Black chalk heightened with white on paper (73.12)

A pupil of Jacques-Louis David, Jean-Baptiste Isabey painted portraits for the French aristocracy, but was among the first artists to create portrait drawings that were meant to be displayed as finished works of art. Though unidentified, scholars suggest the subject here is Isabey's wife, Jeanne Laurice de Salienne.

The woman's dress and demeanor indicate that she is a contemporary woman of the new, post-monarchy era. She engages the viewer with her confident gaze and forthright pose, her unbound hair spilling freely down her shoulders. Prior to the French Revolution (1789–1799), women were known for their extravagantly upswept hair, powdered faces, and voluminous gowns. In contrast, this subject shows herself as sporting and free-spirited, wearing the increasingly popular riding habit, which some derided as mannish and unsuitable for young women. This woman clearly wears it unabashedly, possibly as a reaction against the affected, aristocratic style of the past, which was now synonymous with the debauched and fallen monarchy.



Elizabeth Catlett (American, 1915–2012)

*Sharecropper*, 1952

Linocut on paper

Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2003.8)

According to Catlett, her purpose is to “present black people in beauty and dignity, for ourselves and others to understand and enjoy, and to exhibit my work where black people can visit and find art to which they can relate.” A granddaughter of slaves, Catlett also believed in the democratic power of the print to reach a larger audience, many of whom would not have the means to own expensive, fine artworks. Catlett’s earlier experience at the Taller de Gráfica Popular (The People's Graphic Arts Workshop) in Mexico City had also exposed her to other artists who used their art for social change.

Catlett empowers the nameless woman with strength and dignity by emphasizing her heroic beauty in the face of adversity. The sharecropping agricultural system emerged shortly after the Civil War. Laborers, both black and white, worked the land for a portion of the crops, but they usually lived in poverty and became indebted to landowners.



Pierre Drevet (French, 1663–1738)

*Portrait of Marie de l'Aubespine*, 1698

After a painting by Nicolas de Largillière (French, 1656–1746)

Engraving on paper

Gift of Drs. Saul S. and Gladys D. Weinberg  
in memory of Bernard Weinberg (73.275)

Marie de l'Aubespine was from an aristocratic family with close ties to the Crown. The print affirms Marie's marriage to Nicholas Lambert, who worked as a royal counsellor and president of the royal accounting offices, and later secured a lordship, all of which is indicated to viewers in the inscription beneath the image.

Drevet's engraving of Marie was created after an oil painting (current location unknown) by Nicolas de Largillière, an artist who specialized in portraits of the wealthy. Unapologetic in her display of wealth and privilege, Marie is shown resplendently gowned, bejeweled, and confident. She engages the viewer directly as she cuddles an exotic, miniature dog. Indeed, even her choice of pet accentuates her conspicuous display, though the dog is often a symbol of fidelity. The l'Aubespine coat-of-arms with heraldic, rampant unicorns embellishes the main image, and further underscores the subject's titled status.





Jacques Reich (Hungarian-American, 1852–1923)

*Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 1898

Etching on paper Gift of Mr. Oswald D. Reich (73.39)

Hungarian-born artist Jacques Reich eventually settled in New York where he opened a studio and focused mostly on portraits of famous Americans. Over 2,000 were produced for *Appletons' Cyclopaedia of American Biography*. Reich continued to concentrate on authors and artists, turning almost exclusively to etchings on copper by the 1890s.

Author, feminist, and abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe is widely remembered today for her groundbreaking early account of the horrors of slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), in addition to authoring thirty other books. A stalwart advocate for women as well, Stowe called for women to contribute to the discourse of the day. "I hope every woman who can write will *not* be silent," she wrote. Additionally, she opposed ageism against women, remarking: "So much has been said and sung of beautiful young girls, why doesn't somebody wake up to the beauty of older women?" It is unclear whether Reich ever met Stowe, but we might surmise that he was an admirer of her work, at the very least. While his etching is based on an earlier photograph, its soft lines create a lovely, visual epitaph to Stowe, enhancing the composition that captured her in a moment of stately reflection.



Hans Brosamer (German, ca. 1500–1552)  
*Katharina von Bora Luther*, ca. 1520–1552  
Woodcut on paper  
(71.116)

Hans Brosamer was a Renaissance painter and printmaker, working largely in Germany. His woodcut is based on an earlier painting of Katharina von Bora Luther by artist Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553), a personal friend of both the subject and her husband, theologian Martin Luther.

Remembered today as a pivotal figure for the Protestant Reformation, Katharina von Bora was first committed to a convent by her father, but later fled with several other nuns. With Martin Luther's help, the women found husbands, a shocking turn of events for former nuns. But Katharina, headstrong and independently-minded, rejected suitors offered her, announcing that she would only marry Martin Luther himself. Reluctant at first, Luther finally acquiesced to his willful admirer. The marriage was a scandal indeed: Luther was a monk who had broken his vows to marry a nun who had broken hers. The "wicked union" thus flouted centuries of Catholic doctrine about the celibate priesthood and established a precedent for married clergy in Reformation churches. Many scholars now attribute this momentous change to Katharina's insistence on the marriage, which lasted until Luther's death in 1546.



Käthe Kollwitz (German, 1867-1945)  
*Selbstbildnis von vorn* (self-portrait from the front), 1923  
Woodcut on Japan paper  
Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (90.126)

A staunch socialist, Kollwitz fought to expose the suffering of the German poor, and her protests against the Nazis resulted in her forced resignation from the Berlin Akademie der Künste (Academy of Art) in the 1930s. After living through the Franco-Prussian War and World War I, in which she lost her son, Peter, she would see Germany again torn apart by World War II, during which her husband died of illness and her grandson (Peter's son) fell on the battlefield. "*There has been enough of dying! How many more? Let not another man fall!*" she wrote in published statements protesting the conflict. Beset by grief, anxiety, and depression throughout much of her life, Kollwitz's output of prints and drawings often focused on mourning, loss, and loneliness.

Throughout her life Kollwitz also produced several deeply revealing, courageous self-portraits. In this image, the 55-year old's careworn, prematurely aged face is accentuated by a network of graphic lines that convey profound emotional and spiritual fatigue, a theme pervading her works on the horrors of war.



Frederick Emanuel Shane (American, 1906–1992)

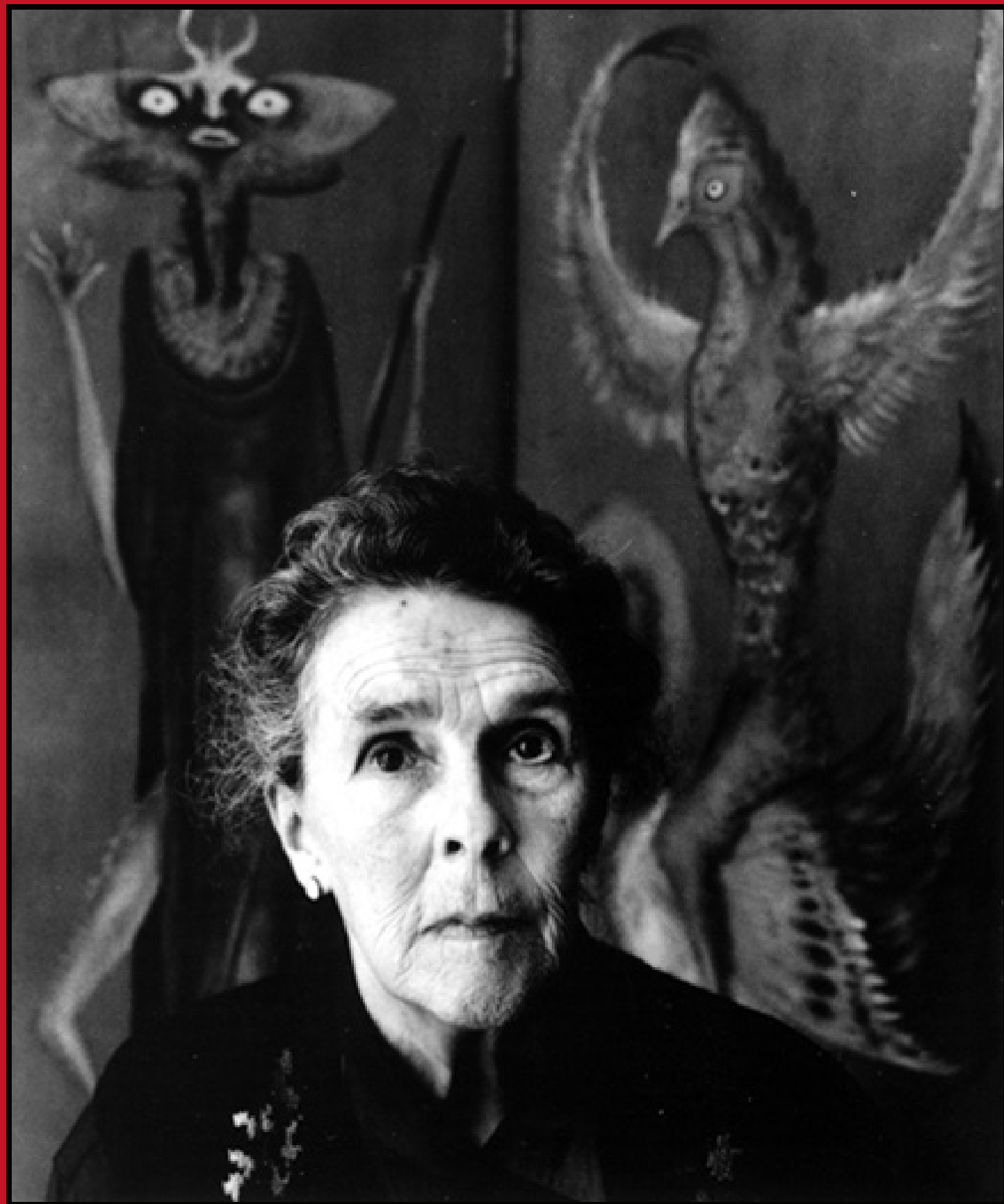
*Portrait Study (Mrs. Kate Robinson)*, 1940s

Black pencil on newsprint

Gift of the artist in memory of Thomas Hart Benton (75.6)

Kansas City-born Fred Shane was a well-known professor of art at the University of Missouri, teaching from 1932–1971. Most of Shane’s early works were portraits, with a focus on working-class people rather than the wealthy. In the portrait of Kate Robinson, the artist did not glamorize the subject, but instead invites the viewer to imagine the woman’s life based on her wizened, haggard face. We might imagine more than a fair share of hardships for this subject, but Shane emphasizes her strength and resolve, which prepare her for whatever her remaining years might bring.





Carole Patterson (American, b. 1937)

*Leonora Carrington*, 1990

Photograph (gelatin silver print)

Gift of the artist (92.41)

Carole Patterson studied photography with Oliver Schuchard at the University of Missouri and with William Clift in Santa Fe. She largely specializes in portraits, mostly of artists, writers, and various public figures. The Carrington photograph is included in the book *Out of the Volcano: Portraits of Contemporary Mexican Artists*, for which Patterson provided all the portraits.

The subject here is British-born Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), who lived and worked in Mexico. A prolific artist and writer, Carrington remained a Surrealist throughout her career. Influenced by various mythologies, her work often included fantastic creatures such as those seen here, but also delved into the female psyche and sexuality. Patterson places Carrington at front and center of the composition, directly engaged with the viewer, eliciting the artist's well-known, formidable personality.



Kenneth Miller Adams (American, 1897–1966)

*Francisca*, 1957

Lithograph printed in black ink on paper

Gift of Harry and Ann Cohen (85.136)

Kansas-born painter and printmaker Kenneth Adams is known today as an influential member of the Taos Society of Artists (1915–1927). Following studies at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students League in New York, he arrived in Taos and ultimately influenced the New Mexico art scene for decades. After a dozen years in Taos, Adams moved to Albuquerque where he taught at the University of New Mexico for the next 25 years.

While his landscapes and still lifes are lauded for their vibrant color and artful brush, his images of the Native American people of the Southwest are known for their soulful realism and natural beauty. He had a fondness for elderly, female subjects whom he represented with a stolid, quiet dignity. Unfortunately, little record survives of these women other than the Adams portraits.