

MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

**Intersections of Gender and Political Economy:
Florine Stettheimer and Other Modernist Salonnières**

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Introduction

En/Gendering the Modernist Salon

Salons were among the first institutions of modern culture. From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, salons fostered the decline of aristocratic castes and supported the rise of a new egalitarian elite. In *Jewish Women and their Salons* Emily Bilski and Emily Braun state: "Cash-poor nobles made wealthy matches with individuals of lesser rank, and intellectuals found patrons and cachet" (1). These new arrivistes assumed many conventions of the aristocracy because there was now the growth and acceptance of negotiation amongst strangers.

Salon culture rejected aggressive behaviour in the search for mutual tolerance, and women were expected to take the lead. Women were considered to have greater equanimity and patience. The women leading the salons were called salonnières, who focused on matters of public importance in the nonthreatening language of open inquiry, seeking and dispensing counsel in equal measure. While some salons were free of economic concerns due to their rich benefactors, other salons were much more restrained due to financial matters related to funding and subsidies. Salons during the modernist era functioned quite differently from each other, due to socio-political, cultural and economic factors. For example, from the early 1920s until her death in 1944, Florine Stettheimer, along with her sisters Ettie (a writer) and Carrie (a gifted hostess and designer), created an avant-garde domestic space with her salon. Stettheimer used her socio-economic background to create a salon with a matriarchal focus, which follows the tradition of the salon, a semi-private, semi-public institution with roots in

eighteenth century France and Germany. These matriarchal and sororal dynamics were a leading influence on the Stettheimer sisters' New York salon, significantly shaping its sexual politics. Through her salon and artwork, Stettheimer used her independence from the art market and rich inheritance to create art works which deconstructed binary gender roles (particularly of her male habitués), and champion new queered identities, which in turn helped fashion her unconventional domestic salon.

Salonnières of the Modernist era have used salon culture as a means to reshape traditional public spheres and social structures. Female salonnières have been influential, yet often forgotten, figures of modernist art institutions. They used their financial and economic clout to help reshape political and economic social structures. Their example also allows us to study the ways in which finances either limited or allowed women to shape social structures, while proving the importance of their salons within the modernist era as a public sphere and as a space to challenge traditional gender roles. Thus, they helped shape the political and economic dimensions of the future art market.

Chapter 1 explores the socio-political, cultural and economic aspects of Modernist Salon culture through a close analysis of salonnières Florine Stettheimer (1871-1944), Natalie Clifford Barney (1876-1972), Romaine Brooks (1874-1970), and Gertrude Stein (1874-1946). These salons reflect a great diversity emanating from the various salons' distinct financial positionings. Stettheimer's New York salon was a public world in a private space filled with guests that were carefully selected, whereas Stein's salon in Paris opened its door to everyone, even guests she had never met. While Florine and Stein welcomed all genders and sexualities into their salon, Romaine and

Natalie focused on building a community of women writers and artists. Chapter 1 centrally explores the economic and financial positioning of Brooks, Barney, Stettheimer and Stein, studying the ways in which their distinct independence or inherited wealth enabled them to create their own worlds and defy conventional gender and social structures. Throughout chapter I, I refer to Henry McBride's personal catalogue on Florine Stettheimer, theories of biopolitics by Michel Foucault and Maurizio Lazzarto, and the socio-political and economic backgrounds of the salonnières by Bridget Elliot and Jo-Ann Wallace in order to unpack the gender and political economic dimensions of the salons.

Chapter 1 offers a detailed exploration of salon culture and these salonnières' and artists' cultural production within the modernist era. I examine the ways in which art, politics and the market intersect in the twentieth century, specifically within the salon culture and identify the ways in which these salons differentiated themselves. I further explore how the salonnières and artists, such as Stettheimer, Barney and Brooks, and Stein, were positioned within the field, and how their material resources enabled or limited their cultural agency.

After establishing a varied spectrum of salons in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 focuses on the specific case study of Florine Stettheimer, an important cultural figure who used her socio-political and economic power to challenge traditional concepts of artistic representation and identity within her salon and through her paintings during the modernist era in New York. Drawing on theories of salon culture by Emily Bilski and Emily Braun, this essay also challenges theories of the public sphere by Jürgen Habermas by applying theories of gender by Linda Nochlin, Helen Langa, and Cecile

Whiting; and theories of the economics of art by Ake Andersson and David Emanuel Andersson.

More specifically, Chapter 2 investigates how Stettheimer constructed queered models of identity within her over-the-top feminine, salon. As a painter, poet, and theatrical set designer, Stettheimer used her rich inheritance and playfully reconfigured gender identities, challenging conventional norms through wit and whimsy rather than Dada aggression, as some of her less financially powerful counterparts, a few of whom lived in poverty, Florine was able to truly experiment with her avant-garde salon and artworks, since she was financially independent and was not reliant on the art market, and yet she also staged her class advantage.

By examining works of art such as Stettheimer's painting *Soirée* (1917 - 1919), an intricate self-portrait and salon portrait, I argue that this piece is important as it mirrors the Stettheimers' economic independence, as well as the eccentric and domesticated apartment, articulating the role of the male habitués that frequented the salon, such as Marcel Duchamp, Henri McBride, and others. Although the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century were revolutionary in breaking boundaries in artistic practices, significant structures of misogyny prevailed (Sawelson-Gorse xii). Male Dadaists maintained the status quo of twentieth-century patriarchal socio-cultural and political codes regarding gender, with women being often denied equal status as artists. Stettheimer's *Soirée* subversively challenges traditional roles and expectations by feminizing male guests such as Leo Stein, Avery Hopwood, Gaston Lachaise and Albert Gleizes. To extend this gender argument further, exploring Stettheimer's rewriting of masculinity and reflecting on her socio-political and cultural beliefs, I examine

Stettheimer's portraits of her male habitués, such as her painting *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* (1923), and *Portrait of Carl Van Vechten* (1922). As we shall see, she portrays them as refined, quiet and effeminate, while the females play more vital roles in her paintings, just as in the actual salon where the women were the dominant forces, shouldering more responsibilities and acting as cultural power brokers. *Soirée* is also important as it mirrors Florine's refusal of participating in the art market. Through her painting, she reminds the viewers that her works are not sold, and rather hung within her salon for the pleasure and perplexity of her habitués.

Likewise, Chapter 2 explores Florine's poems as social critiques and reflections of economic and consumer culture, gender, and the art market. As we shall see, her poems create a double entendre, where she critiques the world of social class, consumption and the art market, while given the ability to do so because of her own social standing. In particular, Henry McBride makes frequent reference to Florine having a large audience for her artworks and salon, regardless of her topics at hand, simply because of her prominent social status. This major research paper explores how she uses this socio-economic power in her work to make sharp social critiques on social constructs. Therefore, both chapters examine the ways in which art, gender, politics and the market have intersected in the twentieth century salon. This essay explores the socio-economic and political background of salonnière Florine Stettheimer Stettheimer with Brooks, Barney and Stein providing further context and examples. It further considers the ways in which Florine Stettheimer uses her social and economic status to express her political beliefs through her artistic practices, her gender defying salon, androgynous portraits, and the socio-political and economic critiques in her paintings

and poems. Ultimately, this essay explores the ways in which these salonnières and artists were positioned within the political and economic field, studying the myriad of ways in which their material resources enabled or limited their salons and work.

Chapter 1

The Financial Positioning of the Salonnière

Four Modernist Case Studies

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas argues that the most vital feature of the public sphere, as it existed in the eighteenth century, was the public use of reason in rational–critical debate. He asserts that an effective public sphere is a common place of dialogue, separate from both state and religion (3-4). Ideally, it is a forum for unfettered discussion and debate that disregards social status and is strengthened by its inclusivity. Rational-critical debate occurred within the bourgeois reading public, in response to literature, and in institutions such as salons and coffee houses. Habermas sees the public sphere as developing out of the private institutions, such as family. During the eighteenth century, public spheres were considered to be inclusive. However, there was a sort of *entry* into the public sphere, which was based on one's education and social status. This development began during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when public spheres slowly became more inclusive (although not entirely), and were primarily for checking the domination of political institutions.

Habermas argues that public opinion was the most important aspect of the public sphere, and he references the works of Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Within the public sphere private people engaged in rational-critical debate and there came about what Kant called “public agreement” (*Öffentliche Zustimmung*) and what Hegel termed “public opinion” (Habermas 117). According to Habermas, in order

to have a genuine democracy, citizens have to be able to come together and discuss issues through critical debate. For Habermas, this theory is known as the "Ideal Speech Situation" (118-121), which is a setting where individuals can come together and debate issues, events and politics. Coffee houses revealed people making use of facts, which supported the rise of newspapers and literacy.

According to Bilski and Braun, who rely heavily on Habermas in their definition of the salon, the authoritative salonnière supported matters of public importance and rational-critical debate of equal measure (Bilski and Braun 1). In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas presents the salons of the eighteenth century France as instances of the newly emerging bourgeois public sphere (Dean 244). From Berlin in the 1780s to their emergence in 1930s California and New York, women's salons (especially Jewish women's salons) served as an inviting public sphere where people of different classes and creeds could openly debate issues related to art, sexuality, politics, literature and music. The salonnières provided their guests with a rational, exhilarating, discursive style (Bilski and Braun 1-2). Before the advent of the mass press and the free press, information revealed confidentially shaped ideas and their reception at large. Bilski and Braun argue that the salon allowed for "the power of conversation," the ability to publicize and arbitrate, to shape consensus, and to connect those who would not normally meet. This was the goal of the political etiquette of the salon (Bilski and Braun 2). As a result, the salon tradition of an egalitarian sociability was especially important to Jewish salonnières who had not only their gender, but also ethnicity and religion to surmount (Bilski and Braun 2-3).

While the term *salonnière* may connote seductive femininity and high-class snobbery, the salon as an institution of modern culture was much more than a performance of class and charm. The appearance of social elitism is contradicted by the salon's real progressive function as a cultural laboratory of sorts in which artists were free to push boundaries and experiment in ways not sanctioned by the public institutions. The salon was a private space, often referred to "at-homes," and it enabled people of different economic standing, religion, rank, and nationality to exchange ideas and be understood as both individuals and as part of society (Bilski and Braun 2). The salon was also important as it granted women a means for education, professional identity and personal empowerment.

Specifically, salons occurred on a weekly basis, on a *jour fixe*, on the same day and at the same time. At the same time, every salon functioned quite differently depending upon its socio-political and economic background. For example, there were invitations sent out through urban postal service, or word of mouth. Bilski and Braun paint a vivid picture of the atmosphere within salons: "Either midday dinner or evening supper was served, although a formal meal was not the focus of activity. Salon sociability prospered instead on flexible seating arrangements—ad hoc pairs and small clusters, open circles for the enjoyment of a performance—save for the commandeering centrality of the *salonnière*, who often presided on a daybed or divan" (2). The tone and credibility of the salon also depended upon the regular habitués that attended. This group was usually composed of friends, prestigious artists and writers, and other persons of renown (Bilski and Braun 2).

Haberm While Bilski and Braun's historicizing and reclaiming of the salon establishes the salon as a largely homogenous and centuries-old institution, the modernist salon that is the focus of this essay presents important departures. While the modernist salon shares many of the characteristics of the salon as outlined in the taxonomy above, it would be wrong to assume a uniformity of structure and practices across centuries. More specifically, the modernist salon departs from the Habermasian public sphere and its emphasis on rational discourse as a distinctive feature. Thus, as we shall see below, during the modernist era from 1880-1940, the salon assumed some characteristics that transcend the Habermasian formula of the public sphere and rational discourse, requiring us to consider new models of approaching the salon. In her study "The Pariah and Her Shadow: Hannah Arendt's Biography of Rahel Varnhagen," Seyla Benhabib, for example, argues that the salon is "a space of sociability in which the individual desire for difference and distinctiveness could assume an intersubjective reality and in which unusual individuals, and primarily certain highly talented Jewish women, could find a 'space' of visibility and self-expression" (17). While focussed on Rahel Varnhagen's salon, as viewed through the lens of Hannah Arendt, Benhabib's approach is highly relevant to this major research paper focussed on twentieth-century modernist salons, given her focus on the ludic and playful components of the salon. Benhabib ultimately views the salon as a space for experimenting with identity, more so than as a space of rational discourse, an element that will be valuable in the chapters below.

Likewise, this major research paper benefits from Jodi Dean's insights as formulated in her article "Cyber Salons and Civil Society: Rethinking the Public Sphere in Transnational Technoculture." This essay's approach resists the idea of a uniform

Habermasian public sphere, refusing to accept “the priority of a bourgeois or official public sphere as a goal site, as an ideal, as the fundamental arbiter of inclusion” (249). As Dean continues in her critique of the Habermasian model: “Seen from the standpoint of the public sphere where trust is linked to unified, embodied subjectivity, play with differing identities and personae is threatening. It is configured as a symptom of larger problems usually associated with fragmentation, postmodernism, or deconstruction” (259). Since play with identity is precisely the focus of much of the discussion of modernist salons that will follow in the chapters of this essay, Dean’s insights provide a helpful prism for discussing the gender play of modernist salons, allowing us to see how such play with identity intersects with issues of subjectivity, community and economics. Even though Dean deals with “the complexities of the information age” (246), her approach is a useful warning of approaches that, in her words, “will judge precisely which exchanges are rational, valid, or authentic” (247). As Dean continues: “Too simply put, the regulatory fiction of the public sphere privileges a theorization of political norms. Struggles that contest, resist, or reject its idealizations are excluded from the political terrain as remnants of tradition, say, or manifestations of a terroristic irrationalism. In contrast, civil society privileges the concrete institutions in which the subjects of politics come to practice, mediate, and represent their actions as political” (247). It is this latter model of civil society, as we shall see, that will provide helpful insight into the functioning of some of the modernist salons, allowing us also to highlight the specific intersection of gender and economics in the modernist salon.

The Stettheimer Sisters' Exclusive Salon

Florine Stettheimer and her sisters grew up within the hermetic, financially comfortable world of New York's German-Jewish society. Stettheimer was related to numerous prominent families including the Seligmans, Goodharts, Bernheimers, Beers, Neustadters, Walters, and Guggenheims (Bloemink 1). She spent most of her childhood in Europe, and in her early twenties was able to study at the Art Students' League in New York for three years. Between 1898 and 1914, Stettheimer, her mother Rosetta and Florine's sisters were frequently travelling back and forth between Europe and New York. While there was no talk about her father, her biographer Barbara J. Bloemink notes that Stettheimer's main familial influence was through her mother: "Stettheimer's maternal ancestors were a combination of old American ancestry and new immigrant money. Given to independent thinking and possessed of relative wealth and forceful personalities, Florine's maternal relations formed a large, extended clan" (3). The Stettheimer sisters lived well through inheritances and shrewd investments and, after they had relocated their residence to New York in 1914, followed their custom by travelling from New York City to the country during the summers. Thus, it is clear that the Stettheimer salon was not subject to economic constraints or pressures, since they came from a prosperous background and did not require public funding for their soirées.

Although she was not dependent on the art market, Florine had an influence on shaping it. In *The Economics of the Arts and Entertainment* Ake E. Andersson and David Emanuel Andersson explain the construction of the value in fine art. The art market is a misnomer for the production, consumption and exchange of the art world products, since entry into that world is dependent upon the actions and value judgments

of critics, curators, cultural lobbyists, politicians and bureaucrats (2). Like the arbiters of taste, Stettheimer carefully selected her habitués, among them well-known and powerful critics and artists, to attend her soirées. Just like the art market, her salon consisted of a space of protectionism and privacy. The art market becomes a place where the “complex interactions among the educational establishment, cultural interest groups, politicians and – on rare occasions – marginal voters which combine to lay down the fault lines between what is considered to be art and what is considered as mere entertainment” (Andersson and Andersson 2).

Stettheimer's salon and artistic practices were private and independent of economic restraints. As well, she was able to use her prestige and financial capital to create an avant-garde space that was relatively free from religious patriarchal domination and traditional gender conformities. She was able to paint her portraits of her male habitués in feminine and androgynous ways, challenging gender constructs, without worrying about labor, material costs, or whether her artworks would be receptive to an audience (Davis 9). The artists and habitués who came to these parties were attracted because of her avant-garde space and artistic talent. Most of these habitués who lent her salon important prestige shared avant-garde aesthetics, defying the institutionalized art forms and practices, such as sculptor Gaston Lachaise, whose bronze nudes challenged the understanding of the female nude in art; Marcel Duchamp, who created scandal in pioneering the ready-made; and Russian Surrealist painter Pavel Tchelitchew, who introduced subversive homo-erotic motifs into art. The avant-gardists, like the other writers, singers, dancers and sometimes even scientists in attendance, were attracted to Florine's prestigious salon as they were invariably

attracted to her glittering and ironic paintings and poems (McBride 10). Duchamp's letters reveal his keen interest in Florine's paintings of himself; he also actively encouraged Florine to exhibit her paintings.

Bloemink argues that Stettheimer's financial security enabled her to make art for her own pleasure. As she writes: "She painted to suit herself, not the vagaries of the art market" (XI). Thus Florine turned down exhibitions, often refused to have her photo taken, and remained a very private person, mirroring the theme of her salon, which operated through principles of careful selection, giving the salonniere a high level of agency. In 1949, Ettie Stettheimer collected Florine's poems in *Crystal Flowers*, a privately printed edition of 250, and in 2010 Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo edited and published these poems under the same title for a new audience, highlighting Florine as an important modernist poet. *Crystal Flowers Poems and A Libretto* includes unpublished material pulled from archives, as well as Stettheimer's libretto for her ballet *Orphée of the Quat-z-arts*. Stettheimer was a very private person who never would have expected her painterly poems to be published. However, her private persona is the reason her artworks are so intimate, fresh and honest. Gammel and Zelazo explain Stettheimer's privacy towards her work: "Stettheimer was a consummate stylist with a camp sensibility, who wrote not to please the market, but herself. Thus she granted the world only glimpses of her work, carefully choreographing and staging it for a select audience of family and friends. Emanating from a singularly private consciousness, and reveling in play and irony, her poems present a rare look at the world between the two World Wars, along with a privileged study of some of its modernist icons" (14). Stettheimer's poems and paintings speak subversively to an array of topics, such as

marriage, sexuality, consumption, friendship and social life; her self-referential topics also included her salon and art. Thus her privacy and selectivity facilitated the creation of art works that challenged conventional boundaries of art and subjectivity.

According to art critic Henry McBride, the only one-man show that Stettheimer permitted herself occurred in the Knoedler Galleries at a time when Marie Sterner was conducting a series of exhibitions. This exhibition was early in her career, in 1916, before her style had fully developed, before the cathedral pictures and the more well known portraits had been painted. Although the mainstream press was receptive to her work, the exhibition did not attract a large enough audience to Florine's liking (McBride 18). Dissatisfied and disappointed with what she perceived as a lacklustre response, she decided that she did not want to have a one-man show again. Her ability to do so, and decision to withdraw from public, or mainstream commerce and criticism, is further confirmation that she was not dependent on the economic gains of the art market. As McBride notes: "She had no real occasion to sell her paintings and when the thing was suggested by her friends as an *evenement* natural to the life of an artist, she used to smile and say that she liked her pictures herself and preferred to keep them" (McBride 18). Unlike most artists or art dealers, Florine could afford not to sell her paintings in her salon, or even the works of others.

Michel Foucault's work *The Birth of Biopolitics* analyzes the move from liberalism to neoliberalism and looks at biopolitics and power, specifically power over life. He studies how certain apparatuses constitute the framework for capitalist (unequal) distribution of power (Lazzarato 111). Foucault argues that social relations are the result of specific apparatuses, what he terms *dispositifs*, which compose the world in a certain

way (Lazzarato 111). Within the Stettheimer's salon there is evidence of a *dispositif* at play, which Foucault would define as *discursive* (Lazzarato 113). This is the idea that our language, and our statements define the world, as formulated and articulated by academics, scientific experts, the law, the media, and other elitist groups. While Stettheimer's salon has been described by Bilski and Braun as a "sexually neutral space" where Florine promoted diverse identities, equality amongst gender, and the breaking of social boundaries, the salon was still very much a product of a leading bourgeois class. For example, in 1946 Henry McBride wrote in the *Florine Stettheimer* exhibition catalogue at the Museum of Modern Art that her experimental taste in her art works and salon "had considerabl[y] to do with shaping the intellectual and artistic impulses of the period just past" (10). He also explained that her conversations and hardy ideas were always quickly put into words, which echoed sooner or later in other parts of the city and created a following.

The Stettheimer salon was a distinctly uptown affair, a stage where modesty and appearances were maintained. The Stettheimer salon was a public world in a private space filled with guests that Florine and her sisters had carefully invited, and in which class boundaries were largely maintained, even though Duchamp, who was poor and relied on the sisters for financial support, lent the salon considerable prestige as an avant-gardist. This highly selective structure is unlike that found in Gertrude Stein's Paris salon at 27 rue de Fleurus, near the Luxembourg Gardens, which opened its door to guests she had never met. Still, like Stein's salon, and the more traditional salons described by Bilski and Braun in general, the Stettheimer salon was a space that cultivated social fluidity. While the Stettheimer salon was not reliant on the market, her

space and eccentric taste were rather an influential product of the market. The upper-class Stettheimer family was very popular amongst the avant-garde artists, writers, poets, and had a regular following of refined and prestigious habitués. Like the eighteenth-century salons discussed by Bilski and Braun (128), the Stettheimer salon was an inner sanctum where inspired and artfully choreographed conversation, rather than art world propaganda and commercial agendas existed. Florine had consciously exited the public art market, escaping its commercial and aesthetic laws, by tightly controlling the audience for her work through her "invite only" salon. This model is in contrast to Gertrude Stein's, whose salon operated under a much more open and inclusive arrangement, reflecting also a different financial positioning.

Gertrude Stein's Inclusive Salon

Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) and her brother Leo (1872-1947) started their salon or "at-homes" in 1906 initially to accommodate the audience who wanted to look at their art collection (Bilski and Braun 113). At 27 rue de Fleurus, Gertrude opened her door to guests she had never met. Despite the fact that Stein had a substantial middle-class inheritance, which provided for basic necessities, she was very interested in the extra income that could be earned through her artistic work and salon (Elliot and Wallace 25).

Stein lost both her parents at an early age, and settled with her youngest brother, Leo, in Paris where together they studied art and started their first collection of Parisian avant-garde art. Their eldest brother, Michael, helped with their education and gave them a very modest allowance to live on, which according to Leo, amounted to \$150 a month to cover books, pictures, food and travel (Elliot and Wallace 26). While upper-

class salonnieres such as Stettheimer, Barney and Brooks used their large finances to shape their salons, Gertrude built her collection within a much smaller budget, making shrewd investments in modern art. As Elliot and Wallace state: "It should be emphasized that their famous collection was built upon the fairly modest allowance that Michael gave them to live upon" (26). Stein continued to grow this collection and salon, and it is often noted that 27 rue de Fleurus was the first Museum of Modern art (Bilski and Braun 119). The salon space consisted of a two-storey apartment with adjacent high-ceilinged atelier, where the Steins hung most of the artworks and where the salon took place. As an advisor to other famous collectors in modern art, such as Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein had a large economic influence on the art market. Many of the pictures that the Steins acquired, such as pieces by Pablo Picasso, Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and Man Ray, were subsequently canonized as masterpieces by the public art institutions where these collections now reside (Bilski and Braun 119-121). Gertrude Stein's avant-garde writings elaborate on her understanding of the salon as a site of domesticity, economics, production, marketing and display. In 1922, Stein began an ongoing publication of a work titled *If You Had Three Husbands*, which was serialized in the journal *Broom*. While Stein did not come from a prosperous economic background such as Stettheimer, Barney and Brooks, as previously noted, this publication was able to market and build her status as an iconic figure of postwar Paris-based American avant-garde (Blair 419). According to Sara Blair's study, "Gertrude Stein, 27 Rue de Fleurus, and the Place of the Avant-Garde," the text is significant as it reveals Stein's insight as "an understanding of the changing space of home—the private world of love and ritual, the sphere of the bourgeois women's self-assertion and the

working women's labor—as intimately linked with other metropolitan sites of production, marketing and display” (419). Thus Stein believes that while the salon is a domestic space it is also a form of production and distribution. More specifically, *If You Had Three Husbands* explores Stein's own domestic economy: the salon as a site of avant-garde cultural networking, production and display. Blair explains that at 27 rue de Fleurus, “doing the marketing refers simultaneously (if not equally) to the work of domestic management and the strenuous labor of culture” (419). Ultimately, then, Stein revises our understanding of the salon. No longer predominantly a Habermasian public sphere, or space of rational discourse, it is conceptualized as a site of domesticity, socio-economics and production.

Building her success with a modest income, Stein established herself as a businesswoman within the early twentieth-century art market. She saw the salon as a site of production and economics and oversaw a gallery in which to collect paintings, a salesroom in which to sell paintings and a classroom in which to mentor her habitués in modernist art connoisseurship. Avant-garde art was looked upon as breaking the classical French tradition, but Stein was able to create a space that accepted and praised the avant-garde aesthetic both within the artworks and in the artists. Investors who bought their modernist art works from Stein, such as the Cone sisters (Claribel and Etta Cone) and Sergei Shchukin, accepted the risk of investing into the modern in hopes to get an even more substantial return for the pieces in the future. Stein usually purchased from the artists themselves, and for several years her atelier was the only space where the audience and artists could view this new avant-garde art, aside from the independent exhibitions, which eschewed academic venues (Bilski and Braun 121).

Stein did not discriminate within her salon as Stettheimer did. Instead, she created a space that welcomed people from every economic class, ethnicity and sexuality. Most importantly, she did not just welcome potential art buyers, but she encouraged those who simply sought to look and learn (Bilski and Braun 121-122). Sara Blair convincingly argues that Stein participates in a revision of the salon, with its historical role in the formation of the modern public sphere (Blair 420). In particular, the space she creates is both indebted to the salon and quite distinct from it. Sara Blair asserts that Stein's salon becomes an entirely new formation of institution, what is also reflected in the salon's physical architecture. Infamous and public—indeed, notorious—the atelier of 27 was adjacent to Stein in the *pavillon*,” as Blair remarks and continues: “[W]hile the studio itself was hidden from the street in a private courtyard, the address was trumpeted by word of mouth and every unofficial guide to bohemian Paris; protected by the only Yale lock in the sixth arrondissement, the salon was nonetheless open to ‘a continuous stream’ of strangers (420).

Stein's salon collected artist “egos” and their masterpieces, and combined highbrow with lowbrow art. Her salon also signaled a profound shift in the traditional nature of salon conversation, one that moved beyond the notion of Habermasian rational discourse, and is hailed in Stein's own profoundly experimental prose.

According to Bilski and Braun,

By 1913, dozens came through on any given Saturday: “*And everybody came and no one made any difference,*” Stein observed in her autobiography. The countless numbers of strangers and foreign tongues were hardly conducive to calm and lucid inquiry. Speaking in earnest gave way to

the importance of seeing and being seen. Stein helped turn literature into sound bites and salons into show business (125).

Stein liked the idea and adventure of new artists and paintings challenging traditional aesthetics. Her salon rapidly grew in size with international fame being just around the corner from Andy Warhol's Factory (Bilsky and Braun 124).

Thus Stein's salon had direct control of the art market, as evidenced in her influence on the New York Dada scene and perhaps best exemplified in the introduction of two master artists, Henry Matisse and Pablo Picasso. Gertrude Stein created extremely playful word portraits of *Picasso* and *Matisse*, which appeared in the August 1912 edition of Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work*. Stieglitz was one of Stein's habitués, who in turn extended her influence into the New York Dada scene, where "Marius de Zayas and Francis Picabia developed literary experiments into abstract, mechanistic, often nihilistic *object portraits*" (Bilski and Braun 124).

Taking inspiration from Gertrude Stein, Mable Dodge, a well endowed American patron of the arts, started her 1913 salon on Wednesday evenings at her home in Manhattan, thus also paying homage to Stein. Artists and writers such as Mable Dodge, Carl Van Vechten, and Henry McBride wrote highly positive reviews about Stein, highlighting her as a celebrity of the modernist era. Stein built herself into a leading figure of the art market during the modernist era (Bilski and Braun 124-125). She measured her success through the success of others, and was able to reinvent the modernist art market by breaking from traditional art works, and putting faith in the avant-garde.

As has been argued, unlike the traditional Habermasian salon, which locates the salon within concepts of the public sphere ruled by rational discourse, Gertrude Stein's salon was a space that sought to bring together domesticity and economics with the cultural production of avant-garde art. Its distinctive social life allowed for participants of many ethnic, economic, social, age and gender backgrounds to engage in the modernist salon as avid habitués, as aficionados of modern art and as seekers of new identities. As a result, a plethora of people such as tourists, art students, art collectors, curators, dealers and artists were invited to become an integral part of the avant-garde community engaged in revamping identities through new art practices.

The Utopian Salon of Natalie Clifford Barney and Romaine Brooks

Natalie Clifford Barney (1876-1972) was an American playwright, poet and novelist who lived as an expatriate in Paris. Her partner, Romaine Brooks (1874-1970), was born Beatrice Romaine Goddard in Rome, Italy, where her American mother, Ella (Waterman) Goddard, was staying after being deserted by her husband (Sicherman and Green 110). As for their financial status, Barney and Brooks must be counted amongst the wealthiest female artists and salonnières during the modernist era. Both received large inheritances which had been funded on nineteenth-century expansionist enterprises (Elliot and Wallace 19). Barney came from the upper echelon of American industrialist families, her wealth stemming primarily from her father's involvement in mining and transportation (Jay I). As Elliot and Wallace explain: "Her father, Albert Clifford Barney, inherited the Barney Car Works, a railroad car foundry which he sold to the Pullman Sleeping Car Company" (19). Upon her father's death in 1902, Barney

inherited \$2.5 million, and when her mother, Alice Pike Barney, remarried in 1911, she inherited another \$1.5 million (Elliot and Wallace 19).

Romaine Brooks was also extremely wealthy; however, since she separated from her family for a period of time she experienced extreme poverty before she became wealthy through inheritance in 1902 (Elliot and Wallace 19). Barney and Brooks claim to have associated their lives with the cultural rather than financial and material circumstances. However, both women were able to use their substantial capital and social status to experiment with artistic self-representation and lifestyle (Elliot and Wallace 19).

Barney directed most of her resources and energy into creating an enclosed community of women writers. In 1909 she created a salon within her home at 20, rue de Jacob, on the Left Bank, a salon that would last for a remarkable sixty years. Elliot and Wallace assert that her community of women writers and artists created "its own systems of artistic production and distribution which allowed her an unusually high degree of control over her various visual and literary incarnations" (20). Barney clearly used finance and capital as a means to influence social structure, and shape gender politics, specifically creating communities to empower women. Her salon, baptised a "Temple of Friendship," was an attempt to form a utopian lesbian community. During the early to mid twentieth century, more women were determined to participate in politics and become active participants in the workforce. Barney created a women's salon which helped give women a voice. In 1904 Barney had also travelled to the island of Lesbos with the intention of establishing a "Sapphic school of poetry" (Elliot and Wallace 19-20). While this school barely flourished, in 1927, she was able to use her

financial power to reshape the male dominated educational social structure. Barney established her Académie des femmes, "a counterpart to the Académie Française," a male dominated academic institution which did not admit any women until 1980 (Elliot and Wallace 20). This school was designed in part to bring about an understanding among English, American and French women writers, provide intellectual and social support for these writers and raise donations to help with the publications of their works (Elliot and Wallace 20).

Although Barney and Brooks were extremely rich and had become lovers by the late 1910s, they pursued quite different strategies of self-representation and artistic expression. While Barney fostered various circles of women through her salon and academies, Brooks used her portraits and adopted a transvestite persona to express her social values (Elliot and Wallace 22). Family wealth secured her place within wealthy and aristocratic social circles in Paris in the early twentieth century. Her sexual orientation drew her to a homosexual literary and artistic culture that demanded a role for sexual identity within the creative process (Chadwick 10).

Interestingly, Brooks always considered herself a social outcast, and as her career progressed, she became increasingly attached to her own paintings and, like Florine Stettheimer, refused to sell them or give them away. Elliot and Wallace reproduce a photograph taken near the end of Brooks' life, which "shows the artist at home literally surrounded by her portraits. In this sense Brooks' wealth affected both her reputation as a 'serious' artist and her market value" (24-25). Brooks, like Stettheimer, linked her pictorial style to her environment, decorating her apartment with the subdued shades of black, white, and gray that she chose for her palette, seeking in her life the

understated elegance and simplicity that characterized her paintings. However, just like Stettheimer, Brooks left a pictorial record of her cultural and social status behind and is best known today as the first woman painter consciously to forge a new visual imagery for the twentieth-century lesbian (Chadwick 297-299).

The value of her work was fairly complex. Since she never intended to sell her pieces, there was never any actual value given to them. Given her financial situation, she was able to intentionally stay outside the market place, and still influence the gendered structural conditions by empowering diverse sexualities (Elliot and Wallace 25). As Pierre Bourdieu's studies of cultural distinctions argue, "financial capital and symbolic capital are related but not necessarily coincidental", and by relying on financial capital to underwrite their refusal to enter the cultural marketplace, Brooks and Barney were able to manipulate political social structures to their advantage (Elliot and Wallace 25).

Consequently, these female salonnières of the early twentieth century, while playing different roles and having come from diverse political and economic backgrounds, have all shaped the modernist era salon most notably, as shall be argued now, in the domain of gender. Not only did they demonstrate the ways in which finances either limited or allowed them to shape social structures, but the ways in which their salons formed an important history of the salon in terms of a political economy. Thus, they shaped the institutional basis for the future political and economic dimensions of the art market. Within their salons we see the notion of structuration, which exemplifies the ways in which social structure gives form to allow habitués to act. Stettheimer, Barney, Brooks and Stein are important salonnières who used their salons to reshape

gender representations, and identity, and who also used their financial and economic clout to help reshape political and economic social structures.

With the basis of the intersections among art, politics and economics detailed in Chapter 1, the focus in Chapter 2 now shifts to the very unique socio-political aspects of Florine Stettheimer's artistic expressions, in particular, her subversive gender politics, which also recall the subversiveness of Barney and Brooks.

Chapter 2

The Socio-Economics of Gender in Florine Stettheimer's Salon and Oeuvre

Let us briefly recall that as a salonnière relatively unencumbered by economic, political, or religious restrictions, Florine Stettheimer was able to use her considerable financial and economic clout to take risks and challenge some orthodox or simply mainstream social and political values. This expression manifested itself through her experimental artistic practices, such as her privately distributed poetry, her avant-garde salon, and her social critiques of consumer culture and the art market. With no one to please but herself Florine was free to construct her salon in her own subversive image. What requires further investigation is the myriad of ways in which she took advantage of her status within the art world and considerable economic power to subvert orthodoxies of gender, sexuality, consumerism, and ultimately the public art market itself.

Stettheimer's work insists on articulating a subtle awareness of socio-economic realities and their power to structure and shape artistic practice. Several of her poems, for example, make reference to Florine's comfortable social and economic status by alluding to her annual summer excursions to Asbury Park, Bedford Hills, Andre-Brook, Larchmont, Lake Placid, and the Jersey Coast. Her poem "New York," for example, captures "the seasonal rhythm of upper-class social life in the metropolis with haiku-like compression: 'In spring my friends droop – / they disappear – / June is empty of them – / In autumn they come back / Stuffed full of Europe'" (18). Florine's poems convey a double entendre on socio-political economics and capital. In particular, she is using her

social and capital power to speak of and critique social status, consumer culture, gender and the art market, as seen in her poem entitled "In The Museum." From the vantage point of her own subversive semi-private/semi-public salon, Florine is not afraid, and more important can afford, to critique the official institutions of art:

In the Mus-e-um

The Directors drink Rum

For Art is dumb

In the Mus-e-um.

(Stettheimer 85)

In satirizing traditional art institutions, these poems exemplify her world and her social critique on orthodox socio-political culture and economics.

Florine wrote her poems on scraps of paper, which now have turned into literary gems. Early reader Mark Pagano, who had been involved with Stettheimer's exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1946, stated that her poems were "made of glass – and they have razor edges and needle points – but they have smooth velvety places to touch too" (qtd in Gammel and Zelazo 15). While Florine's poems are witty and satirical, often articulating strong social critiques that push against the deceptively simple nursery rhyme structures. Satirizing the political economy and institutions of high society, these poems offer strong commentary on marriage, sexuality, gender roles, consumption and the art market (Gammel and Zelazo 16). Thus the poem "Mrs. Golden-Pheasant" is both a social critique on gender roles and consumer culture: "Mrs. Golden-Pheasant / looks pleasant / when she gets a present / When she gets no present / she looks unpleasant / does Mrs. Golden-Pheasant" (Stettheimer 43).

Florine satirizes social constructs that often undermine women's roles as consumers. Not only is this poem commenting on the social constructions of gender and consumption, but it satirizes constructs of women's emotional dependence on consumer goods. Likewise, Florine's poem "A Llama" playfully thematizes commodification: "A Llama / Said something / To his Mama / So she bought / A rubber mat / A brass" (Stettheimer 43-44). Gammel and Zelazo assert that this poem underlines the distinctively American style of commodification, "wherein the collector eventually becomes the collected – the Llama becoming collectible Americana, with the poet playfully riffing on the acoustic connection between *Mama* and *Americana*" (17).

These poems take place during the interwar Manhattan, often commenting on her own life of consumption and that around her in New York. In particular, poems in section "As Tho' from a Diary" traces Florine's *Lehr- und Wanderjahre* in Europe and New York (Gammel and Zelazo 17). A poem entitled "New York" makes references to the Upper West side, Alwyn Court, where Florine lived and hosted her salons, and to Bryant Park, where she had her studio. Since Stettheimer came from a secure economic background, as suggested in Chapter 1, she was not concerned with the receptiveness of the traditional art audience, and selling paintings. Instead, she was interested in taking risks, experimenting with representations of sexuality, and the unconventional use of domestic space, as shown in her paintings of her male habitués and in her self-portraits. At the same time, however, Stettheimer's play with gender was flirtatious and theatrical, not aggressive like that of her fiercely anti-bourgeois Dada sister, the notorious Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, who paid a hefty price for her daring and found herself relegated by the market to a life of abject poverty;

ultimately, Stettheimer remained a member of her privileged class who was careful in selecting both the subjects of her salon portraits and her habitués who frequented her salon.

Deconstructing Gender Roles

Eschewing the notion of the salon embedded within the bourgeois public sphere of rational discourse, Stettheimer created an avant-garde salon renowned for its extravagant and ornate play with surfaces, identities and genders. A play with gender crossing is at the heart of Stettheimer's salon, suggesting that she used her salon as a laboratory for restructuring not just representations of identity but identity itself. At the salon the women could be ladies and so could the men. There was the blurring of identities and sexuality for both Florine and her coterie. Within a theatrical and ludic context, and without any ostensible fear of social ostracism, Florine was able to create new queered and androgynous identities and deconstruct binary gender roles, which in turn sustained her salon as a space of ludic experimentation and playful subversion.

In her aptly titled essay, "Decorating with Stettheimer and the Boys," Cecile Whiting notes that "Florine Stettheimer sustained a dialogue about the proper design of domestic space with her circle of male admirers, which included writers, artists, critics, dancers, and musicians. They conducted this exchange using a variety of artistic means: Stettheimer painted the men's portraits, and the novelists in her coterie described in their books fantastic bachelor interiors decorated with her paintings" (25). The Stettheimer salon was a carefully staged, sexually neutral space as Whiting continues by expounding on Florine's close friendship with Marcel Duchamp. "Florine

and Duchamp shared an aloof demeanor and sexually ambiguous (though not homosexual) identity," Whiting asserts, referencing in particular Duchamp's gender-bending penchant, as seen in the series of photographs taken by Man Ray in 1920 in which Duchamp poses in his female guise as Rose Sélavy. Whiting remarks that "the prettily androgynous features of bob-haired Rose are not too far from Florine's own" (133).

Whereas Barney made an effort to restructure the salon as a female community. and whereas Gertrude Stein, along with her female partner Alice B. Toklas, ran her salon as a lesbian couple yet also superimposed heterosexual structures (with Stein playing the role of "masculine" genius, and Toklas assuming the role of "wife"), the Stettheimer salon exhibits an overtly sororal structure, as all three sisters remained unmarried and played unique and complementary roles within the salon. Ettie was the intellectual who dazzled the guests with her intellectual and conversational skills; Carrie was responsible for creating elaborate and artful food menus; and Florine contributed the visual art including paintings, costumes and decor.

At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Florine was 43 years of age. Her mother and two sisters permanently returned to New York after having made their home in Europe for a considerable period (Mathews 55). As suggested by Nancy Mowll Mathews, when Florine returned to New York,

[s]he was poised to become a player in the increasingly cosmopolitan and sophisticated avant-garde that would embrace many a European intellectual displaced by the First World War. The Armory Show a year earlier had paved a way for such an upheaval and, on another front, the increased feminist activity

that would result in suffrage for women in 1920 brought strong women to the fore. It was the perfect moment for the sisters (55).

The Stettheimer's sisters entered the contemporary art scene in New York, socializing with influential figures such as Alfred Stieglitz, Carl Van Vechten, Francis Picabia, and Marcel Duchamp. Their studio soon became one of the curiosities of the town, reveling in a new aesthetic.

Henri McBride, a regular habitué and friend, describes the Stettheimer salon as a physical work of art, with his rhetoric rendering the salon in visual poetry: "The lofty windows (the studio was double-decked) were hung with billowy cellophane curtains, and the chairs and tables were in white and gold, the tables in glass and gold, and I have remembrance of lamps screened with white beads and unreal but handsome gilt flowers in the vases" (24). Florine's high-culture taste and camp aesthetic is clearly exemplified within her salon. Her passion for décor, in particular, her penchant for combining feminine lace with modern cellophane, was both represented within her salon and continually crept into her paintings. McBride argues that since lace appears in her salon and in her paintings, it becomes her sign-manual (24). Lace represents Florine's passion for décor, her references to richly textured domesticity and luxury, but lace also contrasts with the modernity associated with crackling cellophane during the era; thus her two favorite textures, juxtaposed in the same room, developed important tensions and ambiguities.

Likewise, Stettheimer's paintings are unique representations of socio-political issues, consumer culture, gender and economics. Her paintings have been read alternately as invaluable pieces of history representing American High Bohemia

(Bloemink), and as ironic commentaries on deeply troubling aspects of the early twentieth century (Tatham 27). Yet they also thematize communication, not in the Habermasian sense of highlighting the rationality of the public sphere, but in the sense of highlighting the role of dramatic gestures as rhetorical acts that draw attention to the enduring presence of traditional gender codes even while unravelling them.

During the teens and twenties, Stettheimer's salon and her guests became her primary subjects (Tatham 10-12). Throughout many of her paintings she used her salon and habitués as a tool to shine light on themes of socio-political aspects of gender and the modernist art world, as she deployed satirical references to economics and consumer society. Among these visual records is her evocative painting *Soirée* (1917-1919) (fig. 1), an intricate self-portrait and salon portrait, which shows how Stettheimer broke with conventional gender roles: she restructured identity by superimposing feminine identities onto her male habitués. *Soirée* mirrors the Stettheimers' eccentric apartment, articulating also something about the role of the male habitués that frequented the salon, such as Duchamp, McBride, and others.

The painting depicts habitués such as Leo Stein and the playwright Avery Hopwood at the center, with artists Lachaise and Gleizes standing before an easel at the lower left. Ettie, Isabella Lachaise and artist Maurice Sterne are found in the top left hand corner under Florine's *Family No. 1* portrait, while Carrie is next to Madame Gleizes on a red and white settee (Bilski and Braun 126). The inclusion of her 1915 *Family Portrait No. 1* (fig. 2), creates a layered visual text and play, in that the embedded portrait-within-the portrait depicts Carrie, Ettie, and herself, as well as her mother reading Ettie's novel *Philosophy*. *Soirée* is thus an extremely playful and self-

referential conversation piece, not only because all of the figures can be identified by their likeness but because of these multiple embedded and ironic references. The different roles played by the habitués in this piece reinforce the breaking of gender roles and the ostentatious feminizing that is evident as a strategy in Florine's salon.

In *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, Bloemink argues that *Soirée* is an exploration of the act of looking and satirizes the "posturing and blindness so often mistaken for art appreciation" (96). But the painting, like the salon, also centrally stages portraiture as a communicative rhetoric that relies on doubleness and irony in questioning traditional identity. The most telling gestures in Stettheimer's painting are the hands of the four frontal male habitués. As Bloemink explains:

Lachaise holds his elbow with one hand, while the other covers his right ear and the side of his face. Next to him, Gleizes cups his chin and seals his lips; both men gaze at the unseen painting without expression. This device is repeated in the center of the painting, where Hopwood sits with the back of his palm covering his mouth, while the semi-deaf Leo Stein holds his hearing aide as far away from his body as possible, preventing any communication (Bloemink 98).

The male habitués are portrayed as refined and quiet, ostensibly passive, while the females play distinctly more vital roles in the piece. Just as they did within the actual salon, the women assume responsibilities and take agency in embracing modernity of profoundly ironic modern art expression (a nude that refuses to be abstract and instead confronts the baffled guests in the clearly recognizable nude body of the hostess). It is clear that Mme. Gleizes alone appears to openly acknowledge the resemblance between the features of the large nude hanging on the back wall of the room and those

of her hostess seated at the right. She raises her hand to her chest, suggesting a signal to “speak-up” (Bloemink 98). Meanwhile, Florine, as the mischievous author of this painting and choreographer of this multi-layered scene looks out into the audience holding the very same pose as in the nude portrait, thus inviting the viewer to share in the amusement and layered irony of the scene she is observing. Again, this painting reflects the unconventional borderline space that Florine has created within her salon, as we see in her portrayal of the silenced male habitués assuming a traditionally feminine position in a scene of playful role-reversal and confusion of gender codes.

Soirée also subversively stages the portrait’s ironic awareness of its own socio-economic dimensions. By refusing to sell her *Nude* self-portrait, Florine instead displays it on the wall for her habitués to see; refusing to relinquish it to the anonymous art market, she chooses to baffle her friends in play of intimacy that immediately collapses the traditional aesthetic rules that proscribe aesthetic distance for depiction of the classical nude. Most importantly she uses the bafflement of her habitués and the painting *Nude* as a central topic of *Soirée*, thus creating a playfully modern meta-text on her refusal to participate in the art market and the established art historical practices governing representations of the nude. Instead, she finds pleasure in displaying her own artworks within her salon, such as *Nude*, where she records the reactions of her habitués towards this piece in her painting *Soirée*. The work is used literally as a conversation piece, but one in which the conversational rules themselves are playfully subverted and parodied.

Florine’s paintings of this period are bright, ironic sketches full of deeply personal symbolism, anecdote and social critique. Although her unique personal style of painting

was developed out of stern academic training her paintings still focus almost exclusively on the social milieu in which she lived. Stettheimer produced paintings as part of a self-consciously cultivated lifestyle, which drew little distinction between making art and living well (Chadwick 297). Inspired by the summer of 1919, when Stettheimer, her mother and sisters spent a luxurious vacation at Camp Calumet on Lake Placid's Moose Island, *Lake Placid* (1919) (fig. 3) represents themes of the upper-class consumer and leisure life. While the painting follows the stylistic conventions of the pastoral Hudson River School, with its idealization of landscape, Stettheimer also subverted these conventions in significant ways. "Rather than engaging ideas regarding the natural world and humanity's age-old relationship to it, which had been the fundamentally Emersonian task of earlier landscape painters," as David Tatham notes (18), Stettheimer portrayed consumer products and urban life that were representative of modernist America. In particular, she turned to portraying the region as a place of racing speedboats, aquaplaning, scanty, bathing attire and cigarettes. Not a traditional landscape piece, *Lake Placid* is more accurately a representation of "landscape as theater" (Tatham 18).

But her paintings do more than articulate her economic background. By referencing contemporary consumer life. They also create social satire of consumption and challenge the traditional methods and subject matters of painting. Whitney Chadwick notes that "[p]rotected by her wealth from having to exhibit or sell, [Stettheimer] further insulated herself from the professional art world through her demand that any gallery wishing to exhibit her works be redecorated like her home" (Chadwick 297). Stettheimer's physical salon was just as much of an artwork as her paintings. The

interior space and its decorations were undoubtedly important to Stettheimer both within her home as well as in her art. The idea that a person's belongings and surroundings reflected his or her personality was growing in popularity in the twentieth century and extremely important to Stettheimer. The decorations and arrangements of the salon were viewed as something of an art (Tiersten 18-32). Her decorations of billowy cellophane curtains, white and gold chairs and tables, beaded lamp shades and gilt flowers in vases were artworks themselves that needed to be part of any exhibition representing Stettheimer's work.

Salon Identity in Portraiture

The 1920s witnessed an increased focus on personal psychology (Bloemink 115). Wendy Steiner observes that the genre of portraiture exemplified many of the concerns of modern art, including the idea of "individual identity" (2-5). Bloemink concurs that complex issues surrounding "individual identity" were central to modernism (115). This increased emphasis on personal identity and subjectivity is evidenced in the embracing of portraiture by avant-garde artists. As Bloemink puts it: "Portraiture involved an exploration of the sitter's motives and circumstances as well as the motives and reactions of the artist" (115). Appropriating portraiture as a platform for exploring evolving notions of subjectivity, Stettheimer, like Romaine Brooks, embraced complex new identities along with a new style of painting.

More specifically, through subversive portraits, Stettheimer hailed new gender identities, providing a platform for her male habitués to reveal, and revel in, their female alter-egos. In a number of highly androgynous portraits she depicts whimsical interiors

occupied by ultra-refined young men. Consider, for example, her 1922 *Portrait of Carl Van Vechten* (fig. 4), a well-known writer, music critic and photographer, who was married to the actress Fania Marinoff but was also more or less openly bisexual within the more liberal confines of the salons. *Portrait of Carl Van Vechten* depicts an elaborately queered identity that blurs the boundaries of sexuality and gender, raising intriguing questions about the performance of gender.

This painting offers a look at an interior scene, which surrounds the artist with his favorite professional objects (a piano and large book collection; a typewriter placed on the ground). Van Vechten sits on a chair placed on top of a floral carpet, displaying slender decorated hands, pointed dainty feet, and a slender waist. According to Whiting, “the arrangement and décor of the domestic space conjoin sexual orientation and aesthetic pursuits. Significantly, Stettheimer’s *Roses* - too large and irregularly placed to maintain their moorings as mere tapestry decoration - encircle Van Vechten’s feminized body” (28).

Within this visual grammar of referencing multiple identities (professional and private), one reference complicates Van Vechten’s sexual identity. Clearly visible on the wall is an intricate and highly ironic portrait of Fania Marinoff, the beautiful Russian-born actress and Van Vechten’s second wife. There is a small shrine dedicated to her at the right, including a quotidian throw rug bearing her name, a dressing table (a prop referring to her profession), and a hanging mask that bears a striking resemblance to photographs of the actress and to portraits of her by other artists such as Adolfo Best-Maugard, who portrayed her as a Spanish maiden (Bloemink 123). These allusions to Van Vechten’s marital status in the portrait, and suggested intimacy, yet simultaneous

complementary distance, clearly refute the notion that his sexuality could be easily defined – instead, they suggest something of the fluidity of his sexual identity (Whiting 30-31) and of the complexity of personal lives, suggesting that identity is a complex performance of a myriad of roles.

Likewise, Florine Stettheimer's 1923 *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* (fig. 5) cleverly documents Marcel Duchamp in his double manifestation as a dandy. She painted him three years after he gave birth to his alter-ego Rose Sélavy (Eros—that's life) in collaboration with photographer Man Ray (Bilsky and Braun 133). Interested in incorporating these different personae into her Duchamp portraits, Stettheimer painted him seated facing his later-ego, Rose Sélavy, whom she represented as a stylish female sylph who balances with flawless pose on a stool (Fillin-Yeh 38). The bodies of the two personae are mirrored in their cross-legged pose, while their curved torsos are hardly differentiated to show their contrary genders (Bilsky and Braun 133). Florine and Duchamp were both proud of their sexually ambiguous identities. It is evident that the androgynous features of Rose are similar to those of Florine. "Duchamp and Stettheimer engaged in a complicated dance of gender doubling and transmutation. He referred to her as a bachelor—a pun on her unmarried status and the professional status conferred on a bachelor of the arts" (Bilsky and Braun 134). She created a space where private sexual identities could be expressed, embraced and theatricalized. Some of her homosexual habitués would hide their private identities in public spaces. Yet within the Stettheimer salon they were able to freely express their multiple identities (Bilsky and Braun 134). The salon's unconventional feminine environment allowed for

both male and female habitués to gather and to generate their own distinct social and sexual profiles (Whiting 25).

Throughout Stettheimer's salon and portraits it is clear that she was no stranger to the tactics of dandyism and cross-dressing. In *Dandies, Marginality and Modernism* Susan Fillin-Yeh argues, "In a climate in which women's images and actions as independent artists were without precedent, they made themselves up as they went along, defining themselves in new—and shifting—contexts" (36). Women's dandy images held meanings which were empowering. By embracing tactics of dandyism and androgynous roles, women dandies became walking installations, which in turn framed a challenge to the dominant mode of male discourse (Fillin-Yeh 36). For example, in 1896 photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston's self portrait smoking a cigarette mimics male attributes and body language, and undermines the view that stereotypic male behaviour was unusual for a women. While Johnston portrayed herself in women's clothing, her body language was that of a cross-dresser (Fillin-Yeh 36-37). Cross-dressing becomes a way of reassessing culturally-defined categories of masculinity and femininity (Fillin-Yeh 36-37).

Florine Stettheimer also challenged sexual identities in *Portraits of Myself* (1923), and *Family Portrait No. 2* (1933). The first, *Portrait of Myself* (fig. 6), portrays Florine in her female persona in diaphanous flaming red, who doubles as male in the black beret she wears, which is an accessory referencing the attributes of romantic male artists from the nineteenth-century (Fillin-Yeh 38). In her later painting *Family Portrait No. 2* (fig. 7), she portrays herself as a male in her black painting clothes, with fashionable lounging pyjamas modeled on a man's suit, with red high-heels. In both portraits

Stettheimer gives doubled gender to her image through the accessory, such as the fancy woman's footgear in *Family Portrait* (Fillin-Yeh 39).

Sandra M. Gilbert perhaps sums it up best. In her book *Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature*, she writes: "Feminist modernist costume imagery is radically revisionary in a political sense, for it implies that no one, male or female, can or should be confined to a uniform, a single form or self" (395). Florine Stettheimer's portraits signal the threat that men began to feel in the wake of the suffrage movement and First Wave feminism of control by liberated women (Sawelson-Gorse 28). During World War I there were fears about women entering the labor force. Such transgressions gave rise to fears of a "newly autonomous female type" (Sawelson-Gorse 28). She asserted her independence, successfully challenging male hegemony and destabilizing normative gender roles and codes, as discussed above through the prism of her self-referential paintings and portraits. Florine was interested in projecting feminine attributes onto her male habitués, thereby creating an ambiguous portrayal of sexuality. Through Florine's inspired salon, and independence from the market, she was able to give birth to ambiguous sexual identities, and undermine the dominant gender categories of the day.

Conclusion

Intersections of Gender and Economy

The social space and economic context of the salon during the modernist era, specifically those led by female salonnières Stein, Stettheimer, Barney and Brooks, influenced gender experimentation. These salonnières created spaces where social relationships thrived among artists, writers, poets, and art enthusiasts, and provided a safe support structure for diverse forms of self expressions. In particular, these salonnières were able to create public spheres which broke gender norms, encouraging their habitués to express diverse sexualities and alter-egos, both within the salon and through artistic representations.

However, these salonnières significantly revolutionized the salon by departing from the Habermasian model and its importance on rational critical debate. As has been argued herein, the modernist salon Stettheimer, Stein, Barney and Brooks transcended the Habermasian formula of the public sphere, by creating a space that challenges us to think about new models of approaching the salon. In particular, as this essay has suggested, the salon becomes a space that breaks gender identities, and embraces difference, thereby gesturing toward late-twentieth-century salons and spaces. It also figures as a space in which domesticity plays a central and important role in both art making and the art market.

While this essay has demonstrated the ways in which these salonnières and artists were positioned within the political and economic field, it has also endeavored to shine a significant light on the ability of both well endowed and less financially fortunate

female salonnieres and artists to transform the art world during the modernist era. In particular, Stettheimer challenged art by merging it with her personal life, economics, gender and consumer culture. Barney likewise used her substantial inheritances to create an enclosed and utopian environment of women writers, and a salon in Paris which supported a safe lesbian community. Brooks was able to use her financial capital to experiment with artistic self-representations.

Gertrude Stein also created an extremely popular salon, and had great influence on the art market. While she did not inherit the same amount of wealth as Barney, Brooks and Stettheimer, she built herself a successful life through art collections and eventually her own writings, such as her famous autobiography *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and early art collections. Stein's salon and literature had many references to the economics of the art world. Just like Stettheimer's painting such as *Lake Placid*, Stein's literature *If You Had Three Husbands* explores the salon and home as a cyclical consumer market. *If You Had Three Husbands* clearly echoes the purpose of 27 rue de Fleurus, both a lesbian household and a birthplace of the cultural production of the early modernist avant-gardes. Within Barney and Brooks, Stein and Stettheimer's salon new innovations of early modernist art, and the production of an avant-garde community had flourished. Most centrally, Stettheimer's salon and gatherings eroded stereotypes and were filled with intellectuals, gay men and women, Europhiles and American moderns, who became subjects for her portraits. Stettheimer approached the aesthetic structure of her portraits as a product shaped in the contested terrain of gender and art in modernist Manhattan. As has been documented herein, these photographs were more than simple portraits; they were

constructions of new artistic, cultural and sexual meanings of a personal narrative. Manhattan's upper east and west side salons, as well as Greenwich Village, and the Left Bank of Paris became a community of aesthetic experimentation, feminism, androgynous personae, and other kinds of political activism. These photographs of artists dressed up (such as portraits of Marcel Duchamp by Man Ray, or Stettheimer's androgynous portraits) represented a specialized expression of artifice, a modernist "dandy", which Stettheimer in particular was interested in exploring. While scholars such as Fillin-Yeh have explored this shifting definition and image of *dandies* in the nineteenth century primarily defined as male, this figure was refashioned by artists such as Duchamp, Brooks and Stettheimer to fit their own needs. Cross-dressing became a way for these radical artists to address socially constructed concepts of masculinity and femininity, thereby also challenging the dominant gender configurations of bourgeois society.

Centered in Manhattan and Paris, these artists, bohemians, and cultural radicals embraced experimentation, individualism, and personal freedom in their artistic practice and sexual lives. They were also critical of the very same middle and upper class society to which they belonged. Still, Stettheimer's commitment to her comfortable domestic life, her adherence to traditional modes of femininity, and her embrace of the decorative, set her apart from the anti-bourgeois and anti-materialist aspects of the more radical avant-garde circles (such as New York Dada) within which their artistic productions circulated. The excitement of the modern city, with all of its Americana, served as inspiration to Florine's art and salon. Florine Stettheimer always expressed the same excitement and love for consumer goods and decorative detail that she felt as

a child, and she expressed that passion in her art and her surroundings, creating an unusual and distinctly feminine modern aesthetic, one that was shared by her coterie and modernists.

These salonnières demonstrated the ways in which socio-political and economic standings could significantly influence social structures. Thus, during the early twentieth century female salonnières Stettheimer, Stein, Brooks and Barney used their social status to secure their place within wealthy and aristocratic circles, forming salons and experimenting with new forms of avant-garde art, which in turn became liberating to women, dandies and diverse forms of sexualities. These salonnières were prominent figures that reconstructed their socio-historical moment. Elliot and Wallace assert that feminist cultural studies can help us understand our own positioning and theorize the options available to us (152). Thus, we need to learn from our cultural past and ask questions about why these women made the choices that they did. Nancy Fraser calls for a “pragmatic model” which offers us the ability to locate women’s cultural and political agency within particular social and historical contexts (Elliot and Wallace 152). In particular, what options were available to wealthy women like Florine Stettheimer and Natalie Barney or to less fortunate women like Gertrude Stein?

While Stettheimer, Stein, Brooks and Barney maintained an interest in presenting art works in private and domestic spaces, they were also interested in radically redefining those spaces, such as the crowds of the metropolis. Also, by moving to various metropolitan centers, these women acquired the contacts and networks with various artists, art dealers and art enthusiasts. However, more importantly they gained

the freedom to recognize their domestic lives in ways that allowed them to find time to work and yet live experimentally (Elliot and Wallace 162-163).

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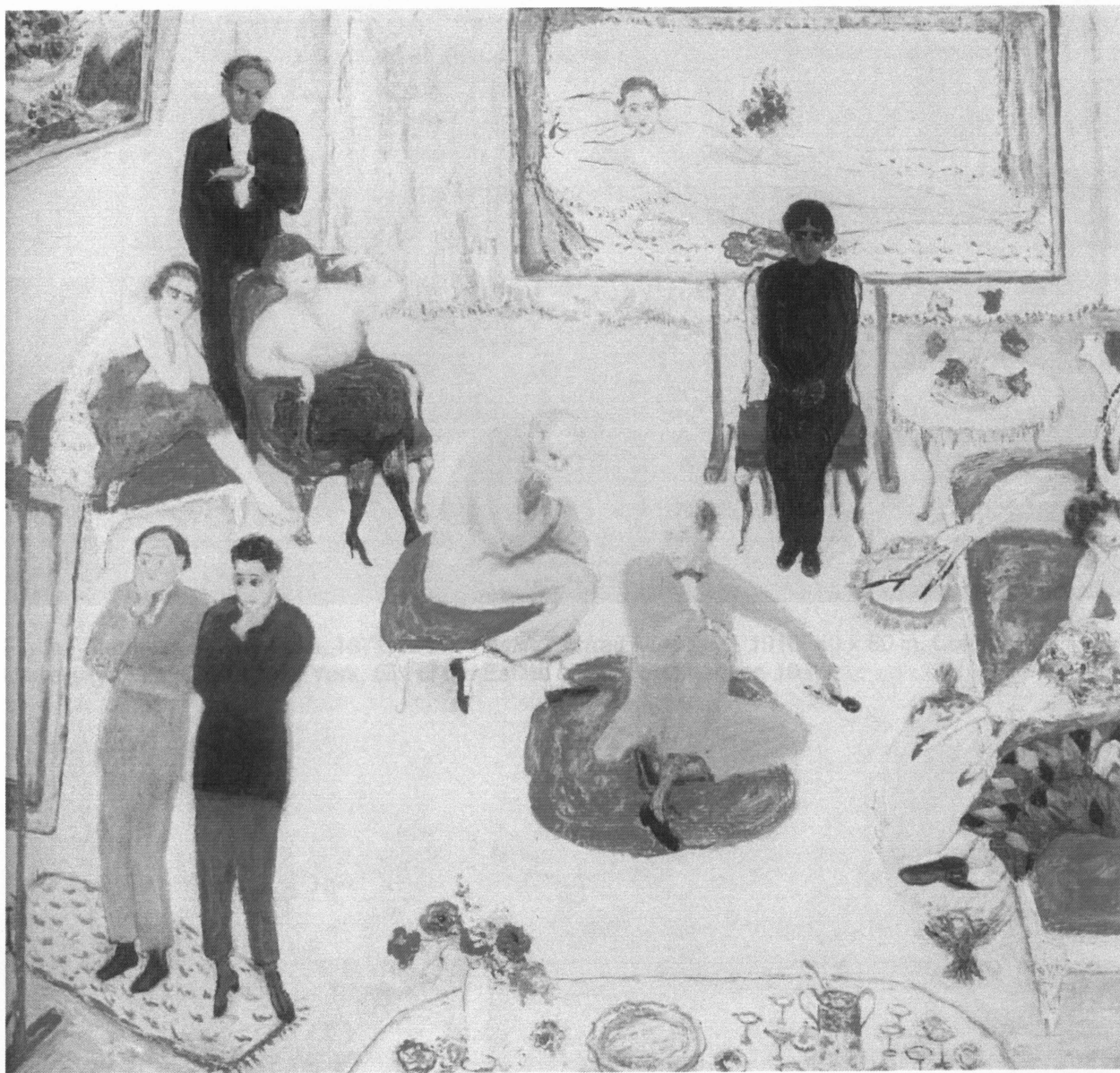
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Images

Figure 1:



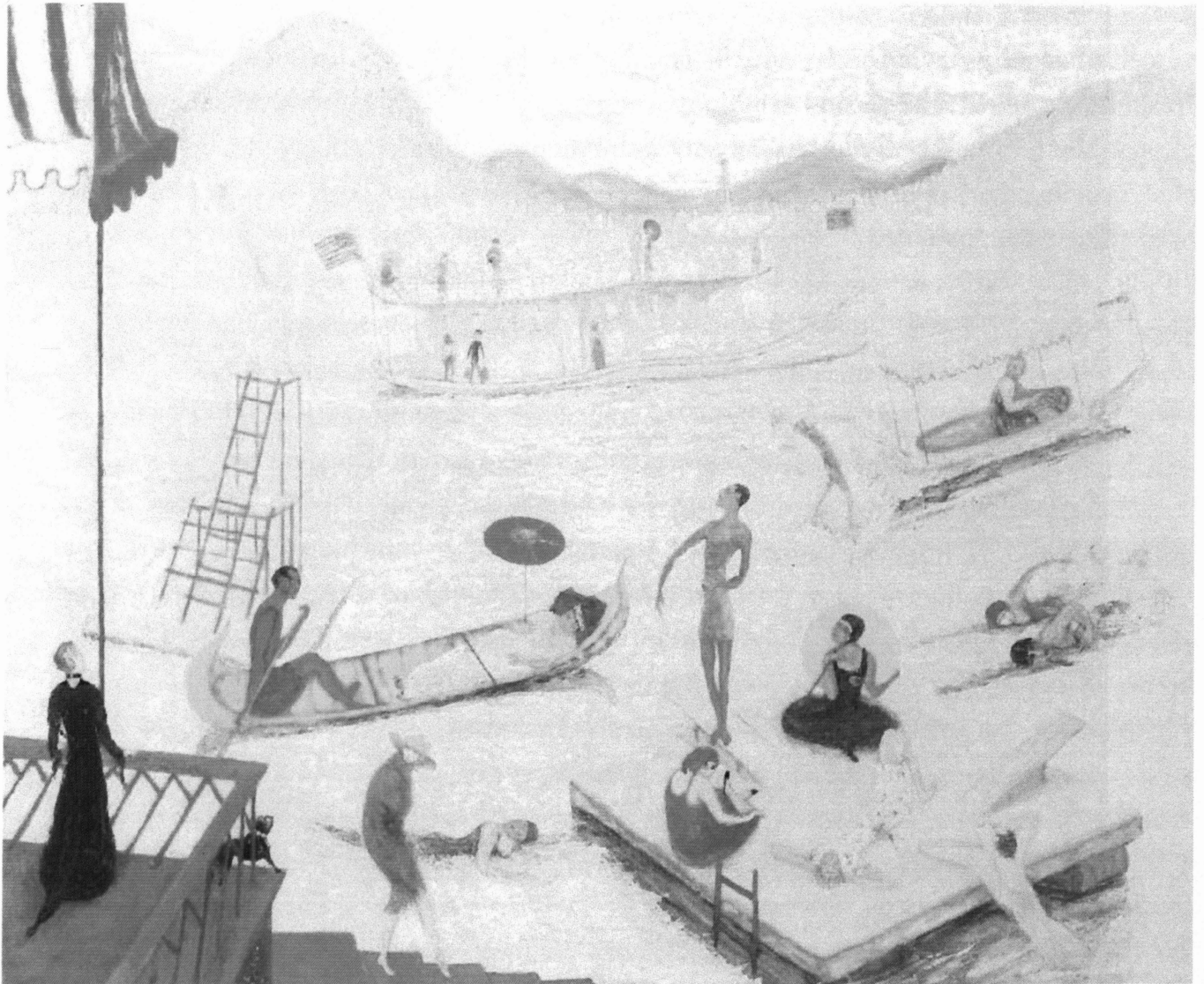
Florine Stettheimer (American, 1871-1944), *Soirée*, 1917-19. Oil on canvas, 28 x 30 in. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.

Figure 2:



Florine Stettheimer (American, 1871-1944), *Family Portrait Number 1*, 1915, 40 x 60 in. Columbia University of the City of New York, Gift of the Estate of Ettie Stettheimer, 1967.

Figure 3:

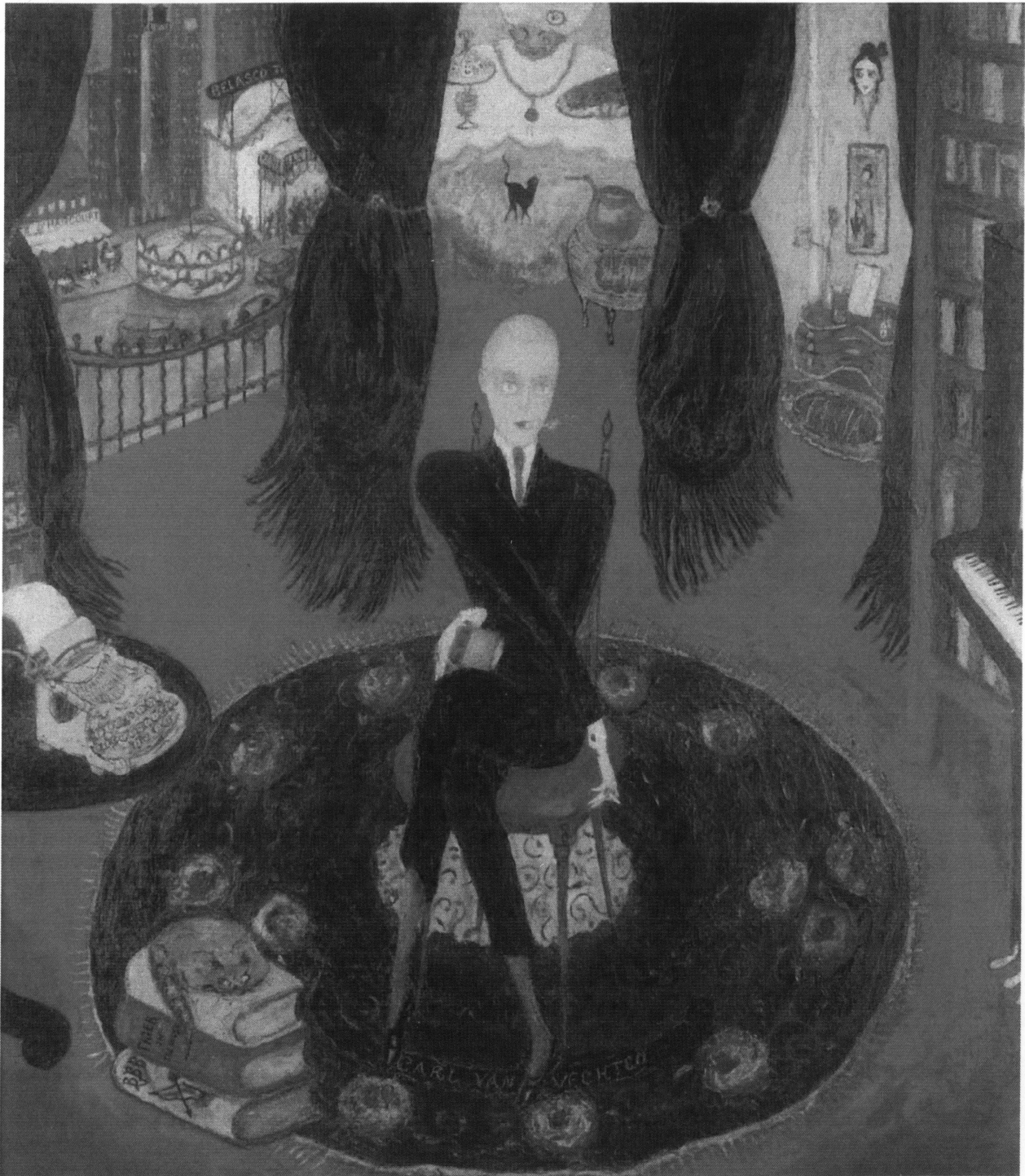


Florine Stettheimer (American, 1871-1944), *Lake Placid*, 1919, 40 x 50 in. Gift of Miss Ettie Stettheimer. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Florine Stettheimer, *Lake Placid*, 1919, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 in. Gift of Miss Ettie Stettheimer. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

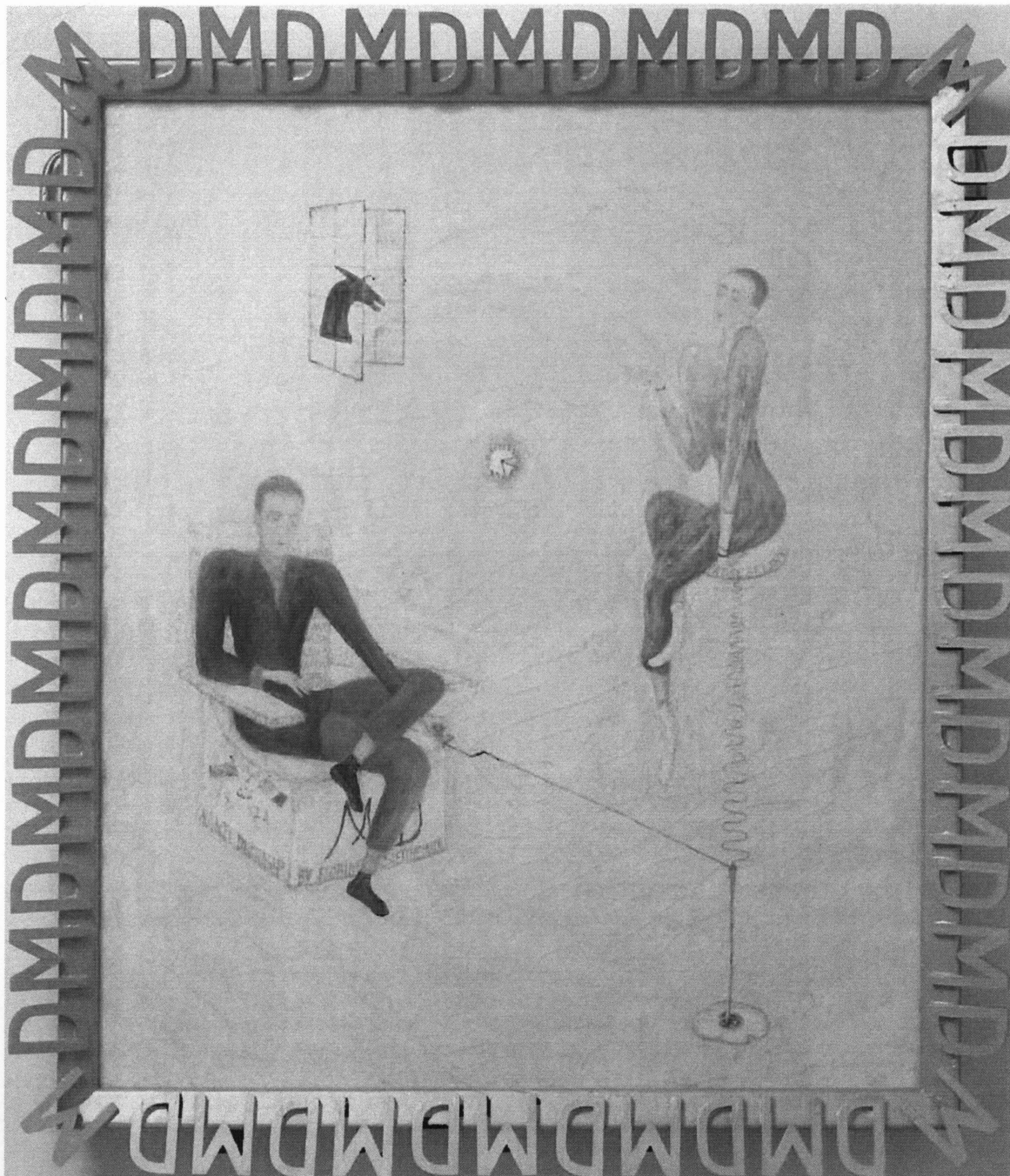
Figure 5:

Figure 4:



Florine Stettheimer (American, 1871-1944), *Portrait of Carl Van Vechten*, 1922. Oil on Canvas, 28 x 26 in. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.

Figure 5:



Florine Stettheimer, *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in. William Kelly Simpson Collection.

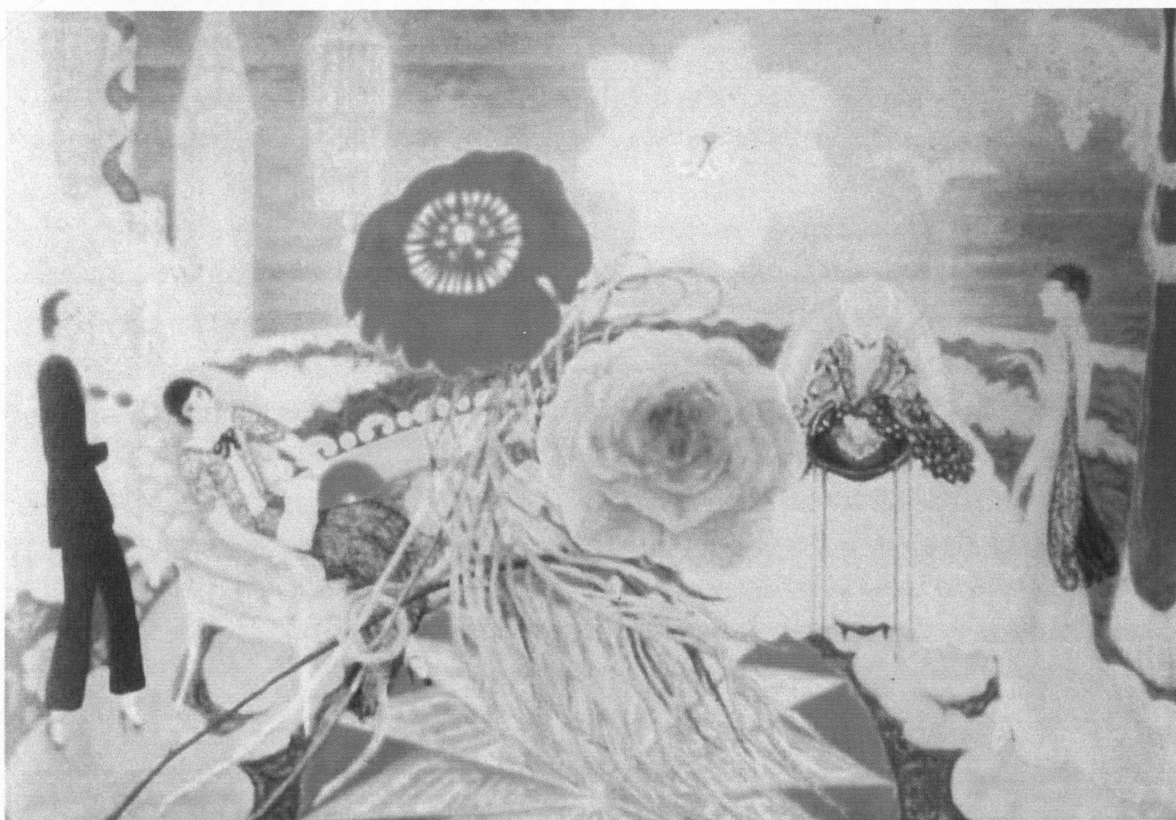
Florine Stettheimer (American, 1891-1983). *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*. Oil on canvas, 40 x 26 in. Columbia University, New York, Gift of A. J. R. G. B. 1983.

Figure 6:



Florine Stettheimer (American, 1871-1944), *Portrait of Myself*, 1923. Oil on Canvas, 40 x 26 in. Columbia University, New York, Gift of the Estate of Ettie Stettheimer, 1967.

Figure 7:



Florine Stettheimer (American, 1871-1944), *Family Portrait No. 2*, 1933, 46 x 64 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Miss Ettie Stettheimer.