

## A Tribute to Linda Nochlin

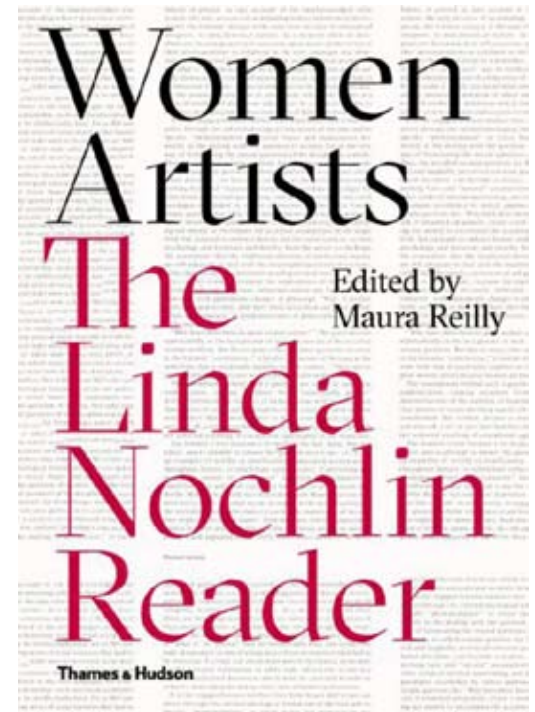
by Maura Reilly

Linda Nochlin (b. 1931) grew up an only child in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, in a secular, leftist Jewish family where intellectual achievement and artistic appreciation were among the highest goals, along with social justice. Of her youth, Nochlin recalled in a recent email to me:

We lived near Ebbets Field and whenever the Dodgers made a home run all the ornaments on the mantelpiece shook from the wild applause. We little girls did a lot of roller-skating and jump rope. We were a cultured group all right. I took piano lessons from the same person who had taught my mother. Bach was and still is my super favorite. In high school, my friend Paula and I would take the subway up to the Cloisters on Sunday for the medieval music concerts. Ballet lessons in Manhattan on Saturdays and lots of ballet and modern dance recitals—Martha Graham and José Limón—with my mother or friends. My friend Ronny and I went to hear our adored Wanda Landowska play harpsichord from the back row of City Center and then threw roses at her. Also Lewisohn Stadium. Took lots of trips to [the] Brooklyn Museum, both for ethnic dance performances and, of course, for art. Remember especially the exhibition “100 Artists and Walkowitz” in 1944 because my grandfather knew artist Abraham Walkowitz and introduced me. Many, many trips to the new Brooklyn Public Library, often with my grandfather who liked Irish authors like Lord Dunsany, but also James T. Farrell’s “Studs Lonigan” trilogy. Books were central to my life, then as now. During vacations I could rip through one a day. Would go through all of Thomas Mann, Dostoyevsky, or Selma Lagerlöf.



Portrait of Maura Reilly. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui.



After attending Midwood High School in Brooklyn, Nochlin headed off to Vassar College in Poughkeepsie (1947–51), where she received a B.A. in philosophy (with a minor in Greek and art history). In 1952 she received a Master's in English literature from Columbia, and then, in 1963, a doctorate from the prestigious Institute of Fine Arts (IFA) at New York University, where she studied with Peter Janson, Robert Goldwater, Walter Friedländer, and Richard Krautheimer. Since then she has published dozens of art books and innumerable articles (on subjects including realism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and feminism, among many others). Nochlin has lectured worldwide and has taught art history at Vassar College, CUNY, Yale, and at the IFA. She is now retired, writing a book on the subject of “misery” in 19th-century art, and has just published a large collection of her writings on feminism and women artists, titled *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader* (Thames & Hudson, 2015), which I edited.

In 1988, Nochlin famously argued that “feminist art history is there to make trouble, to call into question, to ruffle feathers in the patriarchal dove-cotes.”<sup>1</sup> She has spent her entire professional career doing just that, making trouble, embodying the position of the maverick. She has continually questioned academic assumptions of gender, race, and class—and, as such, has transformed not only the discipline of art history, but academic investigations in general. She has examined afresh the work of French painter and provocateur Gustave Courbet (Courbet, 2007); redefined realism as an artistic style, from the 19th century to the present (*Style and Civilization: Realism*, 1998); revised art history to include women artists, and the analysis of representations of women by male canonical artists (*Women, Art, and Power & Other Essays*, 1989); has produced countless monographic texts on male and female artists; and has contributed enormously influential thematic essays—most spectacularly, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971)—which rang down like a clarion call, challenging each new generation to assess changes in the conditions under which women artists work. Among these many scholarly contributions, she has also curated several milestone exhibitions, including the landmark *Women Artists, 1550–1950* in 1976 (LACMA), and, more recently, *Global Feminisms* in 2007 (Brooklyn Museum), among others. She has been unceasingly bold, intrepid, inspiring, and influential, her scholarship consistently transgressive, irreverent, and anti-establishment.

She is a living legend.

In what follows, colleagues, friends, students, and admirers pay tribute to Professor Nochlin.

## Linda Nochlin

by Patricia Cronin

The work of Linda Nochlin has been an embarrassment of riches for me. As a feminist artist, her pioneering feminist art historical research and writing has been instrumental to the development of my work. When I was a young artist fresh out of grad school in the late 1980s I met Linda at a College Art Association Annual Conference where she was giving a keynote speech. I carried a dog-eared copy of *Women, Art, and Power & Other Essays* with me, and I introduced myself to her and asked if she would sign it. She said sure, if I would help her get her lecture pages in the right order! Besides that signed copy, on my table in my studio I always have a copy of Nochlin's "The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity," her 1994 Walter Neurath Memorial Lecture at the National Gallery in London.

Nochlin's work has been enormously inspiring to my artistic and conceptual development. The vestiges, ghosts, and evidence are lurking in every single project, manifesting many of her ideas into my concrete forms, from the early *Erotic Watercolors* (1993–95) (up-close-cropped headless female bodies—think Courbet's *Origin of the World*), *Pony Tales* (1997) (portraits of horses—Géricault), *Tack Room* (1998) (equestrian architectural environment), *The Domain of Perfect Affection* (1999) (fetish objects), and *Luxury Real Estate* paintings (2001) (aerial views of rising bourgeoisie lifestyle); to *Memorial To A Marriage* (2002) (mortuary statue for a female couple—Courbet's *Sleep*) and *Harriet Hosmer: Lost and Found, A Catalogue Raisonné* (2007–09) (an important female artist missing in history); to *Dante: The Way of All Flesh* (2012) (agonizing bodies in pain—Géricault); to my current project, *Shrine For Girls, Venice* (2015), a solo Collateral Event in the 56th Venice Biennale and Rail Curatorial Project (missing/murdered girls—Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*).



Patricia Cronin, *Saris*, installation view, Shrine For Girls, Venice, Chiesa di San Gallo, Solo Collateral Event of the 56th International Art Exhibition - la Biennale di Venezia 2015, saris and wood, 2015. Photo: Mark Blower.

My postmodern-aesthetic strategy has been to inject all these traditional images and forms (many from the 19th century, where realism and symbolism collapse) with my specific contemporary political content. Without Nochlin's revolutionary feminist reading revealing to us the political truths in, or missing from, our most celebrated works in art history, I never would have been able to take some of those same images and forms and subvert them further in my work. I literally took my cues from her essays and books.

I've taken from Nochlin's histories and teased out of them a contemporary reiteration, reimagining. Her work on Géricault is still rolling around in my head; the disembodied/mutilated stacked body parts, decapitation, his focus on men and horses, and his noticeable absence of women. Bodies, horses, and missing women. Nochlin's insightful reflections on the artist's irrevocable loss, nostalgia, and grief for a loss of a utopian wholeness through cropped bodies and pictorial planes really resonated with me.

The body for me, to agree with Nochlin, is "not just a site of desire, but if you have a longer view of art history, is also a site for suffering and death"—with all the metaphorical and conceptual implications, permutations, and artistic opportunities for reflection and subversion. Her life's work is an intellectual and feminist inheritance, a debt that can never be repaid.