

FLORENCE HENRI BEYOND THE BAUHAUS THE VISUAL CONSTRUCTION
OF NEW WOMEN IN EUROPE
1920 - 1940

by

Elizabeth Nicole Salacinski

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DEDICATION

For Dani Huvaere, you make me want to be an Art Historian when I grow up.

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ABSTRACT

Working in Interwar Paris, Florence Henri, an avant-garde photographer trained at the Dessau Bauhaus, created a catalog of women's portraits for commercial and private clients. Existing scholarship on Henri connects her to the Bauhaus and her instructor there, Constructivist László Moholy-Nagy. Using visual analysis, primary accounts of working artists from Henri's social circle, and existing scholarship by historian Elizabeth Otto as a framework, this paper examines the connections with Sonia Delaunay and Germaine Krull that Henri created while working in Paris. This paper centers around the visual analysis of a pair of images Henri made in 1931: a self-portrait and a portrait of Sonia Delaunay. This pair of images serves as a touchpoint for the two artist's connection, shifting the thematic focus of scholarship on Henri away from the German context of the Bauhaus pedagogy, the shortest section of Henri's career, focusing instead on how Henri used her photography to create a visual vocabulary of New Womanhood following World War One and how she presented herself to her portrait clients and her community of other working artists as an autonomous, desirable working woman in her self-portraits. This shift builds on the connections between female artists in Paris in the 1930s through their work, even without direct references to one another in primary documents.

CHAPTER ONE
IN THE SHADOW OF THE BAUHAUS LEGACY

In 1931, shortly after opening her portrait studio in Paris, Florence Henri created a pair of portrait photographs: one of herself (figure 1) and another, using the same composition, of her peer, the Orphist painter and fashion designer Sonia Delaunay (figure 2). In her self-portrait, Henri looks directly into the camera, making eye contact with the viewer. She keeps her facial expression neutral; her right hand is poised between her face and the door frame she leans against. Her right arm below the wrist and her entire left arm are cut off from the frame, limiting the contextual information that the viewer could gather from her dress or surroundings. This draws additional attention to her clothing: a light-colored jacket with geometric patterns on the visible cuff of her sleeve, which displays a pattern Delaunay often used for her boldly colored textiles, paintings, and clothing. Henri wears her hair short, and in this image, she covers it with a cloche hat, made by the famous Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli.

Sonia Delaunay had established herself as an avant-garde artist before World War I. In 1931, she had recently moved back to Paris from Spain with her second husband, Robert Delaunay¹, and was enjoying success as a fashion designer for middle and upper-class women in Europe. Henri remained close to the couple through her life, and photographed Robert four years later as part of her artist portrait series. As a power couple in the modernist circles of 1930s Paris, the Delaunay's maintained connections with artists in Germany, France, and America, but Henri only briefly surfaces in scholarship on the Delaunay's social circle. In her portrait, Delaunay wears

¹ Robert Motherwell, Bernard Karpel, and Arthur Cohen, eds., *The New Art of Color : The Writings of Robert and Sonia Delaunay*. (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 215–25.

layers of silk, the contrasting colors of which are mirrored in her dark lipstick and full eyebrows. Contrasting with other photographs of Delaunay, this image separates the artist from her creations, she is not wearing the geometrical designs she created, nor is she in her studio. Instead this intimate portrait focuses on her physical features, offering an intimate view of the artist. Like Henri, she wears a cloche hat. Her raised left wrist is flipped away from her, so the front of her wedding band is visible.

This set of images is unremarkable on its own. Henri created self-portraits throughout her career. Her earliest images, made while at the Dessau Bauhaus in Germany in 1927, used a mirror to abstract her body. She dressed in fashionable clothing with her distinctive dark lipstick and pencil-thin eyebrows, elements of current Parisian fashion. Her final portrait series included a mix of abstract and direct self-portraits. What makes her 1931 portrait unique is its pairing with Sonia Delaunay's photograph.

By pairing the two images, I wish to suggest that Henri was directly comparing herself to Delaunay and creating a documented connection between their two careers². This portrait of Sonia Delaunay is included in both major publications of Henri's work, but Henri's portrait has been lost over time³. These images, when considered together, exemplify one of Henri's important relationships with another female artist during her lifetime. This aspect of her biography cannot be derived from current scholarship on Henri.

Instead, the Bauhaus dominates Henri's narrative, despite the fact that she has been largely left out of the scholarship about the school, only surfacing in relationship to her instructor, László Moholy-Nagy. This emphasized connection is due to limited primary source material from Henri's

² When discussing married individuals who share a last name, I will use first names. This is for clarity, and not due to a lack of respect for either persons.

³ The only evidence this image exists is a closed Christie's auction from 2007. The photograph sold to a private collection for \$10,000.

artistic career. While still living in Germany, Moholy-Nagy co-edited an avant-garde art publication titled *i10*. In December of 1928, he wrote an article for the magazine titled “Zu den Fotografien von Florence Henri”⁴.

Moholy-Nagy, a constructivist artist and instructor at the Bauhaus, wrote about the ongoing experiments he conducted at the Bauhaus throughout his life, publishing three books. His first, published in 1932, *The New Vision*, explained his earliest experiments in pure abstraction. His later book broke down the artistic experiments that were the foundation of his curriculum while a Bauhaus instructor, titled *Painting, Photography and Film*, was published in 1969. The third book, titled *Vision in Motion*, was published in 1947. Through these publications, Moholy-Nagy’s experiences as an artist and instructor are accessible to current scholars writing about the Bauhaus and its legacy. This means that Moholy-Nagy is centered in discourse about the Bauhaus in art historical scholarship, and in the research on students of the Bauhaus (including Florence Henri), many of whom credit Moholy-Nagy in their formative work.

The *i10* article included two of Henri’s still lifes (figures 3 & 4) and a self-portrait (figure 5) that Henri created earlier the same year while staying with Moholy-Nagy and his wife Lucia at the Bauhaus. Every image included a mirror, a compositional device Henri used in nearly all her early work. Moholy-Nagy praised Henri’s “documentary, accurate and rigorous concept of photography [which is an] extremely precise experimentation with the effect of light.”⁵ Moholy-Nagy’s interest in photography was directly tied to his experiments with abstraction, and he wrote about Henri’s photographs with the assumption that her work would follow his own.

⁴ Which translates to “On the photographs of Florence Henri”

⁵ Laszlo Moholy Nagy, “On Florence Henri’s Photography”, *i10* December, 1928. Reproduced in *Florence Henri*. Aperture, 2015.

In both still lifes, Henri places metallic objects against a small mirror. The combined reflection of the mirror and the windows behind her, distorts in the curved surfaces of the metal balls, and mimics the physical shapes of her three-dimensional objects. This highlights the mirror's ability to extend the planes that the objects rest on, abstracting the shapes by blurring the lines of where the objects physically begin and end.

In her portrait, Henri positioned herself at an angle to the mirror, she framed the image so that the mirror takes up the entire left side of the frame, extending the perceivable space in the image to include the front of Henri (turned away from us) and the back of the chair she leans against. By placing the camera behind herself, outside the mirror's reflection, she creates an abstract space where the viewer can simultaneously see behind and in front of Henri. The mirror, unframed and extending beyond the boundaries of the image, becomes another geometrical plane, abstracting where Henri, as the subject, exists. Even in her earliest work, Henri's experiments with composition expand past Moholy-Nagy's compositions, which were mostly direct prints and abstract photograms used to explore the mechanical interaction of light-sensitive material and light.

As one of the few primary sources, Moholy-Nagy's article is often referenced in contemporary scholarship on Henri, further obscuring her work under the shadow of the Bauhaus. This is the case despite the relatively small portion of her career that was spent with Moholy-Nagy at the Bauhaus. However, some efforts have been made to tell Henri's larger story and to separate it from the long list of artists who interacted with the legendary art school. In 1990, historian Diana C. Du Pont worked with the San Francisco Museum of Art to mount a retrospective exhibit of Henri's artwork. Du Pont's exhibition catalog, which has become an important reference,

examined Henri's career, first as a neo-cubist painter⁶ and then as a photographer. Du Pont was the first scholar to create a cohesive biographical timeline of Henri. She also provided a comprehensive list of Henri's exhibited works. Du Pont's text is cited in nearly every following article on Florence Henri. Without Du Pont's text, relatively little would be known about Henri. However, due to the limited resources on Henri, Du Pont's scholarship glosses over Henri's interpersonal relationships with women that shaped her career. Du Pont's choice to situate Henri's photography only in connection to her instructor at the Bauhaus, László Moholy-Nagy, has had longstanding repercussions for scholarship on Henri.

Later, historian Carol Armstrong examined Henri's mirror photographs, which she made during her stay at the Bauhaus in 1928-29, diversifying how Henri has been discussed. Armstrong argued that the mirror expressed the fluid relationship between creator and subject, linking Henri's work to gender expression through abstraction. She presents many possible interpretations of Henri's Bauhaus photographs, without forcing the totality of Henri's work into her methodology. Nevertheless, there is much work left to do. Armstrong ignored the significant impact of Henri's relationship with Margarete Schall, her partner and art school classmate, who first sparked Henri's interest in the Bauhaus, where Schall was already a student when Henri arrived.

Following Armstrong's work, Historian Sabine Kriebel wrote two articles on Henri, one in 2020 for *October* and the other in 2022, as part of an anthology on the Bauhaus co-edited by Kriebel and another historian, Kathleen James Chakraborty. Kriebel connects Henri's identity as a queer woman to the fluid gender dynamic and social experimentation that took place at the Bauhaus. Kriebel describes Henri's use of mirrors as a "part of a discursive structure that precedes her [...] one looped into discourses of detachment, dehumanization, and formal rigor, or of ironic-

⁶ Du Pont's brief biography on Henri is the only known published research on Henri's career prior to her work as a photographer.

resistant feminist subjectivity.”⁷ She expands Armstrong’s view of Henri as a multifaceted artist. By connecting Henri to historian Rosalind Krauss’s discourse on photography’s connection to the Optical Unconscious. Kriebel argues that Henri’s abstract photographs employ her body, the mirror, and the camera to represent the relationship between the artist and the object. However, Kriebel tethers Henri to the already heavily historicized Bauhaus environment. She does not account for Henri’s later commercial work, which was created in Paris and represents the largest section of her photography career.

Focused solely on the human figure⁸, Henri’s commercial work borrows only selectively from techniques learned at the Bauhaus, techniques I argue aren’t logically traceable to Laszlo Moholy-Nagy or his views of the camera as a mechanism for painting in pure abstraction (i.e., light). Further, in this exclusion, Kriebel ignores the important role of fashion and personal expression for women in France following World War I, passing over the opportunity to link Henri’s interactions with Sonia Delaunay and other women using clothing and textiles for their artwork.

Finally, Elizabeth Otto, a scholar of gender and feminist studies, has written extensively on the Bauhaus. In her work, Otto addresses complex expressions of sexuality and gender performance in which the students of the Bauhaus participated before, during, and after the period Henri spent at the school. Otto briefly mentions Henri in her publication from 2019, *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities and Radical Politics*, comparing Henri’s work to the visual language created by other queer Bauhaus students Heinz Loew and Max Pieffer Wattenphul. She presents the blurred line between public and private images in which

⁷ Sabine Kriebel, “Florence Henri’s Oblique”, 8-34, *October*, vol 172, Spring 2020. 16

⁸ With the exception of a small series of product photographs Henri created and sold for advertising.

Henri's nude studies exist, but Otto choose not to dedicate significant time to discussing Henri's atypical experience as a student of the Bauhaus curriculum.

While each historian thus far has contributed information and, in the case of Kriebel and Armstrong, rigorous examination of some of Henri's work, the existing scholarship has not explored Henri's social surroundings in Paris. Nor has it considered how her identity as a woman living and working independently in the Twentieth Century holds equal influence on her artistic style, as do the stylistic and formal elements she learned at the Bauhaus. For Henri to be included within the canon of queer artists in interwar Europe, her closest connections to other women must be explored. This does not mean that historians must justify Henri's queer identity with artistic or historical proof of the nature of her relationships with women for her work to hold relevance in reconstructing the Queer history. Instead, I argue that building up the connections between other working female artists and Henri (whose relationships with women cannot be contained within a definitive category of platonic friendship or romantic attraction) adds complexity to her narrative. This expands the available visual evidence for queer artists through modern history. To look wholistically at Henri's portraiture, I will briefly introduce the key female artists she interacted with throughout her lifetime, and dedicate a more in-depth examination of them later in this paper.

As previously mentioned, Florence Henri's longest companionship was with Margarete Schall. The two women remained close for Schall's entire adult life. Schall's portraits form the basis of Henri's portraiture and serve as the starting point for understanding how Henri studied women through her photography. Schall is also credited with having introduced Henri to the Moholys⁹.

⁹ Diana C Du Pont, *Florence Henri, Artist-Photographer of the Avant-Garde* (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1990). 130-131.

While at the Bauhaus, Henri lived with Lucia and László Moholy. She was the only known student to do so. Lucia documented the school's architecture and created portraits of many of the other instructors at the Bauhaus. She photographed Henri in 1928, and Henri's portrait style borrows heavily from Lucia's. In addition to Lucia, Henri's Bauhaus experiments overlap with photographs made by Marianne Brandt, who worked in the Metals workshop under Moholy-Nagy.

In Paris, where Henri worked as a private portrait photographer, she spent time with many notable artists, some of whom she had met in Germany, such as Sophie Tauber Arp and Annie and Josef Albers. However, the direct influences on her photography career in Paris came from her interactions with other avant-garde artists like the freelance photographer Germaine Krull and the aforementioned Sonia Delaunay. Krull photographed Henri while the two women were living in France. Earlier in her career, she created the first known Sapphic pornographic photography portfolio titled *Les Amiees*. Krull, a bisexual woman, was one of the first avant-garde photographers to photograph nude women without centering the male gaze.¹⁰

By examining the progression of Florence Henri's portraiture using her relationships to other female artists working around her, the problems of how to present Henri's solutions to the problem of presenting abstract concepts like femineity and Queer identity are illuminated. Henri cleverly marketed herself using her identity as a fashionable European woman to create work that interested her and brought her paying clients. While the direct comparison she drew between herself and Sonia Delaunay illustrates this most effectively, it is one of many variations of Henri's experiments. The interconnected understanding of gender and sexual expression, which Henri would have been familiar with, differs from contemporary understandings of gender and biological

¹⁰ While the term Male Gaze would not be used until much later when Cindy Sherman created her film stills in the 1970's, it encompasses what was an ongoing practice from much earlier history in how nude women were arranged and photographed.

sex as separate aspects of a person's identity. Further, Henri plays with the female body, both her own and other women's, in her images to project the abstractions of core concepts of womanhood as abstractions. This means that the performance of femininity cannot be treated as a topic separate from the indications of Henri's queer identity and the influence that both had on her work.

In this thesis, I will use the existing scholarship on Henri, combined with a formal analysis of her work and an extrapolation of primary source material about femininity and the female experience consumed by Henri and her peers in Germany and France to shift the thematic crux of Henri's work away from the limited influence of the Bauhaus to situate her work within the recovered history of Queer artists working in the Interwar period. In addition to the artwork and consumer materials like magazines, I will use excerpts from letters and interviews from Henri, her students, Schall, Delaunay, and Krull as primary source material.¹¹

We cannot, with the sources currently available prove without reasonable doubt that Henri was a Queer artist. While her relationship with Margaret Schall provides support for an educated guess, the intention of bringing Henri's work into the contemporary discourse of Queer art history is not to prove or disprove her personal sexual proclivities. My arguments in this paper serve to expand the current scholarship of what we consider to be an accepted canon of queer artists in 1920s Europe. The majority of primary source materials on the queer experience, medically, socially and artistically during the early 1900s, have been intentionally obscured, or destroyed due to the long history of oppression and erasure enacted on the Queer community.

Exploring how Florence Henri expressed herself, and how she chose to focus her camera lens on how other women presented, and how the female form could be abstracted, expands what

¹¹ Because of the limitations of my research and the small percentage of Henri's archived source material available I have built my arguments with as much evidence as possible. However, it may be that as more research is conducted on Henri in partnership with the Martini and Ronchetti Gallery in Genoa, who currently handle the estate of Henri, some of the smaller details surmised or conjectured about in this paper will be corrected.

is included in queer history. This follows the discourse that anthropologist and historian Sara Ahmed argues for in her book *Queer Phenomenology* written in 2006. She states, “The promise of interdisciplinary scholarship is that the failure to return texts [or photographs] to their [pre-established] histories will do something [...] it is work that we must do if we are to create something other than another point on a line.” According to Ahmed, to move past the stalled understanding of queer identity in history, scholars must work to reconstruct a history of queer identity that is as complex and multifaceted as the current lived experiences of the Queer Community today.

In service of Ahmed’s concept, I argue that Henri’s commercial photographs created in Paris, developed from and surpassed her early experiments in portraiture at the Bauhaus. These early portraits display Henri’s interest in using photography to depict the performance and abstraction of femininity¹² following the turn of the Twentieth Century and the social change due to the number of women entering the workforce during World War I. Sonia Delaunay is the clearest example of another woman who used her identity as a woman to advance her artistic career, without diminishing her creativity or autonomy. In this thesis, I will examine how Florence Henri adopted a similar trajectory, using her photography to explore her identity as a modern woman.

Beginning with her introduction to photography at the Bauhaus, I argue that Henri’s commercial photographs were a natural extension of her early experiments in portraiture at the Bauhaus. These early portraits display Henri’s interest in using photography to depict the performance and abstraction of femininity. While she studied in Germany, Henri interacted with several women who were exploring themes like hers read: the female body and its abstracted through photography. In Chapter One, “Florence Henri in Weimar: Clothing, Makeup, and Gender

¹² Meaning the experience and acting out of being female within a select society, for Henri this is the Eurocentric conceptualization of what characteristics intrinsically belong to women.

Identity at the Bauhaus” I connect Henri to Margarete Schall and Lucia Moholy, and introduce other students using the same elements in their images, like mirrors, to abstract their bodies. This will free Henri’s early work from needing to directly relate to László Moholy-Nagy’s photography, while also introducing to the reader to the kind of gender play at work among Weimar progressives, and at the Bauhaus in particular.

In Chapter Two, “Florence Henri in Paris: New Womanhood in Interwar France” I will analyze a selection of Henri’s photographs made at the Bauhaus to further elaborate on the themes presented in Chapter One. Specifically, I explore the meanings of New Womanhood in the French context, before shifting to Henri’s post-Bauhaus career in France. The difference between the two societies is figured by the *Garçonne*, or bachelor girl, an androgenous figure that nevertheless underscored the French investment in fashion and femininity.

this allows Chapter Three, “Florence Henri: A Commercial Photographer in Paris,” to introduce the social scene that Henri entered upon her return to Paris in 1929. This context is vital in situating her commercial work created over the next decade. After briefly examining the development of New Womanhood, and separating it from the prior and contemporary understandings of the same vocabulary, I show how the artist Sonia Delaunay represented a kind of aspirational model for a woman’s commercial and artistic success. Fashion provided one avenue for that success in the context of interwar French feminism. This chapter also analyzes Henri’s commercial portrait photography, expounding upon the variations of womanhood that Henri presents of herself and her fashionable clientele. Finally, I introduce the work of Germaine Krull, another commercial photographer of women, this time in the context of erotic imagery, to support the argument for the queer overtones in Henri’s work during this period.

While Florence Henri spent less than twenty years practicing photography, her work provides a wealth of information about how she and the women who influenced her experienced womanhood in a period of rapid cultural change. This insight into the female experience during the Interwar period provides contemporary scholars with an addition to the work of diversifying our historical understanding of identity in modern history.

CHAPTER TWO

FLORENCE HENRI IN WEIMAR: CLOTHING MAKEUP AND GENDER IDENTITY AT THE BAUHAUS

Born to American parents in 1893, and raised in England and Italy, Henri came of age surrounded by artists. During World War I, she lived in Berlin and worked as a piano accompanist for silent films¹³. It was in Berlin, while studying painting with Johannes Waler-Kurau¹⁴, that she met Schall. The two women were both in their early thirties. Upon the completion of their studies, Schall moved to Essen, Germany. Henri wanted to live in Paris, and due to issues obtaining a visa, she married Karl Anton Koster, a working-class man from Switzerland, in 1925. There is no evidence that the two ever lived together, and Henri would revert to using her maiden name long before their divorce was finalized in 1954¹⁵. However, her marriage provided her with the documentation necessary to make the move to France.

Over the next five years, Henri frequently moved between Paris and Germany, spending time with Schall. She developed her cubist paintings and exhibited her work in a handful of international shows. Through Schall, Henri was introduced to Grete Willers and later Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. By 1927, Schall had enrolled as a full-time student at the Bauhaus in its new location in Dessau. Henri, wrote to Schall, airing her frustration with painting, saying, “What is even worse is I can’t work. What am I to do? [...] I couldn’t in Dessau either.”¹⁶ In December of

¹³ Du Pont, *Florence Henri*, 130.

¹⁴ Du Pont points out in her biography on Henri that Walter-Kurau’s methodology borrowed heavily on the composition and formal structure of classical music. It is likely that this teaching style is what attracted Henri to his lessons in particular.

¹⁵ Du Pont, *Florence Henri*, 130.

¹⁶ Florence Henri, letter to Margaret Schall, August, 1927.

1927, she accepted Schall's suggestion to spend more time in Dessau and enrolled at the Bauhaus as an unmatriculated student, meaning she took part in the preliminary coursework, but was not moving through the curriculum with the goal of mastery.

Henri used her time at the Bauhaus as one might an artist's residency, rather than a comprehensive artistic education. While little is known about her career as a painter prior to taking up photography, we do know that she came into the school with a problem in her artistic process. Her experiences, both private and professional, during her time at the school diverged from those of the average student. According to personal photographs, spent most of her time with the faculty. She even celebrated her 34th birthday (figure 6) with Josef and Anni Albers, Oskar Schlemmer, and other artists teaching at the school. It is likely that while living with Lucia Moholy, Henri was encouraged to take up photography. Lucia had first taught László the art form, and at a certain point she had constructed a dimroom in their apartment.¹⁷

Understanding the gendered social dynamics that unfolded at the Dessau Bauhaus is important to understanding how Henri extrapolated the lessons she learned there in her later work depicting modern womanhood through portraiture. Henri lived much of her personal life between categories: she lived with and had significant relationships with both men and women she worked as a painter and photographer, moving through both mediums depending on the phase of her life. From her personal clothing style to how she chose to pose and dress the women she photographed; she incorporated expressions of modern womanhood from the context of Weimar Germany and Interwar Paris. This chapter will provide context on Henri's foundations as a photographer and discuss the differences in the way gender was expressed by the students and faculty at the Bauhaus to better separate what elements of style Henri carried forward with her.

¹⁷ Gonnard, Catherine. "Lucia Moholy." *Womenartists.com*, Dictionnaire Universel des Creatrices, 2017, awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/lucia-moholy/. Accessed 1 Feb. 2025.

The Bauhaus in Historical Context

Scholars of Feminist and Queer history have contributed to a nuanced understanding of the shifts in constructions of sexuality and gender in Germany following World War I. Queer discourse was important to the visual construction of New Womanhood in Germany, particularly because Queer communities survived within more acceptable avenues of self-expression like theatrical or musical performance. However, in the medical and scientific communities of the Weimar Republic, Queer and Trans people were still seen as abnormalities in need of mental and physical treatment. This belief was supported the laws criminalizing same-sex activity and barring gender-affirming care for transgender people. The political upheaval during and after World War I allowed for the renegotiation of alternative lifestyles, like the marginalized community of queer Germans. Other communities went in search of a utopian German future. The practicality of physical health was put in the service of achieving utopia in hopes of rebuilding a stronger, better country than had existed before the war. This led to the creation of many artist communities and cooperative efforts to restructure society. The Bauhaus, as a state funded school became one of the most successful of these endeavors.

Before it was moved to Dessau in 1925, early Bauhaus instructors intertwined their curriculum with the expanding theatrical and exaggerated expressions of the utopian hopes and dreams of post-war Weimar. Bauhaus founder and director Walter Gropius hired László Moholy-Nagy to combat the increasingly esoteric approach students at the Bauhaus were taking to their artistic practices through spiritualists like Johannes Itten. Moholy-Nagy and Lucia Moholy valued craftsmanship and practicality and explored abstraction extensively in their work. Under their influence, the students shifted to a more practical application of theoretical design elements like

color or material types, students also focused on becoming craftsmen instead of trying to find pure artistry without practical application.

By the time Henri arrived as a student, the more exaggerated exercise of these esoteric combinations had diminished, but fragments remained, particularly in the theater department and in the conventions for women's fashion among the students to display the individual's ideology.

Gender Demographics and Experiences at the Bauhaus

Gender essentialism remained a talking point for conservative politicians and a point of contention in feminist circles in Germany well after World War I. Even in liberal learning environments, women were still considered to be less skilled than men. While technically allowed in traditionally male spaces (like academic settings) the assumptions around what women were capable of were still drawn into question. This sentiment was held by some of the instructors at the Bauhaus, despite the vital work that many women, like Lucia Moholy contributed to the school. For example, when Walter Gropius first opened the Bauhaus, he specified that it was equally accessible to both men and women and mentioned that the female students had equal rights as their male peers. However, in his private communications, Gropius noted that there had not been any creative merit for women as craftsmen, and he wrote off the few academically trained female artists working at the time as having “a limited occupation, with pretty little salon pictures made to pass the time.”¹⁸

This attitude bled into nearly all areas of the Bauhaus. Marianne Brandt for instance, expressed how differently she was treated when she first began working in the metals workshop professional, and that she was often given the simplest and most monotonous projects. This subtle

¹⁸ Notes from Gropius's address to the Bauhaus students in 1919. Bauhaus Archive. cited in *Gendered world of the Bauhaus* by Anaja Baumhoff. 53.

attitude of testing women's ability behind the face of public equality presented in the Bauhaus's model may have contributed to the more masculine presentation that female students adopted in their personal style¹⁹.

Female and male students were also treated differently within the curriculum structure. Women were strongly encouraged to enter the weaving workshop, nicknamed the *Women's Workshop*, but were allowed to study other courses after completing the preliminary course²⁰. Most women would either enter the weaving workshop or exit the school without completing the entire curriculum to either marry or due to changes in their financial situation, neither of which applied to Henri²¹. While not a textile artist herself, Henri would remain close to several women from the weaving workshop throughout her life as Margarete Schall was a student in the weaving workshop, also studied there. Since she was already an established artist and older than the average student, Henri did not receive the same pressure to conform to the expectations of female students as those who were entering the program without an established artistic background.

In the chapter "Soft Skills and Hard Facts" written for Otto's book *Bauhaus Bodies*, Dr. Patrick Rössler and Dr. Anke Blümm analyze the student data from the Dessau Bauhaus to provide a picture of the gender make up of each workshop. Their findings are as follows: of the 1,276 total

¹⁹ To present the gender differences experienced at the Bauhaus as accurately as possible to the primary source material this paper will temporarily exclude gender identities beyond male or female. It is worth noting however that the cultural environment at the Bauhaus, and in the Weimar republic at large did include a wide variety of gender presentation and sexual expression that does not fit within our understanding of gender terms today. For more on this, see Elizabeth Otto's chapter 4 "Queer Bauhaus" in her publication *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press). 2019. And Laurie Marhoeffer *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German homosexual emancipation and the rise of the Nazis*. (Toronto Canada: University of Toronto Press) 2015.

²⁰ This remained a reality even though ideas and theories from successful female artists like Sonia Delaunay's ideas around color theory were adopted into the curriculum at the Bauhaus.

²¹ Rössler Patrick and Anke Blümm. "Soft Skills and Hard Facts: A Systematic Assessment of the Inclusion of Women at the Bauhaus. in *Bauhaus Bodies Gender, Sexuality, and Body Culture in Modernism's Legendary Art School*. 1st ed. Elizabeth Otto and Patrick Rössler. (New York Bloomsbury Publishing Inc Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019), 3-24.

students documented at the Bauhaus, 791 (60%) were male, and 462 (about 30%) were female²². Of the female students, 281(60.8%) were short-term students, meaning they did not complete coursework past the preliminary course; this would include Henri, as she only studied there for six months.²³

The gender distribution when divided into each workshop illuminates the gender roles carried through the school despite the high percentage of female students compared to other coed programs. Of the 15 workshops offered over the lifetime of the school, the weaving workshop was the only female-dominated space, with 128 (90%) women and only 13 men²⁴. The next highest concentration of women was in the Architecture workshop, with 40 women (15%) and 221 men²⁵. This means that Henri's choice to study painting, and unofficially photography (not introduced as a course until 1929), combined with her age, would have placed her outside the largest group of women studying there in 1927. However, for any female student entering a workshop besides weaving, their time spent in the classroom would have had little influence from other women. Socially, while the school's total student body was relatively small, free time might have been the female students' only opportunity to interact with one another. As Henri was not a part of the long-term student body, her time would have been divided differently, with greater freedom in whom she could choose to spend it with; making her interactions less proximity-based and more rooted in personal connection.

Interestingly, photography was the only workshop with nearly equal gender distribution, with 25 male students and 24 female students²⁶. This may have been because before the course's

²²Rössler Patrick and Anke Blümm. "Soft Skills and Hard Facts: A Systematic Assessment of the Inclusion of Women at the Bauhaus" 13.

²³ Rössler, Patrick and Anke Blümm, "Soft Skills and Hard Facts" 9.

²⁴ ²⁴ Rössler Patrick and Anke Blümm. "Soft Skills and Hard Facts" 11.

²⁵ Rössler, Patrick and Anke Blümm, "Soft Skills and Hard Facts" 11.

²⁶ Rössler, Patrick and Anke Blümm, "Soft Skills and Hard Facts" 10.

introduction into the pedagogy, photography was used in a variety of contexts not based upon the specialization of the workshop. It is also worth noting that Lucia Moholy's involvement with photography likely helped avoid any preemptive gender associations around the art form. Both men and women used photography personally and professionally before it was an official course. In addition to the Moholy's, Lyonel Feininger and Georg Muche also experimented with photography outside their official coursework. Like Moholy-Nagy, they saw it as a highly technical process, closer to painting than being its own art form. Henri had easy access to both the materials for analogue photography²⁷ and a variety of viewpoints and opinions on how to use photography in and out of the classroom environment. Socially and academically, her experience centered around her identity as an artist and how to solve the problems she faced with her artistic practice. Photography became her solution, and much of the time she spent at the school was dedicated to it.

In addition to the statistical information from school records, the casual photographs taken by students and instructors offer an alternative narrative to the school's public presentation of its student body (a narrative absent of women) to one that allowed both men and women to experiment sexually and socially in a microcosm of the Bauhaus, separate from their lives outside of school. Henri participated in this social milieu, but not to resolve her own identity expression.

Fashion, Appearance, and Gender Expression at the Bauhaus

Parallel to the shift towards craftsmanship and practicality, the female students' clothing changed to meet the wearer's requirements (like climbing onto the industrial looms or working in the metals workshop), which lent itself further to less gendered, practical clothing that would allow

²⁷ In her images, Henri used multiple different cameras including a Kodak Brownie and medium format analogue cameras, they can be seen in a selection of her mirror images and are referenced in correspondences.

students to work and move freely. Some of the variety can be seen in a photograph taken by Lux Feininger in 1928 (figure 7) of some of the female students from the Weaving Workshop on the staircase of the Dessau Bauhaus.

This candid photograph shows the range of clothing the younger female student wore, from loose-fitting trousers to oversized sweaters and knee-length skirts. Nearly all the women have short hair arranged away from their faces. Their shoes are low-heeled Mary Janes, and only one of the women wears silk stockings, the rest choosing pants or long skirts to cover their legs. In “Clothing Bauhaus Bodies”, historian Kathleen James-Chakraborty discusses the range of possible expressions female students of the Bauhaus found through fashion; she writes,

The clothes closely associated with an earlier generation of German architectural reform were still highly artistic confections. Thus, it was the more masculine shirtwaist type of outfit that provided the more suitable precedent for those Bauhaus women who sought to express a more practical approach to fashion, which may or may not in individual cases have also served as an expression of lesbian identity. This uniform was never worn by most of the Bauhaus women; however, it was also not widely adopted by those who favored pants. One advantage to trousers, at this still a startling informal garment, was the lack of need for the elegant, but fragile silk stockings, whose tendency to run made them an expensive luxury for those wearing short skirts at cooler times of the year²⁸.

This style of expression was also adopted by instructors who sought a utopian way of life where clothing was less based upon gender and instead upon practicality, the freedom of movement, and the cost of production. Lucia Moholy, for example, dressed in simple dresses and wore little makeup. Her appearance was clean and well-kept but did not mirror current fashion trends for women in Paris or Hollywood. Lucia’s style was also affordable, reflecting the income difference between her and some of the wealthier women like Ise Gropius. As the wife of the school’s director, Ise could afford current fashion from Paris, and was acquainted with fashionable

²⁸ * James Charkaborty, Kathleen. “Clothing Bauhaus Bodies.” Pg. 136. In *Bauhaus Bodies: Gender Sexuality, and Body Culture in Modernism’s Legendary Art School*, edited by Elizabeth Otto and Patrick Rössler, 125–44. Bloomsbury, 2019.

women in France, including Sonia Delaunay, who created several pieces for her. In a photograph taken by her husband in 1928, Ise is seen wearing a dress designed by Delaunay (figure 8). She stands on the Brooklyn Bridge, her cloche hat and small handbag resemble the style of clothing Delaunay and Henri would wear in Henri's later portraits.

As a stylish working woman, Henri's choice in clothing was as intentional as the other students. In her self-portraits and in the casual images of her time at the Bauhaus, Henri wears current Parisian fashion: boxy dresses that flatten her curves and bold makeup that draws out her dark features. Henri did not choose to change what she wore while studying at the Bauhaus. This could have been partly due to the lack of practicality necessitated in her clothing. Since she was not working with large industrial looms or exerting much physical movement (as the theater students might). However, I argue that this lack of fashion development was due to Henri's already have established herself and how she chose to express her identity through clothing. Following her time in Dessau, Henri would spend most of her artistic career in France, creating portraits of other stylish modern women. While her artistic career was impacted by her time at the Bauhaus, her choice to align with the hyperfeminine aesthetic of Parisian women was not.

Neither a German citizen nor limited by her husband's income, Henri had no reason to dress like Lucia, or as the weavers at the Bauhaus did. Instead, she continued wearing the same clothing articles as she did in Paris. Henri's style did not change during her stay at the school, which is consistent with her experiences as a temporary student there. As a peer of many instructors, she had no need to change her clothing to be perceived as a practical student and craftsman which left her free to express her interests in fashion in her daily life. She even included a French fashion magazine in one of her early still lives (figure 9) blending her interests in Parisian fashion and photography.

Florence Henri was still participating in ongoing gender politics, but her focus was not on the culture at the Bauhaus or to fit within the optimistic dreams of German citizens. Instead, Henri positioned herself through her personal presentation to participate in the epicenter of fashion: Paris. Equally, her clothing expressed her identity on a personal level, and she also used it to present herself as belonging within the world of middle and upper-class women living in France. An aspect of self-expression Henri did share with the students was an interest in expressing her identity as a queer person.

Queer Self-Expression and Visual Language at the Bauhaus

The Bauhaus, especially once it was moved to the new location in Dessau in 1925, became another place where young people could experiment with their own personal presentation, and while publicly the school denied any open queer student activity, Otto has proposed in her book *Haunted Bauhaus* that many of the theater projects, and costume parties held at the Bauhaus were a way that queer students could “play” with gender presentation. The pedagogy created this environment through theater, with Oskar Schlemmer often directing for costumes that “troubled the gender binary.”²⁹ Photographs from Bauhaus parties show male students dressing as women and dancing together 1930 (figure 10). These rare, unedited glimpses into students' personal lives expand our understanding of how gender and identity were performed in their day-to-day lives. In this image, both men wear makeup, and semi-formal clothing adding to the overemphasized theatricality of their performance; this is not a candid photograph of two queer students expressing their personal gender identities, they are actively engaging in a performance of transgender

²⁹ Otto, Elizabeth. 2019. *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press. 141.

expression³⁰. Brought outside of a theater or structured performance setting, this indicates an interest in using transsexuality in a playful, casual context. The unspoken agreement of this behavior in the context of a party is that it is not viewed as a direct expression of the performer's personal identity. This couches the desire for fluidity in gender expression in a socially acceptable setting, protecting participants from the harsh legal and social repercussions that would have followed them if they had behaved similarly in their day to day lives.

Otto builds on the sociologist, Klaus Theweleit's, work which reconstructs a lost history of queer activity within interwar Germany. Otto argues that these drag parties were "Playful, apparently transgressive, but ultimately strictly regulated flirtations [...] that even fleeting performances of gender fluidity and same-sex desire can convey the poetical for new identities and desires."³¹ While these photographs from parties do not prove any information on specific personal predilections, they do provide evidence that, to some extent, gender was seen as performative, and through costuming, Bauhaus students found means of personal expression. I argue that the inverse of this concept can also apply. By accepting homosocial behavior within certain settings, the lines between what a student might personally feel and what they were doing purely for entertainment become blurred. Offering queer students further protection from criticism and potential harm.

The student's academic photography further purposely confused costuming and gender. Max Peiffer Watenphul, one of the few openly queer students from the Bauhaus created several portraits that he ironically titled *Grotesque* upon receiving criticism that his work was perverted³².

³⁰ This was a social phenomenon across Weimar Germany. Images from the Institute for Sexual Health, run by Magnus Hirshfeld provided a space for queer Germans. Images of costume parties hosted by Hirshfeld document a similar intentional confusion of costuming to cross gendered boundaries of presentation.

³¹ Otto, *Haunted Bauhaus*, 141.

³² Otto, *Haunted Bauhaus*, 147.

His series includes riffs on modern femininity, that are purposefully convoluted, as in his portrait from 1928, *Woman with a Fan* (figure 10) of a man in drag, wearing lace and heavy make-up with dark lips and enhanced brows. Otto argues that by tracing back through these more obvious Queer experimentations with presentation more of Watenphul's work can be expanded as a series of experiments in covert Queer representation. She writes,

These networks provided by Peiffer Watenphul with an ongoing community in which to experiment with life and queer sensibilities. His photograph from this time playfully recreates theatrical femininities that would have had particle resonance for Peiffer Watenphul since they likely related to his life as a gay man where cross-dressing was part of the lively underground gay culture.³³

In addition to *The Grotesques*, Watenphul photographed a young man in a mirror, backed against a wall, with one hand suggestively tucked into his waistband in 1931 (figure 11). The subject's reflection in the mirror doubles as a second figure facing the opposite direction. Figural doubling was used by other students at the Bauhaus to a similar effect. The visual motif of two men (a reflection and a real version of the same person) of the same sex engaging in a sexually suggestive gesture is a variation on the photograph made by Heinz Loew in 1927 (figure 12). In this image, Loew uses a double exposure to face another male student across a blurred Bauhaus bathroom, the scene itself a reflection in a pane of glass (as evidenced by the translucent reflection of a lamp and beaker across the frame). His hand reaches gently to cup his double's cheek. The contrast of stiff and natural body language drawing attention to the two men's touch. This, like Peiffer Watenphul's images, creates visual evidence for aspects the artist who made them. Both Peiffer Watenphul and Loew were engaging in the creation of a visual language within the Bauhaus to express aspects of their personhood that remained illegal to publicize. The visual motif of a

³³ Otto, *Haunted Bauhaus*, 148.

mirror to repeat the same figure in a single image also appear in Henri's photographs, which she created at the same time.

The concept of doubling has been tied to queer identity outside its use by Queer Bauhaus students, Claude Cahun is credited as being the first Queer artist to double herself in portraiture to express queer identity in her photographs around the same time as the students at the Bauhaus were experimenting with this concept³⁴. The interdisciplinary influence of theater, literature, and traditional art like painting and photography unfolding in the Weimar Republic makes it nearly impossible to trace the exact origins of doubling as a metaphor for Queerness. However, it was a visual trope used by artists both inside and out of the Bauhaus. doubling also appears in art related directly to queer women, in a clearer timeline to trace.

The understanding of gender within the wider European culture at the time that was, within a system of binary genders, the idea that a woman would be disinterested in men sexually but would not want to "become a man" by presenting as masculine, was interpreted by doctors as meaning that she must have a deep sense of narcissism, and that her attraction to the same sex was an expression of her own self-obsession. This explained away any "unusual" sexual preferences not centered around the male body. Especially in relationships that lacked a male partner. The word narcissism as derives its origin from the Greek myth of Narcissus, a beautiful boy who became so entranced with the beauty of his own reflection in a pool of water that he could not look away until he died. The variation of depicting this fatal flaw in women, rather than men, began to appear in art in the late 1800; such as in French Painter Henry Caro Delvaille's painting *La Brune au Mirror* from 1906 (figure 13) or in Antoine Magaud's 1885 photograph *A Kiss in the Glass*

³⁴ "Queer Artists and Art," The Art Institute of Chicago, n.d., <https://www.artic.edu/highlights/68/queer-artists-and-art>.

(figure 14). Therefore, it was a common trope by the time Henri, Lowe and Pieffer Wattenful began using the self-reflected gaze in their work.

Henri's time at the Bauhaus overlapped with both Lowe and Wattenphul's time spent there. So, Otto's method of mapping the queer identity of students at the Bauhaus to trace possibilities in queer representation offers a possible connection thematically between Henri's Bauhaus photographs of herself, and Margarete Schall, and to her later photographs of women in Paris.

Florence Henri's Early Photography

While Henri never outright expressed the details of her relationship with Schall or others she befriended at the Bauhaus, through their adulthood, the two artists would vacation and live together for several months at a time. The relationship between the women was clearly an important part of their lives. They remained in contact when not physically together via letters until Schall's death in 1939. In her letters to Schall, Henri wrote about her decision to shift away from painting and into photography after she studied at the Bauhaus, along with many other career choices. Notably, Schall was the only other woman Henri photographed at the Bauhaus, and Henri exhibited her portraits of Schall throughout her lifetime. Henri stopped making photographs shortly after Schall's death; their relationship, personally and professionally, paralleled Henri's foray into photography. Henri may have been interested in depicting modern women before she began photography, but her portraits of Schall are the first visual evidence for the shift in her subject matter.

In addition to her relationship with Schall, Henri befriended Karl (Charles) Lambert³⁵ whom she used as a model for her mirror images alongside Schall. Because Henri only used her two

³⁵ T The man pictured in images of Henri at the Bauhaus is only referenced as "Charly" in scholarship.

friends as portrait subjects, in addition to herself, her work and stylistic developments are easier to trace. This too places Henri at odds with the typical Bauhaus student as many of the other students creating photography during this time would model for one another, a practice Henri seems to have reserved for when she worked with Lucia.

When she began photography, Henri switched between abstract still lifes using metallic objects and mirrors to portraiture. Within the images like the still lifes included in Moholy-Nagy's article, Henri experimented with light, contrast, and how the arrangement of the objects in relationship to one another shifted the way each object was perceived. This translated into her portraiture.

Georg Mueche used the reflection in metallic balls to show the subject in his image *Reflections in a Convex Mirror* from 1925 (figure 16). Mueche is credited with providing Henri with the metal balls she used³⁶, and as the figure in her only other image that includes human subjects besides herself, Schall, or Lambert³⁷. In addition to Mueche, Marianne Brandt used metal balls to reflect the subjects in her photographs and create a visual representation of the camera's mechanism to capture light off the reflection of mirror. Brandt pushed the use of reflection in her self-portraits, weaving together abstraction and identity. A graduate of the Bauhaus in Weimar, Brandt took up a position as Moholy-Nagy's assistant in the metals workshop in 1927.³⁸

Brandt, like Henri, came to the Dessau Bauhaus as an established artist and independent adult. She participated in explorations of how to physically depict the conceptual New Woman. In

But here is only one Charles listed in Bauhaus student records, and he attended the school long after Henri was a student there. However, a student registered as Karl Lambert attended the Bauhaus simultaneously as Henri. Registered as an architectural student, when cross referenced with the Bauhaus database online, the entry for Karl Lambert notes his middle or alternative first name as Charles.

³⁶ Du Pont, *Florence Henri*, 20-21.

³⁷ It is worth noting that this figure faces away from the camera and is impossible to definitively identify without additional source material unknown at this time.

³⁸ Otto, Elizabeth, "Paris – Dessau: Marianne Brandt and the New Woman in Photomontage and Photography, from *Garçonne* to Bauhaus Constructivist" *The New Woman International*. Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco, (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor MI) pp.166.

her book *New Woman International*, Otto discusses Brandt's exploration of the relationship between the female body and the physiognomy of the metallic objects she created. Otto connects the reflective objects used by Brandt in her self-portrait from 1928 (figure 17), with the ongoing concept of an avant-garde New Woman in a culture post Industrial Revolution. She writes, "Brandt has moved boldly through a series of abstract and representational strategies, working in metal, photomontage and photography, to an integrated means of self-presentation as a technologized and avant-garde New Woman."³⁹ In this image from Brandt frames herself within the Bauhaus balcony and takes a photograph of her reflection in a mirror, the surface of which distorts the space, blending Brandt and the darker edge of the frame together. She is the main subject, but so is the building. Her composition merged the human body and building in a way that Muche's reflection photography did not, as his photograph equally distorted himself and the other subjects in the room behind him, relying on the lighting and centered position within the reflection isolate his figure from the background.

Brandt's work explored self-representation within the forms of manipulated objects. The reflected surfaces doubled the function that the camera served but distorted instead of clarified it. The result is a reflection of a reflection, and in the distortion that occurs from the reflection of the mirror to the lens of the camera, the artist alters, how her physical body is represented in the space.

Brandt's image also inspired Henri to examine her body in relationship with the architecture of the Bauhaus building. Henri spoke about her use of reflective surfaces to abstract the body, saying, "I use mirrors to introduce the same subject seen from different angles in a single photograph so as to give the same theme a variety of views that complete each other and are able to expound it better by interacting with each other. All this is much harder to explain than to do."⁴⁰

³⁹ Otto, "Paris— Dessau: Marianne Brandt and the New Woman in Photomontage and Photography" Pp.166

⁴⁰ Henri, quoted by Attilio Colombo in "Specchio, Essencialita, Geometria" Du Pont, *Florence Henri*. 40.

This follows her exploration of cubist painting into the ephemeral qualities of many Bauhaus portraits. Otto's argument of Brandt's work follows what Henri described in her own photographs, the composition, and the eye for the mechanical and symmetrical balance becomes as important to distilling the "Essence" of the portrait as does the identity of the subject both of which are divergent from traditional portraiture.

An example of this in Henri's work is her self-portrait from 1928 (figure 18), where she incorporates her body into the geometric architecture, playing with the perceivable space in an image. The self-portrait shifts the angle of the viewer lower than Henri, who is off to the left of the image. This awkward placement mimics the discomfort communicated in Brandt's self-portrait through the implication of how the subject fits into the space. Henri continued this exercise in positioning with her mirror portraits of Lambert (figure 19) with more success. Lambert is integrated into the structures around him and his head, like Henri's in the stairway of her portrait, fits into the square of the ladder he holds. However, the mirror placed in front of him opens the space, relieving the claustrophobic feeling in Brandt and Henri's portraits. When Brandt's self-portrait is compared with Henri's, the elements of abstraction and experimentation on a body in space broaden avenues of inspiration between Henri and other Bauhaus artists.

Henri would return to the Bauhaus in 1929 to visit Schall and photograph her again with mirrors. But aside from this, she would abandon using reflective surfaces in her work until 1935. Lucia Moholy's influence would provide Henri with more of the stylistic elements she would take into her studio in Paris.

Lucia's portraiture has a distilled, minimalist style. Lucia created the most recognizable and widely published portrait of Florence Henri in 1927 (figure 20). When the stylistic elements

of Henri and Lucia's work are compared, it becomes clear that Lucia influenced how Henri later represented modern women in France.

In her portrait of Henri, Lucia slightly offset her subject, leaving only a strip of negative space on the left side. Henri's direct but neutral expression contrasts her bold features and visible makeup. The details of Henri's jewelry, geometric earrings that echo the shapes in Henri's cubist paintings, like her abstract work from 1923 (figure 21), and her short, blunt hairstyle indicate to the viewer her participation in the concept of the New Woman she presents herself within. In this limited view, each element is carefully chosen to build her persona.

Without considering Lucia's portrait, the stylistic departure from Henri's early reflective images to most of her work in Paris over the following decades seems abrupt. Lucia's portrait style created a template for Henri with which she built her portrait style in Paris.

Henri made two portraits in Lucia's style at the Bauhaus (without the mirrors); one of Lambert (figure 22) and one of Schall (figure 23) both taken in 1927. In these images, Henri blended Lucia's style and traditional portrait composition. These images marked Henri's transition away from the convoluted depictions of mirrors, reflections, and her subject. Instead, she experimented with the presentation of a subject that is controlled into a static position by the composition, allowing the viewer to see the detail in the subject rather than the variations of distorted reflections present in her earlier work.

In Henri's portrait of Lambert, he is seated, with his arms crossed, gazing directly at the camera. The background behind him is blank and only shows through the space behind his shoulders and head. The straightforward, neutral expression mimics that of Henri in Moholy's image. The cropping of the image sets it apart from a normal portrait, cutting off the top of his head and the left side of his arm. He slumps forward slightly, making his manner somewhere

between formal and casual. Lambert is not presented in the experimental manner that Brandt used in her portrait, but neither is he confronting the viewer directly as Henri did in her self-portraits. His posture blocks the viewer from seeing most of his body, but his direct eye contact keeps him from appearing shy. Henri created a masculine portrait that falls outside of what was typical in the Bauhaus, and in expectations within the larger Weimar culture. Henri depicted Lambert in her images interchangeably with how she experiments with Schall, ignoring gendered differences and instead focusing on how to depict the body in space.

In her image of Margarete, Henri includes the iconic Bauhaus Wassily chair,⁴¹ and faces Schall toward the viewer, but with her head turned sharply. She is in profile. Like Lambert, her arms are crossed, cutting off the rest of their body from view and creating a strong square shape within the frame. Schall's pose echoes the design of the chair behind her.⁴² Her clothing is a mix of traditional and masculine. She wears a dark blouse with a men's flannel over it. Her face is bare, and she no jewelry. Her hair is cropped short, in a style popular with young men, instead of the Parisian bob sported by Henri. Schall's soft features, light makeup, and relaxed stance contrast with her practical clothing and short hair; her personal presentation closer to that of Lucia Moholy than Henri's style.

Both images borrow stylistic elements from Lucia's portraits of Henri. If Brandt was moving the body into abstraction with the man-made, then Lucia used the confinement of the frame to abstract her subjects. She stripped away the background and any contextual information and presented a highly stylized shape with her model. Rather than twisting or obscuring the figures,

⁴¹ Henri expressed delight over the Bauhaus designs in letters to Margarete stating that she was as excited about the furniture as she was in meeting Munché and Moholy-Nagy. She purchased several pieces to bring back to Paris upon her departure from Dessau.

⁴² Henri also created a self-portrait using a Mirror, in which she is seated with her arms crossed, cutting off the view of her lower body, which indicates that she was using this pose to reinforce her composition.

she simplified them, allowing the viewer to focus on *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) through their essential features in a pared-back composition.

Henri explored both styles but prioritized composition as a means of expression. When asked about her portrait work, she wrote, “When, a year after having started to take photographs, I turned to portraiture [professionally in Paris], it was composition above all that I sought. Certainly, I am not indifferent to my models' plasticity and physiognomy, but what interests me above all is what I can extract from the total effect.”⁴³ Henri’s first few photographic series created at the Bauhaus sparked her interest in pursuing photography professionally and, in a roundabout way, solved her frustrations with the art career with which she came to the Bauhaus, offering her a new avenue to explore the elements of composition and personal expression with which she desired to create. When examined in proximity to Brandt and Lucia’s work, the progression of Henri’s photographs becomes an exercise in the refinement of her technique and how to distill a person’s characteristics into a single frame. Upon gaining confidence in photography, Henri set out for Paris to rejoin the community of artists there with whom she socialized, and to begin working in her newfound discipline.

⁴³ Henri, quoted in Attilio Colombo, “Specchio, Essenzialità, Geometria”. *Florence Henri*, Du Pont. 40.

CHAPTER THREE

FLORENCE HENRI IN PARIS: NEW WOMANHOOD IN INTERWAR FRANCE

Upon leaving the Bauhaus, Florence Henri returned to Paris and set up a portrait studio in her apartment⁴⁴. Personal correspondence from Henri illuminates her social scene and her excitement to explore photography as her new primary medium. Shortly after her move, Henri wrote a letter to Lou Scheper, whom she had met at the Bauhaus, saying, "I've got so many ideas for photographs. . . I'd like to have a profession that produces results that also interests other people."⁴⁵ Over the next decade, she cultivated a strong reputation as an avant-garde photographer in Paris. Her portrait business, targeted at middle and upper-class women, would subsidize her income until 1936. This chapter will introduce the women in Paris who influenced Henri's work, and outline how women were discussed in relation to their public participation in society following World War I.

The Transformation of New Womanhood in the Twentieth Century

For Florence Henri and her contemporaries in Paris, the cultural shifts for women vital to their success began during the Industrial Revolution. In the late 1880's, modern, childless women began working outside the home, entering the middle class, and gaining access to disposable income. With the increased demand for consumer goods directly marketed to women, journal, magazine, and newspaper publishers shifted their content in an attempt to broaden their magazines' readership

⁴⁴ Du Pont, Diana. *Florence Henri*, 140.

⁴⁵ Florence Henri, Letter to Lou Scheper, February 11th, 1928.

and increase revenue. The advertisements and articles in magazines like *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* were marketed to the New Woman, a new social type for working women. Advertisements offering new fashion, practical work clothes and evening wear, cosmetics and personal care products, and household objects were all marketed to women who were participating socially with men and women, in and out of the home. While the term New Woman was used transnationally, there were national and generational differences in how modern womanhood was expressed. While New Womanhood was a construct that emerged in several European contexts, I will focus on its use in France.

One of the first official uses of the term New Woman in the context of post-industrial Europe occurs in the articles written by author and activist Sarah Grand (A penname for Frances Elizabeth Bellenden McFall, née Clarke)⁴⁶ titled “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” published in 1894 for *The North American Review*. Grand writes about the evolution of women’s public persona and challenges the argument that women no longer wished to be mothers or have meaningful relationships, Grand posited that the “woman question” was actually an indication of the failure of masculinity and that the solution was in a higher quality of man. The term was used in positive and negative contexts, but with the rise of the women’s suffrage movement, the concept of modern womanhood was expanded to include not only working women but also women who were politically engaged and demanding equal pay, healthy working conditions, and the right to vote.

Historian Dr. Mary Louise Roberts summarized the impact of Sarah Grand’s remarks in her book *Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalization*. She writes,

⁴⁶ “Sarah Grand (Frances Elizabeth Bellenden McFall, Née Clarke) - National Portrait Gallery.” 2025. Npg.org.uk. 2025. <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp78447/sarah-grand-frances-elizabeth-bellenden-mcfall-nee-clarke>.

“Grand’s coinage helped to make the New Woman a popular focus of English magazines like *Punch* and *Yellow Book* [...] It was not long before the New Woman became reified in the public imagination, assuming a stock appearance, a fixed set of behaviors, and a cultural weight all her own.”⁴⁷ Grand’s first-wave, New Woman, evolved and took on new connotations following World War I. By the end of the war, some 8.5 million men were dead, with the casualties of French troops reaching 6,160,800 (nearly 76% of France’s total mobilized force).⁴⁸ To maintain industries across Europe, women joined the workforce *en masse*. Working women became the default rather than the exception. Many women were disinclined to return home at the war’s end. Those who wished to return to a domestic life found their families in financial ruin, and the pool of available, eligible men was smaller than ever. This further incentivized women to campaign for political equality.

Looking back on this era, Simone de Beauvoir countered criticisms of modern women in her book *The Second Sex*, published in 1956. She noted that “the war intervened. English women got the vote with restrictions in 1918, and an unrestricted vote in 1928. Their success was largely due to their services during the war.”⁴⁹ In France, the enfranchisement of women’s rights was won much more slowly. The civil code Napoleon created in 1804, denying women equal rights in marriage, was upheld until the early 1900s. The Napoleonic code spurred thousands of middle-class women to protest. In 1900, the Women’s Suffrage Society supported the foundation of the National Council of French Women to campaign collectively for equal rights⁵⁰. This formality encouraged upper-class women who did not work outside the home or faced similar financial

⁴⁷ Mary Louise Roberts, *Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalization*. (Duke University Press: 2008) 78.

⁴⁸ Showalter, D.E., Royde-Smith, J.G. "World War I." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 4, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I>.

⁴⁹ Simone, De Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*, Translated and edited by H.M. Parsley, (Jonathan Cape: 1956).

⁵⁰ Grayson Holmes, “Women’s Suffrage Society (Societe le suffrages des femmes) 1876-1909, *Towards Emancipation? Women in modern European history*. <https://hist259.web.unc.edu/womens-suffrage-societe-le-suffrage-des-femmes-1876-1909/> .

situations as working women to become involved in activism. Despite the additional energy put towards civil rights, French women were not legally allowed to vote until 1944.

This meant that while Florence Henri lived in Paris (between 1929 and 1936), she would not have enjoyed the same legal and political freedoms as her male peers, even though she operated her own business and lived independently for decades. Women in France, including Henri, held financial independence and purchasing power long before they had political and legal rights. Because of this, publications marketed to women offered alternative forms of freedom and modernity to women. Femininity became a means of agency for French women. The art and media from this time reflected how fast the conceptualization of young independent women by the larger culture could change. Like her predecessor, the post-war New Woman could be empowering or threatening, depending on how she was viewed.

The Garçonne and Women's Participation in Consumer Culture

While post-war Germany focused on reconstruction, France and the United States became the new cultural touchpoints. Hollywood painted a lavish society where the class system had been replaced by beautiful movie stars who mixed the aesthetics of Paris fashion and culture, with the wealth of America. Working-class women in both countries participated through media consumption, like films and magazines, and through consumer goods that promised to make them like the celebrities they admired. Boyish thin silhouettes and boxy clothing that emphasized a woman's athletic figure were popular in both countries. In France the embodiment of this new style was the *garçonne*.

Named from Victor Marguerite's novel *La Garçonne*, published in 1923, the *Garçonne*, or bachelor girl, became the term applied to such modern French women. Roberts writes about this

symbol: "The *Garçonne* became the center of much controversy about changing gender roles...With her fast, loose ways, and her short hair, the *Garçonne* embodied, for the French, the war's power to undermine the certainties of nineteenth-century liberal society."⁵¹ Roberts goes on to argue that negative perceptions of the *Garçonne* surrounded worry that French women would not marry and have children, choosing instead to remain single in favor of sexual activities without consequences. Eventually, all modern women who chose to accept modern fashion like shorter skirts or wearing lipstick were assumed to be sexually promiscuous. This left little room in between the polar extremes of conservatism and full sexual liberation to express the experiences of most middle-class women. However, the social type of the *Garçonne* had positive connotations among younger women starting in the 1930s continued to hold sway into the 1940s, largely due to aspirational publications targeting young women.

Vogue, first published in America in 1890, expanded to France in 1920. Both publications shared photographs and articles, with consumer goods integrated into the main content of the magazine⁵². This allowed women of lesser income who could not afford designer clothes from Chanel or fabrics designed by Delaunay to still participate in the revolution for women's public presence. Publications like *Vogue* were tools that Henri and Delaunay used to market her creations and ordinary aspects of their everyday lives. The authenticity in Henri's depictions in women comes from her participation in what she chose for her subject matter. Henri adapted the *Garçonne*'s boyish style through her own fashion and short hair. However, she presented herself less as an alluring sexually liberated woman and instead as a fashionable modern artist who had adapted to women's cultural movements. Considering that her clientele base was largely wealthy

⁵¹ Mary Louise Roberts, *Modern Girl Around the World*, 91.

⁵² Kurkdjian, Sophie. "The Emergence of French Vogue: French Identity and Visual Culture in the Fashion Press, 1920–40," *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 6, no. 1 (April 1, 2019): 63–82.

French women, her fashion would have aided in her nonverbal communication with clients convincing them of her aptitude in presenting them in an avant-garde and flattering manner. Vital to her participation in the public sphere of women was her relationships with other female artists like Sonia Delaunay. The rapid restructuring of society following World War I allowed for women to gain greater agency in their life choices. While this did not mean the same level of equality for women in France as it did for German women, at large, women across Europe reached and surpassed the point of no return. Over the following decades women continued to renegotiate the spaces they occupied. Publicly, professionally and privately European women occupied more space.

CHAPTER FOUR

FLORENCE HENRI: A COMMERCIAL PHOTOGRAPHER IN PARIS

In addition to her professional work, Henri documented her personal life; through these photographs, we can piece together the community in which she was involved. Piet Mondrian, Sonia and Robert Delaunay, Jean and Sofie Arp, and Georg Muche were a few of Henri's regular visitors. In what was likely the earliest picture taken after her return to Paris, Henri arranges herself, Muche, and two other friends in her new space (figure 24). The women are seated in Henri's newly purchased Bauhaus chairs designed by Marcel Breuer, a purchase she had made after admiring the interior design of the Moholy's duplex⁵³. On the wall behind them hangs one of Henri's cubist paintings; another is propped on the tabletop next to her. In this image, Henri combines her identity as an artist with her new career as a photographer, marrying items from each into a single composition.

Another image depicts a dinner party at Piet Mondrian's home, with Henri and Schall in attendance (figure 25). Henri wears the same silk scarf in each photograph; her fashionable, modern wardrobe is a consistent element of the social photographs taken around this time. While not always taken by Henri herself, images like these provide some of the details absent from the current scholarship on Henri's life in Paris.

Sonia Delaunay: A Girl's Girl in Paris

Before the self-portrait paired with Sonia's photograph, only one known image of Henri and Sonia Delaunay existed. It was reproduced in two texts on Delaunay, *Sonia Delaunay* written

⁵³ Florence Henri, Letters written to Schall between 1929-1930.

by Arthur A. Cohen in 1975, and *Sonia Delaunay: The Life of an Artist* by Stanley Baron and Jaques Damase in 1995, only the latter of which named Henri⁵⁴ (figure 26). Despite the large crossover between friends, Henri's documented involvement with the Delaunay's is sparse. While the couple mentioned working and visiting Ise and Walter Gropius several times throughout their lifetime, with some of Sonia's color theory and design lessons being incorporated into Bauhaus pedagogy, Sonia only connection outside of the visual evidence to Henri is through their letters written during and after the period Henri spent living in Paris⁵⁵. What is clear, as that the influence over Henri's life was significant enough for her to photograph both the Delaunays on more than one occasion, with the pair of portraits of herself and Sonia providing the most objective comparison Henri created between herself and another artist. Sonia established herself in Paris nearly a decade earlier than Henri in 1924, so by the time Henri created her portrait of Delaunay, the comparison she set up would have been both strategic in presenting herself as another avant-garde female artist and friendly in that the two women interacted personally in addition to their professional connections.

However, Delaunay commented in an interview with Arthur Cohen that when she found herself with international success and her designs were sought out in increasing numbers, she "didn't know what to do...I don't like business."⁵⁶ She goes on to explain that she often relied on her husband, Robert to run the business side of his and her own artistic pursuits, freeing her up to design as much as possible. Henri was well connected, but without a partner helping her, she did not have the same freedom to balance the workload between two people. Instead, she strategically

⁵⁴ In the citation for this book, Baron misspells Henri as "Henry," which likely added to the ambiguity of connecting the two women through this photograph via search terms.

⁵⁵ Nearly all of which are currently archived with the rest of Henri's estate at the Martini Ronchetti Galleria in Genoa.

⁵⁶ Delaunay, Robert, Sonia Delaunay, Arthur A. Cohen, and David Shapiro. *The new art of color: The writings of Robert and Sonia Delaunay*. New York: Viking Press, 1978. 216

connected her work to her peers, positioning herself as both an avant guard artist, and New Woman. An Example of this is Henri's publication of one of her fine art portraits for a German women's magazine *Für die Frau* a supplemental publication of the *Frankfurt Zeitung* in 1935 (figure 27). The publication of her images allowed Henri to increase her income, and gain notoriety with the wealthy women who made up most of her clientele. Additionally, it presented her in the same artistic circles as other successful women artists, like Delaunay, who had her own design on the cover of *Vogue* in January of 1925 (figure 28).

Henri's image generically titled; *Portrait of a Woman* shows a woman with long dark hair swept back from her face. Her hands rest softly against her cheeks, and she looks down past the edge of the frame. Her skin is left natural, so her freckles and the small wrinkles around her eyes show. However, her shaped eyebrows follow current beauty trends, and she wears dark lipstick, overdrawn into a cupid's bow. Only the shoulder and cuffs of the model's dress are visible in the image. The triangular color-block panel is consistent with sketches of a dress of a similar style created by Sonia Delaunay between 1926 and 28 (figure 29) suggesting another collaboration between the two artists. Henri used Lucia's stylistic elements of photography; tightly cropping the frame for her portrait of the woman.

The model's hair is down, and the texture provides visual interest and counters the bold pattern of her dress. Her makeup is minimal, but her lipstick is consistent with trends in women's magazines and from Hollywood. In Henri's photograph, the small details of the model's face make her unique and draw the viewer's attention. Henri's image is an intimate view, with the model's eyes downcast, inviting the viewer to look without acknowledging their gaze. In an alternative slide from the same photography session, Henri photographed the model with her eyes up, looking at the camera (figure 30). It is worth noting that most of Henri's chosen images present a woman

to the viewer with her gaze down, this echo's Henri's expressed interest in the "total effect" her portraits held, communicated through her model's pose in relation to the camera and how that could change the viewing experience.

The close-up, intimate motif in Henri's images was played out over and over in her portraits; in named and unnamed images, her models are positioned close to the lens of the camera, their gaze is off to the side or downcast, and small details of their clothing and jewelry are the only other visible traits aside from their physical features.

In 1930, Henri followed this compositional pattern the year before, photographing an unnamed woman with pockmarked skin (figure 31). This model wears a heavy foundation; her hair is cut in the same bob as Henri's but is slicked down with product creating a smooth hair arrangement. The heavy makeup has set into her textured skin, and the woven straw basket behind her mirrors the texture. Once again, the model gazes down to the left of the image, allowing the viewer uninterrupted voyeurism. The subject's neutral expressions keep from drawing attention unequally to their features, so the slight inclusion of clothing in each image is of equal visual importance.

The other style with which Henri composed her portraits was a variation on the same essential elements. The backgrounds were still empty, but the subject's upper body was in view, offering more information about them. Henri created more significant variations in lighting, using shadows to change the mood of her images. In a portrait she made of her student Lore Krüger in 1935 (figure 32), Henri placed Krüger slightly off-center, her hands cupping her face, and the left side of her face is entirely in shadow⁵⁷. The lighting comes in from a high angle at the far left of the image. Krüger's sweater, covered in small pom-poms, is highlighted by the directional lighting

⁵⁷ Krüger, German-Jewish woman later became a photographer who aided in the Nazi's resistance during World War Two.

and is contrasted with her smooth skin. Her slightly mussed hair is on the right side of her face, breaking up the heavy, dark color-block of her figure. A dark line of shadow cuts down the background, nearly touching the subject, only to fade into the mid-toned foreground. Using only light and small textural differences on her model, Henri draws the viewer's eyes to Krüger's face without the tight cropping that her previous style utilized. The woman presented in Henri's portraits are viewed as objects of desire, but do not directly interact or perform for the viewer. Instead, each women's focus is internal, keeping the viewer at a distance despite the intimacy of a closely cropped portrait. The direction of her subject's gaze follows the same pattern as had been used in many of Henri's images of Schall. Averting her gaze, Schall seems to be unaware of her reflection or the viewer.

While in Paris, Henri created dozens of portraits following these same design elements. She had also begun teaching other women photography, her roster of students included; Lisette Model, a documentary street photographer, Dorothy Weil, Lore Krüger, and Gisèle Freund, a photojournalist who worked with Walter Benjamin and Adrienne Monnier in Paris. In her memoirs, *Memoires de l'œil*, Freund recounts her experience taking lessons from Henri in late 1929. She writes,

I was immediately won over by her charm and the great kindness with which she received me[. . .]At the time, she lived mainly off her portraits. She made her pictures with a huge plate camera and carefully retouched them. Her middle-class clientele would not have accepted her photos otherwise[. . .]I did many portraits but never retouched them. Florence expressed her opinion of my uncertain results by wrinkling her lovely face. She also tried to show me how to light a head. She did my portrait, and I did hers, of which I still have a copy, but she kept the negative saying, 'In truth, I did my portrait myself.'⁵⁸

Through lessons, commissions, and selling the reproduction rights to her images, Henri could live and work off her income from photography. During this time, her artistic style continued to

⁵⁸ Gisèle Freund, *Memoires de l'œil*, (Paris: Seuil 1977), 15-16.

develop. She used the elements of composition she learned from the Bauhaus (strong leading lines, clear, uncluttered backgrounds, and intentional framing of the subject to create a sense of dynamic movement) to create visually compelling portraits of modern women. It was during her successful transition to professional portrait photographer that Henri began exhibiting her early photographs of Margarete Schall. Through participating in international exhibits, Henri met another female artist who influenced her photographic career: Germaine Krull.

Germaine Krull: Developing the Female Ga(y)ze

Germaine Krull, a freelance photographer, worked in France, Germany, and the Netherlands during the Twentieth Century. She returned to Paris after World War One and sold her portraits to women's publications⁵⁹. Like Delaunay, Krull's connection to Henri survives primarily through photographs. Krull and Henri met at an international photography exhibit, and sometime between 1928-1935 Krull photographed Henri (figure 33). In it, Henri positions herself with her head turned away, her profile is recognizable but lacks the frank confrontation that Lucia's portrait conveyed. Instead, Henri is presented in a traditionally feminine pose, with a downcast gaze and her hair swept up off her face. Her hand reaches up to touch her hair, the gesture giving a candid impression to what is still a formal portrait. Krull depicted women differently than Henri, but her work still reflected her personal interactions with women and captured some of the intimacy created by queer women photographing feminine subjects.

⁵⁹“Acting the Lesbian: Les Amies by Germaine Krull” Clare I. Rogan. In *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870'S through the 1960s.*, edited by Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco, 135-154, University of Michigan Press. 2011.

The two women shared a model for their Portraiture: actress Marcelle Romée. Krull sold her portraits to magazines, including *Variétés*, *Art et Médecine*, and *L'Art vivant*⁶⁰. Her portrait of Romée was likely a commercial image for a publication. The two portraits of Romée illustrate the stylistic commonalities between Henri and Krull.

In Henri's image (figure 35), Romée lays against a patterned fabric, her arm lifted to show three large bracelets. Only half of her upper body is in the frame, and she looks up to the corner of the image, unaware of the viewer. The camera is directly above her in another photograph taken in the same session. Romée lies with her arms crossed over her chest, and her eyes closed. Henri's choice to position the camera over the top of Romée and to have her eyes closed, almost as if she is sleeping, is a pattern Henri would repeat several times the same year, once with an unnamed model (figure 36) and in her commissioned portrait of Grete Willers (figure 37). This position places the

viewer in an unconscious position of power of the subject, further in Henri's nude portraits, it alludes to a sexual submission from her model's which adds to the erotic charge in the photographs.

In addition to her commercial work, Kurl created intimate portraits of women, for which she is famous. Krull had relationships with both men and women but disliked reducing her interactions by using limited descriptions that were available to her at the time. She her memoir she wrote about her queer identity saying,

“I never loved a woman, but with Elsa the joy of feeling together was great; she too never left my side. We would have laughed if someone had described us as lesbians; Elsa was so profoundly mine that the physical issue did not count, it had very little importance. She had never experienced an orgasm, not with her husband nor with her lover, and thus it had to be me to give her pleasure. Everything was very simple, and we were happy together.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Martin Gropius Bau, "Germanin Krull: a photographers journey." *Jeu De Paume, Extramural*, Oct 2025. <https://jeudepaume.org/en/evenement/germaine-krull-1897-1985-a-photographers-journey/#:~:text=It%20is%20essential%2C%20here%2C%20to,M%C3%A9decine%20and%20L'Art%20vivant.>

⁶¹ Germaine Krull quoted in *La vita conduce la danza*. Translated by G. Chiti (Florence: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 1992), 125.

Whatever Krull's personal feelings about her queer identity, she chose to center sapphic relationships in her photography. The most famous of her series, *Les Amies* (figure 38) created in 1924 is the first queer female pornographic photo series. In it Krull frustrates the viewer's voyeurism by positioning her subject's away from the camera lens. Their actions are clear, but the details are hidden from the viewer. Krull's subject matter, while more overtly sexual than Henri's, provides a connection to Henri's nude studies created during her time working in Paris.

Henri experimented with nude portraits in the same year she photographed Romée. In an untitled work with the same overhead view of a model with her arms out and eyes closed (figure 39), Henri placed decorative objects like seashells and playing cards around her subject. However, like Romée's portrait, the sparse objects surrounding the woman do not build a narrative but rather frame her nude body as another beautiful object captured in the frame. Unlike Krull's women, Henri cuts her nude portraits at the limbs, trapping her subjects in the frame. The position of the subjects, combined with their averted gaze, gives the images a sense of sensual charge, emphasized by the fact that the viewer is in an uninterrupted space to look at the women. The setting offers no additional context, and instead, it presents the women's bodies as part of a collection of aesthetic objects, not unlike Henri's still-life compositions. Compared visually, the clothed and nude portraits Henri composed with this motif create sets of image types. Instead of combining mirrored portraits of herself and Schall, Henri created pairs of images of passive women laid out in front of the viewer with her active portraits.

Around the same time, between 1930 and 1932, Henri visited Pieffer Watenphul⁶², and he created a small series of images for her that used the same pose. However, Henri keeps her eyes

⁶² Giovanni Battista Martini, "Biography" in *Florence Henri: Mirror of the Avant-Garde 1927-40*, ed. Amelia Lang (Aperture, 2015), 200.

open, looking directly back at the viewer. In the first image (figure 40), Henri lies against a pile of blankets. Her arms are bent and raised in the same position she used for her models. She wears the same bracelets as Romée had, and the camera is angled so that Henri is diagonal to the frame. Her eyes are open, and she looks calmly back at the viewer. The neutrality in her gaze gives her a sense of agency; she is aware of the viewers but does not perform for them. In the second image (figure 41), Henri is seated across from the camera. Her hands are folded in a prayer position, and her head is tilted to the side. She looks at the camera, but her expression is serious.

Henri's portraits give her a sense of agency and autonomy that she does not offer her nude models, her series with Pieffer Wattenphul follow her portrait set with Delaunay and contextualize her development in style upon interacting with Krull. Henri's chose to avoid the overt expressions of queer attraction Krull embraced in her own work, instead, she presented herself as desirable with current fashion and inviting poses much more overtly sexualized than her previous work at the Bauhaus, but Henri remained in control of her agency, a required attribute to her career in a male-dominated field through her eye contact with the viewer. The viewers are offered a beautiful Garçonne, but is denied the invitation to anonymous voyeurism similarly to how Krull frustrates the viewer's observation of her two lovers in *Les Amées*.

In the combination of images, Henri presents herself as a woman engaging in the same poses as her models but maintaining a sense of control. Henri has doubled herself in combination with her conventionally attractive models, allowing her to transition between the viewer and viewed without losing the agency and control she, as the photographer, holds. Working with other queer artists from her time at the Bauhaus, Henri plays with the idea of sapphic attraction interpreted as a misguided expression of self-obsession, turning it instead into a fluid exchange between herself and her models. She explores the dynamics of desire switching back and forth between artist and

subject, and in doing so, she sidesteps either position as being distinctly masculine, the other proposed basis for women's queer desire.

When Krull and Delaunay's interactions with Henri are brought into the context of her Paris work, the trajectory of Henri's development, particularly her depictions of modern women, becomes clear. As both a personal expression and as means of income, Henri's work was part of an ongoing conversation in women's art that reflected the changes in their social and political agency following the end of the 1800's.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN THE SHADOW ON THE WALL: HENRI'S PHOTOGRAPHY CAREER ENDS

In this thesis, I have expanded Elizabeth Otto's methodology, considering how queer students at the Bauhaus used visual doubling in their work, to include Henri's portraits offers current scholars Henri's artwork as an additional portion of queer history. Henri's photographic body of work builds on techniques of abstraction and composition favored at the Bauhaus, which simultaneously can offer another perspective of queer expression in the 20th century. However, her time in France is equally if not more important and could serve as an interesting case study for how the aesthetic and social ethos of the Bauhaus interacted with progressive ideas emerging in other cultural contexts, especially such seemingly retrograde contexts as women's fashion magazines.

A fruitful area of future research would include her wide-ranging network of female artist peers. Future projects expanding this history to include the work of Gisele Freund, Lore Krüger, and Dorothy Weil (Henri's students in Paris), and the work of artists like Ilse Bing, who credited Henri as having inspired her to begin photographing, could continue to broaden our understanding of the interplay between commercial and experimental photography and the artists who used their work to explore expressions of femininity, queerness, and artistic identity in interwar Europe.

Between 1929 and 1939, Henri divided her time between France and extended stays with Margarete Schall, eventually moving to Italy in 1935 and closing her studio in Paris. In 1940, Henri met the poet and author Pierre Minet. Later that same year, she moved into his apartment building, and the two lived together until after the end of World War II. During this period, Henri

continued to exhibit her work internationally and create portraits of other artists within her social circle, including Hans Arp and Robert Delaunay.⁶³

Margaret Schall would die in 1939, still living in Dessau.⁶⁴ Henri created her last series of portraits shortly after. Returning to the use of mirrors, Henri used the balcony of her apartment to create ten images of herself and Minet. Within these, Henri made two pairs of portraits, one set framed by a small mirror (figures 42 and 43) and the other of their shadows projected on the blank wall of her apartment (figures 44 and 45). No longer wearing her distinctive bobbed hair and bold makeup, Henri is dressed in a unisex button-up shirt, accessorized minimally. Henri's presentation has shifted; she no longer contrasts her dark eyes and hair with bold makeup or wears current fashion. Instead, she presents herself in simple clothing. The shadow-portraits abstract the subject's physical body, deflecting the viewer's gaze away from their features, and instead focus on the subject's interaction with the light source, exploring how we conceptualize a body as present or absent. As in her earliest portraits of herself, Schall and Lamber, Henri plays with the viewer's perception of the subject's physical body in the photograph's space and where the spatial planes within the image begin and end. She no longer needs the mirror's reflection, instead using light alone to flatten and defamiliarize her subject, pushing herself and Minet's figures toward total abstraction. Ultimately, Henri's portrait work was always situated between the desire to create personalized, documentary portraits and her interest in abstraction. Following the Nazi occupation of Italy in 1943, the heavy censorship on published photography, and the increased cost of materials made Henri would stop creating photographs altogether⁶⁵.

⁶³ Martini Battista, Giovanni. "Biography" In *Florence Henri: Mirror of the Avant-Gardes, 1927-40*, Edited by Marta Gili. Translated by Amelia Lang. Aperture, 2015. 208.

⁶⁴ Giovanni Battista Martini, "biography" *Florence Henri*. 206.

⁶⁵ Giovanni Battista Martini, "biography" *Florence Henri*. 206.

This final series offers contemporary viewers a closing chapter to Henri's photography career. Henri continued to make art following World War II. She returned to painting and used her photographs taken in Italy to create photomontages, but she did not create any new photographs after the war, leaving this final series as her last experiment in portraiture. The gender expression and Queer experimentation that Henri encountered at the Bauhaus, combined with her immersion in the French culture of New Womanhood, formed her clear and direct style of portraiture. Drawing stylistic influence from Lucia Moholy and Marianne Brandt and combining them with contextual references to other successful female artists like Sonia Delaunay and Germaine Krull, Henri created numerous portraits that celebrated the unique features of each woman she photographed. With intense detail and highly technical execution Henri's catalogue of New Womanhood could only have been created by an artist such as herself, someone who was immersed in, and deeply admirable of modern women's identity and participation in the Twentieth Century.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FIGURES



Figure 1: Henri, Florence. Self-portrait. 1931, silver gelatin print. Private collection.



Figure 2: Henri, Florence. Sonia Delaunay. 1931, silver gelatin print. Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Genoa Italy.



Figure 3: Henri, Florence. Still Life Composition No. 10. 1929, Silver Gelatin Print, International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester NY.



Figure 4: Henri, Florence. Composition 111. 1928. Silver Gelatin Print. Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA.



Figure 5: Henri, Florence. Selbst-Portrait. 1928, silver gelatin print. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY



Figure 6: Unknown, Florence Henri's 34th Birthday at the Bauhaus, 1927, silver gelatin print, Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Genoa Italy.



Figure 7: Feininger, Lux. De Weberinnen auf der Bauhausstreppe. 1927. silver gelatin print. Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 8:Gropius, Walter, Ise Gropius on the Brooklyn Bridge, 1928, silver gelatin print, Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, Germany.

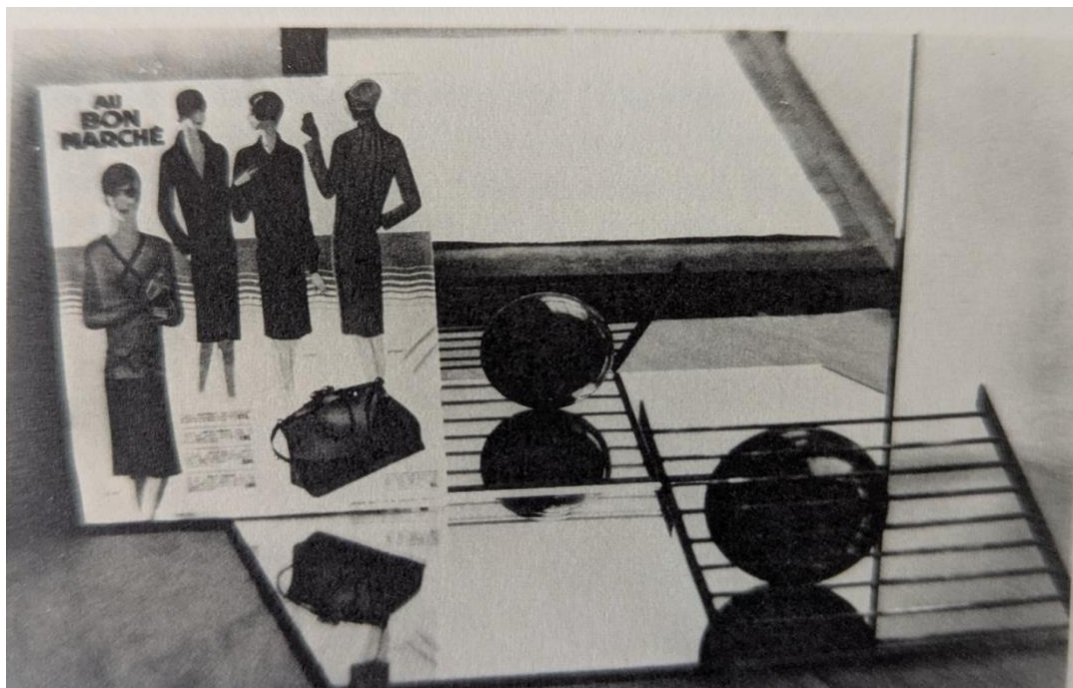


Figure 9:Henri, Florence, Still life with balls, mirror and fashion magazine, 1928-31, silver gelatin print, Bauhaus Archive. Berlin, Germany.



Figure 10: Tomljenovic, Ivana. Preparing for the party, 1930, silver gelatin print. Bauhaus archive & Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.



Figure 11: Piffner Watenphul, Max. Frau mit Fächer (Groteske), 1928. silver gelatin print. Gallery Berinson, Berlin.



Figure 12: Peiffer Watenphul, Max. Untitled (Young Italian Man), 1931, silver gelatin print, Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 13: Loew, Heinz. Dopplporträt Loew und Trinkaus Atelier. 1927. silver gelatin print. Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 13: Caro-Delvalle, Henry.. Brunette at the Mirror, 1906. Public Domaine.



Figure 15: Magaud, Antoine, A Kiss in the Glass, 1885. Etching. Public Domaine.



Figure 16: Muche, Georg, Reflections in a Convex Mirror, 1925. Silver gelatin print, Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 17: Brandt, Maryanne, Untitled (Self-Portrait with a Camera). 1927. Silver gelatin print. Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 18: Henri, Florence. Selbst-Portrait. 1928. silver gelatin print. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France.



Figure 19: Henri, Florence. Man looking in a mirror. 1928. silver gelatin print. San Francisco Museum of modern Art, San Francisco, CA.



Figure 20: Moholy, Lucia. Portrait of Florence Henri, 1927. Silver gelatin print. Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, TX.



Figure 21: Henri, Florence. Composition, 1923, Gauche on paper. Private Collection



Figure 22: Henri, Florence. Portrait of Charley. 1927/28. silver gelatin print. Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Geona Italy.



Figure 23: Henri, Florence, Portrait de Margarete Schall, 1927/28 Gelatin print, Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Genoa Italy.

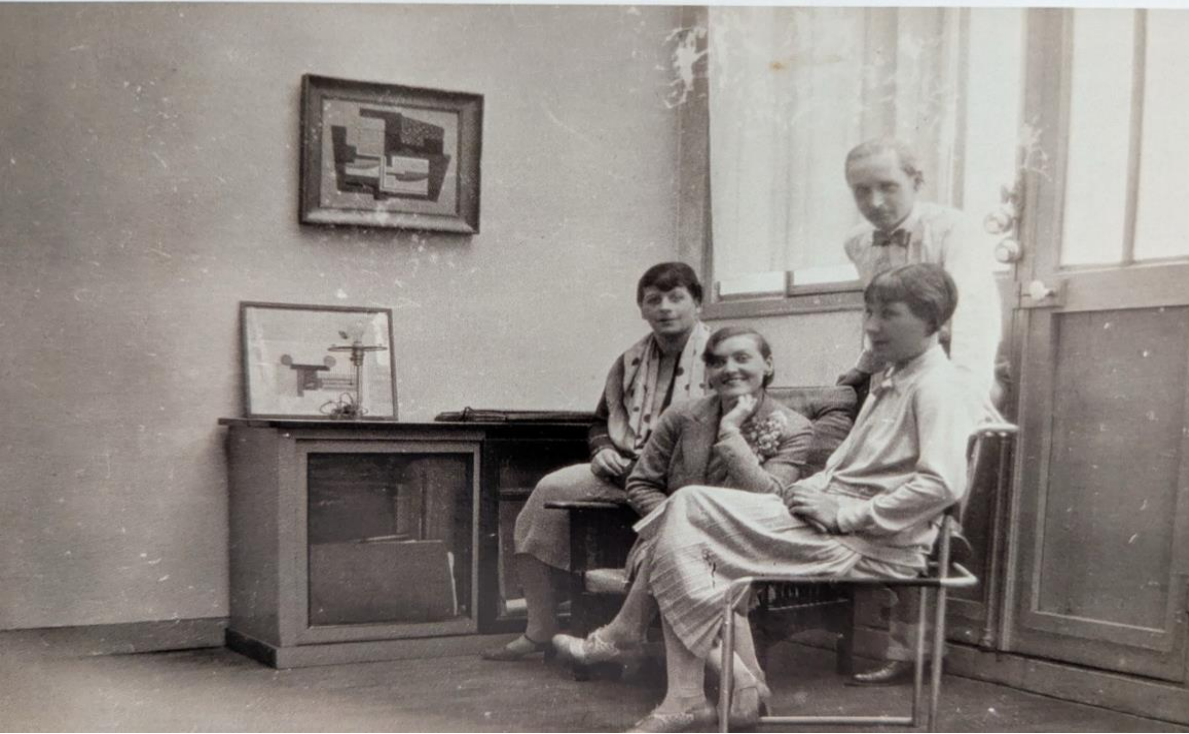


Figure 24: Unknown, Florence Henri, Georg Mucbe and two Friends. 1928, Silver Gelatin Print, Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Genoa Italy.



Figure 25: Unknown, At Piet Mondrain's House, 1929, Silver Gelatin Print, Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Genoa Italy.



Figure 26: Unknown. Dinner at the Voltaire. 1928/29. Private Collection.



Figure 27: Henri, Florence. Cover for Für die Frau. supplemental advertising photograph. 1935. Galerie de France, Paris, France.

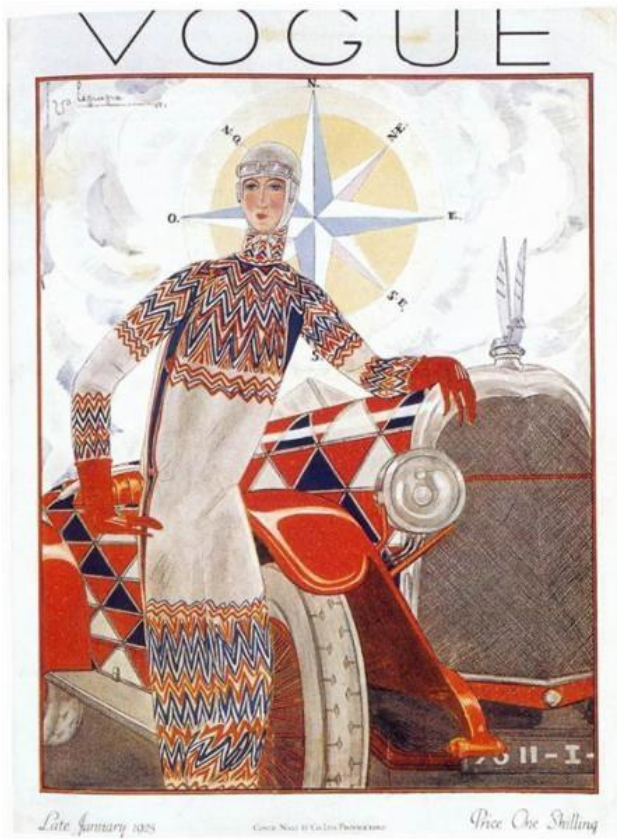


Figure 28: Lepape, George. Sonia Delaunay's dress design for Vogue.1925. Public Domaine.



Figure 29: Delaunay, Sonia. Triangle Dress sketch. c 1930. private collection.



Figure 30: Henri, Florence. Untitled. c. 1930. gelatin silver print. private collection.



Figure 31: Henri, Florence. Untitled (woman with pock-marked skin). 1930. silver gelatin print. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, France.



Figure 32: Henri, Florence. Lore. 1937 silver gelatin print. Galería Martini & Ronchetti, Genoa, Italy.



Figure 33: Krull, Germaine. Florence Henri.c.1920. Private collection.



Figure 34: Krull, Germaine. Marcelle Romée. 1930, silver gelatin print. Private Collection.



Figure 35: Henri, Florence. Portrait Composition. 1930. silver gelatin print. Australian National Gallery, Canberra, Australia.



Figure 36: Henri, Florence. Figure Composition. 1930. silver gelatin print. The Robert Koch Gallery San Francisco CA



Figure 37: Henri, Florence. Portrait Composition (Grete Willers). 1930. silver gelatin print. Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Genoa, Italy.



Figure 38: Krull, Germaine. Les Amies. 1924. silver gelatin print. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.



Figure 39: Peiffer Wattenphul, Max. Florence Henri. c. 1930. silver gelatin print. Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 40: Peiffer Wattenphul, Max. Florence Henri. c.1931. silver gelatin print. Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 41 :Henri, Florence, Self-Portrait. 1938. Silver Gelatin Print. Musee National d'Art, Paris.



Figure 42: Henri, Florence. Portrait of Pierre Minet. 1938. silver gelatin print. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, France.



Figure 43: Henri Florence. Composition, Auto-portrait. 1938. silver gelatin print. Florence Henri archives, Martini & Ronchetti Galeria, Genoa, Italy.

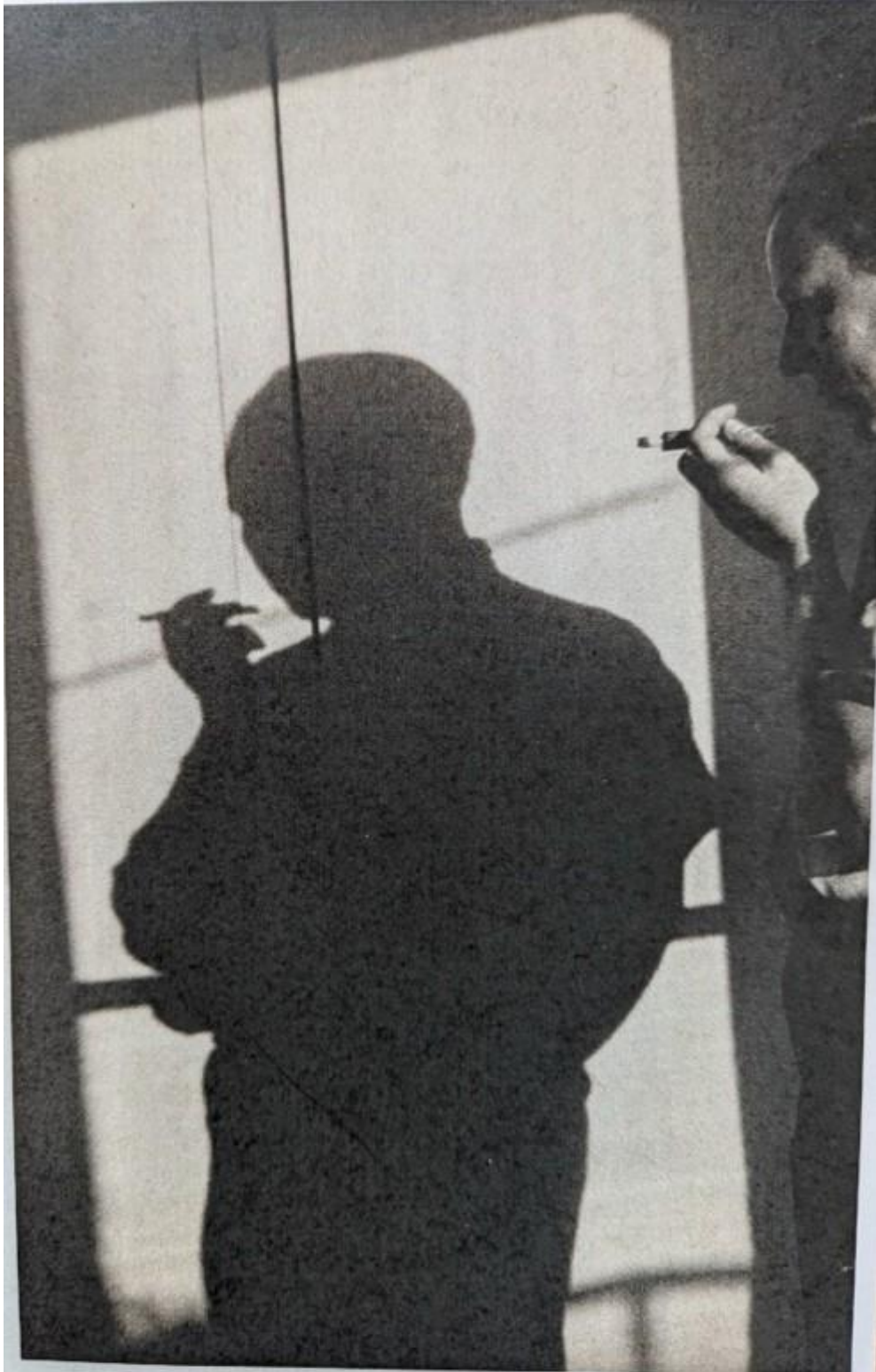


Figure 44: Henri, Florence. Composition Portrait. 1938, Florence Henri Archive, Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Genoa, Italy.