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TRUANT OF HEAVEN *THE ARTIST* MINA LOY

JENNIFER R. GROSS

Not since Marcel Duchamp curated her final one-person exhibition in New York at the Bodley Gallery in 1959 has the artist Mina Loy risen above the obscuring cloud of mystery and notoriety that settled around her in 1914 when her writing was first published in *Camera Work* (fig. 1.1) and *Trend* (fig. 1.2). While literary historians have embraced the breadth and force of her written work,[1] art historians have yet to fully acknowledge the modern marvel that was Mina Loy. Her omnivorous creativity defied categorization, and her superlative, complex persona deflected focus. The artist Mina Loy was at once a shooting star, a lunar beacon, and a constellation unto herself.

While Loy the poet is known to the world, Loy the artist and cultural pollinator, who hybridized her ideas across media as a dedicated and innovative painter, portraitist, inventor, and industrial and fashion designer, remains less recognized. In fact, an understanding of the breadth of the term *artist* as defined by Loy and her peers stands to enrich the definition of modernism in the twentieth century as a phenomenon that was more aesthetically nuanced, media fluid, and culturally inclusive.

It is not a surprise that a woman of keen intellect and an unclassifiable aesthetic has remained an anomaly. She was a true Other, as published in *Others* magazine (fig. 1.3) by Alfred Kreymborg in 1915. She was a reluctant citizen of the British Empire, an assimilated Jew, a resident alien in Italy and France, and finally a naturalized American citizen. She spoke and wrote in four languages. If Loy had been born fifty years later, there is little doubt her polymathic aspirations would have found more enabling reception. The effervescent web of Loy's expression hung on what many identified as her "cerebral" nature. The term was applied by critics to her poetry as well as to her much desired dinner conversation. The machinations of Loy's intellect were precise and

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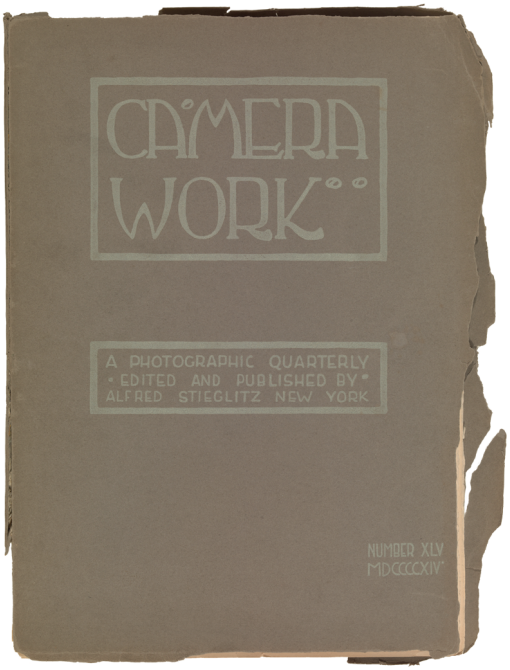

FIG. 1.1

Alfred Stieglitz, ed., *Camera Work* 45, January 1914. Private collection.

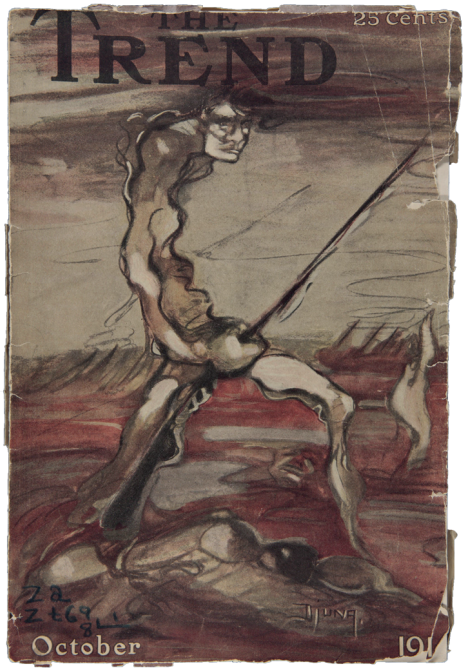

FIG. 1.2

Djuna Barnes, *Trend Magazine* 8, October 1914 (cover). Trend Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library.

unrelenting in their pursuit of truth. She was in fact too smart for her own good. To quote Loy's own "Feminist Manifesto" of 1914, included in this volume,"Leave off looking to men to find out what you are *not*. Seek within yourselves to find out what you *are*. As conditions are at present constituted you have the choice between Parasitism, Prostitution, or Negation." Loy elected negation.

Loy further positioned herself as an outlier in her modernist milieu through her ardent theism,[2] which affirmed her belief that to be an artist was a divine calling.[3] An adherent to Christian Science, Loy blended her belief in God with her belief in science, resolving that the former was a natural evolutionary progression of the latter, which would lead to the redemption of humanity.[4]

She was an ephemeral presence in avant-garde circles, partially because she was tremendously busy—running a business; raising her children;[5] writing poetry, prose, plays, and criticism; painting; and inventing—and also because she was often in retreat, managing the depression that came upon her in waves throughout her life. Her fortitude and authenticity as an artist were why Duchamp and the remainder of her Parisian (1923–36) cohort—Djuna Barnes, Robert Coates, Max Ernst, and Peggy Guggenheim—all attended Loy's Bodley exhibit in her absence. It was their salute to a fellow art warrior. Loy had remained true to her call as an artist and fought nobly against the world and its conventions, the heavens, and her circumstance. She was truly a modern (fig. 1.4).

*

If *painter* was Mina Loy's first and lifelong self-identification, her sustained preoccupation was reckoning with the human condition.[6] She measured her personal experiences against the social conventions that constrained her, and

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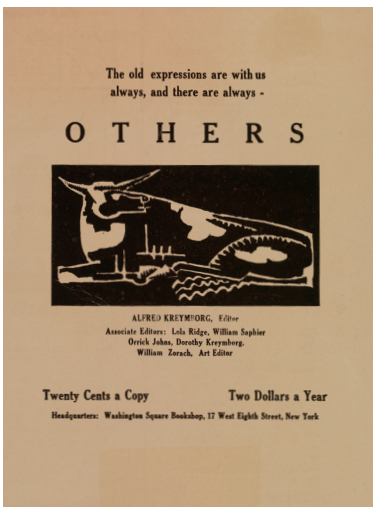

FIG. 1.3

Advertisement for *Others* magazine, ca. 1915–19. Private collection.



FIG. 1.4

George Platt Lynes, *Mina Loy*, 1931, printed 1959. Gelatin silver print on paper, 6½ × 4½ in. (16.6 × 11.6 cm) (image/paper); 14 × 11 in. (35.6 × 28 cm) (mount). Art Institute of Chicago, Photography Expense Fund (1960.509).

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she fought to imagine herself anew through her art.[7] What scholar Samuel French Morse has aptly written of her literary style also applies to her visual work: "The originality of Mina Loy is not merely a matter of typography or syntactical eccentricity; it seems to derive from a peculiar combination of fantasy and savagery ... a relentless attack on the ready-made explanations of human wastefulness."[8] In both artistic practices, she sought to make sense of herself and others[9] against the backdrops of her immediate context and the universe. Her creative process was fueled by the interplay of simultaneity, painting and writing harmonizing on key. "The two, writing and painting, go together with me," she wrote Julien Levy when working on her 1933 exhibition at his gallery.[10] As a child, art enabled Loy to create a fantasy world she longed to inhabit. She described her early capacity to draw as sourced in her imagination rather than the world: "I could draw anything I longed to see provided I had nothing to look at."[11] During her student years and into midlife, this imaginative practice was redirected and disciplined through her close observation of people, particularly women, resulting in a highly developed capacity as a portraitist and as a recorder of genre scenes depicting women's roles in society.



FIG 1.5

Unidentified photographer, *Sigmund Lowy*, ca. 1890. Gelatin silver print on paper. Location unknown.

As a young woman growing up in London, Mina Lowy could not reconcile her identity as the daughter of a nonobservant Jewish immigrant father and a conservative English mother in the socially constraining, middle-class world of Victorian England. Her father, Sigmund Lowy (fig. 1.5), a tailor, had married Mina's mother, Julia Bryan, under duress, as she became pregnant with Mina during their brief courtship. Mina's mother was socially timorous and struggled to keep her daughters in standing with the social conventions their financial means afforded (fig. 1.6). Mina's precociousness was an enigma to her mother, and they remained at cross-purposes throughout their lives.[12] Her father, however, enabled Mina to escape by enrolling her in art school.[13] Once out of the house, Mina's independent streak gained momentum, as she discovered a world that affirmed her doubts about conventional society and revealed she had inherited her father's artistic inclinations. The following year, at the age of seventeen, she moved on to study in Munich at the Kunstlerien Verein. She was on her way to becoming an artist.

In 1903, after a reluctant return to London, Loy moved to Paris to study at the Académie Colarossi. It was an international school, enabling Loy to socialize with both English and American students. The study of plaster casts and cadavers was part of the curriculum, even for women, and Loy further developed her drawing practice.[14] At Colarossi she met Wyndham Lewis and Jules Pascin, who would later inspire her writing and influence her burgeoning modernism. Loy recalled her student days (fig. 1.7, fig. 1.8) in a letter to Carl Van Vechten in 1915:

> Paris in those days for everyone meant just learning to love the dear old impressionists—I had Manet and Monet on the spot—but Degas frightened me for a year—and I shall always feel grateful to the day I first "saw" the early Renoirs—But the most beautiful things in Paris were the Fêtes—and the Bal Bullier.[15]

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FIG. 1.6

Unidentified photographer, *Mina Loy as a Girl*, ca. 1886. Gelatin silver print on paper, 7⅞ × 4¾ in. (20 × 12 cm). Private collection.

FIG. 1.7

Stephen Haweis, *Mina Loy*, ca. 1905. Gelatin silver print on paper, 5 7⁄16 × 3⅛ in. (13.8 × 8 cm). Private collection.

Loy found Paris enchanting, but life would not allow her to settle there for another decade and a half. Within the year she married a fellow English student, Stephen Haweis (fig. 1.9), a marriage they agreed suited them socially, if not amorously, after their discovery that Loy was pregnant. Their marriage freed Mina from the threat of her return to a stifling life in England, and her allowance would support them both. Haweis had a reputable family name, which would secure them a reasonable level of entrée in the world, and he was shrewd at negotiating the social and economic complexities of the art world. He admired Mina as an artist and was astonished to have secured such a beautiful and talented wife. This pride soon soured into humiliation, however, when he realized Loy surpassed him intellectually and artistically. Within the year he became involved in an affair.

Time revealed that Loy was naive about her legal standing in their arrangement, which empowered her husband and left her subject to his demands, under the threat that he would expose their continued deception to her father that they had a harmonious union. For a decade, Haweis resisted Loy's request for a divorce in order to receive a portion of her family allowance. During these years he ably negotiated both of their careers. He mostly likely secured her first one-person exhibition at Carfax Gallery in London in 1912. Later he entered her drawings in shows in America: one, in 1914, at the Architectural League of New York; and one, in 1915, in the Pan-American Exhibition in San Francisco.[16]

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FIG. 1.8

Henri Joel Le Savoureux, *Stephen Haweis and Mina Loy in Art School*, c. 1905. Photograph on paper. Location unknown.

Early in their marriage, Haweis was successful as a photographer, opening an art photography business with a partner named Henry Coles. They secured Auguste Rodin as their client, producing over two hundred photographs of his sculptures. Their work was widely acclaimed, and their images of Rodin's *Balzac*, famously printed by Alfred Stieglitz in *Camera Work*, are renowned. Haweis photographed his wife around 1905, and these images stand as some of the most captivating made of her. One portrait depicts her holding a small Rodin sculpture in one hand, another provocatively smoking, and another in a sensuous full-length view of her nude back, her long hair falling to the floor. In all, Loy does not appear as a passive muse, but a sexually aware collaborator (figs. 1.10, 1.11, 1.12, 1.13).[17]

Through Haweis's connections, the couple made the acquaintance of Walter Sickert and critic George Moore. They met the protofeminist writer Colette, whose personal life may have contributed to Mina's rapid updating of her own perspective on social conventions. Mina continued to paint and draw at home during her pregnancy. She also began to create millinery and clothing designs. In his autobiography, Haweis credited Loy for introducing to Paris the uncorseted profiles (fig. 1.14) for women that later made designer Paul Poiret famous, her acumen for detail, texture, and color in cloth a certain inheritance from her father.

In May 1904, the couple's daughter Oda was born, and six of Loy's watercolors were selected for the Salon d'Automne. Loy registered for the salon

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FIG. 1.9

Mina Loy, *Portrait of Stephen Haweis*, ca. 1905. Pencil on paper. Mina Loy Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

FIG. 1.10

Stephen Haweis, *Mina Loy Holding Auguste Rodin Sculpture*, ca. 1905–9. Gelatin silver print on paper, 5 × 8 in. (12.7 × 20.32 cm). Private collection.

FIG. 1.11

Stephen Haweis, *Mina Loy*, ca. 1905. Gelatin silver print on paper, 7 × 5 in. (17.78 × 12.7 cm). Private collection.



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FIG. 1.12

Stephen Haweis, *Mina Loy*, ca. 1905–9. Gelatin silver print on paper, 7 × 5 in. (17.78 × 12.7 cm). Private collection.

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FIG. 1.13

Stephen Haweis, *Mina Loy*, ca. 1905–9. Gelatin silver print on paper, 10 × 8 in. (25.4 × 20.32 cm). Private collection.

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FIG. 1.14

Mina Loy, *Fashion Designs*, ca. 1915. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 14 × 20½ in. (35.56 × 52.07 cm). Private collection.

as Mina Loy rather than using the surname Haweis,[18] or Lowy. She saw herself as a stand-alone entity without the need for patriarchal oversight or entrée. She was twenty-two. Her work was subsequently exhibited at the Salon d'Automne 1905, 1906, 1913, and 1923 (fig. 1.15). She was elected a member of its drawing society in 1906 and served as a juror in 1912 (fig. 1.16).

Throughout 1904 and 1905 Loy's domestic environment occupied her paintings *Objects*, *La Guitare*, *La Dispute*, *Devant le miroir*, and *La Mere*.[19] She tended attentively to Oda, but the baby contracted meningitis and died on the anniversary of her first birthday. The loss was profound for Loy. Her grief marked her countenance, which she recorded in a self-portrait that year. In *Devant le miroir*, 1905 (fig. 1.17), Loy depicted herself with a blank, dull gaze, a somber self-regard. She was ever distant, as Djuna Barnes would one day describe her in the opening lines of *Dusie*, the eponymously titled short story about her dear friend: "It is about Dusie, Madame, she was very young ... absent and so pale. ... She was *dégagé*, but you could not know her well."[20] Loy depicted herself as a good Victorian, with hat in place, or possibly as if she had caught sight of herself in the mirror, and had quickly recorded this apparition of her sorrow. The drawing captures an indifferent air that Loy would

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FIG. 1.15

Mina Loy, *Women in Carriage*, ca. 1900. Mixed media on paper, 8 × 8 in. (27.32 × 20.32 cm). From the collection of J. and J. Gordon.

FIG. 1.16

Mina Loy, *Sociétaire du Salon d'Automne Paris calling card*, n.d. Ink on paper, 2 × 3½ in. (5.08 × 8.89 cm). From the collection of J. and J. Gordon.

retain throughout her life, which Natalie Barney wrote famously of, decades later, after Mina's return to Paris: "Hasn't she already evolved out of this world of appearances: she walks as though the angels were already nibbling at her heels. But, meanwhile, she wears a blind gaze among us as though she has contemplated the Gorgon—a look as if struck with indifference. Her beauty has receded into itself. She offers us this *Apology of Genius*, as a whole prismatic poetry that plays with this world stopped in density, from which, thanks to some perception of a fourth dimension, she escapes."[21]

Though Mina found Oda's death devastating, her response was to strike out professionally and personally against the limits of her life. In the year leading up to Oda's death, she had felt shut in at home as a young mother and artist, reliant on her husband's contacts to move her name forward. She took matters into her own hands by radicalizing her work. She created a body of small watercolors that were selected for the 1906 Salon d'Automne. The images were rooted in real life but had been transformed through her imagination to introduce more complex and emotional underpinnings of experience.

Carl Van Vechten described Loy's journey from observation to transformation in the genesis of two of these early paintings in *Rogue* in 1915.

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FIG 1.17

Mina Loy, *Devant le miroir*, ca. 1905. Graphite on brown paper mounted on cardboard, 16 × 13 in. (40.64 × 33.02 cm). Private collection.

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FIG. 1.18

Mina Loy, *L'Amour dorloté par les belles dames*, 1906. Watercolor on paper, 15½ × 22¼ in. (39.37 × 56.52 cm). Private collection.

Today his account stands as one of few records of Loy's work process at the time and provides insight into the creation of one of Loy's most acclaimed and exhibited works, *L'Amour dorloté par les belles dames* (fig. 1.18).

> The paintings of Mina Loy seem to the beholder the strange creations of a vagrant fancy. I remember one picture of hers in which an Indian girl stands poised before an oriental palace, the most fantastic of palaces, it would seem. But the artist explained to me that it was simply the façade of Hagenbeck's menagerie in Berlin, seen with an imaginative eye. The girl was a model. ... One day on the beach at the Lido she saw a young man in a bathing suit lying stretched on the sand with his head in the lap of a beautiful woman. Other women surrounded the two. The group immediately suggested a composition to her. She went home and painted. She took the young man's bathing suit off and the women she dressed in lovely floating robes, and she called the picture, *L'Amour dorloté par les belles dames*.[22]

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There is uncertainty as to whether the original title of the work is "l'Amour dorloté *pas* les Belles Dames," which is absent the necessary negation "ne" to translate to "Love does not coddle the beautiful ladies" or "l'Amour dorloté *par* les Belles Dames," "Love pampered by the beautiful ladies." The first seems more apt to Loy's experience. While the women gawk at the slender, winged Eros/Cupid/Icarus[23] who has fallen from the heavens into their midst, they provide no ministrations to him. Loy's grammar was creative even in her native tongue, so the interpretation and translation remain with the viewer. In the foreground, a detached figure gazes into the distance, unaffected by the commotion behind her, absorbed in wistful thought.

The refinement and animation of detail is breathtaking in this painting and other works of this period, such as *La Maison en Papier* (fig. 1.19). Loy's distinctive use of color holds these compositions in coherence and focuses the viewer's attention on every fine detail. She was invited to be a *sociétaire*, a member of the Salon d'Automne drawing society that year, a recognition of which she would remain proud all her life.

Loy's submissions to the 1906 Salon d'Automne were noted by the curator and critic Paul Jamot in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* as evoking the work of some of the most worldly, outrageous, even pornographic artists of the day, those who dared to represent the banal and carnal considerations of society. Jamot's voice was not an incidental one in Paris, as he was to become the curator of the department of painting at the Louvre from 1927 to 1939. He wrote, "Miss Mina Loy who, in her strange watercolors where are combined Guy, Rops, and Beardsley, shows us ambiguous ephebes whose nudity is caressed by ladies in the furbelows of 1885."[24]

Mina Loy was heralded in excellent company, included in a coterie that was integral to defining the modern in Paris. She was identified not as a mere postimpressionist but as a Decadent painter. She had not debuted as a "lady," a distinction in which Loy took great pride. She had empowered her own vision of the world by representing women through a woman's eyes. For the first twenty years of her career, Loy would primarily paint such small-scale genre scenes depicting women in fanciful or actual social contexts and then women at work, including weavers, hat makers, and performers. Her process of transforming her observations of the world through her imagination was leading her toward becoming a modern painter.

Oda's death also energized her to move forward with her personal life. She addressed the neurasthenia brought on by her grief, seeing a young friend who was a psychiatrist and an amateur photographer, Dr. Henri Joel Le Savoureux. We do not know if his treatment ameliorated her symptoms, but their friendship led to an affair. That summer Mina became pregnant. When Haweis learned of her condition he made the claim that the circumstance demanded they strike a new deal in their marriage, one in which he would "accept" the child as his own on the conditions that he and Mina leave Paris, and that she give him another child. Haweis's edict forced Loy to leave behind her extraordinary artistic debut.

Mina and Stephen committed to continuing the pretense of their marriage in Italy. Florence had a strong English expatriate community that

FIG. 1.19

Mina Loy, *La Maison en Papier*, 1906. Gouache and graphite on paper, 19¾ × 12½ in. (50.17 × 31.75 cm). Private collection.

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FIG. 1.20

Mina Loy, *Maternity*, 1935. Terracotta sculpture, 8½ × 3½ in. (21.59 × 8.89 cm). Private collection.

FIG. 1.21

Unidentified photographer, *Mina and Joella*, 1909. Gelatin silver print on paper, 3⅜ × 3⅛ in. (8.5 × 8 cm). Private collection.

FIG. 1.22

Unidentified photographer, *Mina and Joella in Florence*, ca. 1908. Gelatin silver print on paper, 5⅛ × 7 in. (13 × 17.8 cm). Private collection.

Haweis believed would be good for their careers. A daughter, Joella, was born in July. Mina quickly became pregnant with a son, Giles, who was born early in 1909 (fig. 1.20). Emulating Loy's upbringing, the couple employed a nurse named Giulia who oversaw the children's care full-time for the next twelve years. During these years, a dramatic event took place that permanently reoriented Loy's perspective on life. Joella became ill with an infant paralysis that worsened into a coma.[25] In desperation, Mina turned to a Christian Scientist practitioner active in Florence for her healing. Joella (figs. 1.21, 1.22) recovered miraculously, and Mina became a person of faith, setting her on a course to develop a complex belief system that would position her outside of mainstream modernist thought for the rest of her life. Loy believed in God and an ordered universe. Her faith infused her art and writing and was vital to her perseverance through the many difficulties she was yet to encounter.

Loy's drawings from these years are of family, friends, and the Italian street peasants (fig. 1.23). This was the beginning of her lifelong consideration of society's *refusé*, in whose limited options she saw mirrored her own circumstance. Women remained the focus of her art (fig. 1.24). Loy's picture *The Beach*, 1907 (fig. 1.25), shows the resort Forte dei Marmi, where Mina and Stephen would deposit the children to escape Florence's heat in summer. While this work has previously been dated to 1907, it is likely that Joella and Giles were the models for the children at play, which would date the work to 1911 or later. The scene is artistically noteworthy for Loy's innovative introduction of time into the composition by depicting the central character as a woman

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at various stages of womanhood; an adult in the changing tent, a girl coming of age, and a teenager.

Loy had tested this compositional device in *L'Amour dorloté par les belles dames*, 1906, by placing the detached, contemplative seated figure in the foreground. In each work, a single figure looks provocatively out of the composition to engage the viewer, identifying the scene not solely as a depiction of the world, but also as a psychological consideration: Loy's contemplation of herself as a young woman reckoning with her identity beyond her circumstance. In both works the central characters are identifiable as Loy by their distinct eyebrows, which Loy claimed were her strongest feature. The three long-limbed, statuesque figures are repeated in a comparable work, *La Maison des Bains* (fig. 1.26), 1913.

Preoccupied by the humiliation of her marriage and her poor health, Loy maintained a subdued presence in Florence until the appearance of the American heiress Mabel Dodge (fig. 1.27) in 1910. Over the next years, through the artistic and literary alliances she formed through the salon gatherings at Dodge's Villa Curonia and through her separation from Haweis, who began traveling abroad, Loy blossomed (fig. 1.28, fig. 1.29, fig. 1.30).[26] She characterized her life as moving slowly from one "of shilly-shallying shyness ... to expansiveness under the luxury of Mabel Dodge's flowering trees."[27] Through the influx of visitors to Villa Curonia, Loy began to encounter her first modernists, those whose individuality and dissonance with tradition rang true to her own creative being.

Early accounts of Loy report her holding intellectual court at Villa Curonia. In his thinly veiled autobiography *Peter Whiffle: His Life and Works*, Carl Van Vechten recounts a dinner scene at the villa of Edith Dale (a.k.a. Mabel Dodge), in which Loy trounced a flushed contessa's theories of art as a form of black magic with a complex synopsis of literary authors anchoring her rebuttal.[28] "'Art is a protest,' corrected Mina Loy. 'Each artist is protesting against something: Hardy, against life itself; Shaw, against shams; Flaubert, against slipshod workmanship; George Moore, against prudery; Cunninghame Graham, against civilization; Arthur Machen, against reality; Theodore Dreiser, against style.'" While raising children and making art, Loy was keeping up with her reading, and she had begun to add the title of author to her byline.

She and Dodge became fast friends and social allies. Dodge was a remarkable cultural benefactor. Loy constantly turned to Dodge to promote her writing or art (fig. 1.31, fig. 1.32). Dodge reported Loy as making dark genre paintings.[29] The titles of Loy's work of this period, all lost, indicate the trite tenor of her life: *Ladies Fishing*, *Ladies Watching a Ballet*, *Ladies at Tea*, *The Little Carnival*, *Voyageurs*, and *The Heart Shop*.[30]

The next few years marked Loy's transformation and ascendence into public view as a modernist. Her enlightenment came through her introduction in Florence to two remarkably dissimilar sources: Gertrude Stein in 1911, and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1914. It was a formal letter of introduction from Colarossi student Alice Wood that enabled Mina to invite Stein and Alice Toklas to the home her father had bought her young family the previous year



FIG. 1.23

Mina Loy, Untitled drawing, published in *Crapouillet*, ca. 1915. Private collection.

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FIG. 1.24

Mina Loy, *Fille en robe rouge*, 1913. Watercolor with graphite, 19½ × 15½ in. (49.53 × 39.37 cm). Private collection.

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FIG. 1.25

Mina Loy, *The Beach*, ca. 1911. Watercolor and graphite on paper, 20 × 25 in. (50.8 × 63.5 cm). Private collection.

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FIG. 1.26

Mina Loy, *Maison des bains au Forte dei Marmi*, ca. 1913. Gouache and ink with traces of graphite on paper mounted on cardboard, 13¾ × 17½ in. (34.93 × 44.45 cm). Private collection.

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FIG. 1.27

Unidentified photographer, *Portrait of Mabel Dodge, Arcetri*, ca. 1913. Gelatin silver print. Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.



(fig. 1.33).[31] Toklas wrote of their meeting that "a friendship with her commenced that lasted over the years," describing Mina as "beautiful, intelligent, sympathetic and gay."[32] It would continue through the 1920s and 1930s when they all lived in Paris.[33] Stein's writing was of immediate interest to Loy, and Stein shared early versions of manuscripts, including *The Making of Americans*, to which Loy responded intuitively and intelligently. Years later Stein wrote, "Mina Loy ... was able to understand without the commas. She has always been able to understand."[34]

Loy's conversion to modernism was modeled through her own writing in response to Stein's work. This method of self-education would be the first of many such "apprenticeships" through which Loy schooled herself in modernist thinking and forms and discovered her personal expression in response to other artists' work, including that of Constantin Brancusi, Wyndham Lewis, and Edgar Allan Poe (please see Ann Lauterbach's essay in this volume.). Her comprehension of the tenets of modernism as a channeling of intuitive responses to her own experience became paramount. As she wrote, "The flux of life is pouring its aesthetic aspect into your eyes, your ears—and you ignore it because you are looking for your canons of beauty in some sort of frame or

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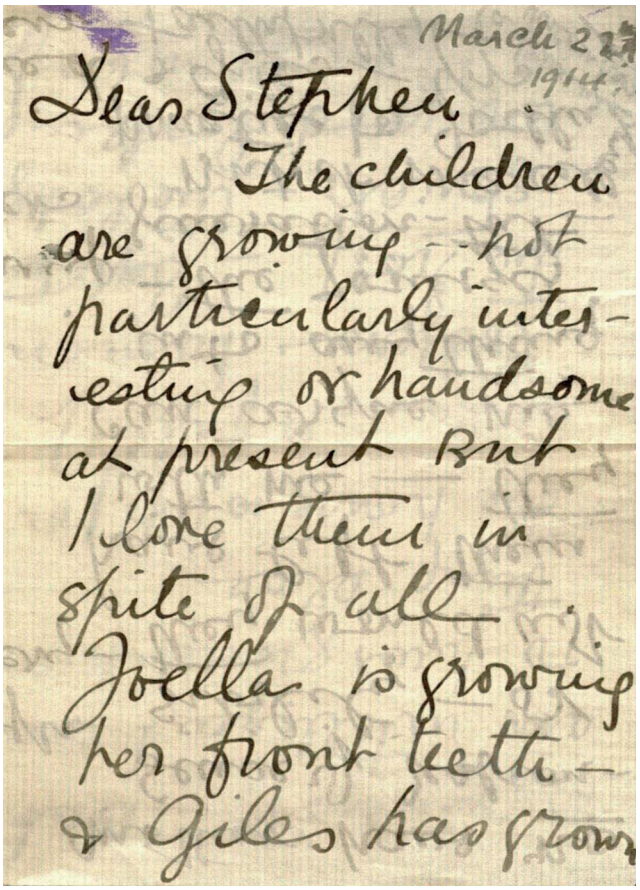
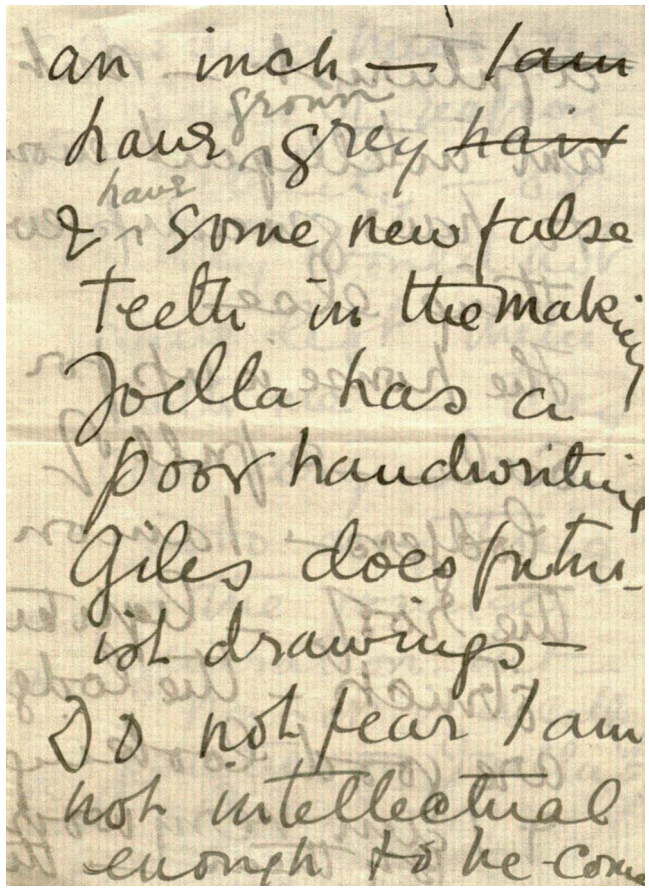
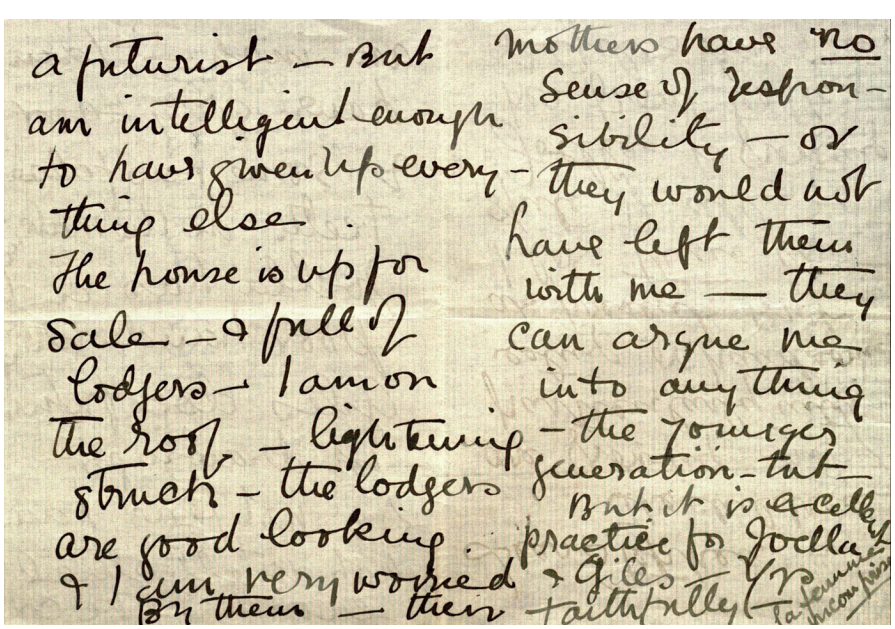


March 22
1914

Dear Stephen
The children are growing — not particularly interesting or handsome at present but I love them in spite of all. Joella is growing her front teeth — & Giles has grown



an inch — I am have grown grey ~~hair~~ & have some new false teeth in the making. Joella has a poor handwriting. Giles does futurist drawings — Do not fear I am not intellectual enough to be-come



a futurist — but am intelligent enough to have given up every-thing else. The house is up for sale — & full of lodgers — I am on the roof — lightening struck — the lodgers are good looking. & I am very worried By them — their mothers have no sense of responsibility — or they would not have left them with me — they can argue me into anything — the younger generation — tut — But it is a cellent practice for Joella & Giles — Yrs faithfully (la femme incomprise)

FIGS. 1.28–1.30

Mina Loy letter to Stephen Haweis, March 22 or 27, 1914. Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

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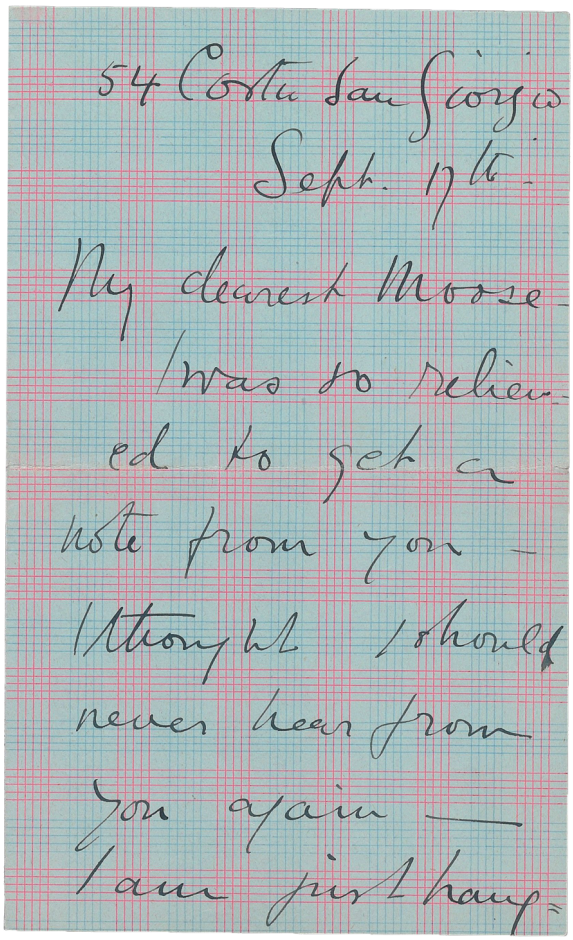
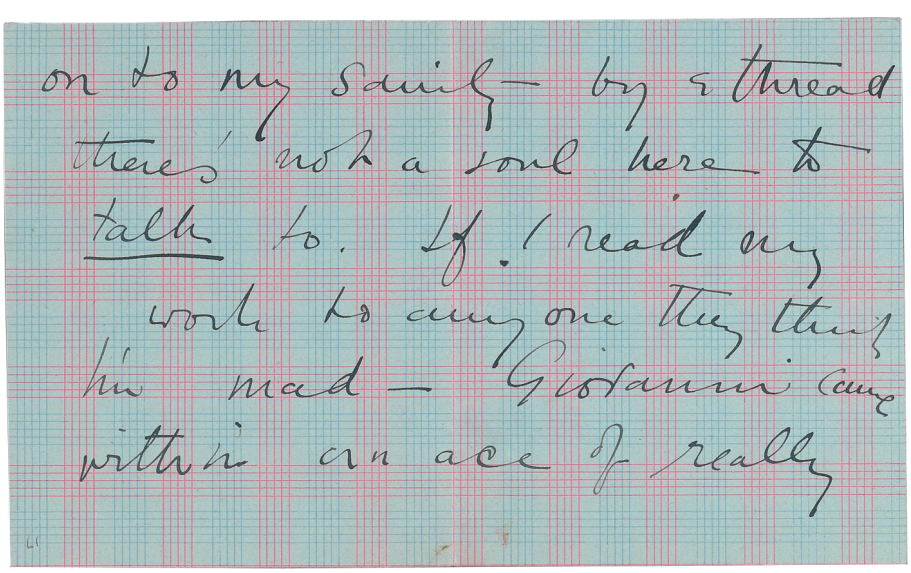

54 Corso San Giorgio
Sept. 17th.
My dearest Moose—
I was so relieved to get a note from you—
I thought I should never hear from you again—
I am just hap-


on to my soul— by a thread there's not a soul here to talk to. If I read my work to anyone they think I'm mad— Giovanni came within an ace of really

FIGS. 1.31–1.32

Mina Loy letter to Mabel Dodge (details), September 17, ca. 1910. Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library.

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FIG. 1.33

Unidentified artist, *Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas and Basket in France*, ca. 1944. Gelatin silver print. Bancroft Library Portrait Collection, University of California, Berkeley.

glass case or tradition. Modernism says: Why not each one of us, scholar or bricklayer, pleasurably realize all that is impressing itself upon our subconscious, the thousand odds and ends which make up your sensory everyday life?"[35] Stein's fracturing of linguistic tradition was a natural progression of Loy's daily experience simultaneously navigating the use of English, French, German, and Italian in conversation as well as in her mind.

Stein's creative autonomy, uncompromising voice, and nontraditional lesbian household modeled for Loy the life of an independent woman artist. Loy became an advocate for Stein, bringing her unpublished work to New York in 1920, to read at Société Anonyme, Inc., the artists' museum formed by Katherine Dreier, Duchamp, and Man Ray. Loy drew Stein's portrait, which Stein was rumored to have signed in approval. Loy also wrote a critical analysis of Stein's work in 1929 (fig. 1.34). The essay was run as a two-part letter to Ford Madox Ford in the *Transatlantic Review* (fig. 1.35) and included a poem dedicated to Gertrude Stein casting her as the Madame Curie of language, who saved the world with her extractions.

Curie
of the laboratory
of vocabulary
    she crushed
the tonnage
of consciousness
congealed to phases
    to extract
a radium of the word[36]

In her essay, Loy identified modernism as an energetic force that reached across disciplines through visionaries including Cezanne, Brancusi, and Stein.

In Stein's work Loy found the articulation of her own outcry against tradition and the narcoleptic haze of everyday life. "The pragmatic value of modernism lies in its tremendous recognition of the compensation due to the spirit of democracy. Modernism is a prophet crying in the wilderness of stabilized nature that humanity is wasting its aesthetic time. For there is a considerable extension of time between the visits to the picture gallery, the museum, the library. It asks 'what is happening to your aesthetic consciousness during the long long intervals?' "[37] Loy answered her own call, awaking from her creative slumber, pen in hand.

During the years of Loy's ascendency as a writer, she also made hats and designed clothes and covers for fashion magazines. She established a regular practice of drawing portraits, for which she became well regarded, exhibiting these in two exhibitions in America in 1925. Portrait drawing was a vehicle for acute observation. Her early subjects included Stein; her Italian psychiatrist friend Roberto Assagioli; and Carl Van Vechten (fig. 1.36). Later subjects included Marianne Moore, Constantin Brancusi, Sigmund Freud (fig. 1.37),

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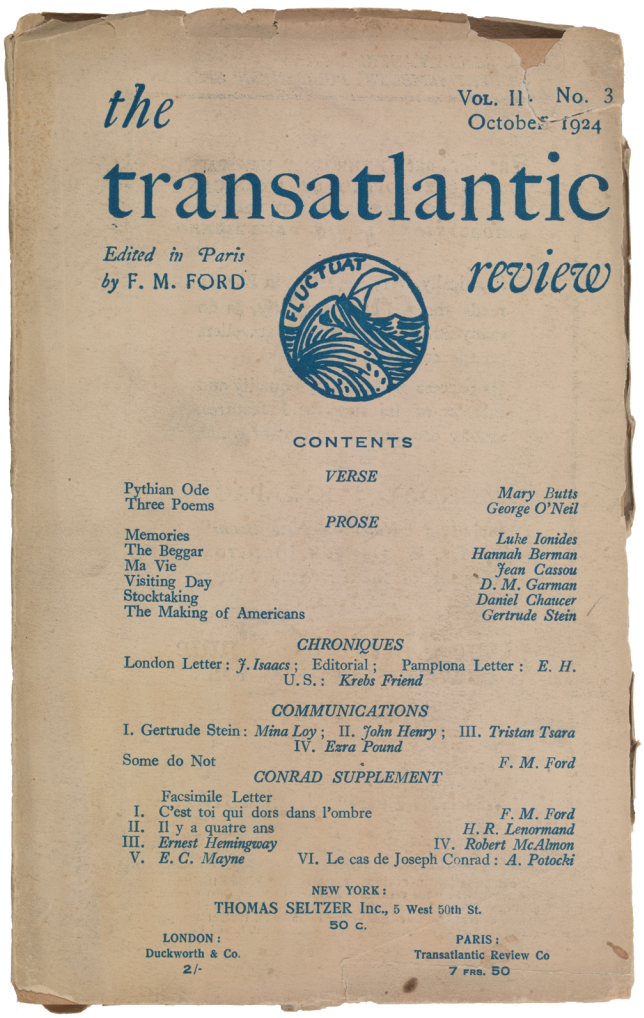

the transatlantic review

Vol. II. No. 3
October 1924

Edited in Paris by F. M. FORD

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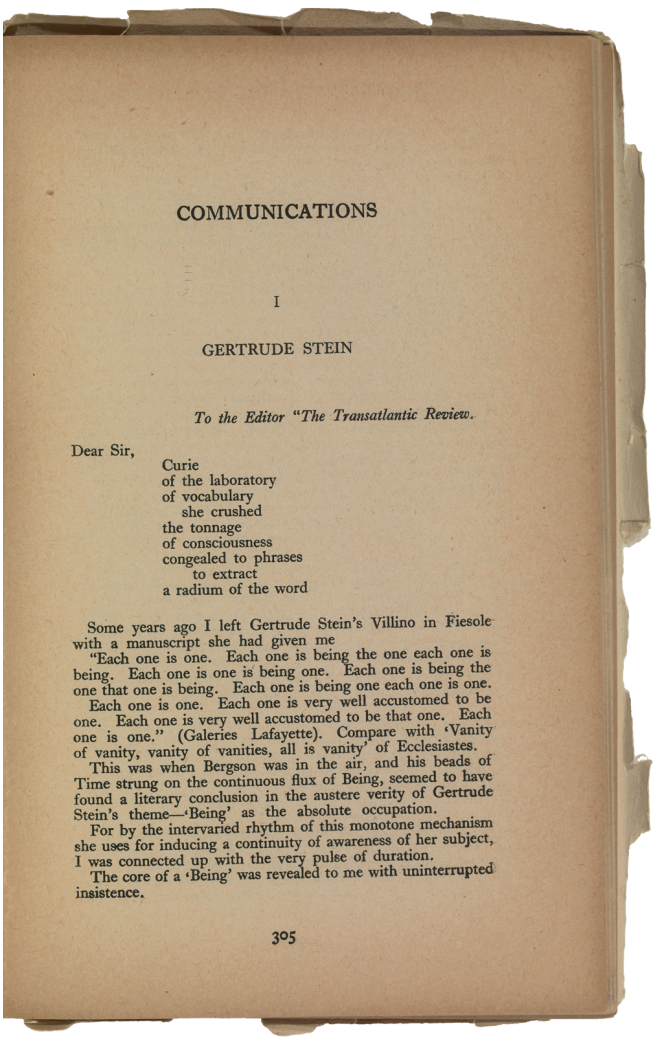
FIG. 1.34

F. M. Ford, ed., *Transatlantic Review*, October 1924. Private collection.



COMMUNICATIONS

I

GERTRUDE STEIN

To the Editor "The Transatlantic Review.

Dear Sir,

Curie
of the laboratory
of vocabulary
she crushed
the tonnage
of consciousness
congealed to phrases
to extract
a radium of the word

Some years ago I left Gertrude Stein's Villino in Fiesole with a manuscript she had given me

"Each one is one. Each one is being the one each one is being. Each one is one is being one. Each one is being the one that one is being. Each one is being one each one is one. Each one is one. Each one is very well accustomed to be that one. Each one is very well accustomed to be that one. Each one is one." (Galeries Lafayette). Compare with 'Vanity of vanity, vanity of vanities, all is vanity' of Ecclesiastes.

This was when Bergson was in the air, and his beads of Time strung on the continuous flux of Being, seemed to have found a literary conclusion in the austere verity of Gertrude Stein's theme—'Being' as the absolute occupation.

For by the intervaried rhythm of this monotone mechanism she uses for inducing a continuity of awareness of her subject, I was connected up with the very pulse of duration.

The core of a 'Being' was revealed to me with uninterrupted insistence.

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FIG. 1.35

Mina Loy, "Gertrude Stein," *Transatlantic Review*, October 1924. Private collection.

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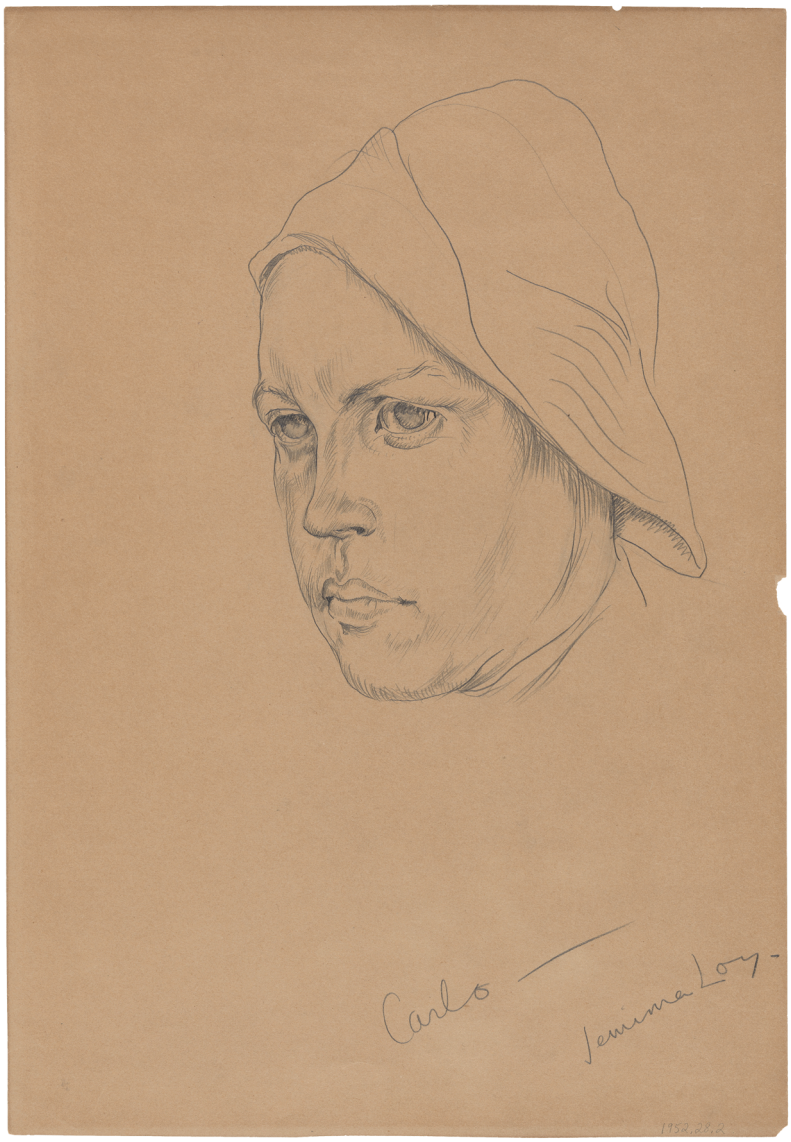

FIG. 1.36

Mina Loy, *Portrait of Carl Van Vechten*, 1913. Graphite on paper, 18 × 12½ in. (45.72 × 31.75 cm). Carl Van Vechten Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library.

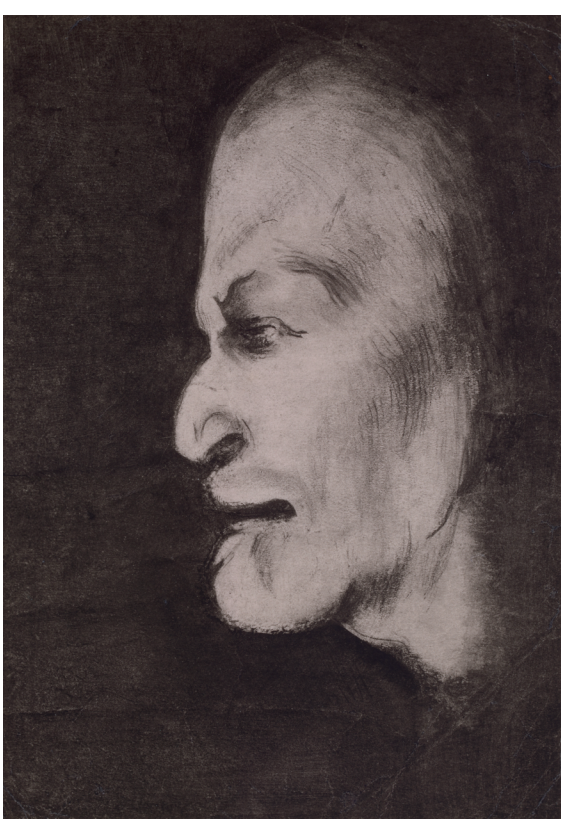

FIG. 1.37

Mina Loy, *Portrait of Freud*, 1922. Ink on paper, Location unknown.

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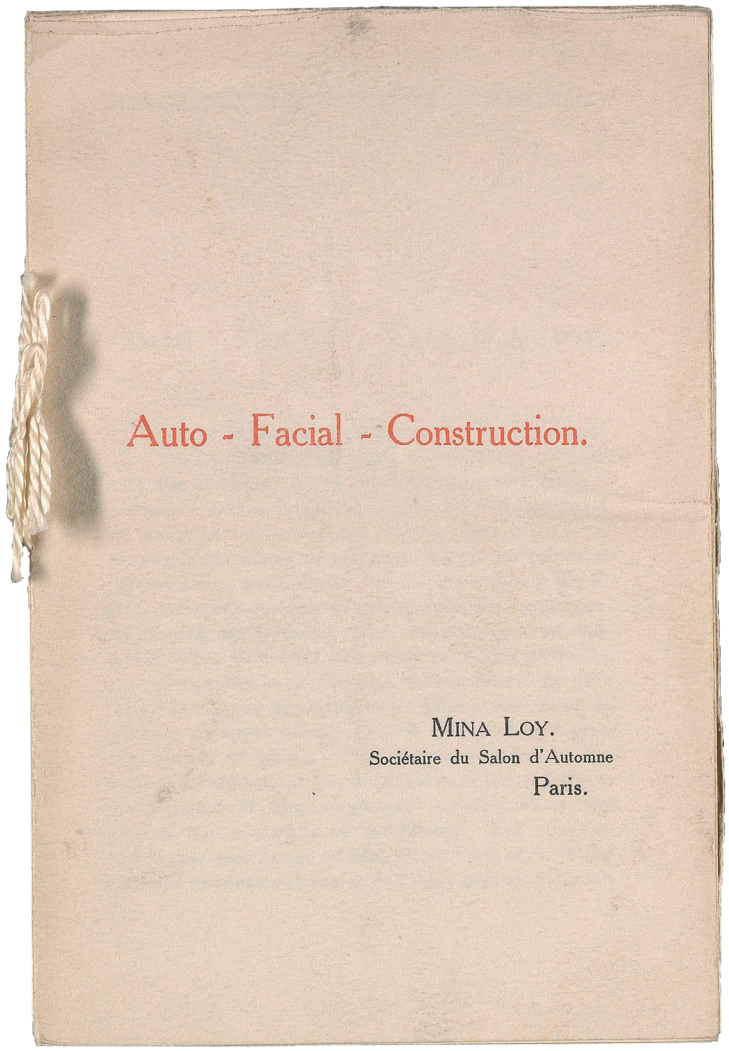

FIG. 1.38

Mina Loy, *Auto-Facial-Construction*, 1919. Printed by Tipographia Giuntina. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library.

James Joyce, and Flossie Williams. A number of these works now exist only in reproduction, as Loy sold them to illustrate biographical articles in magazines. Often, she would create a poem to complement a drawing, providing Loy the opportunity for a more in-depth consideration of the sitter, as was the case for Stein, Brancusi, Moore, and Pascin,[38] and enabling a dialogue in her head between mediums, between visual and verbal reckoning.

Loy considered herself an expert in the close study of physiognomic acumen. This resulted in her creation of a treatise, her first invention, which she called *Auto-Facial-Construction* (fig. 1.38). Loy's proposal for self-induced physiognomic reconstruction appeared in Florence in 1919 as an advertising prospectus. It reads, "Years of specialized interest in physiognomy as an artist, have brought me to an understanding of the human face, which has made it possible for me to find the basic principle of facial integrity, its conservation, and when necessary, reconstruction."[39] She believed the face communicates true personality to others and that the responsibility lay with the owner of the face to wield it with consideration. There is no record of any

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subscribers, but the graphically well-considered "portfolio" attests to Loy's earnest faith in its principle for self-improvement, as well as its potential as a moneymaker. To Dodge she explained, "I am enclosing a prospectus of a new method I shall teach *when* not drawing or writing about art. It came as much as a most unexpected revelation—& it *works*! I think the life-force inspired me with it—to solve the problem of keeping bodies alive without prostituting art."[40]

In Florence, Loy met a number of allies from London: the Duchess of Rutland, American writer Muriel Draper, and Ethel Harter, who would encourage and support her. Loy had her first one-person exhibition at the Carfax Gallery in London in 1912, which received positive feedback in the press. A review in *Studio Magazine's* closely mimicked the review of her work exhibited six years earlier in Paris, which was not a surprise, as she had chosen to exhibit many of the same works. "The Directors of the Carfax Gallery have during the past month, introduced ... Mina Loy (Mrs. Stephen Haweis). ... Her work ... is carried through to success in the strength of a fine imaginative feeling for pattern and an indisputable sense of colour."[41] Another more extensive review in the *Morning Post* of October 14, 1912, called out their variety: "Mrs. Haweis (Mina Loy) shows a collection of drawings at the Carfax. It is difficult to find for these any common denominator. ... Other capital drawings are the series of *Ladies at Tea*, *Maison en Papier*, *Japanese Toys*, and *Voyageurs*. ... The only landscape is a view of the *Bridge at Dinan*, quite simple and good."

The art scene in London had changed dramatically since Loy was a student. Her visit made her aware of the shifts and conflicts incited by the introduction of modernism. Roger Fry's Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition was on view at the Grafton Galleries. The exhibition was radical for London as it set English artists such as Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and Stanley Spencer alongside Bonnard, Matisse, and Picasso. The only artist in whose work Mina specifically expressed an interest was her Paris acquaintance Wyndham Lewis. In a letter to Dodge she described Lewis as "a marvellous draftsman of the Picasso school—in method—but himself alone in vision."[42] His work would soon come to feature more significantly in her own. In the autumn Mina contributed one oil painting, *The Sewing Machine*, and three drawings, *Le Cirque Hagenback à Florence*, *La Petit carnival*, and *La Grotte de Cythere*, to the Salon d'Automne.[43]

In the summer of 1913 the writer and photographer Carl Van Vechten (fig. 1.39) came to Florence as a guest at Villa Curonia. He wrote of being instantly charmed by Loy: "She made an unforgettable figure with her gray-blue eyes, her patrician features, her waved black hair, parted in the centre. Tall and slender, her too large ankles were concealed by the tight hobble-skirts she wore. Her dresses, of soft dove-coloured shades, or brilliant lemon with magenta flowers, or pale green and blue, were extremely lovely. Strange, long earrings dangled from artificially rosy ears: one amber pair imprisoned with flies with extended wings."[44] More importantly, Van Vechten was duly impressed by Loy's writing, and he signed on as her literary agent (fig. 1.40). While continuing to write,[45] she exhibited two works at the Friday Club in London: *Woman's Head* and *Maria con Bruno*, a portrait and a double portrait

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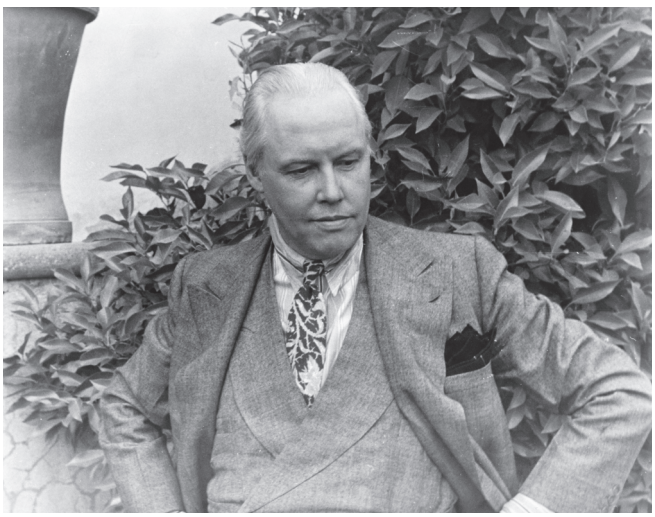

FIG. 1.39

Mark Lutz, *Portrait of Carl Van Vechten, at the Villa, Curonia, Florence*, June 22, 1935. Gelatin silver print on paper. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC, LC-USZ62-137893.

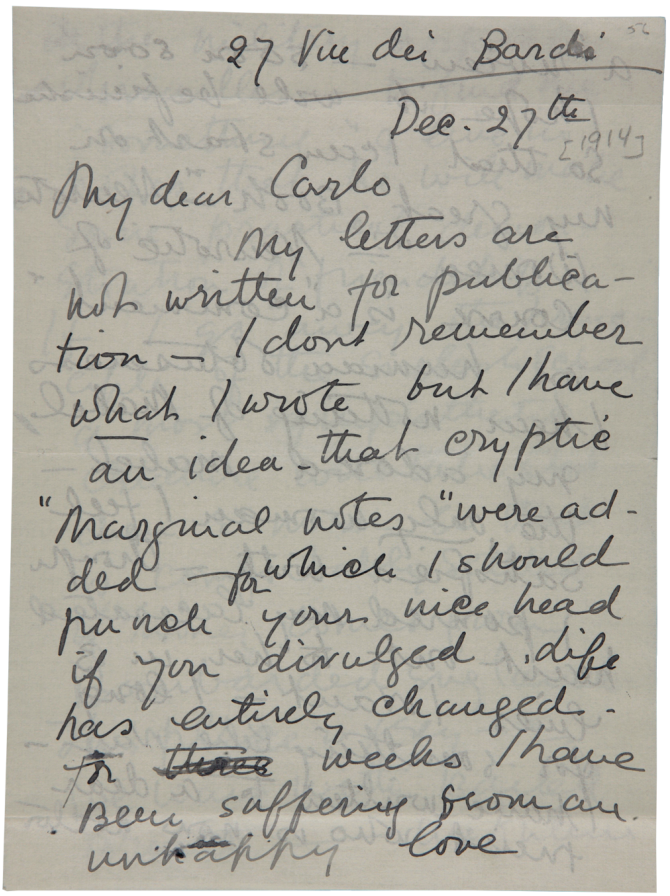
27 Via dei Bardi
Dec. 27th [1914]
My dear Carlo
My letters are not written for publication — I dont remember what I wrote but I have an idea that cryptic "Marginal notes" were added for which I should punch your nice head if you divulged. Life has entirely changed. ~~In three~~ weeks I have been suffering from an unhappy love

FIG. 1.40

Mina Loy letter to Carl Van Vechten, December 17, ca. 1914. Ink on paper. Carl Van Vechten Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

that were hung alongside works by artists considered at the forefront of the British art scene. Loy wrote Dodge that she was proud that Lord Henry Bentinck had bought one of her paintings, but she expressed doubts about the state of her work: "I painted one good picture but I have not evolved beyond post-impressionism."[46]

It was Dodge and Van Vechten who delivered her Futurist-inflected poems to America. Ezra Pound soon credited her as the source of *logopoeia*: "poetry ... akin to nothing but language which is a dance of the intelligence among words and ideas";[47] and the New York avant-garde affirmed her as the harbinger of Futurism, Dada, and unprecedented linguistic scandal. Loy first saw her name in print in January 1914, when Alfred Stieglitz published her manifesto *Aphorisms on Futurism* in *Camera Work* (fig. 1.41) alongside a play by Stein and an art review by Dodge. The text was an incantation about self, a meditation on individual potential and self-determination achieved by radically cutting off one's past and reflexive behavior. The text layout was typographically inspired by Futurism. More of her writing would soon appear in the little

(continued...)

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