

A CONVERSATION WITH JULIE L'ENFANT

What inspired you to write *Pioneer Modernists*?

In 2007 the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Museum of American Art held a joint exhibition, curated by Brian Szott and titled *In Her Own Right: Minnesota's First Generation of Women Artists*. It featured Frances Cranmer Greenman, Alice Hügy, Clara Mairs, Jo Lutz Rollins, and Ada Augusta Wolfe. Afton Press invited me to write a follow-up book that added Elsa Laubach Jemne and Evelyn Raymond to this distinguished list.

What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

I read everything that had been published about these female artists, investigated their personal papers and documents in various archives, and conducted numerous interviews with their descendants, students, and collectors. I also read as much as I could about Minnesota art and modern art in general.

What interesting challenge did you encounter in writing the book?

Pursuing seven different lines of research in writing about seven different women was a challenge,

and, since these artists were not members of a group or movement, it was exciting to discover connections among them I hadn't expected.

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What do you hope readers take away from *Pioneer Modernists*?

I want readers to know these artists and appreciate their accomplishments, for some of them were nearly forgotten. I also hope the book will promote understanding of the depth and richness of Minnesota's cultural tradition. And since I teach art history to art students, many of them women, I hope it will inspire them to work hard and achieve great things right here at home.

What do you most like about the book?

I am very grateful to Afton Press for the book's beautiful design and the excellent reproductions of the artworks. Many of these works have never before been published, or even exhibited, and so the book is a visual treasure.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

I'm originally from Louisiana. Since moving to Minnesota in 1993, I've had opportunities to study, teach, and write about an artistic and cultural tradition that was entirely new to me. The more I learn about it, the more impressed I am with the rich cultural environment in Minnesota and the state's commitment to supporting the arts.

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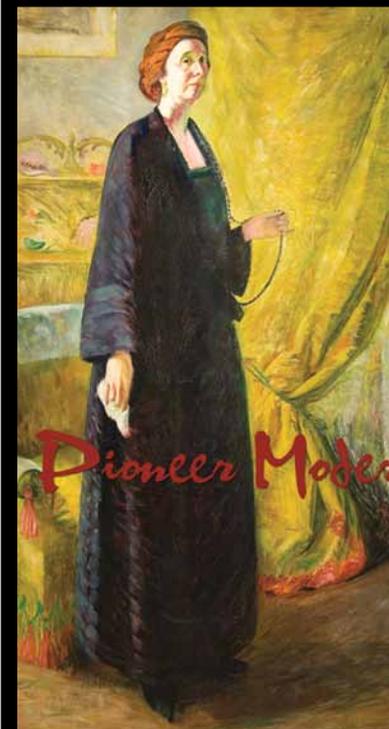
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

24TH ANNUAL

MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Minnesota Winner

Category sponsored by Xcel Energy



BY
Julie L'Enfant

MINNESOTA'S
FIRST
GENERATION
OF
WOMEN
ARTISTS

***Pioneer Modernists:
Minnesota's First Generation
of Women Artists***

by Julie L'Enfant

AFTON PRESS

Pioneer Modernists

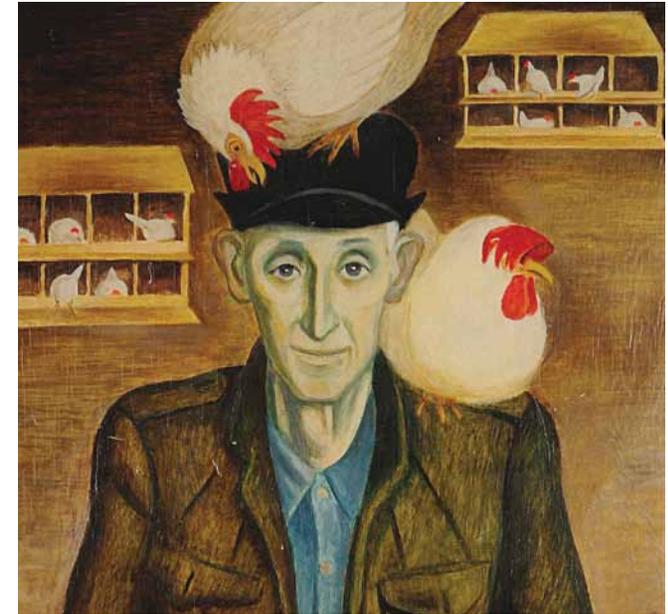


SUMMARY

In *Pioneer Modernists*, Julie L'Enfant uses a host of sources, including previously unpublished papers, to tell the untold story of a generation of ground breaking Minnesota women artists who played a significant, yet often-overlooked role in the development of art schools, galleries, and other institutions that make the Twin Cities the major cultural center it is today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways are these women artists pioneers?
2. Modernism in art history can be defined different ways. How was the work of each of these women “modern?”
3. Most of these women did not come from privileged backgrounds. How did the decision to become an artist open up the world to them?
4. Some of these women were regarded as liberated from social conventions of their day. Would their lifestyles be seen as particularly unconventional today?
5. Does the work of these artists seem like women’s art, or could it have just as easily been created by men?
6. How did these artists use Minnesota history and culture in their work?
7. Did these artists influence Minnesota art and culture in ways that can be felt today?
8. Should these women be considered local artists, or do they have a place in the larger picture of twentieth-century art?
9. With which artist in *Pioneer Modernists* did you most identify?
10. If you wrote a book about an aspect of Minnesota history, what topic would you choose?



ABOUT JULIE L'ENFANT



Julie L'Enfant is professor of art history and chair of the Liberal Arts department at the College of Visual Arts in Saint Paul. She has written about various artists and writers including Dora Maar, Edith Wharton, and Virginia Woolf. Her previous books are The Gag Family: German-Bohemian Artists in America (2002), William Rossetti's Art Criticism: The Search for Truth in Victorian Art (1999), and the novel, The Dancers of Sycamore Street (1983).



Minnesota Department of
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