

Abstract

Title: The Path to Parnassus: A sociological study of female artists in Sweden, 1864–1939.

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This thesis clarifies how female artistry in Sweden is constructed, primarily with the help of Pierre Bourdieu's key concepts ($\text{habitus}(\text{capital})+\text{field}=\text{practice}$), and chiefly through three institutions: art collecting, art history writing, and art criticism. The period covered is 1864–1939 with a background from the early 1800s and a view forward to the year 2000. Central questions are who has power to define what art is and who an artist is, where the female artists stand in this process of canonisation/consecration, and which conditions govern entrance to the art field. The concepts are tested by analysis of longer time intervals and shorter inquiries into the empirical material of catalogues, reference works and journals, as well as of autobiographies and novels.

The thesis seeks and identifies central agents such as the Academy of Fine Arts, museums and collectors, associations of artists and groups of promoters. According to Bourdieu, there is a continuous striving to limit the field. By constructing different canons, the thesis concretises the agents' limiting activities, mainly in terms of a canon for contemporary consecration of female artists in museums and collections, and another for consecration through reference works on Swedish art history. Some feminist art scholars have maintained that female artists were excluded/erased from canons at the same time as art history was established as an independent discipline. This is contradicted in the case of Sweden with support by canons for reference works.

Women's artistic pursuits are an important concern not only for the art field. Especially at the beginning of the study, they are found to be intimately connected with political strivings for women's economic independence and emancipation. Women do not seem to have the same possibilities as men for influencing the consecration process; for example, women were incorporated late among the art historians who decide which artists are to be passed onward in canons through reference works. Yet the art field is governed by the same conditions for female artists as for male ones, even though not as many women as men reach Parnassus – among other things, women are fewer from the outset and still fewer take part in the art-political groupings that provide a path to success. Moreover, despite the art field's relative autonomy with its own rules for consecration, external society imposes different demands on men's and women's pursuits. The field's conditions for artistic activity are subordinated to social norms and limits as a whole.

Keywords: Bourdieu, female artists, canons, consecration, art history writing, feminist art research.