Miner discusses many women illuminators, including Claricia whose student work in a South German, thirteenth-century manuscript is illustrated here (fig. 9). In the Middle Ages illumination was carried out in convents and monasteries by their female and male members, and names of many such nuns have survived, for example, Ende, whose name appears on a Spanish manuscript dated 975, Guta of Schwartzenthan, a twelfth- or thirteenth-century scribe, and Donella, recorded in Bologna in 1271. However, as Miner points out, Claricia, who incorporates her self-portrait into the initial 'Q', is not a nun. Her long, plaited hair and dress are secular. She was probably therefore a student at a professional scriptorium in Augsburg.

In the later Middle Ages women's activities are more substantively documented in guild and parish records which specify women sculptors and illuminators working as members of a family production unit—wives, daughters—as well as working alone or as the heads of households. In the painters' Guild of St John the Evangelist in Bruges some women attained full membership; Miner states that in the year 1461–2 dues by eighteen women were received. Douglas Farquar has calculated that female membership of this guild increased from 12 per cent in 1454 to 25 per cent in the 1480s. Although the names of women renowned for their illuminations have been recorded, it is difficult to attribute any particular manuscript firmly to one of them, because signatures are rare in medieval art. For instance, no work is known by the hand of Anastaise whom Christine de Pisan praised so highly:

> With regard to painting at the present time, I know a woman called Anastaise, who is so skilful and experienced in painting borders and miniatures of manuscripts, no one can cite an artist in the city of Paris, the centre of the best illuminators on earth, who in these endeavours surpasses her in any way. (*Cité des Dames*, quoted in Henry Martin, *Les Miniatures Français*, 1906, p. 164)

As opposed to rigid modern divisions between art made with paint or stone and art made with thread and fabric, in medieval art practice a variety of forms and media were linked by their ritual functions. On the rich and precious copes worn by ecclesiastics, devotional scenes in medallions were embroidered in arrangements comparable to those in manuscript illumination or stained glass windows. What was admired was the skill with which prescribed theological content and common formal arrangements were adapted to the particular medium employed. In the ecclesiastical embroidery that culminated in the style known as 'Opus Anglicanum' ('English Work') of which *The Syon Cope* (fig. 10) is a superb example, a particular method of laying gold and silver gilt threads onto the fabric was developed to ensure that the

cope flowed and glittered when worn in procession. Subtle effects of features, modelling and expression could also be created through the ways silk threads were worked over the hands and faces. The figures and scenes are organized in the then popular arrangement of linked medallions. Patricia Wardle comments in *Guide to English Embroidery* (1970) on the typically English features of the cope which were shared by the East Anglian school of illuminators, particularly the way in which the participants reveal emotions through forceful gesture and facial expressions. And like illumination, embroidery was neither an exclusively female practice nor executed only by those in religious orders.

These few examples of work by women from the Middle Ages only touch this rich period superficially, but can serve none the less as an introduction to the problematic of women's art practice in modern times. What changed with the Renaissance was the whole condition of art practice, with a new identity and social position for the artist, ways of training, functions of art, patrons and documentation. These changes in the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance had far-reaching implications for women, usefully summarized by Annemarie Weyl Carr in the *Feminist Art Journal* (1976). She writes:

> the professional women painters of the fifteenth century were essentially craftspeople working within the conventions of an established style. But they have become not merely unnamed, but anonymous, without the individual immediacy of their earlier medieval counterparts. The miniature was ceasing to be the major art it had been in the Middle Ages. The amateur monastic workshop was giving way to the highly trained professional one; the medieval illuminator was giving way to the miniature painter in the modern sense. Art itself was changing. And with it, not surprisingly, the context of medieval women's art was being swept away. (*Feminist Art Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1976, p. 9)

With the gradual redefinition of art and artist and the restructuring of the conditions of artistic production during the period we call the Renaissance, women's practice in the fine arts was affected by new factors. Increasingly they ceased to have access to conventional forms of training. Some were excluded from the newly organized artists' workshops. We find instead that women became artists by taking advantage of their different circumstances. While male artists tended to come from an artisan or petit-bourgeois background, and rarely from the aristocracy, the significant women artists in the Renaissance were born into the nobility. Caterina Vigri (b. 1413) came from the Ferrarese nobility, and Properzia de' Rossi was the daughter of a nobleman and her talents were those of a cultured lady of her class. She had a taste for music and carved elaborate designs on nuts and peach stones before

developing her skills on a large scale and in a public sphere. Sofonisba Anguissola (1532/35–1625) belonged to a family of five sisters who were encouraged by an enlightened father to play music and to learn Latin, as well as to paint.* The circumstances of her birth may have enabled her to pass by the normal channels of training. But more importantly, she transcended the more obvious constraints of her class and sex. She was no mere 'lady painter', and in addition to her employment as a painter at the Spanish court, she received papal commissions in Italy. Although Anguissola's background as an Italian noblewoman was atypical for a Renaissance artist, both her gender and her class had as much positive as negative effect upon the direction of her work. Without training in anatomy and years of study she was not equipped to paint religious or historical works with many half-draped or nude figures. Instead she concentrated on those scenes or models available to her, authentically portraying her immediate environment. In painting her sisters and their chaperone, *Three Sisters Playing Chess* (fig. 11) she explored a new form of genre portraiture which placed her sitters in intimate, domestic settings rather than among formal or allegorical props.† In his survey of Renaissance artists, Vasari discusses Anguissola and specifically mentioned this early example of a new kind of portraiture known as the 'conversation piece', praising it for such liveliness that the figures only seem to lack speech. To twentieth-century eyes Vasari's enthusiasm seems misplaced, for, at first sight, the painting appears awkward and clumsy: the perspective of the table and the chessboard is faulty and the hieratic stiffness of the girl on the left does not seem life-like. However, on closer examination, the beautifully individualized and characterful faces of the other figures are quite remarkable and carefully document the age and stage of womanhood of each of the three sisters. The presentation of their relations to each other is daringly informal and casual. Even the difficult and problematic parts of the painting are not without interest. The inconsistencies between the composition as a whole and the detailed, successful treatment of individuals point to the experimental nature of the painting, moving from formalized portraiture, as in the *Portrait of a Young Nobleman* (fig. 4), to a new genre based on her own family environment.

Moreover, she painted many self-portraits (fig. 48) at a date when it was relatively rare for artists to use themselves as the subjects of paintings. It is not surprising that Anguissola so consistently advertised herself as an artist to a society that considered women artists as notable exceptions. Yet in doing so she substantially contributed to the development of the self-portrait.

*See L. Nochlin and A. Sutherland Harris, *Women Artists: 1550–1950* (1977), pp. 23–4, for an important discussion of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* on Renaissance attitudes to the education of noblewomen.

†R. Longhi, 'Indicazione per Sofonisba Anguissola', *Paragone*, no. 157, 1963, pp. 50–2.

Although Anguissola was obliged to work in specialized areas of genre and portraiture, her career illustrates a significant feature of the history of women's art practice. Certain types of painting, initially practised notably by women in response to the social conventions affecting them as artists, frequently became, at a later date, important spheres of art activity for men. It was, therefore, as much because of the particular restrictions which narrowed the range of options for women artists in the Renaissance that Anguissola was impelled to explore thoroughly the modes open to her and thus, to produce a singular contribution to the development of Renaissance portraiture and genre painting.

However, amongst most women artists of the period, Anguissola was unusual in that her father was not an artist. The great majority of women artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries came from families of painters in which the absence of sons or the availability of materials and free teaching gave daughters an entry to an artistic career that would otherwise have been far less accessible to them. The careers of Fede Galizia (1578–1630) (fig. 28), Catharina van Hemessen (1528–post 1587), Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614) and Clara Peeters (1594–post 1657) (fig. 29) followed this pattern. Among women in this category Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1652/3), the daughter and pupil of Orazio Gentileschi (1563–1639), a follower of Caravaggio, was one of the most important. Her works conform to the dominant stylistic mode of Caravaggist realism and dramatic subject matter and are a distinctive contribution to that tradition.

The career and work of Artemisia Gentileschi has been well documented in recent years. Her father Orazio Gentileschi taught her himself and also sent her to fellow artists to complete her training. She worked with her father, assisting him in the late 1630s with the decorations at the Queen's House in Greenwich, London. Most of her working life, however, was spent in Italy, first in Florence and later in Naples, where she finally settled. Several letters from Artemisia Gentileschi have survived which show that by the seventeenth century a woman artist was encountering particular forms of prejudice from patrons. She repeatedly had to allay her patrons' doubts about a woman's capacities, reassuring one patron that she invented her own subjects and did not merely repeat the successful formulae of other artists. We find her offering a defence understandable for a woman in a male-dominated world: 'You will find the spirit of Caesar in the soul of this woman.'

Gentileschi's invocation of the spirit of Caesar may have had a great deal to do with seventeenth-century notions of the heroic and with her characteristic subject matter, the actions of heroines of the biblical and classical epochs. Such themes belonged to a tradition of depicting famous women of the past whose deeds were recorded in the Bible and in texts such as that of Boccaccio (fig. 8);

the story of Judith and Holofernes was one of the most popular and was portrayed by male and female artists throughout the Renaissance.

Historians are clearly discomforted by the dramatic and characterful images of women in Gentileschi's canvases of *Susanna and the Elders* (Pommersfelden, collection of the Graf von Schönborn-Wiesentheid), *Cleopatra* (Genoa, Antichità Rubinacci), *Lucretia* (formerly Genoa, Palazzo Cattaneo-Adorno), *Mary Magdalene* (Florence, Palazzo Pitti) and *Judith*. As Amanda Sebestyen and Caroline Dees have pointed out in an article on Gentileschi (*Shrew*, 1973), the women in Gentileschi's paintings have frequently been described as 'gory', 'animalistic', 'buxom', 'sullen'. Her celebration of great women is characterized as 'irreligious', and the Judith subjects were described by the nineteenth-century writer, Mrs Jameson, as 'proof of her genius, and, let me add, of its atrocious misdirection'. Confronted by the expressive, powerful or victimized images of Gentileschi's women, writers have been unable to fit her paintings into the usual feminine stereotype: they cannot trace the expected signs of femininity, weakness, gracefulness or delicateness. Thus, unable to put her work into a stereotype, they turn instead to the dramatic events of her life, resurrecting the opposite category, that of the whore, thus suggesting that she was an unnatural woman. This in turn is used to explain the problematic character of such violent images painted by a woman. Her repeated rape by her teacher, Agostino Tassi, and her torture at the trial to ascertain the truth of her allegations are frequently cited in sensationalized accounts of her life, and she is stigmatized, in the words of Margot and Rudolf Wittkower, as a 'lascivious and precocious girl'.

It is impossible to assess from this distance in time the impact of these early experiences on Gentileschi, but many have been tempted to read her paintings as evidence of dislike of men, a notion contradicted by the same writers' gleeful accounts of her 'amours' which produced four daughters, also painters. It is only when we escape this disturbing fascination with her life and return her work to its context within a specific time, place and school of painting that we can fully appreciate her activities as a painter.

A popular subject in the Caravaggist circle was the story of the Jewish heroine Judith, who decapitated the enemy general Holofernes after gaining access to his tent by being offered as a hostage. Artemisia Gentileschi painted this subject many times. Her interest in the theme was not unusual, nor indeed was her emphasis in some versions (fig. 12) on its violence (fig. 13). What is particular is the prominence Gentileschi gave to the figure of Judith, portraying her as a powerful and decisive woman bravely defending herself, liberating her people, fully capable of an act of carefully planned violence (fig. 14). This later, less melodramatic, version of the Judith subject illustrating that moment of suspense after the murder concentrates on the

two women who have carried out the courageous and dangerous plan. The anxious moments after the actual execution, which were equally important to the success of the scheme, leading to an undetected escape from the enemy camp, are here represented by the Caravaggist use of dramatic chiaroscuro. The light of the single candle plays over the features and figures and casts a golden glow throughout the picture, reflecting the dull golden tone of Judith's dress and picking out the complementary violet of her companion's. The lighting serves to unify the composition and also suggests the eerie silence of the night, the conspiratorial tension of the scene, while drawing the spectator into the shallow enclosed space of the enemy general's tent.

Gentileschi's manipulation of this Caravaggist mode of representation suggests that there have been particular historical styles which women have most effectively used to introduce their own different nuances and meanings. Gentileschi's paintings of celebrated heroines should not be seen as evidence of an individual woman's proto-feminist consciousness reflected in art, but rather as her intervention in an established and popular genre of female subjects through a contemporary and influential style. It is only against this specific background, this prevailing climate, that the particular character of Gentileschi's work can be distinguished. It is by relating the contradictions inherent in the seventeenth-century's fascination with confrontations between male and female protagonists to this woman's treatment of those stories and styles that we can begin to produce useful insights for a theory of how women have fully participated in and altered dominant forms of art practice.

But it would seem that Gentileschi was at least partially aware of some of the contradictions in her position as a professional painter and the current representations of women's supposed relationship to art. In an allegorical self-portrait (fig. 15) she represents a woman artist painting. In addition to the representation of a painter at work, which conformed to Gentileschi's allegiance to the dramatic realism of Caravaggio, the concept of this picture plays on the contradiction between woman as painter's muse, symbolic embodiment of the art, and woman as professional practitioner of the art. There is at least one precedent for this image of a woman artist dishevelled and absorbed in work, an anonymous portrait medallion of the Bolognese painter, Lavinia Fontana (Imola, Biblioteca). But this medallion shows a woman seated at her easel, seized by some strange form of lunacy and ecstasy, her hair on end, eyes enlarged and staring upwards. Such an image suggests that to be an artist and female does not bring the inspiration of divine madness, but the total disordering of the reason and the senses. In striking contrast, Gentileschi's quiet, serious and dignified realism simply asserts that she paints, that she is absorbed by it, that painting is the profession of this woman. Gentileschi's *Self-portrait*, now in the Royal Collection at Hampton Court, furthermore sheds

light on women artists and their fate at the hands of posterity. For generations it languished in storerooms, believed to be merely an allegory of painting by an unknown artist. Its authorship and thus its particular meaning were obscured by a cloak of anonymity, probably because a female figure is commonly used as the symbol of those arts which actual women are presumed not to practise but inspire. In the first article (*Burlington Magazine*, 1962) which reattributed this work to Artemisia Gentileschi, Michael Levey revealingly commented, 'Perhaps the picture's real intention would have been earlier recognised had it been painted by a man' (p. 80). Elisabetta Sirani (1638–65), another painter's daughter, offers an interesting contrast to Gentileschi. Her father, Gian Andrea Sirani (1610–70), a follower of the most influential Bolognese painter of his day, Guido Reni (1575–1692), did not initially encourage his daughter to paint. She none the less learned from him the elements of the idealized and elegant Bolognese style in which she was so successful that even during her brief lifetime a cult grew up around her as the female reincarnation of Guido Reni. She overshadowed both her father and her two sisters, who were also painters.

Sirani was both precocious and prolific. Her own listed works and those recorded by a contemporary biographer, Malvasia, number over 170 in a career which ended with her premature death at the age of twenty-six. She became a legend in her lifetime. The stories of her enormous success that circulated in the seventeenth century have been repeated with some incredulity by later writers. Such stories have served to ensure Sirani's reputation, but, once again, as a strange phenomenon, an exception. The successful woman artist is often transformed into a legend, and the implications are obvious. Her intervention into the male preserve of art is retrieved for the stereotype, adumbrated by Boccaccio, of the exceptional woman, atypical of her sex by virtue of artistic ability. Indeed as Laura Ragg (1907) points out, the oration delivered at Sirani's public funeral was more a eulogy to the city that gave birth to so popular a painter than it was a requiem for the 'Lamented Paintbrush', as Sirani was described by a poet.

Sirani's version of the Judith and Holofernes subject (fig. 16) contrasts with Gentileschi's stylistically, with its cooler colours and more mannered composition, and, perhaps more importantly, in the treatment of the female figure. Sirani's Judith is as cool and detached as Gentileschi's is decisive and involved. Sirani offers Judith to the spectator as a beautiful woman to be contemplated and appraised. Gentileschi evokes the moment of action and draws the spectator into the scene by the tense pose of the main protagonist. This comparison brings to light no qualities shared by the two artists merely because they happened to be female, no essential femininity. It underlines the heterogeneous ways women artists have manipulated dominant modes of

representation, according to their particular situations in relation to the styles of the period and their different experiences.

Sirani's subjects included historical and religious themes—the Holy Family, the Penitent Magdalen, as well as the popular Judith and Holofernes. However, her painting of Portia, wife of Brutus, one of the Roman conspirators who murdered Julius Caesar, *Portia Wounding her Thigh* (fig. 17), is unusual even though it can be placed in the genre of representations of famous women of the past. Some have been tempted to see this painting as a feminist work, for they read it as an image of a strong-willed woman. According to Plutarch, the painting's apparent source, Portia inflicted on herself a cruel wound in order to test her own strength of will so that she might convince her husband, Brutus, that a woman had sufficient strength to share his burdens and his secrets.

But elements in the painting seriously question such an interpretation. For a start the necessity for self-mutilation to prove a woman's ability to be privy to her husband's thoughts strikes a rather curious note. On another level, the picture has overtones of perverse titillation and sado-masochistic sexuality—the exposed thigh, the loosened robe, the knife poised ambiguously, the coiled, almost Medusa-like, head-dress. The picture was listed by Sirani with a description of its subject, Portia, its intended hanging place, over a door, and its commissioner, Signore Simone Tassi. Sirani's female figures, luscious, voluptuous women, painted for her male patrons' more private apartments are stamped by the mode of representing women developed by Guido Reni. Women caught in moments of penitential contemplation or private suffering, in acts of heroism or courage, are shown to the viewer for the enjoyment of the sight of woman and not for the psychological or dramatic impact of the events. The seventeenth-century fascination with dark, violent, sexually disturbing subjects marks Sirani's *Portia*, which has a heavy, close atmosphere produced by the sombre lighting and rich colours. We, the spectators, are closer to Portia than are her maids, withdrawn into a distant room. We are privy to this secret act. In contrast to Gentileschi, Sirani's participation in the dominant stylistic and iconographic modes of her period and city led her to represent female figures in a way which confirmed rather than disrupted the sexual ideology which the Reni mode of representation served.

By the late seventeenth and the eighteenth century both the structure of art training and the status of the artist were changing. The founding of official academies of art as places of art education and public exhibition was an important shift in the organization of art practice away from the craft-based training offered in artists' workshops, and also in the social and intellectual position of the artist. Women were not initially excluded from these influential and prestigious bodies. The Paris Académie admitted a handful of women in the late seventeenth century. But then, in 1706, it barred them altogether. The

English Royal Academy had two female founder members in 1768 (fig. 49), but systematically excluded women from its schools and privileges for the next hundred years. This ambiguous situation had two results. Those women who did break into these male preserves at least offered visible examples of female success to others, but equally further progress could be contained within a policy of tokenism, with a quota system.

More significantly women were denied access to the training offered by these academies and their rare election to membership often represented only a belated recognition of women who had won a reputation outside the academies. The means by which women like Rosalba Carriera (1675–1757) and Adélaïde Labille-Guyard (1749–1803) received their training serve to emphasize once again the positive and negative features of women's particular place in history.

Carriera's fame and skill as a portraitist in pastel (fig. 18), the medium she revolutionised, won her honorary membership of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome (1705), of the Accademia di Santa Clementina in Bologna (1720) and the Académie Royale in Paris (1720). She had not followed a characteristic route to these honours. She came from a craft tradition, probably pursuing her mother's trade as a lace-maker, turning to the decoration of the lids of ivory snuff boxes when the lace market collapsed. Encouraged by appreciative buyers, she began to study drawing and anatomy but only applied her skills to the genres and materials commonly associated with women, miniature portraits and pastel chalks. But she transformed the medium of pastel, which since the sixteenth century had been only a preliminary sketching material, by using it as a vehicle for serious portraiture, which significantly influenced the development of the rococo style in the mid-eighteenth century.

Moreover, she shared her skills as a painter with other women, instructing her two sisters Giovanna (1683–1738) and Angela (1677–1757), who married a painter, Pellegrini, with whom Carriera collaborated in England. Two female pupils are also documented, Margherita Terzi and Angioletta Sartori, whose own sister was also an artist. Carriera had female rivals in the field of pastel portraiture, notably Giovanna Fratellini (1666–1731).

The significance of her introduction into eighteenth-century portraiture of the medium of pastel chalks and her contemporary fame are hard to gauge from modern studies of eighteenth-century art in which she is briefly mentioned as 'Rosalba', casually patronized as women artists so often are by the use of the Christian name alone. When mentioned at all, Carriera is usually treated as an exception, a rarity as a woman artist, an unexplained celebrity. Her work itself and the reasons for her renown are rarely considered. Despite the significance attached by art history to an artist who has pupils and thus propagates a particular style or kind of painting, Carriera's role as teacher and

centre of an artistic circle is ignored. The network of women's studios and rival practices, like the one we can discover around Carriera, is easily obscured once its most prominent member is consigned to the margins of art history. Since excellence in art is usually the product of an extensive system which may include the average as well as the exceptional artist, it is important that in the pursuit of a history of women artists we search out these networks. Carriera's relations with the influence on other women artists were initially obscured by the evolving eighteenth-century discourse on woman artist as celebrity, beautiful object and adornment. (Fuller analysis of this development will be undertaken in chapter 3.) In the later eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries both male and female writers were puzzled by Carriera's success since it was not accompanied by that beauty of person and feminine charm which had come to be the dubious passport to acceptance as a woman artist. By eighteenth-century standards, the artist Carriera was exceptional because she was not a beautiful woman; in the twentieth century because she was a woman she is hardly worthy of mention. And the existence of the larger community of women artists to which she belonged is obliterated by the mystifying notion of individual genius. Within such an ideology artists become exceptional beings and women artists exceptions.

Far from being extraordinary as woman or artist, Carriera's specialization in pastel and portraits was the product of a particular aesthetic shift in the eighteenth century to the style known as rococo. Her subsequent reputation is a telling example of the fate of women artists precisely because they belong so clearly to their period and its art, for when the rococo mode went out of critical favour Carriera was devalued and dismissed because her work was indelibly marked by that eighteenth-century movement. However, in later reassessments of the eighteenth century, the fact that Carriera was a woman has led to her contribution being minimised. Many texts, while fully discussing the work of other eighteenth-century pastellists such as Liotard, Quentin de la Tour and Perroneau, pass over Carriera with a mere mention of her name, 'Rosalba'. In his comprehensive study, *Art and Architecture in Italy: 1600–1750* (1965), Rudolf Wittkower discounts the significance of her work and has to account for her undeniable contemporary success by implying that she was merely the natural product of a decadent society:

> On a lesser level portraiture flourished during the period, particularly in Venice and the *terra ferma*. Rosalba Carriera's (1675–1758) charming Rococo pastels come to mind; in her time they made her one of the most celebrated artists in Europe. Her visits to Paris (1721) and Vienna (1730) were phenomenal successes; in Venice all the nobles of Europe flocked to her studio. But her work, mellow, fragrant, and sweet, typically female

20 Adélaïde Labille-Guyard, *Madame Adélaïde*, 1787
This portrait of Madame Adélaïde, one of Louis XVI's aunts, is, as Bornet's engraving (fig. 19) shows, a large-scale work, and it was hung at the Salon of 1787 in a complementary position to Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie Antoinette surrounded by her Children* (Versailles), further evidence of the way in which work by women artists was hung to encourage comparison between them. Both the women's paintings were placed on the second row, a respectable but not the most prestigious position. It was Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Socrates* that was hung centrally 'on the line', that is at eye level, below the two portraits, as befitted a history picture, and below the work of the two most famous women painters of the period, as befitted a canvas by the leading artist of the day. Bornet's engraving provides visual evidence of the particular position occupied by these women, an intermediate one. Their work was prominent at this Salon, and although the two paintings were compared directly, they also stood in close relation to the painting by David. They were not 'skied', that is, hung too high to be visible, nor were they right 'on the line'. Their position was respectable.

> and a perfect scion of the elegant Rococo civilization of Venice, is interesting (in spite of a recent tendency to boost it) as an episode in the history of taste rather than for its intrinsic quality. (p. 322)

Carriera's innovatory use of pastel had become widespread by the mid-eighteenth century. Adélaïde Labille-Guyard took to the medium in 1769, learning from its most famous French exponent, Maurice Quentin de la Tour (1704–88). Labille-Guyard was the youngest surviving daughter of a haberdasher. Her first professional instruction in art was provided by the painter François-Elie Vincent (1708–90), who had a shop close to that of her father. She had ambitions to be an oil painter and member of the Académie Royale. She exhibited publicly from 1774 onwards, first at the less prestigious rival to the Académie Royale, the Académie de Saint-Luc. When it closed, she exhibited in 1782 at the Salon de la Correspondance, founded in 1779. By the time she applied for membership of the Académie Royale in 1783, Labille-Guyard had had years of training and experience and had built a notable reputation as a portraitist of considerable skill. Despite the 1706 ruling against female membership, a few women had recently been admitted, at least providing a precedent. Moreover, Labille-Guyard was not alone in her success and ambitions; Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755–1842) applied at the same time (1783) for the status of an Academician. The concentrated assault by two women whose reputations and whose access to royal patronage made them impossible to ignore marked a new phase in the discriminatory treatment of women by the male authorities. The threat they represented to existing stereotypes of male creativity was contained by consistently comparing women artists with each other rather than with other artists working in their field (figs 19 and 20). That they posed a threat is confirmed by the subsequent decision, after heated debate in the Académie, to limit to four the number of women who could enter the Académie at any one time.

Both Labille-Guyard and Vigée-Lebrun painted royal portraits. It is known, however, that, unlike Vigée-Lebrun who was a royalist, Labille-Guyard supported the Revolution. Given this attitude, it is difficult to understand why Labille-Guyard painted portraits of the royal family and, in this case (fig. 20), one of its most conservative members. The links between the patronage of women artists and their political allegiances in the years immediately before the Revolution remain obscure, not only as a result of the general uncertainty that still surrounds relations between art and patrons in this period, but because women's different and often difficult situation as regards patronage has never been fully explored. Labille-Guyard and Vigée-Lebrun were in an ambiguous position as professional artists because they were often seen as members of the court entourage. Their skill as artists had

provided them entry to the patronage of the circle around the queen. Women artists such as Labille-Guyard perhaps experienced the contradictions that customarily forced women in all professions into conservative positions. In the struggle to gain access to institutions and to acquire reputations women tend to focus on the status quo, on participating in the existing establishment from which they want and need recognition. One particular incident in Labille-Guyard's career exemplifies this. In pursuit of her ambitions, Labille-Guyard undertook a commission for a huge canvas of an historical subject on which she worked for two and a half years, *The Reception of a Knight of St Lazare by Monsieur, Grand Master of the Order*. However, after the Revolution, with which she sided and of whose leaders she painted many portraits, her great project was considered unacceptably royalist in tendency and she was ordered to destroy the canvas on which she had pinned her hopes for achieving recognition and status.

Before the Revolution, women had reacted to their exclusion from the best of art education in many ways. They found alternative means to learn their craft, and those who were successful instituted classes for less privileged women. Labille-Guyard not only accepted female pupils, the names of nine of whom are known, but also used the opportunity of the first Salon after her admission to the Académie to exhibit a representation of herself at work, observed by her two most famous followers. The inclusion of the artist's two pupils in the portrait of *The Artist with Two Female Pupils* of 1785 (fig. 21) both makes visible the particular circumstances of women's training in the eighteenth century and establishes that women artists had followings and exercised influence. This point is crucially important because one of the most constant criteria within art history for assessing an artist's significance in the history of art is the extent of their influence on others. Yet women are so often isolated in a separate critical category and cut off thereby from this notion of importance in the history of art. The iconography of Labille-Guyard's painting of 1785 directly challenges the basis of the dismissive categorisation of women on its own ground.

After the French Revolution, despite abolition of the royal academy in the 1790s, the situation of French women artists deteriorated drastically. They were absolutely excluded from the Académie when it was refounded and, for most of the nineteenth century, were kept outside the major art institution, the Institut des Arts. In her memoirs, published in 1835, Vigée-Lebrun regretted the outbreak of the Revolution from which she had herself fled. Her nostalgia is obviously personal but her comments are quite perceptive: 'It is difficult to convey today an idea of the urbanity, the graceful ease, in a word, the affability of manner which made the charm of Parisian society forty years ago. Women reigned then; the Revolution dethroned them.'

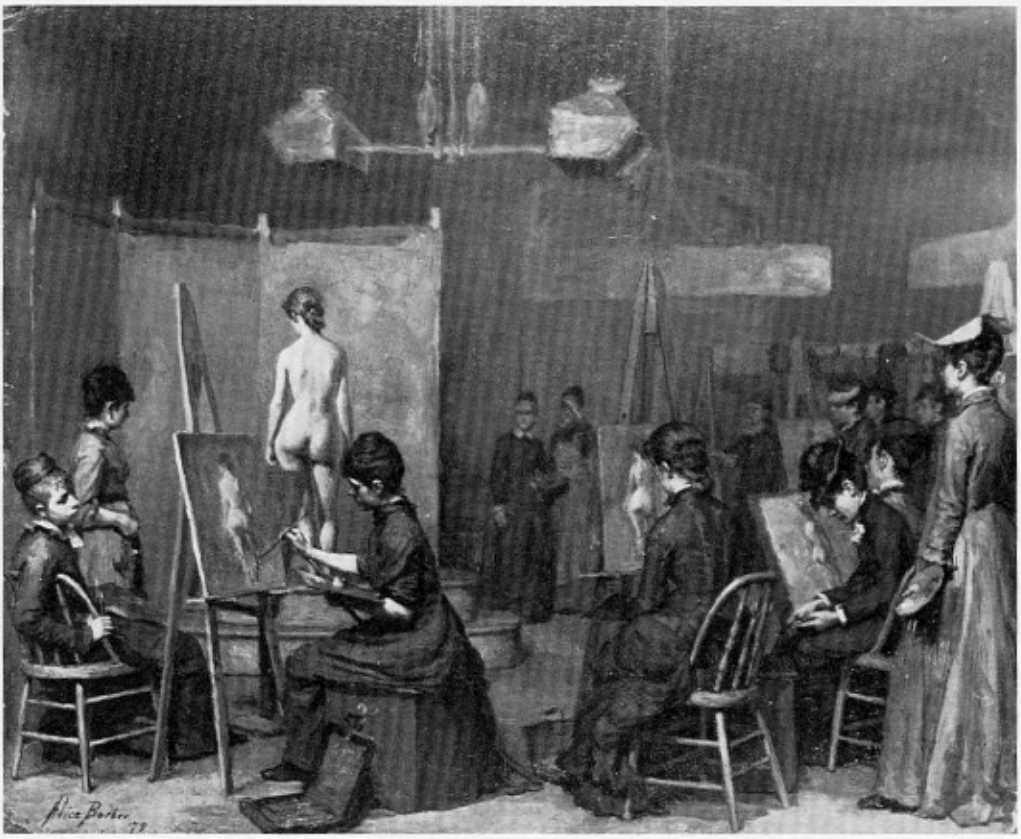
But the most far-reaching effect of women's exclusion from academic

training schools, which was as insistent in the nineteenth century as in the eighteenth, was that they were not permitted officially to study human anatomy from the nude, live model. For almost 300 years from the Renaissance to the hey-day of the academies in the nineteenth century, the nude human figure was the basis of the most highly regarded forms of painting and sculpture—what the academic theorists of art described as 'history painting' and placed at the top of the hierarchy of artistic genres. The simple fact of women's exclusion from studying the nude constrained many of them to practise exclusively in the genres of portraiture and still-life, genres considered, within the Academic canon of art, less significant. By association, the women who practised in the so-called 'lesser' genres were themselves devalued, considered artists of 'lesser' talent. (It should be noted, however, that in cases where men, Reynolds and Chardin for instance, specialized in these genres, their reputations were never impaired.) The notion that women should be kept from anatomy studies and the nude model was so tenacious that in 1886, Thomas Eakins, teaching at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, which did train many women and had instituted an experimental female life class in the 1870s (fig. 22), was dismissed after a public outcry when he removed the loin-cloth from a male model in an anatomy lecture before a mixed audience.

Throughout the nineteenth century women artists campaigned consistently against this exclusion from the nude. But it is arguable that this struggle diverted their energies. It is not without its irony that their final victory and entry into the full academic curriculum occurred precisely at the point when the hegemony of academic tradition was successfully challenged and finally destroyed by new 'avant-garde' theories and practices. On the other hand, when avant-garde artists turned from academic theory and took up the hitherto less prestigious fields of portraiture, landscape and still-life, women could and did take full part in radical movements in art based upon these areas of representation.

The phenomenal success of Rosa Bonheur (1822–99), for example, occurred in landscape and animal painting, genres which became more important during the nineteenth century under the impact of romantic landscape painting and the revaluation and influence of Dutch seventeenth-century art. Once again shifts of artistic ideology touched and transformed areas of predominantly female practice.

Bonheur came from a painter's family: her father was a painter, her mother had been his pupil, and both her brother and sister pursued their parents' career. Bonheur was initially trained as a *couturière* before her father agreed to oversee her instruction as a painter. In 1849 she took over his post as the director of a drawing school. In addition to her father's profession, she adopted his politics. He was a Utopian socialist of the school of Saint-Simon whose doctrines not only espoused equal rights for women but placed a special social



22 Alice Barber Stevens, *Female Life Class*, 1879
The painting was commissioned by the Academy in order to be reproduced in a popular magazine article which described the advanced and progressive courses available in this art school. In the centre of the studio we can identify Susan Macdowell at work on her canvas. Macdowell later married Thomas Eakins who was largely responsible for initiating life studies for women students.