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(Front cover) Adrienne Elise Tarver, *Three Graces* (2019), oil on canvas, 84" x 72".
Courtesy of the artist.

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WAJ's Spring/Summer issue interrogates systems of knowledge that inform our ways of organizing societies, collections, and visual theories. The articles foreground strategies whereby artists transgress geographical and governed identities, or recast time-bound models of cultural and scientific inheritances. In their embrace of the polytemporal, formless, and unconstrained, the artists presented here disrupt, reject, and counter Western modalities of social order often derived from institutional, racial, and misogynistic forms of classifications and taxonomies.

The "tropical aesthetics" of Firelei Báez and Adrienne Elise Tarver are rooted in the exploitative "ecologies of racism" following the devastating effects of colonialism and slavery in the Caribbean and Southern US. Their "utopic" relations to worldmaking, argues Samantha A. Noël, propose freedoms beyond place and selfhood through Black speculative agency. Báez's folkloric *ciguapa* are "unclassifiable" and "unquantifiable" bodily and plant specimens measured against the legacies of taxonomy. Tarver's sub-tropical landscapes subsist outside the bounds of time, the viewer imbricated within the cultivated gaze of her unflinching Black female subjects. Encountering our cover's *Three Graces*, Tarver transfigures an historical yet dehumanizing ethnographic photograph into a monumental painting of uppermost Black self-possession.

Jennifer S. Griffiths chronicles Artemisia Gentileschi's afterlives in American art through models of "feminist time," kinship, and fandom. Drawing on the transhistorical thinking of Mary Garrard, Griffiths traces Artemisia's images as "floating feminist signifiers" and centrifugal forces of feminist consciousness that disrupt our linear reading of art history in favor of cyclical "waves and echoes," loops, or "women's time." Debates from the seventies surrounding *The Sister Chapel* and the Cooperativa Beato Angelico are discussed alongside more recent artist projects by Kathleen Gilje, Anna Ostoya, Betty Tompkins, and Lili Bernard. For Griffiths, Bernard's symbolic appropriation of Artemisia activates Afrofuturist "counter-histories that reweave connections between past, present, and future," concepts arising in Elizabeth Carmel Hamilton's *Charting the Afrofuturist Imaginary in African American Art*, reviewed in this issue.

Allison K. Young examines an understudied photographic body of works by Zarina Bhimji from the nineties that probe our complex subjective and bodily relationships to Western medicine and science and challenge the "classificatory modes" underpinning such institutional spaces and disciplines. Plumbing the pathologies of the "clinical gaze," Bhimji's carefully curated light boxes and vitrines of chemically preserved organic and human matter ultimately resist our desires for objectivity and compartmentalization and "liberate" her subjects intuitively, corporeally, and erotically.

The seventeen book reviews orchestrated by Melissa Mednicov and Erin Devine beckon today's lot of prodigious feminist publications. Tori Champion contextualizes the rich stories and political heft behind the strategic art patronage and commissions of Catherine the Great, who enlisted from her

orbit such prestigious women artists as Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun and Angelica Kauffman and amateur female members from the royal household. Oana Stan fields the "symphony of interpretations" in the first interdisciplinary study on the early Dutch modernist Rachel Ruysch, whose famed flower still lifes bridged botanical science, conservation, and experimental botany. In her extensive coverage of three monographs on Italian early modern women artists—Sofonisba Anguissola, Elisabetta Sirani, and Artemisia Gentileschi—Margaret M. Barnes skillfully reconstructs the fabric of their artistic, business, and social livelihoods in their native cities. Britta Dwyer channels the brilliant transatlantic activities of sixty expatriate modern women in avant-garde Paris, some as famous as master networker Gertrude Stein, others less known, such as the costume designer Winnifred de Wolfe, queer author Djuana Barnes, and Black sculptor Nancy Elizabeth Prophet. In Great Britain at the turn of the nineteenth century, Nancy E. Green marks the advancements and struggles for women's rights, particularly in marriage and property laws, a period that eventually saw the opening to women of royal academies, exhibition spaces, guilds, societies, and clubs.

In a joint review by Kalas Ke, the sexually explicit photomontages of Anita Steckel, a virtuoso of humor, female pleasure, and freedom of expression, is presented alongside the erotic representations of Joan Semmel, Betty Tompkins, and Tee Corinne. Shannon Bewley identifies MoMA's women, the fourteen underrecognized and often uncredited female founders (donors, curators, collection managers, archivists, publicists, conservators) of the lauded twentieth-century art institution. Anna E. Dobbins unveils the illustrious figure of Gertrude Abercrombie whose salon and "bop" paintings took center stage amongst the music and art scene in Chicago. Elizabeth Carmel Hamilton's review determines how art refuses to serve as reparations for Black women in racist and patriarchal society, calling for "reproduction without futurity" and releasing expectations of positivity in favor of revulsion and disgust. Hamilton's own expansive critical framework of Afrofuturist aesthetics and the Black Female Fantastic is featured by Sarah Richter. The artistic trajectory of photographer Gail Rebhan, intimately focused on self-portraiture and the lived experiences of motherhood, reflecting a "beginning and ending with the self," is captured by Sally Jane Brown. Two decades of Diana Al-Hadid's sculptural production is analyzed by Şeyma Müge Iba with an emphasis on the unresolvable and impermanent strategies of "becoming and unbecoming" that scaffold the artist's conceptual, material, and ritual experimentation. Roja Najafi maps the abstract entanglements and kinetic geometries throughout the six-decade career of Palestinian artist Samia Halaby. Women's contributions to the creative and racial diversity of the French and Belgian *bande dessinée* is sketched by Natalie J. Swain. ●

Joan Marter and Aliza Rachel Edelman
Editors, *Woman's Art Journal*

Gail Rebhan: About Time

By Sally Stein
MACK, 2023

Reviewed by Sally Jane Brown

Sally Stein opens her catalogue to the retrospective exhibition of DC-based artist and photographer Gail Rebhan (b. 1953) by stating, “I purposefully don’t speak of the ‘arc’ of Rebhan’s work because I’ve long sensed something more multi-faceted and full of pivots in her observational stance” (6). She identifies two primary realms in which Rebhan operates: “The micro world of family relations or the macro world of urban interactions....” (6). From this, one might anticipate a thematic organization, yet while the book does group works and texts into series, its structure is ultimately chronological. Still, despite Stein’s reluctance to define an “arc,” Rebhan’s practice does form one, not in a linear or evaluative sense, but through a return to self-portraiture. Beginning and ending with the self, with decades of outward focus between, her trajectory feels deeply authentic and quietly affirming of a woman artist’s sustained and reflective gaze.

The retrospective, curated by Stein, took place at the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center (2023), and then travelled to the University of California Riverside, California Museum of Photography (2025). Stein’s resulting catalogue raisonné stands as a luminous testament to an artist whose work remains raw, grounded, and profoundly resonant; a lasting reflection of women’s lived experiences. Stein’s prose is accessible yet nuanced, offering just enough context to illuminate without overwhelming or detracting from the photographs themselves. The selected works beautifully complement her commentary and are presented elegantly against the clean white pages. If the book has a shortcoming, it is practical: the dark brown background beneath the black text in the essays makes reading difficult for anyone without perfect eyesight, and the absence of page numbers further complicates navigation, an unexpected challenge for scholars who may wish to

cite or closely track Stein’s insights.

Nonetheless, Stein adroitly contextualizes Rebhan’s work within the broader history of photography while striking a thoughtful balance with feminist art and the feminist movements unfolding around her. She presents Rebhan as an exceptional artist in both arenas, highlighting how much of Rebhan’s work emerges from her own (female) perspective. By documenting her life with care and insight, Rebhan preserves these experiences while challenging the persistent underrepresentation of women, as well as other marginalized groups, in museums and historical narratives. This book accomplishes both with clarity and conviction.

Stein begins by tracing Rebhan’s early life, from growing up in Chicago, to attending a private school in Geneva, then returning to Washington, DC, all while becoming politically aware under the influence of her activist father. During her time at the “freewheeling radical” (8) Antioch College, Rebhan was inspired by a video professor and ultimately graduated with a degree in communications. Stein devotes particular attention to Rebhan’s 1973 self-portrait, which, along with her “early hippie style” (8), was paired with a clipping from *Ms.* magazine featuring a painting of four older women. Rebhan could not recall any specific significance, so Stein researched the piece in the library, discovering only the artist’s name, Susan Brenner (b. 1950), and little else. Yet she examines the portrait in depth, linking it to the feminist movement of the era: “In this fledgling self-presentation, she directly affiliated herself with a lineage of unfamous but self-possessed females who knew they hailed from a long line of women who gave each other strength to persevere....” (9). These kinds of feminist insights throughout the book are thoughtful and illuminating.

Stein’s methodology is convincing precisely because it draws upon her deep command of both photographic history and feminist visual culture. She brings a rare ability to contextualize Rebhan’s early gestures within broader debates about women’s self-representation, while also attending to the small archival details that other

scholars might overlook. Her research sharpens the stakes of these formative works, showing how even a seemingly modest student portrait participates in far larger cultural conversations. Together, Stein’s scholarly rigor and attentiveness to feminist discourse serve to enrich readers’ understanding of Rebhan’s early works and prepare them for the book’s broader, section-by-section exploration of the artist’s growing practice.

The first section concludes by detailing Rebhan’s return to school for a master’s in photography at CalArts—studying after *Womanhouse* (1972) but still among faculty with strong feminist interests—and her first series capturing the home of her new husband’s mother along with other domestic interiors. While those around her dismissed the photographs as “un-hip or downright tacky” (10), Stein frames them as a crucial point of departure for Rebhan. Through this work, and as a new mother, she began to explore photography “as both an intimate and worldly medium of temporary arrest, to explore further the still image’s complex relation to all that would not stay quietly, obediently fixed” (10), such as a child. The images anticipate environmental photography in their acute attention to place, materiality, and the politics of domestic space, perhaps an early acuity that makes the work even more compelling.

Rebhan’s series focused on the everyday life of herself, her husband, her mother-in-law, and her new son, often capturing sequences or repeated views of the same scene. Stein insightfully frames these images as “more subversive of prevailing sex and gender roles” than Robert Mapplethorpe, even without nudity, while simultaneously “banal and unrelieved by serendipity” (41). She further elaborates on Rebhan’s “dispassionate, philosophical feminism” (42) by highlighting her documentation of “the endless cycles of domestic work” (44). Most of Stein’s comparisons, however, are drawn to male artists. Although she mentions Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) in her notes at the section’s end, and later Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864–1952), additional comparisons to the photos of Julia Margaret Cameron



Fig. 1. Gail Rebhan, selections from the series *Living* (2022), archival pigment print. Courtesy of the artist and MACK.

(1815–1879) and Imogen Cunningham (1883–1976), who also photographed family and domestic interiors, and some over time, would be valuable.

In the next section, which examines Rebhan’s pregnancy and infant series, Stein situates the work alongside Susan Heller’s (b. 1956) *10 Months* (of which Rebhan was, admittedly, unaware, a tellingly common occurrence for women in art), and other pregnancy-focused photographic projects. Stein emphasizes Rebhan’s distinctive approach: a refusal of erotica, the absence of nudity, and a modest, unassuming style, largely captured via *280 Days*, daily pregnant self-portraits in a mirror using a tripod, camera, and flash, many of which were taken from the vantage point of her home closet. Stein vividly conveys this busy period in Rebhan’s life as mother, professor, and household participant, noting a temporary dip in her photographic output. Yet Rebhan engaged with feminist research at the time, particularly “revisionist texts on mothering” (59) and Mary Kelly’s (b. 1941) *Post-Partum Document*, which likely influenced her later text-based works. The section concludes with Rebhan’s

Large Infant Heads series, intimate, blown-up images of crying babies that leave viewers with little respite. Stein captures the unsettling humor of critical responses, such as one offered in a review in *The Baltimore Sun*: “[They are] the opposite of endearing ... but rather ugly, frightening, knowing, even also malevolent in super closeups” (60).

The dualities of motherhood are also central to Rebhan’s *Mother-Son* series, where she combines text and collage to capture moments that, though entirely natural between mother and young son, are potentially embarrassing and socially awkward when revealed to the viewer. Stein thoroughly examines the series’ engagement with issues such as discrimination and other social topics while also addressing its formal qualities, stating that, “Text is spare yet with an engaging flow, and there’s plenty of space around the illustrations so that both text and image may be studied independently and in easy tandem” (74). While she stops short of explicitly connecting the rawness of the imagery to its content, Stein does note that during this period, Rebhan “reclaimed her voice” (75).

If the motherhood series offers little respite, Rebhan’s *A Daughter’s Report on a Father’s Aging* offers none at all. The work is suffused with her care for her aging and ailing father, created shortly after the passing of her mother, whose final days she also documented. Both projects, as Stein notes, evoke a “community of caregivers” (89). While Stein opens with DC-area artist and art professor Ann Stoddard’s glowing assessment of the *Aging* series, praising how it “reframes the ... female caregiver-victim as a powerful subject, the photographer-daughter....” (88), what unfolds is a deeply human, often heartbreaking chronicle of her father’s decline. As Stein emphasizes, he was a vibrant activist and notable international labor leader. Rebhan incorporated text alongside collaged objects from her father’s care, including calendar markings that document his lost abilities.

In the series *Can’t* (2003–6) she lists mundane activities her father can no longer perform, concluding starkly and with finality in a late image, “My 85-year-old father can’t.” Somber images of upraised toilets, diapers, and mattress liners underscore the daily difficulties of

caregiving, prompting Stein to observe, “The indignities outweigh any brush with dignitaries....” (91). A particularly provocative question posed to readers asks how the father might react: “Would he proudly commend his daughter for extending labor concerns to ... unpaid family work? Or would he ... remark that this is what every daughter has always been expected to do as a labor of love, and that second-wave feminism has no business challenging that age-old tradition?” (91). Stein implicitly raises broader questions about legacy and historical narrative: Does this series challenge patriarchal histories that omit invisible labor, or does it simply document it? Rebhan seems to present the complexity, leaving it for viewers to navigate.

Rebhan’s next series offered a welcome reprieve from the serious topic of infirmity and age to focus on photographs taken in her son’s room during his summer visit from college. With minimal text and no attempt at tidiness, the images capture piles of objects: squirt gun, tennis ball, skateboard, remote control, laptop, pizza box, baseball mitt, and an unpaired flip-flop. While helping Rebhan “restore her comic sensibilities,” the series also amplified both the realities of everyday life and broader reflections on consumption and artistry in the mundane. The final image of the section, *Cords* (2015), presents a grid of electrical cords she found in his room, neatly tied and organized, satisfying her “impulse to clean up” (98). Only an artist could render such ordinariness so visually compelling.

More recently, Rebhan extends her gaze beyond the domestic sphere to her neighborhood and land rights, which Stein documents as “a history that is decidedly unsentimental” (112). Stein, however, does not fully articulate how this work diverges from her earlier domestic-focused series or what prompted the shift. Here, Rebhan employs “rephotography,” a technique that superimposes historical photographs onto contemporary scenes, highlighting gentrification. Beyond documenting change, the series conveys “no definitive authorial message,” as

Stein notes, though she helpfully situates Rebhan’s approach alongside the photomontages of Barbara Kruger (b. 1945) while noting that Rebhan lacks Kruger’s “punchy verbal condensation” (114). Returning to her roots as a first-generation American with immigrant parents, Rebhan also interweaves personal memories with clippings and photographs of sites, connecting back to themes explored in her work on her father. Stein provides rich historical context but offers little analysis of the aesthetics. In *Political Act* (2021), for example, Rebhan presents five newspaper clippings about a public pool and its integration. Her accompanying text recounts an incident from when she was ten. Her father had taken her and a friend’s daughter, a child of color, to a public pool and, she recalled, “Nobody bothered them. I didn’t realize it was a political act until about 55 years later” (123). The background is notably abstract, a blue watercolor with a white form that might suggest a swimsuit, alongside a small clipping of a girl lying in a swimsuit and cap. Again, Stein does not comment on the aesthetics, though the background here seems to compete visually with—and perhaps even elevate—the clippings and text, a curious inversion worth noting.

This section’s overtly political work reflects Rebhan’s broader family memories and upbringing, including attending a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., and her response to the recent removal of an African American cemetery. Stein aptly observes this as “quite a pivot for Rebhan, who long maintained a stance of neutrality in her work” (130), highlighting a significant shift in both tone and engagement. Similarly, the final section focuses on Rebhan’s *Living* series (2022; Fig. 1), a title that feels on point. Here, Rebhan shifts from observer to observed, presenting enlarged depictions of parts of her body against stark black backgrounds, a visual impact that resonates both in person and on the page. Stein offers engaging context on the history of self-portraiture, noting that in Marxist sociology “photography was needed to satisfy the sense of self-worth of the rising bourgeois class with

a corresponding demand for mass portraiture” (136). After the nineteenth-century portraits, which often served as tools for social promotion, Stein situates Rebhan within a lineage of provocative female self-presentations, citing artists such as Hannah Wilke (1940–1993), Lynda Benglis (b. 1941), and Adrian Piper (b. 1948), though notable figures like Anne Brigman (1869–1950) and Francesca Woodman (1958–1981) are unfortunately omitted.

Stein provides a lively account of Rebhan’s unflinching aesthetics: raking light that refuses to soften the traces of time on her skin, and the now notable absence of text, leaving the images to speak for themselves. She imagines these portraits framed in terms of opprobrium, yet their unsentimental force asserts, in Stein’s words, that “she is still here, very much so, and capable of holding her ground against rote dismissals” (138). The book closes with a striking self-portrait of the artist’s back and head, her hair streaked with gray—“She insists on being noticed,” Stein observes (138). This image powerfully bookends Rebhan’s decades-long journey: from the tentative self-acceptance of her earlier self-portrait in college, through the assertion of independence shaped by the feminist movement, to this present moment of quiet, resolute presence. Notably, the final series echoes the early work—sans clothes, never fully exposed—creating the sense that Rebhan is turning back to herself, reflecting with honesty and grace. It is a tender, resonant conclusion, both an intimate self-acknowledgment and a testament to a lifetime of artistic inquiry. •

Sally Jane Brown is an artist, writer, and curator. With a passion for women and feminist artists, her writing is published in *WAJ* and *Panorama*, among other publications. Her art is in public and private collections, and included in exhibitions in the US. She curates independently and for West Virginia University Libraries.