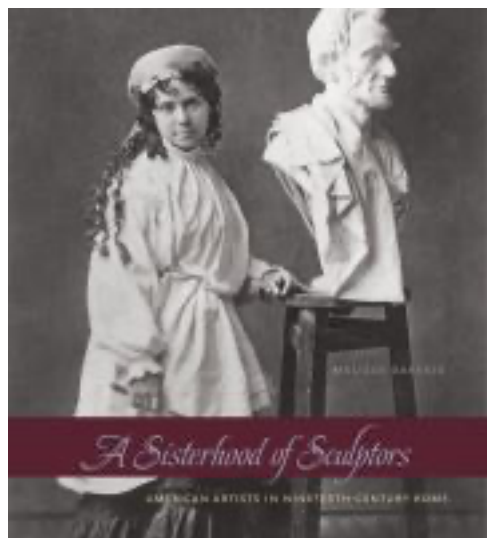


A Sisterhood of Sculptors: American Artists in Nineteenth-Century Rome

by Melissa Dabakis. Penn State University Press, July 2014. 304 p. ill. ISBN 9780271062198 (cl.), \$59.95.

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Mid-nineteenth century ex-patriot American women sculptors, dubbed "The White Marmorean Flock" by the author Henry James, settled in Rome to study and to build careers. In the process, they created new sculpture forms that in turn gave visual expression to the far-reaching political and social issues of their time.

Dabakis, who has made a considerable contribution to the study of American sculpture, provides an in-depth study of this ground-breaking artistic community. Harriet Hosmer, Anne Whitney, Louise Lander, Edmondia Lewis and Vinnie Ream made significant contributions to their chosen medium and the world of American art as a whole. Their sculptural works

included large-scale civic statuary as well as smaller private commissions. Although many were highly regarded during their own lifetimes, they received minimal attention in art historical scholarship until the last fifteen to twenty years.

The book traces the origin of the group, which included artists, writers, and actresses. The choice of Rome as a creative oasis for women owed much to the revolutionary political and social reforms taking place in Italy; its rich sculptural heritage provided a means of expanding the artists' visual education, including the study of the nude, a vital ingredient for an artist's development, and a practice considered beyond the pale for respectable ladies. In contrast to the more stringent limitations placed on women artists in the United States, those who ventured overseas enjoyed a significant measure of freedom to open their own studios, develop a clientele, and nurture their careers.

However successful they became, these artists were still subjected to intense, frequently negative, criticism from male counterparts, the public at large, and sometimes even jealous colleagues within their immediate circle. They labored under Victorian expectations of "true womanhood" while striving to create new forms of sculptural expression. Their art often reflected issues of the time, such as the abolitionist or the suffragist movements, and was met with mixed reviews, if not outright hostility.

This publication is a good example of how an author can blend scholarly research on multiple disciplines with clear, concise writing that is both informative and appealing to a wide audience. Drawing on personal records, correspondence, and previous scholarship on the topic, Dabakis adroitly balances social, cultural, and political history with vivid personal portraits of the artists. The result is well-rounded.

The thoughtfully chosen photographic illustrations provide further evidence of each sculptor's skills which equaled, if not rivaled, those of male sculptors of the era. The reader emerges with a clearer picture of each artist's personality, as well as a greater understanding of their creative processes and of their significance to the history of American art.