

# THE PHILADELPHIA TEN: A WOMEN'S ARTIST GROUP 1917–1945

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(From the catalog)

An exhibition of 247 paintings, all by women, opened on February 17, 1917, at the Art Club of Philadelphia. Included were landscapes (views of Cape Cod, the Arizona desert, Taos, Bermuda, Venice, Ravello, the valleys of Ireland), a few floral still lifes, and occasional portraits. Eleven young women—Eleanor Abrams, Katharine Marie Barker, Theresa Bernstein, Cora S. Brooks, Isabel Branson Cartwright, Constance Cochrane, Mary-Russell Ferrell [Colton], Arrah Lee Gaul, Edith Lucile Howard, Helen Kiner McCarthy, and Katharine Hood McCormick—“several of them associated with the School of Design for Women,” banded together for what proved to be the first of sixty-five exhibitions.

This little-heralded event marked the beginning of the nearly thirty-year history of a group, which, with changes in membership, comprised thirty women who called themselves “Ten Philadelphia Painters,” then “The Philadelphia Ten,” and, later, simply “The Ten.” In time their exhibitions became annual events that critics and collectors could depend upon for consistently high-quality work as well as variety of subject matter and style. The *Art Digest* commented in 1939 that “in sharp contrast to the shifting and disappearing alphabet groups of the government is at least one ever-present numerical group: ‘The Ten,’ Philadelphia’s organization of women painters and sculptors.” The current exhibition of The Philadelphia Ten reintroduces to the public the work of these women artists.

Local and regional art clubs (such as the Art Club of Philadelphia, the Boston Art Club, and the Salmagundi Club in New York) proliferated in America during the opening decades of the twentieth century; even earlier, beginning in the late nineteenth century, women’s art organizations sponsored exhibitions. Founded in 1889, the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors (NAWPS) held their annual exhibition in New York and sent traveling exhibitions around the country. Philadelphia’s Plastic Club, formed in 1897 by a group of women artists as a place to “exchange ideas, hold exhibitions, establish sketch classes, socialize, and enjoy company of like spirits,” held frequent exhibitions at their club on South Camac Street.

Seeking venues for their work, members of The Philadelphia Ten frequently participated in events like the annual Exhibition of Works in Oils (begun at the Art Club of Philadelphia in 1913) and the Annual Colour Exhibition and other group shows (some limited to women, some not) at the Plastic Club.

The February 1917 exhibition differed in that all the participants had been trained in the art schools of Philadelphia—nine at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women and two at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts—and in the decision to limit exhibitors to a relatively small group of artists who wanted to exhibit a large number of works at one time in a controlled situation. The *Christian Science Monitor* observed that “There is an advantage in this banding together of congenial though different art personalities which may be felt particularly in the general high standard of the work shown, and in the number of canvases contributed by each painter. One is not thus forced to judge an artist on insufficient proof, and he may study to his satisfaction the individual bent of each exhibitor.” The women’s goal was “to show just the work they wished to present, in the most dignified and harmonious manner.”

Although several small, independent art groups in Europe and America had begun a fashion for numerical labels, two groups in particular provided a precedent for The Philadelphia Ten: the Ten American Artists, impressionists from New York and Boston, and The Eight (later dubbed the Ashcan school because of their gritty depictions of urban themes). Both groups had high visibility in Philadelphia and New York during the formative years of the women who became The Philadelphia Ten. The Eight's first—and only—exhibition as a group opened in 1908 at Macbeth Galleries in New York, then traveled to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. That same year, the Academy mounted a major retrospective of the Ten American Painters. Furthermore, one of the Ten American Painters, William Merritt Chase, taught at the Academy, and several members of The Philadelphia Ten studied with him there or in New York (where he taught at the Art Students League and the Chase School of Art).

While the women's awareness of these and other groups certainly influenced their adoption of a stylistically neutral label, an important distinction existed: the earlier men's groups had their genesis in protest and secession; the Ten American Artists had seceded from the Society of American Artists in 1897; The Eight found common cause "moral support, friendly competition and good fellowship with Robert Henri's resignation from the National Academy of Design. The formation of The Philadelphia Ten had a more practical purpose: to provide additional venues for the members' work, thereby enhancing their visibility locally and nationally. To that end, the women certainly succeeded—they exhibited from the East Coast to Texas, Milwaukee, Memphis, and beyond, receiving positive reviews and attracting eager patrons wherever they went. Five women—Isabel Branson Cartwright, Constance Cochrane, Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Lucile Howard, M. Elizabeth Price—participated in all (or most) of The Philadelphia Ten's exhibitions. In addition, stalwarts included Theresa Bernstein, Fern Isabel Coppedge, and Nancy Maybin Ferguson. Sue May Gill and S. Gertrude Schell replaced original exhibitors Helen Kiner McCarthy and Cora Smalley Brooks after their deaths; Emma Fordyce MacRae became a regular in the group after Coppedge dropped out in 1935. The current exhibition highlights these 13 women with the greatest number of paintings (from 3 to 7 each and a sculpture by Gill), reflecting their predominance in the group's exhibitions. Ten additional painters exhibited occasionally with The Philadelphia Ten: Eleanor Abrams, Katharine Marie Barker, Maude Drein Bryant, Arrah Lee Gaul, Margaret Ralston Gest, Susette Schultz Keast, Katharine Hood McCormick, Marian T. MacIntosh, Elizabeth Wentworth Roberts, and Edith Longstreth Wood. Seven sculptors also showed with the group: Gladys Edgerly Bates, Cornelia van Auken Chapin, Beatrice Fenton, Harriet Whitney Frishmuth, Genevieve Karr Hamlin, Joan Hartley, and Mary Louise Lawser. These ten painters and five of the sculptors have a proportionally smaller number of works (1 or 2 each) in the exhibition. It has not been possible to include work by sculptors Harley or Lawser, but a portrait of Lawser is among the paintings by Gill in this retrospective.

Fittingly, since the majority of The Philadelphia Ten's most regular exhibitors studied at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (PSDW, now Moore College of Art and Design), the opening of this retrospective exhibition coincides with the 150th anniversary of this first art school for women in the United States. Sarah Worthington King Peter (1800-1877), an Ohio-born philanthropist and the wife of Philadelphia's British consul, founded the school in 1848. Her goal was that "a girl, no matter what her condition in life, should have some practical training which would fit her, should she so desire or the necessity arise, for well-paying self support."

Over several decades following its establishment, the School of Design grew and flourished, its curriculum reflecting the changing art market and the ongoing need for graduates to support themselves. At the outset, alumnae found jobs primarily in the industrial sector as designers of textiles, wallpapers, and other interior furnishings. By the last decade of the nineteenth century and during the first two decades of the twentieth (when members of The Philadelphia Ten attended) emphasis at PSDW had shifted away from the design arts to the fine arts. Nonetheless, the school continued to encourage the concept of art as a career, not a hobby, with economic self-sufficiency a goal. A member of The Philadelphia Ten and a PSDW graduate, Nancy Maybin Ferguson, expressed this philosophy when explaining her decision to study painting, "I don't think

it was a natural love for painting that made me first begin to study; rather it was that I wanted to do some work in the world. I felt every one should, and I chose that of painting. I remember first thinking of writing, but decided for painting.” Emily Sartain, principal of the school from 1886 to 1919, instilled in her students the conviction that women could and should expect success if they worked hard, achieved technical proficiency, and aggressively marketed their products.

The faculty at the School of Design during this period included many artists associated with the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts: Rae Sloan Bredin, Daniel Garber, Robert Henri, Peter Moran, Samuel Murray, Alice Barber Stephens, William Sartain, and Henry B. Snell. Of this list, Snell influenced the painters of The Philadelphia Ten most. He was an impressionist and represented the conservative tendencies of the group of artists who lived in the Bucks County area and made up the New Hope School. Equally influential was PSDW teacher Elliott Daingerfield, who painted mystical, visionary landscapes, as well as poetic genre scenes and academic figural compositions. Beyond the studios of PSDW, Snell and Daingerfield each conducted summer classes in the United States and abroad: Snell taught in Edgartown (1915) and Gloucester, Massachusetts (1916-1920), and in Boothbay Harbor, Maine (1921-1927), while Daingerfield spent summers at Blowing Rock, North Carolina. From 1905 to 1914 and from 1928 to 1935, Snell led tours to Europe—and on one occasion to Mexico—and the participating students studied and sketched art treasures.

The training under these mentors had a lasting effect on the careers of most of the long-time members of The Philadelphia Ten. Not only did their painting styles reflect the influence of Snell and Daingerfield, but they also favored the locales to which their teachers had introduced them. Gloucester became the summer home of Theresa Bernstein, Isabel Branson Cartwright, Fern Coppedge, Susette Keast, Marian MacIntosh, and Emma Fordyce MacRae; Cora S. Brooks and Helen Kiner McCarthy spent their summers in Boothbay Harbor. Similarly, in succeeding years, members of The Philadelphia Ten revisited Amalfi and Ravello, Brittany and Cornwall, European sites where they had painted with Snell.

The specialty of the School of Design’s painting program was considered to be landscapes, although still lifes and portraits were also emphasized; at exhibitions of The Philadelphia Ten, landscapes always predominated. An article written in 1923 compared the School of Design, with its focus on landscape, to the Academy, where the figure played a more important role. Describing the “various painter groups at the Academy” as “consciously mannered,” the unidentified commentator wondered, “Who can say which is to be preferred? Or in what proportions they should merge? Without doubt both are needed, standards of beauty and amenity [the Academy], and a youthful spirit of experiment and adventure seeking to prove the past by means of the present and not the present by means of the past [PSDW].”

To some degree, this difference in emphasis at the two schools affected the presentation of painting and sculpture by The Philadelphia Ten. Paintings of the nude made no appearance in the Philadelphia Ten’s exhibitions; however, when the exhibitors included sculptors (some of them Academy trained), the nude did appear—specifically in the work of Harriet Frishmuth, Beatrice Fenton, Gladys Bates, and Joan Hartley. Training alone is probably not the whole explanation for this difference; undoubtedly marketability also had its effect; the average buyer could comfortably place a nude in the garden, but might hesitate to hang one on the parlor wall. Reviews of the first exhibition of The Philadelphia Ten appeared in the Philadelphia newspapers. Four years passed before the group, somewhat re-formed, exhibited again. Five of the original members—Cora S. Brooks, Isabel Branson Cartwright, Constance Cochrane, Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, and Lucile Howard, all graduates of PSDW, participated in the 1921 exhibition. PSDW graduate Eleanor Abrams and two other Philadelphians, Elizabeth Wentworth Roberts and M. Elizabeth Price, both of whom had studied at PAFA, exhibited also. These eight presented a much smaller exhibition than the first—99 works ranging from large canvases to small sketches—and this was the format adopted for the future. The next year’s exhibition also featured eight artists, but in 1923 the number of exhibitors in the coalescing group stabilized at ten. A year

later at their “fifth annual,” the group, an established presence on the Philadelphia art scene, began using the name “Ten Philadelphia Painters.”

The women artists outgrew the designation “Painters” with the introduction of sculpture in 1926; Beatrice Fenton exhibited as a guest (expanding the ranks to eleven that year). Critics praised “this happy addition,” and especially liked her fountain figures and “the supreme *One Arm Put-Up*.” Fenton exhibited again in 1927, followed by New York sculptor Harriet Whitney Frishmuth in 1928 and 1929. Both Fenton and Frishmuth worked primarily in bronze, producing fountains and garden sculpture, as well as small table-top figures easily cast in multiple editions and sold at affordable prices.

Painters and sculptors alike, The Philadelphia Ten were self-supporting entrepreneurs for whom sales were critical. Vigorous self-promotion, aggressive marketing, and a creative outreach were all components of their commercial success. Exhibited works were always for sale (with the exception of a small number of loans) and prices ranged from \$50 to \$1000, with an average of \$350 to \$500. Hoping to attract the younger buyer or those new to the art market, members tried to include lower-priced art and a variety of sizes and subjects in every show. And, hoping to benefit from the attention given every year to the annual exhibition at PAFA, The Philadelphia Ten usually scheduled their annual on dates that overlapped those of the Academy show. A 1926 review acknowledged their business acumen: “The intelligence which obviously gathered under one roof so many individual types is apparent again in the selection of the canvases for display. In every art exhibition the possibility of sale must govern to some extent the choice of subject matter. The Philadelphia Ten, recognizing this need, have culled from their studios a balanced ration—canvases which have been made for the sheer joy of self-expression; canvases which, consciously or unconsciously, were wrought for the trade, and works which are commissions.” One facet of The Philadelphia Ten’s marketing strategy—the rotary exhibition—coincided with their belief in art education, their interest in bringing the fine arts to a broader segment of the American population, and their desire to encourage women to explore their innate artistic talents—not only as artists, but as consumers with discrimination and taste. In the 1920s and 1930s The Philadelphia Ten circulated “rotary” exhibitions under the auspices of the State Federation of Pennsylvania Women and the American Federation of the Arts. The audiences attracted by these two organizations were quite different.

The exhibitions sponsored by the State Federation of Pennsylvania Women were generally shown in women’s club houses, community centers, and other civic buildings; those that saw the exhibitions in Lancaster, Bedford, Coatesville and other semi-rural Pennsylvania communities were not the traditional art-viewing audience. The exhibitions were part of a national effort to encourage “club women” to incorporate art into their homes; the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (parent organization of the State Federation of Pennsylvania Women) had established a Division of Art whose mission it was to create “a truer public opinion, a saner valuation of art—by every possible means, to make more people realize that art is an essential to happy and successful living for everyone, holding besides an important place in the business and social fabric of the nation.” The numbers indicate that, in their home state, The Philadelphia Ten played no small role in this effort. For example, at the February 1927 exhibition in the Bedford, Pennsylvania, Community Centre (hosted by the Art and Civic Clubs of Bedford, the Bedford Chamber of Commerce, and the Bedford County Federation of Women), the art works were seen over ten days by one thousand people—notably school children (“among the most earnest and enthusiastic visitors”), women’s club members, and teachers. Writing about an early rotary exhibition in Delaware County, Constance Cochrane described the diverse audience that had been attracted: “In every place where it was shown, the children came in large numbers from both public and private schools. As the idea progressed with successive exhibitions, receptions were held in the evening, to which the men were invited, and some of them saw the fine arts in an entirely new light.”

By contrast, the rotaries circulated nationally by the American Federation of the Arts drew an upper class audience more used to attending art exhibitions; they were frequently held in

museums and art galleries. The 1926 rotary, comprising 40 canvases (and sponsored by the Midwest American Federation of the Arts), for example, traveled to Brooks Memorial Gallery, Memphis, Tennessee; the Jackson Art Association, Jackson, Mississippi; the Akron Art Institute, Akron, Ohio; the Institute of Arts and Science, Manchester, New Hampshire; Butler Art Institute, Youngstown, Ohio; and Teacher's College, Albany, New York. In 1928 a traveling exhibition of 43 paintings (accompanied by honorary Texan Isabel Branson Cartwright) was seen in four Texas cities—San Antonio, Beaumont, Houston, and Dallas. Tea parties, held in well-appointed rooms decorated with “a profusion of spring flowers, roses, larkspur and lilies” and hosted by society ladies, were a regular feature of the American Federation of the Arts exhibitions.

An important benefit of both types of rotary was the recognition from outside the Philadelphia area that devolved upon the members of The Philadelphia Ten. While the exhibitions at the Art Club and the Art Alliance of Philadelphia attracted a local following, the rotary shows created national exposure for the group as a whole and for the artists individually. Constance Cochrane's mother wrote, “From the annual exhibition many rotary shows were invited to proceed from one museum or art gallery to another, but most important were the invitations to have ‘One-man Shows.’” The individual histories of the artists of The Philadelphia Ten document an impressive number of one- or two-person exhibitions throughout the United States, many of which, undoubtedly, proceeded from the rotary shows.

The impact of a career on the personal lives of The Philadelphia Ten mirrored the experience of others of their era who chose a profession over the more traditional role of full-time wife and mother. Educated before 1910, most of these thirty women represented the first generation of modern art professionals who felt compelled to choose a commitment to art over home and family. Of the five women who consistently showed with The Philadelphia Ten over its 28-year span, two—Constance Cochrane and M. Elizabeth Price—never married. Lucile Howard did not marry until she was 53. Isabel Branson Cartwright became a widow at 32. In this core group, only Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton was married for most of her adult life and had children. To generalize about the members of The Philadelphia Ten, about half never married, a proportion somewhat greater than the standard for college women around 1910. Of those who married, few had children and several, including Theresa Bernstein, Arrah Lee Gaul, and Lucile Howard, opted to keep their maiden names. Except three who died in their forties—Helen Kiner McCarthy, Cora S. Brooks, and Susette Schultz Keast—most of The Philadelphia Ten lived long lives; they have averaged 82 at the time of death.

Professionally oriented and unconventional though The Philadelphia Ten were, reviews of their work usually revealed the very conventional expectations of critics who never forgot that these artists were women. For example, a reflection of gender was often looked for in a painter's output, particularly when the artist was female. A critic who saw the February 1929 exhibition used his review to explore “the subjects chosen by women artists as compared with those selected by men painters.” He commented that, although women artists often concentrated on “sentimental pieces depicting some aspect of infantile or maternal life, or still-life pictures that showed a predominance of floral decorativeness,” this show seemed “altogether forgetful of ‘mother pictures,’” emphasizing instead landscapes and seascapes, “rugged outdoor pictures.” He wrote, “The doors of life and of their outlook as artists, too, have opened then together for women of our day.” While positing the existence of “feminine” subjects, he did not see them in the work of The Philadelphia Ten.

Most reviewers, in fact, when describing The Philadelphia Ten, stressed the variety of subjects, the focus on the outdoors, the narrative quality, and the individuality of the painters. As one writer put it, “The Ten painters and sculptors have successfully exhibited together for several years, but they have consistently maintained their individual personalities in their work, and their canvases and sculpture are as varied and different as the seasons and the places they choose to paint.” Based on interviews with the artists (who told how they came to paint certain canvases), a review of the 1929 exhibition highlighted the vigor, energy, and drama of the paintings on view: “Over here the sea dashes madly against a ledge of rock; over there an Indian girl stares at the world

with a certain stoic calm; decorative panels of flowers gleam with a subdued golden light on the south wall; an old man with a net lifts a weather-worn face against the background of a quaint Cornish village. Here is a tall landscape of snow in the Pennsylvania hill country; a matter of fifteen feet away finds a Corpus Domini procession winding its gayly colored way between the stone house of Ravello, Italy, and not so far from that a turbulent Irish glen is a dark green jewel.” Similarly, an article in the *Chicago Evening Post* described “the adventure on land and sea and in the wild fastnesses of high mountains and on arid deserts” that characterized The Philadelphia Ten’s 1929 exhibition at the Philadelphia Art Alliance.

In style, as with subject, critics revealed the expectation that the works of women painters would be “feminine,” and a critic in this period could confer no greater compliment than to label a woman’s work “masculine,” or even to mistake it for a man’s. Because many of The Philadelphia Ten used broad, loose brushstrokes and a heavy application of paint, reviewers often described their work as “masculine”—not an ideal to which any of these women aspired, but intended as high praise.

The member of The Philadelphia Ten whose work was most frequently described as “masculine” was Theresa Bernstein, who initially signed her work “Bernstein” to discourage gender identification. W. H. DeB. Nelson, writing in the influential *International Studio* in 1917, described Theresa Bernstein as “a woman painter who paints like a man.” Looking back on gender assumptions in the art world of the early twentieth century, Bernstein summed up her experience: “People want to make comparisons between a woman’s work and the work of a man. Of course, I don’t think sex has much to do with it, except that few women in history were able to be outstanding . . . Although many women have been capable and have done interesting work, they haven’t excelled in painting to the status men have achieved . . . Since there was always the inevitable comparison with the art of men, juries and scholars wouldn’t accept a woman on the same basis. One has to understand that there are limitations not in one’s expression, but in one’s status. The onus is there even when it isn’t elucidated or emphasized.”

Evidently, Bernstein perceived reviews tainted by gender assumptions as part of the larger issue of the status of women artists. Indeed, the “onus” of being a woman was felt most acutely by Bernstein and those of her colleagues who sought acceptance at the highest level in their profession. For women artists embarking on their careers, educational and exhibition opportunities had improved greatly in the last half of the nineteenth century. Both the Philadelphia School of Design for Women and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts played an important role in creating an improved environment for women art professionals. The exhibition records of the National Academy of Design in New York and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts show a high degree of participation over many years by members of The Philadelphia Ten. Women sculptors, in particular, achieved a high level of acceptance and participation (as high as 25 percent) in major exhibitions; in 1915, at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, women represented nearly 30 percent of the exhibiting sculptors. In 1916, the Plastic Club mounted an exhibition of 74 women sculptors (including Fenton and Frishmuth) that included internationally renowned artists like Anna Vaughn Hyatt (later Huntington), Malvina Hoffman, and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. Many women sculptors (including Fenton, Bates, and Frishmuth) played an active role in the National Sculpture Society, based in New York. A critic for *The Arts*, writing in 1921, commented, “There can be no doubt that America has advanced in the variety and interest of its sculpture. And the women of America, the artists in marble and bronze, have done a great deal to bring about this condition.”

Yet, in some respects, the art world resisted change. A male-dominated art establishment controlled membership in the National Academy of Design and in all-male clubs where “connections could be cultivated, deals made, [and] bargains struck.” Bernstein protested that “women have minimal representation in annuals throughout the country. Juries don’t accept the work of women; and if it isn’t hanging on the wall, it isn’t seen.” She noted that although the NAD accepted her work thirty times, she never achieved membership, either as an associate or an academician. Many of The Philadelphia Ten exhibited in annuals at the NAD, but only three

achieved election to membership: sculptors Harriet Whitney Frishmuth and Cornelia van Auken Chapin, and painter Emma Fordyce MacRae.

Thus membership in The Philadelphia Ten, providing “moral support, friendly competition and good fellowship,” may have been even more important for women artists than it was for their male counterparts, given the uphill battle they fought to achieve parity in the marketplace and in the close-knit and tradition-bound art establishment.

Critics’ discussion of feminine versus masculine seems sometimes to have been confused with the passionate debate of the 1920s and 1930s pitting modern art against conservative. In 1923, an unidentified writer protested somewhat incoherently that “One might suppose that the fluent, pleasant painting at the School of Design might be characteristic of women, but that there are more women students than men among the radicals at the Academy, which may go to indicate that women are less conservative than men or that they are more susceptible to leadership.” The Philadelphia Ten’s exhibition history (1917-1945) coincided with a time of change in the arts in America. The period between the two world wars saw American adaptations of European modernism (introduced to the American public through the watershed Armory Show of 1913) and a subsequent reaction that brought a return to realism. Following World War I, the American mood became conservative. Isolationism and a wish to turn away from the influence of Europe grew during the 1920s, peaking around 1930. In this period of self-examination, artists defined the uniqueness of American as opposed to European. Many equated modernism (especially French modernism) with Europe, and realism (particularly social realism) with America and “Americanism.”

In the early 1920s the faculty of PAFA split into two factions: the “old guard” led by impressionist painter and teacher Daniel Garber, and the modernist “upstarts” led by painter-teachers Henry McCarter, Hugh Breckenridge, and Arthur B. Carles. (All four of these artists had graduated from PAFA.) Between 1920 and 1923, PAFA mounted three shows to accommodate the modernists in its midst: In 1920, its “Paintings and Drawings by Representative Modern Masters” (its equivalent of New York’s 1913 Armory Show) displayed work by European masters like Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Auguste Rodin. In 1921, its “Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings Showing the Later Tendencies in Art” featured American modernists and “progressives.” The 1923 exhibition organized by McCarter and Carles, “Contemporary European Paintings and Sculpture,” represented the most radical of European modernists—artists like Pablo Picasso, Chaim Soutine, and Henri Matisse. This last exhibition produced such negative public and critical reactions that modernist exhibitions did not appear at the Academy again until the 1950s.

The painters of The Philadelphia Ten remained relatively immune to the “infectious scourge” (as critic Dorothy Grafly put it). In fact, on occasion, several members of The Philadelphia Ten expressed an aversion to modern art. In the 1930s, however, tinges of an influence from modernism crept into the women’s exhibitions in subtle ways. Coppedge’s work, for example, went through a gradual stylistic change toward simpler forms and brighter, more arbitrary color. With the inclusion of painters Edith Wood and Margaret Gest as guest exhibitors in 1935, critics remarked on a new element in the group: “The work of both these artists is decidedly different from any which ‘The Ten’ showed, leaning more to the modernistic, rather than the realistic,” and “Margaret Gest and Edith L. Wood, two guest exhibitors, strike the only note that suggests a left-wing turn.” Similarly, developments in American sculpture were reflected in a change in the choice of sculptors invited to exhibit with The Philadelphia Ten. In the early years of the century, it was the established method for a sculptor to work at one remove from the finished piece: the sculptor created a clay model; the work was then passed to an artisan who transposed the form to a piece of marble or cast it in bronze—usually with mechanical aids and sometimes on a different scale. In the 1920s, some sculptors began to question the integrity of these methods. Many adopted direct carving techniques (also called *taille directe*). These artists made their first studies, not in clay, but in the material intended for the final piece, and, forgoing the services of an artisan, completed the sculptures themselves. While the first two sculptors who exhibited with The Philadelphia Ten—Harriet Frishmuth and Beatrice Fenton—worked primarily in bronze (their

pieces were cast at foundries like Gorham in Providence, Rhode Island), the sculptors who participated in the 1930s exhibitions—Gladys Bates, Cornelia van Auken Chapin, Genevieve Karr Hamlin, Joan Hartley, and Mary Lawser—preferred direct carving techniques. In the decision to include these innovative artists, The Philadelphia Ten were probably seeking not modernism but the appeal of variety, however.

By 1924, four members of the Ten Philadelphia Painters lived in New York—a fact which was commented upon by several critics—but their association continued, owing to a “common interest existing since many of them were art students.” Even after artists who were not associated with Philadelphia (Harriet Frishmuth, Emma Fordyce MacRae, and Joan Hartley) had joined the ranks of the group, the annual exhibition was held in Philadelphia, usually at the Art Club or at the Art Alliance. Most of The Philadelphia Ten showed regularly in both New York and Philadelphia, in exhibitions organized by other women’s organizations, in commercial galleries (such as Milch and Ferargil in New York and McClees in Philadelphia), and at such traditional venues as the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The exhibitions of The Philadelphia Ten were supplementary to these other opportunities, not alternative to them.

The remarkable stability of The Philadelphia Ten, despite changes in membership, is noteworthy considering the political, economic, and social upheaval that occurred during the nearly thirty years of the group’s active existence: World War I, the stock market crash of 1929, the subsequent Depression, and World War II. While each of these events had a profound impact on the individual lives as well as on the collective story of these women, the fact remains that they were able to continue to produce and sell their art throughout this period. None were engaged in W.P.A. projects, in contrast to so many of their fellow artists, perhaps because their art was inherently conservative and, therefore, more salable.

There is no documented explanation for the disbanding of the group after 1945, although most members were approaching sixty years old and may no longer have wished to take the time or make the effort to plan their exhibitions. During World War II, they had consciously decided not to mount an exhibition despite encouragement from Walter A. Newman, owner of Newman Galleries, the venue for their 1941 show. According to minutes recorded by Constance Cochrane, “A meeting of the Ten was held on December 13th [1941] following the Declaration of War. The group decided against holding the exhibition at the Neuman [sic] Galleries in March because of the many demands on each for service.” Walter Newman’s response to this decision was definite but went unheeded: “I feel that the Ten are going over-timid in their decision to postpone their Exhibition. We have had, and are having with the exception of a few days after the declaration of war, the biggest season since 1928. Also I feel you are making a mistake in not being consistent with your shows. One of the important features of an exhibition such as yours, is the repetition of it at a certain time every year, and I felt that a good start had been made last year and should warrant its continuation. I know that a good many Philadelphians are interested in the work of ‘The Ten’ and it seems to me poor business not to put your work before them when there is so little, if any, expense involved.” The possibility of exhibiting later in 1942 was left open “if things are better instead of worse,” but ultimately no exhibition was held until their final one, billed as “an interim” exhibition, at the Woodmere Gallery in April 1945.

For the women of The Philadelphia Ten, art was a means of financial support and of creative expression. Primarily from an upper middle class background and educated in the best art schools, these women achieved economic independence and professional success in a field where neither is assured. While some might fault The Philadelphia Ten for their resistance to modernism, their exhibitions were clearly an invitation to critical discussion of their work, and The Philadelphia Ten were not accused of seeking “the immunity of feminine fragility,” as were the members of the New York Society of Women Painters. As a vehicle for “bringing high quality art work done by women to the attention of the public,” the exhibitions of The Philadelphia Ten were an important step towards the fuller participation of women in the art community as a whole. In 1924, critic Arline De Haas wrote that the names of the Ten Philadelphia Painters “stand out as among the foremost women in their line of expression and each one has so created her own

atmosphere that her work is suggested with the mention of her name.” It is the purpose of this exhibition that the mention of the names of these outstanding women artists should once again bring recognition and appreciation.