

North Country: The Making of Minnesota

Mary Lethert Wingerd

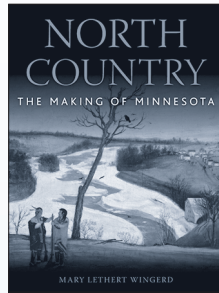
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 449 p. Cloth, \$34.95.)

In *North Country: The Making of Minnesota*, Mary Wingerd has produced a landmark: a state history that places the history of Native peoples at the center of the action. Identifying the fur trade as the economic and political platform that launched the state of Minnesota, the narrative necessarily encompasses the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples, without whom Europeans and European Americans would never have acquired their fortunes or built their political careers.

Wingerd begins by sketching the transformations that the Dakota and the Ojibwe experienced prior to direct contact with Europeans and the emergence of “a hybrid culture that was neither purely Indian, nor purely European.” Indeed, early relations between Natives and whites offered the possibility that Dakota, Ojibwe, and métis peoples would remain key players in the development of Minnesota.

Marriages between Europeans and Natives gave rise to culturally distinctive métis communities and facilitated the early economic successes of white Minnesotans. By the 1840s, Pembina, on the Canadian border, had a mostly métis population of 1,100; it was second in size only to the infant settlement of St. Paul. In southern Minnesota, white traders established bonds of marriage and business with Dakota families, bonds that would be essential to their financial and political accomplishments. When the fur trade went into decline as a consequence of over-hunting and increasing white settlement, these relationships were sundered. The Dakota were removed from the state, and Ojibwe and métis Minnesotans were relegated to the state’s political and economic margins. One of the great strengths of *North Country* is its explication of how mutually exclusive the fur trade and settler-based agriculture proved to be.

Nevertheless, other scenarios were envisaged at that time. A treaty proposed in 1841, four years after the Dakota and Ojibwe signed treaties ceding significant portions of their homelands, would have created a permanent territory for the indigenous peoples of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota, as well as the possibility of full citizenship for its inhabitants. As Wingerd notes, this deeply flawed treaty was “grounded in cultural imperialism and riddled with special interests,” but it still attempted to create an enduring place for Native peoples—on the land and in the American polity. Changing administrations in Washington doomed this plan, however,



and the inexorable flow of white settlers precluded any future treaty that would exclude them from significant tracts of land. The rest of the story, which Wingerd concludes with the “Cataclysm on the Minnesota”—the U.S.-Dakota War—devolves into a more conventional political history, focusing on men whose names today label counties, streets, and high schools: among them, Henry Sibley, Henry Rice, and Alexander Ramsey.

While Wingerd brings the history of Native peoples into her narrative, the effort to incorporate Native people themselves falters at times. Setting out to integrate into Minnesota history “the new social history and the politics of power,” the book does not seem to consider the work of Native scholars. Absent from the bibliography, for instance, are publications by Dakota historian Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Ojibwe historian Anton Treuer. Closer attention to scholarship on Native peoples on their own terms might have led to more appropriate language, including a more accurate literal translation of “Mni Sota Makoce,” the Dakota name for their homeland, and the use of Ho-Chunk to refer to the Winnebago. It is quite surprising to find the Hollywood-esque “brave” used to refer to Native warriors.

Nevertheless, *North Country* challenges readers to rethink Minnesota history. Concluding with the U.S.-Dakota War identifies this traumatic war as a rupture that reshaped the state as a whole, not just its Native population. The brutal removal of the Dakota and Ho-Chunk in 1863 allowed white Minnesotans to begin creating a narrative of their state’s past that erased its multicultural history and the role of Native and métis people in the “making of Minnesota.”

Wingerd’s text is vividly complemented by very useful visual materials. Maps are informative and easy to read (although a map labeled “Dakota and Winnebago exile from Minnesota, 1863” includes reservations established later). Eight sections of color reproductions of paintings and other images are accompanied by explanatory notes that richly reward careful reading.

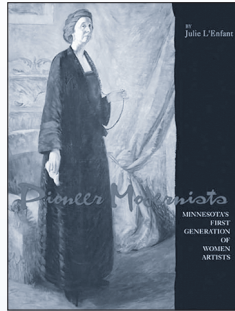
Wingerd’s engaging presentation invites further work that brings in the perspectives and knowledge of Native peoples as well as historical writing about them. *North Country* points the way toward historical scholarship that more fully engages with the history of indigenous peoples within the larger narrative of U.S. history.

Reviewed by Colette A. Hyman, professor of history at Winona State University. Her book Dakota Women’s Work: Creativity, Culture, and Exile (Minnesota Historical Society Press) will appear in April 2012.

Pioneer Modernists: Minnesota's First Generation of Women Artists

Julie L'Enfant

(Afton, MN: Afton Press, 2011. 260 p.
Cloth, \$45.00.)



At the 2011 College Art Association meetings in New York City, a Women's Art Caucus panel on feminism felt like a hot rock n' roll show: standing room only, people clamoring to get in. The air was charged as the ten women panelists took stock of the impact of feminist art, measuring the accomplishments of women in the contemporary art world and the distance left to go.

The attention afforded this panel spoke loudly about the growing stature of feminist art in scholarship and museum exhibitions. In 2007, major exhibitions that surveyed feminist art were mounted at the Brooklyn Museum and at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. As argued in *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art* (2007), there is growing acknowledgement that women have been at the forefront of change in contemporary art over the past 40 years.

These accomplishments built upon the work of earlier generations of women, who insisted on attending previously all-male art schools, drawing from the nude figure, just like the male students, and who helped to bring innovations from Europe and New York to other areas, including Minnesota. Alongside the growing recognition that women helped forge the art world of today, scholars are also engaged in recovering the histories of earlier generations who laid the foundations for the feminist art wave of the 1970s and beyond. Studies like *American Women Modernists* (2005) document the fact that women have been active participants in American art for at least a century.

In Minnesota, art historian Julie L'Enfant has contributed significantly to this growing body of scholarship. Her new book, *Pioneer Modernists*, is a fascinating study of eight prominent artists, all of whom were born in the late-nineteenth century or the first decade of the twentieth. The study was inspired in part by the 2007 exhibition at the Minnesota Museum of American Art, *In Her Own Right*, organized by Minnesota Historical Society art curator Brian Szott.

L'Enfant has done remarkable historical sleuthing, tracking down the eight artists' works to provide generous book illustrations and doing meticulous research in the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art and in Minnesota

collections. She makes use of a wide range of sources, including correspondence of the artists and their circles, gallery advertisements, and personal interviews with living family members. L'Enfant devotes a chapter to each woman, offering biographical and artistic profiles of Wanda Gág, Clara Mairs, Alice Hugy, Elsa Laubach Jemne, Frances Cranmer Greenman, Evelyn Raymond, Josephine Lutz Rollins, and Ada Augusta Wolfe. She documents their impressive training and passionate commitment to art-making. These were not Sunday painters but professional artists who made their living through art—selling their work, teaching, and receiving commissions. They lived fascinating lives, often contradicting norms for women's roles in the early-to-middle decades of the 1900s. L'Enfant's accounts also provide intriguing glimpses into earlier Minnesota art scenes, particularly in the Twin Cities. Other colorful historical aspects include descriptions of bohemian neighborhoods and art enclaves, such as Ramsey Hill in St. Paul.

Like the other artists, Clara Mairs (1878–1963) undertook serious training. She attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Arts, one of the nation's leading art schools, after studying at the St. Paul School of Art and traveling in Europe. She became the lifelong companion (they never married) of Clement Haupers, 22 years her junior, who served as director of Minnesota's Federal Art Project in the 1930s. The couple studied at the Académie Julian in Paris in the 1920s, living in a cold-water flat and eating in Paris cafés at the very time that Gertrude Stein was holding court in her salon. Upon returning to St. Paul, Mairs brought a modernist sense of space, figuration, and color to the Midwest. She exhibited in the Twin Cities and in New York, working in a range of media from oil painting to printmaking and decorative arts. Like Mairs, several others traveled abroad, studied at East Coast art schools and in Europe, and brought back international innovations and ideas to the heartland.

Frances Cranmer Greenman (1890–1981) studied at the Art Students League in New York in the 1910s. Greenman also worked with the famed teacher Robert Henri. Following Henri, she became an adept and innovative portrait painter, earning a prestigious solo show in New York City in 1925. She worked in Minneapolis on portraits of political and business leaders and in Hollywood on portraits of movie stars. Jo Lutz Rollins (1896–1989) became the first female professor in the University of Minnesota's art department.

These artists attained varied levels of national recognition. In the 1920s, Wanda Gág (1893–1946) settled in New York City and rural New Jersey and became a prominent printmaker as well as a famous author and illustrator of children's books, such as *Millions of Cats*. Evelyn Raymond

(1908–98) was commissioned to represent the state of Minnesota at the U.S. Capitol building through a full-length bronze sculpture of educator Maria Sanford. Some of these artists' contributions remain in the public eye, such as murals by Elsa Jemne and Raymond's public sculptures.

It matters where women's art ends up during and after their lifetimes—whether in family estates, private collections, or museum collections. In this regard, the fact that *Pioneer Modernists* does not include upfront collection information for its many illustrations detracts from the book. That information is compiled in the back of the volume. I was not inclined to flip back and forth to track down each work, and most readers will not, either. Where the art rests can determine whether the artists remain in the public eye and its monetary and intellectual value. As the feminism panelists pointed out, the values for women artists remain significantly lower than for men, making collection information vitally important.

It is uncertain whether the women that L'Enfant documents would call themselves feminists. We know that Gág wrote about being a “new woman” of the 1920s, and

L'Enfant acknowledges the overt discrimination and hurdles these eight women faced. Yet they lived their lives according to what we would identify as feminist principles: devoted to their professional careers, breaking down barriers for women in the arts, and balancing a wide range of personal relationships. L'Enfant's study makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of women's creative lives and their role in our regional art history. Like Joanna Inglot's 2007 book on the Women's Art Registry of Minnesota (WARM), a feminist collective begun in the 1970s, *Pioneer Modernists* reveals the courage, tenacity, and downright individuality of each of these fascinating women.

Reviewed by Colleen J. Sheehy, who holds a PhD in American Studies and is director and CEO of Plains Art Museum in Fargo. In September 2011 she initiated an ongoing series, Mothers of Invention, to present solo exhibitions and related catalogs devoted to midwestern women of the generation that opened up the art world in the 1970s and beyond. Sheehy was previously director of education at the Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, for 15 years.



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