



A Tribute to Linda Nochlin

by Maura Reilly

Linda Nochlin (b. 1931) grew up an only child in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, in a secular, leftist Jewish family where intellectual achievement and artistic appreciation were among the highest goals, along with social justice. Of her youth, Nochlin recalled in a recent email to me:

We lived near Ebbets Field and whenever the Dodgers made a home run all the ornaments on the mantelpiece shook from the wild applause. We little girls did a lot of roller-skating and jump rope. We were a cultured group all right. I took piano lessons from the same person who had taught my mother. Bach was and still is my super favorite. In high school, my friend Paula and I would take the subway up to the Cloisters on Sunday for the medieval music concerts. Ballet lessons in Manhattan on Saturdays and lots of ballet and modern dance recitals—Martha Graham and José Limón—with my mother or friends. My friend Ronny and I went to hear our adored Wanda Landowska play harpsichord from the back row of City Center and then threw roses at her. Also Lewisohn Stadium. Took lots of trips to [the] Brooklyn Museum, both for ethnic dance performances and, of course, for art. Remember especially the exhibition “100 Artists and Walkowitz” in 1944 because my grandfather knew artist Abraham Walkowitz and introduced me. Many, many trips to the *new* Brooklyn Public Library, often with my grandfather who liked Irish authors like Lord Dunsany, but also James T. Farrell’s “Studs Lonigan” trilogy. Books were central to my life, then as now. During vacations I could rip through one a day. Would go through all of Thomas Mann, Dostoyevsky, or Selma Lagerlöf.



Portrait of Maura Reilly. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

After attending Midwood High School in Brooklyn, Nochlin headed off to Vassar College in Poughkeepsie (1947 – 51), where she received a B.A. in philosophy (with a minor in Greek and art history). In 1952 she received a Master’s in English literature from Columbia, and then, in 1963, a doctorate from the prestigious Institute of Fine Arts (IFA) at New York University, where she studied with Peter Janson, Robert Goldwater, Walter Friedländer, and Richard Krautheimer. Since then she has published dozens of art books and innumerable articles (on subjects including realism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and

feminism, among many others). Nochlin has lectured worldwide and has taught art history at Vassar College, CUNY, Yale, and at the IFA. She is now retired, writing a book on the subject of “misery” in 19th-century art, and has just published a large collection of her writings on feminism and women artists, titled *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader* (Thames & Hudson, 2015), which I edited.

In 1988, Nochlin famously argued that “feminist art history is there to make trouble, to call into question, to ruffle feathers in the patriarchal dovecotes.”¹ She has spent her entire professional career doing just that, making trouble, embodying the position of the maverick. She has continually questioned academic assumptions of gender, race, and class—and, as such, has transformed not only the discipline of art history, but academic investigations in general. She has examined afresh the work of French painter and provocateur Gustave Courbet (*Courbet*, 2007); redefined realism as an artistic style, from the 19th century to the present (*Style and Civilization: Realism*, 1998); revised art history to include women artists, and the analysis of representations of women by male canonical artists (*Women, Art, and Power & Other Essays*, 1989); has produced countless monographic texts on male and female artists; and has contributed enormously influential thematic essays—most spectacularly, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971)—which rang down like a clarion call, challenging each new generation to assess changes in the conditions under which women artists work. Among these many scholarly contributions, she has also curated several milestone exhibitions, including the landmark *Women Artists, 1550–1950* in 1976 (LACMA), and, more recently, *Global Feminisms* in 2007 (Brooklyn Museum), among others. She has been unceasingly bold, intrepid, inspiring, and influential, her scholarship consistently transgressive, irreverent, and anti-establishment.

She is a living legend.

In what follows, colleagues, friends, students, and admirers pay tribute to Professor Nochlin.

