

MARIE LAURENCIN

Independent 20th Century | September 7–10, 2023
The Battery Maritime Building
Cipriani South Street, New York, NY 10004

“I feel perfectly at ease with everything that is feminine.”
– Marie Laurencin¹

New York, NY—Nahmad Contemporary is pleased to present two decades of paintings by modern artist Marie Laurencin (b. 1883, Paris; d. 1956, Paris) at the Independent 20th Century art fair September 7–10, 2023. Featuring works that Laurencin created in the 1920s and 1930s, the presentation will illuminate her distinct artistic language within the male-dominant avant-garde circles of twentieth-century Paris. Behind her stylized depictions of women, a profound celebration of femininity unfolds.

Laurencin began her artistic career exhibiting alongside the Cubists in Paris at the turn of the century. She moved in circles with artists such as Georges Braque, Fernand Léger, Francis Picabia, and Pablo Picasso; befriended prominent writers and art critics such as Guillaume Apollinaire and André Salmon; and was featured in landmark modernist exhibitions, such as the Salon des Indépendants of 1911, the Salon d'Automne of 1912, and the Armory Show of 1913 that introduced modern European art to the United States. Despite the prevailing artistic inclinations towards abstraction and a brash dissolution of recognizable forms, Laurencin was resolutely devoted to figuration, distinguishing her art through exclusively female subjects. Although she was often sidelined as a muse or model for her male counterparts, she unapologetically emphasized her gender through an enduring commitment to female protagonists and a feminine pastel palette.

The paintings that Laurencin created in the 1920s and 1930s represent a transformative period of self-discovery. After wartime exile in Spain and as a newly single woman, Laurencin returned to her beloved Paris during the roaring twenties, where she distanced herself from the Cubist cohorts of prewar years. Painting with newfound freedom and confidence, she refined her aesthetic and cultivated an alternative to modernism that fully embraced femininity.

Laurencin's female subjects confront the viewer or gaze introspectively into the distance with dark, almond-shaped eyes, and her palette is distilled to pinks, blues, and grays that emblemize her gendered inclinations. By the 1930s, her paint application thickened to a tactile treatment of hair, garments, and accessories as she relished in the aesthetic pleasures of her chosen subject

¹ From Laurencin's memoirs *Le carnet des nuits* (1942; repr. Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1956): 16, quoted in Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)Positionings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 90.

matter. Defending her preference, she once remarked, “Why should I paint dead fish, onions, and beer glasses? Girls are much prettier.”²

Mirroring her aesthetic autonomy, Laurencin was “something of a ‘New Woman’ . . . she was conscious of her own personality and had no intention of modifying it in order to conform.”³ Embodying the modern woman that was slowly blossoming in Paris, Laurencin defied the status quo with her assertive persona and fierce independence. She had romantic relationships with both men and women and mingled with individuals from queer, avant-garde circles, including Natalie Clifford Barney and the women from her sapphic salons.

Despite the odds against her, Laurencin harnessed her individuality to create a hugely successful market for her works during her lifetime. She was represented by renowned art dealer Paul Rosenberg, and her work was acquired by discerning modern collectors, including Albert C. Barnes and John Quinn. She also became a coveted portraitist for high-society individuals, such as Coco Chanel, and was commissioned to design costumes and sets for notable theaters and ballets, such as La Comédie-Française and Serge Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes. Today, however, Laurencin’s distinct contribution to modern art has largely been precluded from the same recognition of her male peers. By fostering newfound appreciation for her work, this presentation aims to promote a more inclusive narrative of modern art. A major retrospective of Laurencin’s work at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia will follow this presentation in October 2023.

² “Art: Pretty Girls,” *Time*, July 21, 1952.

³ Cecily Mackworth, *Guillaume Apollinaire and the Cubist Life* (London: John Murray, 1961), 102.