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Helena Rubinstein's Beauty Salons, Fashion, and Modernist Display

Marie J. Clifford

Helena Rubinstein's exclusive beauty salons blurred the conceptual boundaries among fashion, art galleries, and the domestic interior. This study examines the decor and art displays in Rubinstein's American salons from 1915 to 1937, with a particular focus on her New York establishment. Rather than dismiss these sites as superficial venues devoted to "narcissistic" female adornment, this study argues that precisely because the salons catered to women, they lend insight into varying notions about modern "feminine" space and its audiences. Rubinstein's businesses deliberately strove to redefine standards of taste and fashionable femininity by using selected examples of modernism, in terms of interior decoration and art. The salons endorsed versions of modernism associated with the realm of fashion, and they actively helped cultivate a female public for certain types of new styles.

AT FIRST GLANCE, there is nothing especially unusual about two fashion photographs published in the October 1941 issue of *Vogue*. The images feature models posed for the camera in sumptuous evening gowns, complete with requisite satin gloves, elegant jewels, and affected expressions of ennui. But the setting for this fashion shoot is peculiar. An exaggerated, almost hyperbolic, emphasis on decorative vocabularies coded as "feminine" creates a scene that hovers between lush fairyland and Technicolor™ movie set. One model occupies a room awash in shades of mauve and yellow, a pattern that extends to the walls, carpet, and sculpted cherub (fig. 1). Bright pink curtains are reflected in strategically placed mirrors, and rows of yellow and white opaline glass complement the chairs painted in the same shades. Another model is situated in a space given over to tufted pink and blue satin (fig. 2). A robin's-egg-blue chandelier hangs from the ceiling, matching exactly the color of the vitrines displayed before a central mirror. The wall resembles a display case and includes an ornate decorative relief of stylized floral patterns, bows, and ribbons. The presence of fashion models in the photographs enlists us to read these pastel environments as not only modish backdrops but also complementary accoutrements to the models' attire and accessories. In other words, the space actively participates in the construction of fashionable femininity.

The setting for the fashion spread was Gourielli's, an apothecary salon newly opened by Helena Rubinstein. The elaborate Herb Room and Gift Room were only two eye-popping features of what *Vogue* deemed a "fabulous new shop."[1] Other themed rooms included paintings from Rubinstein's personal collection as well as examples of colonial American glass and furniture. Inviting *Vogue* into the premises was clearly a shrewd publicity stunt, allowing for an adver-

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[1] "Scene at Gourielli's" and "Gourielli's New Shop," *Vogue* 98 (October 1, 1941): 64–65, 118–19.

Fig. 1. Herb Room in Gourielli's Apothecary Shop. From "Scene at Gourielli's," *Vogue* 98 (October 1, 1941): 64. (Photo © Condé Nast Archive/CORBIS.)

Fig. 2. Gift Room in Gourielli's Apothecary Shop. From "Scene at Gourielli's," *Vogue* 98 (October 1, 1941): 64. (Photo © Condé Nast Archive/CORBIS.)

tisement of the space in the guise of a fashion shoot. Yet the lavish setting, the unusual color schemes, and the show of Rubinstein's own artwork also serve to package this shop, or salon, as a kind of art display, with the art acquisitions symbolizing Rubinstein's entrepreneurial success and the beauty services and goods for sale being endowed with the status of art. Gourielli's was only the most recent of Rubinstein outlets to "sell" spectacular displays alongside beauty products and services. From 1915, when she first set up shop in New York on East Forty-ninth Street, to 1937, when she premiered a palatial Fifth Avenue salon chock full of artwork, Rubinstein's exclusive salons blurred the conceptual boundaries among fashion, art galleries, and the domestic interior.

Throughout her sixty-year reign as "Madame," the "Queen of Beauty," Rubinstein's fame as the world's most successful businesswoman only slightly surpassed her reputation as a voracious collector. Her identity as an entrepreneur was intricately intertwined with her investments in artwork, especially modern art. (In 1929 she even introduced a line of "cubist" lipstick.[2]) Although she owned an eclectic range of paintings, sculpture, and furnishings, it was her modern art that she reserved for exclusive display in her commercial venues.

Born Chaja Rubinstein in 1871, the future cosmetics tycoon spent the first part of her life among Krakow's Jewish bourgeoisie. In 1894 she emigrated to Australia to live with relatives. The reason for such a drastic change remains obscure, although it is possible the move was an attempt to

[2] Biographical information is drawn from Helena Rubinstein, *My Life for Beauty* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965); Patrick O'Higgins, *Madame: An Intimate Biography of Helena Rubinstein* (New York: Viking, 1971); Maxine Fabe, *Beauty Millionaire: The Life of Helena Rubinstein* (New York: Crowell, 1972); Elaine Brown Keifer, "Madame Rubinstein: The Little Lady from Kracow Has Made a Fabulous Success of Selling Beauty," *Life* 11, no. 3 (July 21, 1941): 45; T. F. James, "Princess of the Beauty Business," *Cosmopolitan* 146 (June 1959): 38; Jo Swerling, "Beauty in Jars and Vials," *New Yorker* 24, no. 22 (June 30, 1928): 20–23; Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998); Lindy Woodhead, *War Paint: Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden: Their Lives, Their Times, Their Rivalry* (London: Virago, 2003). The lipstick was advertised in *Vanity Fair* 31 (February 1929): 8.

increase her marriage prospects. After working a series of odd jobs, Rubinstein tried her hand at selling cosmetics. She invented a créme called Valaze that was so successful Rubinstein became one of the continent's most famous businesswomen by 1905. With the fortune and reputation she acquired in Melbourne, Rubinstein opened establishments in Paris and London. While living in London in 1908, she married an American, Edward Titus, who in the 1920s would publish *This Quarter*, a small literary magazine with ties to the expatriate Americans and other artists who inhabited the Left Bank in Paris. As Rubinstein acquired fame and success in the pre–World War I era, she began to collect art and to make the acquaintance of a number of artists. In 1908 she established her first Paris shop, inhabited Misia Sert's renowned artistic salon, and increasingly centered her collecting activities on modern art. Escaping the war, Rubinstein and her family moved to New York in 1915, where they remained until 1920. For business purposes, Rubinstein declared the United States her permanent home and always maintained a house in Greenwich, Connecticut, but during the 1920s she split her time between Paris and New York, where she had located her corporate headquarters. Titus and Rubinstein divorced in 1932, and in 1938 Madame married Prince Artchil Gourielli-Tchkonia, a "supposed" Georgian royal. The union not only allowed Rubinstein to adopt the title "Princess" but also provided the name for a new line of apothecary shops that opened in New York in 1941.[3]

Rubinstein first rose to prominence through the specialized treatments she offered to upper-class women at her exclusive salons. But she made her fortune by selling mass-produced cosmetics in the 1920s, a moment when, as Kathy Peiss observes, "Women linked cosmetics use to an emergent notion of their own modernity." It should be recalled that the beauty profession and decorating were two of the few options available to bourgeois women aspiring to professional status in the early twentieth century. Already conceptually conflated with femininity, such careers allowed women a vehicle for their ambitions even as they were forced to negotiate a place in the male-dominated business world. As Peiss persuasively argues: "In the early stages of the cosmetics industry, from the 1890s to the 1920s, women formulated and organized 'beauty culture' to a remarkable extent.... Handicapped in pursuing standard business practices, they resourcefully founded salons, beauty schools, correspondence courses, and mail-order companies; they pioneered the development of modern franchising and direct-sales marketing strategies." Similarly, in the 1910s, women such as Elsie de Wolfe and Ruby Ross Wood parlayed women's amateur decorating work into a profession, designing interiors but also marketing their services as consultants with specialized skills.[4] I approach Rubinstein's enterprise in this vein. Rubinstein's salons constituted sites that symbolically allowed her to articulate her business savvy in gendered ways, departing from reigning masculine models of executive authority.

In this article, I examine the decor and art displays in Rubinstein's American beauty salons. Although Rubinstein had establishments in Chicago, Boston, and Los Angeles, the focus here is on her New York salon, the flagship of her entire business and the place where she devoted the most attention. Because she used her art collection to adorn her business spaces, and because of her associations with the fashion realm, Rubinstein's displays have received virtually no scholarly treatment. Admittedly, her taste in art and furnishings was eclectic, but it was neither dilettantish nor devoid of organizing principles. Rather than dismiss her salons as superficial venues devoted to "narcissistic" female adornment, I argue that precisely because the salons catered to women they lend insight into varying notions about modern "feminine" space and its audiences. Rubinstein's businesses, I suggest, deliberately strove to redefine standards of taste and fashionable femininity by using select examples of modernism, in terms of both interior decoration and art. Not only did the salons

[3] Woodhead, *War Paint*, pp. 36–103.

[4] Kathy Peiss, "Making Faces: Cosmetics Industry and the Cultural Construction of Gender, 1890–1930," *Genders* 7 (Spring 1990): 143. Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, pp. 4–5. For a discussion of the interior design profession, see Lisa Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siécle France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Isabelle Anscombe, *A Woman's Touch: Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day* (London: Virago, 1984); Peter McNeil, "Designing Women: Gender, Sexuality, and the Interior Decorator, ca. 1890–1940," *Art History* 17, no. 4 (December 1994): 631–57; Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design," *Design Issues* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 3–14; Penny Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (London: Pandora, 1995); Pat Kirkam, ed., *Women Designers in the USA: Diversity and Difference* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

endorse versions of modernism associated with the realm of fashion, they also actively helped cultivate a female public for certain types of new styles.[5] Accordingly, I wish to contextualize the salons as key social spaces that generated meanings about modern art and definitions of femininity during a period when neither was stable or resolved.

The Domestic Interior, Fashionable Modernism, and "Womanly" Enterprise

Throughout her career, Rubinstein consistently tied her collection and interest in interior decoration to her enterprise. Recalling the years in which she first set up shop in London and Paris, she emphasized that her fascination with new decorating schemes and vanguard art was initially motivated by her professional desire to modernize her beauty parlors, unlike the majority of bourgeois women who adorned their homes as a sign of womanly but amateur accomplishment. In fact, the two endeavors of interior decor and business were so closely allied in her mind that she referred to her beauty business as "exterior decoration."[6] Since Rubinstein's establishments acted as a liminal space between home and business, it is not difficult to see how such a concept extended to the beauty salon.

Even as Rubinstein marked her entry into the world of modern decor as a business tactic, she nevertheless outfitted her salon spaces to evoke the domestic interior. Rubinstein's first New York salon, opened in early 1915 as the Maison de Beauté Valaze, resembled a chic bourgeois apartment. Indeed, without accompanying text to inform the reader otherwise, the photographs of the site that were featured in the May 1915 issue of *Vogue* might easily be confused with any number of the fashionable interiors the magazine regularly published (fig. 3). The salon was organized around brilliant color programs—deep blue walls, rose baseboards and moldings in the main reception room, and green velvet carpets and red tables in smaller antechambers. One small room attached to the main reception area displayed an orientalist theme and was outfitted with "exotic" gold sofas, Chinese wallpaper, embroidered pillows, and black tables.[7]

In this sense, the space differed dramatically from the majority of American beauty "parlors" of the day. Although the decor of most salons ranged according to the class of clientele, overall they took on the trappings of the vacation resorts or expensive office buildings in which they were located. Generally, top-of-the-line spaces were designed to promote regimes of health and hygiene, as was the case with Budman's Beauty Parlor in Chicago, where patrons undertook beauty treatments in a space that included nine large rooms with iron dressers and tables but little other embellishment. The only salon in Rubinstein's league was Elizabeth Arden's Salon D'Oro at 673 Fifth Avenue, which was adorned to emulate the mansion interiors of her nouveau riche neighbors, a decorating scheme quite different from Rubinstein's.[8]

The conceptual overlap between the decorator and the beauty specialist figured in the promotional material surrounding the debut of Rubinstein's 1915 salon. Announcing her arrival in New York, *Vogue* presented an image of a woman of society who was busily setting up her American home, a picture of "womanly" conduct that would have been familiar to its readers—reassuringly domestic, somewhat upper crust, and, above all, respectable. As if to emphasize Rubinstein's leisured domesticity rather than her status as a businesswoman, the magazine simply referred to her as a "woman specialist," devoting more attention to the decor and furnishings found in the salon than to the beauty services offered. At the same time, special note was made of her professional activities and the fact that she "works tirelessly."[9]

[5] For analyses of gender and modernism, particularly how women artists deliberately embraced the "feminine" in their work and public personae, see Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)Positionings* (London: Routledge, 1995); Lisa Tiersten, "The Chic Interior and the Feminine Modern: Home Decorating as High Art in Turn-of-the-Century Paris," in Christopher Reed, ed., *Not At Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), pp. 18–32; Gill Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Manchester, Eng.: University of Manchester Press, 1995); Anne Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women)* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

[6] Helena Rubinstein, "Exterior Decoration," *Arts and Decoration* 18, no. 3 (January 1923): 52, 56.

[7] Valaze, the name of Rubinstein's first cosmetic product, was a French-sounding made-up word. "On Her Dressing Table," *Vogue* 45 (May 15, 1915): 82, 84.

[8] Budman's is profiled in Anne Hard, "The Beauty Business," *American Magazine* 69 (November 1909): 84–85. Alfred Allan Lewis and Constance Woodworth, *Miss Elizabeth Arden* (New York: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1972), p. 87.

[9] "Dressing Table," p. 84.

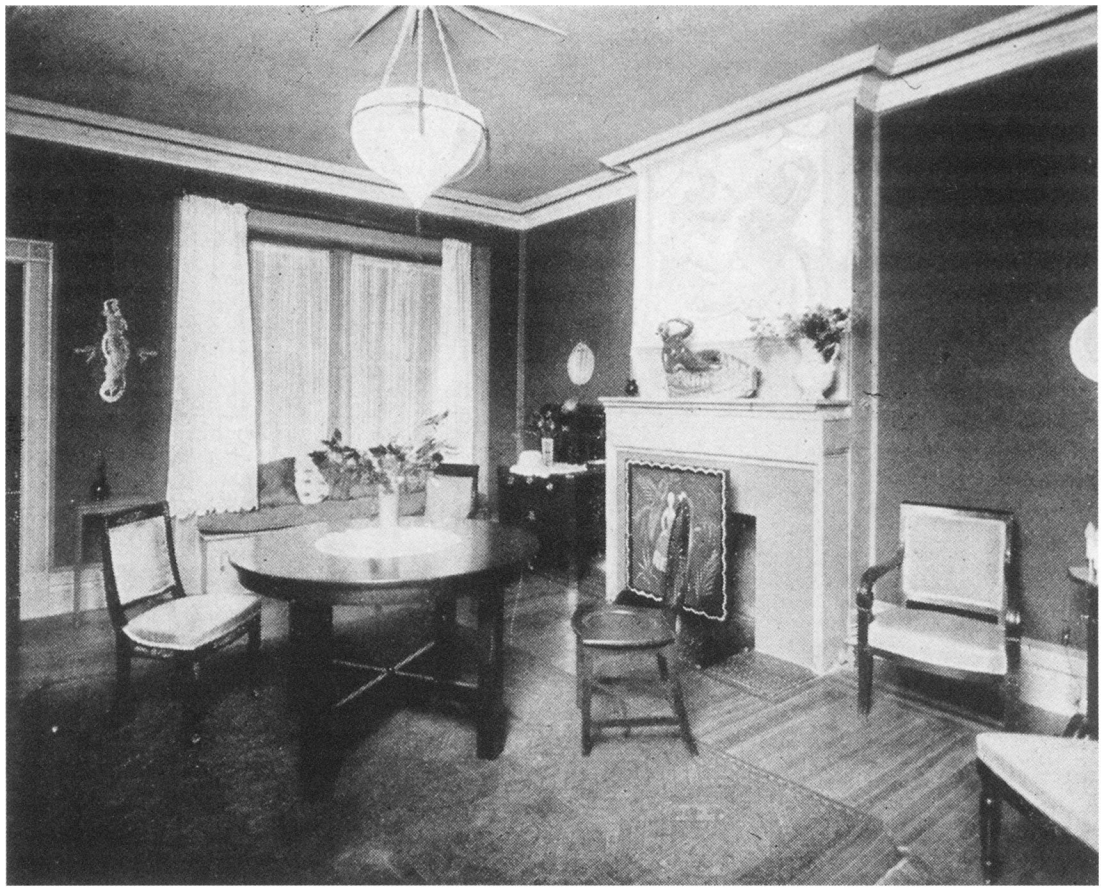

Fig. 3. Helena Rubinstein's 1915 salon, East Forty-ninth Street, New York. From "On Her Dressing Table," *Vogue* 45 (May 15, 1915): 82. (Photo © *Vogue*, Condé Nast Publications Inc.)

As indicated in the salon's inaugural advertisement, which features a portrait of the beautician by French painter Paul Helleu, Rubinstein's role as proprietor and businesswoman was translated into the image of an elegant society hostess (fig. 4). Such a projected air of cosmopolitan refinement promoted Rubinstein and her facility as models of fashionable femininity. By holding herself up as a paragon of fashion, Rubinstein embarked on a career-long practice of turning her image, tastes, and personality into a marketable entity, packaged to signify social and cultural values. At the same time, this publicity tactic provided maneuvering room to signify a kind of "womanly" business acumen, where Rubinstein's professional skills become analogous to the social conduct and lifestyle of upper-class women, clearly her intended clientele. The choice of introducing her new salon with a Helleu portrait reinforced such an impression. The French painter was an international celebrity and a member of the haute bourgeoisie. Upper-class patrons would have been aware of his work by virtue of his cosmopolitan stature in Paris, where he associated with John Singer Sargent.[10]

Nevertheless Rubinstein, a recent immigrant—and a Jewish one at that—did not go so far as to portray herself as a member of American high society, most likely due to the period's pervasive anti-Semitism as well as Elizabeth Arden's popularity among New York's elite social class. As an example of how socially sanctioned anti-Semitism affected Rubinstein's self-presentation, it is worth noting that she had originally intended to open her first salon on Fifth Avenue but was barred because the building she chose prohibited Jews. This exact situation would recur in 1939 when she was searching Manhattan for a new, grand space for her American residence. Having

[10] On the relationship between Sargent and Helleu and cosmopolitan portraiture, see William H. Gerdts, "The Arch Apostle of the Dab-and-Spot School: John Singer Sargent as an Impressionist," in Patricia Hills, ed., *John Singer Sargent* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1987), p. 131.

A FAMOUS EUROPEAN "HOUSE OF BEAUTY"

Announces the Opening of its Doors in New York

MADAME HELENA RUBINSTEIN, who is the accepted adviser in beauty matters to the Royalty, Aristocracy and the great Artistes of Europe; whose position as a scientific Beauty Culturist and whose unique work on exclusive lines have created for her a world-wide fame; whose establishments, the Maison de Beauté Valaze, at 24 Grafton Street, Mayfair, London, and at No. 255 Rue Saint Honoré, Paris, are well-known landmarks in the itinerary of the ladies of high society of both Continents; whose "Valaze" specialties have been found essential to the maintenance of their complexion beauty by the world's most beautiful women announces the opening of her American

MAISON de BEAUTÉ VALAZE at No. 15 EAST 49th STREET NEW YORK CITY

This establishment, equipped in much the same manner as Madame Rubinstein's London and Paris houses, in itself radiates the Spirit of Beauty.

The same famous beauty treatments that have won the admiring gratitude of uncounted numbers of women abroad are now being administered here; and for ladies who, owing to distance or other reasons, find it inconvenient or impossible to come to see her in person, carefully individualized home-treatments will be devised by Madame Rubinstein herself.

While Madame Rubinstein would naturally prefer to meet her clients face to face, yet she wishes to impress upon all those who are prevented from calling on her, that by writing to her freely on the needs and condition of their complexions they will not be calling in vain upon the fund of her great experience.

MADAME HELENA RUBINSTEIN
(From etching by Helleu)

Madame Rubinstein does not pretend to "wizardry" in her beauty-work—this being the charming compliment paid her by one of the most beautiful women of now so unhappy France, Madame Jeanne Faber of the Comédie Française—but she *does* know the ins and outs of a woman's beauty requirements. And what is more to the point, she can fully satisfy these requirements in her own uniquely unfailing way.

Madame Rubinstein's knowledge and unequalled expertness are now at the disposal of the women of New York and sister cities.

A visit to her sanctum or an inquiry by letter solves many a little heartache that may be due to some shortcoming in appearance.

Fig. 4. Advertisement for Helèna Rubinstein's 1915 salon featuring Paul Helleu's etching, *Madame Helena Rubinstein*. From "On Her Dressing Table," *Vogue* 45 (May 15, 1915): 82.

decided on a triplex apartment on Park Avenue, she was informed that building did not allow Jews to live there. To circumvent this rule—and, by extension, the symbolic WASP power structure—she purchased the entire building.[11]

To distinguish her salon from its American counterparts, Rubinstein traded on a certain European cachet. She negotiated a niche for her business and herself by claiming her "difference" and defining it to her advantage. Further, because some beauty businesses of these years were known for dubious characters and specious products, Rubinstein used publicity to cast herself as both legitimate and novel by virtue of her Parisian experience and her expert knowledge of art and home design. For instance, the text that accompanied the Helleu portrait in her advertisement aggrandized Rubinstein as a cosmopolitan adviser to European royalty and the "great Artistes of Europe." She presided over not a commercial establishment but a "sanctum" that "radiates the Spirit of Beauty." In the early days of the salon, the beautician used her proximity to European collections of art as a metaphor for her business proficiency, highlighting how her expertise was inseparable from an artist's skill and the discerning eye of an art connoisseur—an age-old convention that conflates female and artistic beauty. Playing on the shared vocabulary between art and beauty products, Rubinstein presented herself as the only beautician conversant in both: "Cosmetiques really call for a study of art. To understand the matching of tones, and to get a clear conception of the great artists' ideals of beauty, I made a long tour through Europe's most famous picture galleries. Without this I don't think I should ever have realized how subtle is the matter of coloring, and what a variety is needed in all that beautifies." Rubinstein's advertisements, published in journals such as *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* during the 1920s further cemented her connection with art. "Helena Rubinstein Cosmetics Exclaim the Artist!" proclaimed one; another waxed poetic about the beautician's flair for "cosmetic masterpieces."[12]

In the 1920s the Helleu sketch created a public face for Rubinstein that conjured up images of beautiful society women of the Gilded Age, an era that was more than a decade-old memory. Given Rubinstein's lifelong custom of commissioning self-portraits, it is particularly noteworthy that she announced her arrival in New York with an artistic rendering of herself by a French society painter and used this particular portrait in her American advertisements for at least seven years. One 1921 notice reproduced the portrait to fill nearly half a page, and the text expressly pointed to the image before addressing Rubinstein's services. It let Rubinstein's customers know that the artist rendered the picture in the beautician's Paris salon, effectively transposing her beauty parlor with the artist's studio. The caption stresses Rubinstein's Paris connections and reads: "The image here reproduced is that of Madame Helena Rubinstein by the great Parisian artist, Helleu, now

[11] For a comprehensive examination of anti-Semitism in early twentieth-century America, see Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[12] Peiss discusses the early association of cosmetics with hucksters and con artists in *Hope in a Jar*, pp. 21–22. Advertisement in *Vogue* 45 (February 10, 1915): 10. Helena Rubinstein, "Beauty—A Real Definition," *Arts and Decoration* 19, no. 1 (May 1923): 86–87. It is probable that the text was a printed version of the series of lectures that Rubinstein delivered to the public at department stores; she recounts those appearances in *My Life for Beauty*, pp. 61–63. See advertisements in *Vanity Fair* 32 (April 1929): 121; *Vanity Fair* 32 (March 1929): 107.

visiting this country. The portrait was made several years ago in Madame Rubinstein's world-famous salon in Paris."[13] Although Helleu's portrait eschewed any hint of a modernist visual vocabulary, Rubinstein's salons swiftly developed a reputation for advancing new styles.

Credited as an innovative setting for "modernism in art," Rubinstein's New York beauty salon, as *Vogue* was quick to point out, did not foist any nauseating "ultra-modern" work on its patrons but rather featured the work of a "theorist [whose] theories do not ruin his art." The unnamed "theorist" (code for artists whose work incorporated aspects of abstraction and modernist form) was sculptor Elie Nadelman, with whom Rubinstein had a special relationship. In 1911 she had commissioned a large bas-relief, *Autumn: Four Female Figures with a Horse*, for the billiard room of her London Putney Lane house. Ultimately she would purchase more of his work than did any other collector—including Gertrude Stein. Sculpture by Nadelman was found throughout Rubinstein's 1915 salon. A bas-relief entitled *Two Nudes* (1915) dominated the area over the mantelpiece, with a smaller bronze figure adjacent to it. A hollow terra-cotta figure, mounted on an electrical outlet like a light fixture, also originally executed for Rubinstein's London home, glowed from the far left wall of the salon. (Perhaps this was a visual pun; one of Stein's 1911 "word-portraits" about Nadelman played on qualities of light.)[14]

Rubinstein clearly used her business venue to showcase Nadelman's art and perhaps echo the decor of her own living quarters. Equally important, her choice of artist (rather than, say, Pablo Picasso) signified a taste for an accessible yet sophisticated brand of modern art. As *Vogue's* critical assessment of the sculptor suggests, Rubinstein's salon provided its clientele with a middle ground between incomprehensible abstract work and outmoded artistic styles—a compromise that points to a conceptual split between a more palatable form of modern art versus its notorious "radical" versions, especially from an American perspective.[15]

Rubinstein's New York beauty parlor opened a mere two years after the famous 1913 Armory Show, a "blockbuster" exhibition that introduced European modernism to a broad American public. Generally regarded as a landmark in American art history, the display was publicized as an enormous spectacle, akin to world's fairs. Despite nationwide critical condemnations of European vanguard form, a number of small exhibitions of modern European work proliferated across the country, establishing a stable (though not extensive) market for the new art.[16] Yet the Armory Show's association with massive publicity and promotional schemes almost certainly affected the broader public's viewing expectations. By casting the new art as a fascinating cultural event, the show's organizers inadvertently inserted modernism into the realm of consumerism—a significant factor in understanding how Rubinstein could shape her beauty salon as a legitimate venue for looking at modern art.

Nadelman was represented in the Armory Show by two plaster sculptures (*Head of Man* and *Nude*, n.d.), both rendered in the schematic classical vocabulary that had brought him notice in Paris. However, following his immigration to New York in 1914 (Rubinstein paid his passage to New York and donated a studio space) he increasingly favored fanciful wood figures: dancers, fashionable women, and dandified men. It is thus not surprising that both avant-garde and more mainstream art communities embraced him, although he did remain a controversial figure among conservative critics. For example, he exhibited at Stieglitz's 291 Gallery in 1915 and 1916 yet reserved his better-

[13] *Vogue* 57 (May 1921): 107.

[14] "Dressing Table," p. 82. According to Lincoln Kirstein, Rubinstein encountered Nadelman during his 1911 Paterson's Gallery show: "Madame Rubinstein, [Nadelman's] compatriot [from Poland], did not encourage him by a token purchase: she bought his entire exhibition outright. This was the most generous patronage of his career. She mounted many pieces in handsome establishments in London, Paris, Boston, New York, Buenos Aires, Melbourne; they became her trademark for the quasi-scientific beautification of modern womanhood" (Lincoln Kirstein, *Elie Nadelman* [New York: Eakins, 1973], p. 193). It is probable that Rubinstein first became acquainted with Nadelman in Paris, prior to this show, through mutual friends Louis Marcoussis and Alice Halicka. Gertrude Stein purchased Nadelman's work in 1913 and displayed it in her famous apartment at Rue de Fleurs; see Barbara Haskell, *Elie Nadelman: Sculptor of Modern Life* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2003). In the 1930s Rubinstein would again associate herself with illuminated home furnishings, becoming famous for a shining Lucite bed designed by Ladislas Medgyes—a sign of the modern. The word-portrait "Nadelman" was not published until 1927. Stein depicted Nadelman as "the one looking like this one was one feeling light being something being existing" and "He was one feeling light being existing. He was one completely thinking about expressing light being existing" (as quoted in Ulla E. Dydo, ed., *A Stein Reader* [Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993], pp. 144–45).

[15] "Dressing Table," p. 84.

[16] The standard account of the Armory Show is Milton Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, 2d ed. (New York: Abbeville, 1988).

publicized American debut for the wealthier Scott and Fowles Gallery in February 1917. This second show not only sold out but also generated a group of wealthy patrons who "swamped" the artist for portrait commissions. *Vanity Fair*, a magazine that helped disseminate the vogue for modern art, especially touted his work, publishing at least eight reviews from 1917 to 1918.[17] Rubinstein's choice of his imagery to decorate her salon, then, publicly linked her taste to that of Nadelman's other American collectors.

In addition to the displayed artwork, the 1915 salon incorporated modern ideas about home decoration. Given Rubinstein's professed interest in "exterior design," it is not surprising that the establishment's arrangement and decor brought together two contemporary schools of thought about the "proper" adornment of domestic space and *modified* them to signify a new kind of "feminized" interior. First, Rubinstein's theatrical color schemes and amusing items such as Nadelman's illuminated wall piece suggest a view of the interior as a scripted environment, a place for social performance and carefully contrived arrangements of furnishings, art, and so on. Such ideas were in vogue during the 1910s due to the influence of Elsie de Wolfe's best-selling decorating manuals. De Wolfe viewed spatial environments as not necessarily a true picture of the personality of the decorator. Rather the domestic interior was more of an elaborate stage set to display and act out standards of taste. In contrast, as Karen Halttunen has pointed out, the reigning impulse behind modern interior design was that furnishings, color schemes, and other accoutrements expressed personality—the taste that underwrote a space's decor was a revelation of the unique individuals who lived within its walls. De Wolfe, who saw decorating as a stage, also insisted, however, that rooms acted as spatial autobiographies. Hence Rubinstein's richly hued decorative scheme was distinctive but not a radical departure from the standards of the day. It encapsulated de Wolfe's claim that "love of color is an emotional matter." *Vogue* approvingly noted the "gay colors" and Nadelman's "spirited figures," attributing the design to the force of Rubinstein's modish exceptionalism, asking: "What of the personality which this setting suggests? The woman who is the moving spirit of the establishment is obviously as continental and as chic as her charming individuality and Poiret costumes can make her."[18]

The theatrical presentation was deliberate and certainly alluded to Rubinstein's own taste, if not her autobiography. She claims in her memoirs to have based her color schemes on those of the Ballets Russes set designs. More significantly, she identified her encounter with the famous troupe as the inspiration for her interest in modern artistic styles and decor, a lifelong pursuit that played out within her salons. When her first husband learned that she wished to update her salon decor to appear more modern, he suggested she view a Ballets Russes performance. The visit had a profound effect on Rubinstein.

> What thrilled me as much as the dancing were the décors of Léon Bakst and Alexandre Benois. Accustomed as I was to the sweet-pea pastel stage sets of the times, the electric combinations of purple and magenta, orange and yellow, black and gold, excited me beyond measure! Warm, passionate colors, they were as far removed from my virginal whites and noncommittal greens as anything could be.... After the ballet, late as it was, I went straight back to the salon and tore down my white brocade curtains. Next day I gave orders for them to be replaced with the brilliant color schemes I had fallen in love with the night before, and over the years they have been seen in Rubinstein salons everywhere.[19]

In essence, when the beautician incorporated her encounter with the Ballets Russes into her business practices, she turned her salon into a display venue on par with the services it offered. It became a space that acted on the body, transforming clients in ways that exceeded a simple makeover. As can be expected in the beauty business, whenever an establishment refurbished its decor, the new organizing principles were premised on and helped produce new definitions of the female body. Scholars such as Katherine C. Grier and Beverly Gordon have argued that the very concept of domestic space assumed a

[17] Brown, *Armory Show*, p. 298. For more on his immigration and portrait commissions, see Museum of Modern Art, *Elie Nadelman* (New York: By the museum, 1948), pp. 33–36. See Kirstein, *Elie Nadelman*, p. 329, for the citations of the *Vanity Fair* reviews; Haskell, *Sculptor of Modern Life*, pp. 73–85. For a fascinating discussion of Nadelman's later career, see Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

[18] Elsie de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste* (New York: Century Co., 1914). Karen Halttunen, "From Parlor to Living Room: Domestic Space, Interior Decoration, and the Culture of Personality," in Simon J. Bronner, ed., *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880–1920* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), pp. 157–90. De Wolfe, *House in Good Taste*, p. 71. "Dressing Table," p. 82.

[19] Rubinstein, *My Life for Beauty*, pp. 38–39.

corporeal character, consistently portrayed by decorators as a female body in need of adornment and fashionable attire. If the salons of the 1900s accented a "natural" body in need of healthful revitalization and restoration, the industry in the 1920s and especially in the 1930s emphasized a new imperative to shape the body to accord with modern form. As one writer put it in making a case for salon modernization, "The streamlined girl of today demands her beauty services in a shop harmonious with her own modernity." *Vogue's* reading of Rubinstein's site indicates that the rooms were approached as personifying the owner herself, and, by implication, the fashionable modern interior would sculpt its clients to match her modish cosmopolitanism. In this way, Rubinstein's stylish salon and its decor were especially appropriate to a beauty business, for this was a space that was literally designed to improve women's physical appearance and turn them into consumers of European chic and modernist space.[20]

Rubinstein, by tethering her decorating acumen to her role as a beauty entrepreneur, amalgamated two "feminine" professions into one, effectively creating an innovative format for publicizing her enterprise. As a successful beauty professional and up-to-date interior decorator, she was positioned to act as a mediator for new styles, shaping American audiences' taste and expectations about how modern art could be fashionable. Such a stance was novel in the 1910s, but during the interwar years new understandings about the fashion and beauty industries would shift the public's understanding of modernism and Rubinstein's salon.

The Beauty Business, Fashion, and Modernization

In 1928 Rubinstein moved her salon from East Forty-ninth to East Fifty-seventh Street. The building that housed the salon had been owned by railroad tycoon Collis P. Huntington and was known among Manhattan's social elite for its long, slender staircase. According to the *New Yorker*, Rubinstein purchased the building in order to acquire this staircase, decreeing, "I must make everything in this building as beautiful as this stairway." Indeed, the staircase remained, but the rest of the building was entirely renovated. Characterizing the new salon as a "real monument to her taste and sense of decor," the magazine declared the establishment the "most beautiful of her shops," citing its modernist furniture and sculpture as particularly noteworthy. Rubinstein's stated enthusiasm about the staircase signified her embrace of the moderne, or art deco, aesthetic. As epitomized in Le Corbusier's spiral staircase designed for Charles de Beistegui's Paris apartment, by the end of the 1920s elaborate stairways had become standard fare in the stylized geometric vocabulary of art deco.[21]

At this point in her career, Rubinstein modeled her salon along the dictates of the kind of modernity espoused by the increasingly influential fashion industry rather than that seen in interiors of chic living quarters. It should be recalled that in the days before a definitive paradigm of modern art existed, most Americans learned about new styles from fashion magazines, department stores, show rooms, and industrial design. Mode and modern were so intertwined that in 1928 Raymond Loewy, writing on behalf of Bonwit-Teller, asserted that "true modernism is good taste! Bonwit-Teller are modernists in that they interpret in dress that which the age expresses in art."[22]

To further distinguish her space from that of her few American competitors, Rubinstein drew on decorative schemes found in European fashion houses—establishments that highlighted elaborate murals and artwork. As early as 1909, for

[20] For more on the relationship between concepts of the body and nineteenth-century interiors, see Susan Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Domesticity and femininity are outlined in Ethel Davis Seal, *The House of Simplicity* (New York: Century Co., 1926); Beverly Gordon, "Woman's Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age," *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 281–301. Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery, 1850–1930* (Rochester, N.Y.: Strong Museum, 1988). As quoted in "Annual Equipment and Design Section," *Modern Beauty Shop* 23, no. 2 (February 1937): 67. "Dressing Table," p. 82.

[21] Swerling, "Beauty in Jars," p. 20. The art deco aesthetic is discussed in Stephen Calloway, *Baroque baroque: The Culture of Excess* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), pp. 77–83.

[22] As quoted in Terry Smith, *Making the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 361. Rubinstein worked with designers such as Julia Sert, Jean Lurçat, and Louis Marcoussis in Paris. Her New York apartment included the Lucite furniture by Medgyes and decorative schemes by Louis Süe. Her deliberate alliance with modern design is seen by her patronage of Donald Deskey and Paul Frankl, who was commissioned to install furniture in her early New York salon; see Alastair Duncan, *American Art Deco* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), p. 43.

example, the world famous couturier Paul Poiret refashioned his own home into a showpiece for displaying his art and furnishings to best promote his exclusive designer gowns. Rubinstein was well aware of the establishment, as she had purchased numerous Poiret designs and in the early 1930s even used Poiret's interior designer, Louis Süe, for the redecoration of her Paris apartment. In the 1920s the French fashion industry reinvented itself around aggressive marketing strategies and consumer-oriented products. In 1921 Parisian designer Jeanne Lanvin branched out into interior decorating, claiming her knowledge of fashion and femininity as the logical basis for her new art. Around the same time Madeleine Vionnet opened her elaborate *maison* at 50 Avenue Montaigne. Attracting so many tourists that one writer felt the building ought to be declared a national monument, Maison Vionnet featured Lalique stained-glass windows and a mural frieze in which women promenaded in Vionnet gowns. As evidenced by a 1932 *Fortune* profile of Parisian couturiers, by the end of the 1920s, each French fashion house arranged itself as a kind of consumer product, "selling" distinctive settings for the display of art and furnishings alongside the latest mode. The interiors of three salons (Vionnet, Schiaparelli, and Champcommunal) were featured juxtaposed in *Fortune* to indicate the range of decorative strategies, but the journal celebrated their status as business spaces rather than as the rarified cultural enterprises of previous years.[23]

At the same time, American audiences expected to encounter the latest in modern art and design in commercial venues such as department stores. Establishments like Saks Fifth Avenue and Lord and Taylor put on displays of modern art and design in the mid-1920s, effectively coupling new merchandising trends with the promotion of modern art. Therefore, Rubinstein's displays were hardly out of line with other contemporary approaches to modern art as key to manufacturing new consumer tastes.[24]

Aligning her practice with haute couture distanced Rubinstein's salons from models of domesticity. However, while the shops were distinct in the American market, after the crash of 1929 they also became out of sync with the beauty business in general. On the one hand, by the late 1920s and 1930s, American beauty salons were increasingly dedicated to a modern look. On the other, the favored style was unabashedly mechanomorphic. Establishments catering to a more middle-class constituency almost uniformly adopted an art deco vocabulary. In this sense, the key word *modernization* connoted sleek, schematic decor, emulating the industrialized sheen of a Norman Bel Geddes design. Above all, the new salon was a space of efficiency and productivity, arranged around sleek but simple decor without ornament. Chrome trim and furniture, oval and triangular mirrors, and stenciled wall murals depicting abstract flower imagery all supplanted the wicker chairs and tables, objects d'art and bric-a-brac, massive floral arrangements, and Louis XIV vocabularies of the early 1920s.[25]

Although turn-of-the-century salons concentrated their promotional efforts on the *services* they offered to regenerate good health and hygiene, during the 1930s the industry almost exclusively focused on modernization of *space*, loosely defined in terms of new interior decor, furnishings, and up-to-date equipment. The specialized trade journal *Modern Beauty Shop* zealously devoted itself to the cause. Each year it published a comprehensive review dealing with design issues and regularly featured profiles of successful new venues, tips on display and publicity, and technophilic praise for such recent inventions as air-conditioning, refrigeration, and

[23] Nancy J. Troy, "Domesticity, Decoration, and Consumer Culture: Selling Art and Design in Pre–World War I France," in Reed, *Not At Home*, pp. 123–26; Nancy J. Troy, *Couture Cultures: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003); Albert Boime, "Entrepreneurial Patronage in Nineteenth-Century France," in Edward C. Carter III et al., eds., *Enterprise and Entrepreneurs in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 158–60. For the relationship with Süe, see Rubinstein, *My Life for Beauty*, p. 48. The French fashion industry is discussed in Tag Grönberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris* (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 1998). Lanvin is discussed in Leo Randole, "An Artist in Dress and Decoration," *Arts and Decoration* 15, no. 6 (October 1921): 384A. Jacqueline Demornex, *Madeleine Vionnet* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), pp. 43, 49. "The Dressmakers of France," *Fortune* 6, no. 2 (August 1932): 21.

[24] For commercial strategies for selling modern art in venues like department stores, see Marie J. Clifford, "Working with Fashion: Art, Taste, and Consumerism in Women's Professional Culture, 1920–1940," *American Studies* 44 (Spring/Summer 2003): 5–29. These issues are further explored in Marie J. Clifford, *Built by Beauty: Helena Rubinstein's Art Collection, Fashion, and the American Reception of Modern Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

[25] A number of *Modern Beauty Shop* articles stress the aesthetic of sleek but simple; see Max Hoefer, "From Frills to Efficient Simplicity," *Modern Beauty Shop* 21, no. 11 (November 1935): 80–81, 163; Josephine Scott, "Beauty Treatment via Modernization," *Modern Beauty Shop* 24, no. 5 (June 1938): 66–68, 118. I base my description of these changes on a variety of features published in *Modern Beauty Shop* from 1930 to 1940.

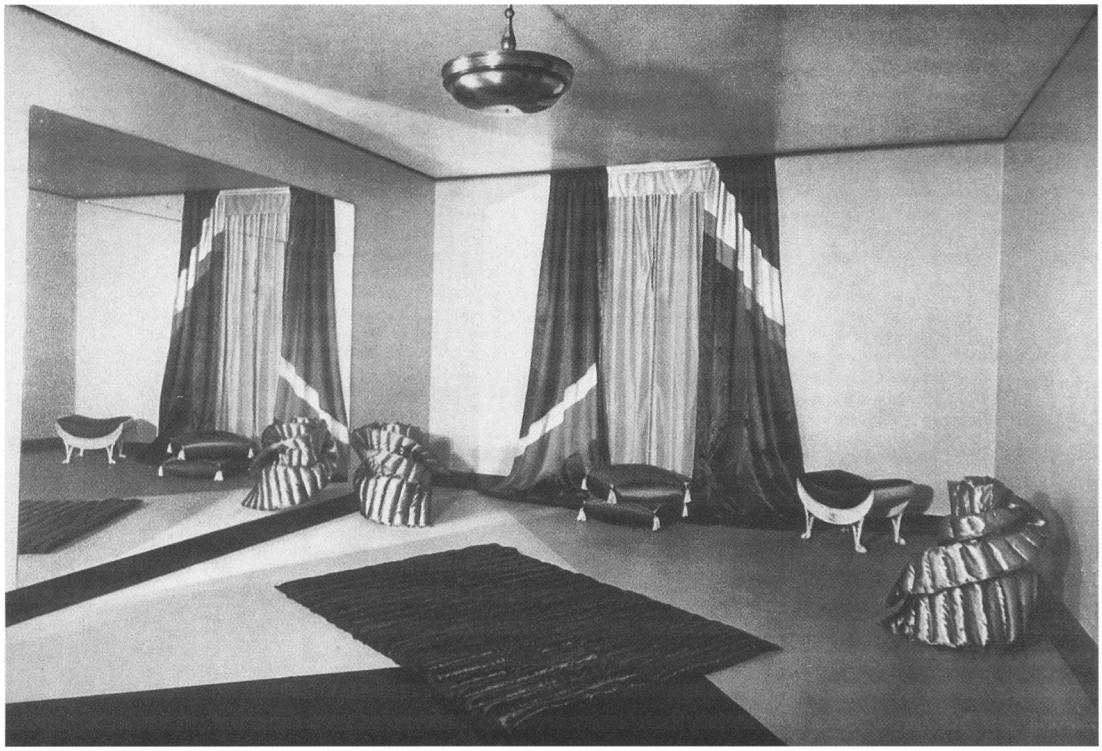

Fig. 5. Elizabeth Arden's salon, 691 Fifth Avenue, New York, 1930. From "Elizabeth Arden: Queen," *Fortune* 11, no. 2 (August 1930): 40.

intercom systems. An embrace of modernization was seen as *the* key to success and profitability—business objectives that were a constant dilemma throughout the Great Depression. Readers, who were salon proprietors and other workers in the beauty business (mostly women), encountered such urgent injunctions as "there seems to be one answer [to succeed], and a very simple one . . . MODERNIZE!" and "Get on the bandwagon now and put your shop in the front ranks of the modernization parade!" Given their professed emphasis on constant renovation, these outlets encapsulated the dynamism of the modern mode itself: reconfigured female bodies, reconstructed identities, restructured views. They crucially bridged the apparent, though not necessarily real, gap between culture and industry and equated consumption of modern style with "feminine" space.[26]

As "beautiful" as Rubinstein's salon may have been, by the early 1930s her use of interior decor would no longer sustain her establishment's reputation for chic. *Fortune* magazine's 1930 profile of Elizabeth Arden is a case in point. Observing that Rubinstein's (now) archrival was "the vogue of the moment," the periodical lavished praise on her new salon, especially its combination of hard-edged industrial forms and "ultra-feminine" pastels. For instance, Arden's famous red-doored salon at 691 Fifth Avenue—which gave the trademark name Red Door to her establishments and products—engulfed its public in a virtual sea of abstract, geometric forms. As evidenced in the exercise room decor, the interlocking clean-edge patterns of the pink and green satin curtains and chairs assumed the look of a three-dimensional Georgia O'Keeffe painting, from whom Arden would later purchase a work for display in this very room (fig. 5). Additionally, the beauty parlor featured jade-green glass walls, crystal lights, and five floors worth of similar moderne imagery. *Fortune* magazine, the most authoritative voice of the business press, approvingly declared that "chic . . . pervades the rarefied atmosphere and the pastel corners of her salon."[27]

[26] As quoted in "Annual Equipment and Design Section," *Modern Beauty Shop* 21, no. 2 (February 1935): 72. For a thorough investigation into the complex relations between 1930s industrial and culture industries, see Smith, *Making the Modern.*

[27] "Elizabeth Arden: Queen," *Fortune* 11, no. 2 (August 1930): 40. For a contemporary view of beauty parlor modernization

When *Fortune* noted the "black and white modernism" of the shop, it also affirmed the geometric, machinelike forms that dominated corporate advertisements, logos, and building designs. Arden validated the success of this aesthetic in a commercial setting but nonetheless reassuringly translated it into proper "feminine" form. According to Arden's biographers, she wholeheartedly embraced modernization, renovating her showpiece establishment to rid it of its former rococo-like decor.[28]

Further, the *Fortune* article hinted at the identity of the consumers for the Red Door salon, happily listing a virtual social roster of Arden's most prestigious patrons. This praise is not surprising given that Arden worked tirelessly to accommodate the tastes of "Junior League" types (a social faction synonymous with "good taste"), including employing a doorman for her Fifth Avenue salon and tailoring her services and products to debutantes and the "well-born." By comparison, *Fortune* conceded that Rubinstein was once "the first great lady of the salons" but presently

> the Rubinstein salons have passed their days of chic, [though] the Rubinstein business is still most probably the biggest of its kind . . . But she offers her advice indiscriminately, not seeking selected outlets. Her demonstrators have appeared in such socially dubious locations as the New Jersey State Convention of School Teachers (chalk dust is bad for the complexion) and the Marie Antoinette (ladies') Room of the Paramount Theatre in New York. . . . Buxom, swarthy, addicted to smartly exotic dress, she has a husband named Edward Titus who sells books in a stall by the Seine.[29]

What under different circumstances could appear as marketing savvy, such as selling cosmetics to professional women, is here reproached for a lack of taste and distinction. Not unsubtly, the text further associates this deficit with coded references to Rubinstein's Jewishness, contrasting only a sentence apart a (literally) chalky complexion with the beautician's "swarthiness" and her "exotic" dress.

While it is difficult to reconstruct the exact class of clientele for Rubinstein's salons, as seen in the quote above, there is evidence that by the 1930s she attempted to cultivate a new market among career-oriented, middle-class women, more than, say, among the established social elite. In publicity statements, Rubinstein had made a point to address "stenographers, clerks, and even little office girls" and portrayed herself as an advocate for women's rights. This is especially apparent in the ways she marketed her cosmetics. For example, she alone among cosmetics entrepreneurs sent representatives to the National Association of Business and Professional Club Women's biennial convention in July 1933, where they presented talks and demonstrations on the subject of "Beauty for the Business Woman." Trading on her own business identity, she attempted to build patrons from this group by emphasizing her status as a successful female entrepreneur; she provided a point of identification as an exemplar, even pioneer, of a type of modern femininity. In a book outlining women's career choices, Rubinstein had voiced the sentiments of many when she observed, "The cosmetic business is interesting among industries in its opportunities for women. Here they have found a field that is their own province—working for women with women, and giving that which only woman can give—an intimate understanding of feminine needs and feminine desires."[30] Such a tactic directly confronted Arden's pretensions by associating Rubinstein's products with women's professional aspirations and ambitions more so than with the elite class status of Manhattan debutantes.

Fortune's discomfort with Rubinstein was not simply about anti-Semitism. She had long insisted that her business was intertwined with women's modernity, particularly in terms of careers. In short, she offset the "feminine" qualities of her enterprise by skirting dangerously close to feminism. Obviously, this stance met with a different reception in certain women's publications. *Independent Woman*, for one, did not set Arden against Rubinstein; instead it interpreted both their successes in feminist terms, observing, "Beauty cultivation is probably the outstanding example of a field in which women may actually

as a tool for publicity, see Charlotte Miller, "Style Shows Modernization: A Two-Part Publicity Program," *Modern Beauty Shop* 24, no. 3 (March 1938): 92–93, 158.

[28] Arden reportedly shouted at her designers, "Tear it down, dear! I never want to see the dump again" (Lewis and Woodworth, *Miss Elizabeth Arden*, p. 142).

[29] "Elizabeth Arden: Queen," p. 37; Lewis and Woodworth, *Miss Elizabeth Arden*, p. 89. "Elizabeth Arden: Queen," p. 92.

[30] Helena Rubinstein, "The Beauty Specialist's Place in the Community," *Beauty* 1 (December 1922): 31; Allison Gray, "People Who Want to Look Young and Beautiful," *American Magazine* 94 (December 1922): 32–33; *Career Women in America* (New York: Cultural Research Publishers, 1941), p. 55; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, p. 80. Helena Rubinstein, "Manufacturing—Cosmetics," in Doris Fleischman Bernays, ed., *An Outline of Careers for Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1928), p. 331.

own and operate their own businesses to advantage," citing the figure that 90 percent of salons were conducted "under feminine regime." Using a set of evaluative criteria similar to those exercised by *Fortune* when it found Rubinstein outdated and less than discriminating, *Independent Woman* substantially differed in its final assessment. Deeming her (then Fifty-seventh Street) salon "handsome," the journal noted that Rubinstein

> is one of the few women who is president of her own organization, and owns and manages its affairs herself. She employs mostly women and has over 2,000 in her American personnel, including department store demonstrators who are on her payroll. Five of her salons are entirely managed by women. She is intensely interested in her employees and encourages them to come to her with their own problems, no matter how personal... It was Madame Rubinstein... who first employed women as traveling sales representatives. The beauty counselor lectures before women's groups and over the radio, conducts demonstrations in department stores and holds consultations with women on individual beauty problems.

However, even if the text heralds qualities viewed disdainfully by *Fortune*, it nonetheless shares some of the latter's assumptions about the "innate femininity" of the beauty business, arguing, "We all feel the urge to cultivate and improve; it is part of feminine psychology to realize the necessity of making the most of one's appearance—an elementary urge. And right in that thought lies the secret of the natural gravitation of women toward the field of beauty work. It is part of their nature; they like it; they are adapted to it." As if conceding to *Fortune* magazine's model of success, *Independent Woman* was careful to put the accent on Rubinstein's executive status rather than her association with fashion; nowhere is there a mention of her art collection or her salon's modernism.[31]

In fact, Rubinstein's investment in art and artists associated with the French fashion world had become problematic. Critiques of modernism first launched in the 1930s highlighted the relation of modern art to fashion, primarily to devalue modernism as feminine. Surveying the cultural landscape in 1931, critic Forbes Watson noted one small glimmer of hope for American artists in the otherwise dismal economic climate. The Great Depression, he asserted, had expedited the downfall of the "Franco-maniacs," collectors and poseurs who, during the previous decade, idolized everything and anything produced in a Parisian atelier. Watson composed his picture of the deleterious effects of the "Paris Art Bourse" with a repertoire of gender-specific images that serve to this day as shorthand for the consumer indulgences of the 1920s. If the new-found success of French modernism had spawned a commercial version of mere "Paris-art," which the critic likened to "international dress-maker painting," the fault lay squarely with those "flapper-minded" art patrons whose pursuit of fashion and novelty had corrupted the art market, opening the door for unscrupulous "get-rich circles" to manipulate and undermine national culture. He elaborated:

> Those particular Paris dealers who were blinded by money craving, and ignorant of the sayings of no less a person than Abraham Lincoln, continued to send to America [in the 1920s] vast and indiscriminately selected stocks of fashionable picture products and some sculpture. These were thrown helter-skelter upon the American art market and created a double confusion, for simultaneously wiser and more experienced dealers were shipping to us many of the best contemporary French pictures.... What a parade.... All kinds of hooks with all kinds of bait were tossed into that ocean of dollars that the less traveled trade in Paris thought of as the whole of America.[32]

Watson linked economic stability to authentic national culture, charging that both had been crucially undermined by the "feminine" pursuit of fashion. The notoriously right-wing critic Thomas Craven went further. The alliance between fashion and modernism, he asserted, had transformed a whole generation of male artists into decorators and stylists—in essence, into female impersonators:

> The artist is losing his masculinity. The tendency of the Parisian system is to disestablish sexual characteristics, to merge the two sexes in an androgynous third containing all that is offensive in both. If you doubt the growing effeminacy of the artist, you have only to examine the performances of the modern Ecole de Paris. The school is fundamentally sexless, from Picasso to Laurencin and Dufy. In exteriors, it often appears harsh and brutal, but the harshness is factitious—the acid face and *dominating toughness of the professional woman* [my italics]. In essence, it is an emasculated art, an art of fashions, styles, and ambiguous patterns.

Obviously, Watson and Craven's texts rely on metaphors of sexual difference to suggest national artistic distinctions, contrasting the "femininity" of French modernism with the implied

[31] Hazel L. Kozlar, "Making a Job of Beauty," *Independent Woman* 12 (April 1933): 132, 154.

[32] Forbes Watson, "The Star Spangled Banner," *Arts* 18, no. 1 (October 1931): 45.

"masculinity" of American art. In raising the specter of fashion, each had a particular kind of femininity in mind. The dressmaker, the flapper, and the "dominating" professional woman all point to patriarchal anxieties about the career-oriented New Woman and the impact of her tastes on cultural production.[33]

Both artists and businesspeople conceded that Paris had undoubtedly set the tone for modern style. The dilemma they faced was to modify American art and fashion production into modern form while continuing to profit from French exports. The editor of *Women's Wear Daily*, Morris Crawford, suggested in *The Ways of Fashion* that his tastes were ultimately tempered by his national viewpoint. Yet he equivocated: "I hope [I have not lacked] sympathy for an understanding of France or her great industries of fashion. It is my belief that neither in culture nor in industry do we compete with France, but we are component parts of the same basic culture and draw our technologies and our arts from the common funds of a basic civilization." Edward L. Bernays, a guiding force in modern public relations, noted that one of his clients, Cheney Silk company, sold its designs by appealing to Parisian cultural cachet. However, part of the tactic involved educating American consumers about more accessible brands of modern French art. Thus in 1927, Bernays arranged a traveling exhibition featuring School of Paris artist Kees van Dongen, circulated prepackaged reviews of his work, and encouraged competing designers to manufacture goods inspired by the painter. Importantly, the company sponsored a show of von Dongen's paintings at the Anderson Galleries, where each picture was draped with an analogous Cheney silk.[34]

Yet from the outset of the Great Depression, the American business community balked at French style leadership, especially its ties to modernism. Late in the 1930s *Fortune* magazine summed up the French influence on American show windows in the 1920s as a plethora of "grotesque mannequins, . . . cubist props [and] gaga designs." American women working in fashion careers pointed out, however, that they contrasted with their Continental cousins because they viewed fashion as more of a profession than a matter of self-adornment. The American Commissionaire in Paris (who worked for a women's professional organization called the Fashion Group) declared, "French women think chiefly about clothes and love, and chiefly about clothes. . . . The American woman has something in her head besides fashion . . . because most of us have jobs . . . it's smart to have jobs." In 1929 the fashion reporter for the *New York Times* had acidly contrasted a Parisian-driven revival of belle epoque fashion with a supposed American penchant for practicality. Her words eerily presaged Watson's castigation of the "Paris Art Bourse": "Under the combined attack of couturiers and corset makers, manufacturers of silks and velvets, advertising artists, stylists, window decorators and fashion magazines, women are to be made 'feminine,' no matter what the cost to comfort or to bank accounts. And 'feminine' is defined in its narrowest and most thoroughly traditional sense. Not what American women are in 1929, but what French women are supposed to have been before they were contaminated with modern ideas."[35]

Well past sixty years of age at this point, Rubinstein was still identified with a sense of style specific to the 1910s (the Ballets Russes color schemes, the Poiret gowns). Modernist vocabularies that had once been hailed by her American public for their modish chic now seemed dated and anachronistic. Paradoxically, even as *Fortune* contrasted Arden's modernity to Rubinstein's ostensible antiquity, it celebrated the beautician's cosmetics corporation for its marketing skill and product design.[36] Obviously, as this purposeful differentiation illustrates, Rubinstein's cosmetics corporation was considered both up-to-date and "American," but the woman herself and her salons were figured as foreign and increasingly unfashionable. While Rubinstein would always trade on her "exoticism" and Parisian reputation

[33] Thomas Craven, *Modern Art: The Men, the Monuments, the Meaning* (New York: Halcyon House, 1934), p. 29. For a comprehensive analysis of the New Woman and art, see Ellen Wiley Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

[34] M. D. C. Crawford, *The Ways of Fashion* (New York: Fairchild, 1940), p. 289. Edward L. Bernays, *Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel, Edward L. Bernays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), p. 308.

[35] "Window Display," *Fortune* 15, no. 1 (January 1937): 92. Anita Chace, speech delivered to the Fashion Group, November 24, 1933, cited in Victoria Billings, "Altered Forever: A Women's Elite and the Transformation of American Fashion and Work Culture" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1990), p. 210. Mildred Adams, "Revolt Rumbles Fashion World," *New York Times*, October 27, 1929.

[36] "Cosmetics: The American Woman Responds," *Fortune* 11, no. 2 (August 1930): 30–31.

to generate an aura of glamour about herself and her products, during the early days of the Great Depression the symbolic capital manufactured by this identity had diminished in light of increasing nativism in the realms of business and the arts.

Brand Name Modernism: Art Publicity and Consumer Spectacle

In the disquieting climate of the early 1930s, Rubinstein reinvented her American image. As David Nye argues in his study of early-twentieth-century "image worlds," modern corporate imagery was increasingly predicated on self-representation; that is, on marketing a picture of a business itself, equally as vital to sustaining the health of a company as the promotion of goods and services. Corporate publicity increasingly relied on the new tool of public relations, which worked by mediating the very construction of social and cultural identities, actively shaping values and beliefs on multiple fronts. Because Rubinstein always insisted that her own image *was* her business, her beauty parlors, her public persona, and her collecting activities all couched her enterprise in cultural terms. This tactic is most evident in her new, extravagant 1937 salon, which she designed as a publicity machine. Upon her purchase of the building at 715 Fifth Avenue and the subsequent move of her salon from East Fifty-seventh Street, Rubinstein hired Harold Sterner to renovate the facade in accord with the sleek appearance of art deco exteriors, as can be seen in the Bauhaus-like signage all rendered in lower case.[37] Rubinstein retained her practice of using the space for displays of her own collection as well as modish interior decoration, but she also added consumer spectacles and staged events so that the establishment itself took on the aura of celebrity. Rubinstein thus participated in the new phase of public relations in which the salon and all it contained became a marketable entity, packaged for consumption on a number of levels—as a fashion outlet, alluring consumer spectacle, and gallery-like showcase for her own collection.

Rubinstein had also begun to ante up her cultural capital via more conventional artistic venues, making her collecting activities better known to her American public. As early as 1932 she had lent her collection of Nadelman sculptures for a display at Marie Sterner's International Gallery in New York. This show was immediately followed by a small exhibition dedicated to her entire collection. In 1935 she collaborated with the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) by lending a substantial number of her African sculptures to the museum's *African Negro Art* exhibition. And eventually she would lend items to MoMA's 1936–37 show of portraits by Salvador Dali as well as its exhibitions featuring the work of Candido Portinari, Nadelman, and Pavel Tchelitchew. However, Rubinstein never became affiliated with a particular museum nor did she ever work to build her own, as did other female collectors like Isabella Stewart Gardner, Gertrude Whitney, and Peggy Guggenheim.[38] Instead she contrived her own set of exhibiting tactics, primarily reserved for spaces—like her salons—in which she would have the most control over how her collection was represented.

When the seven-story salon at 715 Fifth Avenue opened in January 1937, *Life* anointed it Rubinstein's "toniest."[39] In the coming years, few would refer to the establishment without accompanying adjectives like "swank." The beauty parlor was featured in New York City tourist guides (the only other one earning inclusion was Arden's) and set a new standard for the industry. As if to blur the line between her cosmetics company and her salon, Rubinstein also located her corporate headquarters in the building's upper three floors, decorating the space in shades of pink and including framed studio photographs of herself in almost every office.

[37] David Nye, *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric, 1890–1930* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985). See Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998). The 1937 salon is described in Woodhead, *War Paint*, p. 237.

[38] "Beauty Specialist Displays Her Nadelmans," *Art Digest* 6 (April 15, 1932): 15; Marie Sterner, *The Collection of Helena Rubinstein* (New York: International Gallery, 1932); Edward Alden Jewel, "Art in Review," *New York Times*, May 16, 1932. *African Negro Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1935). The catalogue does not discuss Rubinstein, although her works are reproduced and identified as part of her collection. An earlier profile of this collection appeared in 1929; see Marya Mannes, "African Art in the Rubinstein Collection," *International Studio* 92, no. 384 (May 1929): 55–56. On the MoMA show, see Rubinstein, *My Life for Beauty*, p. 103. Anton Gill suggests that Rubinstein *did* want to found an institution that would rival New York's Museum of Modern Art; see Anton Gill, *Art Lover: A Biography of Peggy Guggenheim* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), pp. 208, 210.

[39] "The Business of Beauty is the Business of Rubinstein," *Life* 2, no. 9 (March 1, 1937): 39.

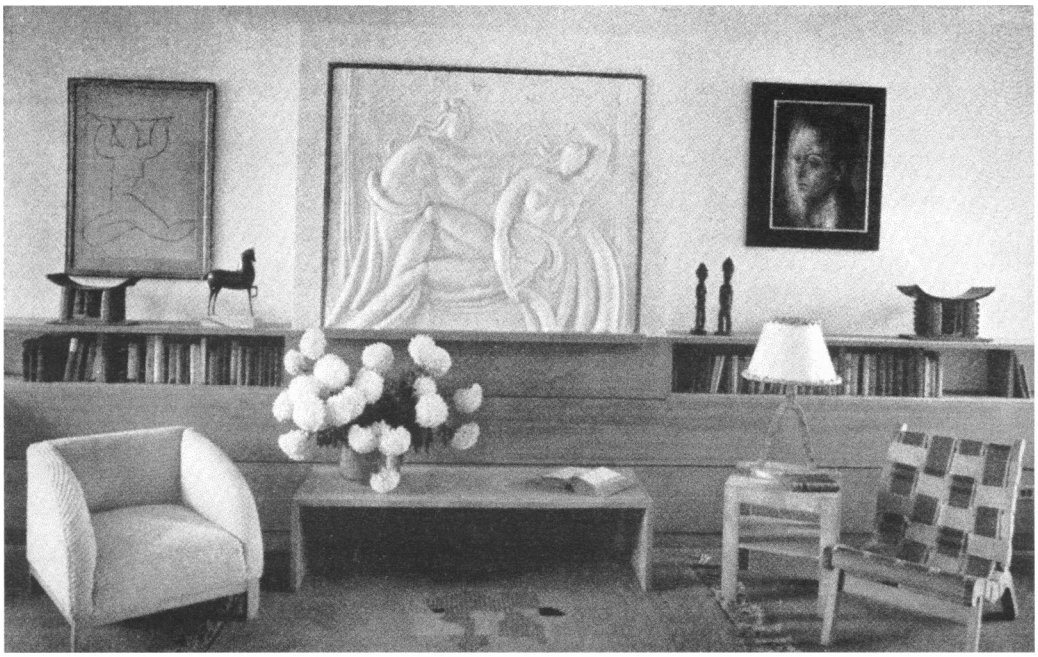

Fig. 6. Reception Room in Helena Rubinstein's 1937 salon, 715 Fifth Avenue, New York. From "Two New Scenes in Modern Decoration," *Arts and Decoration* 45, no. 5 (January 1937): 38.

As evidenced in the salon's treatment rooms, each resembling a boudoir, and the waiting area, which mimicked a living room, the domestic interior continued to factor obliquely in the design of Rubinstein's establishment. But the signs of domesticity were secondary to the display of art. The main reception area contained the Nadelman bas-relief from the 1915 salon surrounded by new items like African sculpture, a Ferdnand Léger rug, and an Amedeo Modigliani silhouette entitled *Caryatide* (n.d.). Gazing over the entire ensemble was Tchelitchew's sequined portrait of Rubinstein (fig. 6). Portrait busts by Malvina Hoffman and murals painted by School of Paris artist Alice Halicka were located in the salon's health bar and treatment rooms. Finally, the usual assortment of colorful decor consisting of pink mirrors, purple curtains, and gold cabinets glittered alongside the artwork.[40]

From the "feminine" color scheme to the actual artists on display, Rubinstein once again relied on the image of fashionable femininity to sell her space. Certain parts of the interior were clearly designated for consumption as tasteful fashion. Photographs and profiles of the salon were reproduced in style magazines such as *Arts and Decoration* and *House Beautiful*, and artists such as Hoffman, Halicka, Nadelman, Léger, Tchelitchew, and Modigliani would have been familiar to the salon's clientele as exemplary of the fashionable modernism promoted by upscale magazines.[41]

The decor in the 1937 salon also suggests thematic organization. While physically absent, Rubinstein's presence is signified by the Tchelitchew portrait. Her head turned to face left, Rubinstein looks out over the entire arrangement in the room. Nadelman's bas-relief calls to mind the stylized classicism popular in the late 1910s. Modigliani's linear female form is economically rendered and schematic, fitting well within the conventions for art deco. Conversely, Tchelitchew's surrealist image of Rubinstein is a swirling wash of brilliant greens, blues, and golds. The entire surface is covered in thick gold sequins, creating the impression of either a glamorous,

[40] "Two New Scenes in Modern Decoration," *Arts and Decoration* 45, no. 5 (January 1937): 38.

[41] In 1943 Hoffman collaborated with Elsa Schiaparelli on an antiwar exhibition entitled *Men of the World* and was chosen to create the trophy for the Coty award, a prize for excellence in design. Halicka, firmly affiliated with French couture, developed a unique type of collage based on affixing rich swaths of fabric to painted figures. She spent 1935 to 1938 in the United States and had exhibitions at the Harriman Gallery and the Julien Levy Gallery in 1937. On Hoffman, see Pamela Hibbs Decoteau, "Malvina Hoffman and the Races of Man," *Women's Art Journal* 10 (Fall/Winter 1989–90): 7–12; Palmer White, *Elsa Schiaparelli* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), p. 200. On Halicka, see "Playthings of Childhood Are Realities of Art," *Vogue* 60 (July 15, 1922): 65; Perry, *Women Artists*, pp. 152–53.

Fig. 7. Mala Rubinstein in Helena Rubinstein's 1937 salon, 715 Fifth Avenue, New York. (Helena Rubinstein Foundation; photo © Paul Thompson.)

sparkling halo or a series of golden pimples. In another publicity photograph, Rubinstein's favored pieces—Nadelman's *Two Nudes*, Modigliani's *Caryatide*, and Tchelitchew's portrait—form the backdrop to an image of Mala Rubinstein (Helena's niece) instructing employees in facial massage (fig. 7). As the young women examine themselves in the tilted mirrors, they would have seen these examples of Rubinstein's collection along with their own reflections. In the mirror closest to the viewer in the lower right foreground, we can discern the abstract forms of Louis Marcoussis's *La Recontre* (1937). Set up for the purposes of promotion, the salon's display afforded Rubinstein the opportunity to imagine her place in the recent history of modern style. Thus the works of art present a small-scale chronology of accessible styles critical to marketing modernism within the fashion arena. But such a visual chronicle can only be seen within Rubinstein's establishment, not in a gallery or museum.

That Rubinstein constructed her space to amplify the work of artists who were associated with fashion is best seen in her patronage of Marie Laurencin, from whom Rubinstein commissioned three paintings. Her choice of artist is significant. As scholars have argued, Laurencin built a lucrative career for herself in the 1920s by consciously emphasizing "feminine" vocabularies like rococo ornament and decorative color. The artist, more so than, say, Georgia O'Keeffe, deliberately aligned herself with the fashion realm, producing portraits of modish women that were often consumed as fashion illustration. One of her distinctive modish *femmes* graced the August 1923 cover of *Vogue*. Indeed, American audiences were best acquainted with her painting only through the fashion arena. Such was her association with modish imagery that one writer could refer simply to a "Marie Laurencin palette" while another used her name as an adjective for fantasy paintings. In 1927 *Vanity Fair* would credit her with founding a whole new school of art, placing the artist in its coveted Hall of Fame because "her work has influenced the world of fashion as well as that of the galleries."[42]

[42] According to art dealer René Gimpel, "[Laurencin] is preparing three canvases for Helena Rubinstein, the purveyor of beauty products, who will have reproductions done for her salon" (Diary entry, March 16, 1938, as cited in René Gimpel, *Diary of an Art Dealer*, trans. John Rosenberg [New York: Farrar, Straus and

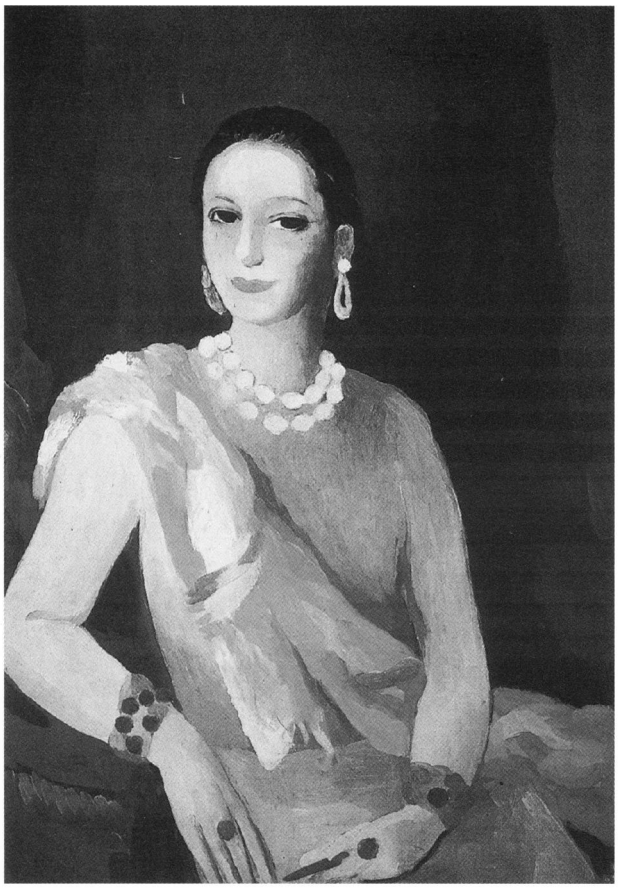

Fig. 8. Marie Laurencin, *Helena Rubinstein Wearing a Yellow Shawl*, ca. 1934. Oil on canvas; H. 33″, W. 27″. (Helena Rubinstein Foundation; photo © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.)

Fig. 9. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jimson Weed*, 1936–37. Oil on linen; H. 83½″, W. 70″. (Indianapolis Museum of Art, gift of Eli Lilly and Company; photo © 2003 Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.)

Laurencin's 1934 portrait of Rubinstein portrays the beautician in the artist's characteristic style of softly blended pastels and diffuse form (fig. 8). Resembling so many of Laurencin's other portraits of fashionable figures (such as Coco Chanel), Rubinstein's body melds into the fabric of her pink gown; blobs of white and teal form an enormous necklace and earrings. The beautician is portrayed with the doe-eyes and stylized painted lips commonly found among Laurencin's female imagery. Already well into middle age when she commissioned the portrait, Rubinstein was rendered to resemble not so much a physiognomic appearance (or even a fantasy version of her youthful guise)—rather, it is a version of Rubinstein as inflected in one of the most popular styles of decorative modernism. Rubinstein inserts herself within Laurencin's modernism, metaphorically demonstrating her identification with an artist who epitomized "feminine taste" and her literal self-construction through its vocabulary.

Only months following the opening of Rubinstein's new outlet, Elizabeth Arden mounted O'Keeffe's enormous *Jimson Weed* in her Fifth Avenue salon (fig. 9). Large schematic flowers stenciled on beauty salon walls had become standard decor for such establishments as the industry waged a campaign of "modernization" in the 1930s. Aspects of Arden's decor and O'Keeffe's canvases were deemed "ultra-feminine"—a term that evokes essentialist definitions of femininity as well as the avant-garde, which was often termed "ultra-modern." By hiring the nation's best-known female artist to do the wall-size painting, Arden strategically modified the kind of publicity her salon would receive. She anointed the room where the painting was hung the "Gymnasium Moderne" and placed O'Keeffe's creation along the wall so that it would be reflected in the room's mirrors (fig. 10). When performing rhythmic dance or poise exercises, the clientele could look

Giroux, 1966], pp. 427–28). I have been unable to determine exactly what these paintings were, since none of the Laurencins included in Rubinstein's estate have dates that correspond to the diary entry. However, it is possible that at least one of these works may have been Laurencin's *Portrait of Helena Rubinstein in a Yellow Shawl* (ca. 1934). Bridget Elliott, "The Strength of the Weak as Portrayed by Marie Laurencin," *Genders* 24 (1996): 69–109. Perry, *Women Artists*, pp. 109–17. Margaretta Byers, *Help Wanted—Female: Careers in the Field of Fashion* (New York: Julian Messner, 1941), p. 285; Allene Talmey, "No Progress No Fun," *Vogue* 107 (February 1946): 192. As cited in Cleveland Amory and Frederic Bradlee, eds., *Vanity Fair: A Cavalcade of the 1920s and 1930s* (New York: Viking, 1960), p. 139.

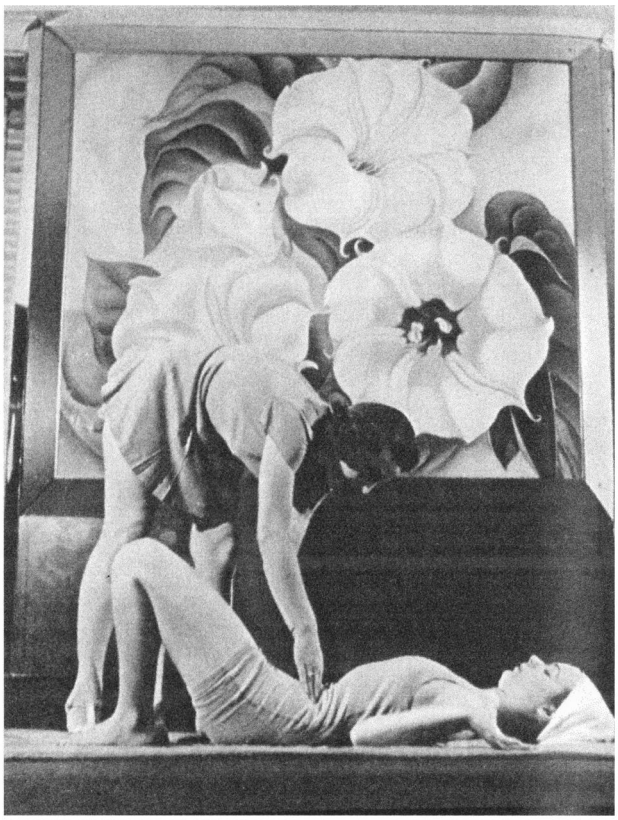

Fig. 10. Women exercising in front of Georgia O'Keeffe's *Jimson Weed*, Elizabeth Arden's salon, 691 Fifth Avenue, New York. From "I Am a Famous Woman in This Industry," *Fortune* 18, no. 4 (October 1938): 60. (Photo © Arthur O'Neill.)

at themselves as they moved before the blossoms hovering in the background. In this instance, Arden indeed molded bodies to accord with modern form, but the form in question is O'Keeffe's cascading petals and buds. The installation was celebrated for its artistic significance and transformed the redecoration of Arden's business into an exhibition premiere. The occasion was simultaneously publicized as a celebrity event, equally significant as a public coalition between two well-known stars—one associated with fashionable femininity, the other with women's artistic modernity. Unlike Rubinstein, whose salon openings became theatrical galas, Arden unveiled her newly redecorated exercise room with a special tea. However, she was careful to invite photographers, posing for the camera with O'Keeffe.[43]

Arden's public identification with O'Keeffe was highly strategic. By turning her salon into a venue for viewing the artist's flower painting, she clearly strove to counter the enormous publicity Rubinstein generated with the founding of her own Fifth Avenue salon earlier that year. Further, Arden's move allied her business with an artist who was an American modernist associated with femininity. If Rubinstein promoted a largely Parisian brand of modernism within her commercial sites and business enterprise, then Arden offered a homegrown product that subtly pointed to her archrival's foreignness. Unlike Rubinstein, however, Arden limited her involvement with interior design to choosing a suitable decorator; she had little hands-on input but did maintain a small collection of modern paintings by female artists such as O'Keeffe, Laurencin, and Mary Cassatt. Arden also commissioned portraits of herself from Augustus John and purchased sculpted busts of "famous Parisian beauties" by fashion photographer Baron Hoyningen-Huene. According to Margaretta Byers, these she "exhibited widely." This collecting activity appears to have been a response to Rubinstein's, since Arden only began to acquire art once Rubinstein had defined her own beauty salons through art display. Arden clearly had shifted her views since 1930, when *Fortune* magazine took approving notice of her "chaste gray and silver apartment" and complimented her for moving away from "the lacy, chi-chi kind [of decor]."[44]

Arden's efforts to publicize the new look of her salon were no match for Rubinstein's "stunts." Although the artwork mounted within Rubinstein's new interior showcased the beautician's "good" taste, most observers focused on the overwhelming spectacle of the entire environment. "From across the street her salon is a luxurious facade," observed *Harper's Bazaar* in 1937. "Once inside the door it is a gigantic and splendid boudoir." *Vogue* was more effusive:

> Chirico's white horses. Ladies sunning under artificial sun. Halicka panels in the health bar. Milk baths. Treatment rooms like dressing-rooms. Miniature rooms in shadow boxes. Malvina Hoffman's sculpted heads. Your own head looking well coiffed. These are no

[43] On the use of stenciled flowers, see *Modern Beauty Shop* 20, no.12 (December 1934): 63; *Modern Beauty Shop* 23, no. 5 (May 1937): 76. One year after Arden installed O'Keeffe's painting, the journal advocated the use of flower decorations; see "Furniture and Equipment Section," *Modern Beauty Shop* 24, no. 2 (February 1938): 67–110. "Beauty is Fun," *Town and Country* 92 (April 1937): 152. The painting is briefly discussed in Jonathan Weinberg, *Love and Ambition in Modern American Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 121–22.

[44] For more on Arden's collection, see Lewis and Woodworth, *Miss Elizabeth Arden*, p. 130. Byers, *Help Wanted*, pp. 243–244. "Elizabeth Arden: Queen," p. 40.

surrealist babblings; they are the first, exciting impressions you receive in Helena Rubinstein's brand-new beauty establishment.

As the reference to "surrealist babblings" indicates, Rubinstein premiered the new salon at the end of MoMA's 1936–37 *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* show. Clearly striving to capitalize on the publicity surrounding the exhibition, Rubinstein acquired Man Ray's painting of colossal female lips, *Observatory Time—The Lovers* (1932–36), and displayed it—appropriately enough—as a backdrop for a show window selling her own lipstick. The painting had previously been featured in a fashion spread published in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1936 (fig. 11), suggesting how Rubinstein's trompe l'oeil engaged multiple publics. The MoMA show, while critically panned, utterly fascinated the viewing public, who approached the array of fur cups, parrots mounted on mannequin legs, and bizarre landscapes as if the exhibition were an amusement park. Already enthralled, audiences witnessed an explosion of surrealist imagery in the commercial realm, from store windows, merchandising displays, and, above all, fashion magazines. That she used Man Ray's work as an expedient advertisement but never intended to add the painting to her collection was made clear when Rubinstein swiftly returned the piece to the artist.[45]

Just two months after the Man Ray escapade, Rubinstein again alluded to spectacular surrealist displays when her salon's shop window was transformed into a stage set where live models stepped into a gilded frame for fifteen minutes at a time, creating a *tableau vivant* of such paintings as Edouard Manet's *The Balcony* (1869) and Picasso's *Woman in a Blouse* (figs. 12, 13). So many passersby stopped to view the living window, or, as *Life* put it, "Rembrandt and Manet and Picasso á la Rubinstein," that Fifth Avenue's other businesses ordered Rubinstein to dismantle her star attraction, conveniently resulting in more publicity for the outlet.[46]

[45] Carola de Peyster Kip, "Worn Out and Repaired," *Harper's Bazaar* 71 (February 1937): 102; "It's a Beautiful Day," *Vogue* 89 (January 15, 1937): 74. For more on surrealism, see Dickran Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde, 1920–1950* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995); Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001); Richard Martin, *Fashion and Surrealism* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987). Man Ray, *Self-Portrait* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1963), pp. 257–58.

[46] "Business of Beauty," pp. 39–40.

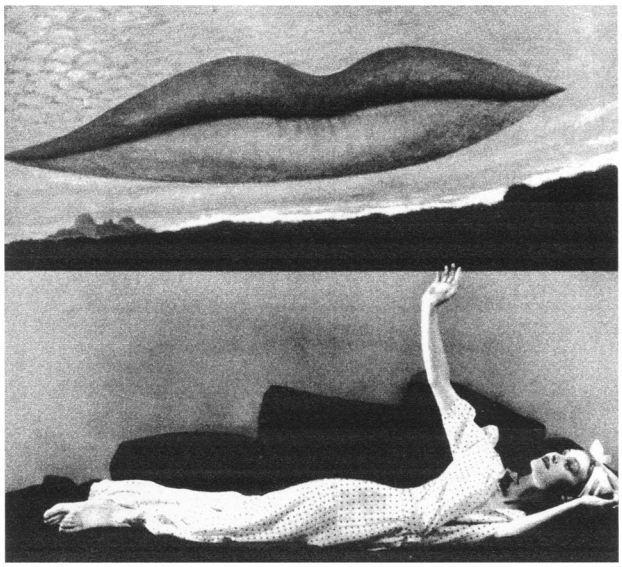

Fig. 11. Model wearing beach coat in front of Man Ray's *Observatory Time—The Lovers*, 1932–36. (Photo © 2003 Man Ray Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.)

The extent to which Rubinstein staged commercial spectacle at the Fifth Avenue venue is seen by the fate of the fashionable interior decor that had once played such an important role in defining the space of her earlier salons. "Domesticity" itself became entertainment. One floor of the beauty parlor was devoted to miniature dollhouses, set within the walls of the establishment and viewed through small windows (fig. 14). A small, historically themed diorama, the dollhouses reduced fashionable interiors from different moments in history into neat consumer packages, and they linked Rubinstein's salon to current trends in fashion display. For example, New York's influential Fashion Group, the premier organization of female fashion professionals, had held a symposium on the topic of window displays in 1935, with participants pointing to surrealist-inspired show windows as essential to garnering viewer attention. Added one stylist, "It is easier for people to look at little windows than big ones." Thus, by the late 1930s the miniature fit nicely with surrealist spectacle but was also promoted as a particularly modern merchandising strategy.[47]

[47] The dollhouse dioramas drew on another fad for miniature houses prevalent in the Great Depression, best typified by actress Colleen Moore's 1935 nationwide department store tour with her little domiciles. In the fall of 1937, the Art Institute of Chicago mounted a display of specially designed dollhouse period rooms, which featured hand-crafted reproductions of famous artwork.

Fig. 12. "Living model" in the window of Helena Rubinstein's 1937 salon, 715 Fifth Avenue, New York. From "Mme. Rubinstein's Living Art Blocks Fifth Avenue Traffic," *Life* 2, no. 9 (March 1, 1937): 40. (Photo © Charmante Studio.)

There can be no doubt that Rubinstein's show windows and amusements were bald efforts to generate publicity. In contrast, her placement of African sculpture in the salon constituted a public relations strategy in its most nuanced form. More than her Nadelman, Marc Chagall, and Modigliani works, these were the objects that drew the attention of such forces as André Breton and MoMA.[48] Knowledgeable salon patrons would have immediately recognized the set of African art on display as representative of the work Rubinstein had lent to MoMA's 1935 *African NegroArt* show. With such legitimating attention paid to this aspect of her collection, Rubinstein gained a valuable publicity tool. The work served as a reminder of the hallowed cultural spaces in which she moved, heralded her sophisticated eye for accumulating such a collection, *and* disguised her commercial interests through the edifying power of "high brow" taste.

In a publicity photograph from 1935, Rubinstein strikes an imperious pose as she holds up a mask from the Ivory Coast (fig. 15). Depicted by fashionable photographer George Maillard-Kesslere, Rubinstein timed the photo's release to the nation's press to coincide with the MoMA show. Although the image adheres to established visual codes of authority and possession, it also subtly suggests a fashion reading. Rubinstein balances the mask in hands adorned with black velvet Chanel gloves, distinctive for their bell-shape cuffs made of straw, subtly framing the art object as a fashion accessory. Gloves also evoke the careful touch of the art expert, like a conservator. Rubinstein presents the artwork in a way that traverses the fetishized handling of objects ascribed to both consumer desire and curatorial expertise. With thin "painted on" eyebrows and cupid lips, a hairstyle composed of a single braid, and her rigid, upright stance, Rubinstein herself seems as stylized as the linear ornaments incised on the mask's face. This juxtaposition between white femininity and the racially coded blackness of the mask alludes to established visual codes in modernist representations. Found in paintings and fashion photography, such imagery invited the spectator to make equivalences between sexual and racial difference, conflating femininity with otherness, and likened the modernity of the fashionably made-up face to the "primitive" schematic, geometric forms ascribed to non-Western aesthetics.

Rubinstein, however, circumvented the limitations of this possible interpretation of her image. Unlike modernist representations that

The dollhouses on display at Rubinstein's salon had been publicly exhibited in a gallery at least once. Assembled by Rubinstein over the years, the rooms were outfitted by professional decorators as accurately as possible; see Leslie Paris, "Fairyland for the Nation: Colleen Moore's Dollhouse Charity Tour and the Spectacle of Childhood, 1935–1939," paper presented at the California American Studies Annual Conference, Berkeley, Calif., May 1997; Charles Fabens Kelly, "The Miniature Period Room at Chicago," *Art News* 36, no. 2 (October 9, 1937): 14; Charles Fabens Kelly, "Setting a Doll Up in Her Own Furniture," *Arts and Decoration* 40 (April 1934): 54–55. In the 1920s Florine Stettheimer and her sister Carrie constructed elaborate dollhouses, which included removable facades and whole galleries featuring examples of modern art, re-created in miniature. More mainstream salons sometimes used cabinets that contained miniature scenes, such as panoramic vistas of mountains; see Dana Wolf, "Built-In Displays: Space Savers and Silent Salesmen," *Modern Beauty Shop* 23, no. 10 (October 1937): 80–81, 174, 176. "Symposium on Window Display," Bulletin of the Fashion Group (January-February 1939): 3, Archives of the Fashion Group International, Department of Special Collections, Manuscript and Archives Division, New York Public Library, box 144, folder 11.

[48] Rubinstein also entertained Marxist poets and artists in her home; see Tashjian, *Boatload of Madmen*, pp. 40, 164.

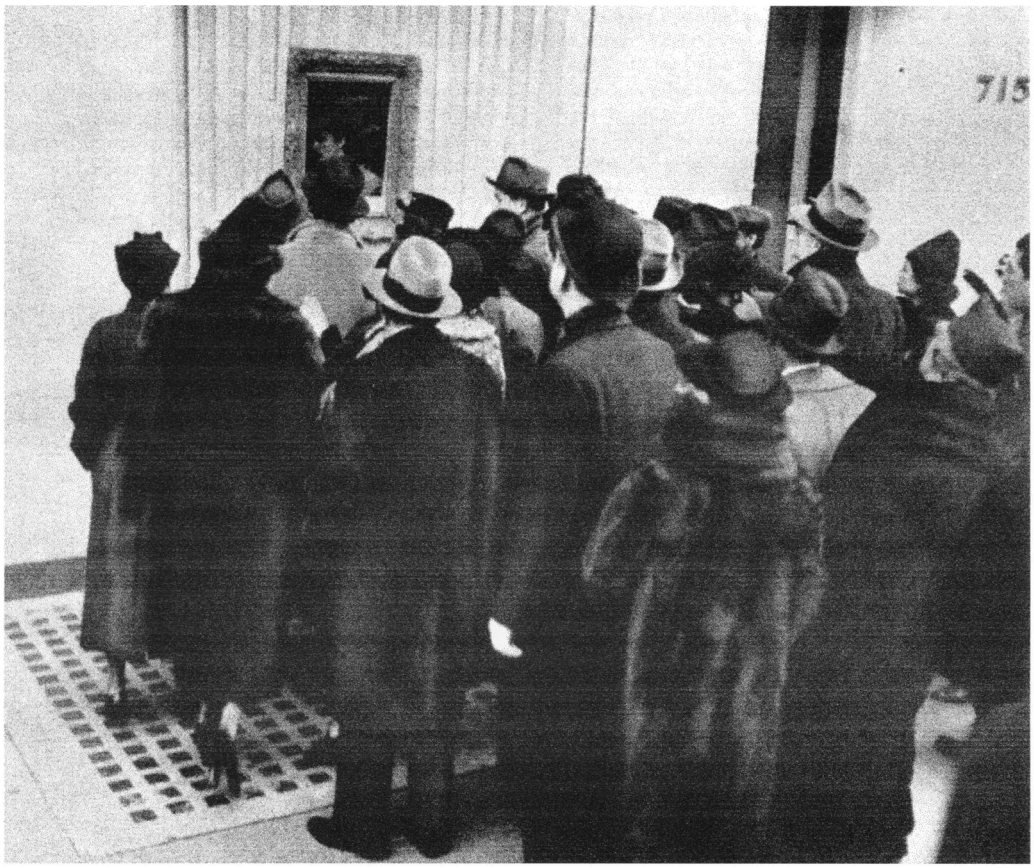

Fig. 13. Crowd looking at the "living model" in the window of Helena Rubinstein's 1937 salon, 715 Fifth Avenue, New York. From "Mme. Rubinstein's Living Art Blocks Fifth Avenue Traffic," *Life* 2, no. 9 (March 1, 1937): 40. (Photo © Charmante Studio.)

picture frequently nude and anonymous models with African art, Rubinstein, in her business suit and pearls, accentuates her professional status. Her outfit differs dramatically from the exotic gowns in which she was photographed in other publicity portraits. Her career-oriented clothing alludes to signs of women's modernity that contrasts with the "primitiveness" of the African mask. In a lengthy press release that accompanied this photograph, Rubinstein similarly appropriated the language of primitivism. Casting herself as an exotic explorer, the text recounts how Rubinstein searched remote and exotic lands for beauty elixirs:

> [The] collection of these weird objects which appeal to this beauty expert because of their "strange charm and beauty of expression," was gathered by Helena Rubinstein with infinite pains during the past fifteen years of her traveling about the world in search of new ingredients and formulas for her well-known beauty products. . . . They have a strange beauty all their own. Such well known modern artists as Picasso, Matisse, Modigliani, Epstein, Zadkine, and others owe an admitted debt to the newly discovered sculpture of darkest Africa, having been inspired by the original arrangement of lines, masses, colors, light and shades to be found in these carvings of bygone eras.[49]

Her interest in African art is inflected by her enterprising pursuit, while the significance of her enterprise is associated with a roster of esteemed modernists and their co-opting of African art to "regenerate" painting and sculpture.

When recounting her attraction to African art in her memoirs, Rubinstein followed an "official" narrative that so-called primitive African art was important insofar as it launched avant-garde experimentation. Pointing out that English sculptor Jacob Epstein had first introduced her to African art in the 1910s, she noted:

> As my collection grew, few of our friends cared for it. "How strange," they would say, "to think of someone who has dedicated her life to beauty, buying such ugly things." It was not until years later, when the paintings

[49] Typescript of undated press release (ca. 1935) in the archives of the Helena Rubinstein Foundation, New York.

Fig. 14. Madame Rubinstein's miniature rooms in her 1937 salon, 715 Fifth Avenue, New York. From *Vogue* 89 (January 15, 1937): 116. (Photo, Anton Bruehl © *Vogue*, Condé Nast Publications Inc.)

of Juan Gris, Picasso, and Modigliani began to receive world-wide recognition, that African primitive sculpture came into its own as a source of inspiration. How wisely Jacob Epstein had advised me. I had always favored the unusual, and when I followed such sound advice as his, as well as my own "inner eye," my purchases were invariably good.[50]

Without doubt, in her own mind her acquisition of African sculpture gave her impeccable vanguard credentials and distinguished her taste from that of her colleagues in the beauty business. However, it is much more likely that Rubinstein's interest in non-Western art began in the 1920s (when she began collecting it), a time when fashion designers, magazines, and designers embraced African art with all the fervor of the newly converted.

In the years between the wars, European and American fashion venues became key sites for the appropriation of non-Western motifs and images, helping to produce exotic fantasies of primitivism. No doubt inspired by Parisian *negritude*, American fashion venues such as Bonwit-Teller displayed examples of African art alongside models adorned in "African-inspired" fabrics. In one photograph from 1923, the white models are arranged before Congo masks, textiles, and sculpture (fig. 16). These mannequins have been lit in such a way as to cast shadows, creating the impression of warriors holding spears and figures with elaborate headdresses. Even as the text exalts the "need of a new and vigorous note in contrast to the over-elaboration of the European periods which have dominated our textile art for the past fifty years," concepts of "savage" African culture and people quite literally shadow the show of modern fashion. Bonwit-Teller's Estelle Hamburger, who was the driving force behind the store's display, recalled in her autobiography of 1939 how she met up with the Brooklyn Museum's Stuart Culin, who introduced her to the institution's African collection: "We would make

[50] As quoted in Tashjian, *Boatload of Madmen*, pp. 50–51.

Fig. 15. Helena Rubinstein with African mask, ca. 1935. (Helena Rubinstein Foundation; photo © George Maillard-Kesslere.)

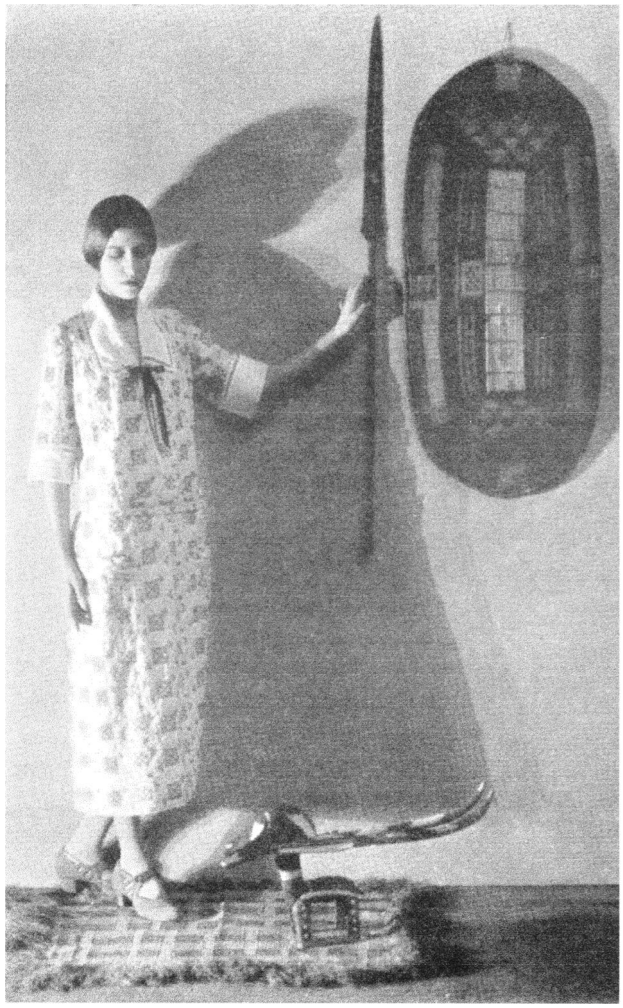

Fig. 16. Model posed with African artifacts, 1923. From "Dress Decorations Inspired by Native African Art," *Arts and Decoration* 19, no. 2 (June 1923): 52.

Congo art a fashion!...But none of us foresaw, with the vision of Mr. Culin, that in the smooth, sculptured planes of the ebony heads and masks created by savage artists, was the first inspiration for an entirely new movement in decorative design which would come to be known as 'Modern.'" Echoing modernist claims that non-Western art was a regenerative source for Euro-American imagery, fashion sites such as Bonwit-Teller validated the very claims later made for African art by esteemed institutions like MoMA. The store took note of non-Western art purely for its supposedly fresh style: "Art, history, and fashion collaborated to revive the vogue of figured fabrics, lifting the veil of ancient civilizations from Peru to Persia, scouring the wide world from Java to Japan in quest of beauty in design, and evolving the Renaissance of the gown of simple lines with pattern its only adornment." Following the International Colonial Exposition of Paris in 1931, one American fashion writer effused: "I predict a profusion of colonial fabrics, of colonial themes, of colonial forms in hats and gowns, and decorations. The colonial influence will extend to necklaces, bracelets, combs and jewels."[51] Such commentary serves to this day as shorthand for the excesses of imperial culture and the commercial spectacle of primitivism.

[51] "Dress Decorations Inspired by Native African Art," *Arts and Decoration* 19, no. 2 (June 1923): 52. The displays were on view at Bonwit-Teller. The previous month the magazine published an article by Morris Crawford profiling the collection of African art in the Brooklyn Museum, examples of which are reproduced in the fashion spread; see M. D. C. Crawford, "The Art of the Boshongo Craftsmen," *Arts and Decoration* 19, no. 1 (May 1923): 28–29, 54. In the late 1910s, the Brooklyn Museum's Culin and Crawford collaborated with fashion venues to promote non-Western art; see William Leach, *Land of Desire* (New York: Vintage, 1993), pp. 164–70. Estelle Hamburger, *It's a Woman's Business* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1939), pp. 139–40. The Bonwit-Teller interest in non-Western dress can be seen in an undated advertisement cited in Hamburger, *It's a Woman's Business*, p. 140. Undated press clipping (ca. 1931), cited in Robert Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 81.

It is not surprising that leaders in the world of fashion were also avid collectors of non-Western art. In addition to Rubinstein, Frank Crowninshield of *Vanity Fair* (who, like Rubinstein, also acquired modern art) assembled a prolific collection of African art, which he displayed in the pages of his magazine and living quarters, lit "by special equipment designed to enhance their exotic forms and gleaming surfaces."[52]

Rubinstein's display, then, evoked African art in a manner that parallels MoMA's organizing principles insofar as the museum manufactured the idea that non-Western art seeded vanguard experiments and regenerated the whole of Western art. However, she used her African art as an extension of her reputation for fashion. Her highly publicized taste also positioned her at the intersections of modern art, fashion, and museum constructions of non-Western art as "modern" form.[53] Due to the high visibility of African art in Paris art and fashion circles, the display of such objects in her salon helped infuse the space with Parisian ambience, even as these items evoked everything from a museum setting to a commercial display.

As we have seen, beginning in the late 1930s Rubinstein increasingly turned her business venues into exhibition sites, justified at the time as philanthropic shows for war relief. The 1941 opening of the new apothecary called the Gourielli shop was staged as a two-week-long exhibition of American and Mexican folk paintings for the benefit of China's war effort. Rubinstein deliberately used her salon as a symbolic site of national relations, holding a reception to honor Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. All the images on display were of children, suggesting that Rubinstein at this time of national crisis invested in more conventional signs of respectable femininity like philanthropy (the reception was meant to raise funds for charity projects) and motherhood. This activity additionally served to place her beauty business squarely in legitimating discourses of patriotism and smooth over any potential doubts about her "Americanness." Similarly, in the spring of 1942 the entire second floor of the Fifth Avenue salon was briefly incarnated as the Helena Rubinstein New Art Center, with proceeds intended for the Red Cross. For the admission price of 25 cents, viewers could see a historical survey of seventy nonobjective modernist paintings and sculpture, some owned by Rubinstein but many on loan from Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery. One reviewer for the *New York Times* failed to even mention that this new exhibition space was set within a beauty parlor: "In attractive large galleries, the lighting arrangement of which will doubtless be perfected as time goes on, we find a diverse survey that carries us back as far as French cubism and that includes some of the most recent exploits of artists both European and American." It is also possible that the name was simply a convention to attract notice to the art show during its run, distinguishing it from the exclusive salon. The admission price would suggest a venue open to the general public. Of course, holding an art show for charity within the salon space had the added advantage of luring potential customers into the establishment.[54]

In subsequent years, Rubinstein would be condemned for her spectacular presentation of artwork—of using "pure" art to advance her business interests. However, because the modern-

[52] "Primitive or Classic?" *Art Digest* 16 (July 1, 1941): 18. For examples from Crowninshield's collection published in *Vanity Fair*, see "African Art," *Vanity Fair* 44 (December 1935): 89; "Black Art," and "African Art Captures New York," *Vanity Fair* 44 (June 1935): 9, 39–40. Obviously, these reproductions were linked to MoMA's *African Negro Art* show, which featured a number of works from Crowninshield's collection. Unlike Crowninshield, Rubinstein never had any involvement with the Harlem Renaissance's Africanism.

[53] Given Rubinstein's presence in Paris during the 1920s, a full investigation of her interest in African art would deal more thoroughly with the French context for her acquisitions. Rubinstein's second husband, Prince Artchil Gourielli, is a shadowy figure in every published account of Rubinstein's life, including her memoirs. Rubinstein's new title of "Princess" carried considerably more cachet in America than in Europe, where, presumably, it was recognized for the dubious claim that it was. Significantly, whenever Rubinstein attempted to market grooming aids to men, she used this name. In the 1950s she briefly experimented with a masculine line of products and men's boutique called the House of Gourielli, which failed miserably; see Rubinstein, *My Life for Beauty*, p. 103; for a more entertaining account, see O'Higgins, *Madame*, pp. 203–6.

[54] For photographs of this social evening, see "Prince and Princess Gourielli Give a Party for China," *Harper's Bazaar* 74 (November 1941): 50. For descriptive reviews, see "Art by Americans to be Put on View," *New York Times*, September 24, 1941; "Among the Local Shows," *New York Times*, September 28, 1941, sec. 9. It should be noted that the market for folk art was especially strong at this time, and Rubinstein may have regarded this genre as a more modish inroad to collecting home-produced art than, say, contemporary American painters. Guggenheim's gallery primarily presented surrealist artwork—all drawn from her own collection—as part of a larger art installation, rather than discrete paintings viewed individually; undated *New York Journal* clipping and details of the installation can be found in Melvin Paul Lader, *Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century: The Surrealist Milieu and the American Avant-Garde, 1942–1947* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1981), pp. 129–30. Edward Alden Jewell, "Many Art Shows Aiding War Relief," *New York Times*, March 31, 1942; "At the Galleries," *New York Times*, April 5, 1942, sec. 8.

ist canon was yet unfixed, this was a time when commercial displays readily overlapped with gallery or museum exhibitions. Even MoMA recognized the need for popularizing certain types of modernism in commercial venues, like department stores, to create a viewing public for the more "difficult" work within its walls. At the precise moment when institutions such as MoMA and the Boston Museum of Modern Art championed the Parisian avant-garde of the 1910s as the instrumental force shaping the nature and "heroic" progression of modern art, Rubinstein's salon offered audiences an alternative interpretive framework. Her displays prioritized interior decorating, fashion decor, designs, and commercial merchandising that had accompanied the popularization of modern art since the 1910s. Not incidentally, such venues were associated with femininity and the marketable forms of modernism that invited such derision among influential critics like Clement Greenberg.[55]

Citing such examples as Rubinstein's collection in his recent discussion about 1930s fashion and surrealism, Dickran Tashjian concludes that while fashion figures and magazines mediated between the avant-garde and the larger, consumer-oriented public, they also "simplified" and "domesticated" revolutionary movements. Certainly it is true that Rubinstein, herself a member of a privileged elite, never consciously endorsed political or oppositional brands of modern art. Like the fashion world in which she moved, she acted as a popularizing force for more accessible forms of modernism. Yet are the ways she used her collection any less innovative than those proposed by the "radical" avant-garde? In addition to contributing to how modernism was marketed to female audiences, Rubinstein also devised new strategies of promotion and public relations. While taste transplanted from the home into the marketplace may have carved out an enabling space to signify "womanly" business acumen in a previous era, self-staging as a celebrity validated female fashion entrepreneurs according to another set of "modern" skills, such as the manipulation of one's own image in consumer culture. Similar strategies were devised by couturiers like Elsa Schiaparelli and Coco Chanel, who publicized their work as a product of celebrity rather than, say, corporate leadership.[56]

When Rubinstein used her Fifth Avenue salon as an exhibition venue for selected items of her art collection, she was, in effect, constructing a brand-name modernism. Like International Business Machines and the Container Corporation of America, the beautician used artwork to advance a cultural understanding of her enterprise.[57] At the same time she distinguished her salon as a space that did not *reflect* trends in modernism but actively *contributed* to discourses surrounding competing modernisms and their definition. The eclectic display at the Fifth Avenue salon, with its miniature rooms, "living" paintings, and blend of School of Paris imagery alongside surrealist pieces and African sculpture confounded easy classification as commercial venue, gallery space, or publicity gimmick. Ironically, Rubinstein's salon and "feminine" art styles associated with fashion may have factored into critical efforts to forge a coherent paradigm that explained modernist production. Rubinstein's visibility in 1930s visual culture, among other factors, generated a sense of urgency among critics and museums to draw the lines separating commercial imagery from disinterested "high" art, the "minor" modernists versus the major figures, and the streamlined, genealogical view of vanguard stylistic "evolution" from social and political forces that factored into modernist imagery. In the final analysis, Rubinstein's exhibiting practices and the design of her salon spaces shed light on a contested and contradictory history of modernism and its reception in America.

[55] For one of the few scholarly discussions about the relationship between American museums and the department store in the early twentieth century, see Carol Duncan, "Museums and Department Stores: Close Encounters," in Jim Collins, ed., *High Pop: Making Culture into Popular Entertainment* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 129–54; see also Neil Harris, "Museums, Merchandising, and Popular Taste: The Struggle for Influence," in Ian M. G. Quimby, ed., *Material Culture and the Study of American Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), pp. 140–70. The most famous example of this presentation of modern art's lineage is Alfred Barr's chart for the catalogue, *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), frontis. For a denigration of art deco, see Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

[56] Tashjian, *Boatload of Madmen*, p. 69; see pp. 66–90 for a survey of the fashion world's use of surrealism.

[57] For analyses of the Container Corporation of America and its use of art in promotional campaigns, see James Sloan Allen, *The Romance of Commerce and Culture: Capitalism, Modernism, and the Chicago-Aspen Crusade for Cultural Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Michele H. Bogart, *Advertising, Artists, and the Borders of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 259–69. IBM's art acquisitions are discussed in A. Deirdre Robson, *Prestige, Profit, and Pleasure: The Market for Modern Art in New York in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Garland, 1995); Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, *Art Inc.: American Paintings from Corporate Collections* (Montgomery, Ala.: Museum of Fine Arts, 1979).