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MINNA CITRON:

A SOCIO-HISTORICAL STUDY OF AN ARTIST'S

FEMINIST SOCIAL REALISM IN THE 1930S

A Thesis in

Art History

by

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## ABSTRACT

Minna Citron (1896-1991) was a lifelong self-proclaimed feminist, a divorced mother and an artist who believed in individual expression. One of her main artistic interests, particularly early in her career, was the way feminist concerns related to her dual roles as wife/mother and professional artist. She struggled to make a name for herself in the male-dominated art world between the 1930s and 1950s, beginning during a decade in which social roles for women increasingly tended towards domesticity. By the late 1960s, however, Citron's interest in feminism was renewed by a new generation of women. The course upon which she set herself, in many ways, was uncharted and her concern with women's issues and the challenges faced by women perhaps resonate more clearly with us today than while she was alive.

My dissertation brings to the fore the Depression-era work of this American, whose career has been largely undervalued and overlooked by the traditional art historical canon. Through an interdisciplinary approach involving concepts from art history, visual culture, social history, film studies and women's studies, I demonstrate how Citron wove her personal experiences in the 1930s into the larger social context and created unique social realist works that at times reflect her feminist interests as well. Works from her three major series of the decade, "Feminanities," the "Gambling Series," and "Judges and Juries," will be discussed in relation to Depression-era advertising images found in popular magazines such as *The Ladies' Home Journal*, popular Hollywood films, and novels and plays focusing on women subjects, as well as contemporary feminist issues. The distinctive works of this witty American artist are sarcastic, even boldly ironic, and they are unmatched by anything produced by her peers. Citron's paintings and prints

from the 1930s, as will be demonstrated in this thesis, are representative of several socio-historical trends including issues regarding feminism and women's changing social roles, their continued fight for equality, and increasing interest in gambling, the law and court proceedings.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION: PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

The kind of character apparently attributed to Woman is really most peculiar: it is full of contradictory aspects and as intricate as the labyrinth itself. Incorporated in it are fantasies and convictions which seem to have changed hardly at all since primitive times and which are evidently deep-rooted in human emotions.<sup>1</sup>

---Minna Citron and Jan Gelb

The “contradictory aspects” of “Woman’s” character are revealed in New York artist Minna Citron’s aptly titled *Self-Expression*, one of the canvases to appear in her 1935 solo exhibition, “Feminanities,” at Midtown Galleries (Figure 1). In her self-portrait, as well as in another painting from the series, the main compositional figure concerns herself not with matters of beauty, as will be seen in several other works, but rather with work. *Self-Expression* reveals the artist as she spent much of each day—working in her studio. The earlier print version of this self-portrait, from 1932, has been described by Valerie Kidrick in her thesis on women printmakers of the 1930s as the “most telling” of Citron’s prints because “the straightforward and utterly honest portrayal of her figure seems brutal” (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> She sits in a less-than-dainty burlesque-type pose, hardly appropriate for one wearing a dress and sitting with her legs sprawled open. Citron uses a similar pose in another self-portrait, from 1938, titled *Minna Citron by Minna*

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<sup>1</sup> Minna Citron and Jan Gelb, *Venus Through the Ages: The Character of Woman as Portrayed in Art*, Minna Citron Archives, Denver Colorado. In this manuscript, light on text and heavy on illustrations, Citron and Gelb discover that the illustrations of women over the course of history fell into several categories. As stated in a draft of the preface, the first is “concerned with cultures which venerated at Great Goddess—a ‘Magna Dea.’ . . . The second part . . . views the roles assigned to Woman as Fate, Sybil, Harpy, Sphynx [*sic*], etc. – all vessels of mystery, whether beneficent or horrendous, and here, too, all are charged with psychological overtones which retain significance today. In the third section . . . we compare artists’ conceptions of Woman during the early, possibly matriarchal cultures with those of the patriarchies which followed and still prevail, and also with those of the brave new world which may be developing—one where the sexes establish a more amiable coexistence in which neither man nor woman is dominant.”

<sup>2</sup> Valerie Anne Kidrick, “Uncommon Women: Women Printmakers of the 1930s” (M.A. Thesis, The University of Utah, 1992), 86.

*Citron (Self-Portrait from the Back)* (Figure 3), where the figure this time straddles the chair backwards. In *Self-Expression*, she conventionally faces front on the chair, but she exposes part of her upper thigh and more slip than propriety would have allowed, and remains unabashed while doing so. Action and drawing equipment dictate the figure's posture, yet the artist continues to be comfortable in attitude, refusing to idealize herself. Citron's biographer wrote of *Minna Citron by Minna Citron*, but his description is apropos of the earlier work:

In an early Self-Portrait from the Back (1938), she depicts herself seated on a chair, working. Determination and a sense of humor are forcefully combined. She does not so much sit on the chair as ride it like a horse. The drawing offers a most engaging glimpse of the artist at work. The self-portrait recurs several times as a subject for her drawings, among them some of her most haunting works. Ruthlessly searching for her true identity, she discovers and lets us see her strength, but also her vulnerability and doubts. These are not the drawings of a woman concerned with the attractiveness of her physical appearance, although photographs taken at various times during her life show us an attractive, even chic woman. These portray an artist, a human being in search of her soul. What she shows us is neither 'pretty' nor cheerful. She conveys the precarious condition of our existence, in which death is a fact impossible to grasp fully. Above all, these drawings are fiercely honest: she does not shy away in her search from whatever she might find. These self-portraits might have been disturbingly somber, but Minna's saving grace is her sense of humor. Behind all these lines there might lurk the death mask of a skull, but there is still an ever-so-subtle twinkle in one eye.<sup>3</sup>

The "determination" of an "artist at work" and the "sense of humor" of Citron evidenced in the 1938 drawing are also clearly present in *Self-Expression*. This somewhat tongue-in-cheek representation of the artist sitting before her easel is comparatively out of proportion, with the figure's lower body being much bulkier and heavier than the upper half. With the pose, she reveals, in the words of one critic, "her less than dainty

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<sup>3</sup> Minna Citron and Clemens Resseguier, *Minna Citron: Her Stories—Her Work*, Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado, 113.



attitude about a woman's propriety."<sup>4</sup> She concerns herself here, and in many other of her images from the thirties, not with matters of decorum, propriety or mannerly behaviors; rather she remains forthright, even brazen, in her commentary. And for some the figure's anatomical proportions were not awkward, but instead alluded to a conscious reference to contemporary Hollywood icons. In fact, when asked about the image, Citron responded, "... [P]eople have said to me 'Well you gave yourself Mae West proportions.' Well why not...when you're drawing yourself you might as well."<sup>5</sup> Mae West, one of the premier Hollywood icons of the thirties, was a full-figured woman who often wore fitted clothes to show off her womanly hips and bosom (Figure 4). West, according to film historian Mick LaSalle, "wasn't exactly sexy—that was just part of her act. But she *was* sexual . . . ."<sup>6</sup> In Citron's self-portrait, then, we see the artist drawing, in part at least, on contemporary popular culture icons, and in doing so, this "chic" woman who, according to her biographer, appears to be unconcerned with "attractiveness" and "physical appearance" when representing herself, makes herself sexual, like Mae West.

In *Self-Expression* the viewer finds neither an image of the ideal heroic artist as genius, nor the artist as a gorgeous icon of beauty. Instead one sees a sardonic working portrait of the artist herself. Citron applies the same critical eye to herself as she does to her other women, and in doing so makes herself a "femininity" as well. Furthermore, Citron's representation of herself, like the self-portrait of Judith Leyster several centuries before, and of several other contemporaries of Citron, portrays the figure not as the

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<sup>4</sup> Greg, Masters, "From the 1930s-40s, 50 Years Ago: WPA/AAA," *Arts Magazine* 61 (February 1987): 106.

<sup>5</sup> Minna Citron, interview by WQED personnel, *Seasons of Life III: 713.1-713.3*, transcript, 11, in Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>6</sup> Mick LaSalle, *Complicated Women: Sex and Power in Pre-Code Hollywood* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 153.

traditional object of the male gaze, but boldly confronting us (Figure 5).<sup>7</sup> In both images the artist sits confidently and self-assuredly: Leyster, calm, casual, even relaxed with her arm propped up on the chair, leaning back to meet the viewer; Citron, decidedly unladylike with legs spread, furiously concentrating on the easel before her. These figures are not the passive images of women conventionally seen in Western art history; rather, they are actively engaged in their profession and each presents an image of herself as she saw herself—as a professional and an artist. Leyster, one of the few successful female painters of Holland’s Golden Age, confidently engages the viewer, and at the same time, she proudly displays the work-in-progress propped up on the easel. She is attired in her best dress, the height of seventeenth-century fashion, as a testament to her financial success as an artist. Citron, by contrast, shows herself in the process of working, rather than sitting in front of a completed, or nearly-completed image, and while wearing a dress, the immodesty of her pose practically dares us to look up her skirt.

A recent exhibition catalog focusing on self-portraits by women notes that, like Citron, the artists in the show attempt to “reconcile cultural constructions of femininity with what it meant to be an artist and a woman at specific historical moments.”<sup>8</sup> These women use their self-portraits as a way to portray themselves as both beautiful and as professionals. For example, as art historian Whitney Chadwick discusses in her catalog essay, “How Do I Look?”, Anna Zinkeisen combines stylishly made-up face and hair with an image of work (Figure 6).<sup>9</sup> The artist stands self-confidently before an easel in

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<sup>7</sup> Leyster, who came from a non-artistic family chose to pursue a profession dominated by men and eventually made a name for herself as an artist by gaining entry into the Guild of St. Luke in 1633. *Judith Leyster: A Dutch Master and Her World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). This exhibition catalog provides a fairly comprehensive account of Leyster’s life, artistic career and paintings.

<sup>8</sup> Liz Rideal, *Mirror Mirror: Self-Portraits by Women Artists*, with essays by Whitney Chadwick and Frances Borzello (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2002), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Whitney Chadwick, “How Do I Look?,” in *Mirror Mirror*, 13.

her 1944 *Self-Portrait*, and, like Leyster, pauses for a moment to meet the viewer's gaze, while holding tools of the trade in one hand. She stands, presumably in her studio, with rolled up sleeves and strong arms that are necessary for a demanding physical labor.

Quite different from Zinkeisen's working portrait is Isabel Bishop's 1927 *Self-Portrait* (Figure 7). Unlike the previously discussed artists, Bishop, in this image as well as in a number of similar self-portraits dating to the late 1920s, shows herself with none of the traditional painter's accoutrements.<sup>10</sup> She does not stand or sit perched in front of an easel; nor does she grasp brushes or palettes. Rather, she sits in profile with her left hand up to her lower cheek and little finger at her lips, turning her head back over her right shoulder, thereby, like Leyster, eagerly capturing the viewer's gaze. This painting, "the first important instance of Bishop's series of self-portraits in the great tradition," depicts the artist as vulnerable, intelligent, "profoundly humanist and supremely feminist."<sup>11</sup> It is, according to Yglesias, "unlike a male self-portrait in that it tells us something different about the sitter, who is female, particularly in the modeling that positions the hands at the cheek with the little finger tenderly stroking the lip. Yet like a Rembrandt or a Van Gogh self-portrait the artist is seen . . . as a quintessentially human subject."<sup>12</sup> Bishop, then, it seems, is more concerned with demonstrating her own humanity. Her artistic proficiency comes through in the rendering of the image itself, but she is not as outwardly interested in showing herself *as* an artist within the image.

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<sup>10</sup> Helen Yglesias, *Isabel Bishop*, with a foreword by John Russell (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Yglesias continues, "The little finger on the lip speaks of vulnerability; the intelligent eyes look out warily but eagerly; the small, exposed ear is listening. The image is reading us at the same time that we are reading it. We meet, spectator and model, head on, in a confrontation profoundly humanist and supremely feminist."

Another contemporary and friend of Citron and Bishop during the 1930s, Lee Krasner, also painted a self-portrait one might compare to Citron's *Self-Expression*. Krasner's earliest known self-portrait is, like Leyster's and Zinkeisen's, a working portrait created in 1930, apparently as an entrance piece for admission into the National Academy of Design's life drawing class (Figure 8).<sup>13</sup> Wearing a blue work shirt and a white apron shrouding her body, Krasner extends one hand toward the easel while the other grips several brushes and a rag. She, too, gazes steadily out toward the viewer who, in art historian Anne Wagner's interpretation, is forced into the role of the artist herself and the mirror into which she looks.<sup>14</sup> Both Zinkeisen's figure and Krasner's have strong forceful mannish arms, but while Zinkeisen portrays herself with stylish make-up, nicely coiffed hair, and perfectly sculpted eyebrows, Krasner's hair is cropped short, like a boy's, and her makeup appears to be quite exaggerated.

As did these other artists, with the exception of Bishop, Citron blends the professional and the personal in *Self-Expression*; however, hers is a more complicated image, portraying more than just the artist herself and the easel on which she paints. Citron sits in her studio, the location of which is clearly identified by the buildings seen through the window, but she tells us about herself: she is hardworking, as she perches before her easel, and serious and intense, as indicated by the scowl of concentration on her face. In addition, she is decidedly not shy, sitting with her legs spread. All of the compositional elements—the studio, the scene outside the window, and the easel—are used to show off and accentuate the figure herself in the center. These “essential elements

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<sup>13</sup> Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 111.

<sup>14</sup> The canvas hangs “at an angle that recalls the mirror Krasner claimed to have nailed to a tree to as to be able to paint outdoors.” Ibid.

of life,” as they have been called by Kidrick, most notably the inclusion of the 14<sup>th</sup> Street area outside the studio’s window, aid the viewer in gaining a more thorough understanding of Citron as a woman and an artist.<sup>15</sup> She does not use the environment in a purely documentary manner, so much as a form of self-conscious commentary, and by including such elements, Citron comments on herself in that milieu.

In both the painting and the print, nearly half of her composition is given over to the depiction of Union Square as seen from her upper story studio, while only a small corner of the studio itself is shown. Her first studio, located at 857 Broadway, sat in the middle of Union Square, an area of the city with a long history.<sup>16</sup> By the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the area had become a prominent location of political activities and demonstrations, a distinguished hotel and shopping district, home to stores including Tiffany’s, Macy’s, B. Altman and Company and FAO Schwarz, and the neighborhood of the Art Students League. This fashionable district, however, lost its prestige by the turn of the twentieth century as bargain stores, such as Ohrbach’s and S. Klein’s (seen in *Self-Expression*), as well as numerous commercial buildings, began to replace the much more renowned stores that were moving uptown. Affordable rents in the area, however, were

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<sup>15</sup> Kidrick, 88. Kidrick speaks only briefly of the print version of *Self-Expression* in her analysis before moving on to a discussion of *Dress Circle*, *Carnegie Hall*, 1936 and *The Magic Box*, from the T.V.A. series, and *Lady with a Program*, 1941. Her description is as follows: “The hustle of New York’s 14<sup>th</sup> Street remains just outside her upper story studio, should she choose to allow it entrance into her artistic sanctum. The figure’s total concentration with her work belies the hubbub of activity below, yet somehow the viewer can understand the relevant connection between the artist and the environment. By merely including the scene in this self-portrait, Citron hints at the importance of urban setting to her work. Union Square, the East Village and 14<sup>th</sup> Street are all inherent elements in Citron’s work, as they are in Bishop’s and by understanding the essential vibrancy of the figure, really seeing it and comprehending the city’s connection to her work, a new dimension in her art comes into view.”

<sup>16</sup> After beginning as an unpopulated sand hill, Union Square developed into a prominent area within the city. In 1783 George Washington was welcomed at the city gates, at 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Union Square East, the day after the British evacuated the city. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries wealthy families bought the land surrounding the square and had lavish houses constructed. Funeral services for Abraham Lincoln were held in the Square in 1865. For a brief history of Union Square see *The Artists of Union Square* (New York: Associated American Artists, 1987).

ideal, and in the 1920s and 1930s artists, including Citron and Isabel Bishop, lived and/or had studios in and around the Square (Figure 9).<sup>17</sup>

When comparing the painted version of *Self-Expression* to the photo from which Citron seems to have worked, it becomes obvious that the artist consciously neglected to provide much detail about her interior abode (Figure 10). She concerns herself not so much with her private studio space, but rather with her relationship to the area of the city where she spent so much of her time. In the painting, the viewer only sees her easel—a testament to her profession—the stool upon which she sits and a small unidentifiable picture (excluded in the print) hanging on the wall just above and to the left of her head, while a much larger area of the workspace is seen in the photograph. Additionally, when observing the photograph one quickly notices that the artist and her easel are placed in a different part of the room than indicated by the painting and print. The left edge of the photo cuts off a chair, while a radiator, a table and several pictures hanging on the wall can be seen in the corner of the room. In her artistic renderings of the studio space, Citron concentrates on the space cut off by the right edge of the photo. As such, the window, and thus Union Square, which is only suggested in the photo by the large area of light penetrating the image from the right, around the corner from the radiator and table, becomes the focal point of her attentions. Not only does Citron give much of her compositions over to a representation of the area of the city from which she drew so many of her subjects, but in the painting she allows that area to enter into her studio by leaving open the large floor-to-ceiling window at her back. She welcomes the hustle and

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<sup>17</sup> Citron's studio, from 1929-1933 was located at 857 Broadway, in the same building where Isabel Bishop worked from 1934 until 1978. In 1933 Citron moved to 32 Union Square where she continued to work for the rest of her career. In 1978 Bishop moved to 33 Union Square and worked there until relocating to 41 Union Square in 1980. Ibid.

bustle of the city into her private domain, placing herself within the goings-on of the community below, rather than closing the window and cutting herself off from the noise and activity. The commotion and hubbub of the square below Citron's studio come to life vividly in several passages by fiction writer Albert Halper in his 1933 novel *Union Square*, including the following:

The morning broke damp and chill. The gray fog which had settled down during the night did not lift as usual. Traffic swept around the square. Long before the doors of Klein's Dress Store opened, crowds of women and girls had gathered. Private policemen in gray uniforms tried to keep order at about nine-thirty, because at that time all the doors were unlocked and the women swept forward in a powerful surge, grabbing at the dresses on the racks, searching and clawing for bargains. It was cash down here, "on the Square," each woman held her money in her fist.

Near the curbing, along Fourth Avenue, ran the subway grating, with dank heat flowing up. Women did not like to stand there, as the warm draft blew their skirts up, but the men did not seem to mind; there was always a gang of them gaping and grinning and nudging, waiting for unsuspecting dames to walk across the ironwork.

With the first crack of daylight the parade of the Fourteenth Street beggars began. There were legless fellows; blind men who held onto small, faithful dogs; deformed, cleanly shaven fellows who wore army shirts and overseas hats to give a good "ex-service" effect . . . .<sup>18</sup>

Klein's, the store before which women congregated prior to its opening, as Halper illustrates, looms large in the background of *Self-Expression*. Descriptions and portrayals of Union Square were popular in novels as well as in paintings and prints by Citron's contemporaries, including, for example, Betty Waldo Parish's 1935-45 *Union Square Rally* or Edward Laning's 1931 *Unlawful Assembly, Union Square*, so her rendering is far from unique (Figure 11 and Figure 12). But, unlike many of her peers, Citron discloses none of the frequent revolutionary activity of the square. Nor does she (with the exception of the women in *Hope Springs Eternal*) show the crowded masses so often

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<sup>18</sup> Albert Halper, *Union Square* (New York: The Viking Press, 1933), 47.

gathered there. She focuses, rather, on a smaller segment of the area and keeps references to the Square itself on the periphery, outside if you will, yet remaining a significant part of the image's compositional format. In doing so, Citron indicates the importance of the location to her, and strengthens her representation of a reality always strongly based on her own personal experiences. As such, this work, like the majority of her other representational works from the thirties, acts as her own personal editorial perspective on the world.

The clever ironies infused into many of Citron's other satirical images during the thirties creep into her self-portrait as well. In the lithograph, the word on the distant building's rooftop water tower, "Square," leaves no doubt as to the setting. The awning in front of the most visible of the multi-storied buildings reads "Klein Annex," and the large story-tall sign at the top of the building, reads S. Klein (although the L and the E are concealed by the studio's window molding). A 1936 photograph by Berenice Abbott provides evidence of the similarities between the S. Klein building and Citron's representation of the structure (Figure 13). In both, a large top-story sign clearly advertises the building, while several smaller though no less prominent signs adorn the building's lower stories. The window frame in the painted version of Citron's self-portrait also bisects the S. Klein sign. This time, however, it obscures the K and the L, leaving the remaining letters to spell "S.IN." Additionally, several not-so-subtly-placed phallic-shaped water towers sit perched atop the building in both versions, and can also be seen in the upper left of Abbott's photograph. The water towers and references to sin lend a facetious touch to the self-portrait, especially given that the artist shows herself sitting with legs wide open, daring the viewer to look up her skirt, thereby engaging in



illicit behavior. As will be demonstrated below, this impudence and her droll sense of humor will permeate many of Citron's Depression-era paintings and prints, even when more serious social, cultural and/or political concerns are at the heart of her subjects.

One of the things that makes Citron such a unique and fascinating artist is the fact that during the 1930s, while focusing on the subjects she encountered in and around the Union Square area of the city, she also entered venues previously inaccessible to women, including Reno gambling halls and New York courthouses. Using both painting and printmaking as her media, Citron applied a critical eye to women (as in her self-portrait) and men, and even to society more broadly. Her Depression-era works, including *Self-Expression*, are often sharp edgy observations of contemporary society. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, Citron weaves her personal experiences during the 1930s within the larger social context by producing works executed in the realist style learned from Art Students League mentor Kenneth Hayes Miller. Her works are noteworthy for the ways in which her subject matter differed from that of others during the decade, particularly her female contemporaries, and several of Citron's works from the mid-1930s will be discussed in relation to the work of her friend and colleague, Isabel Bishop. Although they studied at the same school with the same teachers, and had studios in the same building in Union Square, the approach taken by each of the artists, specifically with regard to their female subjects, is quite different. Bishop reveals images of young working women who, in the words of the artist, "generally live in the Bronx and work here [Union Square]. It's a moment in their lives when they are really in motion, because they, of course, are looking for husbands and, at the same time, they're earning

their living.”<sup>19</sup> Citron, on the other hand, portrays unglamorous women engaged in stereotypically feminine leisure activities, including shopping, getting manicures and having their hair done. In some ways, Citron’s images from the thirties are more similar to those created by her friend Reginald Marsh in that they, like Marsh’s images, present to the viewer tawdry environments, images of dereliction, and the lower class. The men in Marsh’s compositions, including his 1930 *Why Not Use the El?* or *Bowery* of the same year, depict seemingly unemployed men who become signifiers of the Depression and of the period’s economic woes. Citron, as we shall see, will draw upon seedy locations and unsavory characters not just from Union Square, but from Reno, Nevada, a location to which most of her peers did not have firsthand knowledge. Like Marsh, Citron, too, was indebted to the earlier Ashcan realism of Robert Henri and John Sloan, but her realism was at times infused with more irony, wit and wry commentary than Marsh’s.

In an era when domesticity, industrialism, and technology tended to be fairly common subjects among New Deal artists, Citron, who was not as reliant on the governmentally sponsored art programs as were so many of her contemporaries, provided derisive commentary about narcissistic and lower-class women often enjoying leisurely activities. Government sponsored art projects of the New Deal, particularly within the Section of Fine Arts, according to historian Barbara Melosh, “promoted a vision of work as purposeful and productive, energetic but not driven, cooperative and communal. [And] in a moral universe focused on work, leisure was potentially subversive [and] might readily evoke associations with the consumption and careless excess of the 1920s, widely repudiated in Depression America. Respite from work might look like the enforced

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<sup>19</sup> Isabel Bishop, quoted in Yglesias, 66.

leisure of unemployment.”<sup>20</sup> As such, when leisurely activities were shown in Section art, the “vision of leisure” was either “consistent with the work ethic,” thereby presenting “leisure as respite earned by labor,” or “activities with little connection to the market.”<sup>21</sup> By contrast, Citron’s images of what people do in their free time include shopping, lounging at a salon, and even gambling.

Chapter two of this thesis investigates several of the artist’s images of leisure that appeared in her 1935 exhibition, “Feminanities,” and focuses on her early representations of women. Using wit and satire, Citron critiques society’s vanities and foibles and explores the shallow and frivolous activities of women. Within such seemingly trivial topics, Citron cleverly incorporated larger social issues at the heart of her message—including the plight of women and children during the Depression, the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby, the trial(s) of the Scottsboro Boys in Alabama, and, even if only tangentially, the current status of feminism in the thirties and thus the nature of gender roles and identity. Citron obviously takes women as her subject for this series, yet one may find it difficult to read the paintings in terms of feminist discourse. Citron’s feminism—her interest in equality of the sexes and belief in women’s independence—does not fit in neatly to the larger trend toward domesticity that swept the nation during the Depression. As such, one may see her “Feminanities” not as empowering visions of the fairer sex, but as critical images. And in an attempt to define her vision of feminism and to fit it into the larger social context of the thirties, the works from the “Feminanities” series will be considered in conjunction with a number of other mass media images, including contemporary advertisements found in popular magazines, plays

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<sup>20</sup> Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 185.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

and novels focusing with leading female characters, as well as Hollywood films and the ways in which women were portrayed in the movies.

A shift in subject took place with Citron's second series of the decade, and chapter three considers the group of paintings comprising her "Gambling Series." The "spicy scenes" of seedy Reno gambling establishments, inspired by the artist's six-week divorce trip to Reno, Nevada, in 1934, depict the unsavory behavior of the colorful men she encountered there.<sup>22</sup> The reasons why Citron had to travel more than two-thirds of the way across the country in order to obtain a divorce are explored, as is the history of gambling in Nevada, for both offer significant context for Citron's images. Additional framework for the gambling paintings and prints will be provided by looking at other contemporary media forms—again, specifically, Hollywood films, novels, and poetry.

The paintings of her final major series of the decade, "Judges and Juries," portray both women and men as subject matter. With the "Judges and Juries" canvases Citron probes the issue of women participating in the legal milieu as jurors. Chapter four reflects on a long and hard-won battle fought by women seeking to be granted the rights of full citizenship, including the right to serve on a jury, as set forth by the Constitution. As one of the first women jurors in New York County, Citron used the opportunity to stitch her autobiographical experiences into the larger social context as evidenced, ultimately, by the resulting images. Less biting in commentary than "Feminanities" or the "Gambling Series," "Judges and Juries" is a no less significant part of with Citron's oeuvre. By late in the decade, when she was creating the images for the last series to be considered in this

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<sup>22</sup> Martha Davidson, "Minna Citron, Critical Commentator of American Life," *Art News* 30 (October 30, 1937): 16. Davidson describes the scenes as "spicy."

thesis, her sarcasm and ironic tone was, to some extent, muted as she began to take her art in a new direction.

Chapter five concludes with a brief discussion of Citron's art and career after the 1939 "Judges and Juries" show. In the last years of the 1930s and early into the 1940s she continued working in a representational style while completing several New Deal post office murals in Tennessee and a series dedicated to "New York in Wartime." Shortly thereafter she began moving toward abstraction, a shift encouraged by Stanley William Hayter and those working at his printmaking studio, Atelier 17, in New York. This stylistic change toward abstraction notwithstanding, Citron's interest in women continued, as evidenced by the titles of some semi-abstract and abstract pieces, including *Men Seldom Make Passes at Girls Who Wear Glasses*, *Ishtar*, and *Victoria, the Queen*, and these pieces will be briefly considered in relation to her burgeoning career as an art teacher and lecturer during the latter half of her life.

During the 1930s Minna Citron was interested in many aspects of culture and society, and while her artistic voice became less overtly satiric as the decade progressed, her vision remained consistent. Using painting and printmaking as her media, she visually expressed an interest in society and in cultural issues by drawing inspiration from serious social subjects dealing with the plight of women and children during the Depression and by addressing cultural concerns relating to race, class, gender roles and identity. And, as will be demonstrated in the ensuing chapters, Citron's works are difficult to categorize. She has been labeled by critics as a Social Realist and a feminist, yet neither quite adequately describes the artist or her work. It is perhaps due to the lack of ease in classifying her work that Citron has been generally overlooked by the traditional art

historical canon. Her work, however, merits a much more thorough discussion than it has received to date. As a result, it is the goal of this dissertation to bring to the fore the work of a unique American woman artist in the Depression decade through an interdisciplinary socio-historical approach involving concepts from art history, visual culture, social history, film studies and women's studies. In doing so, I will demonstrate that the previously unrecognized work of this distinctive, sharp, witty and at times sarcastic American artist during the 1930s is unmatched by any of her contemporaries. And furthermore, it will become clear that her works from this period are representative of a number of larger socio-historical trends, including issues regarding feminism and women's changing social roles and their continued fight for equality, as well as increasing interest in gambling, the law, and court proceedings.

### **Citron and the New York Art Scene**

European Modernism, so influential after the 1913 Armory Show, gradually lost popularity during the twenties. And as David Shapiro points out in his introduction to *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon*, by the Depression years American artists still working with "modern techniques and forms had lost their paying audience . . . for . . . collectors . . . largely ignored the home-grown experimentalist."<sup>23</sup> As American society retreated into isolationism during the twenties, becoming increasingly xenophobic, American artists found themselves disengaging with contemporary European artistic trends as they began to search for new forms of representation. By the thirties, artists, as well as the public, were looking for an art that defined America, and the emphasis increasingly

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<sup>23</sup> David Shapiro, ed., *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1973), 7.

turned toward content rather than form. The American Scene painters, many of whom reached their artistic maturity during the Depression decade, wholeheartedly believed that European subjects and artistic trends should be rejected in favor of American themes.<sup>24</sup> They were overall anti-European, anti-modern and did not take inspiration from industry as the Precisionists had done during the twenties. Instead, indebted in part to the Ashcan artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, artists looked to urban or regional life as their subject and began painting in an easily understandable representational style.<sup>25</sup> These New York American Scene painters, including Citron, Miller, Bishop, Marsh and the Soyer brothers, among others, began painting the world in and around the city's Union Square/14<sup>th</sup> Street area where most of their studios were located, and thus became known as the 14<sup>th</sup> Street School. Marsh and Miller, for example, assembled a variety of types for their models, including middle- and lower-class shoppers, beggars, cripples, and prostitutes, while Bishop and Citron took as their subjects the women of the region. Citron, too, searched for a uniquely American subject matter and she, like Marsh and her Ashcan predecessors, turned to the grittiness of the city. She, however, infused her scenes with more wry and ironic commentary than did her peers. Her "Feminanities" in particular come from Union Square, and while Citron expanded her vision of the American scene westward with the gambling, she returned to the city and its people for the "Judges and Juries" series.

Citron's works from the thirties, on the other hand, have also been described by some as "Social Realist," placing her among a group including Philip Evergood, Ben Shahn, and William Gopper, among others who worked in a figurative style and were

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<sup>24</sup> Mariea Caudill, "The American Scene: Urban and Rural Regionalists of the '30s and '40s," University Gallery, University of Minnesota, April 1 - May 13, 1976, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Hart Benton, John Stuart Curry and Grant Wood, of course, are the triumvirate known as the Regionalists who focus primarily on mid-western rural life. By contrast, some call their contemporaries in New York the Urban Regionalists. See Caudill.

openly critical of society.<sup>26</sup> To many of these artists the American Scene “did not seem to have dynamic force or complexity of thought.”<sup>27</sup> While Citron was indeed critical of society, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, she did not attempt to use her art, as did the other Social Realist, to “protest and dramatize injustice to the working class—the result, as these artists saw it, of capitalist exploitation.”<sup>28</sup> Hers was a criticism based on her philosophies about society, culture and even, tangentially, politics, and inspired by personal experiences.

Born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1896 to parents who were relatively wealthy merchants, Minna Wright was the youngest of five children, and the only daughter. After age eight, and following the untimely death of her father, young Minna was raised by her domineering mother. In 1916, she married her high school sweetheart, Henry Citron, moved to Brooklyn and had two sons—all in keeping with societal expectations of women at the time.<sup>29</sup> Young women of her generation were expected to be obedient wives, to support their husband’s career and to raise the children, none of which, recounts her biographer, suited her independent nature and personality.<sup>30</sup> One example of her strong willed self-determination comes from a story told both in her unpublished biography and in an interview during the mid-1970s. She talks of getting a job during World War I when she became a member of the Women’s Motor Corps of America, wanting to drive and maintain ambulances.<sup>31</sup> “My husband had no enthusiasm for such activities,” recounts the artist. “He put his foot down firmly on my driving the

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<sup>26</sup> Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin, “Minna Citron at 90.” Mabel Smith Douglass Library, Rutgers University, Rutgers, N.J., October 3-24, 1986, unpaginated.

<sup>27</sup> Shapiro, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 3. Shapiro continues by observing that “In narrative content this was an art boldly and often fiercely anti-Establishment . . .”

<sup>29</sup> Minna Citron, Miscellaneous materials, Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>30</sup> Citron and Resseguier, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 2.



ambulances. I compromised by taking the place of the intern or nurse who customarily rode inside.”<sup>32</sup> In telling the story to interviewer and nephew, art historian James M. Saslow, Citron provides more detail of the account: “In 1916—the war hadn’t started *here* yet. When it did, I didn’t want to do what most of my friends were doing—rolling bandages or knitting. I proceeded to join, without benefit of [my] husband’s consent, the Women’s Motor Corps. Henry drew the line at my driving an ambulance [*sic*]—said he wasn’t going to have the responsibility for the damage. So I compromised and sat on the *back* of the ambulance [*sic*].”<sup>33</sup> Following her time in the Women’s Motor Corps, serving her country in a time of war, the Citrons settled into married life and began having children. After sons Casper and Thomas were born, the artist’s mother came to live with them, and Henry’s mother who, according to Minna, was “very dictatorial and very rich,” lived just around the corner.<sup>34</sup> “And so,” the artist later said, “it wasn’t a good situation at all.” She was tired of “being a kept woman,” and wanted to find “something that [she] could earn a living at.”<sup>35</sup>

Her strong personality, independent, even rebellious, character and pressing need to break away from the upper middle-class domestic lifestyle she found herself leading, set her on a quest for self-expression. She began creating art first as a hobby, then more earnestly, ultimately resulting in career lasting more than sixty years. Initially enrolled at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences in 1924, Citron moved to the New York School of Applied Design for Women between 1925 and 1927, and finally, because she

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> James M. Saslow, “Still Hitting on All Cylinders at 80,” *The Advocate* (November 17, 1976): 34.

<sup>34</sup> Minna Citron, interview by WQED personnel, *Seasons of Life: 711.1-711.3*, transcript, 14, in Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

felt she was still unable to draw the figure, went on to the Art Students League in 1928.<sup>36</sup> It was there that the developing artist came under the tutelage of Kenneth Hayes Miller, John Sloan, Kimon Nicolaides, and studied lithography with Harry Sternberg.<sup>37</sup> As their student she acquired the representational style that dominated her early work, adding little formal invention of her own, at least initially.<sup>38</sup> While indebted to the style used by her teachers at the Art Students League, Citron's work is different. Many of her fellow artists infused their work with references to the general social conditions found under the ideological systems of Socialism and Communism. One of the things setting Citron apart from her contemporaries was the fact that she seems to have adhered to no particular ideology or dogma. Although she did register as a Communist during the late 1930s, she claims to have never been "a member of the Communist Party," nor did she consider herself "as ever having been a Communist ideologically," noting in a later statement, from 1954, that her registration as such was "an emotional gesture rather than a statement of political principles," and that she "did not engage in any political activities in support of the Communist ticket."<sup>39</sup> She remarked, also, that her "her interest in politics has been that of the average responsible citizen," that she was "never a student of political problems," and had never "done any extensive reading in the field."<sup>40</sup> Citron's visual

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> In fact, many of her lithographs, some of which will be discussed in the following chapters, were created as copies of the larger paintings. Rarely, however, are they exact copies for more often than not, elements of the overall composition and/or smaller, less obvious details were changed.

<sup>38</sup> Citron and Resseguier, 39. Citron's biographer notes that although she received solid training, she added little or no formal invention. However, he writes that she "was able to merge the rather rigid approach of Miller in composition and the handling of color with the freer more imaginative approach of Nicolaides in drawing and design. The high degree to which she integrated these two opposing approaches is one of the roots of quality in her work. Another is her ability to express with these 'academic' means such general themes as the precarious pursuit of happiness on different levels. Her sympathetic understanding of the foibles and predicaments of others is convincing." Citron and Resseguier, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Minna Citron, *Miscellaneous Materials*, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>40</sup> During the McCarthy era, Citron's passport was taken away from her. In the *Seasons of Life* interview Citron recounts that "Almost all the artists in New York City, almost all...were very much

observations of society were often only tangentially related to politics, for just a few of her canvases from the thirties deal directly and overtly with political matters. Citron's biographer claims that she "pleaded for understanding without judgment, at a time when it was fashionable to accuse . . . [because to] Minna belongs the understanding, even teasing smile and not the accusing pointing finger."<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, Citron recounted that during the 1930s,

Rebellion was in the air . . . and I, along with many others, was rebelling against a multiplicity of things. The Great Depression was in full force. Social injustices, until then tolerated, were now held to be untenable. Women were agitating for additional rights, and Margaret Sanger . . . had with the advent of the diaphragm literally put birth control into women's own hands. Many men felt threatened by this, fearing that if birth control became women's own prerogative, sexual liberty would inevitably follow and ultimately lead to sexual license.<sup>42</sup>

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interested in the new Communism in Russia and Socialism. And so McCarthy [*sic*] had labeled us all Communists...so they came one morning, two strong guys and said, 'Let us have your passport.' Showed me their badges. Well, I gave them my passport and it took me three years to get it back. Why? Because they said I made some speeches, I belonged to the organizations that were labeled, you know . . . ." *Seasons of Life: 711.1-711.3*, 6-7. In 1954 Citron issued a statement defending her actions during the 1930s in an attempt to get her passport re-issued. She noted also that prior to registering as a Communist, it was her "understanding that women had been fully emancipated, that they were able to take their place in society and not be regarded merely as domestic workers. I heard reports of a simple divorce system, which impressed me, particularly in light of my own difficulties . . . . Basically, however, enrollment as a Communist in 1936 was not a reflection of any political convictions which I held then or at any other time. Nor was it the result of careful reflection and consideration. It was what I then thought was a way of protesting against a series of agonizing emotional experiences through which I suffered in the years immediately preceding, experiences which had no direct relationship to politics. . . . I remember that during the Thirties I frequently argued with Communists about the fact that party regimentation robbed them of their freedom and that I ridiculed them for their slavish obedience to party regularity. . . . I also protested against the thought control and regimentation of artists under Communism. . . . I have always been repelled by the fact that artists who were Communists or Communist-sympathizers felt obligated to produce only work that was 'class conscious' and had a propagandistic content. As an artist I disapprove both of the kind of art they did and of the ideological discipline that dictated to them the kind of work they had to do. All this is entirely contrary to everything I have believed and tried to express as an artist. Until about 10 years ago, during the period when my work was 'representational,' it concerned itself with the individuality of man, a concept antithetical to Communist principals." Minna Citron Archives, Miscellaneous materials, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>41</sup> Citron and Resseguier, 39. It will be argued in the following chapters, however, that Citron's satirical representations of the women, and to some degree of the men, she portrays, can, at times, in fact be read as accusatory.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

Liberty and freedom of the sexes, whether it be sexual or civic freedom, for the artist, was paramount and we will see her stance making its way into the art produced in her three major series of the thirties. Her observations, however, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, were from the point of view of an individual American woman; they were not representative of any kind of political or social ideology or radical dogma. During the Depression numerous American writers, artists and intellectuals turned to Communism for, in the words of historian Michael E. Parrish, “it seemed to offer an intellectual framework for analyzing the crisis [of the Depression] and a practical way of organizing discontent against the status quo.”<sup>43</sup> David Shapiro argues that even though many American artists of the thirties interpreted what was happening “as a class struggle between capital and labor,” the “Marxism of most artists, whether it included membership in one of the Marxist parties or not, tended to be uncomplicated by knowledge of Marxist theory . . . [because] with rare exceptions, the painters and sculptors were not intellectuals.”<sup>44</sup>

After a decade of increasing production, construction and prosperity in America during the twenties, the country plunged into economic crisis following the stock market crash of October 29, 1929, and countless citizens began to find themselves out of work and, more often than not, destitute. To aid those in dire financial straits, governmental

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<sup>43</sup> Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 423. Parrish continues by noting that for many American intellectuals during the early thirties, who were seeing themselves as “members of a revolutionary vanguard,” the Soviet Union “seemed to promise a sensible, planned economy without the unemployment and misery of capitalism in the West.” Parrish, 424.

<sup>44</sup> Shapiro, 13. Shapiro continues by offering a synopsis of their ideology: “They saw American economic life as having failed because of the inherent contradictions of capitalism. Therefore, capitalism was bad . . . and it was doomed. Socialism promised to solve the economic problems; it would prevent exploitation, making a new ruling class of the workers. Therefore, socialism was good—and in any case, inevitable.” The Social Realist artists, Shapiro maintains “concerned themselves with the communication of ideas, with an art that pointed a moral, told a story, or created an emotion in the onlooker—preferably an emotion that led to militant social action. . . . The Social Realist sought common cause with the workers: his role was to both portray and inspire their actions.” Shapiro, 14-15.

programs were implemented as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, for one of his goals was to get large numbers of Americans, including artists, back to work, and the New Deal programs, including the Section of Painting and Sculpture, provided jobs and stipends for thousands.<sup>45</sup> Commonly referred to as the Section, this program was established under the Treasury Department.<sup>46</sup> The art produced under the auspices of the Section is considered in great detail by Belisario Contreras and Francis V. O'Connor, who both succinctly outline the Section's five primary objectives.<sup>47</sup> It was at the behest of the Section that Citron spent two years during the late thirties in Tennessee making sketches for murals that would adorn the Manchester and Newport post offices. Despite the fact that the thirties was a period of unusually hard financial times for most,

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<sup>45</sup> Beginning as early as November 1933 with the Civil Works Administration (CWA), a number of governmentally sponsored work relief programs were implemented. This was the first time in American history that the government sought to patronize the arts on such a large-scale basis. The Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), initiated by Edward Bruce under the aegis of the Treasury Department, was financed by the CWA and only existed as an emergency form of relief for six months, from December 1933 to June 1934.

<sup>46</sup> The Section operated from October 1934 until June 1943. Other New Deal programs include the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP), headed by Olin Dows and funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) existed for 3 years, from July 1935 through June 1938. The fourth New Deal relief effort pertaining directly to the arts was the WPA Federal Arts Project (WPA/FAP), established by Harry Hopkins and placed under the direction of Holger Cahill from September 1935 until May 1943. The WPA was the most extensive New Deal Program, and according to O'Connor had the greatest impact on culture. O'Connor quotes Cahill's outline for the basic procedures of the WPA/FAP. According to O'Connor, the "primary objective of the project is the employment of artists who are on the relief rolls...The project is planned in the belief that among these artists will be found the talent and the skill necessary to carry on an art program which will make contributions of permanent value to the community....Through employment of creative artists it is hoped to secure for the public outstanding examples of American art....The aim of the project will be to work toward an integration of the arts with the daily life of the community, and an integration of the fine arts and practical arts." Francis V. O'Connor, *Federal Art Patronage 1933 to 1943*, with a forward by George Levitine (College Park, Md.: University of Maryland Art Gallery, 1966), 28-29.

<sup>47</sup> "To secure suitable art of the best quality for the embellishment of public buildings. To carry out this work in such a way as will assist in stimulating, as far as practicable, development of art in this country and reward what is regarded as outstanding talent which develops. So far as consistent with a high standard of art, to employ local talent. To endeavor to secure the cooperation of people throughout the country interested in the arts and whose judgment in connection with art has the respect of the section in selecting artist for the work to be done and criticism and advice as to their production. In carrying out this work, to make every effort to afford an opportunity to all artists on the sole test of their qualifications as artists and, accordingly to encourage competitions wherever practicable recognizing the fact, however, that certain artists in the country, because of their recognized talent, are entitled to receive work without competition." Ibid., 12-13. A similar summary is provided by Belisario R. Contreras, *Tradition and Innovation in New Deal Art* (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1983), 51.

surprisingly, it was an era of optimism as the New Deal started putting people to work, helping to restore people's faith in government and society. And while the Depression was economically hard for everyone, Citron noted that it was perhaps less so, initially, for the artists since they "never having been far up on the economic ladder . . . didn't have far to go down."<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, the Depression-era artists were able, usually for the first time in their lives, to fully devote their time and energy to work and the New Deal projects "coincided with their [the artist's] interest in a reformed society" where art would be available to everyone.<sup>49</sup> Cahill, Bruce and others had a "strong belief that the government should work *with* the artist in raising artistic standards and increasing cultural awareness."<sup>50</sup> In order to do this, according to the administrators in charge, subject matter had to be clearly understandable and identifiable to the public. Therefore, abstraction and academic classicism were generally rejected in favor of realism, and the American Scene became the primary subject of artists, particularly those working under the Section of Painting and Sculpture.<sup>51</sup> To further their ends, historians Marlene Park

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<sup>48</sup> Minna Citron Archives, Miscellaneous Materials, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>49</sup> Dore Ashton, *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 44. Ashton continues by pointing out the one of the most compelling forces to emerge out of the Depression-era, government sponsored art programs was the emergent artistic milieu, "their sense of having found each other. . . . The continuity of artistic life, which many experienced for the first time on the project, proved to be the catalyst that was to change the diffident American painter into a professional who would finally see himself as an equal in the world of modern art." Ashton, 44, 51. In addition, this aim of making art available to everyone was echoed in the responses of some artists, including the Social Realists, "who insisted that art belonged to the people, not to the ruling class." Shapiro, 10.

<sup>50</sup> O'Connor, *Federal Art Patronage*, 20.

<sup>51</sup> The primary goal of the WPA/FAP was to provide relief to the artists, and the artists were free to choose their own subject matter. Section artists, on the other hand, worked under a more rigid set of guidelines, for the agency was concerned primarily with decorating public buildings. For the post office projects in particular, competitions were often held to choose the artist who would do the decoration of the interiors. Sketches had to be submitted to a committee for approval. Their guidelines were for subjects "familiar to the public and presented realistically so that the public could understand them. In the 1930s realism, a convenient term for representational art, did not imply either an accurate rendering of contemporary events or a meticulous accuracy of detail....The Section wanted a contemporary American realism that was natural, authentic, and normative....On the whole, the Section believed that the public wanted recognizable and commonplace but dignified images." Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz,

and Gerald E. Markowitz tell us, these artists who were so anxious to “reach the public” coordinated organizations dedicated to public art.<sup>52</sup> Much of the art produced for these government-sponsored programs became a reflection of the idyllic past, and frontiersmen/women and pioneer families, engaged frequently in leisurely pastoral picnics or celebrating their cooperative labor efforts, were popular subjects among Section artists.<sup>53</sup> Such images, created in the midst of a period of financial catastrophe, reminded viewers of what life was like before disaster struck. Hence, even though the present situation seemed incredibly bleak and hopeless, viewers could seek hope for the future by looking at the past.

The New Deal art programs provided work and, thus, stipends to thousands of artists, yet Citron was not as reliant on the programs as were so many others. Her mother inherited money from a wealthy brother-in-law and was financially secure. Her husband, Henry, was the president and co-founder of a box manufacturing company in New Jersey, thereby enabling his family to live comfortably in spite of the Depression. Personal records indicate that Citron did teach briefly in New York City as part of one of the New Deal programs.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, as previously noted, she spent time under the sponsorship of the Section in Tennessee between 1938 and 1940 recording, in part, the improvements made by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) as part of a two mural series for the Manchester and Newport post offices. These murals brought Citron’s work to national

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*Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 125.

<sup>52</sup> Organizations included the Artists Union, the Artists Congress, the Architects, Painters, and Sculptors Collaborative, and the Public Use of Art Committee. *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>53</sup> Melosh.

<sup>54</sup> Kidrick notes that she taught painting for the WPA Federal Art Project, New York between 1935 and 1937. Kidrick, 139.

attention when the TVA panels were exhibited in New York at the New School of Social Research in 1940, and Eleanor Roosevelt attended as the guest of honor.<sup>55</sup>

The majority of Citron's projects from the thirties, however, were not supported by the patronage of governmental programs. The works being considered in this study, while retaining the basic representational style most government-sponsored art, are more critical of society and more wry in their commentary than the simple-minded nostalgia found among the work of many of her WPA counterparts. Choosing to follow her own artistic path, Citron set out upon what she later called her "uncharted course" creating works unlike anything being made by her contemporaries.<sup>56</sup> Her artistic career was one of experimentation; after working on a particular topic or technique, she moved on to something new. During an interview late in her life, she told a story of an event early in her career—apropos of this uncharted course. A gallery owner wanted her to complete twelve canvases that looked alike so he could easily sell them. Citron responded, "No, I can't do that. I didn't get to be an artist 'cause I expected to make a killing or something . . . And I'm not going to do what I don't want to do." Mentor Kenneth Hayes Miller

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<sup>55</sup> Some of the works were also on display at Midtown Galleries. "Minna Citron: Paintings of the Tennessee Valley," Midtown Galleries, New York, New York, December 15, 1941 – January 3, 1942.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen Neil Greengard, ed., "Ten Crucial Years: The Development of United States Government Sponsored Artists Programs 1933-1943, A Panel Discussion by Six WPA Artists," *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 1 (Spring 1986): 52. Greengard points out that the "uncharted course" was a term devised by the artist because she never worked in the same medium or style for very long; her interests were always changing and she followed the course of her inspiration in whatever direction it led her. Donna Marxer concurs noting "Hers has been called an uncharted course, for following and utilizing accidents in her work....But she never had the big success. Critics and dealers don't like artists who are always changing and experimenting. Their work tends to be uneven and they don't fit easily into categories." Donna Marxer, "The Artist's Proof," Donna Marxer Archives, Spring 1992. In describing a series of etching and engravings titled "The Uncharted Course," Citron said "Some stimulus—some thought, something seen, something imagined, some inarticulated impulse of the artist's unconscious—starts a free sensuous expression upon the canvas. Without quenching its spontaneity, he follows where the fancy leads, and counts as a work of art the record of a sensuous creative experience . . ." "Minna Citron: The Uncharted Course," Peter Deitsch Gallery, New York, New York, May 5 – 30, 1950.



warned that she would lose her following if she continuously changed her style, to which she retorted: “I’m gonna do what I wanta [*sic*] do.” The artist continued by adding:

I think that has been the thing that has made me very happy in my life. And that’s why I’m doing what I want to do now. . . . If you’re not free to do what you feel you should be doing, it’s just as though you were handcuffed or chained in your life. . . . [Y]ou might be gaining something materially . . . but you’re not doing what you feel you have to do and that’s the important thing.<sup>57</sup>

Consequently, the evolution of her artistic style moved from early representational pieces, the subject of this dissertation, to abstraction in the 1940s before moving on to assemblages and other mixed-media pieces later in her career. And as will be demonstrated in the following pages, the paintings and prints completed by Minna Citron during the 1930s were, in fact, representative of larger socio-historical and cultural trends. The works from her three main series of the decade will be used to demonstrate the artist’s interest in women’s rights and equality, in her willingness to go into unfamiliar surroundings, such as the gambling dens of Reno, so as to report back to her audiences, and in her ability to bring a new consciousness into a previously all-male area of governance, the New York court system.

### **Scholarship on Minna Citron**

The largest body of primary source material on Citron comes in the form of archival material. Microfilms, vertical files and the artist’s personal papers are held in the collections of the Archives of American Art, the Bird Library at Syracuse University, the New York Public Library, the Newark Museum of Art and the Newark Public Library as

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<sup>57</sup> Minna Citron, interview by WQED personnel, *Seasons of Life II: 712.1-712.3*, transcript, 1-2, in Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado.

well as in the private collection of the artist's granddaughter, Christiane Citron, who serves as the estate's executor in Denver, Colorado.<sup>58</sup> Included within these files are miscellaneous newspaper clippings, catalogues, letters, photographs, personal statements and exhibition announcements from throughout Citron's professional career. The vast majority of documents within these archives date to the decades after the 1930s, and therefore do not significantly aid in an understanding of the artist or her work from this era. However, a number of unpublished materials within the Denver archives have been enlightening, the most notable being a draft of the artist's semi-autobiography. Written in conjunction with Clemens Resseguier in the 1980s, this biography, titled *Minna Citron: Her Stories—Her Work*, reconstructs the artist's personal life and artistic career.<sup>59</sup> Chapters by Resseguier are interspersed with memoirs by Citron covering everything from the influence of her mother's purple petticoat (the petticoat epitomized her mother's beauty and was her "first intense perception of color"), to Walter Broe, to her trip to Paris in 1947.<sup>60</sup> Resseguier's chapters outline Citron's artistic career beginning with the realist paintings and murals executed between 1927 and 1944 before her break with realism between 1944 and 1947. He discusses, also, the artist's abstract pieces created between 1947 and 1970 as well as the collages and constructions produced during the seventies.

Although fairly comprehensive in scope, Resseguier's discussion of Citron's art could be

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<sup>58</sup> Minna Citron, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel 97, 342-714, 1930-1967. Minna Citron, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel 268, 471-1119, 1947-1972. Minna Citron, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, unmicrofilmed material. Minna Citron, Bird Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y.: unmicrofilmed material, 1946-1965. Minna Citron, New York Public Library, New York, N.Y.: unmicrofilmed material, 1932-1998. Minna Citron, Newark Museum of Art, Newark, N.J.: unmicrofilmed material. Minna Citron, Newark Public Library, Newark, N.J.: unmicrofilmed material, 1934-1994. Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>59</sup> No date can be found on the manuscript, although the preface indicates that Resseguier met Citron in 1979, prior to the writing of the book.

<sup>60</sup> Citron, "Mama's Purple Petticoat," in Citron and Resseguier, 8-9. In writing about her mother Citron also notes that "early and completely she enslaved me." This enslavement by her mother was one reason she chose to enter into psychoanalysis during the late 1920s.

expanded to include interpretive and historically analytical commentary. Currently each object receives the attention of only a few sentences dealing with formal analysis.

Nonetheless, the text is an invaluable resource in terms of biographical information and a source in which to find some of Citron's own writings about her life and art. As a valuable primary document, perhaps this biography will be published in the future in conjunction with further analysis and interpretive commentary.

A second unpublished manuscript located within the Denver archives is a collaborative project between Citron and artist Jan Gelb titled *Venus Through the Ages: The Character of Woman as Portrayed in Art* and written during the late 1960s/early 1970s.<sup>61</sup> The idea for the book came to Citron several decades earlier while giving a lecture at the Art Students League during the late 1940s. As she showed slides of the Venus of Willendorf and an Egyptian figure, she noted—off the cuff—“Look at what happened to Venus through the Ages!”<sup>62</sup> Richly illustrated, the ensuing short manuscript, comprised of several brief chapters (3-4 pages each), demonstrates the changing character of women as portrayed by artists throughout the centuries.<sup>63</sup> Citron and Gelb show, as written in the introduction, that “Woman is both God's surrogate and the Devil's, an imbecile and an angel, an inspiration and an earth-fettered liability; she formerly ruled the

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<sup>61</sup> Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado. Partial drafts of the manuscript are also included within the microfilmed materials at the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington DC.

<sup>62</sup> Citron and Gelb, Unpublished prefatory statement, Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>63</sup> The following are a selected few of 108 proposed illustrations for the manuscript: *Venus of Willendorf*, Cycladic *Idol* (female), Citron's *Ishtar*, *Guardian of Ancestral Bones*, from the African Fang tribe, Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, Brancusi's *The Kiss*, Fragonard's *The Swing*, and a Hindu figure of *Siva and Parvati*. On many of the illustration pages quotes from a variety of sources are included. For example on the page with Citron's *Ishtar* the following typed quote appears: “According to Simone de Beauvoir, ‘She is the queen of heaven...she is also the empress of hell, whence she crawls forth, symbolized in a serpent...Everywhere she creates life; if she kills, she also revives the dead. Capricious, luxurious, cruel as Nature, at once propitious and fearsome, she rules over all the Aegean archipelago, over Phrygia, Syria, Anatolia, over all western Asia.’”

earth and should do so again; and (or?) she never did, could, will or should.”<sup>64</sup> In attempting to fit images of women into this definition of both God’s and the Devil’s surrogate, the artist-authors group their illustrations into three categories—creativity, destructiveness, and sexuality—noting that these categories are “parallel to the three ‘aspects’ of the Great Goddess.”<sup>65</sup> The chapters further categorize the varying types of women portrayed throughout the ages: “Woman as Creator (Fertility Aspect),” “Woman as Destroyer (Dread Aspect),” and “Woman as Sexuality (Erotic Aspect).” In the first chapter they discuss the connection between the woman’s “menstrual rhythms and the moon’s monthly cycle” and the fact that the earliest deities were moon goddesses to whom man prayed for the fruitfulness of women, animals and the cultivated fields.<sup>66</sup> Sometimes these goddesses were depicted as “cruel, fearsome, devourer[s] of humans,” and while many early peoples prayed to the moon goddesses, the dark, destructive aspect of the Great Goddess was often “equated by the ancients with the dark of the moon, that time for evil spells, black magic, great spells.”<sup>67</sup> Sexuality, they tell us “was the third of the three natures attributed to the Great Goddess.”<sup>68</sup> The sexuality of the Goddess, is not the passive sexuality of an odalisque, but rather that of the aggressor or the “eager partner in the sexual act.”<sup>69</sup> Citron and Gelb conclude by noting that the “Great Goddess has helped us to discover various qualities considered to be part of Woman’s character,” and the numerous illustrations are included to help reveal those qualities.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Citron and Gelb, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 15.

And finally, among the numerous other unpublished materials found within the archival materials, the “Seasons of Life” interview has proved to be most significant in reconstructing Citron’s early artistic development.<sup>71</sup> These unpublished transcript notes were ultimately pared down to form a short section in John Kotre and Elizabeth Hall’s *Seasons of Life: Our Dramatic Journey from Birth to Death*.<sup>72</sup> Discussing everything from her childhood and her relationship with her mother, to her marriage and its subsequent problems, her psychoanalysis and the ramifications it had on her personal growth, and the development of her art, the artist remained candid throughout the interview. Reading the artist’s own words provides much insight into her personality as well as her artistic career.

Unfortunately, the longevity of her career notwithstanding, art historical scholarship and criticism largely ignores Citron. The relative lack of significant scholarship on her art, particularly in the period under consideration for this project, is astonishing given the engaging aspects of the work. Perhaps Kenneth Hayes Miller was correct. By constantly changing her artistic styles and interests, maybe she did lose her following. This hard-working, dedicated, independent, unconventional and at times brash woman pursued her uncharted course with little regard for what the public and/or critics thought. Hers was a personalized art, based on her own experiences and interests, infused with an individual yet, often presumptuous commentary. As such, Citron’s work strongly merits a much more in-depth consideration. This dissertation remedies the scholarly

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<sup>71</sup> Citron, *Seasons of Life: 711.1-711.3, Seasons of Life II: 712.1-712.3, and Seasons of Life III: 713.1-713.3*.

<sup>72</sup> John Kotre and Elizabeth Hall, “Still Free at Ninety,” in *Seasons of Life: Our Dramatic Journey from Birth to Death* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), 337-342.

oversight by bringing attention not only to Citron's works from the 1930s, but also to the larger cultural context within which those works were produced.

The majority of published commentary on Citron's work comes in the form of small exhibition catalogues, newspaper and journal reviews (again, most of which focus on her post-1930 work), and texts devoted to printmaking.<sup>73</sup> Much of the source material devoted to Citron's work during the 1930s (and even later in her career), is restricted to brief reviews in journals, *The Art Digest* and *Art News* being the most common.<sup>74</sup> As primary documents, the importance of these sources should not be dismissed. However, the reviews are short, generally not longer than a paragraph or two providing little more than the dates and location of the show and the mention of several individual works.<sup>75</sup>

Exhibition catalogues comprise the largest body of literature on Citron.<sup>76</sup> As with the reviews, these sources generally offer little information about the artist, her career, or

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<sup>73</sup> The following are merely a few examples of each source: "Minna Citron." A.C.A. Gallery, New York, New York, September 29 – October 18, 1947. H. Boswell, "Citron Rules the Waves," *The Art Digest* 17 (April 1, 1943): 19. Judith Brodsky and Ofelia Garcia. *Printed by Women: A National Exhibition of Photographs and Prints* (Philadelphia: The Print Club, 1983). Ellen Ekedal and Susan Barnes Robinson, *The Spirit of the City: American Urban Paintings, Prints and Drawings, 1900-1952* (Los Angeles: Laband Art Gallery, Loyola Marymount University, 1986). The texts in which Citron is discussed in conjunction with other artists from the period, however, consider her as a printmaker alone, rather than as a printmaker and a painter. This is interesting in light of the fact that in many cases, the prints produced by the artist were executed only *after* the initial painting was successful.

<sup>74</sup> The following are several of these sources: Paul Bird, "Gambling and Minna Citron," *The Art Digest* 12 (November 1, 1939): 12. M.D., "Minna Citron, Critical Commentator of American Life," *Art News* 30 (October 30, 1937): 16. W.L.J., "Citron's Light Tones for Humor and Civics," *Art News* 38 (November 18, 1939): 22. "Minna Citron Vivisects Judges and Jurors," *The Art Digest* 14 (November 15, 1938): 26.

<sup>75</sup> "Minna Citron," *Parnassus* 11 (November 1939): 23. For example, this review of the "Judges and Juries" series mentions the following works: *Court Recess*, *Answer Yes or No!*, *The Plaintiff*, *The Judge*, and *Colloquy*.

<sup>76</sup> Louis Weitzenkorn, "Feminanities," Midtown Gallery, New York, New York, April 16 – April 29, 1935. "Paintings by Minna Citron." Midtown Galleries, New York, New York, October 19 – November 4, 1937. "Minna Citron: Exhibition of Paintings," Midtown Galleries, New York, New York, November 3 – November 20, 1939. The following sources are a representative few of the many catalogues from the 1940s, 50s and 60s. "Minna Citron," A.C.A. Gallery, New York, New York, September 29 – October 18, 1947. "Minna Citron," Galerie Lydia Conti, Paris, France, June 20 – July 13, 1947. "Minna Citron: Oleos, Acuarelas, Lacas," Lyceum, Havana Cuba, April 25 – May 5, 1952. "Minna Citron," Jason Gallery, New York, New York, November 15 – December 3, 1966.

the larger socio-historical context in which the works were made. Rather, they, too, tend to contain only the title and dates of the show, a list of the works exhibited, and, on occasion, a brief introductory essay by the curator of the show. A relatively recent catalogue containing a discussion of Citron is Mary Francey's *American Women at Work: Prints by Women Artists of the Nineteen Thirties*.<sup>77</sup> Francey states that most women's art from the thirties portrayed the working class, was non-critical, and was not meant to shock the public.<sup>78</sup> Only one work by Citron, *The Magic Box, T.V.A. Series*, dating to 1940, is considered in the book.<sup>79</sup> Francey includes this work because, she argues, it contains none of the biting commentary or satirical criticism of the artist's earlier work, thereby placing Citron within the "non-critical" and "non-shocking" realm of art as discussed in her text. The author does, however, acknowledge the difference between the works of the two decades, declaring that in the thirties Citron's images were in fact more about social commentary than those from the forties.<sup>80</sup> She notes that Citron's work from the thirties "included her own satirical view of how women coped with the vicissitudes of the Depression," noting that *Subway Technique* and *Self-Expression* "may be interpreted as images of low income women in search of social independence promised during the nineteen twenties but which had been curtailed by the Depression."<sup>81</sup> While not containing much information specifically about Citron, Francey's catalogue is useful for this project

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<sup>77</sup> Mary Francey, *American Women at Work: Prints by Women Artists of the Nineteen Thirties* (Salt Lake City: Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah, 1991).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>79</sup> In 1937 Citron joined the WPA as part of the Easel Division, and produced one painting, *Staten Island Ferry*. The following year she was commissioned by the government to work on murals for the Newport, Tennessee post office on the subject of the Tennessee Valley Authority. *The Magic Box* lithograph included in this catalogue is a print produced after one of her paintings for the Tennessee post office project.

<sup>80</sup> Francey, 18.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

because it recognizes Citron and her contemporaries, thus providing a greater sense of the artistic milieu in which she was working.

The most useful exhibition catalogue for this project comes from the 1970s.<sup>82</sup> Karal Ann Marling and Helen Harrison's *7 American Women: The Depression Decade* places the artistic work of the women artists, as well as their biographies, within the larger socio-historical context of the period. Along with Citron, Elizabeth Olds, Lucienne Bloch, Rosalind Bengelsdorf, Marion Greenwood, Doris Lee and Concetta Scaravaglione are examined. Following an introductory article by Marling entitled "American Art and the American Woman," one finds several pages devoted to each of the artists, including a chronology, a brief introduction to her work, a short list of bibliographic references and a reproduction of one work from the show.<sup>83</sup> Marling's essay begins with a discussion of the increasing number of women in the workplace during the 1920s. She cites studies by Robert and Helen Lynd and Dr. Martha Tracy, and guidebooks for women by Helen Ferris and Virginia Moore, for example, in order to provide relevant statistics on the subject.<sup>84</sup> Moving to a discussion of the arts, she cites Mary Franton Roberts's studies on women's artistic careers. Roberts concluded that women's careers as professionals were not always taken seriously, despite the fact that females were no longer denied access to artistic training, and that their works accounted for nearly 15% of the total exhibitions held in New York.<sup>85</sup> Next, several pages of the essay are dedicated to the 1930s including discussions of Frances Perkins (Secretary of Labor and the first female Cabinet member), Eleanor Roosevelt and various other female social and political reformers. In addition,

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<sup>82</sup> Karal Ann Marling and Helen A. Harrison, *7 American Women: The Depression Decade* (New York: A.I.R. Gallery, 1976).

<sup>83</sup> Citron's *She Earns An Honest Living*, oil on pressed wood, 1934 is reproduced.

<sup>84</sup> Marling and Harrison, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.



the author looks at prominent females within the art world, including Juliana Force of the Whitney Museum and Audrey McMahon, regional director for the WPA in New York and New Jersey. Marling's essay focuses on more than just the decades of the twenties and thirties. It sets the stage for what would happen during those decades by tracing the developments of feminism and the increasingly prominent roles of females in the work place dating back to the nineteenth century, and in doing so, provides an excellent context for the period considered in this project.

Another resource which looks at Citron in conjunction with several of her female contemporaries, including Isabel Bishop, Wanda Gag, Mabel Dwight and Elizabeth Olds, is Valerie Kidrick's master's thesis titled "Uncommon Women: Women Printmakers of the 1930s."<sup>86</sup> Kidrick reflects upon the training these women received at the Art Students League and the ways in which they were able to make connections between art and society during the bleak economic era of the thirties. She focuses, specifically, on the women as printmakers, noting that printmaking "was the natural choice for women interested in the changes in society and their effect on the common individual."<sup>87</sup> Like Francey's work, Kidrick's text is a worthwhile addition to the scholarship of women artists from the Depression era, and her focus on prints makes Citron a logical choice for inclusion since Citron created many prints during the thirties. However, it should be noted that many of the prints from this decade were actually created *after* the paintings.

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<sup>86</sup> Kidrick.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., iv.

## **Scholarship on the New Deal and Art of the 1930s**

Unfortunately, for a number of decades in the mid-twentieth century, much of the art produced as part of the New Deal projects was eclipsed by the following generation of Abstract Expressionists, and the art of the 1930s, to some extent, was given little attention by comparison. In part, at least initially, this oversight probably came from “a tendency to simply forget the decade which represented to many the greatest hardship they had ever endured.”<sup>88</sup> And in fact, it was not until nearly twenty years after the end of the Depression that a new generation of scholars began devoting in-depth research to the Depression art programs. Nonetheless, within the last three decades there has been a steady reemergence of scholarship on the art produced during the thirties. In general, the majority of texts consulted for this project begin, at least in part, with a discussion of the various projects set up under the auspices of the New Deal. The alphabet soup of acronyms used for the projects is defined, their goals set forth and numerous statistics on numbers of artists, wages, and works produced are provided. The first person to undertake this daunting task was University of Maryland art historian Francis V. O’Connor, and no study or investigation into the art of the 1930s can begin without looking at his work.

O’Connor, perhaps the most prolific author writing about art in the thirties, laid the essential groundwork for further study into Depression era, and he was instrumental in cataloging the art produced during the New Deal. Any study on the art of the 1930s should at least partially credit O’Connor since he undertook the overwhelming task of gathering all the empirical information and primary source documentation concerning the various New Deal programs together into a series of useful sourcebooks. His 1972 edited

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 8.

anthology titled *The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs* provides in-depth recollections of participants and administrators working on the New Deal art projects.<sup>89</sup> The stories told by the interviewees lend valuable insight into the period as well as to the issues confronting those working under the auspices of the New Deal. Although Citron is not included among those interviewed for O'Connor's project, reading the reminiscences of her contemporaries provides a broader context of the Depression years, thereby aiding in accurately fitting Citron within that milieu.

Prior to this, in 1966, O'Connor authored *Federal Art Patronage 1933 to 1943*, a catalogue meant to accompany an exhibition at the University of Maryland Art Gallery.<sup>90</sup> A major scholarly contribution to this field of inquiry, the catalogue provided the impetus for numerous other scholars to begin further investigation into American art of the 1930s.<sup>91</sup> O'Connor spent an extraordinary amount of time scrutinizing the primary documents recording the activities of Roosevelt's New Deal. As a result, he presents a thorough summary of the various agencies, administrators, and goals set forth by the programs and although primarily archival in nature, his work is invaluable nonetheless.

Belisario Contreras outlines some of the same programs discussed by O'Connor, but he looks at how the personalities of select administrators influenced the various programs under consideration. *Tradition and Innovation in New Deal Art*, as well as much of the scholarship on the art, artists and administrators of the 1930s, focuses on the accomplishments of the men in charge. Contreras's book reflects upon how Roosevelt's

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<sup>89</sup> Francis V. O'Connor, ed., *The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972).

<sup>90</sup> O'Connor, *Federal Art Patronage*. Although relatively short, the catalogue's text provided O'Connor with the background for his 1968 report to the National Endowment for the Arts on the New Deal Art Projects in New York City and State entitled *Federal Support for the Visual Arts: The New Deal and Now*. This report evaluated the successes and failures of the New Deal art projects.

<sup>91</sup> George Levitine, forward to *Federal Art Patronage 1933 to 1943* by Francis V. O'Connor (College Park, Md.: University of Maryland Art Gallery, 1966), 2.

New Deal art programs changed the relationship between art and government in the United States. And in addition to skillfully discussing the role of personalized administration within the various agencies (particularly that of Edward Bruce and Holger Cahill), the author treats a wide range of artists, again mostly male, including Edward Laning, Philip Evergood and James Brooks among others. It is worthwhile to look at *Tradition and Innovation* as another sort of introduction to the thirties. The author includes many illustrations within the pages of the text and as such provides a broad scope of artwork produced; however, in doing so, he can then only devote a brief summary to each object rather than a lengthier conclusive discussion which would more effectively draw his theories and the illustrative examples together.

Stephen Wallis continues the tradition of O'Connor and Contreras by beginning his article, "The Federal Art Project: A New Deal for Artists," with facts and statistics about the 1930s.<sup>92</sup> He reminds the reader that the Federal Art Project (FAP) was the largest WPA relief program and that FAP artists created thousands of works of art including murals, prints, sculptures, and photographs while others on the project taught art classes and ran community art centers.<sup>93</sup> Wallis claims that most artists tried to justify the works created for the FAP in social terms, and points out that while Realism was the most common way to address social concerns, artists including Stuart Davis and Ilya Bolotowsky for example, continued to draw from the European Modernist tradition.<sup>94</sup> He argues throughout the article that whether working in a realist or abstract style, artists were given an unprecedented opportunity to continue producing art despite the nation's

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<sup>92</sup> Stephen Wallis, "The Federal Art Project: A New Deal for Artists," *Arts & Antiques* 19 (June 1996): 58-65.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 62.

economic crisis. The programs of the New Deal encouraged an exchange between artists and the public that was vital and the general population was exposed to more “fine art” than ever before; the era truly was a “new deal for artists.” It is, of course, advantageous to have a full understanding of all that was occurring during the 1930s in order to situate Citron into that realm despite the fact that she only worked as part of the Projects for a brief period late in the decade.<sup>95</sup>

A more recent source is the exhibition catalogue titled *A New Deal for the Arts* by Bruce I. Bustard.<sup>96</sup> The show was sponsored by the National Archives and Records Administration, and the themes of this text reflect the issues found within New Deal art, including the following: the use of American history, the celebration of common man, the support of the New Deal itself, political activism, and “useful” arts such as posters and pamphlets.<sup>97</sup> Bustard demonstrates how these themes are present in examples of the theater productions, writings, murals, prints, and easel paintings produced under the auspices of the New Deal programs. Numerous illustrations support Bustard’s textual arguments and provide the reader with a broad range of material to study. Bustard’s book is a valuable source for anyone investigating the art, music, theater or writer’s projects of the New Deal. He clearly outlines the various programs, provides the names of important administrators and carefully considers how the works completed as part of the projects are representative of the larger socio-historical, political and economic contexts of the decade.

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<sup>95</sup> Citron painted *Staten Island Ferry* as part of the Easel Division before being commissioned to execute murals focusing on the Tennessee Valley Authority for post offices in Newport and Manchester, Tennessee.

<sup>96</sup> Bruce I. Bustard, *A New Deal for the Arts* (Seattle, Wash.: The University of Washington Press, 1997).

<sup>97</sup> Each chapter in the book is based on/devoted to one of these themes.

Another helpful text on this period, dealing specifically with the history of the post office murals commissioned by the Treasury Section of Fine Arts Program, is Karal Ann Marling's *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression*.<sup>98</sup> Like Contreras, Marling discusses many well-known male artists of the time, including Thomas Hart Benton, Charles Sheeler and Jared French among others, but she also looks at several female muralists, including Isobel Bate, Doris Lee, and Edna Reindel to name a few. While a beneficial source of information on the murals and the period in general, Marling's book, even with the inclusion of women artists, makes no attempt to address the issue of feminism. Nor, in fact, do the murals produced by these women invoke any kind of feminist concern. Instead, they represent women taking part in traditional domestic activities, thus fitting them into the realm of subject matter called for by the male members of the administration during what was a period of increasing domesticity.

Indebted to Marling's seminal works two years before, historians Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz continue to study the works produced by artists working for the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture between 1934 and 1943, when murals and sculptures were created for federal buildings throughout the United States, as well as over one thousand post offices.<sup>99</sup> In *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal*, Park and Markowitz bring to light a number of these often neglected art works noting that what today seems "aesthetically bland and politically innocuous," caused, in the 1930s, "heated and prolonged critical controversy." The seemingly "innocent subjects [of] farmers or industrial workers," the authors observe, "had a

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<sup>98</sup> Karal Ann Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982).

<sup>99</sup> Park and Markowitz.

different meaning when farmers were dumping their milk to raise prices and workers were fighting police to establish unions.”<sup>100</sup>

Media historian and retired University of Iowa journalism professor Hanno Hardt takes a different approach to the art of the twenties and thirties as he looks at the varying roles of media in urban settings in a group of essays collected in *In the Company of Media: Cultural Constructions of Communication, 1920s-1930s*.<sup>101</sup> In the chapter in which Hardt mentions Citron, he takes under consideration the American newspaper, concentrating specifically on the ways in which visual artists use representations of the newspaper in their artworks, and noting that the papers serve as “extensive fragments of cultural history” since artists “transform experience into images of reality that help to explain society.”<sup>102</sup> Citron’s work is significant to Hardt because of her creative inclusion of media in her images in ways that allow her to comment on and critique popular culture and society.

### **Scholarship on Feminism, Beauty and Film Culture in the 1930s**

Unfortunately, few scholars have thoroughly discussed the topic of gender, feminism and the arts during the 1930s, and many artists, especially women and including Citron, have been virtually ignored and undervalued by scholarly research. Several texts, however, including Nancy Cott’s *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, focus on the historical developments of feminism and were useful for this study.<sup>103</sup> Cott

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>101</sup> Hanno Hardt, *In the Company of Media: Cultural Constructions of Communication, 1920s-1930s* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000).

<sup>102</sup> Hanno Hardt, “The Gaze of the Artist: American Newspapers in an Urban Setting,” in *In the Company of Media: Cultural Constructions of Communication, 1920s-1930s* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000): 13-34.

<sup>103</sup> Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

charts the transformation of feminism from the late 1800s through the early decades of the 1900s. At the turn of the twentieth century, the author argues, feminism emerged as a result of the convergence of the higher education of women, increasing numbers of working women, and the prevalent atmosphere of reform.<sup>104</sup> Cott discusses the various women's organizations that were in place, including the National Woman's Party (NWP), the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), and the Women's Bureau, as well as the goals each attempted to accomplish. Official organizations are considered in relation to the personal (and professional) lives of the women involved. Cott uses 1920 as a dividing line, arguing that women's activism began a steady decline during the twenties.<sup>105</sup> Citron came into her own as an artist after 1920, but was born just outside of New York City in the late nineteenth-century and thus grew up in the midst of a wave of feminism that was sweeping the nation. While as noted above Citron was never really part of any organized ideology, the feminist ideals suggested in her works produced during the thirties also do not fit neatly into the conservatism of the decade, and Cott's text adequately provides the historical context for feminism of the period.

By the Depression decade, suffrage had already been won and, as suggested above, in many ways women's social roles became more conservative. Like Cott, Nancy Wolloch contributes a valuable introduction to the history of American women with her

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<sup>104</sup> Susan Porter Benson, review of *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, by Nancy Cott, *The American Historical Review* 94 (December 1989): 1461. In addition, Cott points out that the word "feminism" was not used regularly until the 1910s and it represented a shift from the nineteenth century "woman movement."

<sup>105</sup> In part this decline was a result of conflicting ideologies among "feminists" in the 1920s. These women wanted equality, yet at the same time arguments arose on gender differentiation. Diversity among women was recognized, but at the same time they were in search of unity. However, the author concludes that by the beginning of the 1930s feminism looked either archaic or revolutionary depending on one's point of view—archaic since women had already achieved educational, sexual and political rights; revolutionary because of a demand that women move beyond traditional gender roles. For a concise summary of this issue see also Phyllis Palmer, review of *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, by Nancy Cott, *Reviews in American History* 16 (September 1988): 452.



*Women and the American Experience*.<sup>106</sup> The author traces the developments of women beginning with the seventeenth century, and dedicates two chapters to the 1930s and 1940s. While focusing on the domestic and political roles of women, Woloch also devotes attention to issues of race and class. Like Cott's text, Woloch's work dates to the decade of the 1980s; however, both sources have been valuable for this project in terms of providing a concise and easy to follow introduction to the progress and implications of the nineteenth-century woman's movement and early twentieth-century feminism. Furthermore, Woloch's survey of American women's history supplies the reader with valuable information about the key figures involved in those movements, including Mary W. (Molly) Dewson and Eleanor Roosevelt, for example, from the thirties.

Among the authors who have also provided a clear concise history of feminism, and more specifically feminism in the thirties, are Susan Ware, Lois Scharf, Nancy Woloch and Sheila Rowbotham.<sup>107</sup> These texts, with the exception of Rowbotham's, were written during the early to mid-1980s, and they remain the most comprehensive resources on the subject, provide insightful commentary on the topic, and thus provide a useful context for Citron's "Femininities." In *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal*, Susan Ware seeks to bridge what she calls the "gap in knowledge of the New Deal," since she notes, "in conventional histories of the period, women are hardly mentioned," in part at least, due to "the absence of an organized women's movement in the

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<sup>106</sup> Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984).

<sup>107</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1997). Scharf and Jensen, eds., *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983). Lois Scharf, *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism and the Great Depression* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980). Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981). Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982).

decade.”<sup>108</sup> Ware, like the several other sources mentioned thus far, brings to light women’s expanded public roles, contributions and influence during the New Deal era. She expands on the premise of *Beyond Suffrage* in *Holding their Own: American Women in the 1930s*, in which she further examines women of the Depression era in terms of education, employment and social status, observing that the decade “emerge[s] as a rich, if somewhat contradictory, period of 20<sup>th</sup> century women’s history.”<sup>109</sup> In chapter one the author considers the increasing trend toward domesticity at the onset of the Depression; “most women’s lives in the 1930s centered around their homes and families where they struggled to make due during the Depression. . . . The man was the breadwinner and the woman ran the household,” Ware tells us.<sup>110</sup> This division of duties notwithstanding, nearly one-fourth of the women in the country were still employed in 1930, and Ware devotes chapter two of her text to a discussion of working women during the decade under consideration.<sup>111</sup> She continues with chapters devoted to youth, education and careers, feminism and social reform, women on the left, and popular culture and popular heroines of the thirties. Perhaps most beneficial chapter for this project is chapter six “Literature and Fine Arts.” Ware cites a number of women artists working as part of the New Deal Projects, including Louise Nevelson, Alice Neel, Lee Krasner, Rosalind Bengelsdorf and Lucienne Bloch, among others. Additionally she makes note of the women who made significant contributions to FDR’s art projects, including Ruth Reeves,

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<sup>108</sup> Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*, 1-2.

<sup>109</sup> Ware, *Holding Their Own*.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 8, 13.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 21.

Audrey McMahon and Juliana Force.<sup>112</sup> Ware's text is a valuable introductory resource to any study of women in the thirties in spite of lacking comprehensive definitive answers.

As did Susan Ware, in the early 1980s Lois Scharf undertook several book projects dealing with women's issues, feminism and the Depression era. Scharf authored *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism and the Great Depression* in 1980, and three years later edited and wrote an introduction to *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940* with Joan M. Jensen.<sup>113</sup> As the title of the first book suggests, Scharf deals with the experiences of married women workers and "assess[es] the Depression's effect on the patterns of female employment."<sup>114</sup> Like Ware, she notes that while women, particularly married women, increasingly entered the workforce between the years of the late nineteenth century and the 1920s, professional occupations for women declined during the 1930s.<sup>115</sup> Chapter one considers working women between 1890 and 1920 while chapter two focuses on "Married and Careers: Feminism in the 1920s," thereby setting the stage for the larger discussion of the Depression decade. Scharf addresses government workers, teachers, and feminism under the New Deal.

Scharf's interest in the subject expands to the volume titled *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940*.<sup>116</sup> Scharf and her collaborator Joan M. Jensen call the period under consideration the "decades of discontent" due to, in their words, "the great contradictions that clashed in the background of the historical stage upon which these women [everyone from Gertrude Stein, Billie Holiday and Dorothea

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<sup>112</sup> Ruth Reeves, a muralist by training, became the first national coordinator for the Index of American Design. McMahon served as the head of the New York City Federal Art Project, and Juliana Force, of the Whitney Museum, worked closely in conjunction with McMahon on the project.

<sup>113</sup> Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*. Scharf and Jensen.

<sup>114</sup> Scharf, ix.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> And, in fact, Scharf's essay titled "'The Forgotten Woman': Working Women, the New Deal and Women's Organizations" is an excerpt from her earlier manuscript, *To Work and To Wed*.

Lange to Margaret Sanger, Frances Perkins and Eleanor Roosevelt, among others] performed so brilliantly.”<sup>117</sup> The authors consider the “economic structure, the political institutions, and the social ideology” that allowed individual women to achieve, while recognizing that these same conditions also “made it difficult for the women’s movement to either maintain its strength or expand as an organized group committed to social change in opposition of the established order.”<sup>118</sup> The book is organized into four sections: The Historical Context; The Economic Context; Images—Female, Feminine, Feminist; and Organizational and Ideological Struggles, with essays by a variety of scholars covering topics ranging from the new woman of the 1920s, to *chicanas* and Mexican Immigrant families, to Yiddish women writers and women’s organizations between the wars.

Barbara Melosh, Susan Noyes Platt, Helen Langa, and Ellen Wiley Todd are among the few recent authors tackling the specific subject of women in the arts during the Depression.<sup>119</sup> Melosh’s *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater* presents a broad picture of America’s political and social values during the thirties. The author looks at representations of women in WPA art more than at the women artists involved in the project. Melosh notes that women in New Deal art tend to be shown in familial or domestic settings, frequently with children in their arms

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<sup>117</sup> Scharf and Jensen, 3.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>119</sup> Melosh. Susan Noyes Platt, *Art and Politics in the 1930s: Modernism, Marxism, Americanism, A History of Cultural Activism During the Depression Years* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1999). Helen Langa, “Egalitarian Vision, Gendered Experience: Women Printmakers and the WPA/FAP Graphic Arts Project,” in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992). Helen Langa, “Modernism and Modernity During the New Deal Era: New York Printmakers, Social Themes, and Stylistic Innovations,” *Southeastern College Art Conference Review* 12 (1994): 273-283. Ellen Wiley Todd, *The “New Woman” Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Ellen Wiley Todd, “Isabel Bishop: The Question of Difference,” *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 3 (Fall 1989): 25-41.

or by their sides. If working women are depicted, they are engaged in the conventional “female” professions of either nursing or teaching. Traditionally, the men, the hardworking breadwinners for dependent women and children, were shown working in the fields or the factories.<sup>120</sup> Artists focused on the figure of the hard-working man since such images represented mastery of labor and the ability to shape the world. The New Deal administrators, according to Melosh, were uncomfortable with compositions dominated by women that took up too much space, instead favoring more modest and subdued representations of female figures, often, as just stated, engaged in domestic activities.<sup>121</sup>

Melosh argues that the male administrators determined the type of imagery to be used and questions why the female artists conformed to these rules. She suggests one reason may be that by the early thirties, feminism had begun to lose ground and was no longer a mainstream movement. The author points out that the anonymous competitions held by the Section provided an environment relatively free of sexual discrimination, thereby offering more of an opportunity for women artists to gain artistic commissions.<sup>122</sup> Nonetheless, fewer awards were actually given to the women artists. This information is offered simply as a statement of fact without any kind of suggestion as to *why* women were receiving fewer commissions than their male counterparts. Regardless, *Engendering*

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<sup>120</sup> As part of the New Deal relief projects, men were typically given jobs ahead of women because many of those in charge believed that women served the family better at home in a domestic role, taking care of the house and the children. For a full discussion of this issue, see Kimn Carlton-Smith, “A New Deal for Women: Women Artists and the Federal Art Project, 1935-1939” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1990).

<sup>121</sup> Melosh, 205. Melosh points out that “...administrators and audiences alike demanded the inscription of ‘femininity,’ protesting female figures that were too large or imposing or that violated prevailing standards of female beauty or demeanor. . . . [T]he Section [often] intervened to enforce respectful and ‘dignified’ portrayals of women, most dramatically in its close control over the representation of women’s bodies.” This observation was also demonstrated by Marling in *Wall-to-Wall America*.

<sup>122</sup> Helen Langa also comments on this issue, in her essay “Egalitarian Vision.”

*Culture* is a valuable feminist-inspired contribution to the study of the socio-political context of the thirties.

Like Melosh, Helen Langa remarks in the introduction to her essay “Egalitarian Vision, Gendered Experience: Women Printmakers of the WPA/FAP Graphic Arts Project,” that the New Deal Federal Art Programs were advantageous for women since, due to their anonymity, the competitions were sexually unbiased.<sup>123</sup> Following in the footsteps of O’Connor and Contreras, Langa begins her discussion by outlining the various art programs of President Roosevelt’s projects. She then turns to a discussion of gendered equality within those groups, noting that women involved in the projects, like Lee Krasner for example, extolled the lack of gender discrimination.<sup>124</sup> Artists including Elizabeth Olds, Peggy Bacon and Mabel Dwight, among others, are discussed in relation to their male contemporaries as well as the types of subject matter represented by each.

Langa continues her discussion of 1930s printmakers in an article titled “Modernism and Modernity During the New Deal Era: New York Printmakers, Social Themes and Stylistic Innovations.” She points out that, despite popular belief, not all art produced during the 1930s was solely in conjunction with the government’s preference for realism. In fact, she argues that some of the most remarkable prints produced during this period were those in which artists were looking to modernist styles (Surrealism and Cubism for example) for inspiration.<sup>125</sup> The Graphic Division of the Federal Art Project allowed artists the freedom to create images that were at once socially conscious and experimental in terms of style while at the same time remaining “suitable” for mass

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<sup>123</sup> Langa, “Egalitarian Vision,” 409.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 410.

<sup>125</sup> Langa, “Modernism and Modernity,” 273.

audiences.<sup>126</sup> These artists, according to the author, depicted modern subjects observed around them every day and believed that the social commentary infused in their prints, even when drawing on modernist aesthetics, made their works truly modern.<sup>127</sup> Again, while Citron was not actually a part of the Graphic Arts Division of the FAP, it is interesting to investigate her works in comparison to what was produced by her contemporaries (Mabel Dwight, Elizabeth Olds, et al.) who *did* work on the Project, especially given that Citron was also a printmaker.

Another author investigating, to some extent, women in the 1930s is Susan Noyes Platt. She explores a variety of topics in *Art and Politics in the 1930s*, and several chapters are even devoted to women, including sections on Katherine Dreier, Elizabeth McCausland, Charmion von Wiegand and Anita Brenner.<sup>128</sup> Platt attempts to cover numerous subjects in her book including Depression politics, German Nationalism, mass media imagery, Marxism, the Popular Front, MoMA, abstraction and contemporary critics. The author's intentions in covering such a wide range of subjects in a single manuscript are admirable and the book contains a great amount of empirical data. However, she leaves open many questions about the topics at hand. As a general introduction to Modernism, Marxism and Americanism, Platt's book is a useful source.

In her 1989 article on Isabel Bishop, art historian Ellen Wiley Todd considers the artist's female office workers within the larger socio-historic context in which they were produced and in comparison to images by Kenneth Hayes Miller, Reginald Marsh,

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>128</sup> Platt. The book was originally to be dedicated to women critics, but soon the author's subject matter expanded.

Raphael Soyer and William Siegel.<sup>129</sup> Todd discusses women in the workplace during the 1930s and reflects on the varying types of advice manuals suggesting the type of attire to be worn by young working women popular during the decade. She reiterates Scharf and Ware by noting that in the thirties a woman's primary concern was the domestic realm, and states that these popular how-to guides instructed women about how to get a job so that she might also get a husband.<sup>130</sup>

Todd expands her discussion of Bishop's women to include those portrayed by Kenneth Hayes Miller, Reginald Marsh and Raphael Soyer in her 1993 book *The "New Woman" Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street*.<sup>131</sup> In the introduction the author observes that the decade of the Depression "was one of accommodation between older and newer models of femininity as well as one of divisiveness among feminists, who debated notions of equality versus difference and woman-centered vs. heterosexual ideals."<sup>132</sup> She continues by noting that the representations of women by the 14th Street School artists, of whom Citron was a part, "participate in the large discourse on new womanhood and, for the most part, affirm traditional ideologies of domesticity, heterosexuality, femininity, and motherhood, [but that] none of the images, however, can be definitively linked to a single unifying conception of womanhood, or to a particular constituency of feminist viewers."<sup>133</sup> As such, one can then consider Citron's images of women, which are at times difficult to read in terms of the artist's feminist concerns, in relation to the images by Marsh, Miller, Soyer and Bishop taken into account by Todd.

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<sup>129</sup> Todd, "Isabel Bishop: The Question of Difference."

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>131</sup> Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised*.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., xxvii.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.



In her book *Hope in Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, historian Kathy Lee Peiss examines not artistic representations of women as does Todd, but rather beauty culture and the growing significance of cosmetics during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in America.<sup>134</sup> She points out, as will be shown in relation to Citron's "Femininities" images, that the burgeoning cosmetics industry, early in the century at least, was dominated by women. Peiss deals with the history of cosmetics and the cosmetics industry, in addition to considering the implications the industry had for both black and white women. She also reflects upon the marketing and advertising used to promote beauty products. Also useful for this project is Peiss's discussion of the cinema and the ways in which Hollywood icons used cosmetics and what this meant for the typical American woman. Although the author focuses only a little attention on the use of cosmetics during the Depression era, the history of the beauty industry in the twenties and very early thirties provides an excellent context for Citron's "Femininities."

One of the primary components of this project is to place Citron's Depression-era works, particularly those comprising her three major series, within the larger historical framework of the decade's other forms of visual culture, chiefly by looking at representations of women in contemporary Hollywood films and in fashionable advertisements. Several other scholars have undertaken similar projects, including Barbara J. Coleman and Erika L. Doss.<sup>135</sup> In 1990, under the direction of Erika Doss, Barbara J. Coleman completed her master's thesis titled "Video Vamp: Images of

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<sup>134</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1998).

<sup>135</sup> Barbara J. Coleman, "Video Vamp: Images of American Women in Art and Film During the Decades of the 1930's to the 1950's (M.A. Thesis, University of Colorado, 1990). Erika L. Doss, "Images of American Women in the 1930s: Reginald Marsh and *Paramount Picture*," *Woman's Art Journal* 4 (Fall-Winter, 1983-1984): 1-4.

American Women in Art and film During the decades of the 1930's to the 1950's." As stated in her abstract, the thesis proposes the "dualistic meaning [of film and art] as both mythical and realistic reflections of American economic and social conditions during these decades."<sup>136</sup> In her chapter on the 1930s, Coleman discusses the 1932 film *Red Dust* in comparison to images by Isabel Bishop and Thomas Hart Benton, arguing that "all mirror the more palliative policies of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal . . . [b]y espousing traditional values of hard work, perseverance, community, pragmatism and social mobility."<sup>137</sup>

Several years prior to this thesis, Coleman's advisor, Professor Erika L. Doss also looked to images of women in the 1930s, specifically in reference to Reginald Marsh's *Paramount Picture*. Doss argues that representations of the cinema as used by Marsh in this particular image "provide a glimpse of the manner in which popular entertainment contributed to the formation, and transmission, of American social attitudes" at the time.<sup>138</sup> She discusses movie culture in the thirties, film history, and trends in female employment in her analysis of Marsh's picture.

A number of sources were consulted for advertising images, including issues of *McCall's*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and the *New York Times*. Perhaps the most fascinating resource, however, is a book edited by Jim Heimann titled *All-American Ads: 30s*.<sup>139</sup> While the advertisements found on the microfilms of the magazines were useful for the project, the images in Heimann's text are breathtakingly reproduced and cover a wide range of products from alcohol and tobacco to fashion and beauty to food and

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<sup>136</sup> Coleman, iii.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>138</sup> Mary Ann Calo, Introduction to Doss, "Images of American Women in the 1930s," 295.

<sup>139</sup> Jim Heimann, ed., *All-American Ads: 30s*, with an introduction by Steven Heller (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2003).

beverage.<sup>140</sup> Each page of the book is comprised of up to four reproductions, but many are devoted to a full page single image. If there is a shortcoming with the book, it is that the reference for each advertisement tends to be rather general, citing either the category of product and date (Gloves, 1930, for example), or the magazine and year (McCall's, 1933). Nonetheless, for anyone researching visual culture and or advertising of the Depression decade, this book is an essential source.

Additionally, Mee-Ae Kim's thesis, "Defining Womanhood: Images of Women in Advertisements in *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1890-1930" provides adept insights into the "changing role and ideology regarding women in American society" between the years under consideration.<sup>141</sup> Kim demonstrates that the images of women found in America's most popular mass-market magazine "represent a certain set of existing ideals about the role of the woman in relation to herself, to men, to her family and to society in general."<sup>142</sup> It is interesting to compare these advertising images with Citron's paintings of women, in relation to how Citron's representations engaged with the established set of societal ideologies as exemplified by the advertisements.

Furthermore, Citron's figures, her women in particular, will be compared to Hollywood representations of women, and a number of film-studies sources have been consulted for this project, including classic texts by Marjorie Rosen and Molly Haskell, and more recent scholarly contributions by Mick LaSalle and Thomas Doherty.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Other categories covered include the following: industry, interiors, travel, entertainment, consumer products and automobiles.

<sup>141</sup> Mee-Ae Kim, "Defining Womanhood: Images of Women in Advertisements in *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1890-1930" (M.A. Thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1992), 1.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (New York: Avon, 1973). Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). LaSalle, *Complicated Women*. Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood:*

First published in the early 1970s, when, in the words of the author, “the rhetoric of the women’s movement [was] peaking [and] was at its most romantically utopian,” and then reissued in a second edition in the late 1980s, Molly Haskell’s *From Reverence to Rape* remains one of the decisive studies on women in the movies.<sup>144</sup> The chapter most useful for this project is the one devoted to the thirties and she opens with a brief discussion of the ways in which women were portrayed as truly liberated in the years between 1930 and 1934. They were, she observes, “conceived of as having sexual desire without being freaks, villains, or even necessarily Europeans, [and that women] were entitled to initiate sexual encounters to pursue men, even to embody certain ‘male’ characteristics without being stigmatized as ‘unfeminine’ or ‘predatory.’” Nor, she continues “was their sexuality thought of as cunning or destructive . . . rather, it was unabashedly front and center.”<sup>145</sup> Haskell looks at the differences between the sexualized women shown before 1934 and the responsible “working woman” of the post-Code era. Most beneficial for this project, in all the film studies sources consulted, are the discussions of women in the pre-Code era, the years which correspond to the years Citron created her femininities. Images of women in pre-Code Hollywood films, in addition to the later yet notable exception of the 1939 blockbuster *The Women*, will be used as a comparison for Citron’s “Femininities.”

Like Haskell, Marjorie Rosen divides her book into sections devoted to each decade of the twentieth century. The author uses film to study the ways women view themselves in each decade because film are, she says “mirror[s] held up to society’s

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*Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

<sup>144</sup> Haskell, vii.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

porous face [and that they] reflect the changing societal image of women.”<sup>146</sup> The cinema woman, Rosen observes, “is a Popcorn Venus, a delectable but insubstantial hybrid of cultural distortions.”<sup>147</sup>

Film historian Mick LaSalle argues, as did Haskell, that the best years for women’s pictures were “the five years between the point that talkies became widely accepted in 1929 through July 1934, when the dread and draconian Production Code became the law of Hollywoodland.”<sup>148</sup> After the implementation of the Code, women were prevented from having fun, he continues.<sup>149</sup> The Code prohibited women from being “assertive, free [and] happy,” and it is LaSalle’s intention here to “reclaim them and the pictures they left us.”<sup>150</sup> While seeming to be fairly thorough in terms of a discussion on the types of women portrayed in pre-Code films, with an emphasis on, and entire chapter dedicated to, Greta Garbo and Norma Shearer, the text contains no footnotes, thereby making it difficult to do follow-up research on LaSalle’s statements. Nonetheless, LaSalle’s book serves as a worthwhile introduction to the history of women in film during the thirties and the appendix is useful in providing an alphabetical list of films and where they can be found (available on video, seen on Turner Classic Movies, owned by Fox/not yet available).<sup>151</sup>

Thomas Doherty, in *Pre-Code Hollywood*, focuses, to some extent on women in the movies and, like the other authors already discussed, looks particularly at the four years between 1930, when the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America

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<sup>146</sup> Rosen, 9.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>148</sup> LaSalle, 1.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>151</sup> This appendix would be more useful if it were more comprehensive and included the year the movie was made, the main actors and even, perhaps a brief synopsis of the film.

“formally pledged to abide by the Production Code, until July 2, 1934, when the MPPDA empowered the Production Code Administration to enforce it . . .” and he mentions several hundred films within this comprehensive tome, giving a dynamic and fairly detailed discussion of many of them.<sup>152</sup> During this so-called pre-Code era, censorship, Doherty tells us, was relatively lax and “Hollywood did not adhere to the strict regulations on matters of sex, vice, violence and moral meaning . . . [and for four years] the Code commandments were violated with impunity and inventiveness in a series of wildly eccentric films.”<sup>153</sup> While the main body of the book is devoted to films produced between 1930 and 1934, equally noteworthy are the book’s appendices. Appendix 1 includes the text of the Production Code, while Appendix 2 is the addenda to the 1930 Code and Appendix 3 lists amendments to the Code. Most film studies books look at the Code, discuss its history, and provide some generalized statements regarding the contents of the Code and the ramifications it had on film. Being able to read the actual code, addenda and amendments in Doherty’s appendices makes the text invaluable for any study involving films of the Depression era.

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<sup>152</sup> Doherty, 2. See comprehensive film index at the back of the text.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2

### SOCIAL SATIRE AND IMAGES OF WOMEN

Between a frightened master and a resentful slave, no true love is possible. Only as men become strong enough, self-confident enough, and integrated enough, can they tolerate and finely enjoy self-actualizing women, women who are full human beings. But, in principle, no man fulfills himself without such a woman. Therefore strong men and strong women are the condition of each other, for neither can exist without the other.

---A.H. Maslow<sup>154</sup>

A lifelong self-proclaimed feminist, New York artist Minna Citron upheld an interest in women and women's rights, and included her concerns over such issues in several canvases during the early 1930s that were part of an early solo New York show.<sup>155</sup> Held in 1935 at Midtown Galleries, "Feminanities" caricatured the shallowness and narcissism of contemporary women's culture.<sup>156</sup> In the forward to the exhibition's catalog, Louis Weitzenkorn wrote that Citron's "satirical adventures into the dreadful results of modern civilization on human beings have a shattering effect upon ones [*sic*] complacency. In spite of the seeming cruelty of the characters, there is always a transparent tenderness and sympathy for the creatures, that once were men and women, whom she draws. Her attack upon the shallowness of the modern woman's vanity . . . should curl the hair of beauty experts and take the wave out of their victims."<sup>157</sup> The show, full of witty and satirical representational works, assailed the vanity and foibles of

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<sup>154</sup> This quote from psychologist A.H. Maslow appears on several scraps of paper in Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado, and in Citron and Gelb. See Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971).

<sup>155</sup> Her first solo show, in 1930, was held at the New School for Social Research, and her second solo exhibition took place in 1932 at the Brownell-Lambertson Gallery. With "Feminanities" Citron joined the Midtown Cooperative Gallery and "was firmly established as an artist working in New York." Citron and Resseguier, 3.

<sup>156</sup> To date, after extensive investigative work, the author has been unable to locate the following works, or reproductions of the works, listed in the exhibition catalog: *Pelé*, *Contemplation*, *Nude*, *Display*, and *What Keeps the Doctor?*.

<sup>157</sup> Weitzenkorn.

modern women. The women she chose to portray were often homely members of the lower middle class.<sup>158</sup> Of these figures, Karal Ann Marling and Helen Harrison have noted that the artist felt a “bond” with them, since, while working on the series, she was seeing a psychoanalyst on a regular basis, her marriage was breaking apart, and, according to the authors, she was thus better able to identify with women, rather than men, as subject matter.<sup>159</sup> Following a period in psychoanalysis, Citron decided to divorce her husband and in the psychologically telling “Gambling Series,” her second major series of the decade discussed in chapter three, the artist directs her attention not to women, but rather to the men encountered during her divorce trip to Reno, Nevada.

In “Feminanities” she explores what has been called the “shallow” and “frivolous” everyday trivial activities with which lower middle-class women concern themselves, including purchasing new cosmetic products, or spending the day at a beauty parlor.<sup>160</sup> On the other hand, in addition to these self-absorbed characters, a working woman sells newspapers in one canvas and newspaper boys do the same in another. With these two canvases, the always-critical Citron comments, as we shall see, on the plight of women and children during Depression. Citron is often characterized as a Social Realist because at times she alludes to contemporary socio-political events, such as the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby and the ensuing trial of Bruno Hauptmann, in *Grist to the Mill*, and to the Scottsboro boys in Alabama in *Subway Technique*. Also as part of the show she included, among other subjects, the previously discussed representation of

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<sup>158</sup> “Minna Citron as a Caricaturist,” *Art Digest* 9 (May 1, 1935): 18. Stephen Gayle, “Daily Closeup: Portrait of the Artist,” *New York Post*, Wednesday May 12, 1976. Both sources use the terms “vanity” and “foibles” to describe the series.

<sup>159</sup> Marling and Harrison, 26.

<sup>160</sup> Marling and Harrison, 26. “Minna Citron as a Caricaturist,” 18. The authors of both use the term “shallow” to describe these paintings.



herself, aptly titled *Self Expression* (Figure 1), suggesting that her own work, too, is a “femininity.” Regardless of specific subject, all of the “Femininities” works become visual representations of the artist’s sardonic outlook toward humanity as a whole and, more often than not, toward members of her own sex, during the early years of the 1930s.

### **Citron and Feminism in the Thirties**

Early in her artistic career, Citron declared herself to be feminist and she continued to believe in women’s rights and equality throughout her life.<sup>161</sup> Citron’s feminism, in spite of the fact that she came of age during the pre-suffrage years, did not develop out of an organized movement. And, as we shall see, no single well-defined theoretical feminist ideology existed during the thirties. Rather Citron’s feminism seems to have been a practical type of feminism grounded in her personal experience and based on her beliefs about equality and independence, more in line with post-suffrage women interested in the rhetoric of equality. Her early images of women, however, are far from immediately recognizable as empowering, and she often portrays unattractive lower-class women engaging in stereotypically feminine activities. Her women fail to take advantage of opportunities provided for them by the earlier generation of feminists. Instead, in an attempt to beautify themselves, they buy cosmetic products, have their hair done, and get manicures. Consequently, at first glance, her early images of women appear to be potentially misogynistic depictions of women in less-than-fashionable clothing—women whom she seemingly chastises.

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<sup>161</sup> Ekedal and Robinson note that the artist has “been active in the women’s movement, becoming a director of the Pan American Women’s Association in the 1950s, and was honored as Woman of the Year by the Women’s Caucus for Art in 1985.” Ekedal and Robinson, 14. To date, however, I have yet to find any documentation in the Citron archives that the artist was a member in any kind of formal feminist organization during the thirties.

However, the images came from the point of view of a self-proclaimed feminist and an advocate for women's rights. In spite of an overriding trend toward domesticity during the 1930s, the independent Citron began moving away from her upper middle-class lifestyle, first by attending art schools and thereby beginning a new career, and second by deciding, at the height of the Depression, to divorce her husband, to take the children and move to Manhattan as a single working mother. Severing the ties to her domineering husband suited her independent nature and, we can assume, was empowering for her. Citron considered her situation and chose to do what was best for her rather than remaining in an unhappy domestic arrangement. In "Feminanities" the artist applies satire and ambiguity as a route toward empowerment. She ridicules, mocks and chastises to raise the public's consciousness about the state of feminism, women's rights, and larger social issues of the day.

In order to further understand Citron's approach to feminism and what her relationship with that ideological system may have been, before looking specifically at the images, one must consider what it meant to be a feminist during the Depression decade. In the early 1930s Citron had begun to make a name for herself in the art world. At the same time, the feminist movement had undergone some significant changes, and the feminists of the 1930s played a different role within society than those of the previous generation. The definition of feminism in the thirties was changing, and Citron's view of feminism was perhaps atypical from those of the majority of women during the Depression decade.

Prior to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, feminists were interested in and participated in social reform and political activism. As Estelle Freedman

outlines in her essay “Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930,” most early feminists in the nineteenth century “did not adopt the radical demands for equal status for men . . . .”<sup>162</sup> Instead they chose to develop a “separate female sphere . . . one in which women could be free to create their own form of personal, social and political relationships,” and they used these associations to build separate female institutions that promoted their causes.<sup>163</sup> By the 1920s Freedman continues, this “self-consciously female community began to disintegrate . . . as the ‘new women’ were attempting to assimilate [themselves] into male dominated institutions.”<sup>164</sup> She argues that this younger generation’s interest in integrating male values into their previously separate organizations ultimately led to the decline of public feminism in the post-suffrage era.<sup>165</sup> The increasingly popular “rhetoric of equality,” as Freedman defines it, “subverted the women’s movement by denying the need for continued feminist organization.”<sup>166</sup> As such, feminists in the twenties and thirties “turned away from collective goals to concentrate on individual fulfillment.”<sup>167</sup> Lois Scharf argues, however, that the “female social reformers of the 1920s have been re-discovered and presented as an alternative image of womanhood.”<sup>168</sup> She discusses a feminism that advocated the right of women to work in spite of the increasingly dominant image of domesticity that was developing throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s.

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<sup>162</sup> Estelle Freedman, “Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930,” in *U.S. Women in Struggle: A Feminist Studies Anthology*, ed. Claire Goldberg Moses and Heidi Hartmann (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 73.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. Freedman cites, for example, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) as having “roots in the social feminist tradition of separate institution building.” Ibid., 76

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 80. Freedman continues by observing that external factors “including the new Freudian views of women, the growth of a consumer economy that increasingly exploited women’s sexuality, and the repression of radicalism and reform in general after World War I” also affected the future of the feminist movement.

<sup>167</sup> Todd, *The “New Woman” Revised*, 33.

<sup>168</sup> Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*, 21.

Suffrage was won a decade before Citron began proclaiming her feminist interests in painted form, and for several generations prior to the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 middle-class feminists had been united in their campaign for electoral reform.<sup>169</sup> By the second decade of the twentieth century, more women were attending universities, were enjoying greater freedom and were taking advantage of more choices than had ever been available to their Victorian mothers and grandmothers. For example, in terms of the workforce, during the twenties the number of women working as professionals increased 50%, and the number of married women who worked increased 25%.<sup>170</sup> Women were able to enter professional fields that have traditionally been reserved for men, including real estate, retail and banking, and took advantage of the development of new vocational options including working in beauty parlors and at cosmetics counters, sites that Citron took for two of her own sardonic compositions.<sup>171</sup> These young liberated “new” women were the flappers of the 1920s, and in spite of the advances gained by the previous generation many of these young women were interested

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<sup>169</sup> Woloch, 325-361. In chapter 14, titled “Feminism and Suffrage, 1860-1920,” Woloch discusses all of the chief advocates for suffrage, including, among others, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Chapman Catt, Anna Howard Shaw, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Crystal Eastman, organizations formed to aid in the campaign (American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)), and the ramifications of their actions.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 388, 391. In her essay on Reginald Marsh’s movie pictures, Erika Doss confirms this flood of women into the workforce, using statistics from William Chafe, *The American Woman, Her changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University, 1972), 89. Doss notes that “number of professional women increased by 460,000 and business women by over 100,000.” By contrast, however, while nearly 10 million women were employed at the beginning of the Depression in 1930, by the end of the year approximately one-fifth had lost their jobs, and, according to reports from the National Industrial Conference Board and the American Federation of Labor, almost 60% of the unemployed labor force in 1936 was comprised of women. Doss, “Images of American Women,” 3.

<sup>171</sup> Woloch, 391. The new vocations in beauty parlors and cosmetics counters were significant. One’s appearance became so important during the twenties that the number of beauty parlors across the country, which had up to that point been patronized solely by the well-to-do, increased dramatically. Mee-Ae Kim, 66. Kim continues by noting that by 1928 nearly 30,000 beauty parlors were in existence and that approximately 1.825 billion dollars were spent on cosmetics, cosmetics, manicures and the like.

in entering the workforce simply as a means to an end—to find a husband.<sup>172</sup> Much of the ideology of “womanhood” during the twenties revolved, not around joining together to fight for women’s rights, but rather around reaching and maintaining the established idealized standards of beauty—to look attractive and have a youthful appearance so as to find, and ultimately keep, the love of a man.<sup>173</sup> These “new” women had little interest in organized feminism, and, in some instances, even equated feminism with loneliness and being unmarried.<sup>174</sup> In theory, at least according to Ware, “these younger women took for granted the right to a college education, their ability to enter whatever professions they chose, their right to vote and hold office, their free choice between marriage and career. . . . So much progress had occurred that younger women believed they no longer had to fight for their basic rights.”<sup>175</sup>

The lack of an organized movement among women, according to Susan Ware in her book *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal*, ultimately led scholars to overlook women’s efforts and advancements during the period under consideration in this thesis. However, Ware points out, there were a tremendous amount of opportunities afforded to

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<sup>172</sup> As Mary P. Ryan discusses in her article of women in the movies during the 1920s, “The cheerful camaraderie and spunky optimism characteristic of the working-girl flapper stemmed from the assumption that her job tenure would be brief. The avenue of escape was predictable enough: matrimony.” Mary P. Ryan, “The Projection of a New Womanhood: The Movie Moderns in the 1920’s,” in Scharf and Jensen, 122.

<sup>173</sup> Kim, 67. Kim observes that “Everywhere women turned idealized images of beauty stared out at them, urging self-examination—to scrutinize their appearance, constantly compare and ask whether they reached, or even came close to reaching the beauty standard.” Ibid. Although, as Lois Scharf points out, not all women were solely concerned with makeup and finding a husband. There were women reformers working toward equality during the 1920s, and the most visible group was the National Women’s Party (NWP). This feminist organization proposed, in 1923, an equal rights amendment and fought primarily for economic independence. Members “made the employment of married women a major plank in their platform, and they alone recognized, publicized, and protested discriminatory practices encountered by working wives.” Scharf, *To Work or to Wed*, 22, 35.

<sup>174</sup> Woloch, 387-388.

<sup>175</sup> Ware, *Holding their Own*, 111.

women under the umbrella of President Roosevelt's New Deal Program.<sup>176</sup> While not organized under a single banner, as had been the previous generation of feminists who fought for suffrage and equal rights, the women of the 1930s were encouraged nonetheless to participate in politics, to develop and oversee a variety of social welfare programs, and to take on an "unprecedented role in the public sphere."<sup>177</sup> Female leaders, in all realms of society including the art world, went to college and developed "a high consciousness of their special roles in public life as women reformers. These were the women who supplied most of the administration of the New Deal, who kept the women's organizations and voluntary associations alive in the Depression, who rallied to protest laws that discriminated against women on the federal and state level."<sup>178</sup> They were, however, as has already been suggested, a relatively small group who did not necessarily inspire the masses in the ways in which their predecessors had done. Feminism as a movement during the 1930s was more or less "crippled by lack of vision and uninspiring leadership," and the few female administrators and leaders who held positions of power generally neglected to recruit the next generation.<sup>179</sup> As a result a true continuation of the feminist activism of the first two decades of the twentieth century does not occur again until the late 1960s.

With the onset of the Great Depression came a reactionary move in terms of feminist roles and issues. Women were once again encouraged to remain at home so as to allow the men to be the family's breadwinner. According to polls taken during the Great Depression, over 80% of Americans were opposed to women working. In fact, all levels

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<sup>176</sup> Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*, 1-2.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>178</sup> Ware, *Holding their Own*, 111.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 94. See also: Genevieve Parkhurst, "Is Feminism Dead?" *Harpers* 170 (May 1935): 734-745.

of government during the thirties passed legislation limiting women's rights to work, and in some cases women were even forced to resign their positions so that men could work.<sup>180</sup> Less than one quarter of American women were employed outside the home as teachers, nurses, domestic servants, factory workers or as secretaries.<sup>181</sup>

Writer Dorothy Bromley, in the late 1920s, revised the vision of the New Woman as one who was "well dressed, fond of men, and interested in a full life that included pursuits outside the home as well as marriage and children. She valued her career for its creative outlets and for the economic self-sufficiency it provided. . . . [She believed] that as a collective entity women were frequently narrow, strident, and petty. She believed in being chic [and] . . . maintained a belief in monogamy and marital bond. Within her companionate marriage, however, the new feminist demanded greater freedom, honesty, and intimacy."<sup>182</sup> Bromley's new woman, reports Todd, "accepts woman's right to work and participate in the democratic process and is interested in self-fulfillment rather than selfless devotion to an ideal of duty and submissiveness."<sup>183</sup>

Film historian Molly Haskell demonstrates that in the popular culture of the time, working-women often give in to love, marriage and home.<sup>184</sup> The working-woman in the films of the thirties is never a career figure interested in a lifelong pursuit of a vocation. Love, Haskell observes, "was a woman's career, and there was an entire genre devoted to

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<sup>180</sup> See Lynn D. Gordon, "Education and the Professions," in *A Companion to American Women's History*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 2002): 243. Gordon continues by noting that "Federal, state and local governments passed laws limiting married women's right to work in various professions and occupations; teachers, in particular, suffered from this legislation." On the other hand, Ware explains that because so many jobs during the thirties were segregated, women maintained a certain amount of job protection. Ware, *Holding their Own*, 35.

<sup>181</sup> Ware, *Holding their Own*, 21, 24. Ware sites the 1930 census for her statistical information noting that in 1930 nearly 11 million women were employed in the above-mentioned fields.

<sup>182</sup> Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised*, 32-33.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>184</sup> Haskell 141-152.

her exploits in this arena, a genre that, like the Gothic romance, could rise to the heights of art, or indulge in endless self-pity, could confirm woman's choice, or challenge the entire social foundation on which it was based."<sup>185</sup>

In painting, too, when working women are portrayed by Isabel Bishop, for example, they are not lifelong career women, but rather young women presumably working only until they found a husband.<sup>186</sup> Bishop, like Citron, believed in "women," but "she did not advocate 'feminism' in the sense of women's collective endeavors."<sup>187</sup> When asked later in life about her own viewpoint on feminism during the thirties Citron remarked: "I think I've always been a feminist and [have always been] fighting women's battles but they weren't organized in those years, you see? And since then . . . women have been more organized . . . I haven't had time to do much protesting. But my feelings were there."<sup>188</sup> The artist, it seems, was interested in fighting for women's rights, but the lack of organization in the thirties, as compared to the early decades of the century or the early years of modern feminism in the seventies, made it difficult to accomplish any broad social changes. Regarding the roles of women in society during her early career versus more contemporary roles, Citron observed: "Well, I think women [now] are more cognisant [*sic*] making choices and taking responsibility . . . "<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 151-152.

<sup>186</sup> During the 1930s young women, "white, native-born, unmarried, and recently out of high school," (much like Isabel Bishop's young office girls) who employed as clerical workers dominated the work force. Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised*, 283. Todd also reports that a 1930 Census report indicated 18.3 percent of women working clerical jobs were married, and by the middle of the decade that number had dropped. Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised*, 284. Lois Scharf tells us that the "proportion of employed females to the total working population grew from 16.5 percent in 1890 to 20.2 percent in 1920." Scharf, 11. By the Depression years, Scharf continues, the "proportion of women in all professions pursuits declined from 14.2 percent to 12.3 percent . . . so that the overall distribution of women in this classification was barely higher in 1940 than it had been twenty years earlier." Scharf, 86.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>188</sup> Citron, *Seasons of Life: 711.1-711.3*, 22-23.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 24.



For Citron, then, feminism meant autonomy and equality of the sexes and individualism; she opposed existing double standards. Independent by nature, the artist desired to make her own decisions, both personal and professional, without hindrance from a husband who tied her down or held her back. She wanted to make a name for herself in the male-dominated art world and “Feminanities” was an expression of her search for direction in life at a time when her marriage was breaking apart.<sup>190</sup> Ultimately, Citron’s desire for a self-reliant lifestyle led her to seek a divorce from her husband, the artistic ramifications of which will be discussed further in chapter three. By the time Citron began to emerge from the cocoon of upper middle-class domesticity within which she had been immersed for over a decade, the ideology of feminism had been transformed into something different from what it had once been.

### **Women and Satire**

In spite of the “uninspiring leadership” and “lack of vision” of the feminist movement in the thirties, Citron remained faithful to her belief in women’s rights throughout the decade and, beginning with “Feminanities,” created ironic canvases portraying women, including herself—as seen in *Self-Expression* (Figures 1 and 2)—in and around Union Square. Her hard-working, albeit it somewhat caricatured, self-portrait, permeated with references to a contemporary film icon, her working environment, and the part of the city in which she lived, is witty and telling in terms of what it reveals about the artist. In her representational art, even the early “Feminanities” series, Citron demonstrates “the individuality of man,” or woman as the case may be, including her

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<sup>190</sup> Marling and Harrison, 26. Citron is quoted as saying of her representations of women, “All I try to do is hold a mirror to the unlovely facets of a woman’s mind.”

own individuality.<sup>191</sup> Her biting wit, somewhat expressed in *Self-Expression*, takes center stage in two other femininities, *Hope Springs Eternal/Bargain Basement* and *Beauty Culture*, both of which were motivated, in part, by her feminist leanings (Figure 14 and Figure 31). While the feminists of the first two decades of the twentieth century had fought for suffrage, equality and the rights of women, many of their descendants, as has been discussed and much to Citron's surprise, failed to take advantage of the opportunities before them. Too many of her own sex, the artist believed, focused on the trivial and the inconsequential, things such as make up and manicures, for example, rather than on the fact that the world had been opened up to them.<sup>192</sup> *New York World-Telegram* staff writer Geraldine Sartain, in a review of "Femininities", wrote the following of Citron: "She [the artist] believes woman is in conflict, for she's [woman] been preoccupied too many generations with the small things and now that the world is opening up to her, her mind doesn't mature rapidly enough to permit her to seize it and bend it to her will."<sup>193</sup> Disgusted by such convictions, Citron lampooned these women in *Hope Springs Eternal*, calling them "silly" in their futile hope of being transformed into ravishing figures. When discussing the choice of subject matter for *Hope Springs Eternal* and *Beauty Culture*, Citron told Sartain: "I used the beauty parlor and the cold cream and lotion counter motif because there are those silly women everlastingly hoping against hope that beauty will be theirs. Women are such children; I want to see them adult."<sup>194</sup> Consequently, her canvases then become chastising images of these women and their trivial interests.

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<sup>191</sup> Minna Citron, Unpublished letter, Denver Archives, 1954.

<sup>192</sup> See Geraldine Sartain, "Woman Artist Tries to Ridicule Feminine Silliness with Brush," *New York World Telegram*, 19 April 1935, in Minna Citron Archives, Denver Colorado.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Citron, in Sartain.

Citron's painted women stand for the thousands of women across the country who were beginning to embrace the cosmetics industry by the early twentieth century.<sup>195</sup> In the early nineteenth century most women in America were interested in cosmetic products (lotions, creams and other skin protecting substances) more so than in makeup, per se (what we typically think of as rouges, eye shadows, and lipsticks). Access to information about such products abounded with the mid-century publishing boom as guides to fashion and beauty proliferated.<sup>196</sup> In fact, most nineteenth-century moralists saw makeup/face paint as "corporeal hypocrisy," as a "display of female hypocrisy and vanity," and encouraged women to "shun paints and artifice in the service of new notions of female virtue and natural beauty."<sup>197</sup> This perception, however, began to change during the latter decades of the nineteenth century—as middle-class women began engaging in more social activities, the fashion industry/economy flourished, and new urban sites of consumption grew, and ultimately had profound ramifications for the cosmetics industry leading into the next century.<sup>198</sup> As the notion of women's consumer culture began to emerge around the turn of the century, women's interests in beauty products grew.<sup>199</sup> Prior to World War I, "painted women," outside the urban metropolis of New York City, where makeup had become a growing phenomenon, often remained

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<sup>195</sup> In her book on America's Beauty Culture, Kathy Peiss, Professor of American History at the University of Pennsylvania, writes about the development of American's cosmetics industry and the ways in which women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries used makeup and cosmetic products to express themselves and their roles within society. Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1998), x.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 9-10, 14. National advertising, however, did not come to the fore until the mid 1910s when, between 1915 and 1930, mass-circulation magazines expanded from \$1.3 million to \$16 million, and during which time "toiletries placed third among all classes of goods advertised in magazines generally, second in women's magazines, and fifth in newspapers." Ibid., 106.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 24, 26, 38.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 50-51. Peiss notes that cosmetics sales grew incrementally in the thirty years between 1870 and 1900, but quickly thereafter began to accelerate. While retail outlets helped to boost cosmetics sales early in the twentieth century, druggists, says Peiss, remained the primary distributors.

spectacles and were often thought to be prostitutes.<sup>200</sup> After the war, however, a burgeoning mass market cosmetics industry, run initially at least by women including Elizabeth Arden and Helen Rubinstein among others, took root, and tens of thousands of women purchased cosmetics products.<sup>201</sup> Along with these products, by the 1930s women could buy detailed how-to manuals, which provided instructions on how to apply creams, lipstick, rouge and eye shadow; what several decades before had been criticized as paint was now celebrated as *glamour*.<sup>202</sup>

It is this glamour that Citron's women are attempting, in vain, to acquire. In *Hope Springs Eternal*, Citron presents a basement cosmetics counter, as designated by the sign located in front of the central bisecting Corinthian column, and a group of homely looking women crowds around the counter.<sup>203</sup> The column, traditionally used in much ancient Roman architecture, becomes here a symbol of the fading grandeur of Citron's spinsters. The issue of class is noteworthy here, and given the location at which these women have chosen to shop, the basement of the department store, and the slightly out-of-style clothing they wear, the viewer can easily surmise that they are probably among the lower middle-class. Were they not of such modest means, they could afford to patronize, like their wealthier upper-class counterparts, the high end, more expensive counters located within the department store's main floors, as seen for example in a 1942

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<sup>200</sup> Peiss continues her discussion by remarking that public authorities continued in their Puritanical attempts to "preserve the older ideal of womanly beauty," with some even proposing legislation making it illegal for women under the age of 44 to wear makeup "for the purpose of creating a false impression." *Ibid.*, 55, 168.

<sup>201</sup> In the two decades between 1909 and 1929, the number of American cosmetics manufacturers doubled and the factory value of their products swelled from 14.2 million dollars to 141 million dollars. *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>203</sup> Peiss observes that in the 1930s, at Macy's Department Store, working women bought the largest amount of rouges and lipsticks "crowding onto the selling floor during their lunch hour sniffing powder compacts and "pay[ing] anything for Tangee, Incarnat, Indelible or Rubinstein's lipstick." *Ibid.*, 171.

photograph of R. H. Macy's toiletries department (Figure 15).<sup>204</sup> By the 1930s, upper-, middle- and working-class women flocked to exclusive cosmetics salons and department stores to purchase their pricey makeup products, while inexpensive brands could be bought in variety stores and from door-to-door salesmen.<sup>205</sup> Citron's women, while indeed shopping in the department store, are, by financial necessity, patronizing the *bargain* basement counter. Their clothing, to be discussed in more detail below, also provides a telling revelation of their social status, for while they are not dressed in the tattered rags of the poor lower classes, neither are they dressed in the most up-to-date and fashionable styles.

One who is, however, dressed stylishly is the beautiful well-proportioned slender blonde clerk. Complete with an aqua-colored ribbon tying back her perfectly coiffed hair, she attempts to sell a new kind of face cream, one that purportedly will make these homely customers stunning. In her right hand she holds a jar of cream, while with the left she paints her lower cheek with the cream. The artist masterfully renders this vignette of daily life, as the women wedge themselves into the confined space around the counter, anxiously waiting to throw away their hard earned dollars on a product that will allegedly keep them forever young and gorgeous. Six figures, with varying degrees of interest and excitement, and with ungainly postures and unattractive facial features, swarm around the counter.<sup>206</sup> A seventh patron, who wears an aqua colored coat with brown fur collar, blue

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<sup>204</sup> Confirming this notion that wealthy customers shopped in the department stores, Peiss informs her readers that "for the affluent consumer, department stores brought beauty secrets into a new urban setting of publicity and spectacle. . . . A Macy's executive proudly told perfumer manufacturers in 1909 that department stores intentionally 'lured' women 'to the counters by playing on their sense of smell.'" Chain drugstores, and variety stores, sold bargain brands of cosmetics. In rural areas, one could purchase cosmetic products either from mail-order businesses or from door-to-door salespersons. Peiss, 51-52.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>206</sup> The circular compositional format used here is repeated in a number of Citron's compositions dating to the thirties, including several of the gambling images to be discussed in the following chapter.

hat and clutches a purple purse in her left hand, stands at and is cut off by the far right edge of the composition, exiting the scene as if she has just purchased the miracle cream.

Hovering in the background, and anchoring the congregation, a tall ungainly black woman peers over the heads of the other women. While the viewer is unable to see her entire body, one can see her rounded face and neck awkwardly lurching toward the counter, her red lipstick-covered mouth open in utterance. This expression adds no attractiveness to the figure, but rather emphasizes one of her missing front teeth. Wearing a purple coat and bright pink hat, a color echoed in the floral skirt bottom of one figure, the blouse of the salesgirl, and the accessories of two other shoppers, she is the only non-white figure in the composition. Peiss observes that “commercialized beauty was . . . a problem of politics [because] cosmetics were never far removed from the fact of white supremacy, the goal of racial progress, the question of emulation.”<sup>207</sup> In the late nineteenth century many cosmetics manufacturers reinforced racial bigotry with claims of being able to lighten African American skin. And while by the thirties a new aesthetic for African Americans was in place, controversy over cosmetics products and the advertising of those products to blacks continued.<sup>208</sup>

Opposite the sales girl, and closest to the viewer, is a white-haired woman wearing a tan overcoat, red hat and large pearl earrings. She clutches a purple purse in her left hand and listens attentively to the sales pitch of the perky blonde before her. Most notable is her extremely long and pointed nose protruding from an otherwise well-

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<sup>207</sup> She continues by noting that “with the rise of new movements for racial solidarity in the 1910s and 1920s, skin color and hair texture—and the use of cosmetics to alter them—became ever more charged political issues. . . . Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) proclaimed not only a new political destiny for the masses of African Americans, but a new aesthetic for dark-skinned people. . . . Condemnations of bleaching and straightening rang out in African American political journals.” *Ibid.*, 203, 208-209.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

proportioned face, one of a number of exaggerated and caricatured features to be seen among the group of shoppers. To her right is a red-haired woman sporting a purple coat, the main feature of which is the massive fur collar rising up behind her elongated neck and head, reaching nearly to the crown of her skull. The lime green hat complements her red hair and serves as a harmonious accent to the merchant's skirt and vest, while the red collar of her dress, the edge of which can be seen under the coat's fur collar, echoes the red hat and skirt of the first lady, thereby allowing Citron to draw the composition together, in part, via color. Raising her eyebrows high on her forehead in amazement at the display, she opens her mouth and pulls her lips back as if uttering a long drawn out "oh," an expression which draws attention to her two slightly separated front buck teeth.

To the black woman's right is a slightly weightier, dour faced woman, also wearing a brown and black grid patterned, fur-collared coat. A tight fitting brown cap, trimmed in lace, covers her eyes. While her body turns toward the composition's right side, her head points the opposite way, her lips pull to the left in a rather awkward facial expression and with this posture and look the artist accentuates the woman's double chin. The next figure's aqua hat and jacket echo the coat of the woman at the painting's far right edge. This woman, however, is wholly engaged in the explanation of the face cream given by the clerk. The spectacled figure faces directly out toward the viewer, yet gazes intently at the blonde clerk, pursing her lips in a manner reminiscent of a stereotypical image of the prim and proper matronly schoolteacher. Lastly the viewer sees a slightly older woman, as indicated by the lines around her eyes, crammed into the small space between the prim woman in aqua and the counter attendant. She, too, directs her attention toward the jar of facial cream in hopes that a miracle may occur with its application,

thereby transforming her severe features—crooked nose and off center mouth—into something much more ravishing. Standing at the counter’s edge, squeezed into the space between the counter and the wall, she, along with the woman in aqua to her left, are situated directly in front of a large, gold-framed mirror. A traditional attribute of vanitas painting, the mirror serves as an omniscient object with the power of sight, a truth-teller whose fleeting images reflect what stands before it. The transitory nature of a mirror’s image, then, becomes symbolic of transience and points to the futility of life. Here, Citron’s mirror reflects, not the women at the counter, for it is just behind and above the main group, but rather the basement’s opposite wall upon which hangs a sign and corner column. Unlike the window of *Self-Expression*, which opens up onto and reveals part of the world in which Citron spent much of her time, the mirror in *Hope Springs Eternal* reflects nothing substantial, nothing overtly significant. However, in conjunction with the painting as a whole, it becomes symbolic. The large canvas itself, filled with its group of aging bargain shoppers, serves a mirror of the artist’s personal point of view, and it reflects her vision of feminine vanity. Her openly registered disillusionment with the fairer sex is given pictorial form here, and she uses the painting to reflect her own beliefs.

Citron’s assembly of women, with their unsightly features, surrounds the large display model of cream, set on a pedestal, located in the center of the display case. The whiteness of the oversized jar, exaggerated by the darkness behind it, takes on an ethereal glow, as the women venerate the product they desperately desire and it, in turn, functions, almost religiously, as an icon of consumerism. A barely-readable label covers the jar of cream, yet clearly written in the upper left corner of the label is the word “La,” while in the lower right corner one sees indistinct letters spelling out the word “Jolie.” Placed in



the center of the label is an abstract blue circular design that bears a resemblance to a map of the world. This same pattern, as well as the more clearly defined word “Jolie,” appears on a poster hanging on the wall directly behind the pert blonde, yet it is cut off by the left edge of the canvas. Citron’s inclusion of the term “La Jolie,” the fictive brand name of the advertised miracle product, is humorous as the word in French means “pretty.”<sup>209</sup>

Thus, her subjects hope, most likely in vain, that this cream—perhaps in conjunction with the three thousand face powders and several hundred rouges available to American consumers—will make them “pretty,” attractive, sexy, and perhaps even alluring—like the gorgeous movie stars of the day, including Marlene Dietrich and Norma Shearer among others, or the attractive models such as those seen in print ads for Maybelline, Richard Hudnut Makeup, Irresistible Perfume and Beauty Aids, and Seventeen makeup (Figures 16-21).<sup>210</sup> Peiss points out that the highly made-up movies stars, like Dietrich, Shearer or Greta Garbo, influenced how Americans—men and women—looked at women, and tells of a male college student in the thirties who chose girlfriends resembling his favorite actresses. Such behavior led young women of the time to want to emulate the clothes, hairstyles, makeup and gestures of the sexiest screen stars.<sup>211</sup> These women were persuaded, throughout the twenties and thirties by an ideology of “womanhood” promoting idealized images of beauty and by a proliferation of advertisements, to buy products that would transform them by helping them attain

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<sup>209</sup> The La Jolie Dress Company was located at 11 West 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York City, as discovered in a *New York Times* classified advertisement. *New York Times*, 2 July 1925, p. 32. Thus far, however, the author has been unable to determine whether or not La Jolie was in fact the name, also, of a cosmetics product. It is most likely that the term is used by the artist here as a clever pun.

<sup>210</sup> Peiss, 103. Peiss provides these statistics of the available products in 1930. For images, see Heimann, ed. Collected within this volume are hundreds of beautifully reproduced color advertisements originally appearing in the popular journals and magazines of the 1930s.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 191-192.

perfection.<sup>212</sup> Many women, including Citron's, were unable to achieve these so-called standards of beauty and thus, according to Peiss, were at risk for developing a low self-esteem.<sup>213</sup> The women shown in advertising images, with their perfectly coiffed hair, faultless features, perfect proportions and attractive makeup, were the ideal. The glamorous representations of these made-up women, with their glossy lipstick and eyes darkened with liner, shadow and mascara, were no longer the deplorable "painted" prostitutes of the previous century, but rather represented the model to which "regular" women of all social classes were to strive. Citron's women, however, with their pop bottle glasses, double chins and buck teeth would never, even with the aid of makeup and miracle face cream, be as sexy or as glamorous as the women found in such ads. The bargain basement shoppers of *Hope Springs Eternal*, like the figure of the artist in her self-portrait, are not idealized; they are not beautiful, nor will they ever be glamorous. If they pin all of their hopes on the fact that cosmetics will remedy their situation, they may ultimately be disappointed. These women, to some extent, signify the lack of confidence a young Citron may have felt while still a child in New Jersey. In a mid-1970's interview, Citron talked candidly about her family and her childhood and in one telling passage recounted the following: "My mother Lena was married when she was 17—she was *very* beautiful. When I would meet somebody, they'd say, 'Which Wright were you? ... Oh, Lena, the most beautiful girl in Williamsburgh. You look like your father.'"<sup>214</sup> Growing

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<sup>212</sup> Kim, 67.

<sup>213</sup> During the 1920s mass produced images of "glamorous screen stars, chic Parisiennes, aristocratic beauties, and breezy flappers" were familiar and served as the ideal to which white women were to strive. Peiss, 134. The author also notes that "For some, cosmetics use quickly became a self-diminishing habit. . . . Women reported as early as the 1930s that advertising and social pressures to be attractive lowered their self-esteem. Peiss, 6.

<sup>214</sup> Saslow, "Still Hitting all Cylinders," 34.

up, then, Citron may have felt like the women in the painting—that she needed some kind of cosmetic product to make her as beautiful and as stylish as her mother.

Moreover, the clothes worn by Citron's shoppers are not the chic contemporary fashionable items advertised in popular magazines including, for example, *Ladies' Home Journal*. The stylish hats worn by the models in a 1930 hat ad resemble the flapper hats of the twenties, tightly hugging the figure's head, yet none of Citron's women don the trendy hats (Figure 22). The "youthful fall chic" and "formal lines" of the "flattering" coats in the early 1930s were form-fitting, accenting the slender lean bodies of the models (Figure 23 and Figure 24). Citron's vivacious shop girl is the only figure in the composition sporting such a "flattering" style, with her long, fitted skirt and a vest which comes just to the top of the hips so the curve of its edges draws attention to her hips and tiny waist. The bargain hunters, by contrast, while all wearing skirts or dresses, cover themselves with big heavy, often fur-collared coats. If buttoned, the stylish coats advertised by C.M.O. Toppers, for example, would be much more form fitting than those worn by Citron's shoppers (Figure 25). Their mid-calf to ankle length coats, bulky with their big fur collars, are neither the "smart styles" nor the "smart lengths" (falling either just below the hips or to the mid-thigh region) appearing in ads and stores at the time. These lower to lower middle-class bargain shoppers are futilely spending their hard earned dollars on makeup and not on stylish designer clothing.

The women of *Hope Springs Eternal* hope to make themselves beautiful through artificial means; they resemble in no way the typical Western classical ideal of beauty identified with the arts of Ancient Greece, Rome and the Italian Renaissance. In *Cold Comfort* Citron makes more specific reference to this long-standing ideal by including as

the focal point a classical statue (Figure 26). Such classical icons of antiquity were re-popularized by the most sought-after sculptor in America between the wars, Paul Manship.<sup>215</sup> After a number of years as the premiere sculptor in America, Manship found himself being dubbed the “patron saint of Art Deco” during the twenties.<sup>216</sup> His “politically neutral . . . conservative” subjects, including, for example, the 1922 bronze *Eve* (#2) or his slightly later bronze *Standing Nude* (#1), were masterful works of “perfect craftsmanship,” and he, like his Greek predecessors “who strove to best their rivals by personal interpretation of canonic types . . . created a distinctly personal style” (Figure 27 and Figure 28).<sup>217</sup> His understanding of the body’s anatomical make-up and his ability to animate his figures distinguish him from his peers.<sup>218</sup>

By contrast, Citron takes the model of classical beauty, as filtered through Manship, and makes it manly by emphasizing the figure’s muscularity. Her figure appears more closely related to a Michelangelo sibyl in its muscularity than an elegant classical vision of gracefulness (Figure 29). In *Cold Comfort* the artist plays with issues of eroticism and sensuality by including a man luridly gazing at the figure while lightly caressing her left breast with a feather duster. The only comfort this lascivious janitor receives from a woman, it seems, is the cold comfort of the hard marble-fleshed statue.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Susan Rather, *Archaism, Modernism and the Art of Paul Manship* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>216</sup> Harry Rand, *Paul Manship* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 71. Rand continues remarking that “Art Deco was sustained by an artistic vocabulary that Manship helped to create but whose decorative program he never endorsed. He did not call himself an Art Deco sculptor. Between the wars and before the term came into general use, Manship unknowingly participated in the formation of our era’s most popular and enduring style of art and decoration. Indeed, Art Deco may well be the style that characterizes our century to future generations, and we cannot really assay Manship’s career without reference to it.”

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>218</sup> Rand further comments that Manship’s academic associates were “incapable” of incorporating the “vivacious subtlety” that animates a figure. *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>219</sup> The figure of the janitor is Walter Broe. Raphael Soyer met the hobo one day while on a walk and he saw the man fishing for coins through a subway grill. They talked and Soyer offered him a job—to

The work, unlike *Hope Springs Eternal*, is not a specific commentary on the members of her own sex. Rather, it presents a broader social and cultural satirical observation. Like the story Peiss recounts of the college boy who chose his girlfriends based on whether or not they looked like Hollywood movie stars, many, including the janitor in *Cold Comfort*, looked to and longed after classical ideals of beauty.<sup>220</sup> Thus, it seems as though Citron viewed this desire as a contributing factor to women trying to achieve such a state. By showing the classical statue as mannish and overly muscular, the artist demonstrates that her view of beauty is not necessarily the archetypal standard held in such esteem by so many others; it is about more than just perfect proportions or graceful elegance.

The artist continues to represent crude figures in another “femininity” from 1935, the aptly titled *Buffeted* (Figure 30). Described as one of the two best paintings in the series in terms of craftsmanship, *Buffeted* shows a woman wearing a hat and coat walking along a low wall, struggling against a strong gale wind.<sup>221</sup> Although there is nothing overtly skeptical or satirical in terms of social commentary surrounding this work, the exaggeration and distortion of the figures’ features in *Hope Springs Eternal* can be seen here, albeit to a much less obvious extent, and these features will become typical characterizations of many of Citron’s figures during this decade. The buffeted figure’s large bulbous nose will reappear in several of the later gambling figures. The pulled back mouth emphasizing the slightly buck teeth of the figure are reminiscent of one of the bargain basement shoppers. And the masculine hand keeping hat in place could easily be

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come to his studio and be a model. After hiring Broe, Soyer recommended him to his colleagues, including Reginald Marsh, Isabel Bishop, Edward Lanning, Katherine Schmidt and Minna Citron. In her biography, Citron described Broe as a “fine-looking man. His skull was long, his forehead high, his features Celtic, and his manner gentle.” Citron and Resseguier, 41-43.

<sup>220</sup> Peiss, 192.

<sup>221</sup> “‘Femininities,’ by Minna Citron at Midtown,” *New York Post*, 20 (?) April 1935.

the hand of the mannish statue in *Cold Comfort*. Struggling against a wind which pushes her backward with force, the figure continues to advance.<sup>222</sup> She, unlike her shopping counterparts, makes an effort to move forward, against the odds. They, on the other hand, did not take advantage of opportunities, for they were too concerned with beautifying themselves with miracle cosmetics products. In many ways, I think, this buffeted figure represents the artist, and thereby serves as the key to the entire series. As she struggles against the wind, Citron was striving to make a name for herself in the art world.

While many of Citron's works from the thirties embody a social critique specifically against the figures in the painting, as in *Hope Springs Eternal*, at times the artist is skeptical of and criticizes people in larger situations, as in *Cold Comfort* and in another "femininity," *Beauty Culture*, dating to 1933 (Figure 31). In *Beauty Culture*, Citron's women continue their vain attempts to become beautiful. The artist ridicules here, in the words of art critic Greg Masters, not only "shopping frenzy devotees" of *Hope Springs Eternal*, but also the "frivolity of the beauty parlor habitués."<sup>223</sup> The viewer stands before a beauty parlor full of women engaged in stereotypically female activities—having their hair coiffed, scrutinizing gossip magazines, perusing sale ads, and enjoying the luxury of a manicure. Each occupies herself in a slightly different manner, and all but one are imprisoned by the hairdryers under which they sit, locked, as it were, in their vanity.

Beginning at the far right of the composition, the viewer notices a figure sitting, legs again spread less than daintily, in a tacked leather chair, behind which leans a push broom against the wall and what appears to be a pile of cut hair under the chair. Hanging

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<sup>222</sup> One of the definitions for buffet is "to make one's way esp. under difficult conditions." Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. "Buffet."

<sup>223</sup> Masters, 106.

on the wall above her head is a sign, the top part of which is indecipherable. The two legible words, in the center and at the bottom are “Famous” and “Scalpers.” A second sign, indicating the name of the salon, hangs on the back wall just to the right of the composition’s center and reads “Atelier Pierre . . . Palm Beach.” One might wonder why a New York artist who often depicts the area of the city in which she kept a studio would create an image of a salon in Palm Beach. The reference here may be to the increasing craze of sun tanning, and the growing desire among American women to have darker complexions. During the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century, as discussed in relation to *Hope Springs Eternal*, light skin was considered to be the most acceptable shade and women, even African Americans, bought powders, creams and bleaches to lighten the skin. By the mid 1920s, however, as outdoor recreational activities had become more popular, darker complexions became more acceptable. In effect the new desire for darker skin “challenged the cosmetics industry’s basic assumption” about light skin being good skin.<sup>224</sup> Marketing and advertising had to change in order to reflect this transformation, and as tanning products became more popular, references to “health, Palm Beach or Deauville” became more prominent.<sup>225</sup> Citron’s *Beauty Culture* women, then, are from the sunny locale of Palm Beach where they could sunbathe and darken their skin all year long.

The first of these figures, at the far right of the composition, holds a magazine, with the words “Mental Mystery” on the front cover, in her right hand.<sup>226</sup> Her left hand, elbow resting on the arm of the chair, comes to her head as her expression-filled face

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<sup>224</sup> Peiss, 150.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> An 1895 publication by Albert Carr is titled “Mental Mystery: The Material Organ of the Mind,” however, the author was unable to attain a copy of the manuscript.

reveals shock and amazement over the current gossip scandal being reported in the paper.<sup>227</sup> When asked whether the woman depicted was indeed shocked reading a gossip magazine, Citron laughingly responded, “Oh, I supposed so . . . passing the time, you know.”<sup>228</sup> Again, the artist satirizes the stereotypical activities in which the figures are engaged. However, the magazine is far from just a random item included within the composition, and is more than just a scandal sheet. The cover words, “Mental Mystery,” suggest the issue, or at the very least an article within the issue, contains information about the brain. Citron, in addition to being a self-proclaimed feminist, was an avowed Freudian. During the 1920s, while many of her friends were studying to be psychiatric social workers, she entered into psychoanalysis (the ramifications of which will be discussed more in chapter three), and first became interested in Freud.<sup>229</sup> According to art historian Jane Comstock, Citron was interested particularly in “Freud’s ideas about society, creativity, and art as well as his ideas about how to activate one’s personal potential.”<sup>230</sup> In light of this interest and in conjunction with the title of the painting, *Beauty Culture*, the heading of “Mental Mystery” becomes significant. The artist satirizes

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<sup>227</sup> This issue of gossip will figure even more prominently in one of the “Judges and Juries” images to be discussed in Chapter four.

<sup>228</sup> Citron, *Seasons of Life III: 713.1-713.3*, 8.

<sup>229</sup> Stephen Gayle, “Daily Closeup.” “My crowd were [*sic*] all very much interested in Freudian analysis...and most of my friends were psychiatric social workers. I spent five days a week on the couch for a year.” In another interview Minna recounted, “. . . Freud I became very much interested in through a friend, one of my earliest friends, a man who was interesting and used to write. . . . [ He] used to write a lot about Freudian psychology and psychology in general [and] . . . was very instrumental in steering me to some very good reading. . . . I think my period in psychoanalysis freed me. It freed me to break the tie with my mother. Eventually it freed me sexually because I began to wonder whether I was functioning properly with my ex-husband or not. . . . Well I believe that a lot of people are held back by inhibitions or early training or whatever, as I was too. . . . I think psychoanalysis, when it’s good, helps people to free themselves from those kinds of restraints and opens them up to drawing on their unconscious. The unconscious mind is a very rebel, you see. We get ideas from inside. And that’s what psychoanalysis does . . . . And . . . if the psychoanalysis is successful . . . you begin to understand what is making you tic [*sic*].” Minna Citron, interview by WQED personnel, *Interview with Minna, Tape #778*, transcript, 7, 13, in Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>230</sup> Jane M. Comstock, “Minna Citron’s *Detente*: From Social Realism to Abstraction in Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Printmaking,” Unpublished Paper, in Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado.



not the specific individuals portrayed, but rather a general mindset of a society which has become, as the title suggests, obsessed with beauty. She ridicules the culture in which what these women are doing—getting manicures and having their hair styled—actually makes sense because it has become the norm. So, as with *Hope Springs Eternal*, Citron presents a wry commentary of society by portraying caricatured individuals who attempt—more often than not in vain—to attain the standards of this beauty culture. Thus, the “mental mystery” of the magazine, implies the mystery as to why these individuals are so concerned with fitting into such a shallow concept of culture. It implies that Citron, and perhaps others, have taken the time to think about such issues rather than buy into them wholesale.

The women portrayed, on the other hand, are active participants in this culture. The figure in the far right corner of the room and facing the back wall also reads a paper, but rather than reading up on the latest scandal, she peruses the advertised sales. Thus one can surmise that she, like the women in *Hope Springs Eternal*, is thrifty and, therefore, always in search of the best bargain. These two not only have the luxury of spending their day getting primped and preened, they also direct their attention to gossipy scandals, rumors and matters of shopping, activities which, it can be presumed, men would never take part in.<sup>231</sup> Furthermore, as Mee-Ae Kim tells us in her thesis on images of women found in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, spending the day at the beauty shop was, by the early thirties, no longer an activity reserved for the well-to-do.<sup>232</sup> As personal appearance took on greater importance during the 1920s, Kim observes, beauty parlors for the middle-

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<sup>231</sup> Further discussion of gossip as a stereotypical woman's activity will take place in Chapter four.

<sup>232</sup> Kim, 66.

class woman opened all over the country, and by the late 1920s over 30,000 salons were in operation.<sup>233</sup>

The next figure, facing the back wall of the salon, remains free of the imprisoning hairdryer. However, her head is covered in curlers, suggesting that she awaits a turn under the dryer. Next to her, and with her back to the central front figure, is a fourth woman, also, like the first two, reading a magazine while waiting for her hair to be dried by the contraption under which she spends her allotted time. The woman to the far left sits facing out toward the viewer's space. She relaxes in her chair, legs crossed in a much more lady-like fashion than is seen by her counterpart on the right side of the canvas. Similarly, her elbow rests on the arm of the chair and she nods her head, leaning into her hand. While waiting for the drying process to cease, she relaxes in her chair, with a slightly gaping mouth and closed eyes, perhaps in boredom, perhaps in enjoyment of having a few spare minutes free of other demands.

The most prominent figure in the composition is positioned just to the left of center in front of those already discussed. Towering over the others, she sits in a larger chair, facing the viewer in a three-quarter pose. She wears a low-cut dress, over which is draped a striped salon cape, and her neck is accentuated by a jeweled necklace. Her face, comprised of long luscious eyelashes, perfectly proportioned nose and tiny rosebud shaped lips, is the beautiful counterpart to her companion on the right. In addition to sitting under the hair dryer, the woman is enjoying undergoing a manicure, getting her nails filed and polished by the manicurist who, dressed in simple attire with her hair

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid. American women in the late 1920s were spending \$1.825 billion on manicures, face-lifts, cosmetics products and hair dying. Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books Inc., Publishers, 1978), 186; quoted in Kim, 66.

pulled back into a neat bun at the top of her neck, sits before her on a low stool. The manicurist's tray of instruments, polishes, and creams sits to the left, on a low cylindrical table next to the chair in which the patron sits. As the societal importance of this beauty culture grew throughout the 1920s, a woman's hands came to symbolize refinement, attractiveness and femininity. No woman wanted to have "dishpan" hands, since it would suggest carelessness in terms of appearance.<sup>234</sup> Consequently, numerous advertisements for hand lotions, nail polish, and cleaning products that allowed one to clean without ruining one's hands can be found in the women's magazines of the period, including the most popular of them, *Ladies' Home Journal* (Figure 32 and Figure 33).<sup>235</sup>

In addition to advertisements, other forms of mass media imagery were used in an attempt to shape public opinions about "beauty," female activities and acceptable, or unacceptable as the case may be, behaviors. And, moreover, Citron was not the only female artist of the 1930s lampooning her own sex in paintings like *Beauty Culture* and *Hope Springs Eternal*. Playwright Clare Boothe satirized women in her hit play *The Women*.<sup>236</sup> Boothe's satire and irony, as Susan L. Carlson points out, have a dual message here: "its scintillating wit is both freedom and escape, its stage full of women at once a potential women's community and a backhanded endorsement of a male world."<sup>237</sup> The play, in the words of its author, is "about a numerically small group of ladies native to the

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<sup>234</sup> Kim, 60.

<sup>235</sup> Kim sites a number of different ads from *Ladies' Home Journal* dating to the 1920s, but the trends she discusses can be seen continuing into the 1930s.

<sup>236</sup> Clare Boothe, *The Women* (New York: Random House, 1937). Boothe's play was the inspiration for Anita Loos and Jane Murn's screenplay of the same title, directed by George Cukor and produced by Hunt Stromberg in 1939.

<sup>237</sup> Susan L. Carlson, "Comic Textures and Female Communities 1937 and 1977: Clare Boothe and Wendy Wasserstein," in *Modern American Drama: The Female Canon*, ed. June Schlueter, (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), 207.

Park Avenues of America . . . [who] are shown as merely vulgar, silly and futile.”<sup>238</sup> Yet, at the same time, it becomes a “broader study of women’s roles.”<sup>239</sup> These “bitchy gossip women,” are shown in salons, kitchens and powder rooms and like Citron’s figures, they fill their days with trips to the beauty parlor, salons, and card games.<sup>240</sup> They were bred to be “perpetual adolescents . . . [in] imaginations and emotions” and their teenage cattiness carries over into their adult lives.<sup>241</sup> In the opening scene, as the women gossip about their husbands’ philandering, their friends’ facial wrinkles and other mundane topics, Sylvia (played by Rosalind Russell in the 1939 Hollywood film version of the story) informs the reader/viewer that Stephen Haines, unbeknownst to wife Mary (Norma Shearer), is having an affair with shop girl Crystal Allen (masterfully played by Joan Crawford) by telling of her latest trip to the salon:

Wait till you hear. You know I go over to Michael’s for my hair. You ought to go, pet [she speaks to Edith]. I despise whoever does yours. Well, there’s the most wonderful new manicurist there. (*Shows her scarlet nails*) Isn’t that

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<sup>238</sup> Boothe, vii, x. *Life Magazine* observed that as a satire, the play “scathingly derides the conduct of useless, metropolitan females. As a social document, it reveals, with horrifying realism, the workings of such heretofore neglected 20<sup>th</sup> Century phenomena as the Reno dude ranch and the deluxe beauty shop.” “Movie of the Week: *The Women*,” *Life*, 4 September 1939, 28.

<sup>239</sup> Carlson, 208.

<sup>240</sup> A review of the film notes that “It is a holiday from Hays . . . [with] more wicked wit than Hollywood has been allowed since ‘The Front Page,’ . . .” “Manhattan-to-Hollywood Transfer,” *The New Republic* 100 (September 6, 1931): 132.

<sup>241</sup> “Other Plays of the Season,” *The Forum* 97 (June 1937): 356. The anonymous reviewer continues by noting that despite the play’s extreme originality, the last act, by comparison, is inadequate as it “merely breaks off.” The inspiration for Boothe’s characters came from the women she met during her Reno divorce trip. In the introduction to the play, Boothe tells the reader that “The women who inspired this play deserved to be smacked across the head with a meat-axe. . . . They are vulgar and dirty-minded, and alien to grace, and I would not if I could—which I hasten to say I cannot—gloss their obscenities with a wit which is foreign to them, and gild their futilities with a glamour which by birth and breeding and performance they do not possess. They are the advocates of the hackneyed, devotees of the wisecracks, high priestesses of the banal. That they speak not with the tongues of angels . . . but with the tongues of fishwives and bartenders, can be laid at the door of good reportage. Everything they say and do is in deplorable taste, because everything I have ever heard such women say and do *is* in deplorable taste. But indeed, if one is not susceptible to their ludicrousness, tickled by their gargantuan absurdities, one is quite justified in being either bored or appalled by them. . . . The plot . . . is also ‘weak.’ It was knowingly intended to be no more than a peg on which to hang this bedraggled bit of Park Avenue plumage. It is deliberately a commonplace squirrel-cage, full of holes, getting nowhere, serving only the purpose of further emphasizing the miniscule, foolish, whirligig activities of a few cancerous little squirrels . . . .” Boothe, xii-xiii

divine? Jungle Red . . . . This manicurist, she's marvelous, was doing my nails. I was looking through *Vogue*, the one with Mary in the Beaux Arts Ball costume . . . . Well, this manicurist: 'Oh, Mrs. Fowler,' she said, 'is that Mrs. Haines who's so awfully rich?' . . . I forget what she said next. You know how those creatures are, babble, babble, babble, babble, and never let up for a minute! When suddenly she said: 'I know the girl who's being *kept* by Mr. Haines!' . . . She's a friend of this manicurist. Oh, it wouldn't be so bad if Stephen had picked someone in his own class. But a blonde floosie!<sup>242</sup>

Rather than directly confronting Mary with the information, her "friends" slyly arrange for her to hear the news from the gossipy manicurist, after which Mary ultimately, and again at the urging of her friends, heads to Reno for a divorce. Although witty in terms of dialogue and hilarious in the portrayal of high society women, Boothe, according to Yvonne Shafer, ultimately helped perpetuate the "stereotypes of women as selfish, scheming, idle creatures who spend their time in malicious gossip, and value their husbands only in monetary terms."<sup>243</sup> Likewise, Citron is at times in danger of disseminating a similar stereotype, as her women, like Boothe's spend their time shopping and enjoying the luxuries of a day at the spa. Much of Boothe's play is given over to the exaggerated pettiness of this exclusive group, gossiping not just about those outside their group, but about their so-called "friends" within the group as well. These idle gossipmongers spend their time in the salon getting primped and preened, as do Citron's women in *Beauty Culture*, and the staging notes at the opening of scene two suggest the atmosphere of a salon similar to the one portrayed by Citron:

A hairdressing booth in Michael's. . . . Right, a recessed mirror in the wall. Left, from the high partition pole, a curtain to the floor. The rear wall is a plain partition. Center, a swivel hairdressing chair. Above it from an aluminum tree, the hanging thicket of a permanent-wave machine. In the wall, gadgets for curing irons, electric outlets which connect with wires to the drying machine, the hand dried, the manicurists' table-light, stools for the pedicurist, the manicurist, Olga.

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>243</sup> Yvonne Shafer, *American Women Playwrights 1900-1950* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 339.

As the curtain rises, the booth is, to put it mildly, full.

Mrs. Wagstaff, a fat, elderly woman is in the chair, undergoing the punishment of a permanent. Wires and clamps, Medusa-like, rise from her head, to the cap of the machine.

Olga, at her right, is doing her nails. Her fat bare feet rest in the lap of the pedicurist. The first hairdresser cools her steaming locks with a hand-drier. The second hairdresser, watch in hand, fiddles with the wires, times the operation. When the machine is working, a small, red light glows among the wires.

Mrs. Wagstaff, apparently inured to public execution, smokes, reads a magazine on her lap, occasionally nibbles a sandwich which the manicurist passes her from a tray near her instruments. The drier, whenever it is on, makes a loud noise, drowning out voices, which must be harshly raised above it.<sup>244</sup>

Furthermore, a still from the movie version of Boothe's play reproduced in a *Life Magazine* review is also reminiscent of Citron's depiction of the beauty salon (Figure 34). In the film still Rosalind Russell sits similarly trapped within the confines of the hair drying contraption, cigarette in mouth, magazine in hand, looking to her right at the manicurist who diligently paints her finger nails the dark color seen on the left hand which holds the magazine. The manicurist, simply attired in a uniform, delicately holds Russell's hand just above her tray of instruments and pleasantly concentrates on the task at hand. Other stills from the salon sequence depict steam cabinets, bubble and mud baths, sun rooms and a woman surrounded by three attendants receiving a manicure, pedicure and hair treatments (Figure 35).<sup>245</sup> Boothe, like Citron, derides these women, believing their actions to be in "deplorable taste," believing they are wasting their time gossiping, playing cards and spending their days at the spa subjecting themselves to such

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<sup>244</sup> Boothe, 25.

<sup>245</sup> Although, as the caption tells us, clients rarely had more than two "repair jobs" done at one time. "Movie of the Week: *The Women*," *Life*, 4 September 1939, 28.

forms of self-indulgent torture.<sup>246</sup> While insisting that the play was not intended to be misogynistic, the sexual double standards of *The Women* perhaps indicate the contrary.<sup>247</sup>

These stereotypically lazy and bitchy women, found in Boothe's play and film, are not, however, the only female "types" to be found in the movies of the thirties, and in fact, images of women in films during the early years of the 1930s are different from those found after 1934, the year the Hays Production code went into effect, thereby altering portrayals of women, sex and violence over the course of the next several decades. In July 1934 the Production Code Administration, otherwise known as the Hays Office, started regulating what was seen in Hollywood movies. The Hays Office, originally begun in 1922, joined efforts in the early 1930s with the National Legion of Decency, the outcome of which resulted in the official Production Code. The code set forth a policy of what was and was not allowed to be depicted in movies, and in July 1934 American cinema changed.<sup>248</sup> Between 1930 and 1934 movie-goers saw "gun-toting gangsters and smart-mouthed convicts, adulterous wives and promiscuous chorines, irreverence from the lower orders and incompetence from above . . ." and moral reformers, church leaders [primarily Catholics] and politicians began looking to Hollywood to "transform the moral landscape of American cinema."<sup>249</sup> With this change came, among other things, a transformation in the depiction and portrayal of women in film. As film historian Molly Haskell aptly summarizes, prior to the implementation of the code "women were conceived of as having sexual desire without being freaks,

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<sup>246</sup> Boothe, xii.

<sup>247</sup> Carlson, 212.

<sup>248</sup> In fact, Joseph Breen, head of the Studio Relations Committee in 1933 who ran the Hays Office beginning in 1934, pulled from circulation objectionable films made pre-1934, and they were not re-released "unless rendered moral." Doherty, 19.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 319.

villains, or even necessarily Europeans. . . . Women were entitled to initiate sexual encounters, to pursue men, and even to embody certain ‘male’ characteristics without being stigmatized as ‘unfeminine’ or predatory.”<sup>250</sup> She continues by noting that the division between pre- and post-code films, “between film with Freudian slips and explicit sexuality and films in which sex took cover under veils of metaphor,” significantly impacted women’s roles.<sup>251</sup> One of the greatest female film stars of the pre-code era was Mae West, and it has been suggested by film historian Mick LaSalle that her 1933 features *She Done Him Wrong* and *I’m No Angel* prompted the full implementation of the Code the following year.<sup>252</sup> Haskell tells us that after the code was put into place

marriage was declared sacrosanct, display of passion was discouraged (double beds were verboten, twin beds de rigueur), exposure of the sex organs, male or female, child or animal, real or stuffed, was forbidden. . . . There were further proscriptions against perversion, miscegenation, the detailed rendering of crime, or its depiction in such a way as to imply success or to glorify its perpetrators. The futility of crime, both spiritually and financially had to be demonstrated: The villain had to die or, if the hero or heroine had erred, their contrition and conversion had to be triumphantly shown. . . . But the emphasis of the code, like that of the Hays Office before it and the rating system of the Motion Picture Association after it, was on sex, an activity both sinful, and from the moral referees’ point of view, contagious, since it could be transmitted by the image on the screen like sperm on a toilet seat.<sup>253</sup>

Thus, a shift can be seen from sexy pre-code women to post-code working women fulfilling the demand in the thirties for a more “down-to-earth heroine.” Many of these

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<sup>250</sup> Haskell, 91.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Additionally, LaSalle continues with a lengthy discussion of Greta Garbo’s 1934 feminist film *Queen Christina*. The film tells the story of the seventeenth-century bisexual queen of Sweden who abdicates her power, and, according to LaSalle “embodies everything that the Code wanted to destroy . . . [partly because it was] the ultimate expression of the twenties’ and thirties’ preoccupation with individual concerns over matters affecting society.” LaSalle, 152, 193-195.

<sup>253</sup> Haskell, 117-118.



working women, however, sought employment as a means to a domestic end—they were on the job market primarily in order to find a husband.<sup>254</sup>

These attractive young post-code working women can be found in the fine arts as well, particularly in works by Citron's friend and colleague, Isabel Bishop, who, like Citron, depicted figures in Union Square. The two artists had studied together at the Art Students League and remained friends throughout their lives, but Bishop received more critical attention throughout her career, beginning as early as the thirties, perhaps because the images she created during that decade were more conventional, and less biting in their commentary, than those by Citron. Both artists, however, chose lower middle-class women as their subjects; however, unlike Citron's women who shop for beauty products and lounge in salons, Bishop's figures are working women, such as those seen in *The Noon Hour* (Figure 36). They are young and independent, probably just out of high school, working clerical jobs for a few years before finding a husband and settling into a more domestic role. Her figures lean casually upon a wall, in relaxed poses and with a rather deferential demeanor as compared to the more stereotypically provocative poses insinuated by her male counterparts including Reginald Marsh or Kenneth Hayes Miller (Figure 37 and Figure 38). Additionally, Bishop's women are not the unemployed men and women depicted by Marsh, for instance, but independent working women full of dignity and self-determination. She attempted to suggest that these young women "could transcend the limitations of class, sex, and occupation. . . . [And] she believed that they [too] had freedom of choice, even if economic evidence suggested the contrary."<sup>255</sup> Her

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>255</sup> Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised*, 294-295.

images of women are more affirmative than those by Citron. Whereas Citron pokes fun at women buying miracle cosmetics products, Bishop glorifies the young working girl.

Because she painted the urban working class, Bishop, like Citron, is generally pigeonholed as a Social or Urban realist, but, unlike her colleague, she claims to have never commented directly on the social or political aspects of the decade. Rather, she focused her attention instead on the general characteristics of her subject and their type. She struggled to capture gesture and movement rather than any issue which may have been at the fore of social and/or political agendas, although some have argued that her work does, in fact, engage in social issues, particularly with questions related to gender, class, work and unemployment.<sup>256</sup> Unlike her friend, Bishop consistently denied ever being a feminist and has been quoted as saying “I didn’t want to be a *woman* [my italics] artist, I just wanted to be an artist.”<sup>257</sup> Bishop’s images contained observations of the people in and around Union Square, as she saw them, and were not critiques of a particular class of individuals. Thus, her paintings are less edgy than Citron’s; they are less threatening due to the lack of satirical commentary found in Citron’s work. Bishop never showed her work in an exhibition for women only, nor did she ever participate in any women’s organization, and according to art historian Ellen Wiley Todd, she downplayed gender difference in favor of individual achievement, in both her life and her art even though critics acknowledged her as the best *female* artist of the time.<sup>258</sup> In addition, while Bishop may not have been a feminist, Lawrence Alloway believes that feminist thought allows the modern scholar to interpret the artist’s works more

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<sup>256</sup> Ellen Wiley Todd, “Isabel Bishop: Our Modern Master?,” Review of *Isabel Bishop*, by Helen Yglesias, *Woman’s Art Journal* 13 (Spring/Summer 1992): 47.

<sup>257</sup> Isabel Bishop in an interview with Ellen Wiley Todd, December 16, 1982, quoted in Todd, *The “New Woman” Revised*, 273.

<sup>258</sup> Todd, *The “New Woman” Revised*, 310.

effectively. “She is a painter whose main subject is women, and her homosocial imagery has an acumen and an empathy that . . . neither males nor sexually mixed subjects elicit. . . . She needs two people as her subject, and, for whatever reason, they have to be women. Without that she cannot depict the web of mutual responsiveness which is at the core of her meaning and which is rarely found in the history of the painting of couples.”<sup>259</sup> Of this homosocial imagery of young women enjoying the “noon hour,” Bishop observed simply, “The time that I try to catch them, that I’m interested in trying to present, is when they are in their lunch hour, the hour of respite . . . . I catch them, I feel, in a moment during the day when they have stopped, but in a sense, the work day is continuing.”<sup>260</sup> Their generally fashionable clothing seems to be in keeping with the times, yet as Todd suggests, their dresses are a bit too fluffy and not necessarily appropriate for the work place.<sup>261</sup> These youthful office workers, tied together by social class, are further united by the affectionate gesture of the woman on the left who encloses the other’s arm within her own. A more subtle gesture linking these women is their gaze. Although not actively engaging the viewer in confrontation, they tilt their heads toward one another as if in the midst of a discussion to which we are not privy. This obvious sense of camaraderie and companionship between colleagues and friends is repeated in many of Bishop’s paired portraits, including *Two Girls* from 1935 (Figure 39). The artist never showed her girls actually engaged in work at their jobs or in their domestic roles at

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<sup>259</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “Isabel Bishop, the Grand Manner and the Working Girl,” *Art in America* 63 (September/October 1975): 64.

<sup>260</sup> Unpublished interviews with Isabel Bishop conducted in September 1957 by Louis M. Starr of the Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York; quoted in Helen Yglesias, *Isabel Bishop* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 66.

<sup>261</sup> Todd, *The “New Woman” Revised*, 302. In chapter seven of the book entitled “The Question of Difference: Isabel Bishop’s Deferential Office Girls,” Todd provides a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary Depression era working girl. She discusses the demographic profile for the worker, the types of jobs held by these women, and the modes of dress that were expected of the young female office worker in relation to Isabel Bishop’s portrayal of these women.

home. Rather they are always depicted on breaks, in moments of leisurely relaxing activity, eating ice cream, or, as in *Tidying Up*, checking their lipstick, just as she observed them in Union Square (Figure 40).<sup>262</sup> Citron also observed the women of Union Square, as we have already seen, but with more wit, skepticism and ironic commentary than her friend and colleague. Some of Citron's women, as seen in her self-portrait, and in *She Earns an Honest Living* are even working.

### **Working Women and Children, Newspapers, and the Subway**

*Self-Expression*, as previously discussed, is one of several "Femininities" images in which the figure actively engages in work. A second working figure is found in Citron's 1934 *She Earns an Honest Living*, an image described by contemporary critics as "tragic rather than satiric" (Figure 41).<sup>263</sup> Here the viewer confronts a portrait of a blind female newspaper vendor engaged in a job requiring no training—a job with no future or promise of success.<sup>264</sup> The newspaper vendor represents, for Citron, the plight of modern women forced to sell papers on street corners and in subways during the Depression in an effort to earn some money. After a lifetime of social consciousness and interest in women's equality, Citron recalled the 1930s, in relation to this painting:

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<sup>262</sup> According to Kathy Peiss, in the 1920s public primping was eschewed "because it exposed the artifice behind the illusion, the back stage of women's performance." Thus a woman "tidying up" in public, such as Bishop's figure, would have been completely unacceptable. Bishop, however, captures her in this unmasking. Peiss, 155.

<sup>263</sup> "'Femininities,'" *New York Post*.

<sup>264</sup> Joel Smith, "We New Yorkers: The City in the Camera," in "Modern Metropolis," The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, April 5 – June 16, 2002, page 3. Smith describes the woman as blind. While discussing artists use of the camera in the city, Smith compares Citron's image to those by Ben Shahn, noting that "Although Minna Citron's sardonic studies of unwitting subjects, such as her blind young woman who 'Earns an Honest Living' selling papers, are not based on photographs, they give viewers a sense of voyeuristic access similar to [Ben] Shahn's. Yet while Shahn relished the random juxtapositions that his viewfinder turned up in a crowded city, Citron gave her painting the structural clarity of arranged studio inventions."

This was a tough time. It was especially tough for a woman. What else could she do—other than be a ‘hausfrau.’ Women had no options. This was a time of metamorphosis. Do butterflies suffer when they emerge from their cocoons? Because this is what we were really doing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The thirties was a period of emerging, especially for women. Women were changing from being housebound; from being chattels of their fathers and husbands. Into what? There were few jobs for anyone, fewer still for women.

It was a very dramatic time, a difficult time, with Freud casting a spotlight onto the psyche. The trinity of Freud, Marx and Einstein was changing the world.

There was no model. The woman in this picture is archetypal. She represents the psychology of many women of the day—without training—women who had to reevaluate their thinking and lives.

Just as a butterfly sheds its snug cocoon and has immediately to fly without any period of leaning, so was a woman. She had to painfully adjust to the unknown and try to reach for the few opportunities that existed for her.<sup>265</sup>

This archetypal woman, like Citron herself in the mid-1930s, sheds her domestic cocoon, attempting to make the best of the situation in which she finds herself.<sup>266</sup> The vendor sits front and center, parked on a wooden box, leaning up against a blue and silver painted I-beam which bisects the composition. Just to her left, in front of the structural support, and bracketing the right side of the painting, is, as Joel Smith notes in his brief discussion of the painting, a bright red chewing-gum dispenser.<sup>267</sup> Her blue skirt and matching blue hat are echoed in the architectural detailing of the arched subway tunnel and the small rectangular sign which is cut off by the left edge of the composition. In comparison with Citron’s bargain shoppers, the newspaper vendor wears a slightly more stylish brown overcoat, a lime green sweater over a white oxford, stockings, and the same style of shoes worn by the front customer in *Hope Springs Eternal*. The vendor’s attire suggests neither that she is downtrodden nor that she has fallen upon hard times. And, while perhaps not

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<sup>265</sup> Ekedal and Robinson, 14.

<sup>266</sup> In 1934 Citron divorced her husband and moved to Manhattan with her two sons.

<sup>267</sup> Smith, 3.

the most fashionable items of clothing available at the time, she by no means appears shabby. Only the fact that she is selling newspapers in the subway on a Sunday morning suggests her financial situation.

The viewer witnesses the scene from just outside the vendor's space, as the edge of the composition cuts off at the tip of her toes, yet he/she remains voyeurs to the scene. The vendor looks, with blind eyes, not out to us, but to the right, waiting and listening for those coming down the steps to catch the next train. The composition, however, is devoid of other people; on Sunday no rush hour crush of people floods the station anxious to buy a paper to read on the commute to work, and the vendor attempts—apparently in vain—to sell the stack of the *Sunday News* she holds on her lap. She remains hauntingly alone, perched next to the subway track, passing the time before the train deposits some more potential customers. The conspicuous bold capital letters of the headline, reading “GIANTS AND DODGERS WIN,” are the only legible words on the papers.<sup>268</sup> Unlike the idle women of *Hope Springs Eternal* or *Beauty Culture*, this archetypal woman reaches for any available opportunity, even if it is just an unsuccessful attempt to sell papers on a Sunday morning. She, in many ways like the woman in *Buffeted*, struggles to make her way under difficult conditions. The irony of the situation is that a blind woman sells newspapers she cannot read, thereby deepening the symbolic tragedy of the image—she works, but can never enjoy the product she sells.

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<sup>268</sup> A search of the *New York Times* database found stories of the Giants and Dodgers winning on several different days in 1934, including Wednesday April 18, Friday May 18, Monday June 18, Tuesday July 3 and Thursday September 26, but there was no indication of a double victory occurring on a Saturday such that the article would appear in Sunday morning's paper. It seems, then, that Citron's prominent headlines are invented. An investigation of another New York Newspaper, *The Daily News*, however, revealed that sports stories were prominently located in the paper, often on the front page, with large headlines.

In addition to *She Earns an Honest Living*, newspapers are prevalent in several other paintings in the “Femininities” series, including *Subway Technique* and *Grist to the Mill* ((Figure 42 and Figure 46). Media historian Hanno Hardt considers newspapers in artistic images of the late 1920s and 1930s as fragments of cultural history, and briefly mentions *She Earns an Honest Living* in one paragraph of his essay.<sup>269</sup> Hardt argues that artists, like media historians, challenge conceptions of society, critique social conditions and explore their contributions to the cultural history of newspapers during the Depression years. Using Citron’s above-mentioned quote, Hardt notes that the newspaper vendor “represents the plight of women in the 1930s [in addition to] reflect[ing] the strong social conscience of the artist.”<sup>270</sup> Arguably, the inclusion of a working woman, trying desperately to make ends meet during the Depression, demonstrates the artist’s principles and her concern for the state of humanity. She proves herself, then, as capable not only of being able to make satiric and ironic observations, but of more obviously bringing to light the dire social circumstances in which her figures often find themselves.

Citron continues to be a shrewd observer of human behavior, while at the same time reflecting on social and cultural manners, in her 1932 *Subway Technique*, capturing what many would consider an awkward moment on the subway. An incident witnessed one morning during her commute from Brooklyn to her Union Square studio space proved to be the inspiration for this painting:

I used to ride from Brooklyn to New York after I got my kids . . . off to school . . . I would take the subway and I’d go to New York—Manhattan—and . . . when I’d see something I would almost be sorry because I had to sketch it. . . . [O]n the subway I saw this composition . . . I always had a feeling that this guy was goosing her . . . but she was liking it.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Hardt, “The Gaze of the Artist,” 13-34.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>271</sup> Citron, *Seasons of Life III: 713.1-713.3*, 10, 14.

Once again we see the artist stitching her personal experiences together in order to make art. She saw a scene on the subway and she recreated it in paint while infusing the composition with a personalized social commentary, as we shall see. Reminiscent of so many of her canvases from the thirties, the cramped space thrusts the figures into the foreground and, in this particular case, suggests the overcrowded rush hour experienced daily on the subways of New York. The throngs of people packed into the tight airless space of the city's underground transportation system inspired other artists in the 1920s and 1930s as well, including Reginald Marsh, whose two images appearing in the *New York Daily News* in 1923 brilliantly capture the scene (Figure 43 and Figure 44). The viewer becomes more a part of Citron's image than Marsh's, however, and the positioning of the characters within her vignette suggests that we witness the scene either from the next pole or, more likely, from the seat just to the right of the figures. The pole bisects the image almost evenly, with its right edge located at the exact center of the composition, leaving the figures to occupy the surrounding space. Three of their hands grasp the pole, providing stability and balance as the subway hurriedly makes its way through the tunnels of the city.

The central, most brightly dressed figure, and only woman, faces us, gripping a bag of popcorn between her arm and torso while clutching her purse with her left hand, all the while gently holding the pole at hip level with her right hand. The round-faced, generously-proportioned female stands gracefully in contrapposto, with her left hip jutting out slightly as she simultaneously turns her head a little to her left, thereby giving her entire body the subtle classical S-curved pudica pose. Yet, similar to the statue in



*Cold Comfort*, Citron's figure is again not the epitome of traditional Western classicism and grace; her round face and big-boned, fleshy frame are more suggestive of a Rubensesque figure than one from the Classical period. The artist presents neither an upper class society woman dressed in expensive clothes and jewels, nor a prudish figure outraged by the behavior of the man/men surrounding her. Rather, in keeping with the artist's statement about the image, the leering woman takes a certain amount of pleasure in the unexpected fondling of a stranger.

A spectacled man wearing a hat positions himself behind the other figures. Approximately three-fourths of his profiled head, capped by a fedora, can be seen, as the rest is obscured behind the woman's body and the arm of the fourth figure. The location of his hands is unclear, so one might assume that he is the culprit violating the female. Also wearing a fedora, the third man, at the composition's right, dons a dark green trench coat and yellow gloves. In his left hand he holds a folded over newspaper, presumably reading a column; however, upon careful observation, one notices that he slyly peers in the direction of the woman in orange. Smiling, she glances toward him, seemingly enjoying the illicit "goosing." As Michael Brooks notes in his brief discussion of this image, the main figure, whose expression he calls "tentative," wonders what to do. He suggests that she could "maintain her dignity and pretend that nothing has happened" or "cry out in public against a culprit whom she cannot identify."<sup>272</sup> As suggested by Citron's account of the incident, the woman was far from aghast over what had transpired, instead taking pleasure in the attention. She cannot be certain, however, of the

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<sup>272</sup> Michael W. Brooks, *Subway City: Riding the Trains, Reading New York* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 180. Brooks refers to the title of print version of this work as *Subway Manners*, but his is the only reference to that name. All other sources, including the artist's personal scrapbook and copies of her unpublished book use the title *Subway Technique*.

identity of the culprit since two of the three potentially guilty persons remain behind her.<sup>273</sup>

To the woman's right, and cut off by the left edge of the painting, stands a black man who, with his back to us, reaches out with his right hand to steady himself against the pole, and the dark color of his skin provides a contrast to the woman's porcelain white face and neck. Standing in profile, he wears a cap on his head along with a white shirt and tie (seen by the shirt collar and tie knot around his neck) underneath his suit coat. In the pocket of his coat, at the front of the composition and on the same plane as the woman's hand, also holding the pole, a folded newspaper is visible. The partially visible headline of the paper indicates the most obvious example within the series of Citron's concern with larger social issues—the front page story is about the trial of the Scottsboro Boys, one of the foremost new stories of the thirties, and one of the most “shameful examples of injustice in our nation's history,” according to attorney and law professor Douglas O. Linder.<sup>274</sup>

The so-called “Scottsboro Boys” were nine black teenagers arrested in March 1931, and tried in Scottsboro, Alabama, for allegedly raping two white girls on a Southern Railroad freight train heading from Chattanooga to Memphis, and coverage of their case was extensive, particularly in New York.<sup>275</sup> It was a case that, for many, raised

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<sup>273</sup> Books continues his brief discussion of this work by suggesting that it “would be comfortable for the viewer to think that it is the nasty-looking gentleman on the right, but it might also be the pleasant-looking one on the left. The arm movements are ambiguous and the artist always refused to say who was guilty. It is the ambiguity that matters.” *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>274</sup> Douglas O. Linder, “The Trials of the Scottsboro Boys,” in *The 1930s*, ed. Louise I. Gerdes (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 2000), 26.

<sup>275</sup> A search of the *New York Times* Historical Database for information on the Scottsboro Boys' case from 1931 until the end of 1932 (the year Citron painted *Subway Technique*) shows that 37 articles appeared in the *New York Times*, and a select few of the articles include the following: “Deny Negroes' Trial is 'Legal Lynching,'” *New York Times*, 9 April 1931, p. 31. “New Yorker tells Judge Hearing Retrial Plea He was Ordered ‘to Get Out and Stay Out,’” *New York Times*, 6 June 1931, p. 6. “Scottsboro Case

not just cultural concerns, but social and political issues as well. As historian Dan T.

Carter notes in the preface of his book on the Scottsboro Boys,

. . . for most white Southerners it [the Scottsboro Case] raised the specter of Communist subversion and racial insubordination; for Negroes it was a mirror which reflected three hundred years of mistreatment they had suffered at the hands of white America; Communists and other radicals saw Scottsboro as the inevitable offspring of an economic system based on racism and class exploitation; and for American liberals it became a tragic symbol of the sickness which pervaded the South's regional culture.<sup>276</sup>

Thousands of people, blacks and whites, northerners and southerners, protested the trials and the convictions.<sup>277</sup> “No crime in American history” reports Linder, “produced as many trials, convictions, reversals, and retrials as did an alleged gang rape of two white girls by nine black teenagers on a Southern Railroad freight train run on March 25, 1931.”<sup>278</sup> The boys were tried in several small groups, rather than in one large group, beginning in April 1931, just twelve days after their arrest, and all but one of the boys were sentenced to death. The conviction was overturned by the United States Supreme Court in November 1932, in part due to the “incompetence” of the defense attorneys, and in 1933 Alabama Judge Horton granted the motion for a second round of trials.<sup>279</sup> Again

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Called ‘Landmark,’” *New York Times*, 9 November 1931, p. 40. As one article by John Temple Graves aptly points out, the Scottsboro case produced much division not just along racial lines, but along political and class lines as well. Several radical organizations, including the New York based International Labor Defense, who sent lawyers work on the case, wanted, according to Graves, to “make the Negroes appear as martyrs in a class struggle,” and were determined “to save them simply because they were Negroes,” while Alabamans (whose white juries quickly convicted the boys and sentenced them to death) wanted “to execute them without regard to guilt.” John Temple Graves, “Alabama Resents Outside Agitation,” *New York Times*, 21 June 1931, p. 53.

<sup>276</sup> Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), xi.

<sup>277</sup> Historian James Goodman tells us that most white southerners, by contrast, believed the rape story. James Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), xii.

<sup>278</sup> Linder, 246-247.

<sup>279</sup> Linder notes that the defense attorneys “demonstrated their incompetence in many ways. They expressed a willingness to have all nine defendants tried together, despite the prejudice such a trial might cause to Roy Wright, for example, who at age twelve was the youngest of the nine Scottsboro Boys. . . .

the boys were convicted. More reversals were issued, on a variety of grounds (including one citing a violation of the Constitution for excluding blacks from the jury rolls), more trials ensued, and ultimately a number of the boys were sentenced to prison.<sup>280</sup> In none of the trials was there the usual presumption of innocence; and no matter how many holes were poked in the stories of the witnesses, the boys were automatically and without reservation presumed guilty.<sup>281</sup>

Many had expected the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to help defend the Scottsboro boys, but because rape was “a politically explosive charge in the South, and the NAACP was concerned about damage to its effectiveness that might result if it turned out some or all of the Boys were guilty,” they declined to send attorneys.<sup>282</sup> Instead, the International Labor Defense (ILD) of the Communist Party, who, in the South, were “treated with only slightly more courtesy than a gang of rapists” took the boys’ case and saw it as “a great recruiting tool among

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The cross-examination of Victoria Price [one of the young women allegedly raped] lasted only minutes, while examining doctors R. R. Bridges and John Lynch were not cross-examined at all. Ruby Bates was not asked about contradictions between her testimony and that of Price. The defense offered only the defendants themselves as witnesses, and their testimony was rambling, sometimes incoherent, and riddled with obvious misstatements.” Linder, 249. William L. Patterson and Richard B. Moore, *Mr. President: Free the Scottsboro Boys!* (New York: International Labor Defense, 1934), 11, 16-17, 31. According to Patterson and Moore, the Scottsboro boys “symbolize the oppression of the entire Negro people and the exploitation and suppression of all the toiling masses, white as well as black . . .” The International Labor Defense, whose offices were located at Room 430, 80 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street, New York City, raised funds for the Scottsboro case. See Advertisement asking for contributions.

<sup>280</sup> The Communist Party and the Young Communist League were two groups who organized workers and progressive liberals on behalf of the Scottsboro case who pledged their “undying loyalty and devotion to the cause for Negro emancipation—which is the struggle of all people who wish to be free.” They recognized that “in order to wage an effective fight it was necessary to expose and publish abroad the denial of elementary human justice, the inhuman exploitation which are invariably imposed upon the Negro by the bourgeois ruling class of the South.” Angelo Herndon, *The Scottsboro Boys: Four Freed! Five to Go!* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1937), 13, 10-11.

<sup>281</sup> One of the young women allegedly raped, Victoria Price, swore in all her testimony that each of the boys took his turn in raping her on the train, even though the facts of the case contradicted her statements. Her friend, Ruby Bates, who initially lied about the rapes out of fear, eventually rescinded her statement and fought on behalf of their innocence. Patterson and Moore, 8, 22-23.

<sup>282</sup> Linder, 250.

southern blacks and northern liberals.”<sup>283</sup> These young black boys, who were ultimately exonerated years later, were innocent of the charges, yet everyone within the Alabama court system—judges, lawyers and members of the jury—believed they were guilty.

Given that it is the black man in Citron’s painting who holds the newspaper referencing the Scottsboro Boys, and that it is his bare hand which rests inches from the white woman’s neck, one immediately assumes he is the one who has goosed the woman, since it was the nine African American boys who had allegedly violated two white girls on the train in Alabama. In this instance, however, Citron’s black man is innocent for he stands with his eyes closed, most likely in an effort to ignore the “goosing” by the man across from him, aware of the dangers facing him if he is caught participating in the illicit activity. Furthermore, Citron’s image of this African American man, as will also be seen in one of the courtroom images in the following chapter, is a more dignified representation than was typical in the 1920s and early 1930s, and her proclivity to include caricature within her compositions is muted here in favor of a more serious commentary based on cultural concerns and issues.

Representations of African Americans in this era, for example Marsh’s *The Melting Pot* or Palmer Hayden’s 1930 *The Subway*, often featured a stereotyped caricature of black Americans, and the exaggerated facial features and unusually large lips of the dark-skinned men in their works “play right into racist stereotypes” (Figure 43 and Figure 45).<sup>284</sup> Art historian Theresa Leininger-Miller notes that although he himself

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid. The ILD “defended clients in civil liberties and criminal cases initially scored by the respectable bar. . . . [And in addition, the] labor organizers [of the American Communist Party] played an absolutely crucial role in the many struggles for union recognition and collective bargaining” during the mid-thirties. Parrish, 425.

<sup>284</sup> Theresa Leininger-Miller, *New Negro Artists in Paris: African American Painters and Sculptors in the City of Light, 1922-1934* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 66.

was an African American, Hayden's images came from "life not only as he experienced it, but also as he saw it in the manner of popular culture images in minstrel shows and penny postcards."<sup>285</sup> In fact, historians have lambasted Hayden's images of blacks as looking like "one of those ludicrous billboards that once were plastered on public buildings to advertise the black minstrel face."<sup>286</sup> Leininger-Miller continues by pointing out that "few artists, black or white, had much access to dignified depictions of blacks in fine art in the early twentieth century."<sup>287</sup> Hayden's painting, like Marsh's, is similar to Citron's in that the viewer is presented with a cramped subway car, full of passengers, some of whom are even reading the paper during their commute. Several women sit to the right, several others stand to the left and in the background while two men, one white, one black, stand, like Citron's figures, holding the pole. The black figure is the most prominent, for he stands in the center of the composition, facing toward and looking out at the viewer.

In both works, signage, most of which is unreadable, appears above the subway car's door and windows. Citron's signs suggest some of the rules by which passengers should abide. In the line of advertisements seen above the door, few words or images are actually legible. What can be clearly read, though, are the words of the sign just above the car's door which read "Keep Hands." The rest of the sign, cut off by the right edge of the composition, probably reads "inside the car," but one could also surmise that "off the white woman" might complete the phrase, thus indicating that the passengers in the

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> James A. Porter, *Modern Negro Art* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 110; quoted in Leininger-Miller, 66.

<sup>287</sup> Leininger-Miller, 66.

cramped quarters of a filled rush hour subway car should avoid contact with others and that black “boys” especially should keep their hands to themselves.

This work, like several others within the “Feminanities” series, is difficult to interpret with regard to the artist’s feminist interests. Is she satirizing here, as she does in *Hope Springs Eternal* and *Beauty Culture*, the lower- or lower middle-class New York women who ride the subway and who, on occasion take pleasure from an illicit encounter with a stranger? Or is *Subway Technique* an example of radical feminism calling for a recuperation of woman’s pleasure? Is Citron saying that the woman depicted is not the victim of a crime and that it is acceptable for her to enjoy what some might consider the objectionable touch of a stranger during her morning commute? Perhaps. However, the inclusion of the reference to the Scottsboro Boys overshadows any type of feminist framework. Again the artist satirizes the social mores of people in an urban setting. She might tangentially be interested in whether or not the woman being goosed is “allowed” to take pleasure in the act, but her larger concern, as it was with *Beauty Culture*, is social and cultural commentary. Citron’s overall vision remains consistent, even in works tangentially related to political concerns, and her larger concerns regarding society, culture, and how people interact with one another, will continue to play a roll in the works created later in the decade.

Another example of the artist infusing paintings with her own personal experiences, social criticism and the inclusion of noteworthy media stories can be seen in Citron’s 1934 *Grist to the Mill* (Figure 46 and Figure 47). The image depicts two young boys sitting on top of a stack of unfolded papers on subway station floor. These sturdy newspaper boys, like the hausfrau of *She Earns an Honest Living*, attempt to turn the

Depression to their advantage, thus the title of the work.<sup>288</sup> The inspiration for *Grist to the Mill*, as with so many of Citron's other works, came from a personal experience. While the artist's younger son, Tom, recovered from an extended illness, her husband, Henry, would spend Saturday evenings with the boy, thereby enabling her to leave the house for a period of time. She would go and sit under the Brooklyn Bridge, describing the time there as follows: "I went each week with pen and pencil to sketch the tough newsboys squatting there waiting for their allotment of Sunday papers. Thus, I kept my sanity and thus I developed material for my painting 'Grist to the Mill.' But, why newsboys? It was reassuring to see their sturdy bodies while poor Tom's was, at that point, emaciated from confining casts and long bed-rest."<sup>289</sup>

While waiting for their customers, these young vendors each read a paper. The headline of the *Daily Mirror* reads "Child Slayer: Hair-Raising Details [of the] Murder," with indecipherable pictures of both the victim and the killer. The headline presumably refers to Bruno Hauptmann, alleged kidnapper of Charles Lindbergh, Jr., infant son of American hero Charles Lindbergh and his millionaire wife. The crime, according to historian James D. Horan, was "without parallel in the public shock, indignation, and fury it produced. The nation and all the civilized world was appalled."<sup>290</sup> Due to the family's prominent public image, stories about the child's kidnapping from their central New Jersey home on March 1, 1932 flooded the press and it, like the case of the Scottsboro

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<sup>288</sup> Grist, when used in the phrase "grist for one's mill" refers to "something turned to advantage." *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. "Grist."

<sup>289</sup> Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado. The artist's own children, at the time she painted *Grist to the Mill*, were about the age of the boys portrayed.

<sup>290</sup> James D. Horan, "The Crime of the Century: The Lindbergh Baby Kidnapping," in *The 1930s*, ed. Louise I. Gerdes (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 2000), 231.



Boys, became one of the most notorious stories of the decade.<sup>291</sup> To millions Colonel Lindberg “was no longer the Lone Eagle, but a . . . bereaved father describing how he had done everything possible to recover his infant son.”<sup>292</sup> After nearly two years of investigating the kidnapping, law officials were led to a German-born immigrant, Bruno Hauptmann, living in the Bronx. His trial lasted for several weeks in early 1935 and in April of the following year Hauptmann was executed for the crime. As a mother going through rough marriage, ensuing divorce and subsequent move into the city during the early years of the 1930s, Citron, like every other mother in the country, must have been concerned about the well-being of her children. And as such, while not drawing explicitly on the theme of women’s vanities, foibles or general activities the city, the idea of motherhood is implied, even if tangentially, by the subject matter of *Grist to the Mill*.

Perhaps more notable, however, given the context in which her other works have been discussed, is the pervading social commentary within the work. These poor newspaper boys, as was true of the blind woman in *She Earns an Honest Living*, are grist for the capitalist system that exploits their labor. The headline story in the *Daily Mirror* is about the sensational Lindbergh story, while the real stories of poor children, including these two figures, ironically, never make it into the papers they are forced to sell. The newspaper-reading public, Citron suggests, is more obsessed with the trivialities of Babe Ruth’s salary, as evidenced by the headline “The Babe Gets Salary Reduced to 50,000,” movie reviews about “Hot Love,” and images of John Dillinger (as seen in the section

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<sup>291</sup> The following is but a select few examples of the media stories appearing in a variety of sources; “The World against the Lindberghs,” *The Nation* 134 (March 16, 1932): 301. Silas Bend, “Lindbergh and the Press,” *Outlook* 160 (April 1932): 212-214. Harry Elmer Barnes, “The Deeper Lesson of the Lindbergh Kidnapping,” *The Survey* 68 (April 1, 1932): 17-19. P. W. Wilson, “The Lindbergh Case,” *North American Review* 237 (January 1934): 51-58. Helen MacGill Hughes, “The Lindbergh Case: A Study of Human Interest and Politics,” *American Journal of Sociology* 42 (July 1936): 32-54. Leigh Matteson, “Science Says the Lindbergh Baby was Killed in Cold Blood,” *Liberty*, 25 April, 1936, p. 15-18.

<sup>292</sup> Horan, 240.

heading “Officials Pose with Dillinger”) than with young boys working for mere pennies per week.<sup>293</sup> The irony of Citron’s painting comes from her not-so-subtle commentary on the capitalist system. In the middle of the Depression a baseball player earns tens of thousands of dollars per year while young boys and women barely make a living on the few cents earned selling newspapers in the subways and under the bridges of New York. So while not a specifically feminist-inspired piece, *Grist for the Mill* is in keeping with the artist’s continued interest in social commentary and ironic depictions of those around her. Every work within the “Femininities” series from the early 1930s contains critical observations not just about the individuals that surround the artist, but about the society in which she finds herself living—a society that, in Citron’s view, has become a beauty culture concerned more about professional athletes and the country’s rich-and-famous than the working poor and those hard-hit by the Depression.

Unlike many of her artist friends, Citron, as discussed above, was not as affected by the Depression. Her independent spirit allowed her to set off in a new direction, after a number of years of living within the comfortable confines of an upper middle-class lifestyle in Brooklyn, as she began to make a career for herself as an artist during the early 1930s. She was, as has been noted, a self-proclaimed feminist and while her feminism may not have adhered to strict ideological guidelines, she was a strong believer in women’s equality. Hers was a practical feminism grounded in her own personal experiences, and she chose to represent this personal reality in paintings and prints

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<sup>293</sup> Between January 1933 and February 1934 ten stories about Babe Ruth’s salary negotiations appeared in the *New York Times*, including, among others, the following: John Drebing, “Ruth Says \$50,000 was Yanks’ Offer,” *New York Times*, 18 January, 1933, p. 23. James P. Dawson, “Ruth and Rupert Clash on Salary; Babe Says, ‘\$60,00 or I’ll Quit’; Owner Replies, ‘Not a Cent Over \$50,000,’” *New York Times*, 14 March, 1933, p. 23. James P. Dawson, “Ruth and Ruppert Agree on \$52,000,” *New York Times*, 23 March, 1933, p. 21. This agreement marked a compromise between the owner and player and a reduction of \$23,000 from Ruth’s salary the previous year. John Drebing, “Ruth’s Salary Cut \$17,000 for 1934,” 16 January, 1934, p. 25.

infused with the social issues, events and people that surrounded her everyday. She believed women should be independent, and should have the right to choose freedom over being tied to the shackles of domesticity. Women who did nothing but worry about their appearance, who spent their time shopping for miracle beauty products and getting manicures were, in her words, “silly.” Citron, I think, had more respect for the archetypal buffeted figure who, like herself, continued along her own path in spite of difficult conditions or for the female newspaper vendor trying to make the best of hard economic times by getting out and working—even if it was at a job that required no skills and offered no advancement opportunities. Citron was hard working and independent and she defied tradition when she decided to divorce her husband, a decision which ultimately led to the creation of a unique set of images forming the basis of her second major series of the decade.

## CHAPTER 3

### DIVORCE, GAMBLING AND THE SEEDY MEN OF RENO

I'm on my way to Reno, to break the marriage knot  
You just get off the train and drop a nickel in the slot  
You just get off the train and then turn around and jump right on again  
Shouting the Battle Cry of Freedom  
---Bill Murray<sup>294</sup>

Nevada, the state with the most lenient divorce laws in the country, provided the backdrop for Minna Citron's most irreverent series. The artist was one of thousands of Easterners, most, but not all, of whom were women, traveling westward for the sole purpose of quickly ending a marriage, and the journey proved to be a tremendous inspiration for the development of her artistic career.<sup>295</sup> Citron's "reno-vation" resulted in a group of paintings known as the "Gambling Series," and they comprised nearly half of the works on display at a 1937 exhibition at Midtown Galleries in New York.<sup>296</sup> The colorful characters encountered within the gambling community during her extended stay in Nevada—a blackjack dealer, men crowded around a roulette wheel placing bets, men scrutinizing the racing statistics, and a gambling house guard—were the subjects of Citron's series and critics lauded the 1937 show. They described her as the "witty

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<sup>294</sup> Sung by Billy Murray on Victor Records, c. 1910. Reproduced in Anita J. Watson, "Tarnished Silver: Popular Image and Business Reality of Divorce in Nevada, 1900-1939" (M.A. Thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 1989), 64.

<sup>295</sup> Beginning in March 1931 one could obtain a divorce in Nevada by establishing residency after six weeks and citing nothing more than "cruelty" as grounds for the divorce.

<sup>296</sup> Mella Rothwell Harmon, "Getting Renovated: Reno Divorces in the 1930s," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 42 (1999): 50. In this article, Harmon notes that radio announcer and newspaper columnist Walter Winchell began using the term "Renovation" to describe a Reno-style divorce. The term is also used several times in a magazine devoted entirely to Nevada's divorce mecca titled *The Reno Divorce Racket* (Minneapolis: Graphic Arts Corporation, 1931): 3, 4, 8; "Paintings by Minna Citron," Midtown Galleries, New York, October 19 – November, 1937. The remaining works in the show were, at least in part, a continuation of what she accomplished two years before in "Feminanities," and should be discussed in conjunction with the earlier works.

chronicler of America,” writing of her “spicy scenes” that she “with a lusty humor transcribed...on her canvas.”<sup>297</sup> Citron’s trip to Reno afforded her the opportunity to gain access to venues relatively inaccessible to her at home. Many New Yorkers, as will be demonstrated, viewed gambling as an illicit activity that took place behind closed doors. The media covered stories of various gambling rackets being shut down by the police and gamblers being sent to jail. In Nevada, however, gambling was a legal and accepted practice by the 1930s, and Citron made the most of an opportunity to freely patronize gambling establishments and in turn focused her attention on the men she found there.

### **Reno: The Land of Divorce**

Upon first glance, the paintings comprising the “Gambling” series seem to have nothing explicitly to do with divorce since they portray casino guards, dealers and gamblers. Yet without Citron’s divorce trip to Nevada in the mid-1930s, she could not have created such a unique series of images. The artist made the journey to Reno after nearly twenty years of marriage to her teenage sweetheart, Henry. A number of years prior to this divorce trip, in the mid 1920s, and shortly after beginning her artistic training, Citron took her eldest son to a therapist. While he was in the other room taking an IQ test, she began talking with the doctor about her own life. Having become increasingly unhappy with her domestic situation, she began seeing the therapist on a regular basis, and was, in fact, one of the first Americans to enter psychotherapy in the 1920s.<sup>298</sup> While her growing interest in Freudian theory helped prompt forays into abstraction during the early 1940s, the initial effects of therapy were more immediate.

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<sup>297</sup> Davidson, 16.

<sup>298</sup> Brodsky and Olin.

One day her analyst asked if she had ever had an orgasm. Having never heard the word before, and thinking that “yes” sounded like a better answer than “no”, she responded in the affirmative, running home after the session to ask a friend what it meant. In part because of this incident, Citron decided shortly thereafter to get a divorce, and made the westward trip.<sup>299</sup>

The Citron family, part of upper middle-class society in Brooklyn, was not as hard hit by the Depression as others due to Henry’s successful business.<sup>300</sup> Their relative financial stability allowed the Citrons to get a divorce during a period when, in fact, many couples who otherwise may have chosen to be divorced decided to stay married because it was easier for people to get on relief rolls if there was a family to support.<sup>301</sup> Divorce statistics in Nevada notwithstanding, between 1929 and 1934 the national divorce rate actually dropped from 1.66 per 1,000 to 1.28.<sup>302</sup> Nevertheless, there was one crucial factor that led Citron westward for her divorce rather than going through the legal channels of New York. According to New York divorce laws, a divorce was granted only if proof of adultery could be given to the court. This relatively conservative law, according to divorce historian Nelson Manfred Blake in his study titled *The Road to Reno: A History of Divorce in the United States*, ultimately led thousands of people, including Citron, to travel many miles to states with less rigid divorce laws where the process was less time consuming and less expensive.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Citron, *Seasons of Life: 711.1-711.3*, 5-6. Within 10 years of beginning psychoanalysis, Citron was divorced, had severed ties with her overbearing mother, regained her independence and had turned her hobby into a serious art career. Brodsky and Olin.

<sup>300</sup> Henry was founder and president of a box manufacturing company in Elizabeth, New Jersey called Shampain, Citron and Clark.

<sup>301</sup> Ware, *Holding Their Own*, 7.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Nelson Manfred Blake, *The Road to Reno: A History of Divorce in the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), 64-65. Blake’s initial project was to write the first history of

Nevada, Reno in particular, provided an option for those in search of a quick and easy divorce. According to Blake, the majority of people supporting the Reno divorce mill were females from New York.<sup>304</sup> Census statistics indicate that Nevada's permanent population, 91,058 in 1930, was the lowest overall within the Union, and the ratio of men to women was heavily oriented toward men at 140.3 to 100, the greatest disparity among all the states.<sup>305</sup> Furthermore, economists Ron DePolo and Mark Pingle conducted a statistical study of Nevada's population from 1860 through 1993 and, supporting Edwards' conclusions, discovered that the population of the state, in comparison to the United States as a whole, was overwhelmingly male until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>306</sup> So, although the divorce-seekers traveling to Nevada and establishing "residency" there

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divorce in New York, but soon after realizing that to understand the evolution of divorce in that state, one had to situate New York within the broader context of divorce in America, the scope of the project changed. He notes in the preface that "no adequate history of American divorce appears to have been published since 1904, when George E. Howard's able three-volume *History of Matrimonial Institutions* appeared" (viii). As such, Blake's text has been invaluable to others writing about divorce in the United States more recently, including Glenda Riley whose book on divorce traces the "historical evolution of divorce from American colonial days to the present." Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), vii. In addition, a section of *The Reno Divorce Racket* is devoted to divorce laws within the 48 states. The New York entry tells the reader "After looking over the New York divorce law, you can see why Reno gets the business! With only one ground for divorce allowed, there isn't much chance to use your imagination, and that stuff about hubby throwing a beer bottle won't do at all. However, New York is not so strict regarding annulments. There's always an out, if you look far enough, in any law." "48 States—and 48 Ways," *The Reno Divorce Racket*, 55.

<sup>304</sup> Blake, 158.

<sup>305</sup> Jerome Edwards, "The Big Gamble," *Nevada* (March/April 1991): 36, 38. Jerome Edwards, "From Back Alley to Main Street: Nevada's Acceptance of Gambling," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 33 (Spring 1990): 19. A series of articles, including the two listed above, by University of Nevada history professor Jerome Edwards carefully consider the history, legalization and ultimate acceptance of gambling in Nevada. See also the following: Edwards, "The Americanization of American Gambling," *Halcyon* 14 (1992): 201-216. Edwards tells the reader that 1931 was a crucial year in Nevada history, in part because the contract for the construction of Hoover Dam was put forth. But also because the residency requirement for a Nevada divorce was reduced to a mere month and a half and gambling, which was to have the most significant impact on the future of the state, was (once again) legalized. Edwards, "The Big Gamble," 34. Perhaps most significant in relation to a consideration of Citron's gambling images, are the articles' images of casino interiors from the thirties, reproduced from the Nevada Historical Society archives. These photographs, along with those appearing in articles by Ralph Roske, Raymond Sawyer and others, are indispensable as comparisons with Citron's gambling pictures.

<sup>306</sup> Ron DePolo and Mark Pingle, "A Statistical History of the Nevada Population 1860-1993," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 37 (Winter 1994): 296-297. DePolo and Pingle also note that Nevada, which began as a frontier state, with mining as its primary industry, had, in the 1860s, a population which was overwhelmingly male (89.5%) when compared to the rest of the country (51.2%).

exclusively for legal purposes were predominantly women, the overall permanent population of the state as a whole remained dominated by men.<sup>307</sup> It is the male-oriented world of Nevada—the dealers and the patrons—that Citron records in gambling pictures. Single men are depicted in *The Dealer—21*, *The Lookout*, *Western Gambling House*, and *Racing Form*, while groups of men occupy the space presented in *Laying the Bets* and *Doping the Horses*. Among all of the gambling images, a female figure, apparently a self-portrait of the artist, appears in only one canvas, *Croupier*, but she stands in the background, secondary to the main male character.<sup>308</sup>

Citron's images, to be discussed in more detail below, are not the only cultural record of the gender imbalance to be found in Nevada. This overwhelmingly male world of Reno, complete with cowboys, is aptly portrayed in John Huston's 1961 film *The Misfits*.<sup>309</sup> Although *The Misfits* was produced three decades after the period under consideration in this paper, a scene at the train station is in keeping with the accounts of Reno in the 1930s. Divorcees stand on a departing train proclaiming their undying love for the cowboys they met during their lengthy stopover in the town. Clark Gable's character is among the cowboys saying good-bye to the tearful throngs of women with whom they have "fallen in love," promising to write/visit them back East when, in fact,

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<sup>307</sup> In fact, nearly three-fifths of those establishing residency in Reno for the sole purpose of obtaining a divorce were women. "The Mechanics of a Reno Divorce are Simple and Swift," *Life*, 21 June 1937, 34.

<sup>308</sup> Davidson, 16. To date, the author of this manuscript has been unsuccessful in locating the painting.

<sup>309</sup> The screenplay for this film was written by Monroe's husband at the time, Arthur Miller, and Clark Gable's character, Gay, represents Miller in this "pseudo-sociological study of . . . cowboy[s] . . . Reno and the horrors of divorce . . . [and an] embarrassing psychoanalysis of Marilyn Monroe, Arthur Miller, and what went wrong with their famous marriage." "New Picture: The Misfits," *Time Magazine*, 3 February 1961, 68.



they are merely waiting for the next group of divorce-seekers to move into town.<sup>310</sup>

Additionally, boarding house owner Isabelle Steers serves as a witness to the legitimacy of Roslyn Taber's "residency," coaches her on answers to be given in response to the judge's questions in court, and accompanies her to the courthouse on the day of the proceedings. Historic preservationist Mella Rothwell Harmon points out in her cleverly titled article "Getting Renovated" that the 1931 divorce law required a witness, usually a landlord, or hotel/ranch manager, to testify to having seen the plaintiff on each and every day of her/his residency in the city.<sup>311</sup> The Reno divorce mill, which began in earnest decades before the production of the film, was portrayed in the early sixties as still going strong.

While the permanent population of Nevada was overwhelmingly male, as evidenced by statistical surveys and in Huston's portrayal of the city, the divorce-seekers were, more often than not, female. Generally, the husband was the main wage-earner for the family and was unable to leave his job for several weeks/months to make the westward divorce- trip. As a result, he stayed at home to work and continue supporting the family, while the wife, and occasionally the children, went to Nevada.<sup>312</sup> Huston fills

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<sup>310</sup> Marilyn Monroe's character, unlike the women on the train, decides to begin her life anew and remain in Nevada, so she, with the help of Isabelle (Thelma Ritter), Gay (Clark Gable), and Guido (Eli Wallach) moves out of the boarding house in town to Guido's desert house and the remainder of the movie traces the development of Monroe and Gable's relationship.

<sup>311</sup> Harmon, "Getting Renovated." After writing a master's thesis on the economic opportunity the divorce trade brought to Reno, Harmon continued her interest in the subject with "Getting Renovated." In the article, she briefly summarizes the history of Nevada's divorce laws, focusing more on the economic implications of the trade than does Jerome Edwards in his account of gambling and divorce in Reno. She discusses the ways in which the divorce trade shaped Reno society and its image, and includes statistical information on the number of divorces granted to men and women and the amount of money each spent while in residence in Nevada (as well as a breakdown of these costs). She then considers gambling, public transportation, and the types of housing options and entertainment venues available to the temporary residents of Reno. Most significantly in terms of economic impact, Harmon notes that while little has been written on the subject and in spite of the Depression, jobs were to be found in Reno, thus "bear[ing] witness to the favorable effects of the divorce trade on the city's economy." Harmon, "Getting Renovated," 48, 60.

<sup>312</sup> Watson, "Tarnished Silver," 59-60.

the departing train with weepy women, while novelist Grace Hegger Lewis recounts what women in Reno encountered upon their arrival in the city. Lewis's pseudo-biography of her marriage to author-husband, *Half a Loaf* from 1931, aptly portrays the scene:

After their [the women's] first few weeks of bewildered adjustment to the social disorder of Reno . . . they began casting about for male society. There wasn't any. Men of any financial importance could not afford to spend six months in idleness; economically it was simpler to let their wives get the divorce on a plea of mental cruelty or desertion. But these women missed their men, and the constant discussion with lawyers of their most personal affairs, the bald confidences of their fellow-sufferers, the letters from the old love and the new, kept alive a low fire of sexual unrest which at intervals would flame up and satisfy itself in cheap flirtations with chauffeurs, soda clerks, cowboys, and even with the downy-faced students of the state university.<sup>313</sup>

Furthermore, the lives and activities of the divorce-seekers in Reno are portrayed in both a well-liked novel and a popular play, turned into a film, from the decade contemporaneous with the one under consideration in this paper. Reno serves as the venue for part of Rupert Hughes' 1931 novel, *No One Man*.<sup>314</sup> At the story's beginning the reader meets Penelope Newbold, a young woman from a wealthy family who spends her days doing little more than tanning herself in the sand at Palm Beach, as per the requirements of the beauty culture in which she finds herself, playing tennis at the athletic club and flirting with the numerous men who surround her.<sup>315</sup> After an

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<sup>313</sup> Grace Hegger Lewis, *Half a Loaf* (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1931), 378. Lewis continues "But between flare-ups, these women resigned themselves to their highly feminized existence and decided that this was the grand opportunity to rest and prepare their bodies for the next encounter." An entire chapter of Lewis's novel is devoted to the main character's six month sojourn to Reno and the reader finds the main character, Susan, spending the first two days of stay in a hotel before renting a bungalow on the residential end of Reno's main thoroughfare Virginia Street. It is notable that even though the book was written in 1931, the same year Nevada passed the six-week residency law, the main character stays in Reno for six months, the amount of time Lewis herself must have spent in Nevada getting her own divorce.

<sup>314</sup> Rupert Hughes, *No One Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1931).

<sup>315</sup> One reviewer of the book notes that "all the elements to which his audiences have grown accustomed are present: allusions to the unsavoriness of polygamy as a social institution, combined with digressions tending to prove that woman is naturally polygamous; scenes of what are supposed to be modern high life in Palm Beach, New York, Reno, related in a style that has a glib factitious affectation of smartness. Above all, every page tingles with an ingredient which has the appearance of being sex, but

entertaining series of marriage proposals in a single day, a three-day, comic trial pre-marriage to one suitor, and finally an actual wedding (to another of her admirers), Nep realizes, shortly after stating her marriage vows, that she could never be the wife Joe Sturgis ought to have and demands a divorce.<sup>316</sup> During their three-month Reno stay, the couple ate dinners at the “swanky” and fashionable Riverside Hotel, where the wealthy divorce-seekers are purported to have lived and dined, toured the mining region around the city and visited a nightclub up in the hills.<sup>317</sup> As they approached the club, all looked dark and, as it turns out, one could only be admitted via invitation, procured for Nep and Joe by their Reno attorney. Inside the couple found themselves among the throngs of noisy dancers, drinkers and gamblers; Nep herself even played the roulette wheel. Being before 1931, when the wide-open gambling laws were put into effect, one can, through the account of this author, begin to get a sense of the secrecy in which gambling was carried out—dark house, no lights on, a peephole in the door. Although only a short

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which is not really sex at all, or anything nearly as vital, but simply a sort of bedroom curiosity, a suspense that makes a Peeping Tom out of the reader.” He points out, too that the book is favorable among “large audiences.” Niven Busch, Jr. “Cherchez La Femme: *No One Man and Wife to Hugo*,” *The Saturday Review of Literature* 7 (June 20, 1931): 912. Unable to fathom the possibility of marriage, Nep, as she is known by her friends, firmly believes that “it takes a dozen men of different ages and types to keep a girl entertained,” and puzzles over the fact that “she is supposed to single out one of them and sentence herself to life with him in the most exclusive of all clubs—matrimony . . .” Hughes, 1.

<sup>316</sup> Joe, being a lawyer in New York, insists that she go to Reno for a divorce, since according to New York law at the time, she would have to wait until he had deserted her for five years, or allege, and be able to prove, adultery. Ibid., 202. Not wanting to spend three months in Reno by herself (indicating that the story was written prior to the passing of Nevada’s shorter six-week residency requirement), Nep convinces Joe to accompany her and they rent a bungalow for their stay.

<sup>317</sup> The Riverside Hotel in downtown Reno is mentioned in the following sources as having an international reputation as the place where the wealthy would stay while waiting for a divorce: Mella Rothwell Harmon, “Divorce and Economic Opportunity in Reno, Nevada During the Great Depression” (Ph.D. diss., University of Nevada, Reno, 1998),” 51.; Barbara Land and Myrick Land, *A Short History of Reno* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1995), 51; Henry F. Pringle, “Reno the Wicked: The American Capital of Divorce and Gambling,” *Outlook* (July 29, 1931): 395; Dwayne Kling, *The Rise of the Biggest Little City: An Encyclopedic History of Reno Gaming, 1931-1981*, with a foreword by Rollan Melton (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000), 140-143. This popular novel, then, brought further public awareness to Reno as a place where divorces were easily obtained.

passage of the novel is devoted to Reno, the brief description, by all accounts, is an accurate one.

Additionally, part of Clare Boothe's 1937 hit story, *The Women*, takes place in Reno. This story, according to Barbara and Myrick Land, exaggerates the 1930s divorce mill in Reno and was designed chiefly for laughs, even though Boothe knew the Reno-scene first-hand.<sup>318</sup> It was the women she met during her three month stay in Reno who provided the inspiration for her story. Mary, after discovering her husband's affair, heads to Reno for a divorce. On the trip she meets several other women including the Countess de Lage (played by Mary Boland in the film version) who, getting her fourth divorce, tells Mary: "Wait till you've lost as many husbands as I have. Married, divorce, married, divorced! But where love leads I always follow. So here I am, in Reno."<sup>319</sup> At the dude ranch where they are staying, and where all the action takes place in the film (the viewer never actually gets to see Reno), the Countess, like Monroe's character in *The Misfits*, meets a cowboy, falls in love and marries for the fifth time.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Barbara Land and Myrick Land, "Reno Divorce Days," *Nevada* 56 (1991): 61. Barbara and Myrick Land's contribution to the literature on Reno is twofold, but it their article titled "Reno Divorce Days" proved to be most useful for this project. In their brief discussion of Reno the authors consider not only the celebrity divorce of actress Mary Pickford in 1920 (an event that garnered national media attention and thus helped attract more people to Reno), but also Clare Boothe's trip to Reno and her subsequent satirical play, *The Women*.

<sup>319</sup> Boothe, 140.

<sup>320</sup> Such dude ranches were extremely popular among divorce-seeking women visiting Reno and provided them with an opportunity to ride horses, meet cowboys and enjoy a "typical" western lifestyle while on their respite from, in many cases at least, hectic eastern city life. Mella Rothwell Harmon and Susan Horton briefly discuss the dude ranch. Harmon points out how local ranchers turned their operations into divorce ranches "catering to wealthy (mostly Eastern) women, offering a healthy outdoor experience and the company of handsome cowboys. Harmon, "Divorce and Economic Opportunity in Reno," 1. Horton also observes that "wealthy Easterners were mesmerized by the thoughts of days spend horseback riding and swimming at a local dude ranch, followed by glorious nights of gambling and dining in elegant casinos. . . . Dude ranches offered a desert haven for those wishing to escape journalists and photographers. . . . The dude ranches were a novelty to Easterners . . . . A divorcee could expect to end her residency in love with at least two handsome cowboys. Once Reno-vated, she would return to her Park Avenue penthouse, the envy of her friends, disgustingly healthy and suntanned." Susan Horton, "The Six-Week Cure," *Nevada* 1981 (November/December 1981): 28.

Nep Newbold and the characters of *The Women* represent a few of the thousands who flocked to Nevada each year to have their marriages dissolved. Between 1922 and 1945 the number of divorce decrees granted in the state of Nevada increased annually, and by the mid 1930s, when Citron made the journey, between 3,600 and 4,100 people were divorced.<sup>321</sup> The state's initial six-month residency requirement was increased by the state legislature to one year in 1913; however, after losing millions of dollars in revenue the following year, they reduced the mandatory residency period back to six months in 1915. Since the state's economy was so dependent on the dollars brought in by divorce-seekers, a 1922 proposal to again lengthen the residency was rejected.<sup>322</sup> There

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<sup>321</sup> Watson, "Tarnished Silver," 57. Watson includes information compiled from the United States Bureau of the Census, *Marriage and Divorce, 1916, 1922-1932* and from the State of Nevada, *Biennial Report of the Board of Health, July 1, 1938 – June 30-1945*. Her chart shows that in 1922 1,026 divorces were granted. That number increased to 5,206 in 1931 after the passing of the most lenient divorce law in the country and by the mid 1940s the number was up to 18,904. The first divorce in Nevada had been granted in 1863 to Mr. and Mrs. Powell of Gold Canyon, but the state's divorce laws were not brought to national and international attention until 1900 with the celebrity divorce of England's Lord John Russell. Harmon, "Getting Renovated," 50. Lord Russell's divorce attracted much media attention both nationally and internationally. He traveled to Nevada after ten years of marriage to his wife, Mabel and sought to marry his mistress, Mollie Cooke Somerville. A countersuit was filed in England by Mabel, charging her husband with bigamy and, upon his return with his new bride, Lord Russell was arrested and spent three months in prison. Land and Land, *A Short History of Reno*, 47; and Watson, "Tarnished Silver," 23. Thousands of miners traveled to Nevada during the mid nineteenth century, particularly after the 1859 discovery of the Comstock Lode, in search of a fortune in silver ore. The mining era, it has been argued, lasted until 1931 when what is commonly referred to as the "gaming era" began with the legalization of casino gambling and wide-open gambling laws. DePolo and Pingle, 282. Upon creation of the Nevada Territory on March 2, 1861, with James H. Nye serving as territorial governor, a residency requirement of six months was established so as to allow miners to acquire voting privileges quickly. Blake, 152. The same residency period seemed reasonable when writing the territorial divorce laws as well; thus, the first divorce law in Nevada, passed in 1861, required the plaintiff to live in the state for a period of six months. This original residence requirement, therefore, was not "made to favor matrimonial misfits, but to give citizenship to prospectors and miners who wander about and seldom remain a year in one place." Leslie Curtis, *Reno Reveries* (Reno: Armanko Stationery Co. 1924), 55. Further media attention was given to Nevada and its divorce laws in 1906 when Mrs. Laura B. Corey, wife of the U.S. Steel president, divorced her husband after his increasingly public affair. This case is discussed in Blake, 153; Land and Land, *A Short History of Reno*, 48. The following year, New York attorney William H. Schnitzer, who had moved to Nevada, began advertising his services in newspapers and theater programs back East. Moreover, he published a pamphlet, titled *Divorce and Practice Procedure*, in 1907 which examined the reasons for the increasing popularity of Nevada's divorce law—primarily short residency and lenient grounds for divorce. Reno's divorce industry was on its way to becoming nationally, and internationally, popular. Riley, 136. As a result, Schnitzer had his law license temporarily revoked in 1911. The account of Schnitzer's exploits can also be found in Blake, 153-154.

<sup>322</sup> Blake, 155, 156.

were some, however, who fought the legislation and believed the immorality of divorce outweighed any economic benefits that might be reaped from the trade.<sup>323</sup> Responding to such arguments, Leslie Curtis published the following poem in 1924:

### The Colony

Have you ever thought about the Reno Colony  
And what we owe this little fad, divorce?  
Fair plaintiffs oft advising,  
Forever criticising [*sic*],  
Yet their money helps us on a bit, of course.

If you legislate against the Reno Colony,  
To other fields the fair ones you will drive.  
For ill-advised propriety  
Brings poverty and piety,  
And some of us would much prefer to thrive.

Does Reno really know how much the Colony  
Contributes to the cafes and the stores?  
Hotels would soon be closing,  
The population dozing  
If broken hearts should favor other shores.

A necessary evil is the Colony,  
It must exist when Love has sullen grown,  
So quit the foolish knocking,  
Your own progression blocking,  
And learn to let what's well enough alone.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Even into the following decade, after the legalization of gambling and the more lenient divorce laws were passed by the Nevada Legislature, there were people, including Paul Hutchinson, who took an adversarial role in the arguments against divorce, gambling and legalized prostitution. Paul Hutchinson, "Nevada—A Prostitute State," *Christian Century* 48 (November 25, 1931); Paul Hutchinson, "Reno—A Wide-Open Town," *Christian Century* 48 (December 2, 1931): 1519-1520. Paul Hutchinson, "Reno's Divorce Mill," *Christian Century* 48 (December 9, 1931): 1557-1559. Paul Hutchinson, "Can Reno be Cured?" *Christian Century* 48 (December 16, 1931): 1592-1594. In another instance Henry F. Pringle points out that while there was no organized opposition to Reno's new liberalism, Methodist Board of Temperance member Dr. Clarence True Wilson called Reno a combination of Sodom, Gomorrah and perdition. Others, including, for example, Mrs. O. H. Mack, president of the Woman Citizens' Club and former president of the League of Woman Voters, attempted to "rally public opinion" against officially recognized gambling, prostitution and easy divorce, but to no avail. Pringle, 403, 395.

<sup>324</sup> Curtis, 83-84.

During the 1920s, as other states increasingly tried to get in on the divorce business, Nevada once more reduced the time period one must live in the state to get a divorce to three months.<sup>325</sup> Between 1926 and the passing of the shorter residency requirement in 1927, Nevada divorce decrees jumped from 1,021 to 1,953.<sup>326</sup> That number swelled to 5,260 in 1931 when Nevada, again not wanting to lose revenue to Arkansas and Idaho who had each just passed their own relatively liberal divorce laws, decreased the residency yet again to an unprecedented six weeks.<sup>327</sup> In Nevada, as in many other states, one could easily obtain a divorce on one of the following grounds: cruelty, adultery, desertion, nonsupport or neglect, habitual drunkenness, felony, impotency, and five years of either separation or insanity.<sup>328</sup> If one were using cruelty as the reason for divorce and if the case was uncontested, specific proof of the stated cruelty was not required; therefore, the majority of the divorces were granted quickly and easily—and this new liberal divorce law is what made Nevada unique.<sup>329</sup>

### **The Land of Gambling and the Men of the “Gambling Series”**

During the same session that reduced the residency requirement for divorces to a mere month and half, the Nevada State Legislature passed a wide-open gambling law, which, in effect, finally legalized casino gambling, an activity that had been fairly

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<sup>325</sup> Blake, 157; Harmon, “Getting Renovated,” 50.

<sup>326</sup> Riley, 137.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid. The law went into effect on May 1, 1931. The other benefit of the new law, in addition to the shorter residency requirement, was that divorce-seekers were no longer required to live only within the county in which the divorce application was filed. The law broadened the terms of residence to be within the state, thereby allowing flexibility in terms of being able to travel around the state—to Reno, to Lake Tahoe, to Hoover Dam etc., Pringle, 397.

<sup>328</sup> Blake, 158; Philip E. Siggers, *The Truth about Reno: A Guidebook to Reno, Nevada and the Surrounding Country Useful to the Prospective Visitor and Newcomer* (Reno: privately printed, 1934), 25.

<sup>329</sup> Blake, 158.

inaccessible to the general population.<sup>330</sup> Gambling had always been present in Nevada, yet the road to legalized gambling was not an easy one.<sup>331</sup> Gambling was first legalized, albeit with controls and over the protests and veto of the state's first governor H. G. Blasdel, in 1869.<sup>332</sup> Over the course of the next forty years Nevada's gambling laws underwent changes, being rewritten by legislators several times.<sup>333</sup> A nationwide era of anti-gambling reform ended in 1910 when Nevada, as well as other states, was forced to close its casinos and once again outlaw gambling.<sup>334</sup> By 1915 racetrack betting in Nevada was again legally recognized and while wagering on card games was also permitted, casino gambling was still forbidden. As a result, throughout the late teens and into the twenties illegal gambling in the back rooms of legitimate businesses continued.<sup>335</sup>

Such "hidden" gambling establishments are revealed in a 1931 film written by Kubec Glasman and John Bright and directed by Alfred E. Green called *Smart Money*. The movie, starring Edward G. Robinson and James Cagney, deals with gambling. Small

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<sup>330</sup> Ultimately, the gambling laws were more important to the state; however, it was the liberal divorce law that brought more immediate economic benefits. Jerome H. Skolnick, *House of Cards: The Legalization and Control of Casino Gambling* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 108.

<sup>331</sup> In Territorial Nevada during 1859 the Gold Hill Mining District outlawed organized gambling, among other things, and two years later when James H. Nye, who was opposed to gambling, took over as territorial governor, the first session of the Nevada Territorial Legislature passed laws controlling gambling. Land and Land, *A Short History of Reno*, 33.

<sup>332</sup> The law declared that while gambling was legal it could not take place on the first floor of a building and there could be no signs on the exterior of the building advertising what took place within. Edwards, "The Big Gamble," 34; and Ralph J. Roske, "Gambling in Nevada: The Early Years, 1861-1931," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 33 (Spring 1990): 31.

<sup>333</sup> The legal gambling age was raised to 21, license fees lowered, games at which one could easily chat banned, and laws regulating bookmaking put into place. Eric N. Moody, "The Early Years of Casino Gambling in Nevada, 1931-1945," (Ph.D. diss., University of Nevada, Reno, 1997), 18. See also Roske, 32; and Edwards, "The Big Gamble," 34.

<sup>334</sup> Legalized gambling in America was dormant after 1910, with the exception of a few horse racing tracks that were permitted to operate, and New York was forced to close its racetracks in 1911. William N. Thompson, *Legalized Gambling: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO Inc., 1994), 67.

<sup>335</sup> Moody, 25, 29; and Edwards, "The Big Gamble," 34.



town barber Nick Venizelos (Robinson) runs a small poker game out of his shop.<sup>336</sup> He takes money staked by local friends and heads off to the “big city,” presumably New York or Chicago, to gamble with the big players. The hotel’s blonde cigar counter clerk tells Nick where to find the card game, but he is soon forced to leave town, broke, after being scammed in a crooked game. Later returning to the city with more money, he swindles the con-artists, makes a lot of money and opens a barber shop, which serves as a front for an elaborate gambling hall. Like the nightclub of Hughes’ novel, Nick’s hall appears dark from the outside, has a door with a peephole and a guard to let only the invited in. As such, both representations of Nevada gambling establishments are in keeping with how games were run in the years prior to the 1931 legalization of gambling.

Citron’s 1937 *The Lookout—Western Gambling House* portrays a watchman in strict profile, seated in a chair outside the entrance of a Reno casino (Figure 48). Citron cleverly refers to art historical precedents in a number of works from early in her career, including this one. She had traveled to Europe as an art student and, it appears, drew on masterpieces from European Museums, including the Louvre, for inspiration. For instance, in this particular work, the artist may have had Whistler’s 1871 *Arrangement in Black and Gray (Portrait of the Artist’s Mother)* in mind when thinking about the composition (Figure 49). Citron’s figure, however, is much more relaxed in comparison to Whistler’s who holds a more rigid and formal pose. The watchman, wearing the same visor as the dealers in *Laying the Bets* and *The Dealer—21*, both of which will be

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<sup>336</sup> Robinson’s character Nick was named after several real contemporary gamblers: Nick Forzelli who, it was reported, won and lost \$1,000,000 three times, and Nick “The Greek” Dandolas, friend of Jack Dempsey. “The New Pictures: Smart Money,” *Time*, 29 June 1931, 20. Another contemporary review of the film notes that the chief character is a composite of Nick the Greek and John the Barber, both of whom were “front page gamblers.” “Smart Money,” *Variety Film Reviews* 4 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1983), June 23, 1931.

discussed below, is donning, like the other dealers, slightly rumpled attire. Looking completely relaxed, he pushes back on his chair, balancing it on two legs, while sitting, one leg crossed over the other, steadying himself with one foot. One arm remains on the chair's armrest while the other is bent, hand reaching toward and resting on his chin in a moment of boredom. The shallow pictorial space is emphasized by the overall rectilinear quality produced by the strict lines of the walls, windows, and doorways. One of the peculiarities about the painting, given that by the mid-thirties gambling was no longer an activity that took place in back rooms, is the fact that the artist chose to depict a figure acting as a lookout or a guard at a gambling house. Hence the irony of his napping/relaxing; there is nothing left to be on the lookout for after legalization.

The figure represents a guard who worked at a back room establishment prior to 1931. Keeping in mind that she was creating these images for Eastern audiences, and given the fact that gambling was still outlawed in her home state of New York at the time, Citron chose a guard outside a gambling hall as her subject because he was a figure who might have been familiar to New York audiences. Numerous articles in the *New York Times* from the 1930s relate stories of gambling raids by the city's vice squads—telling of the back room card games, small scale gambling operations, and the numbers of people arrested and taken away in the paddy wagons.<sup>337</sup> As such, the masses not privy to the actual games would have been familiar with the punishment for participation in such unlawful pastimes.

Several Hollywood films of the thirties also recreate the secrecy of gambling, and the seedy behavior of those participants. In *Smart Money* games took place in hotel

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<sup>337</sup> Several such examples include the following: "32 Held in Gambling Raid," *New York Times*, 3 August 1930, p. 6; "Take 35 in Gambling Raid," *New York Times*, 17 August 1930, p. 16; "Gambling Charges Heard," *New York Times*, 26 August 1930, p. 11.

rooms and larger guarded gambling establishments.<sup>338</sup> In the 1934 *Manhattan Melodrama*, gambling racketeer Blackie Gallagher (Clark Gable) operates a backroom casino, and in one scene when the cops arrive all of the gaming tables are flipped over and the chips put quickly away so the covert casino appears to be a regular social club frequented by wealthy, well-dressed men and women. Gambling also took place in the back rooms of legal business establishments or in large houses/mansions outside of town, as shown in *No One Man*, presumably away from the watchful eye of the law. Although in many cases, including Robinson's when the police were not paid off for protection the inevitable vice squad would appear to raid the establishments and arrest all within.<sup>339</sup> As such, this closed world of gambling was not necessarily available to the masses, and, as portrayed in the film, only serious gamblers and/or the wealthy had access to such venues. In fact, as historian William N. Thompson tells us, the gaming houses in Eastern cities started emerging as organized crime began to realize the financial possibilities of offering games of chance to the affluent classes.<sup>340</sup>

It has already been mentioned that in 1930 Nevada had the lowest population of any state and that the population was weighted heavily toward males. Members of the legislature believed legalized gambling would attract more people, of both sexes, to the state, perhaps even tourists, rather than just female divorce-seekers, the result of which

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<sup>338</sup> Additionally, the film shows that it was the men, not the women who were gambling in the smoky hotel rooms, such as the underhanded game Nick enters after his arrival in the city. Pringle tells us that an establishment called the Bank Club, run by Jim McKay, Bill Graham and Ray Kendall, the "Big Three" gamblers in Reno, was located in a basement before 1931. After legalization it was moved to street level and maintained over fifty feet of one of Reno's main thoroughfares. Pringle, 402.

<sup>339</sup> Robinson's character, in addition to his penchant for gambling, has a particular fondness for blondes, which proves to be his downfall. Irene (played by Evalyn Knapp) is used by the police to spy on Nick's gambling establishment. See apt summary of the movie in Mordaunt Hall, "The Screen: The Gambling Barber," *New York Times Film Reviews* 1 (New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1970), June 19, 1931; Leo Meehan, "Smart Money," *Motion Picture Herald* (May 16, 1931): 34.

<sup>340</sup> Thompson, 8.

would be an even greater stimulation of the economy, thereby ensuring a certain amount of financial prosperity for the state. Nevada's passing the wide-open gambling law in 1931 legalized casinos, card rooms and gaming devices.<sup>341</sup> After the legalization of gambling, dozens of casinos and gaming halls opened in Reno, for various periods of time ranging from several weeks to several decades. In 1934, according to Dwayne Kling's encyclopedic account of Reno during the first fifty years of the "gaming era," at least thirty enterprises offered games at which one could place a bet.<sup>342</sup> Some, such as the Ace of Spades, a tango parlor, offered only one game, while others, including the Riverside Hotel and Casino and Harold's Club, were licensed as full casinos.<sup>343</sup>

It was within these three dozen or so establishments that Citron found her subjects during the course of her six-week stay. As already noted, Citron's view of the gambling world is gender-biased—she records only the male dealers and male patrons. In *Laying the Bets* and *Doping the Horses*, the viewer notices that only men are portrayed (Figure 50 and Figure 55). The figures within both compositions also find themselves within sparsely decorated gambling establishments. To the right of the three men laying their bets in figure 50, and at the end of an elongated oval-shaped table, sits a roulette wheel. In front of it rests an ashtray with a still-lit cigarette producing a line of smoke that, along with the dealer's hand cuts across the left third of the wheel. The dealer, standing upright behind the table and thus facing the viewer, stretches out his left arm, again with

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<sup>341</sup> While New Jersey was among the first states to again legalize horse track betting, in the late 1930s, it was not until 1976 that New Jersey's gambling laws began to rival the liberal regulations and monopoly of the industry held by Nevada. Denise von Herrmann, *The Big Gamble: The Politics of Lottery and Casino Expansion* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 13, 34. von Herrmann includes several useful tables outlining the dates when each state adopted state lotteries as well as casinos, card rooms, and gaming devices.

<sup>342</sup> Kling. Kling's comprehensive book catalogs the various gaming establishments and people involved with the gambling industry. With regard to each enterprise, Kling makes note of where each was located, the dates of operation, and the games for which each was licensed to offer.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 140-143.

wrinkled shirt sleeve rolled up to the elbow, toward the far edge of the composition and holds it hovering above the wheel, ball in hand, ready to drop it into the wheel after the three patrons have placed their bets. An older figure, as evidenced by his sunken cheeks, the dealer bends his slightly balding head toward the table. A visor, pulled down to his ears and resting on his forehead, covers the top half of his face, consequently concealing it and, in turn, rendering him anonymous. The dealer's head turns slightly toward the wheel rather than toward the figures and the rest of the table as would have been appropriate. However, given that half of his face is covered by the visor, one is unsure whether or not he is covertly watching the gamblers out of the corner of his eye.

The circle of the roulette wheel and the oval of the table are echoed in the composition, drawing the viewer's eye in a circular direction across the canvas. Our gaze first rests upon the head of the dealer, which serves as the apex of the composition, before moving along his outstretched arm, the hand of which is bisected by the rising plume of cigarette smoke, through the edge of the roulette wheel and on to the threesome in front of the table. The figure next to the wheel stands in front of a stool, resting his elbow upon a cane, the handle of which directs the eye to the bent right arm and jutting elbow of the middle figure. His hand, firmly resting upon his hip, points to the left and guides the viewer to the left-most gambler. His arm, also bent with hand in pocket and rolled newspaper pressed to his side, is in alignment with his head, thereby directing the viewer's gaze back toward the standing dealer.

The three figures, bending over a concealed roulette table, are presumably, as indicated by the title of the work, placing their bets by laying chips on the table. Huddled together the figures lean, almost as one over the table, and their heads are only inches

above the table's surface. Each figure's left arm rests on the table, but their bodies block the action in front of them. While the viewer is meant to deduce that they are laying their chips on the color/number upon which they are betting, conceivably one could also conclude that a sleight of hand is taking place. The proximity of the bending figures to the table is too close, the dealer neglects to watch where the chips are being placed, and the smoke from the cigarette at the end of the table bisects the dealer's hand. In comparing Citron's roulette table to an "action" photo of the New Yorker Club in 1932, one sees the gamblers sitting or standing before the table (Figure 51). Occasionally, as in this photo as well as the 1931 image from the Bank Club, the gamblers may have put their hands, even elbows on the table in front of them, but never are they huddled so closely together with one another as are Citron's figures, and never are they leaning in only inches from the table's surface (Figure 52). The artist consciously chooses to deviate from the "real" photo, which, incidentally, appears to be somewhat staged as several of the figures pause to look out toward the camera. Citron exaggerates the stances of her figures by way of caricaturing their attitudes. As with the "Femininities" series, she never mocks specific individuals involved in gambling as a simple put down of their activities. Instead, through visual exaggerations, she continues to demonstrate her own personal ironic perspective toward people and the situations in which they find themselves. Citron's gamblers take advantage of the seemingly indifferent attitude of the dealer, and are making an effort, through some sort of sleight of hand, to beat the house odds.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> In his history of gambling in America, Herbert Asbury observes that gambling houses make more money from the roulette wheel than any other gaming device because it is nearly impossible for a roulette wheel to lose in the long run since "a fixed percentage of between five and six operates against the player every time the wheel is spun." Herbert Asbury, *Sucker's Progress: An Informal History of Gambling*

The roulette dealer, like the blackjack dealer to be discussed below, stands tightly wedged between his gaming table and the blank wall which again serves to push the figures out toward, but not into, the viewer's space. Although the figures are thrust to the foreground, they remain separate from the viewer's space by keeping their backs turned toward us, separating us from the actual action, forcing us to be observers of, rather than participants in, the scene. The shallowness of the space notwithstanding, the composition remains fairly balanced with few figures who, although slightly overlapping one another, occupy their own space. By looking at the interiors of casinos during the 1930s and early 1940s, such as the photograph of Harolds Club from 1935 or of the Mint Club in 1942, one sees that they were crowded, packed full of gambling patrons and, in all likelihood, visiting divorcee-tourists (Figure 53 and Figure 54). Citron, however, edits these figures out of her gambling images, focusing instead on a select few of the patrons encountered. Her choice of the types of people to take as her subjects is an interesting one. She portrays men in all of her gambling works, carefully excising the female dealers, gamblers and tourists from the world she reveals. One might think that she chose to depict only men in her gambling works in view of Nevada's gaming history—in light of the fact that, until just three years prior to her visit, gambling had been a predominantly male activity that took place in relative secrecy. It may also seem likely that a woman painting the location where she spent several weeks in order to get a divorce from her husband would erase images of men, rather than women, from her scenes. But, she was an artist who, as was discussed in chapter two, was witty, sarcastic and ironic, and in the

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*in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc., 1938; reprint, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003), 49, 444. Skolnick concurs with this assessment noting that in Nevada the house advantage is 5.26 percent. Skolnick, 53. As such, according to Skolnick, roulette is fairly unpopular among knowledgeable Nevada casino gamblers. Skolnick, 53. Citron's three figures, however, are extremely interested in the game.

“Gambling Series” she pokes fun at and caricaturizes the men who are vigorously engaged in what might be considered by some to be socially questionable behavior. Given this post-divorce satire interpretation, Citron’s anonymous male figures, in *Laying the Bets* as well as other works within the series, offer the impression that they are more interested in money, cards, horses and boxing than they are in the fact that a woman is in the casino or club sketching them.<sup>345</sup> They, like her successful wealthy businessman husband, appear to be more obsessed with money than with being in the presence of a woman. If, as Sawyer has suggested, nearly 90% of gambling patrons were men, one would think that a single woman, such as Citron, in a casino would draw the attention of the male clientele. However, none of the figures in her gambling series are aware of her presence, and she remains, like the viewer outside the picture, an observer documenting the scene rather than an active participant in it. It seems hard to believe that a single woman could enter an establishment primarily full of men and, as suggested by these paintings, not be noticed. Perhaps, then, she is commenting not just on men’s behavior in general, but more specifically on her own marriage. In the years leading up to her divorce, as her marriage was slowly breaking apart, maybe the artist felt more like an observer than a participant.

Grace Hegger Lewis’s pseudo-autobiographical novel both confirms and refutes the assessment regarding women being noticed in Reno. She writes that the main character’s first two days in Reno were spent in a hotel “where every time she went for a

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<sup>345</sup> When Citron served on the federal grand jury in New York (the subject of her third series of the decade and of Chapter four), she spent much of her time, sketchbook in hand, quickly recording those around her, and, as we will see, a number of those sketches remain extant. To date, the author has yet to locate any such *in situ* sketches from her Reno trip, but it is unlikely that she took all of her canvases and paints with her. It is more likely that she created numerous sketches on the spot, while in the casinos and clubs of Reno, and then produced the final compositions back in her New York studio before exhibiting them at Midtown Galleries in 1937.



walk she had had to run the gauntlet of the lobby-lounging rows of traveling salesmen and visiting cowboys, who looked her over with calculating eyes of men who bargain.”<sup>346</sup> In this instance the young attractive woman, as one would expect, draws the attention of every male she passes. On the other hand, Lewis continues in her description of Susan’s walk down Virginia Street in downtown Reno: “As the lights grew brighter she became timid at being alone at night, without a man, even in so small a town as Reno. But no one paid any attention to her. Reno was accustomed to women alone.”<sup>347</sup> Gamblers, then, as suggested here, were used to seeing women, particularly the divorce-seeking tourist, in casinos, and thus, Citron’s presence was not out of the ordinary.

No attention is paid to the artist in another work from the gambling series, a lithograph titled *Doping the Horses* (Figure 55). And, similar to the majority of the other works in this group of paintings (apart from *The Lookout*), the faces of nearly all the figures here are concealed from the viewer. The exception to this statement comes, obviously, in the representation of the second man from the left who stands, with a bulbous nose, pipe in mouth, derby hat on head, ascot around neck, reading a newspaper presumably filled with information pertinent to the day’s racing activity. A slight profile of the third and fourth figures from the left can be seen, but not enough to provide any real sense of either’s identity. Why does Citron still conceal the faces of her figures when, as has been noted, gambling had been legal for several years and those wanting to partake in games of chance no longer were required to hide in the back rooms of legitimate businesses? Is she, like a court reporter for instance, merely protecting their identities by rendering them anonymous? Is there still an undercurrent of moral disdain

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<sup>346</sup> Lewis, 370.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

for the “purveyors of vice?”<sup>348</sup> Is she attempting to hide the evils and immorality of activities which some considered to be so sinful?<sup>349</sup> Is she merely universalizing the male gambler rather than individualizing him, so that he symbolizes all men rather than a single individual? Is she portraying the “secrecy” of gambling that would have been more familiar to her New York audiences? In all probability it is a combination. As has been suggested, Citron was fairly liberal in her view of the world, not particularly religious and, given that she traveled across nearly the entire country just to obtain a divorce, it is unlikely that she was offended by the openness of activities surrounding her in Reno. Additionally, Citron was an artist attempting to make a career for herself in the competitive New York art world, and would have consciously been thinking about the audience for whom she was painting. While she herself tended to be open-minded and not offended by the aforementioned “purveyors of vice,” many of those viewing her paintings may well have taken affront to Nevada’s toleration of such activities. As such, by rendering the figures anonymous and leaving her subjects nameless the artist was protecting their reputations.

She exposed these New York spectators not just to the interior of gambling halls and the variety of gaming devices to be found in them, but to the world of horse racing as well. The men represented in *Doping the Horses* stand in a semicircle before a wall,

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<sup>348</sup> Hutchinson, “Can Reno Be Cured?,” 1592. The majority of articles and books cited in this chapter present the divorce and gambling trades of Nevada with a relatively positive outlook, because as thousands of people flocked to the state, they stimulated the economy. Paul Hutchinson, by contrast, takes a moralizing tone in a series of articles written for *The Christian Century* in 1931 as he vehemently decries Nevada’s “purveyors of vice” and points out his moral disdain for the legalization of activities such as gambling, divorce and prostitution. Hutchinson notes that while most of the permanent residents of Reno saw the divorce racket as a legitimate business and even though legislators argued for the economic necessity of them, he found the money making aspects of these activities offensive. With divorce, gambling and even prostitution, and because “the nation is full of people who . . . are eager to escape from the social regulations of their own communities in order to indulge in forms of relaxation that are taboo,” Nevada cashes in on the country’s overarching desire for vice. Hutchinson, “Nevada: A Prostitution State,” 1488-1490.

<sup>349</sup> Hutchinson, “Can Reno Be Cured?”

backs to the viewer, mulling over the paper, trying to figure out which horses to bet upon. As with *Laying the Bets* the title here offers a clue about the activity taking place within the scene. One definition of the term “doping,” as per *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, means to “figure out.”<sup>350</sup> The men in the picture then, it can be surmised by looking at the newspaper held by the second figure from the left, are figuring out the odds on horses for an upcoming race(s).

A hallway to the left of the composition, leading to the washroom, as designated by the stenciled letters reading “GENTS” above an arrow pointing back the hall, indicates the only recession of space within the composition. These four capitalized letters are significant in terms of the artist’s satirical wit. From her point of view, it seems, the Reno gambling establishments are a “men’s room,” a place where, although legally allowed to enter, women are unwelcome. A wall, containing two essentially unreadable signs (the word “Indians” being the only legible word on either sign) posted upon it, cuts off any sense of depth, thereby once more thrusting the figures into the foreground, almost, but not quite, into the viewer’s space. They engage with one another within their confined arena, backs to the viewer, cut off from our world as they focus on placing bets on the day’s races. The viewer is occluded from the scene, forced to gaze upon figures whose gaze remains veiled from our own. Although the faces of the figures are not accessible to us, we are able to obtain a slight sense of each person’s individuality by observing gesture and dress.

The first figure from the left is older than the others as evidenced by his thinning hair and hunched over stance. Standing with his right hand in his coat pocket and elbow jutting out toward the edge of the composition, he reads the newspaper over the second

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<sup>350</sup> *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. “Dope vb Doped.”

figure's shoulder. The shortest figure, third from the left, wears a leather aviator's jacket and holds a small notepad in his left hand on which he can write notes about the day's racing information. And, like the figure next to him, not enough of his profiled face can be seen to garner any sense of personality or individuality. The fourth figure, also wears a short jacket, but this time one with a fur collar around the neck, wears a suede cap, holds his right arm behind his back and reaches his left arm, cigarette in hand, toward his mouth. Only the side of his head and top of one shoulder can be seen of the final character. By comparison with photographs of contemporary Reno gambling scenes, as in figure 56, or in the previously seen 1931 Bank Club photo (Figure 52) and the 1932 New Yorker Club photo (Figure 51), Citron's bettors, like her dealers, are not as clean-cut and well-dressed. Most of the figures in the photographs are dressed in crisp business suits, complete with neckties and fedoras, whereas several of Citron's figures, as mentioned, wear short leather bomber jackets and a variety of types of hats, including the derby hat and cabby's cap. The men of *Laying the Bets* are sloppily dressed in their loose-fitting, baggy, wrinkled pants and jackets. This provides more evidence that Citron visited, and took subjects from, not the sumptuous "carpet joints" patronized by the wealthy, but rather gambling halls frequented by lower and middle-class gamblers, perhaps even local working members of the community.

Citron's gambling images suggest a gender-bias in the population of bettors who frequented the casinos. However, Nevada's 1931 wide-open gambling laws allowed men *as well as* women to participate in card, dice and other games of chance legally. Women in an "ultra-fashionable casino" are seen playing roulette in a photo reproduced in Henry

F. Pringle's 1931 article on the wickedness of Reno (Figure 57).<sup>351</sup> In only one of Citron's canvases, *Croupier*, mentioned above and which has yet to be located by the author, does a woman appear, and she, according to descriptions, remains in the composition's background.<sup>352</sup> Prior to the enactment of the 1931 gambling laws, games were more often than not frequented by men. Although women were legally permitted to enter into gambling establishments and participate in the games offered, according to Raymond Sawyer, during the mid- to late-1930s, when Citron would have been there, nearly 90% of the gambling patrons in Reno were still white men.<sup>353</sup> Sawyer uses a photo of the interior of the Bank Club, taken just after its opening in November 1931, to support his argument since, as can be seen, no women are present (Figure 58).<sup>354</sup> By contrast, however, in his dissertation on the early years of gambling in Nevada, historian Eric Moody discloses that Sawyer's statistics fail to consider the women who were in casinos not as serious gamblers, but merely as tourists.<sup>355</sup> Moody explains that in the early 1930s women were actually present on both sides of the gaming tables, and that while women were not welcome in pre-1910 gambling houses or in the back rooms of 1920s gaming halls, they were accepted in post-legalization casinos.<sup>356</sup>

In an attempt to attract more people, including women, to the new legalized gambling establishments, many proprietors updated the appearance of their

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<sup>351</sup> Pringle, 395.

<sup>352</sup> Davidson, 16.

<sup>353</sup> Raymond I. Sawyer, *Reno: Where the Gamblers Go!* (Reno: Sawston Publishing Company, 1976), 35.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>355</sup> Moody, 161. Moody explains that while the statistics used by Sawyer in his 1976 study were probably accurate for older gambling houses in downtown Reno, they failed to consider women who were strictly tourists in these clubs, or who went to the nightclubs and restaurants that also included casinos.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 105 and 135-136. Moody maintains, however, that many of the women in the casinos (not the workers) were in fact divorcee tourists.

establishments.<sup>357</sup> Early gambling establishments took two forms: either small bars/clubs with several gaming tables and slot machines or large smoke-filled rooms with bright lights, and austere walls/floors. As a way to attract a variety of customers, including women, gaming establishments became more diverse in terms of appearance by adding entertainment halls, dance floors and restaurants.<sup>358</sup> Those early establishments, housing only a few tables and slot machines, are referred to as “sawdust joints” while the more upscale, intricately decorated locations are called “carpet joints.”<sup>359</sup> These “sawdust joints,” as well as the smaller clubs in town, catered to “a predominantly male crowd of recreational and habitual gamblers, while fancier casinos with amenities including restaurants, nightclubs and entertainment venues tended to be frequented by the divorced tourists.”<sup>360</sup> Figures 59 and 60 show how radically different the interior decoration of these clubs would be.<sup>361</sup> The Deauville Club, which was licensed for craps, roulette, 21, big-six, faro and hazard from 1931 until 1933, was a cabaret club opulently decorated with richly colored fabrics, thick lush carpets and extravagant chandeliers to name just a few of its luxurious amenities (Figure 59).<sup>362</sup> The Mint Club, by contrast, is less lavishly

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<sup>357</sup> Many of these new casinos and clubs used decoration in an attempt to transform the idea that gambling was a vice; proprietors of the new legal clubs were making an effort to transform vice into virtue. The owners of Harolds Club, for instance, decorated their club with “bright lights and colorful trappings to counter the idea that gambling should be done in a smoke-filled back room.” Skolnick, 109.

<sup>358</sup> Moody, 105.

<sup>359</sup> John M. Findlay, *People of Chance: Gaming in American Society from Jamestown to Las Vegas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 121; quoted in Moody, 105.

<sup>360</sup> Moody, 106-107.

<sup>361</sup> While the photo of the Mint Club is of a club, which was probably more of an “upscale” establishment than the typical “sawdust joint,” one can still get a sense of the different decorative aspects being employed by proprietors. Photos of the interiors of gaming establishments are fairly rare because, as Sawyer aptly points out, even in the early years there were regulations against taking pictures of people gambling. Sawyer, 28.

<sup>362</sup> Kling, 36.

decorated; the walls and floors are bare, the lighting not as sumptuous (Figure 60).<sup>363</sup> The plain wall surfaces seen at the Mint Club and, presumably, in other more unassuming establishments, rather than the opulence of the Deauville Club, are in keeping with what Citron depicts in her gambling series.

She presents to her audiences back in New York the male dealers and patrons of, seemingly, the “sawdust joints” and less chic establishments rather than the plush interiors of casinos designed for the purposes of attracting the wealthy upper class patron. She took advantage of the fact that women were now granted entrance into gambling halls, using the opportunity to document a world she did not have access to back East.<sup>364</sup> She continued to be fascinated with the world around her. In her “Femininities” series, she drew her subjects from those living, working and shopping in and around New York’s Union Square. When she went to Reno, she looked to the gambling halls for inspiration. She was intrigued by the gambling community and its “colorful characters,” focusing on blackjack dealers, men placing bets and crowded around a roulette wheel, as well as a supposed guard at a gambling house—subjects that were, especially for a female artist in the mid-1930s, fairly uncommon.<sup>365</sup> One art critic accurately observes that Citron “never wearies of painting people in their funny moments, and she seldom makes her comments wearying to the public. In this show she draws better than she ever

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<sup>363</sup> Although this photo of the Mint Club dates to the early 1940s, just after the period under consideration here, it provides an opportunity for us to see what the less exquisitely decorated clubs of the time looked like.

<sup>364</sup> In New York gambling was still an activity for serious gamblers and the wealthy that took place behind closed doors. Stories on gambling appearing in the *New York Times* during the 1930s generally recount the activities of police raiding illegal gambling establishments, often naming the types of gambling equipment being used, names of those booked on charges of running a gambling house, receiving bets and the like. Several examples include the following: “32 Held in Gambling Raid,” *New York Times*, 3 August 1930, p. 6; “Take 35 in Gambling Raid,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1930, p. 16; “Gambling Charges Heard,” *New York Times*, 26 August 1930, p. 11; “Three Victims Detail Race Track Frauds,” *New York Times*, 7 July 1934, p. 29.

<sup>365</sup> “Gambling House: Historical Gaming Art is Now on Exhibition,” *The Colorado Gambler* 6 (November 27, 199(6?)), in Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado.

did, makes her case with realism less thickly saturated with satire, and more palatable than before.”<sup>366</sup> She went, according to another critic, “into the gambling houses, fastened her eye on some telltale posture, gesture or physical index, like a bulbous nose or a copious waistline, and with a lusty humor transcribed them on her canvas,” all in keeping, in my opinion, with her interest in wry commentary.<sup>367</sup>

The aforementioned “copious waistline” is unmistakable in *The Dealer*—21 (Figure 61) as the swelling of the figure’s stomach puts so much strain on the buttons of his vest they seem ready to pop open. In this painting a corpulent male, with a half-smoked cigar balanced in his mouth, plays the role of blackjack dealer. Wedged in the confined space between the wall and his green felt table, the dealer, similar to the figure running the roulette wheel in *Laying the Bet*, wears a visor, concealing his face above the nose and cheeks. An apron the same shade of green as his visor, a long sleeve white striped shirt, rolled up to the elbows, dark brown pants, a brown striped necktie, and a matching brown vest, complete the dealer’s attire. With his arms outstretched above a tray containing gambling chips, he holds the deck of cards in his left hand, a single card in his right, as he deals to the patron(s) who, presumably, sits outside the composition to the viewer’s right. According to gambling historian Jerome Skolnick, blackjack, otherwise known as 21, is one of the most popular games in Nevada, and in explaining the rules of the game, he describes the layout of the gaming table itself.<sup>368</sup> The blackjack table is generally in the shape of a semicircle, with a green felt top (as seen in Citron’s painting) and a leather edge. Around the semi-circle up to seven bettors may sit, yet in the

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<sup>366</sup> Carlyle Burrows quoted in Paul Bird, “Gambling and Minna Citron,” *The Art Digest* 12 (November 1, 1939): 18-19.

<sup>367</sup> Davidson, 16.

<sup>368</sup> Skolnick, 56.



painting, our view is limited to just a portion of the large semi-circular table and the dealer.<sup>369</sup>

The shallowness of the space in which the figure sits serves to accentuate him, as well as the activity in which he is engaged. The space over the figure's left arm is painted in a slightly darker shade of brown than the wall immediately behind him, and a demarcating line suggests an extension of the space in the form of a hallway leading behind the dealer; however, the space remains ambiguous. The sign hanging on the wall behind the figure, which is partially concealed by his head, reads, in capital letters, "21 GAME: THIS GAME NEVER CLOSES." This sign, identifying the specific game for which the figure deals, as well as the fact that the new legalized gambling establishments in Reno were open twenty-four hours per day, is the only embellishment on the wall. A similar sign can be seen in a 1931 photo of the Bank Club (Figure 52). The compressed space of the Bank Club is reproduced in Citron's painting. The club's faro dealer, like her blackjack dealer, squeezes into the narrow space between his table and an empty wall. The arrangement of the gambling tables at the Mint Club further echoes the space in Citron's painting (Figure 60). Pushed up against the walls on each side of the room are the gaming tables. The middle of the room remains open for customers while the dealers stand between the tables and the wall. Citron accentuates the compactness of this space with the robustness of the figure himself. Note also that, although his appearance is much tidier, the Bank Club's faro dealer is similarly outfitted. With shirt sleeves buttoned at the wrists, his shirt and vest remain wrinkle-free. Worn high on his forehead, the visor leaves his view of the table, chips, cards and players unobstructed. With the visor of Citron's dealer pulled down over his eyes, the viewer is unsure where his gaze is directed: is he

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

counting chips, looking at the cards, slyly gazing out toward the gambler we cannot see?  
Is there, like there was in *Laying the Bets* a sleight of hand taking place?

While one can surmise that the figures in the *Laying the Bets* and *Doping the Horses* represent, based on their clothing, working men gambling in their spare time, Citron selects another class of character—a cowboy—for the main figure in *Racing Form* (Figure 62). The inclusion of a cowboy among the other gamblers represented is an interesting one. “Indians” tend to be thought of as the counterpart to cowboys, and in *Doping the Horses* the word “Indian” is the only legible word within the wall signage. The figure in *Racing Form*, then, appears to be the slightly more rugged counterpart to the five figures in the previous composition as all are considering the day’s racing statistics. The reference to cowboys and Indians in these two paintings suggests the world of the Wild West and the romantic notions of the West held by Easterners, more proof of Citron’s consideration of audience when choosing her subjects. If, in painting for an Eastern audience, she is attempting to recreate a world of gambling familiar to those viewers, she is also doubtless recreating the images of an idealistic view of the West. In doing so, she is satirizing that romanticized view of the old West, for in reality it is a seedy boy’s club full of obsessive and oblivious men. It is possible that she is also referring to a specific period in time in Nevada’s history. The Washoe Indian tribe was in Nevada, along with the Apaches and Navajos among others, long before the white man, and the Washoes settled down along the Truckee River, which flows from Lake Tahoe to Pyramid Lake just outside of Reno.<sup>370</sup> Citron’s subtle inclusion, by word and by inference, of the Native American in conjunction with the local working class gambler

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<sup>370</sup> Quentin Reynolds, “Relax in Reno,” *Colliers*, 28 December 1935, 20.

and dealer, combines notions of the old West and contemporary gambling culture in Nevada.

Her cowboy's attire includes denim jeans, cowboy boots complete with ankle spurs, long sleeve shirt, vest and, of course, the distinctive cowboy hat. A wall in the painting yet again forces the cowboy into the foreground, and once more the viewer stands outside the scene looking at his back. As he faces the wall upon which his hands are placed, he gazes upon the racing form, planning how to lace his bets. As has been seen in other examples, only a small percentage of the text on the paper can be read by the viewer. Among the most legible words on the paper are those in its title: "Daily Racing Form." Just below, on the left page, are the listings for the "Sixth Race," and the bottom of the page, under the figure's arm, reads "never a loser." The only clear words to be read on the right hand page of the paper are "Today's Entries." *The Daily Racing Form*, commonly referred to as *The Form*, was the bible of those betting on horseracing and was founded by a Chicago newspaper man, Frank Brunnell, just prior to the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>371</sup> It was a form, according to the author of a book on horseracing, published in a number of states, including one where racing was an illegal activity and carried the caption "Official Newspaper of the National Association of State Racing Commissioners."<sup>372</sup> Citron's cowboy is obsessed with all of the trivial detail found on the

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<sup>371</sup> Walter Steigleman, *Horseracing* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1947), 125 and 128. The paper was sold to Annenberg and partners in 1924 and expanded its territory and coverage to major cities across the United States.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 126. Copious amounts of information filled the pages of *The Form*, including some of the following: correct weights of the horses, results of each horse's six to ten previous races (with the date of the race, track, distance, time of winner, track conditions, and closing odds), and, among other things, the best time ever run by each horse for the same distance. Additionally charts of each of the previous day's races listing each horse's position from start to finish, jockey's name, weight and closing odds were included. Steigleman notes that these statistical charts were prepared by two men: one watching the horses through binoculars while calling out the position of each, and the other recording the information. Below the statistical chart one was able to find descriptions of how the horses ran each race. For example, "Broken

form. Furthermore, a second sign, tacked to the wainscoting on the lower half of the wall and partially obscured by the cowboy's leg as he stands in front of it, advertises a "boxi"ng event "to-n"ight "at 8," referring to yet another popular activity on which people gambled. On July 4, 1910, just three months before the elimination of legalized gambling, a major boxing match was held in Reno after the original San Francisco venue cancelled the event. Jim Jeffries, former boxing champion came out of retirement to fight the first black heavyweight champion Jack Johnson.<sup>373</sup> With the open laws passed in 1931, and the re-legalization of prizefighting, Citron's poster suggests a renewed popularity. A third advertisement or racing form hangs in the upper left of the painting, cut off by the edge, but, dangling from one tack, is folded over itself obscuring whatever text may be printed upon it.

Citron's trip afforded her the unique opportunity among her peers to recreate in paint a slice of life that was likely unfamiliar to many among her New York audiences, thereby making her unique among her contemporaries. Yet through skillful crafting the artist makes her subjects familiar. She went to Reno to "take the cure," but came back with subjects for her second series of paintings.<sup>374</sup> She recorded, or rather recreated, the world of gambling in a state where divorce was one of the most popular money-making enterprises at the time. Although gambling and divorce had been occurring in Nevada for

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Bones started slowly, but responded when put to pressure and worked his way between horses to second at three quarters. . . ."

<sup>373</sup> Land and Land, *A Short History of Reno*, 36. According to historic preservation specialist Mella Rothwell Harmon, prizefighting first came to Nevada in the late nineteenth century. In 1897 the scheduled heavyweight championship between Gentleman Jim Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons in San Francisco was cancelled. Nevada legislators quickly legalized fighting and the match brought many fans, and thereby economic success to the state's capital, Carson City. Harmon, "Divorce and Economic Opportunity in Reno," 14.

<sup>374</sup> "Taking the Cure in Reno," *The Reno Divorce Racket*, 4. The term "taking the cure," like "reno-vation," was used by contemporaries to describe what the divorce-seeking women in Reno were doing.

many decades, during the 1930s it was easier than ever to get a divorce and anyone could gamble. Citron focused not on the vanities and foibles of her fellow divorce-seekers, but on the male gamblers and dealers she found in Reno; however, she rendered these figures anonymously. Despite the wide-open gambling laws and general acceptance of divorce in Nevada, many back East were still offended by the idea of “dens of sin” being easily accessible, and Citron’s images resonate with this Eastern conception of gambling.<sup>375</sup> The results were works unlike anything being produced by her contemporaries, and the artist continued to use unique experiences as the basis for her third major series of the decade, “Judges and Juries.”

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<sup>375</sup> Upon legalization Reno’s mayor has been quoted as saying “It’s all nonsense trying to regulate people’s morals by law. For eight years I’ve been trying to make Reno a place where everybody can do what they please, just so they don’t interfere with other people’s rights. Now we can do lawfully what Nevada has always done under cover.” “‘Old West’ Returns in Nevada Gambling,” *New York Times*, 21 March 1931, p. 3.

## CHAPTER 4

### *VOIR DIRE*

There is no more important service that woman can render. . . . By calling women to serve as jurors new sources of intelligence are opened up, and intelligence is surely needed on a jury.  
---Florence Allen<sup>376</sup>

Citron's first experience inside a courtroom took place in the Washoe County Courthouse in Reno, Nevada.<sup>377</sup> Her second opportunity to be a participant in the legal system was a less personal one and came in New York City in 1937 where she served as one of the first women jurors in the state. Several more stretches of jury duty followed over the course of the next two years. Time spent in New York's Federal Court and a session in the city's Municipal Court between 1937 and 1939 afforded the artist with ample subject matter for part of her last major exhibition of the decade—the “Judges and Juries” series.<sup>378</sup> Nearly half of the fourteen canvases on display at Midtown Galleries in November 1939 focused on the theme of the courtroom: *Answer Yes or No!*, *Appeal to Reason*, *The Judge*, *The Plaintiff*, *Court Recess*, and *Colloquy*.<sup>379</sup> Subjects within “Judges and Juries” range from a single close up portrayal of a judge seated on the bench, to

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<sup>376</sup> Ohio Supreme Court Justice Florence Allen as quoted in “Women Begin Drive to Serve on Juries,” *New York Times*, 27 January 1925, p.7.

<sup>377</sup> As noted in her biography, Citron's interest in Justice came much earlier in life, during her introduction to literature at the Board of Education's Model School's Teacher's Training Project in which she played Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*. Citron and Resseguier, 11.

<sup>378</sup> A review of the “Gambling Series” notes that “Three weeks ago Mrs. Citron was drawn on a jury and she spent her spare moments sketching the judge, the defendants and her fellow jurors, with results that the *New Yorker* or *Esquire* should fall upon with glee . . .” *New York Times*, 12 November 1937, in Minna Citron Archives, Bird Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. This clipping indicates that Citron served as a juror both in Federal court and in Municipal Court. The “Judges and Juries” series was part of a large exhibition held at Midtown Galleries. “Minna Citron: Exhibition of Paintings,” Midtown Galleries, New York, New York, November 3 – November 20, 1939.

<sup>379</sup> To date, after extensive investigation, the author has been unable to locate *The Plaintiff* or *Appeal to Reason*. Images of people not involved in the legal process comprise the remainder of the show and include: *Sherman*, *Lady with Program*, *Strike News*, *The Editor*, *Summer Reading, No. 1*, *Summer Reading, No. 2*, *Forced Labor*, and *Siren's Song*.

active courtroom scenes played out by temperamental lawyers, apprehensive witnesses, hardworking stenographers and a variety of jurors, to one striking canvas of a group of plump middle-aged gossipy women. These works present a record of the activities within the courtrooms wherein Citron served as a juror and where she spent each session sketching a variety of characters.<sup>380</sup> The drawings, made on site, served as preparatory studies for the larger paintings rather than as documentary evidence to be reproduced in contemporary newspapers and magazines.<sup>381</sup> And when displayed at Midtown Galleries, the works, as well as their creator, again garnered acclaim from the critics. As one reviewer noted,

Miss Citron has been caught in the meshes of jury duty and like the resourceful person she apparently is, has turned it to double account. Not only did she get a daily stipend as juror, but also a series of sketches or memories that form the basis of the greater part of her present display. Still, the repressed dignity of court seems to have left its mark on her, and only in 'The Plaintiff' and 'Answer Yes or No' does she seem to have let herself go and given her keen sense of satire an even break as it were.<sup>382</sup>

The artist's lampooning of humanity, as seen to varying degrees in "Feminanities" and the "Gambling Series," continues, but in this last series of the decade she presented a much "kindlier view of social institutions."<sup>383</sup> While the artist, in the words of another critic, "usually comes sharply to the point in her observations of such bits of life—having already proved her skill in her comments on life in Reno and on women generally," her paintings in this series "do a little less mischief, and are perhaps even more credibly

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<sup>380</sup> In addition to the paintings from the November 1939 show at Midtown Galleries, the author has discovered a series of nine courtroom sketches within the collection of the Newark Public Library. These sketches served as the basis for the paintings displayed at Midtown Galleries.

<sup>381</sup> Still cameras had been banned in the courtroom since the Lindberg kidnapping trial. Ida Libby Dengrove and Frank W. Martin, *My Days in Court: Unique View of the Famous and Infamous by a Court Artist* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1990), 223.

<sup>382</sup> Melville Upton, *New York Sun*, 11 November, 1939, in Minna Citron Archives, Bird Library, Syracuse University.

<sup>383</sup> "Minna Citron," *Parnassus*, 23.

painted, than those she has shown before.”<sup>384</sup> As noted above, some satire and wit can be found in this series, particularly within the dramatically titled *Answer Yes or No!* canvas, but it is not as immediately obvious as it was in “Feminanities” or in the caricatured gambling pictures. The artist mutes the irony in her third series of the decade, but the images within the “Judges and Juries” series are no less important as socio-historic documents of the world within which she found herself.

### **Citron’s Jury Service**

Although the “Judges and Juries” images are less sardonic, the artist’s feminist concerns, and her interest in equality for women, expressed particularly in “Feminanities,” continue to be substantiated late in the decade. Citron’s renderings of those involved in the legal system may have “pricked the dignity of some pompous legal men,” but their significance comes from the fact that they were created by a woman who was, in New York during the late thirties, finally legally allowed to serve as a juror.<sup>385</sup> In fact, Citron was among the first women called for jury duty in New York City during the fall of 1937.<sup>386</sup> In some unpublished notes comprising part of the artist’s personal archives, she tells the story of how a friend helped her, apparently at her request, to get called for jury duty:

The Uncle of my friend was the Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals in Brooklyn and he volunteered to send in my name to the Commissioner of Jurors. Soon thereafter I got a call at the studio from one . . . [who] identified himself as James MacGurrin, Commission of Jurors and [he] stated that Justice Lazansky

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<sup>384</sup> Gabor Peterdi, “Judges & Juries,” *New York Sun*, 11 November 1939, in Minna Citron Archives, Bird Library, Syracuse University.

<sup>385</sup> “Minna Citron Reveals the Artist in Everyone,” *Brooklyn Eagle Sun*, 12 November 1944, p. 14.

<sup>386</sup> Brodsky and Olin. The catalog notes that Citron was one of the first women jurors in New York City.



had recommended me for Jury Duty. Since he would have to fingerprint me . . . [I was] to drop down to his office in the Hall of Records. . . . When he called Judge So & So who was charged with the selection of new jurors, the following colloquy took place.<sup>387</sup>

She wanted to be a juror. She wanted to take advantage of the opportunity put before women in New York for the first time in the late 1930s. She wanted to get into spaces previously off-limits to see what was going on—as she had with the gambling dens in Reno, just two years before. Citron continues recounting the first part of the conversation in which MacGurrin recommended to the judge a poet-friend for jury duty and proceeds to detail the rest of the conversation as follows:

‘Well, Judge, keep your shirt on as I’m about to recommend a woman.’

‘What! A Woman! Oh, well, I suppose we’ll soon have to take one of them but tell me something about this one.’

‘Alright, here goes. She’s an artist.’

‘A woman and an artist too! Jim have you taken leave of your senses?’

‘Let me reassure you Judge. I had her down here. She arrived on time and she wears hats like other people. She looks more like a teacher than an artist and she talks sense. Give her a trial. I’ll take the responsibility.’

‘So I was in and I served in Civil, Municipal and Federal Juries and Grand Juries in the Southern District of New York for many years. I reaped a harvest of interesting stories, some funny, some tragic and drew and painted a series of works entitled ‘Judges and Juries.’<sup>388</sup>

And thus, the prompt, hat-wearing, sense-talking woman who looked like a teacher began her lifelong participation and interest in the New York legal milieu. She used what was at the time a unique opportunity to become one of the first artists to record and document New York women serving as jurors, thereby continuing her interest in equality for and the freedom of women, as per her personalized version of feminism. She

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<sup>387</sup> Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

once more stitched her autobiographical experiences into the larger social context and used those personal incidents to create art. By using the time spent as a juror as inspiration for a series of images, Citron adeptly, and at times even humorously, documented the legal system and its participants.

One reason Citron wanted to be a juror was because she believed that an artist “should be prepared to earn a living at practically anything.”<sup>389</sup> She first became interested in serving as a grand juror, not necessarily due to her self-proclaimed feminist concerns, but “because it earned [her] a little extra income.”<sup>390</sup> Contemporary accounts indicate that Citron would have earned the requisite three dollar per day “salary” in addition to whatever meals the judge ordered for members of the jury.<sup>391</sup> While Citron never *had* to go on the relief rolls or work for one of President Roosevelt’s New Deal art programs, her preparedness to “earn a living at practically anything” is testament to widespread frugality during the Depression years. This fits with her status as an independent spirit in terms of doing whatever she had to/wanted to do in order to get by. In this instance, the artist earned some money, not through New Deal wages, but by serving as a juror within the legal system.<sup>392</sup> The resulting works, however, as we shall see, ultimately ended up serving, in part, as unique documents demonstrating the historical achievements of women in winning the fight for equality—at least in the realm

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<sup>389</sup> Gayle. Gayle sat down with the artist to discuss her life, divorce and artistic career. She is quoted as saying of her divorce, “I won’t deny that I had a hard time. It was messy. He kept the money and I kept the children. But I felt that it wouldn’t hurt my children to discover they can live with less . . . I live on a lot of different piecemeal incomes. . . . In fact, I got to be a grand juror because it earned me a little extra income. An artist should be prepared to earn a living at practically anything.”

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Mildred Adams, “Women Knock Loudly at the Jury Box,” *New York Times Magazine*, 29 March 1937, p. 6.

<sup>392</sup> Kidrick notes that Citron taught briefly for one of the WPA programs in New York City between 1935 and 1937. Late in the decade, as will be discussed in the following chapter, the artist traveled to Tennessee to paint two post office murals, in Manchester and Newport, as part of the Treasury Department’s post office mural project. However, because of the financial position of her ex-husband and her mother, she was not among the thousands *forced* to work on the relief rolls.

of the jury box. Thus, the “Judges and Juries” paintings become among the first artistic images showing New York women serving their civic duty as jurors, as seen especially in *Answer Yes or No!*, and in *Court Recess*. So while Citron’s feminist concerns were not initially the primary reason she wanted to be a juror, several of the canvases, by their inclusion of women performing their legal duty, serve as testaments to the hard won achievements of the advocates for women jurors.

## Judges

Two of the more straightforward images from the “Judges and Juries” series, *The Judge* and *Colloquy* (to be discussed below), contain no women, but do provide autobiographical commentary about the artist’s time within the courtroom (Figure 63). Wearing his judge’s robe, a middle-aged man with short thinning hair dramatically parted on the side and combed over the crown of his head, leans forward in his high-backed chair glancing at a piece of paper in *The Judge*. Wire rimmed glasses sit perched partway down his sizable and slightly exaggerated nose, while his pointed chin dramatically juts out beneath his mouth. The painting is simply titled *The Judge*, yet there is no indication of his identity. Two sketches of named judges by Citron are part of the Newark Public Library collection, but neither *Judge Clancy* nor *Justice Wallis van Devanter* is the man portrayed in the painting (Figure 64 and Figure 65). The sketches probably depict the actual judges under whom she served versus the painted version of a more generic *type* of judge, like those found in contemporary Hollywood films. Sketches of Judges Clancy and van Devanter, as well as *The Judge*, show the respective figures seated at their benches in their high-backed chairs. As seen in Citron’s other images and in the courtrooms scenes

of Hollywood films, including *Marked Woman* (1937), *Manhattan Melodrama* (1934), or *Fury* (1936), the jury boxes are traditionally located on one side of the courtroom, perpendicular to the judge's bench, thereby giving the members of the jury a profile view of the judge. In her sketches of Judges Clancy and van Devanter, however, Citron shows them not in profile, but rather frontally. Thus, as will be shown in relation to *Answer Yes or No!*, the issue of spectatorship is an important one when considering Citron's courtroom images. If Citron was sitting in the jury box, how, then, was she able to record a frontal view of the judges? She seems instead to take on the role of public witness, not active participant in the court proceedings. *The Judge*, on the other hand, conforms more to the expected view a juror would have had of the head court official.

Judge John W. Clancy, as seen in Figure 64, was a New York Federal judge under whom cases of mail fraud, racketeering, citizenship, and conspiracy were heard during the late 1930s. Here he is shown wearing his robe over a shirt and tie and leaning forward while seeming to read a document.<sup>393</sup> Appearing to be younger than the figure in *The Judge*, Judge Clancy has a full head of hair, and no real elements of caricature have been bestowed upon him by the artist. Citron's sketch of *Justice Wallis van Devanter* (Figure 65) is actually mislabeled. *Willis* van Devanter, not Wallis, was a Supreme Court Justice who retired from the Court in June 1937 at the age of 78. In an effort to relieve some of New York County's congested court calendar, van Devanter, seen in a *New York Times* photograph with Judge John C. Knox, was appointed to serve as a Federal Judge during

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<sup>393</sup> Federal Judge John W. Clancy's name appeared in a number of *New York Times* articles between January 1937 and March 1939 including, among others, the following: "Doherty's Heath as Basis of Deals," *New York Times*, 16 January 1937, p. 23. "Mail Fraud Jury Disagrees," *New York Times*, 2 May 1937, p. 2. "Racketeer Gone; Bail is Forfeited," *New York Times*, 22 June 1937, p. 17. "Suit on Citizenship Against Kuhn Fails," *New York Times*, 30 October 1937, p. 9. "Spy Ring 'Friend' is Heard by Jury," *New York Times*, 20 May 1938, p. 13. "Archbishop Denies Guild in Conspiracy," *New York Times*, 7 March 1939, p. 9.

the district's 1938 Federal Court Session, during which time he presided over several newsworthy cases: the trial of a group accused of mail fraud in relation to sales of the Atlas Tax Corporation's stock and the trial of Reno gamblers and club owners James C. McKay and William J. Graham, brought up on charges of mail fraud and conspiracy (Figure 66).<sup>394</sup> During one of the cases as a Federal Judge in New York, van Devanter headed the proceedings before his first mixed jury where four women and one alternate served for a trial of seven defendants charged with defrauding the government out of \$300,000 in taxes in 1935 and 1936.<sup>395</sup> Rather than leaning forward to read something, as in *The Judge* or *Judge Clancy*, the older van Devanter, with white hair and eyebrows, leans back in his chair, elbow bent and resting on the bench, chin resting on his hand, listening to the arguments taking place before him. Compositional similarities exist between *The Judge* and several of Citron's gambling images. Like *The Dealer—21*, the solitary figure of the judge sits compressed between his bench and a blank wall, and this compact space serves to accentuate the figure. Additionally, while the judge leans forward in his high-backed chair at his bench, presiding over the court in front of him, the figure of *The Lookout*, *Western Gambling House* sits alone, in a relatively shallow space, leaning back in his chair guarding his establishment.

The shallow cropped space, so typical of Citron's work, is seen again in *Colloquy* (Figure 67 and Figure 68). The white haired spectacled judge, in the painting is clearly neither Judge Clancy nor Judge van Devanter, sits behind his raised bench, perched

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<sup>394</sup> "Van Devanter to Sit in Federal Court Here to Relieve Heavily Congested Calendar," *New York Times*, 29 December, 1937, p. 42. "Third Trial begun in Vast Swindles," *New York Times*, 25 January 1938, p. 22. Graham and McKay were partners in the Bank Club in Reno, Nevada and other gaming institutions who, along with their "field agents" Boles Heed of Phoenix, Arizona, Allen Comer of Sioux City, Iowa and Thomas W. Sloan of New Britain, Connecticut were convicted of allegedly cheating seventy people out of \$2,500,000. According to the article, van Devanter ordered the jury to be kept under guard for the duration of the trial.

<sup>395</sup> "Van Devanter Addresses His First Mixed Jury," *New York Times*, 14 January 1938, p. 13.

forward on his chair, while in the print he stands behind the bench. In both versions he raises his chin, gazing upward in careful contemplation over the arguments being made by the lawyers before him. The stenographer, seated at his table before the bench, pauses, enjoying the break in the action. He leans forward, one arm on his leg beneath the desk, resting his chin in the other hand. The inkwell and pen in the center of the desk and the pile of papers to the left, attest to his duties. Three figures gather in front of the judge's bench while a third hangs behind, leaning, left elbow resting on the clerk's desk, right elbow jutting out as he places his hand on his hip. This third figure, in the painted version at least, is the same lawyer that will be seen in *Answer Yes or No!*, but here he is more calm, reserved and relaxed. The location of the stenographer's desk and the door behind the figures also recalls the arrangement in *Answer Yes or No!* suggesting that it is the same courtroom and that the witness box sits just to the right of the judge's bench, thus obscured from the viewer's sight by the gathering attorneys.

According to one critic *Colloquy* is "full of the *sotto voce* implications of a consultation at the judge's box," and the artist, who has "already proved skills in commenting on life in Reno and women" gives us works that are "perhaps even more credibly painted than those she has shown before."<sup>396</sup> Unlike the "Femininities" or "Gambling" works, one finds no real obvious lampooning taking place here. Nor is the viewer exposed to the opposing temperaments of the main characters, as he will be in *Answer Yes or No!* Rather, with *Colloquy*, one finds a more straightforward depiction of the happenings within the courtroom, what has been described by one critic as an "informal session before the judge's bench."<sup>397</sup> While many of Citron's women gossip,

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<sup>396</sup> Peterdi.

<sup>397</sup> "Minna Citron," *Parnassus*, 23.

shop, and get manicures, her men, in the “Judges and Juries” series at least, are working. They’re contemplating, arguing, listening and recording, and in *Colloquy* they are engaged in the high level serious discussion implied by its title; they are the cogs in the wheel of justice.

### **Jury Duty for Women and the Woman Juror Bill**

But, as previously mentioned, by the late 1930s, when Citron had the opportunity to participate within New York’s legal system as a juror, women had also become an integral part of the justice system. For them, the opportunity to serve on a jury was a matter of civic duty and the women called to service carried out their responsibility with pride. While the women portrayed in Citron’s “Judges and Juries” images represent those who were among the first to serve as jurors in New York, these figures were far from the first in the country to perform their civic obligations in the form of jury duty.<sup>398</sup> Soon

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<sup>398</sup> In fact, the first woman called upon to serve on a jury, in March 1870, was Miss Eliza Stewart of the Wyoming Territory. Grace Raymond Hebard, “The First Woman Jury,” *The Journal of American History* 5 (Fourth Quarter, 1913); 1303. Several other women were called for the same Grand Jury including Mrs. Amelia Hatcher (widow), Mrs. G. F. Hilton (doctor’s wife), Mrs. Mary Mackel (wife of clerk from Fort Sanders), Mrs. Agnes Baker (merchant’s wife), and Mrs. Sarah W. Pease (Deputy Clerk of the court’s wife). They were, according to Hebard “the first women to be summoned to serve on a common law jury anywhere recorded in any part of the world.” Hebard notes that when the Sheriff called upon Miss Eliza Stewart to issue the summons for jury duty he said “Miss Stewart, you have the honor of being the first woman ever called upon to serve on a court jury.” The first Legislative Assembly of the Wyoming Territory passed a Council Bill No. 70, which was then signed into effectiveness in December 1869 by Governor John A. Campbell, entitled “An Act to grant the Women of Wyoming Territory the Right of Suffrage and to Hold Office.” Hebard, 1293, 1295.; The first mixed Grand Jury session in Wyoming created a sensation around the country and around the world, as the King of Prussia cabled congratulations to the United States President on the “evidence of progress, enlightenment and civil liberty in America,” and newspaper men from across the country congregated in Laramie, Wyoming for the event. Hebard, 1304. “The fact that women were serving on the Grand Jury and could serve on a Petit Jury was telegraphed to all parts of the country and not only was there much local interest awakened over the action, but a real sensation was created throughout all of our nation and civilized countries abroad.” Hebard, 1305. By the time New York finally enacted legislation making mandatory women’s service as jurors, 23 other states had already passed similar measures. “Jury Duty for Women,” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953). Victor H. Bernstein, “Ladies of the Jury Make their New York Debut,” *New York Times Magazine*, 5 September 1937, p. 7. Bernstein also notes that New York was the 23<sup>rd</sup> state to sanction the mixed jury. University of Wyoming Librarian and Wyoming State Historical Society Trustee Grace

after suffrage was won with the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment, women in New York (and elsewhere in the country where they were as of yet unable to participate within the legal milieu as jurors) began campaigning for the right to serve on juries.<sup>399</sup> On several occasions throughout the 1920s and early 1930s New York's League of Women Voters (NYLWV) and other women's organizations proposed initiatives which would permit women to serve as jurors; but, these measures always died upon reaching the Legislative Committees. Arguments for and against the proposed measures were numerous with men and women taking stances on both sides of the issue. Advocates argued that there was no good reason why women should not serve as jurors. They argued that women were just as capable as men. More names were needed for the jury rolls. And, perhaps most significantly, women's basic rights of citizenship were at stake over the issue. Opponents contended that taking women away from the home would disrupt and be detrimental to family life. They claimed that women were too emotional and would empathize/sympathize too much with defendants. Another argument against women jurors was that too many women would request exemption from service due to

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Raymond Hebard successfully considers the events regarding women and jury service that took place in Wyoming during the late 1860s. After beginning by citing King John of Britain's 1215 Magna Carta, which, in part, gave anyone accused of a crime the right to be tried by his/her peers, the author compares the implications of the Magna Carta to the effects of a bill titled "An Act to Grant to the Women of the Wyoming Territory the Right of Suffrage and to Hold Office," enacted by the Governor of Wyoming Territory in December 1869. After recounting the lengthy political process by which territorial legislators came to this resolution, Hebard discusses the empanelling of the Grand Jury in March 1870, the first in which women were summoned to serve. It was the first time in criminal court history, the author notes, that the words "Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury" were uttered in a courtroom. Hebard, 1293. Unfortunately, however, when Justice Howe, the man responsible for passing the law allowing women to serve on juries, retired, his successor reversed the decision and prohibited the selection of women jurors. And, according to the data in the U.S. Department of Labor pamphlet titled "Jury Duty for Women," compulsory duty for women was not re-implemented in Wyoming until 1949. "Jury Duty for Women."

<sup>399</sup> At the beginning of 1920, six states allowed women to serve on juries (Compulsory laws were found in California, 1917, Michigan, 1918, and New Jersey, 1917, while voluntary laws were upheld in Kansas, 1913, Utah, 1898 and Washington, 1911). By the end of 1923, twelve more states had implement laws allowing women to serve on juries (Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky and Nevada, 1920; Maine, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oregon and Wisconsin, 1921; and Ohio and Alaska, 1923). "Jury Duty for Women."



the lack of proper accommodations (women's powder rooms, female bailiffs, and the like). For instance, in 1920, early in New York's campaign Alfred J. Talley, New York's Assistant District Attorney, argued against a woman's right to serve on a jury maintaining that women

by the nature of things she is called upon to perform, should be exempt from jury service. The prime duty of woman is that she should be the mother of the race and guardian of the home, and this is more important than any service in the court room. Some women may be better fitted than men, but this is no compliment to the women. Public policy under the form of law has said some things to women for no other reason than that they are women. Woman's hours of labor are limited, yet women do not try to repeal these laws because they feel that they are deprived of a right. A healthy woman is more important than any jury duty in the court room.<sup>400</sup>

Talley, then, suggested that the domestic realm would invariably suffer greatly should women be called away to perform a duty heretofore traditionally held as a man's obligation. Moreover, Mary G. Kilbreth, President of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, echoed Talley's statements. She questioned what was "to become of the family when the woman is off on jury duty."<sup>401</sup> While seemingly opposed to the idea on the same grounds as Talley, Kilbreth, surprisingly, urged passage of a law requiring jury service for women.<sup>402</sup> While Talley, Kilbreth and others were concerned primarily

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<sup>400</sup> "Talley Opposes Women as Jurors," *New York Times*, 26 January 1920, p. 15. Perhaps the most invaluable resource for recounting the drama and debate surrounding the issue of women jurors has been *The New York Times*. Numerous articles within the paper's pages provide a variety of accounts regarding the events leading up to the legalization of women jurors in New York. Some articles present merely statistical facts on the number of votes a certain edition of Woman Juror Bill received. Others, however, supply portions of the on-going dialog between advocates and opponents of the measure, some of which will be recounted in this paper, thereby bringing to light, to some extent at least, the drama of the debate itself.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid. Talley continues by discussing the differences between what she terms "free-lance women", defined as those with "highly developed mental perception" and thus capable of assuming jury duty, and the majority of "commonplace" women who, she states, lacked the ability to serve on a jury

<sup>402</sup> Ibid. She wanted "to have this experiment of woman suffrage tried out to its extremity," and she traveled to Albany to promote the issue of "making women bear all the political burdens that now rest on men's shoulders."

about the disruption of family life, New York Assistant District Attorney Rose Rothenberg contended that the concern not be with family matters, but rather with issues of one's *right* as a citizen of the United States.<sup>403</sup>

The debate continued as Mrs. Pauline Field, attorney and President of the Criminal Bar Association drew up an amendment introduced to the New York Legislature in January 1921. The proposed amendment would eliminate the word "male" from existing judiciary law stating that a juror must be a "male citizen of the United States."<sup>404</sup> The author of a December 19, 1920 *New York Times* article, clearly opposed to the idea of this change, snidely wrote, "There is no doubt that the present daily amusement of many women will be interfered with if the bill becomes a law and the judges will not be likely to excuse tardiness because the women jurors were detained at a bargain sale on the way to court."<sup>405</sup> He was afraid, it seems, that the women of Citron's *Hope Springs Eternal* or *Beauty Culture* would be waylaid on their way to court by a good bargain or the sudden need to have their nails done! However, to allay fears (those having to do with family duties more than those about stopping to shop before going to court), the Commissioner of Jurors, Frederick Byrne, indicated that his office would be lenient in allowing women to be excused from service primarily due to the fact that there was an urgent need for more jurors and the addition of women to the rolls would fill the gap.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid. Rothenberg "saw no reason why woman should be deprived of a right that came to her automatically when she received citizenship." Citing rights of citizenship as the main reason why women should serve as jurors was the argument used by most advocates of women serving as jurors for the next decade and a half

<sup>404</sup> "N.Y. Women to Be Eligible for All Juries, Under Bill to Be Submitted to Legislature," *New York Times*, 19 December 1920, p. E1.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid. The one allowable exemption mentioned in the article was having young children at home.

Field's amendment failed to get a majority approval and in 1923 and 1925 the NYLWV attempted, again to no avail, to get the Women Jury Service bill passed.<sup>407</sup> The appeals and discussions on the issue continued during the latter half of the decade and into the thirties. One long standing argument against jury service by women had to do with the lack of accommodations. During testimony before the Committee on the Judiciary House of Representatives in 1937, however, members were reminded by Burnita Shelton Matthews, legal counsel for the National Women's Party (NWP), that the subject of accommodations was essentially a non-issue, for in those States granting women the right to serve, the necessary adjustments had been made without a problem.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> "Outlines Women's Legislative Plans," *New York Times*, 17 December 1922, p. 33. "Women Begin Drive to Serve on Juries," *New York Times*, 27 January 1925, p.7.

<sup>408</sup> "Women Jurors in Federal Courts: Hearing before Subcommittee No. 1 of the Committee on the Judiciary House of Representatives" (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1937): 2. Matthews provided one of the longer testimonies before the subcommittee. She served as a vociferous campaigner for women's rights and was a strong advocate of the woman juror bill. In 1930 she wrote an article appearing in *Equal Rights* on the status of women jurors in the United States. Burnita Shelton Matthews, "The Status of Women as Jurors," *Equal Rights* 16 (May 23, 1930): 123-125. Matthews, like Hebard, began the article by citing the English precedent for American legal law, particularly by noting that the English jurist Sir William Blackstone held women to be excluded from jury service solely because of their sex. The only exception, according to Blackstone, was in the rare instance of a jury of matrons, in which questions of pregnancy were to be determined. Matthews, 123. In arguing in favor of women jurors, Matthews, as Gretchen Ritter would do several decades later, cites the United States Supreme Court decision to allow black to serve on juries, remarking that disbarment would brand them as an inferior class of citizens and deprive them of equal protection of the law guaranteed by the National Constitution. Matthews, 123. Perhaps one of the most helpful aspects of Matthews's article for this project is the table showing the status of women jurors in the United States. Comprehensive in nature, the table is comprised of several categories listing where women are and are not eligible as jurors and the years in which each state began permitting women to serve as jurors. Additionally, she includes a list of states where the exemptions for women and men are the same (California, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania), as well as a list of the special exemptions found in fourteen other jurisdictions. Matthews, 124-125. Matthews also played a significant role in the House of Representatives Subcommittee hearing on women jurors in the federal court system. "Women Jurors in Federal Courts." Others called for testimony include the following: Miss Laura Berrien, national vice president of the National Association of Women Lawyers, Mrs. Max Rotter, representing Wisconsin Branch of the NWP, Miss Izora Scott, legislative representative of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Mrs. Harvey W. Wiley, president, Women's city Club, Mrs. George Morey, representing Maryland Federation of Women's Clubs, Miss Aurelle Burnside, president, Arkansans Council of Women Lawyers, Mrs. Helen Hunt West, editor *Equal Rights*, Mrs. George E. Pariseau, representing Montgomery County branch of the Maryland Federation of Women's Clubs, Mrs. Helena Hill Weed, Mrs. Victor Dulac, representing Maryland National Woman's Party, Mrs. Thomas Musgrave, representing Federation of Republican Women of the State of Maryland and Mrs. Rudolph Vincenti, representing Federation of Maryland Democratic Women. Not only was Matthews the first person to testify before the committee, but the panel suggested she write to Federal judges in states

Judge Seth Thomas of Iowa, in response to a letter of inquiry by Matthews to Federal judges regarding that status of women jurors in each state, wrote the following, "Permit me to say that women are not called to serve on juries in the Federal court in this the northern district of Iowa. This, I am informed, is because the old Federal buildings here

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where women jury service was permissible so as to inquire about their experiences. The latter third of the document is comprised of the letters Matthews sent to judges in California, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah and Indiana, as well as the responses received. The statements provided by Matthews and the others, as well as the written responses to her queries on behalf of the federal judges bear witness to the status of women jurors in the country and concisely sum up arguments in favor of a national bill which would afford women the full rights of citizenship already guaranteed their male counterparts. "Women Jurors in Federal Courts." Several years before Matthews's article, Ohio Supreme Court Justice Florence E. Allen made a statement regarding what Ohio had done in order to accommodate women jurors. "We have provided a rest room for the women in each of our court houses. Women bailiffs, or 'tipstiffs' as the Pennsylvania law has it, have been appointed to preside over the women while passing from one case to another, or while waiting a call for a case. "In first degree murder cases where the jurors are very often locked up over night, we, of course, give the women separate quarters from the men in the hotel rooms. Otherwise no especial alteration has been made in court life with the advent of the woman juror." Florence E. Allen, "Women Jurors a Success." *Equal Rights* (February 5, 1927): 411. While many of the arguments in favor of women jurors in New York were set forth by those never having had the opportunity to be part of the legal process, Allen spoke from actual experience. The women of her state, Ohio, represented every age group and social class and had served on juries since November 1920. Justice Allen addressed the issues proposed by many that women were too emotional to serve, and spoke to the benefits of their ability to serve their duty, noting that women are "not particularly sentimental . . . [and] neither are they heartless." Allen, 411. A decade later, Mildred Adams continued expanding upon Allen's point of view. In her magazine article on women and the impending amendment allowing them to serve on juries, Adams cites several of the arguments made in favor of the change, including the fact that adding women would double the juror pool and cut in half the amount of time each juror would serve. Adams, 6. She notes the professional men who, by reason of their job, including judges, sheriffs, surgeons and firemen to name a few, are exempt and indicates that the wives of these community members *would* be able to serve their civic duty, thereby bringing more educated people to the jury box instead of the poor who seek primarily the requisite three dollar per day remuneration. Elizabeth Sheridan, member of the Philadelphia Bar Association, also weighed in on the issue of women and jury service during the mid-twenties, and she, like Allen and Adams, cites the pros and cons for the implementation of the woman juror bill. Elizabeth Sheridan, "Women and Jury Service," *American Bar Association Journal* 11 (1925): 792-797. Sheridan cites specific legal cases, from the late nineteenth century as well as from the early twenties. For example, in *Strauder vs. West Virginia*, the case was made that the "right to vote carried with it eligibility for jury service." Sheridan, 792. In another case, *McKinney vs. the State of Wyoming* in 1892, McKinney, convicted of grand larceny by a jury of twelve men brought forth a "writ of error on the ground that it was a deprivation of the rights, privileges, and immunities accorded him by the Constitution of the United States under the Fourteenth Amendment that women were not required to serve on juries as were men." Sheridan, 792. Sheridan includes statements by Mr. George Brodbeck, Clerk of the United States District Court at Philadelphia, Mr. Harold B. Beitler, member of the Philadelphia Bar, Judge Robert Marx of the Superior Court of Cincinnati, and the Honorable R. Justin Miller, Professor of Law at the University of Oregon, all of whom promoted the idea of women jurors. The primary objection to women jurors as set forth by this article, and elsewhere, was the need to enlarge or remodel existing facilities, or to build entirely new structures, to accommodate women. It was noted, however, that this should not be a real deterrent since in Pennsylvania and Maryland, women were called to service "without any preparation to speak of." The author continues by including an article from Philadelphia's *Evening Bulletin* in which the women proved "themselves willing to endure inconvenience when duty called." Sheridan, 796.

have no equipment to accommodate women jurors. . . . I know it would be a real hardship to compel women to submit to the conditions prevailing.”<sup>409</sup> Consequently, then, because it would be expensive to update and remodel pre-existing facilities, it was easier for some states just to exclude women from jury rolls.

In 1925 members of the NYLWV and the NWP discussed two jury measures with members of the Senate and Assembly Judiciary Committee. One of these measures, sponsored by Senator Straus and Assemblyman Goodrich of Westchester, proposed to make woman’s jury service *mandatory*. The other, a measure to which members of women’s organizations were opposed, was a *permissive* measure.<sup>410</sup> Woman advocates wanted full consideration as jurors without any additional exemptions. They wanted essentially to be regarded as *equals* to their male counterparts, and while they saw no good reason to be excluded from jury service, men who were proponents of the amendment’s passage likewise believed that women would be a welcome, even beneficial addition to the courtroom.<sup>411</sup>

Finally, fifteen years after the adoption of suffrage, and after a decade and a half of debate, a bill for women jurors, introduced by Democratic Assemblywoman Doris Byrne of the Bronx, was passed by the House by a vote of 105 to 33 in March 1935.

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<sup>409</sup> Seth Thomas, letter to Matthews, “Women Jurors in Federal Courts,” 27.

<sup>410</sup> “Women at Albany Press for Equality,” *New York Times*, 4 March 1925, p. 21.

<sup>411</sup> Mrs. Clarence M. Smith, Chairman of the NWP argued, “It is a shame that the women of the Empire State have to come here and ask the Legislature to give us the right to serve on juries inasmuch as we have been given the right to vote. We believe the women of the state are just as qualified to serve on juries as the men and we feel it is our duty.” Mrs. William Blauvelt of Scarsdale concurred, “There is no earthly reason why the women of New York State shouldn’t serve on juries. The opposition to this bill, while not expressed here today, is purely sentimental and emotional, and it’s all nonsense.” Abram J. Rose, New York attorney, maintained that, “After my long experience in law I am frank to say that I believe women are more solid in their judgment than the men, and I am certain that women jurors would be an improvement in our jury.” Ibid.

Unfortunately its demise came in the Senate where it was defeated.<sup>412</sup> Byrne's bill was reintroduced the following year by Westchester County Republican Assemblywoman Jane Todd.<sup>413</sup> The measure passed through the Assembly, but died once more in Senate committees.<sup>414</sup> In 1937, and for the third year in a row, the Assembly approved the bill and sent it on to the State Senate.<sup>415</sup> This time, however, the Senate, after making some changes to the proposal, passed a bill for permissive, rather than mandatory, jury service.<sup>416</sup> After a long battle, the Woman Juror Bill was finally approved by both of New York State's legislative bodies and was sent to the Governor in May 1937.<sup>417</sup> Upon receipt, the Governor signed the bill into a law that became effective on September 1, 1937, at which time the names of women voters and women who owned property, and were eligible for jury service, were added to the state's list of potential jurors.

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<sup>412</sup> "Woman Juror Bill Amended," Special to the *New York Times*, 20 March, 1935, p. 10. "Woman Jury Bill in Test Tomorrow," *New York Times*, 9 February 1936, p. N7. This article indicates that the House voting record on the bill was 105 to 33.

<sup>413</sup> "Woman Jury Bill in Test Tomorrow." For this measure Todd received important backing from the only woman serving in the New York State Senate, Mrs. Rhoda Fox Graves, in addition to continued support from Byrne. Echoing the sentiments of those a decade before, Todd said of the bill, "For sixteen years we have been seeking out this right which is justly ours, and in view of the fact that we have the right of suffrage, there is no real argument against keeping us out of the jury box." "Bills for Women Jurors Voted by Assembly after Brief Debate," *New York Times*, 12 February 1936, p. 1, 4. Fellow Republican Horace M. Stone countered Todd's argument with a belief still held by many: "It certainly will not improve the administration of justice to have women on juries. As a matter of fact it will be necessary to provide more exemptions for women than men. I realize women have just as much intelligence to act as jurors as men, but the point I am making is that there is no urgent reason why they should do so." "Bills for Women Jurors," 1. According to a later account in the *New York Times* a woman could claim exemption from jury duty for merely being a woman. In other words, if she, for whatever reason did not want to serve, she would not be forced to. "Jury Duty Notices for Women in Fall," *New York Times*, 30 May 1937, p. 60. Connecticut law, implemented just two months prior to New York's, was compulsory, "allowing only a few statutory exemptions." Bernstein, 7.

<sup>414</sup> "Bills for Women Jurors," 1, 4.

<sup>415</sup> "Woman Juror Bill Changed in Senate," *New York Times*, 3 February 1937, p. 6.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid. The Senate changed the language of the measure to indicate jury service for women would not be mandatory but rather "permissible." Senator Kleinfeld, of Brooklyn, headed the campaign for the change indicating a belief that "a woman is wholly qualified to render jury service and, with the exception of those who have household duties or are charged with the care of children, should be allowed to serve." "Bars Forced Basis for Women Jurors," *New York Times*, 24 March 1937, p. 27. With this permissive law, women could claim exemption "merely on the basis of their sex." Bernstein, 7.

<sup>417</sup> "Woman Juror Bill, Fiscal Study Voted in Albany Wind-Up," *New York Times*, 8 May 1937, p. 1, 10.

Additionally, in June of the same year, registration banks became available, allowing women to ensure inclusion of their names on the lists of the eligible juror pool.<sup>418</sup>

The first women drawn as jurors in New York State served on juries in the Federal Court House in Canandaigua, New York.<sup>419</sup> Women began sitting on juries in the municipality of New York City, Citron's district, on September 28, 1937.<sup>420</sup> The passage of the Woman Juror Bill was a long-coming and monumental achievement for the State of New York; however, New York's women were not the first in the country to serve as jurors; it was the 23<sup>rd</sup> state to allow mixed juries.<sup>421</sup> Among the first women in New York

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<sup>418</sup> "Jury Duty Notes for Women in Fall," *New York Times*, 30 May 1937, p. 60. The article lists the qualifications for *petit* jury service and notes that the "condition of selection of grand jurors precludes service by women as yet." For one, man or woman, to qualify for *petit* jury in New York County he/she had to own property assets (cash, insurance, furniture) in the amount of \$250 or real estate in the county valued at \$150. He/she had to be between the ages of 21 and 70 and of average intelligence with a good civic record and no felony convictions. As reported by the *New York Times*, women, often in large groups (including 74 women with the Women's Democratic Club of Washington Heights and 15 members of the New York League of Women Voters), continued registering their names with the Commissioner of Jurors. "90 More Women File for Duty on Juries," *New York Times*, 18 June 1937, p. 22. As noted above, according to Citron's telling, she was approved for jury service, not by going to a registration bank, but by calling on a friend for a favor.

<sup>419</sup> "Women Jurors are Drawn," *New York Times*, 28 August 1937 p. 2. The location, Canandaigua, is ironic because it is the town where Susan B. Anthony and fourteen other women, in 1873, were convicted of violating election laws after having violated constitutional election laws by voting in Rochester on November 5, 1872. While the law making women's jury service mandatory officially went into effect on September 1, 1937, two women, Mrs. Blanche Best and Mrs. Carrie Harris became New York's first female jurors, serving on a trial for reckless driving on August 29, 1937. On September 8 and 14 of that year, New York City's Commissioner of Jurors was scheduled to draw for the first time the names of men and women who were being called to jury service for the City and Supreme Court sessions slated to begin on September 27, 1937 and then for the Court of the General Sessions and Municipal Court term opening October 4, 1937. "1<sup>st</sup> Women Act on Jury in State," *New York Times*, 29 August 1937, p. 35.

<sup>420</sup> "First Woman Put on Jury Lists Here," *New York Times*, 9 September 1937, p. 25. Anne I. Farley, a housewife in her mid-forties, is listed as being the first woman whose name was drawn for jury service in New York City. "Women Jurors Sit in First Cases Here," *New York Times*, 28 September 1937, p. 25. Housewife Mrs. Julia E. Ehrentreu is listed as being the first woman juror selected to hear a case in New York City. She along with five other women and six men comprised the jury in a divorce case tried before Justice Salvatore A. Cotillo. According to the article, out of the 143 women called before the Manhattan Supreme Court October jury panel, only eight asked to be excused. The rest were willing and excited to serve their civic duty. "First Women Sit in Crime Case Here," *New York Times*, 5 October 1937, p. 27. This article notes that for the "first time in the history of the Court of General Sessions . . . women were accepted as jurors in criminal trials."

<sup>421</sup> While one long-standing argument against women serving on juries was that too many would need to be excused for "domestic" reasons, in actuality, according to contemporary reports, not 2 percent of the 3,000 women who have served (the majority of whom were housewives) asked to be excused, in

to serve was attorney Dorothy Kenyon. She described the experience as “invaluable” and “stimulating to everyone involved in the court procedure,” and remarked that having women on juries “has served to brace up men jurors, because you are always on your mettle when members of the other sex are watching you. They are all on the alert now, and the jury system, although a rough instrument of justice, is working better with everyone putting their minds on their work.”<sup>422</sup>

### **Women, Rights of Citizenship, Juries and the Courtroom**

Another woman called to jury service in New York was the socially conscious Citron who, at her first opportunity began sketching the legal environment and those involved in the legal process. The dramatically titled *Answer Yes or No!*, which suggests a climactic movie-like moment, records, at least in part, the number of women involved in the process for one of the trials on which Citron served (Figure 69 and Figure 70). As she did with *Hope Springs Eternal*, Citron places the African American figure prominently within *Answer Yes or No!*. In the earlier painting the African American woman, although situated behind the other figures within the circular group of shoppers, was larger than her counterparts, and stood out among them. Here, too, easily noticeable, the African American conspicuously sits in the front row of the jury box, on the end closest to the viewer. The decorate scroll work of the bench serves to draw even further attention to this figure whose placement is perfectly framed between the juror behind him and another figure sitting on a bench perpendicular to the jury box. These seemingly minor compositional details help illuminate the figure as he sits, attentively engaged in

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comparison to the 40 percent of men who had their lawyers claim exemption on their behalf. “Few Women Seek Jury Exemptions,” *New York Times*, 26 December 1937, p. 67.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.



the courtroom proceedings. Citron prominently includes the African American figure in the jury box as a subtle reference to the battle fought by both African Americans and women in an attempt to gain the right to vote, to serve on juries, and to have all the rights of citizenship as stated by the United States Constitution. Early suffragists, including, most notably, Susan B. Anthony, cited the post-Civil War Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments in their argument over the rights of citizenship. The Reconstruction Amendments, as they were known, put an end to slavery, established terms of (male) citizenship and “provided that the right to vote would not be determined on the basis of race or previous condition of servitude [slavery].”<sup>423</sup> In the decades following Reconstruction, suffragists used these Amendments as the basis for their arguments regarding their right to vote and to serve on juries, believing that these laws, written, in theory, to protect ex-slaves, should apply to women as well.<sup>424</sup> Susan B.

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<sup>423</sup> Gretchen Ritter, “Jury Service and Women’s Citizenship before and after the Nineteenth Amendment, *Law and History Review* (Fall 2000) <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lhr/20.3/ritter.html> (2 February 2004), par. 11. The issue of women’s jury service and citizenship has been taken up more recently by University of Texas Associate Professor of Government, Gretchen Ritter. Ritter’s text provides an informative historical record of the issue of women’s citizenship in the United States from the late nineteenth century up through the 1970s. She discusses the relationship between jury service and citizenship and references the Reconstruction Amendments, which abolished slavery, established the terms of national citizenship, and provided that the right to vote would not be determined on the basis of race or previous condition of servitude (slavery), observing that “this was the constitutional context within which the woman rights movement made claims for women’s right to vote and serve on juries.” Ritter, pars. 10-12. Ritter also recalls important legal cases in which the rights of citizenship were questioned. Following suffrage, the issue over women jury service continued to spark debate and Ritter poses the question asked by woman rights advocates of whether or not jury service, like voting, is part of the political rights of citizenship and contends that those early advocates, in most cases, were unsuccessful in “claiming their right to vote and serve on juries under the Fourteenth Amendment.” Ritter, par. 38. For these women jury service and suffrage were “markers of civic status” and “the role of the voter and juror served not only to distinguish between those citizens who had political rights and those without them.” Ritter, par. 41. While focusing primarily on the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the first several decades of the twentieth, Ritter concludes by noting that the struggle for equality continued up through the 1970s. As late as 1961, she states, the “Supreme Court of Florida upheld Florida’s practice of automatically exempting women from jury service.” Ritter, par. 70.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 12. Ritter explains, however, that the federal courts determined women to be ineligible to serve on juries, citing Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* as their precedent. Sir William Blackstone, an English jurist, advocated that women were to be excluded from jury duty merely because of their sex and could serve only on matron juries in which their job was to determine questions of pregnancy. Matthews, 123. Elizabeth Sheridan, member of the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Bar

Anthony, for example, was an advocate for women's citizenship and gave a series of speeches on the issue in 1873, just prior to her appearance in court over casting illegal ballots in upstate New York.<sup>425</sup> Anthony and the others used the political rights of citizenship, as per the Fourteenth Amendment, as a key point on which women's rights advocates based their arguments. They also cited the rights of African American men to vote, as per the Fifteenth Amendment, for their cause. Advocates held, prior to the Nineteenth Amendment, that if women were given the right to vote, "they were more likely to be recognized as first class citizens and accorded other political and civil rights, including the right to serve on juries. If their elevation to the status of elector failed to enable women to hold office and serve on juries, then, according to many, women were still being denied the position of first class citizens."<sup>426</sup> Their fight, then, was for equality

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Association, also cites Blackstone's precedent for current laws. "At common law, women were never called to jury service, with the single exception of a jury of matrons. . . . Blackstone in his *Commentaries* deliberately eliminated them from persons qualified by the use of the following language: 'Under the word *homo*, though a name common to both sex, the female is excluded propter defectum sexus (Because not the right sex.).' Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 362, quoted in Sheridan, 792. Ritter then aptly summarizes the interpretations of the post Civil War Amendments used by those involved in the women's rights movements. They contended that under the auspices of the Fourteenth Amendment "women were entitled to vote and serve on juries as privileges of citizenship" and that "women defendants were entitled to have women jurors as their peers." Suffragists also stressed, Ritter tells us, "the connection between electoral status and jury service." Ritter, par. 13.

<sup>425</sup> In her speeches, as recounted by Gretchen Ritter, associate professor of government at the University of Texas, Austin, Anthony asserted that ". . . there is no provision in [the United States Constitution . . . that can be fairly construed into permission to the States to deprive any class of their citizens of the right to vote. . . . No disenfranchised person is allowed to be judge or juror—and none but disenfranchised persons can be women's peers." Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 2 (New York: Arno, 1969): chapter 25; quoted in Ritter, par. 18, n. 17.

<sup>426</sup> Ritter, par. 41. Miss Laura Berrien, representative for the National Association of Women Lawyers, in her statement to the Committee on the Judiciary House of Representatives, pointed out to the members that "jury service is one of the highest functions of citizenship, and that all over the country there are patriotic and civic-minded women who feel that they are and will be glad to exercise this function." "Women Jurors in Federal Courts," 10. Mrs. George Morey, representing the Maryland Federation of Women's Clubs, took the citizenship argument a step further by including a specific reference to African Americans when she stated, "There are an awful lot of women who want this jury service . . . . Often think that if those women realized that the Supreme Court decided that all Negro men had to have jury service, because otherwise it placed a stigma on their citizenship and denied them the equal protection of the law, I think you would be mobbed down here . . . ." "Women Jurors in Federal Courts," 16.

in terms of the basic rights of citizenship as granted by the Constitution.<sup>427</sup> By the late 1930s in New York, after women had gained suffrage and the right to serve on juries, they were recognized, within the court and justice system at least, as “first class citizens.” Thus, Citron’s prominent African American juror in *Answer Yes or No!* refers to the hard won battle of women and to the precedent of the Reconstruction Amendments upon which her predecessors and peers had called.

In the slightly more caricatured print version of *Answer Yes or No!* three women sit interspersed among their eight male counterparts, seven middle-aged white men and one African American (Figure 70). The implied twelfth juror, and would be fourth woman, is unseen and therefore presumably the artist. These jurors, in addition to the witnesses, court officials, and lawyers function as the court’s sanctioned spectators. They are the people engaged in the trial, each serving his or her civic duty. The other group of spectators, the public audience, watches the proceedings, but does not participate in them. This second group remains separate from the trial participants and occupies the space behind the composition’s three foreground figures (who, incidentally, sit with their backs to the viewer, further closing off the active courtroom space). Interestingly, Citron seems to occupy both groups of spectators. She shifts between being a juror—the activity which granted her access to the courtroom in the first place—and being an audience member watching the proceedings, and carefully observing the participants, from behind the rail. It would have been inappropriate, however, for a juror to leave the jury box in the midst

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<sup>427</sup> Ironically, although the Reconstruction Amendments theoretically gave the full rights of citizenship to African Americans, blacks were still left off the jury rolls in many states including Maryland, Alabama, North Carolina, and Virginia among others. At times, when this occurred, mistrials were declared and second trials were granted on grounds of unconstitutionality. “Negroes as Jurors,” *New York Times*, 12 July 1932, p. 16. F. Raymond Daniel, “Negro Juror Ban to be Trial Issue,” *New York Times*, 30 March, 1933, p. 10.

of a trial, so she took her sketch pad with her to the jury box each day, recording those around her, and then, later, created final compositions loosely based on her series of sketches (Figures 71-73).<sup>428</sup>

The painting with the same title and similar compositional arrangement diverges from the print in several minor ways including the makeup of the jury, yet in both the African American man sits attentively in the front of the jury box (Figure 69). This representation of the African American figure, like the one in *Subway Technique*, is a rather dignified one, for he appears to be taking his civic responsibilities with more seriousness than some of his counterparts. In the painting, as seen in a photographic reproduction of the image taken from one of the artist's scrapbooks, there are nine men and three women, none of whom resemble the artist. The younger man with glasses, just over the lawyer's right shoulder has been omitted in the print. Other discrepancies between the two versions can be found in the depictions of the lawyer and the witness. Much more animated in the print, the brutish lawyer, complete with slicked back hair, furrowed brow, long pointed nose and wide-open mouth, lunges toward the witness box, roaring the title question at its timid occupant. Using his right arm in both versions to brace himself upon the front of the jury box, in the print his left arm bends at the elbow, slightly raised toward the witness, while his fist curls around a rolled up document. Obviously having just posed a question to his nervous victim, the lawyer vociferously demands a response. In the print the witness, confined within the witness stand, sits with arms at his sides, head slightly bent forward with a meek expression on his face. By contrast the painting's witness, an entirely different figure from the one shown in the

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<sup>428</sup> This process, however, might lead one to wonder how the artist, if sketching in the jury box during the trial, could have continued to pay attention to the testimony given by witnesses and arguments made by the defense and prosecution attorneys.

print, shifts nervously in his seat, arms bent with hands on his chair, as though shifting or just about to rise out of the chair. The lawyer here appears to speak rather than bellow, yet one senses a certain amount of awkwardness and hesitation as the witness readies himself to respond.

This work has been described by some as the “best satirical anecdote” of the series.<sup>429</sup> Others, however, including Citron’s biographer, disagree and in a comparison between Citron and the nineteenth-century French satirist Daumier, Resseguier contended that the “emotions shown by the individual figures in Citron’s work, the tensions in the confrontations . . . reach an intensity reminiscent of Daumier. His renderings of subjects, however, have a strong flavor of social satire, whereas Minna’s lithographs and paintings on this theme depict the emotions of people involved in such situations, rather than the weaknesses of human beings and their institutions.”<sup>430</sup> Regardless of the satirical element, the composition of *Answer Yes or No!* is masterfully arranged, and the compositional elements—the position of the jury box, the curving benches on which the foreground audience members sit, the jurors’ gazes, and the location of the resolute lawyer in the center—draw the viewer’s attention to the reticent figure in the witness box whose gaze, in turn, leads back to the attorney. The painting focuses on the engagement between the lawyer and the witness, yet at the same time includes numerous amusing little details, including the yawning bailiff, about the trial participants. Other less obvious techniques and elements—the feathered hat of the woman at the right and the carved decorative scroll work at the front side of the jury box—draw the viewer’s attention to the left, toward the focal point and the confrontation between lawyer and witness.

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<sup>429</sup> Peterdi.

<sup>430</sup> Citron and Resseguier, 35.

Various stages of jurors' interest are evident in the poses and expressions captured by the artist. Most, with the exception of the spectacled man in the second row and the figure just to the left and behind him, face the witness anxiously awaiting a response. The artist's humor and comic wit comes through in her representations of the other two as they sit with their heads bent slightly forward and eyes closed, taking a brief nap, perhaps out of boredom. One older gentleman seated at the right side of the jury box, in the second row, holds a hand up to his left ear in an exaggerated effort to better hear what is being said. The African American man and the woman at the opposite end of his bench sit in contemplation with arms resting beneath their chins. And serving as the antithesis to these relatively attentive jurors and the actively engaged stenographer, who dutifully records the details of the trial while sitting at his table before the witness stand, is a caricatured court official located near the lower right corner of the composition. His boredom with the monotony and dullness of another trial is unmistakable as he sits slouched in the chair, hands folded neatly in his lap, never attempting to conceal his long drawn out, exaggerated yawn, and he is cut off by the edge of the composition, as though we are not meant to see him.

Like the gamblers, these courtroom characters, the "ladies and gentlemen of the jury," as they were by this time in New York addressed by the judge, lawyers and court officials, often appear in Hollywood films during the 1930s. *Marked Woman* (1937) is a tale about a nightclub "hostess" Mary Dwight (Bette Davis) teaming up with district attorney David Graham (Humphrey Bogart) to convict a New York City crime boss, Johnny Vanning (Eduardo Ciannelli).<sup>431</sup> Illustrating the new law and the changing times,

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<sup>431</sup> This film, which was based on the recent trial of Vice-Racketeer Lucky Luciano, has been described as "a powerful and grimy melodrama, complete with courtrooms, district attorneys, killings,

several female jurors appear in the jury boxes in each of the movie's two courtroom scenes.<sup>432</sup> The film's courtrooms, in which Bogart twice attempts to bring down Vanning, are similarly arranged, but it is the layout of the first which most resembles Citron's. In the film, as in Citron's *Answer Yes or No!* and *Colloquy*, the stenographer and court official both sit at tables directly in front of the judge's bench. A large table for the prosecuting attorneys, defendant and defense attorneys is positioned in the middle of the room in front of the stenographer's desk. Behind this table a row of chairs serves as seats for the witnesses, while a railing separates those involved in the trial from the members of the public audience who occupy the back half of the room. And finally, the witness stand and jury box sit to the right of the judge's bench, as they do in Citron's painting.

A similar arrangement can be found in the courtroom setting of *Manhattan Melodrama* (1934). The film stars Myrna Loy as Eleanor Packer, a girl caught between her old gambling gangster-racketeer boyfriend "Blackie" Gallagher (Clark Gable) and her husband, district attorney turned Governor of New York, James W. Wade (William Powell), who, as it turns out was the boyhood friend of Gallagher.<sup>433</sup> Near the end of what truly is a melodramatic film, District Attorney Wade addresses the "Gentlemen of

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beatings, clip joints and dialog like, 'I'll get you if I have to crawl back from my grave to do it.'" *Time Magazine*, 19 April 1937, p. 66.

<sup>432</sup> This film is used as an example, by Nicole Rafter, professor in the Law, Policy and Society Program at Northeastern University, of one in which the "justice figure" hero (Bogart) attempts to stop the "injustice figure" crime boss and gangster (Ciannelli). Nicole Rafter, "American Criminal Trial Films: An Overview of their Development, 1930-2000" in *Law and Film*, ed. by Stefan Machura and Peter Robson (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2001), 9-10. What is most interesting about the inclusion of women as jurors in the film, however, is that although the film dates to 1937, the year New York women legally gained the right to serve as jurors, the film was released five months prior to the September first implementation of the bill. "News of the Screen: Bette Davis Back in Warner Fold with 'Marked Woman,' Showing at the Strand Today," *New York Times*, 10 April 1937, p. 11.

<sup>433</sup> Story by Arthur Caesar. Screenplay by Oliver H. P. Garrett. Directed by W. S. van Dyke and George Cukor. The film was described as "well directed," "superbly photographed," and "first rate cinema, chiefly important because it marks the elevation to stardom of Myrna Loy." *Time Magazine*, 14 May 1934, p. 25. Another popular magazine described the film as "big box-office" with "fast, crisp, intelligent dialog." *Variety*, 8 May 1934, p. 14.

the Jury,” a group of twelve well-dressed middle-aged white men wearing suits and ties, who sit in the jury box to the right of the judge’s bench and witness chair.<sup>434</sup> Again one finds similarities between the movie set and Citron’s version of the courtroom. In the film, the stenographer takes his place in front of the judge’s bench, this time, however, facing the jury. Just behind him, also facing the jury box is the defense table, while the prosecutor’s table sits perpendicular to both just in front of the railing and audience. In conjunction with Citron’s images, Hollywood films such as these examples mutually confirm an interpretation of what courtrooms in the mid to late thirties looked like both in terms of characters involved and in arrangement of the settings.

Another popular courtroom film of the 1930s was Viennese director Fritz Lang’s first American film, the protonoir *Fury* (1936), described as “the most bitter courtroom film in Hollywood history.”<sup>435</sup> After being wrongly imprisoned for kidnapping and presumably dying in the jail fire set by a lynch mob, Joe Wilson (Spencer Tracy), who survives unbeknownst to anyone but his two brothers, seeks revenge against the mob. With their help, Joe intends to see the mob members convicted of (his) murder. In the end, and primarily because his fiancée Katherine (Sylvia Sydney) discovers he is alive and threatens to leave him if the ruse continues, Joe reveals himself to the court, thus sparing the lives of the defendants, but remaining “deeply resentful [as] the criminal justice system stands condemned for a second failure to do justice.”<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Indicative of the time, 1934 and three years before the passage of the Woman Juror Bill, the jury is comprised exclusively of men.

<sup>435</sup> Nicole Rafter with Charles Alexander Hahn, “Courtroom Films,” in Nichole Rafter, *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 100. “In graphic, relentless, brusquely literal sequences, the dialog and camera passages translate the sundry cross-sections of the average American mentality, as belated justice seeks to square the debt.” *Variety*, 10 June 1936, p. 18.

<sup>436</sup> Rafter and Hahn, 101. “The big moment of a courtroom scene which sets an all-time high for legal realism on the screen arrives when the newsreel is projected with stopped action until most of those suspected are convicted.”



These are just three examples of the numerous types of crime/courtroom dramas of the 1930s and, as film historian Drew Todd notes, “crime films reflect the power relations of the context in which they are made—attitudes toward gender, ethnicity, race, and class relations, opinions about fairness and justice, and beliefs about the optimal relationships of state to individual.”<sup>437</sup> Citron’s courtroom images parallel the larger popular culture interest in crime dramas of the decade because with the country in chaos, there developed a larger social interest in law and order, thus beginning “a golden decade for crime film” for it was during the thirties that gangster films and prison films became popular.<sup>438</sup> So, while her initial inspiration for the “Judges and Juries” series came from actual time spent within the courtroom, she may also have been referencing forms of pop culture, including Hollywood films. As such, her images would have fit in with a larger societal interest in crime and courtroom drama, even if she was poking some subtle jibes at the romanticized view of the legal system, by including bored, yawning bailiffs and sleeping jurors.

Americans identified with the criminals in the top three early decade gangster films, *Little Caesar* (1930), *Public Enemy* (1931), and *Scarface* (1932), according to Drew Todd, because they shared “economic disadvantages and dreams of wealth during hard times . . . [and] echoed the financial predicaments of many ordinary Americans during the Great Depression . . . .”<sup>439</sup> Another popular genre of film, developed in the

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<sup>437</sup> Drew Todd, “The History of Crime Films,” in Nichole Rafter, *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 19. Drew Todd goes on to say that the interest in organized crime and the popular gangster films of the 1920s did not wane after the end of Prohibition in 1933. J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI “G-men,” as well as the “flag-bearers of lawlessness, such as John Dillinger, ‘Pretty Boy’ Floyd, [and] ‘Baby Face’ Nelson . . . stimulated a public appetite for movies about crime and punishment.” Ibid., 20.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 20-21. These movies “connected criminality with economic hardships and portrayed gangsters as underdogs. Walking a populist tightrope, these films spoke to Americans struggling to make ends meet while simultaneously attacking crime and the government’s ability to control it.” Ibid., 21.

early thirties was the courtroom film, examples of which include the above-cited *Manhattan Melodrama* and *Fury*, in which the *justice* and *injustice* are pitted against one another, and the overall theme of the films is the “difficulty in achieving justice.”<sup>440</sup> It is this justice system in action that Citron portrays in the “Judges and Juries” series.

Contemporary Hollywood films are but one example of popular visual culture demonstrating the role of women in the courtroom as jurors. Several plays from the 1920s and 1930s reveal the potential power and significance of having women serve on juries. In one example from 1923, *The Jury Woman: A Play, 3 Acts*, the story opens with lovers George Wayne and Betty Brown in their remote Vermont Cottage.<sup>441</sup> Ultimately, a discussion turns to an argument over ending their affair and, as Wayne leaves and drives away in his car, Betty fires a pistol at the door. Act Two takes place in a typical courtroom where Grace Pierce stands trial for killing James Montgomery (later revealed as George Wayne from Act One).<sup>442</sup> Testimony from Grace reveals that James had been living with a woman in Vermont just prior to the birth of their child.<sup>443</sup> The act ends with the prosecutor and defense attorneys addressing the “ladies and gentlemen of the jury.”<sup>444</sup>

Act Three opens in the jury room, a space furnished with a long table, office chairs and a small table to the side, in which the jury spends its second day trying to

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<sup>440</sup> Rafter and Hahn, 94-95. This chapter examines traditional courtroom dramas.

<sup>441</sup> Bernard K. Burns, *The Jury Woman: A Play, 3 Acts* (Milwaukee: B. K. Burns, 1923).

<sup>442</sup> During the course of the trial, through the testimony of Grace’s mother, the reader/audience discovers that Grace and James, supposedly married, had a baby which died shortly after its birth. The mother recounts for the court a quarrel between her daughter and “son-in-law” on the night James was shot in which she heard James shouting “I’m ready to quit the whole dam [*sic*] affair right now. . . Well, by God, I’m through trying to let you down easy, but if you haven’t got enough sense to let it go at that, why you’ve got to take it as it comes. This affair is at an end. I’m through.” Ibid., 13, 14.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>444</sup> Obviously a certain amount of artistic license was taken with this story. It is set in New York (with the defendant, her mother, and the deceased living at 91500 Woos Street, New York City), and a woman serves on the jury—fourteen years *prior* to the legalization of woman jury service in that state. The play was published in Wisconsin in 1923, however, two years *after* women became eligible for jury service in that state. See chart in Matthews, 124.

come to an agreement about the verdict in the case.<sup>445</sup> Of the jurors, only one is a woman, Mrs. Horace Masters (who, as it turns out, is Betty from Act One), and while the only one voting “not guilty”, she remains resolute in her decision.<sup>446</sup> After arguing her case, Betty ultimately admits to the jury, and to her husband, also a juror, that she was the woman sharing the cottage with Montgomery/Wayne in Vermont, and that the deceased had promised her the same things as the defendant and then suddenly ended the affair.<sup>447</sup> Thus Betty, like Henry Fonda in *Twelve Angry Men*, one of the century’s most popular court dramas from 1957, was unyielding in her convictions, thereby ultimately convincing the other jurors of the defendant’s innocence.<sup>448</sup>

A woman also plays a significant role in the outcome of a trial in another play, *Ladies of the Jury: A Comedy in Three Acts*.<sup>449</sup> The play opens in present day at the Rosevale, New Jersey County Court House and begins with the defense attorney, Rutherford Dale, and the prosecutor, Halsey van Styne, selecting jurors for a first degree murder case in which Yvette Gordon is accused of killing her husband in order to inherit

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<sup>445</sup> Burns, 36.

<sup>446</sup> Betty says she will sit there “‘till Hell freezes over before I will vote a death penalty against that poor girl.” Ibid., 40. Another juror (Simes) counters with “Oh! That’s just sympathy . . . the maudlin sentimentalism that is turning guilty women free all over the country . . . and making it easier for other women to kill as they please. Did you think of that when you stated under oath that you would find a verdict according to the evidence regardless of the fact that the defendant was a woman?” Ibid. A third juror (Schmidt) jumps into the argument, “Yes, did you think of that? Do you think you know more than the whole bunch of us men? Women shouldn’t be on juries . . . that’s a man’s work.” Simes: “But Mrs. Masters, you will accomplish nothing by sentimental obstinacy. We will sit here for a week...disagree...be discharged...and the case will be tried over again...and *any jury will convict on the evidence*.” Ibid. Garrity “You are too tenderhearted for a jury, Mrs. Masters...the jury is no place for women.” Ibid., 43.

<sup>447</sup> She said “And the way that I shot at Montgomery is the way that girl out there shot him...in a blind unknowing impulse....” Ibid., 48.

<sup>448</sup> Incidentally, *12 Angry Men* (directed by Sidney Lumet) includes no women even though women had gained the right in New York to serve on juries 20 years prior to the making of the film. A group of men of various ages and professions (painter, architect, watchmaker, advertising man, high school coach, garage owner etc.) are locked in a jury room for several hours deciding the case of a young man accused of killing his father. One lone dissenting juror, played by Henry Fonda, points out that the case is not as clear-cut as it seemed in court and spends the remainder of the film slowly convincing the other jury members to change their votes to “not guilty.”

<sup>449</sup> Fred Ballard, *Ladies of the Jury: A Comedy in Three Acts* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1929, 1931).

his money.<sup>450</sup> After rushing into the courtroom for the first time, Mrs. Crane, the overly polite, very humorous, wealthy New Jersey society woman, sits in the witness box while the judge explains the process of jury selection.<sup>451</sup> The play continues with the trial itself, during which, on several occasions, Mrs. Crane interrupts the proceedings with a series of questions regarding clarification of court procedure as well as questions for the witnesses.<sup>452</sup> The second Act takes place in the jury room, a large room off of which several doors, leading to the Gentlemen's Smoking Room and the Ladies' Parlor, open.<sup>453</sup> It is here that the jury spends the ensuing three days sequestered, trying to reach a verdict. The initial vote comes back eleven to one with a guilty verdict, and the following days are spent in conflict as Mrs. Crane, the lone dissenter, like Betty in *The Jury Woman*, deftly manages to convince each of her fellow jurors to change his or her vote to "not guilty."

In both of these plays, women act as a protector, looking out for the rights of the underdog defendant. Betty's coincidental presence on the jury as well as her steadfastness in terms of the verdict ultimately saves the life of the defendant, for no one other than

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<sup>450</sup> Six women and six men, from a wide range of social classes, are chosen in due course. Women in New Jersey became eligible to serve on juries in 1921. Matthews, 124. Among the women are a wealthy society woman, an intellectual spinster, an idealistic college graduate, a new wife and a fat, temperamental Irish cook. The men are a middle-aged wealthy bigot, a real estate agent, a World War veteran, a likeable gardener of Scottish descent, and a romantic young poet. Ballard, 7-8.

<sup>451</sup> "JUDGE: The Court has not the slightest doubt of your mental qualifications, Mrs. Crane, but before you can serve as a juror you must be accepted by counsel on both sides, and before counsel can accept you—counsel must examine you." Ibid., 13.

<sup>452</sup> Mrs. Crane asks "Mr. Van Styne has just told the jury what he is going to prove during the trial, but really, your Honor, if Mr. Van Styne can prove everything he says he will prove, why bother with a trial at all? Why not let Mr. Van Styne prove it to you and then sentence the defendant?" The Judge responds to Mrs. Crane as well as to the women reading/watching the play who, unfamiliar with court proceedings and jury duty, may also question the reason for/significance of having a time-consuming trial, "Mrs. Crane—one of the oldest and most sacred rights in the English-speaking world is the right of trial by jury—a jury of our peers. . . . That is the purpose of the trial—to find out if Mr. Van Styne can prove what he says he can prove." Ibid., 21.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 48. Accommodations for women jurors have obviously been made with the inclusion of a Ladies' Parlor.

Betty could have known the story of the couple in Vermont. By divulging her secret and opening herself up to a potential scandal, truth and honesty triumph. Similarly, the resolute Mrs. Crane in the end acts as savior; she firmly believed in Gordon's innocence and failed to back down from her convictions, despite being initially outnumbered in the jury room. These jury scenes, as presented by Burns and Ballard, clearly demonstrate the power a woman on the jury could potentially wield. The male authors portray their female characters as emotional, sympathetic, even empathetic, whereas Citron provides no sense of sentimentalism in her jurors. The plays and movies romanticize situations and characters where Citron provides a more sardonic view of the reality within the courtroom.

Nevertheless, the characters in the plays, in spite of their sympathies are resolute, firm, and determined; they are the type of women the courts were seeking, and their actions prove that their inclusion within the jury system is vital. While many had maintained that women were too emotional and sentimental to serve on juries, these two fictional characters demonstrated the influence women could have. And a statement made in the late 1920s by Ohio Supreme Court Justice Florence E. Allen attests to the value of having women in her courtroom. "Women are not [as had been argued] particularly sentimental," remarked Allen. "In a first degree murder case tried in my room the women voted with the men in imposing the death penalty. Neither are they heartless. They have [like Betty and Mrs. Crane] in a number of cases recommended mercy."<sup>454</sup>

The women of Citron's *Answer Yes or No!*, like the women in *Ladies of the Jury* and the star of *The Jury Woman*, sit engaged in the jury box, actively fulfilling their civic duty, participating fully and perhaps even eventually influencing the outcome of the trial.

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<sup>454</sup> Allen, 411.

By contrast, the “six pudgy women jurors,” wittily observed and satirically presented by Citron in *Court Recess* “spend a court recess knitted together in the fascinating yarn of gossip” (Figure 74).<sup>455</sup> In *Answer Yes or No!*, as well as in the courtroom scene of *Marked Woman*, the women jurors are separated from each other as they sit interspersed among their male counterparts; whereas in *Court Recess* they are grouped together purportedly in gossip, deliberately separated from the men. Gossip, an activity which traditionally is a communal activity taking place between two or more women, has been stymied in *Court Recess* and *Answer Yes or No!* by the separation of the women. In *Fury*, by contrast, two of the female jurors sit adjacent to one another. Rather than focusing on the court proceedings, they talk, perhaps even gossip, during the courtroom drama unfolding before them. Another somewhat more humorous and obvious instance of gossiping in *Fury* takes place when the townsfolk begin talking about the lynch mob and the burning of the jail. The sequence opens with several women chatting in a kitchen. Then a montage of quickly cut shots of other townspeople talking is strung together and is interspersed with shots of a group of clucking hens. While *Fury*’s gossipmongers are both men and women, “gossip” has traditionally been defined as an “informal method of communication” that often takes the form of “an exchange of information about other people.”<sup>456</sup> Sandra D. Casella, in her thesis titled “The Nature and Function of Gossip for Women,” further defines gossip, the current meaning of which did not evolve until the nineteenth century, as a “process—a form of communication,” noting that gossip is

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<sup>455</sup> “Minna Citron Vivisects Judges and Jurors,” 26. The reviewer of the article is anonymous, but the derisive proposal that the women are taking a break from the formality of the courtroom to pass time gossiping rather than deliberating suggests that it was written by a male critic. Incidentally, the Newark Public Library sketch indicates a preliminary title of *Women’s Conference* (Figure 75).

<sup>456</sup> Sandra D. Casella, “The Nature and Functions of Gossip for Women” (M.A. Thesis, The Ohio State University, 1992), 15.

“perceived to be a form of women’s communication and thus of little significance.”<sup>457</sup>

Historian Chris Wickham counters this argument asserting that gossip is not necessarily a gendered activity, noting especially that “men and women often gossip according to different narrative strategies.”<sup>458</sup> Social anthropologist Max Gluckman determined that gossip is “enjoyed by people about others with whom they are in a close social relationship, . . . [and that] the right to gossip . . . is a certain privilege which is only extended to a person when he or she is accepted as a member of a group or set. It is a

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 1, 9, 12. Casella continues by remarking that, by contrast, “When men gossip, it is often called ‘shop talk’ or ‘shooting the bull,’ definitions that have [more] neutral or friendly connotations.” And while not entirely relevant to a discussion of Citron’s women, her discussion of the nature of gossip is an interesting one to consider. Casella’s thesis provides a concise definition of gossip as it is traditionally used and the author sets forth to complete a study of gossip as a form of communication, a field in which, she says, little research has been done. She defines gossip as a “process—a form of communication” and undertakes to investigate the nature of gossip among several different groups of women—a group of feminists, a group of mothers, and several bakery workers. Casella asks each group to define what the word “gossip” means to them and to cite examples of what each gossips about, and a large portion of the thesis’s text is devoted to examples of gossip taken from taped transcripts of the women under study.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 12. While writing about gossip among the medieval peasantry, Wickham, from the University of Birmingham, says that “Gossip has a bad press. There is a strong tendency, with a long history, to say that people should not gossip, and that the act of gossiping is idle and trivial.” He continues by defining gossip as “simply talking about other people behind their backs. It can also be characterized a little further through statements about what it is not: it is not necessarily malicious (though, of course, it often can be); it is not gendered (the oldest trick is to say that women gossip, whereas men talk about work or sport or whatever—a classic piece of social construction—though it does seem to be true that men and women often gossip according to different narrative strategies); it is not necessarily idle or arbitrary (much gossip is self-interested or manipulative, or else essential information exchange); it is not necessarily about secret behavior . . . ; and, finally, it is certainly not necessarily untrue—indeed gossip is at its most effective when it is exact, and, even when it is not, it is true to the attitudes of a given social group, that is to say it is meaningful to them.” Chris Wickham, “Gossip and Resistance among the Medieval Peasantry,” *Past and Present* 160 (August 1998): 9, 11. Although not necessarily pertinent to a discussion of Citron or the art of the thirties, Professor Wickham’s article effectively summarizes the scholarship on the subject of gossip. As stated in his introduction, the author aims “to offer a defence [*sic*] of the study of gossip in medieval (and not only medieval) history,” and he begins by relating a twelfth century Tuscan court case dealing with the ownership of a piece of land. Wickham, 3. Both he and Casella refer to what seems to be the most canonical source on gossip, Max Gluckman, “Gossip and Scandal,” *Current Anthropology* 4 (June 1963): 307-316. Gluckman, professor of Social Anthropology at Manchester England’s Victoria University, illustrates the “social afflictions” of gossip and suggests that gossip and scandal, have “positive virtues” because they “maintain the ‘morals and values of social groups’” and “enable these groups to control the competing cliques and aspiring individuals of which all groups are composed.” Gluckman further notes that “popular comments about gossip tend to treat it as something chance and haphazard and often as something to be disapproved of. . . . Yet it is possible to show that among relatively small groups, gossip, in all its very many varieties, is a culturally determined process, which has its own customary rules . . . . Anthropological studies on the Makah Indians conducted by Dr. Colson in the 1940s, Gluckman states, provide evidence that gossip is a “culturally controlled game with important social functions” and that gossip “is not idle: it has social functions and it has rules which are rigidly controlled.” Gluckman, 308 and 312.

hallmark of membership. . . . [It] is a duty of membership of the group.”<sup>459</sup> Citron’s women, then, according to Gluckman, have defined themselves as an exclusive group. These women, presumably unknown to each other prior to the trial, have collectively come together, formed an exclusive group, and their “informal method of communication,” as characterized by Casella, and which was tellingly (in the sketch) referred to as a more serious “conference,” takes place in Citron’s painting of a recess from court (Figure 75).<sup>460</sup>

This circle of gossiping women, confined to the corner of an otherwise unadorned room, huddle together before a closed window. They sit not at the jury table where deliberations among all twelve jurors would take place as it did in *Ladies of the Jury*, but rather in a circle separate from them men. While unseen, the presence of their male counterparts is suggested by the inclusion of their derby hats and overcoats hanging on the coat racks, one of which is cut off by the left edge of the painting and the second of which sits to the right, just behind the ring of women. In the courtroom, as seen in *Answer Yes or No!*, the jurors were depicted as equals, each occupying his/her space in the jury box and each (for the most part) actively paying attention to the testimony. Here, however, one finds an alternative hierarchy of power in place, as only half of the jurors are shown. One can assume that these women are in fact, gossiping rather than deliberating, because any discussion of the trial would take place among all twelve jurors, not just a select few. Thus, the exclusivity of the group’s membership can be seen as providing a certain sense of empowerment among the figures.

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<sup>459</sup> Gluckman, 313.

<sup>460</sup> Casella, 15.



As with the men in *Doping the Horses* and *Laying the Bets* from the “Gambling Series,” the faces of half of the women in *Court Recess* are concealed from the viewer, thereby rendering them anonymous. Three of the figures are seated in the foreground facing the window, with the profile of one and the ear and cheek of another discernible. These figures, like the foreground figures in *Answer Yes or No!* separate the viewer from the scene, leaving him/her as a witness rather than an active participant in the scene. The viewer, then, does not have the privilege of being part of this exclusive group. Citron masterfully captures the figure at the far right, seen in full profile, in the middle of a sentence, her mouth open, hand gesturing as she speaks. She, like the woman beside her, is dressed in a long fur-collared winter coat. Additionally, she wears an elegant pair of earrings, as seen in her left ear, and a showy feathered hat perches atop her head. Although inside, all of the figures don coats, some complete with elaborate fur collars (similar to those worn by the clip joint hostesses in *Marked Woman* who dress up when going to court) and all wear hats. The furs and jewelry of Citron’s women at first suggest that only wealthy, property owning, society women served on juries because they had the leisure time to do so while a poorer woman may not be able to afford to take time off work, an ironic observation subtly shown through the details in the painting. According to statements made before the House Judiciary Committee regarding women jurors in federal courts, however, women of all classes served on juries.<sup>461</sup>

Four of the five other figures look to her as she speaks. The fifth, who sits to her left, looks toward the figure at the opposite end of the circle while leaning back, right arm

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<sup>461</sup> Mrs. Max Rotter, representative for the Wisconsin Branch of the NWP, responded to the query of what type of women serve on juries in Wisconsin, as follows: “I should say all types.” At which point Earl C. Michener, Committee Member representing Michigan, concurred, “I can answer as to Michigan. The very highest type. The farm woman comes in, the club woman, and the society woman, and they all appreciate their responsibility, and we have splendid juries.” “Women Jurors in Federal Courts,” 12.

resting on the chair back, left hip pouring off the seat of the chair. Nothing of her face can be seen other than her left ear and the plump cheek of her presumably round face.

Continuing around the circle of women we find the oldest of the six figures and the white haired woman, again whose profile is barely seen, before moving on to the figure, wearing a belted trench coat, hat and pearl earrings, and fashionable high heeled shoes, who sits slightly forward on her seat, legs crossed at the ankles and tucked back under her chair. The plumpest woman, framed by the window overlooking the neighboring building, faces out to the viewer, but her head is turned, like her neighbor's who wears an elaborately feathered cap, as she listens to the woman speaking at the right. The only real divergences between the sketch/study and the painting come with the representation of these last two women. The last woman wears glasses and, as does the other figure, a slightly less ornate hat than in the final version. Citron's assembly of gossiping women, like her homely shoppers in *Hope Springs Eternal*, wear neither the tattered rags of the lower class, nor the most fashionable styles of the late 1930s.

Critics noted that Citron's great sense of "sociology" is what makes works like *Court Recess* interesting.<sup>462</sup> They lauded her ability to suggest not only the drama of the courtroom, but also the "humorous gossip relaxation so patent to any citizen who has done jury duty."<sup>463</sup> What seems odd is why the artist chose to include a gossip painting in the midst of more serious courtroom scenes. The jurors, lawyer, witness, and stenography of *Answer Yes or No!* are actively engaged. The lawyers and judge of *Colloquy* discuss evidence and testimony, yet the women of *Court Recess* gossip. They do not deliberate

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<sup>462</sup> L. J.W., "Citron's Light Tones for Humor and Civics." (Midtown Galleries) *Art News* 38 (November 18, 1939): 22. The author also notes that Citron's works are not "technically on par" with Isabel Bishop's.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

over the merits of the case or over the evidence presented. Instead, they seem more likely to be discussing what the attorney was wearing, the hairstyle of the witness, or some such trivial, even petty, detail about the others in the courtroom. Again, as with the images of women seen in “Feminanities,” Citron uses satire and irony in *Court Recess*. By 1937 women had been granted further rights of citizenship and could serve on juries. Nevertheless, as suggested by this work, and like the women of *Hope Springs Eternal*, they may not have taken seriously the opportunity set before them. They do not look at the facts of the trial; rather they sit around in their jewels and fur coats discussing the trivial and inconsequential. During recesses from court, jurors are prohibited from discussing the trial; it is not until after closing arguments that deliberations are permitted to occur. As such, these women are enjoying a moment of respite.

This “informal means of communication” and “exchange of information about other people” is clearly substantiated in a 1932 play by Bell Elliott Palmer titled *We Never Gossip: A Comedy in One Act for Eleven Women*.<sup>464</sup> The cast of characters for this one act play consists of members of the Small Town Literary Club, nine wives and two single women, who gather in club president, Mrs. Carpenter’s, living room and who wear dark-colored blouse suits whose lines are “not noticeably out nor in the latest style,” much like Citron’s women.<sup>465</sup> The Small Town Literary Club members agree to play a game in which each gossiping member would be fined a quarter for each “gossip slip.”<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> Casella, 13. Bell Elliot Palmer, *We Never Gossip: A Comedy in One Act for Eleven Women* (Boston: Walter H. Baker Company, 1932).

<sup>465</sup> Palmer, 3. They sit around the living room, sewing and crocheting, while the secretary of the group, Mrs. Fanshaw, sits at a table ready, like the courtroom stenographers, to record the minutes in her notebook. Mrs. Carpenter begins speaking and talks about the evening’s agenda: to discuss the bazaar and the subjects for the upcoming year’s literary program. Palmer, 5.

<sup>466</sup> The decision to play such a game came after one member, Mrs. Truman, recounted an event from her trip to visit her cousin in Chicago. While there, the women attended a club meeting together, and

The remainder of the play is filled with quick-witted banter among the women—discussions of club businesses interspersed with much (unintended) gossip about people outside their group.<sup>467</sup> After raising ten dollars from their game, the women came to realize that gossip was not just “malicious remarks,” as Mrs. Truman assumed, but rather included, as Mrs. Carpenter pointed out “idle personal talk” to which all had given way.<sup>468</sup>

Another one-act comedy, comprised solely of a female cast and in which gossip is the focus, is E. Tait-Reid’s *Gossip: A Comedy in One Act*.<sup>469</sup> Early in the play after a discussion about the maid’s (Mrs. Elsie) former employer, the mistress Miss Sherborne informs her, “I think you let your tongue run away with you, Mrs. Elsie; it’s your one great fault, as I’ve often told you.”<sup>470</sup> For the remainder of the play, gossipy Mrs. Elsie runs at the mouth telling stories about neighbors, her daughter-in-law, and the signalman to whom her daughter-in-law is to marry.<sup>471</sup> Miss Sherborne reprimands the maid, “. . . how often have I warned you about thinking the worst of your neighbours and jumping to

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as a fun game, the members of the group were fined a small amount each time one was caught gossiping. At the end of the evening, the fines were collected and donated toward food for the poor.

<sup>467</sup> The women, who, to some extent, feel good about themselves for knowing all of this information about others, however, become distracted from the original task at hand. They find themselves talking too much about other people instead of planning the club’s programs and goals.

<sup>468</sup> “Mrs. Truman. ‘I supposed gossip meant malicious remarks and I know our club hasn’t indulged in that kind.’ Mrs. Carpenter. (*With smile*) ‘One of the dictionary definitions of gossip is *idle personal talk*. I fear we have all given way to a bit of that.’ Mrs. Gates. ‘Which shows how easy it is to slip into little personal criticisms without realizing it.’” They used the money to buy books and flowers for a hospitalized friend. Palmer, 12.

<sup>469</sup> E. Tait-Reid, *Gossip: A Comedy for Women in One Act* (Boston: Walter H. Baker Company, 1936). Written in Sussex county England, the play was performed overseas in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. A preface in the text notes that the expressions and surnames used in the play are part of the regional Sussex dialect and when performed in other counties/countries, local colloquialisms should be substituted. Tait-Reid, 2.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>471</sup> The funniest part of the play is when Mrs. Elise tells Dorrie, her daughter-in-law, that Miss Sherborne is a lonely old maid, who used to be part of a harem, waiting for her long lost sheik (who turned out to be her brother, not her lover) to return.

wrong conclusions?”<sup>472</sup> In both of these plays, the women chatter about people both within and outside of their own immediate groups, and it leads one to wonder about what, or whom, exactly Citron’s women gossip. But, stereotypically, in *Court Recess* at least, it is the *women* rather than the men who participate in such idle talk. By contrast, the men of the series, in *Colloquy*, *The Judge*, and *Answer Yes or No!*, while at times slightly caricatured, are engaged in work and/or deliberation.

While seemingly more straightforward depictions of a slice of life in the New York judicial system during the 1930s, the “Judges and Juries” images are no less significant than those in “Feminanities” or the “Gambling Series” in terms of the artist’s humorous adaptations of her own personal experiences, but also, even if tangentially, her continued interest in feminist ideals. “Jury service is an important civic function. It is a form of participation in the processes of Government, a responsibility that should be shared by all citizens regardless of sex,” and it is this civic responsibility that Citron reveals, to some extent, in “Judges and Juries.”<sup>473</sup> In recording the courtrooms where she served as a juror, the artist skillfully, cleverly, and at times subtly inserted social commentary into her images, whether it be by including the African American juror, or by showing the men working while the women, some at least, are gossiping. The overt satire and ridicule of her earlier works has softened and is present only more subtly as the “uncharted course” of her career slowly began to move in a new direction with the beginning of a new decade.

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<sup>472</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>473</sup> “Jury Duty for Women.”

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The warp and woof of my efforts, whether verbal or visual, painted  
or printed is people or the situation in which they find themselves.  
---Minna Citron<sup>474</sup>

People and the situations in which they found themselves were indeed the focus of Citron's major projects of the thirties, "Feminanities," the "Gambling Series," and "Judges and Juries." Her ability to cleverly apply an ironic critical eye to her own personal experiences allowed her to create three series of images that uniquely stand out among all the works she produced during her sixty-plus year artistic career. It is the social commentary infused with an underlying biting satire and wit that makes them remarkable. Independent in nature, Citron set out on her own to make a career for herself without the support of her husband, whom she chose to divorce, and this spirit ultimately afforded her access to venues, including Reno gambling halls and district courtrooms, unfamiliar to most of her colleagues. Experiences within these venues were then used as inspiration for her art.

Many of Citron's artistic peers depended on governmental support during the Depression decade, and Citron, while not wholly reliant on such financial assistance, did participate in several New Deal projects. The most notable New Deal works completed by Citron were projects that brought her to national attention—two Tennessee post office murals executed under the auspices of the Section.<sup>475</sup> Following the installation of these

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<sup>474</sup> "Minna Citron," Pratt Manhattan Center, New York, New York, November 11 – December 5, 1972.

<sup>475</sup> Additionally, she painted the Newark Museum's *Staten Island Ferry* for the WPA Easel Division in 1937.

murals in the early 1940s, the artist began following a new path and her artistic style underwent some significant changes. Citron continued along her self-proclaimed “uncharted course” for the next five decades, experimenting with abstraction, collages, and constructions all the while teaching, lecturing and serving as an artist-in-residence at various locales both nationally and internationally.

### **The TVA Series, New York in Wartime, and Abstraction**

Between stretches on jury duty in New York during the last years of the 1930s, Citron spent some time in Tennessee. In 1938, after submitting an entry to an anonymous competition, she received a commission from the Treasury Section of Fine Arts to create murals for a post office.<sup>476</sup> Organized under Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. in October 1934, the Section’s goal was to make art part of people’s everyday lives.<sup>477</sup> The program was responsible for decorating hundreds of new post offices throughout the country with scenes that in some way reflected the community in which they were located.<sup>478</sup> In his book on Tennessee post office murals, Howard Hull notes that the majority of those winning the competitions, including Citron, lived in the Northeast. Citron, then, like the others, spent weeks or even months visiting the post office location, sketching, and talking with the locals before returning to her New York studio to create the final murals.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> These anonymous competitions were beneficial particularly for women and other lesser-known artists. In fact, Citron won two post office commissions: one in Manchester, Tennessee and one in Newport, Tennessee.

<sup>477</sup> Park and Markowitz, 6.

<sup>478</sup> One percent of the cost of each new federal post office was set aside for the decoration, and most of the commissions were granted for between \$500 and \$2,000. *Ibid.*, 6, 204.

<sup>479</sup> Howard Hull, *Tennessee Post Office Murals* (Johnson City, Tenn.: The Overmountain Press, 1998): 4. Hull continues by noting that completed sketches had to be submitted to the main office of the Section of Fine Arts in Washington. Upon acceptance, the artist then had to submit a full-size cartoon to the

After winning the first competition, Citron traveled to eastern Tennessee, and in October 1940, much to the delight of the townspeople, a mural titled *T.V.A. Power* was installed in the Newport post office (Figure 76).<sup>480</sup> The TVA, or Tennessee Valley Authority, project transformed “a meandering river into one of the vast power-sheds of the world.”<sup>481</sup> As architectural historian Walter L. Creese points out in his book on the public planning of the TVA, the new visions of “architecture, site planning, and reorganization of the land” under the TVA appeared at a “time when all other, lesser signs of economic well-being were shrinking and disappearing.”<sup>482</sup> Man-made lakes, newly paved roads, concrete dams and modern electrical power plants appeared as a result of the TVA and stood out in stark contrast to the area’s old log cabins, rural churches and country schoolhouses.<sup>483</sup> The advancements of the TVA was a turning point for the south and the beginnings of Modernity in the region, for as electricity was introduced, the economy began to develop and prosperity started to spread throughout the region. The TVA’s new hydro-electric plants and dams brought electricity to rural communities within the Tennessee Valley, and it is these technological advancements,

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Section for approval. Once granted, the cartoon was either transferred to canvas and later installed in the post office, or transferred directly onto the plaster wall.

<sup>480</sup> The mayor of the town wrote a letter to Citron in November 1940, just after the installation of the mural and said: “I want you to know how very much we, the people of Newport, like the murals you have painted for our post office walls. The whole town is loud in its praise of the manner in which you have shown the many activities of this section of the country. The TVA background is excellent, but what we like best is the way you have shown our industries and buildings of Newport. We feel that we are extremely fortunate in having our post office chosen for these paintings, and that they will serve as an attractive drawing card for the many tourists and visitors who come to our town. And too, I do not know any ‘furriner’ (as the mountain people would say) that has captured our hearts as you have. You have made many friends while here, and your interest in the people of this section and the friendships made will further endear the murals to us. We shant [*sic*] forget your kindness and patience in explaining your work to all of us who asked so many questions.” Mayor Lloyd Nease to Minna Citron, November 1, 1940 in Hull, 120. Before their installation, the murals were displayed in New York, at the Art Students League and Eleanor Roosevelt attended the opening as the guest of honor. *From the 80 Years of Minna Citron*.

<sup>481</sup> “T.V.A. Muralized,” *Art Digest* 15 (October, 15, 1940): 7.

<sup>482</sup> Walter L. Creese, *TVA’s Public Planning: The Vision, the Reality* (Knoxville, Tenn.: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990): 1.

<sup>483</sup> See Creese, 2-5.



and the new industry made possible through the introduction of the TVA's cheap energy, that Citron draws upon for her forty-eight foot mural project in the Newport, Tennessee post office.<sup>484</sup> Images of the Great Smokey Mountains, Norris Lake, the Wilson and Norris Dams, local buildings, the flour mill, Stokely cannery workers, farmers, grazing cattle pigs, and TVA transmission lines fill the composition.<sup>485</sup> And, while the developments of the TVA project are the main focus of the mural, the cultural effects on local life are also considered, as the "regeneration of farming under the impetus of cheap power is revealed" with new farm planning ideas and the "revival of industry and life in Tennessee Valley towns."<sup>486</sup> In addition to the Newport murals, Citron also created several paintings based on the TVA developments, including *The Magic Box*, which were among those displayed at Midtown Galleries in 1941 (Figure 77).<sup>487</sup> The so-called "magic box" of Citron's title refers to the electric meter recently installed on the side of this rural cabin, before which the woman and her two children stand, and symbolizes the advent of electricity in the Tennessee Valley.

Similarly, Citron's interest in people and animals continues in her second post office commission, awarded in 1942. Titled *Horse Swapping Day*, the mural for the Manchester post office on Hillsboro Highway in Coffee County reflects a weekly event

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<sup>484</sup> Citron and Resseguier, 4.

<sup>485</sup> David Popel, "Newport Mural Beckons Artist's Granddaughter," *Cocke County Banner*, 27 September 1976, p. 1A, in Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado. David Lilienthal, "Two Murals of 'T.V.A.' for the Post Office, Newport, Tennessee by Minna Citron," The Art Students League, New York, New York, October 8 – October 19, 1940. Lilienthal, who wrote the forward to the exhibition pamphlet, was director of the TVA.

<sup>486</sup> "T.V.A. Muralized": 7.

<sup>487</sup> "Minna Citron: Paintings of the Tennessee Valley," Midtown Galleries, New York, New York, December 15, 1941 – January 2, 1952. Paintings listed in the catalog include the following: *Lamb Creep*, *Phosphates*, *Tennessee Farmer*, *The Magic Box*, *Old Hee Haw*, *River Freight*, *Lily of Tennessee Valley*, *Welder*, *Pigs*, *Concrete Forms*, *White Mule*, and *Precious Metal*. In addition, *Wheat*, and *Barnyard Madonna* are listed as two watercolors.

(Figure 78).<sup>488</sup> As with the Newport images, local buildings occupy the landscape.

Figures wave to one another, ride horses, and sit in wagons. A group of three horses in the central foreground forms the main point of interest. As a foal nurses from its mother, a farmer, with his back to the viewer, hands on hips, gazes upon the horses. The third horse, standing in profile, faces the foal and its mother, but turns its head out toward the viewer.<sup>489</sup> In both the Newport and the Manchester post office murals, Citron continues to adhere to her realist aesthetic, but the satire, droll criticism and wry social commentary of her earlier works is largely absent. She presents her post office figures not as heroic, exploited or even caricatured individuals, but rather as simple, hard-working, dignified people whose “work-load will be lightened considerably by the miracle of electricity.”<sup>490</sup>

A 1943 show at Midtown Galleries demonstrated Citron’s continued use of realism, her persistent interest in strong independent women, and a late example of her use of the realist aesthetic.<sup>491</sup> After spending time sketching areas in the city frequented by soldiers, including the Opera, Penn Station, the Officers Service Club at the Hotel Commodore, and the “Boot Camp” at Hunter College, Citron created the “New York in Wartime” series.<sup>492</sup> *What the Well Dressed Woman Wears to the Opera* and *The Square Knot* are but two of the images in this early 1940s series, the latter serving almost as a prelude to the former as the figure *The Square Knot* is caught in a moment of action

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<sup>488</sup> Hull, 104.

<sup>489</sup> This horse was modeled after Gene Autry’s horse, Champ, Jr. After having difficulty drawing a convincing image of a horse, Citron attended a Madison Square Garden rodeo to study the animals and chose Autry’s horse as her model. Ibid., 105.

<sup>490</sup> Citron and Resseguier, 5. Francey, 18. Francey speaks, specifically, about *The Magic Box*.

<sup>491</sup> “Minna Citron: Drawings,” Midtown Galleries, New York, New York, March 29 – April 1, 1943.

<sup>492</sup> H. Boswell, “Citron Rules the ‘Waves,’” *Art Digest* 17 (April 1, 1943): 19. In addition to a number of drawings, the series comprised part of the 1943 show at Midtown. The following works are listed in the catalog: *Mail Censor*, *Her Coat of Navy Blue*, *What the Well Dressed Woman Wears to the Opera*, *Piping the Girls Aboard*, *Penn. Station Detail*, *Ensign Rosemary Harrison*, *The Square Knot*, *Cooperation*, *The Armed Forces Invade the Met*, *Scanning the Tree*, *On the Hiring Line*, *The Fitters go Into Action*, *One Round Turn*, *Shipshape and Bristol Fashion*, *Without Glamour*, and *Welder*.

(Figure 79 and Figure 80). Dressing in her military uniform, the figure takes a moment to tie the requisite tie knot around her neck before presenting herself in public. *What the Well Dressed Woman Wears to the Opera*, like many of Isabel Bishop's images from the thirties, is a paired portrait of two women, dressed in their formal military uniforms, out for a night on the town. They, like Bishop's women, enjoy a moment of respite from work by attending the opera. Citron's female naval recruits, or Waves, are far removed from the women of "Femininities" several years before. With this series the artist moved away from the sarcasm used in the portrayal of shopping and salon-going women, turning instead to a more "sympathetic rendering—identifying . . . with their pursuit of a non-traditional female occupation."<sup>493</sup>

Several years after the completion of the "New York in Wartime" series, Citron's artistic style began moving away from realism altogether. The change was a gradual one, beginning when she turned to Stanley William Hayter's studio in New York. Hayter, an English painter/printmaker whose studio, Atelier 17, was in Paris, left Europe for New York in 1940, like so many others, to escape the war. Upon arriving in New York, he set up a studio under the auspices of the New School for Social Research, and European immigrants including Marc Chagall, Jacques Lipchitz, André Masson and Salvador Dali among others, came to the studio and worked alongside American artists including Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Isabel Bishop, Reginald Marsh and Citron.<sup>494</sup> Citron's early interest in psychoanalysis and Freudian theory during the mid- to

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<sup>493</sup> Judith Brodsky, "Women's Caucus for Art Honor Awards for Outstanding Achievement in the Visual Arts," Helen Lindhurst Fine Arts Gallery, University of Southern California, February 12- 16, 1985.

<sup>494</sup> Jane Comstock, "Minna Citron, Social Realist and Abstract Expressionist," in "Minna Citron (1896-1991): From Social Realism to Abstract Expressionism, A Centennial Celebration," Oz Architecture, Denver, Colorado, November 7, 1996 to January 31, 1997. Comstock suggests that it seems likely that it was with her Union Square circle of friends that Citron first became interested in Atelier 17. There was a

late-1920s burgeoned at Hayter's studio. He, like a number of the Surrealists who had also emigrated, was fascinated with the method of what he called "unconscious writing" and believed, as art historian Jane Comstock observes, "that the artist should approach the printing plate with few preconceived notions of the work he or she wished to create, and should follow the unconscious to direct the initial creation of the image."<sup>495</sup> While some, including Kenneth Hayes Miller, were concerned about the stylistic changes taking place in Citron's work, she paid no attention. Miller told her that she would lose her following if she changed her style, to which she replied "I'm gonna do what I wanta do."<sup>496</sup> A sincere believer in the freedom to travel along one's own course, Citron became one of the first artists in New York to begin experimenting with abstraction. However, her pioneering efforts have not received due credit, in part, some have suggested, because of her gender and her independent nature.<sup>497</sup>

An example of an early abstract work in which representation has yet to be completely abandoned is her 1946 *Men Seldom Make Passes at Girls who Wear Glasses* (Figure 81). A reinterpretation of her earlier self-portrait, this work, in spite of the social satire contained within the title, this work demonstrates the artist's burgeoning new interest in formal concerns, rather than narrative commentary. She begins to break apart the form, gradually dissolving her earlier social realism into abstraction. *Squid Under*

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significant difference in her attitude from that of those colleagues, however; from the outset she was more receptive to stylistic change and experimentation than they were.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 3. Comstock continues by noting that his own formal artistic style, combined with this fascination in Freudian and Jungian psychology was a primary influence on the artists who would, several years later, form the New York School of Abstract Expressionists.

<sup>496</sup> During the *Seasons of Life* interview Citron recounts a conversation with mentor Kenneth Hayes Miller who told her "Minna, if your work changes, I'm warning you, you'll lose your following." She replied "Well, I'm gonna do what I wanta do." And she did. She continues by telling that interviewer that ". . . if you're not free to do what you feel you should be doing, it's just as though you were handcuffed or chained in your life. You might be gaining something materially . . . but your [*sic*] not doing what you feel you have to do and that's the important thing." *Seasons of Life II: 712.1-712.3*, transcript, 1-2, in Minna Citron Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>497</sup> Brodsky and Olin.

*Pier*, from 1948-49 is, according to Comstock, one of Citron's most famous images from this period (Figure 82).<sup>498</sup> The image developed from "subconscious thinking . . . and conscious scribbles on her desk pad."<sup>499</sup> As the course of her career developed, Citron continued to employ the unconscious as a source of inspiration in abstract works for the next fifty years, working with paintings and prints before turning to collages and constructions in the sixties and seventies.<sup>500</sup> Despite the shift to an abstract mode of representation, Citron's interest in women continued, as evidenced by the titles of some abstract works including, *Ishtar* (Figure 83) and *Victoria the Queen*.

A career brought to national attention with the TVA murals turned international in 1947 with her solo show at the Galerie Lydia Conti in Paris.<sup>501</sup> Soon Citron began exhibiting, and lecturing, and serving as an artist-in-residence throughout the United States, Europe, and Latin and South America.<sup>502</sup> She published articles and lectured on

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<sup>498</sup> Comstock, "Minna Citron, Social Realist and Abstract Expressionist," 4.

<sup>499</sup> Karl Kup, "Citron Monograph," 1950. Reproduced in *From the 80 Years of Minna Citron*. Kup continues with words from Citron about *Squid*: "The component in 'Squid under Pier,' which, some time after completion of the print, came to be called 'squid,' is a threatening entanglement of tortuous, menacing lines: black lines, white lines, bitten lines and incised lines, with exciting variety in third dimensionality, forming a linear pattern of dynamic tensions and of great plastic depth. Contrasting with this disturbing agitation are the quiet interpenetrating, transparent planes of neutral-colored 'pier' and the fluid open areas of light-blue 'sea' and 'sky.' It is a though one might escape from these encircling tentacles to a temporary shelter and security under the 'pier' and finally to peace and tranquillity [*sic*] in the timeless and limitless space of fair skies and open sea. 'Squid under Pier' satisfies because it achieves a harmonic pattern of relationship in its component parts and dynamic equilibrium as an integrated whole."

<sup>500</sup> Citron's biographer tells us that between 1950 and 1970 color, line shapes and texture were the artist's principal concerns. Citron and Resseguier, 57.

<sup>501</sup> "Minna Citron," Galerie Lydia Conti, Paris, France, June 20 – July 13, 1947. The show was put together under the auspices of the United States Cultural Office.

<sup>502</sup> The following are a few of the many international exhibition catalogs from Citron's post-1945 career: "Minna Citron," American Embassy, Grosvenor Square, London, England, May 4 – 26, 1967. "Minna Citron," Lyceum, Havana, Cuba, 1948. "Minna Citron," Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, Zagreb, Croatia, June 1960. "Minna Citron: Oleos, Gouaches, Grabados," Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo, Brazil, 1952. See bibliography for a more thorough list. Select fellowships and appointments as artist-in-residence include the following: Artist-in-residence, Lakeside Studio, Lakeland, Michigan, 1971; Yaddo Fellowship, Saratoga, New York, 1970 and 1947; Ford Foundation Artist-in-Residence Grant, Roanoke Virginia Fine Arts Center, 1965; Edward C. MacDowell Fellowships, Peterboro, New Hampshire, 1956-59; Fellowship at Research Studio, Maitland, Florida, 1942-43. For a more comprehensive list of Prizes and Awards, Artist-in-Residence and Lectures, Collections, and Solo and Group Shows see *From the 80 Years of Minna Citron*.

topics including abstract art, the communication of modern art, and her personal development as an artist and a woman. She collaborated with fellow artist Jan Gelb in the late 1960s/early 1970s to write *Venus Through the Ages*, which as yet remains unpublished. Additionally, she participated in the Corcoran Gallery of Art's conference on woman artists in 1971 and in 1985 was further honored by the National Women's Caucus for Art Conference in Los Angeles. Minna Citron's efforts were pioneering. She was a divorced mother struggling to make a career for herself as an artist in a male-dominated world between the 1930s and 1950s, and by the late 1960s/early 1970s her interest in feminism was renewed by a new generation. The course upon which she set herself was, in many ways, indeed uncharted, and her concern with women's issues and the challenges faced by women perhaps resonate more clearly today than while she was alive.

### **Avenues for Further Research**

Minna Citron's lengthy artistic career is ripe for further investigation, for I have touched only on a small segment of her life's work in this dissertation. She created numerous other representational works in the thirties that warrant further examination, both in their own right and in comparison to those works considered in this thesis. It was the goal of this project to bring to light the work of this undervalued artist who has been generally overlooked by scholarship, and her works have only been discussed briefly in conjunction, specifically, with those of Isabel Bishop and in relation to those of Reginald Marsh and Kenneth Hayes Miller. A more in-depth consideration of Citron's paintings and prints as compared to works by her contemporaries, especially the women, will be an

important addition to the existing literature regarding art of the 1930s. The majority of writings on Citron's career, as mentioned in the introduction, takes the form of small exhibition catalogues, reviews appearing in newspapers and journals, and brief inclusion in printmaking texts, and most of the literature considers her post-1930s career. Given that she spent nearly half a century working within an abstract aesthetic, while also experimenting with various other media including collages and construction, much research on this period of her life and career can be done and is necessary for a more complete understanding of the artist. Furthermore, a large part of her career was spent traveling around the world lecturing, teaching, and writing about art. An interesting investigation would be one concentrating on the content of her talks and essays, and what she had to offer as a teacher and mentor to younger generations of artists.

Although Minna Citron's artistic career spanned more than six decades, the focus of this project has been on a select few of the works created early in her career during the Depression decade. One gains insight into the artist's psychology, her interests, and her ironic sense of humor by looking at the images comprising her three major series from the thirties. While many of her Social Realist works from the Depression era are edgy, witty, and satiric, some are also infused with more serious social commentary, including the plight of the poor and issues concerning gender and race. All of the works in these series, however, whether humorous or critical, were drawn from the artist's own life. She wove personal experiences, from the people encountered in Union Square to the events and people she came across in Reno and those she observed while on jury duty in New York during the late 1930, within the larger social context of the times, and consequently produced some of the most unique Social Realist-inspired works of the decade. Citron's

works from the thirties can be understood within the art and visual culture of the time, including Hollywood films and the ways in which movie icons were portrayed, Depression-era advertising images found in popular magazines, and novels and plays focusing on women subjects. In many ways her work is an ironic commentary of that contemporary visual culture, and, at the same time, becomes representative of larger trends including women's issues and concerns as well as an increasing interest in gambling, divorce and court proceedings. With her prints and paintings from the thirties, Citron applied a critical eye to society, and in doing so became one of the most unique artists of the period.



## APPENDIX

List of paintings appearing in “‘Feminanities’ Paintings by Minna Citron,” April 16<sup>th</sup> through April 29, 1935, Midtown Galleries, New York, New York.

1. Concert
2. Grist to the Mill
3. Pelé
4. Contemplation
5. An Honest Living
6. Self-Expression
7. Hope Springs Eternal
8. Finishing Touches
9. Buffeted
10. Cold Comfort
11. Nude
12. Display
13. Beauty Culture
14. Subway Technique
15. What Keeps the Doctor?

List of paintings, including the “Gambling Series,” appearing in “Paintings by Minna Citron,” October 19 to November 4, 1937, Midtown Galleries, New York, New York.

1. The Lookout, Western Gambling House
2. Laying the Bets
3. Racing Form
4. The Dealer—“21”
5. Doping the Horses
6. The Croupier
7. Staten Island Ferry
8. Dress Circle, Carnegie Hall
9. Chuck
10. Final Adjustment
11. Polishing the Samovar

List of paintings, including the “Judges and Juries” series, appearing in “Minna Citron: Exhibition of Paintings,” November 3 to November 20, 1939, Midtown Galleries, New York, New York.

1. “Answer Yes or No”
2. Appeal to Reason
3. The Judge
4. The Plaintiff
5. Court Recess
6. Colloquy
7. Sherman
8. Lady with Program
9. Strike News
10. The Editor
11. Summer Reading, No. 1
12. Summer Reading , No. 2
13. Forced Labor
14. Siren’s Song

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