

The background of the entire page is a painting of a woman with long, wavy, reddish-brown hair. She is reclining on a large, textured, yellowish-brown surface that resembles a fur rug or a pile of fabric. She is wearing a dark, heavily embellished dress with intricate patterns and textures. Her right hand is raised to her forehead, and she has a contemplative or melancholic expression. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting her face and the texture of her dress against a dark, shadowy background.

Les Dames Extraordinaires: Passion and Art in the Lives of Three Parisiennes



The 2019 Symposium on the Arts of France
May 8, May 22 and June 5, 2019



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Misia Sert had the belle époque at her fingertips. A muse to Renoir and Bonnard, she was also Picasso's confidante and Coco Chanel's best friend. Sarah Bernhardt was a pioneer of the stage who still holds the title of the queen of drama, once stating "If you want to succeed, people must talk about you." And the whole world did. Mona Bismarck, a proper Kentucky gal would become a countess and in 1933, was named the best dressed woman in the world, a title never before bestowed upon an American. Imagine living in Paris during a time when art, fashion, photography, (and personalities) were in the midst of a renaissance. These women had something in common—*electricity!* They were strong, independent and above all, extraordinary.

A bientôt à l'Alliance,

Myriam Bransfield Mary Blust
Symposium Co-Chairs

Entrance

Alliance Française de Chicago • 54 W. Chicago Avenue
(312) 337-1070 • www.af-chicago.org

Each program will begin with coffee at 11:00 a.m., lecture at 11:30 a.m., followed by a seated luncheon for Grand Patrons, Patrons and their guests. Individual Lecture Ticket – \$45

Both photographs taken in the 1930s for Vogue; one made the pages of the iconic fashion magazine, the other, did not. Can you guess which?

To the left, Misia Sert wears a long white sequin dress made by her good friend Coco Chanel, with a 15-strand coral necklace. This photo was taken by André Durst and featured in Vogue Magazine, December 1936.

To the right, Mona Bismarck was born Edmona Margaret Travis Strader in Louisville, Kentucky. Married five times, Mona was once the wife of Harrison Williams, said to be the richest man in America. Givenchy was reported as saying, Mona had two lifts of different speeds installed in her apartment in Ave de New York; the faster one was for the domestics so that they could reach the landing before her to open the door. In this photograph taken by Cecil Beaton, she wears a citrin gold and gray Belperron bib necklace. When all was said and done, she was Countess Mona Travis Strader Schlesinger Bush Williams von Bismarck de Martini Bismarck.



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May 8, 2019, 11:30 a.m.

Misia: Muse, Model and Style-Setter for the Avant-Garde 1890-1930

with Gloria Groom

Misia is known by her first name only, a simple one syllable belying her expansive and complicated life as the Polish-born bachelorette Godebeska, and then as Mme Natanson, Mme Edwards, Mme Jose-Marie Sert and as the off-and-on companion of Coco Chanel. But she is much more appropriately memorialized not as spouse and partner, but as muse and model. This lecture will look at Misia's precocious and winner-take-all sense of chic and daring that made her so appealing to artists ranging from Renoir to Toulouse-Lautrec, as well as writers, musicians, dancers and impresarios like Diaghilev.



Gloria Groom is currently Chair of European Painting and Sculpture and the David and Mary Winton Green Curator at The Art Institute of Chicago. An internationally acclaimed scholar and author on 19th Century French painting, she joined the Art Institute in 1985. Since then, she has been involved in major monographic exhibitions and catalogues including Gauguin, Odilon Redon, Caillebotte, Renoir, Manet, Seurat, Toulouse-Lautrec, and thematic exhibitions such as Beyond the Easel: Decorative Paintings of Bonnard, Denis, Roussel and Vuillard, the art dealer Ambroise Vollard (2008), Impressionism, Fashion and Modernity (2012-2013), Van Gogh's Bedrooms (2016) and Gauguin: Artist as Alchemist (2017). Her current exhibition Manet and Modern Beauty devoted to the little known paintings, pastels, and watercolors of the artist's last years, opens at the Art Institute this May and travels to the J. Paul Getty Museum, Santa Monica. Dr. Groom has also led the project for monographic on-line scholarly collection catalogues on the Impressionist collection (to date: Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Caillebotte, Gauguin and Manet) involving an international team of scholars, conservators and scientists. She has been named Chevalier des arts et des lettres and became an Officier in 2013. In 2016 she was honored as a Chevalier in the Légion d'honneur.

*“She has a talent for walking, laughing,
putting one in one's place, handling a fan,
getting into a carriage, designing a diadem.”*

Jean Cocteau on friend Misia Sert



May 22, 2019, 11:30 a.m.

Sarah Bernhardt: The Art of High Drama with Carol Ockman

Dubbed “the greatest actress of the Western world,” Sarah Bernhardt graced global stages and screens for well over half a century with a distinctly “feminine” and physical style of acting. Her talent for death scenes—Camille, Tosca, Hamlet—was so remarked that dying nightly, twice a day when there was a matinee, became de rigueur. Bernhardt's afterlife, including a series of phrases still in use, like “Who Do You Think You Are—Sarah Bernhardt?” is one of many indices of her role as the first mass-media star.

Any list of Bernhardt's occupations also has to include sculptor, painter, theater impresario, playwright, author, fashion trendsetter, and model for health and beauty aids. The endless public fascination with Bernhardt and her continuous self-fashioning combined with a scandalous public life—a mother who was a courtesan, an illegitimate son, a reputed promiscuity that encompassed liaisons with numerous men and women, a domestic menagerie including a cheetah, a wolfhound, a monkey, three dogs, and six boggle-eyed chameleons. Mercilessly caricatured by the press for her thinness, Jewishness, gender-bending, and multiple careers, Bernhardt had the uncanny ability to turn every liability to her advantage. Please join us for an afternoon with the “Divine Sarah”!



Writer, performer, and curator, Carol Ockman is the Robert Sterling Clark Professor of Art at Williams College. Her focus is modern and contemporary art with special interests in the body, trauma, and performance. Publications include Ingres's Eroticized Bodies: Retracing the Serpentine Line and Sarah Bernhardt: The Art of High Drama (with Kenneth E. Silver). Curator of the eponymous award-winning exhibition located at the Jewish Museum (New York, 2005-6). Her forthcoming memoir, Sarah Bernhardt's Handkerchief has become a one-woman show. As Curator at Large for Marie Selby Botanical Gardens (Sarasota, FL), she has curated Marc Chagall, Flowers and the French Riviera (2017); Warhol: Flowers in the Factory (2018) and Gauguin: Voyage to Paradise (thru June 30, 2019). Since 2017, she has been performing with dancers and other writers in Netta Yerushalmy's “Paramodernities,” a series of six new works devoted to iconic historic dances (World Premiere, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, 2018; Wexner Center for the Performing Arts, 2019; New York Live Arts, March 14-17, 2019).

June 5, 2019, 11:30 a.m.

Greater than Gatsby: Mona Bismarck

with James Birchfield

Five times wed – into the richest family in Wisconsin, to the handsomest man in America, to the richest man in America, to the grandson of Otto von Bismarck, and to an Italian count – Mona Strader, raised on a Kentucky horse farm, was regarded as a sociological marvel. Living chiefly in France during the entre guerre period, she moved among the social elite of Paris, including the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Baron Guy de Rothschild, Baron Alexis de Redé, Lady Diana Mosley, Cole Porter, and many others. She was photographed by Cecil Beaton and painted by Salvador Dali, and appeared over fifty times in Vogue. Parisian couturiers named her the Best Dressed Woman in the World in 1933, and her wardrobe included couture by Chanel, Schiaparelli, Balenciaga, and Hubert de Givenchy. Countess Mona Bismarck died in Paris in 1983, and her home in the fashion district became the Bismarck Center for American Culture.



James Birchfield, a Florida native, is former Curator of Rare Books at the University of Kentucky. He has served as editor of The Kentucky Review, chairman of the University of Kentucky Art Museum board, president of Clay Lancaster's Warwick Foundation, a member of the boards of the Henry Clay Memorial Foundation, and the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation. He has been a guest curator of exhibitions at the University of Kentucky Art Museum, the J. B. Speed Art Museum, Preservation Nantucket, the Grolier Club of the City of New York, and served as a visiting scholar at the University of Rome. He is the author of Clay Lancaster's Kentucky: Photographs of a Preservation Pioneer (2006), Mona Bismarck in Art and Fashion (1997), as well as articles on art, architecture, the decorative arts, literature, and printing history. He has organized many events featuring major figures in the book arts.

“...elle s’installa avec vue sur la Tour Eiffel – ce qui trahissait à mes yeux ses origines américaines. Elle recevait le monde entier, changeait de mari (mais point de chien) et quand elle sortait dans une de ses immenses Rolls-Royce, elle provoquait des embouteillages monstres.”

Sir Valentine Abdy



Photo Credits

Cover: Georges Clairin (1843-1919) • Portrait of Sarah Bernhardt, 1871
Inside Cover Left: André Durst (1907-1949) • Mme Jose-Maria Sert. Vogue, December 15, 1936, Pg 40. André Durst/Vogue © Conde Nast
Inside cover Right: Cecil Beaton (1904-1980) • Mrs. Harrison Williams (Mona Bismarck). © The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's.
Page 2: Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) • Portrait de Misia Sert, 1908. Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum.
Page 5: Georges Clairin (1843-1919) • Portrait de Sarah Bernhardt, 1876. Musée de Petit Palais.
Page 6: Frederico de Madrazo Y Ochoa (1875-1912) • Portrait of Jean Cocteau, c. 1910-12.
Page 7: Carol Ockman. Photo by Wit McKay.
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Back Cover: Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) • Portrait of Misia Godebska-Sert, 1904. National Gallery, London.

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