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"Actividades femeninas" Collective exhibitions of women in Chile between 1914 and 1939

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Cover Page Footnote

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Actividades femeninas: Women's collective exhibitions in Chile between 1914 and 1939

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Abstract

In 1927 the great *Female Exhibition* was held in Chile within the framework of the fiftieth anniversary of the Amunátegui Decree (1877), a precept that allowed women to go to university. The Exhibition was the result of a series of initiatives held by the high bourgeoisie that began in 1914 with the creation of women's organizations such as the Women's Art Society.

Twelve years later, in 1939, the MEMCH—the Pro-Emancipation Movement of Women in Chile—held the *Actividades femeninas* (Feminine Activities) exhibition, conceived as a response to previous experiences led by the elite, and focused on the political and social aspirations of women.

Resumen

En 1927 se desarrolló en Chile la gran *Exposición Femenina* en el marco del cincuentenario del Decreto Amunátegui (1877), precepto que permitió a las mujeres ingresar a la Universidad. La Exposición fue el resultado de una serie de iniciativas de la alta burguesía que se habían iniciado en 1914 con la creación de organizaciones de mujeres como la Sociedad Artística Femenina.

Doce años después, en 1939, el MEMCH —Movimiento Pro Emancipación de las Mujeres de Chile— realizó la exposición *Actividades femeninas*, concebida como una respuesta a las experiencias anteriores lideradas por la elite, y concentrada en las aspiraciones políticas y sociales de las mujeres.

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Telling the stories of female artists in Chile is a reflexive process within the field of local historiography that started just a few years ago. The scarce presence of female artists in museum collections—less than 15%—as well as their absence in the history of art and the difficulty of accessing archival sources, have favored their systematic omission. While we can rarely recover first-person stories and know their experiences on the arts scene, there are some indications of their experiences scattered in women's magazines designed for female entertainment. These notes constitute a true archive of women's production and artistic practices—the agencies of the subaltern.

This article seeks not only to present the female art scene in Chile between 1914 and 1939, but also to highlight the creation of women's artistic organizations and collectivities. What was the part of these women in the movement and validation processes of works of art? What role did they have in contemporary feminist discussions? These are some of the questions that I intend to answer through a study of visual and intellectual discourses and political positions. This approach will allow us to consider feminine production as a territory in construction where the known symbolic order and canon becomes altered.

Social equality: the pioneers in the Academy of Fine Arts and the struggle for women's suffrage (1866-1934)

Although the feminine entrance to formal education in the arts happened as early as 1866, when Agustina Gutiérrez (1851-1886) became the first woman registered in the Painting Academy—only seventeen years after the foundation of the Academy of Fine Arts and ten years before the Amunátegui Decree, which was promoted by liberal historian and ideologist Miguel Luis Amunátegui (1828-1888) and enabled women to take exams,

¹ In 1849, the Painting Academy was created in Chile. However, there is previous non-formal education on Chilean arts. In the case of artists, the first news we have of a professional Chilean female painter in the exercise of art is Paula Aldunate de Larraín (1812–1884) in 1835. Other names on the scene during this time are Anglo-Argentinean Clara Álvarez Condarco Dudding (1825-1865), English Mary Graham (1785-1842), French Clara Filleul (1822-1888) and Argentinean Procesa Sarmiento

apply for a professional diploma and attend the university¹—the training of women was always diminished by questions of gender, morals and good manners, and through restricted access to life-drawing courses, to name just a few issues faced by female art students at the time. Agustina Gutiérrez was the foundational protagonist of female participation in the Academy not only as a student, but also as a teacher, since she was hired there as drawing professor in 1869. However, her work is hardly known except for some reproductions in art magazines of the time and some mentions in accounts of competitions and national salons.

One of the most significant events that reflected the increasing female incorporation to artistic production was a National Exhibition in 1884, sponsored by the National Agricultural Society, which had a section devoted to fine arts. In one of the catalogues of the exhibition, the participation of some “excellent artists” in the Liberal Arts section is highlighted, standing out among them “some distinguished ladies from Valparaíso”². The first national Salon organized by the Artistic Union in 1885 also recognized the important number of works presented by young Chilean female artists, on which Ángela Uribe de Alcalde commented in *El Taller Ilustrado*, a publication directed by the sculptor José Miguel Blanco, in an article entitled “The art and the Chilean female artists”:

The exhibitions of 1872, 1875, 1884 and the painting exhibition in the *Salon* in 1885 have been successively manifesting, because of the large number of girls that have exhibited their paintings in these contests, that Fine Arts can be cultivated among us. Just as we can see on the twilight sky of the afternoon, one after another multitude of stars emerging, we have thus seen appear in the sky of the arts, from 1872 to 1875, one after another multitude of ingenuities, a pleiad of artists.³

From that moment on, the names of women appear on the art scene with greater frequency, as is the case of Celia Castro (1860-1930) who was honored

(1818-1899), to name just a few of the artists active in the art market and the artistic production of the first third of the 19th century.

² *Valparaíso en la Exposición de 1884* (Imprenta del Nuevo Mercurio, Valparaíso, 1884), 157.

³ Ángela Uribe de Alcalde, “El arte y las artistas chilenas”, *El Taller Ilustrado*, year I, no. 25, Monday, February 1, 1886.

at the 1888 Salon for her painting *The Pruner* (1888) and in 1896 at the Edwards Contest, one of the most outstanding recognitions in Chilean art. Along with Castro, the Aurora sisters (1863-1939) and Magdalena Mira (1859-1930) were often granted gold and silver medals in national salons, as in 1884. Chilean women were also present at the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition with artists such as Dolores Álvarez (active in 1887-1889) and Genoveva Merino (active in 1884-1901), on whom I have not found much information.

This female participation in the visual arts went in tandem with the emergence of various discussions on the situation of women in the public and private spheres. The creation of the Valparaíso Mutual Aid Society No. 1 of Female Workers (1887), the Emancipation of Women Society (1888), the Girls' Professional Schools (1888) and the School of Arts and Crafts for Women (1887), the latter created by the Sofía—Society of Industrial Development—and the Ministry of Industry and Public Works for the training of female labor, hints at the discussions on the social role of women.⁴ Also the literary and journalistic work of women in the early twentieth century was manifested in publications such as *El Eco de las Señoras de Santiago* (1865) and *La Familia* (1890), appearing together with women writers like Martina Barros de Orrego (1850-1944), whose translation of John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) was published in the 1872 annual publication *Revista de Santiago*, with personal notes by Martina Barros, expressing clear support for the female vote.⁵ Three years later, and in an unusual way, a group of women from the town of San Felipe (Valparaíso Region) claimed their right to vote under the Constitution of 1833, which

guaranteed the equality of “all Chileans”. The result of this action was a new law enacted in 1884 prohibiting the right to vote for women,⁶ referring to speeches alleging the feminine incompatibility to exercise “citizenship in all its extension [sic].”⁷

The incorporation of women into the university space and their economic independence, through the decree of 1877, allowed female intellectuals of the early twentieth century to sustain the struggle for women's civil rights. There were also conferences and writings, such as the visit of the Spanish Belén de Sárraga (1874-1951), who was invited by the main representative of trade unionism, Luis Emilio Recabarren (1876-1924), and the radical newspaper *La Razón*. She was invited to participate in various public conferences in the cities of Antofagasta, Iquique, Negreiros and Pisagua in 1913 and 1915, in the middle of the process of the mutualist movement of saltpeter workers. The presence of Sárraga in Iquique motivated the creation of the Women's Anti-Clerical Center that took her name, fostered by leader Teresa Flores, Recabarren's companion. This context gave strength to the struggle for the civil and social rights of women, increasing the participation of intellectual women in the discussions that were promoted by the Chilean magazines.

The closeness to the church and the Conservative Party made the proto-feminist movement of the time still hold on to Christianity, good manners, family and philanthropy, although the movement itself was liberal in matters of civil rights, such as divorce law⁸ or the economic independence of women.⁹ The Church's support for the female vote

⁴ In general terms, the practical teaching in these establishments was divided into the following sections: Commercial, Dressmakers, Lingerie and Current Sewing, Embroidery, Gloves, Carton and Leather Goods, Cooking, Washing and Ironing, Drawing. See “Crónica: Escuela de Artes i Oficios para Mujeres”, in *Boletín de la Sociedad de Fomento Fabril*. (La Sociedad, 1884-1935) 51 v., year 5, no. 1, (ene. 1888), 43.

⁵ Martina Barros de Orrego (1850-1944) was a Chilean writer and intellectual considered as one of the precursors of feminism in Chile.

⁶ Diamela Eltit, *Crónica del sufragio femenino en Chile* (Servicio Nacional de la Mujer, 1994), 21

⁷ Jorge Huneuus, *La Constitución ante el Congreso*, (Imprenta los Tiempos, 1879), 33-34.

⁸ The interference of the Church in matters of the State in Chile has a long history. Only in 1925 the Constitution separated both powers, although doctrinal and legislative discussions were still present in the years to come. An example of the above was the discussions on the possibility of including divorce in the New Civil Marriage Law. The first proposal was established in the parliamentary debate in 1914. Ten years later the

radical deputy Hernán Figueroa proposes the bond divorce, which was already raised in 1917 but never reached a consensus agreement due to the sacramental character given to the marriage contract. It was not until 2004 that divorce was introduced as a way to dissolve marriage in Law 19,947. As for the rights of women within marriage, one of the first advances took place in 1925 when it was first legislated on the Reserved Heritage of married women. In this regard, see *La iglesia y la Ley de Matrimonio Civil*, by Karina Alethia Bettini Silva and Estrella Ibarra Gutiérrez, memory to apply for the Academic Degree of Law Degree in Legal and Social Sciences (Faculty of Law, University of Chile, 2007).

⁹ With regard to the incorporation of women in the processes of industrialization and the emergence of capitalism in Chile, discussions focused especially on the relevance of certain work spaces that could diminish the strengthening of the working class family. For example, the motherhood of working women and the effects of paid work on the maintenance of family order was one of the main issues put on the table by the political world, whose feminine responses came from the hand of autonomous organizations, with a worker and popular character.

was based on the possibility of broadening the bases for the formation of a new electoral bloc—according to Erika Maza—thereby increasing their capacity to achieve positions of power.¹⁰ Meanwhile, for the feminine fight, the right to vote was secondary to wage issues, public health, education, among other affairs that seemed to have greater urgency for achieving women’s social justice.

The rejection of the first bill of women’s suffrage presented by conservative Luis Undurraga (1871-1932) in 1917 generated diverse reactions in the different sectors participating in the discussion. Among them was Martina Barros, who would write in the *Revista Chilena* of that same year:

Are not issues of high social interest, closely related to our very life, continually being aired, in which we cannot, I’m not saying take part, but not even contribute with our vote in order to demand that we be served? Educational problems are continually discussed. Who could deny us the right that mothers have to be heard in a matter of such transcendental importance for the future of our family? And the teachers, who have dedicated their lives to the direction of teaching, how can they not bring more light to the resolution of these problems than any young person who comes to the Chamber with no more background than their humanities studies? Has not a bill of divorce been filed already, which, if it is denied today, will have to be discussed some day, and is it perhaps intended to decide a question of such high interest for us, denying us even the right to be heard? What law of justice, equity or simple common sense can deny us that right?¹¹

The Constitutional Reform carried out in 1925 by president Arturo Alessandri (1920-1925 term) did not consider the longed for feminine vote that the Chilean suffragists pursued during the 19th century, and the military regime of Carlos Ibañez del Campo (1927-1931 term) did not favour the demands of female groups because of the political persecution of trade union movements on the one hand and, on the other, the assumption that women

who supported the suffrage movement belonged to conservative elite groups linked to ecclesiastical power. However, the Feminine Union was founded in 1927 in the city of Valparaíso by Aurora Argomedo (?-1948) and Graciela Mandujano (1902-1984), who brought together the interests of women from different social strata, overcoming class issues in favor of social and political rights of women. That same year, the Democratic Feminine Party, one of the most active groups in the fight for change in electoral law, had dissolved, to be replaced by the Feminine Bloc. The latter maintained ties with the International Pro Suffrage and Peace League for Women and the League of Nations.¹²

Finally, the feminine vote in Chile was approved in 1934, but only for municipal elections. It was not until 1949 that women were granted the right to vote for presidential and parliamentary elections, effective in 1952 for the presidential election of the second government of Carlos Ibáñez de Campo (1952-1958 term).

The First Women’s Art Organization (1913-1916)

Along with the struggle for women’s suffrage, women organized themselves in various groups, including in those of a social nature. In the field of the arts, actions aimed at enhancing women’s progress were led by women of the Chilean high bourgeoisie, and their beginnings can be found in the creation of the Feminine Art Society, which was founded in 1913 by the newspaper *El Mercurio*’s director Julio Pérez Canto (1867-1953) and the French-Chilean painter and art critic Ricardo Richon Brunet (1866-1946).

¹⁰ Erika Maza, “Catolicismo, anticlericalismo y la extensión del sufragio a la mujer en Chile”, *Estudios Públicos*, 58, 1995, 139-140.

¹¹ Martina Barros de Orrego, “El voto femenino”, *Revista Chilena*, vol. II, 1917, 393.

¹² Lavrin, *Mujeres, feminismo y cambio social*, 373.

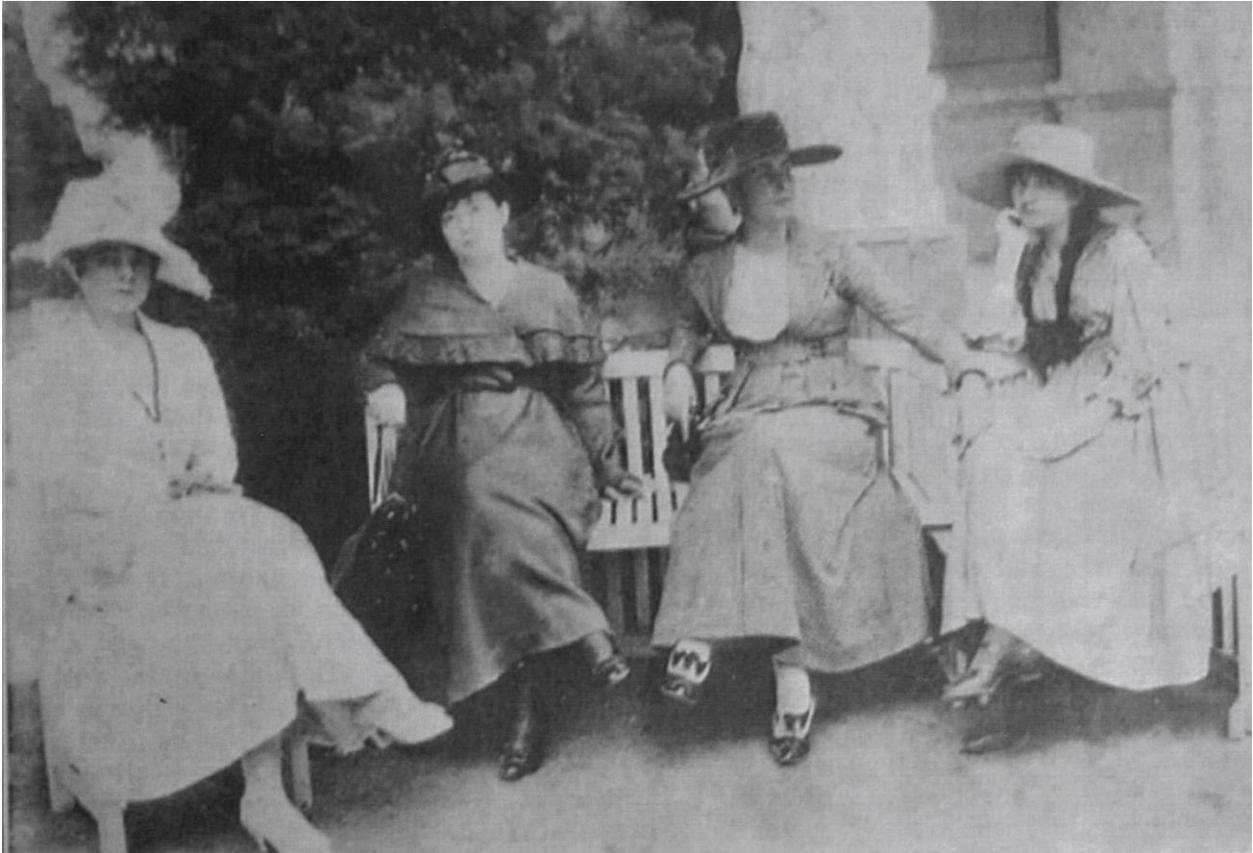


Figure 1. Women's Artistic Society in *Pacifico Magazine*, 1917. Appear in the photograph: Dora Puelma, president; Sofía Barros de Jara, vice president; Ester de Ugarte, secretary.

In the society's directory there was painter Dora Puelma Fuenzalida (1885-1972)¹³, president of the association, and Esther Ugarte (active in 1915-1927), secretary, along with other *madams and ladies*, all gathered to "help each other in the cultivation of the arts."¹⁴ (Fig. 1) Although in 1913 a first female exhibition was held in the *El Mercurio* salons where about two hundred works by more than forty artists were presented¹⁵—an event discussed in *Revista Zig-Zag* with photographs of the artworks but without the names of their authors (Fig. 2)—the main official exhibition of the Society took place one year later in the same space. The exhibition featured Puelma and Ugarte, mentioned above, with two female portraits, Dora Alcalde (active in 1914-1915) with a still life with

with flowers, Elmina Moisan (1897-1938) with a portrait of a girl, and the sculptor Blanca Merino (1893-1973) with two works entitled *Margarita* and *Female Bust* (ca. 1914). The success of the exhibition, "far superior to what was expected at the beginnings of the female artistic culture,"¹⁶ resulted in the organization of other such exhibitions until 1916 (Fig. 3). These shows included the aforementioned women, with the addition of other artists including Henriette Petit (1894-1983) and Judith Alpi (1893-1983), for a total of 50 paintings in 1916. In the sculpture section, there were some very young women, "barely girls", including the fourteen-year-old Laura Rodig (1901-1972), who was "of extraordinary talent and who is a national art promise."¹⁷ With the exception

¹³ In addition to being a painter and sculptor, Dora Puelma was a professor of painting at the School of Fine Arts and was a founding member of the National Society of Fine Arts. She also collaborated as a columnist for the newspapers *La Nación* and *El Mercurio*.

¹⁴ José Backhaus, "La exposición de arte femenino", *Revista Zig-Zag*, 1916, no pagination.

¹⁵ Ricardo Richon Brunet, "Exposición de Arte Femenino", *El Mercurio*, September 14, 1913, no pagination.

¹⁶ "Exposición de arte femenino", *Revista Zig-Zag*, May 16, 1914, no pagination.

¹⁷ "De uno a otro año", *Revista Familia*, January 1916, 1

of the latter, who will later be listed as one of the most militant artists of her generation, most of the participants belonged to the Chilean high bourgeoisie.¹⁸



Figure 2. Women's exhibition in the galleries of *El Mercurio* daily, published in *Zig-Zag Magazine*, September 1913.

Although the participation of these artists in these diffusion and creation scenarios did not reach, in most cases, political connotations, they assumed active and public functions in the defense of women. In these affirmations of the feminine and their imaginaries lies a focus of sustained subversion in the configuration of systems of self-

¹⁸ The participation of women in the Academy, the subsequent School of Fine Arts and the national exhibitions and salons, responded in the beginning to the formative possibility of women of the bourgeoisie and the Chilean elite, which extended this problem not only to issues of gender, but also to class issues very present in the social dynamics of the country. Only from the first third of the 20th century do we find women from the middle class; to date, we have not been able to identify artists whose

representation and self-legitimization that promptly question the patriarchal canon and the masculine tradition in the exercise of the arts and creation. Several portraits were created in this period, among them, one by Elmina Moisan in 1915 of the painter Dora Puelma that was presented at the Feminine Salon that same year. We also find a double portrait by Judith Alpi in which, on one side, the image of Laura Rodig is depicted, and on the other, a feminine foreshortening painted upside-down. A sign of contempt for the female nude model imposed by academic norms, which both Alpi and Rodig transgressed in their spaces of intimacy.¹⁹



Figure 3. Female Exhibition. *From one to another year*, published in *Family*, January 1916.

origin is identified with the working or popular world, which did happen with men since the end of the 19th century.

¹⁹ Gloria Cortés, *Desacatos. Prácticas artísticas femeninas (1835-1938)*. Catalogue of the exhibition held at the National Museum of Fine Arts (Chile) between July 13 and September 17, 2017.

“A temple closed to our eyes, wrapped in clouds of prejudice and false fears, the School was not a center for young ladies”,²⁰ declared painter Emma Formas (1886-ca. 1959) in 1917, giving an account of the difficulties presented that were experienced by female artists, especially when entering drawing courses. While men had access to live nude models of both men and women, women artists had to settle with copying inert images, plasters and lithographs commissioned by the government to complete and extend the education and aesthetic sense of Chilean artists at the Painting Academy and in the Sculpture Course, according to the modernizing program of the period. Even though the process of teaching natural drawing was homogenized over the years, criticisms of the deficient technique in the works by women representing the human figure are recurrently seen in press articles, led almost all of them, by men.

However, it is in the press itself, especially in women’s magazines, that the contributions of women artists were reinforced and made visible. Magazines such as *Familia*, oriented at women’s household chores, included a series of articles on home care, combined with feminist proclamations where the interests of elite women and middle class intellectuals met. This led the publication to quickly become the official organ of feminine emancipation. Various articles, press releases and interviews to the protagonists of the Chilean feminine arts were disseminated in the magazine, which thus became a space for the diffusion of female artists who had no other place to promote their actions. While other periodicals, such as *Zig-Zag* or the *Pacífico Magazine*, included notes on the annual, national and feminine salons—in addition to criticism of the exhibitions or texts dedicated to female painters or sculptors—the interesting thing about the *Familia* was that it also incorporated the writing of women. This enabled the conjunction of a scene in which women wrote about women, consolidating the work of a women’s press that had been developing

with strength and independence since the 19th century.

Although they were often awarded prizes and medals, it was not until 1919 that the first and second medals of the National Salon were awarded to two women: Elmina Moisan with *Coquette* (1916) and Judith Alpi with a female portrait. Alpi also presented *The two friends* (ca. 1916), which we only know by the press of the time. These works address eroticism and feminine subjectivity based on the representation systems of the women of that decade: female nudes, bath or boudoir scenes are taken from the visual imaginary of masculine modernity to be addressed on a feminine dialectic and the construction of their private spaces. Despite the wide recognition of women’s participation in the Chilean scene, it was not after the creation of the Female Artistic Society that artists could have an organized system of promotion and circulation of their works, placing them in an emerging art market. It is likely that the buyers were female patrons of art themselves or their close social circle, members of the Female Artistic Society, the Ladies Club (1916), the Ladies Reading Circle (1915) and other women’s organizations aimed at the defense and promotion of women activities and their economic, cultural and political independence. Although their actions did not detach from activities related to charity, these organizations enabled the configuration of a network that was not exempt from issues related to social, economic and subjective differentiation on the concept of class.²¹ Charity, a feminine domain par excellence, particularly during the 19th century, opened a space for elite women to have political participation in public life. This was reflected in a series of initiatives led by socially renowned ladies, who brought up discussions in the Chilean parliament on public policies related to health, childhood, social protection and women’s labor. The 1927 Women’s Exhibition, which will see later, had a very successful and popular section dedicated exclusively to charity work. The Centennial Pavilion

²⁰ Emma Formas, “Desarrollo del arte pictórico”, *Revista Familia*, June 1917, 3

²¹ In this regard, see Gloria Cortés, “Femeninas y feministas. Aristócratas o desclasadas. Asociaciones artísticas femeninas en Chile (1914-1927)”, *Boletín de Arte*, no. 17,

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received in its dependencies the National Board of Infancy, the Children's Pots, the School Welfare Board, the Child Protection Society, the Orphans' Asylum and the School of Social Service, among other agencies. Outside the pavilion The Red Cross of Santiago, Peñaflor and Osorno set up their tents, and their magnificent presentation received a general applause."²²

The Ladies Club, led by Luisa Lynch (1864-1937), one of the most active women of her generation, also considered social support as one of its most important duties. Interviewed by the *Familia* magazine in 1915, Lynch exemplified this subject with the particular situation of a young Chilean female artist:

It's about a girl, one of the first painters we've had. She went to Europe and there she married a Frenchman. War came along, together with poverty, even misery. (...) If the Ladies Club had been functioning, it could have protected her, presented her paintings, give her an atmosphere in society, helped her in a thousand discreet ways, without appealing to the alms that high spirits reject although they are in the most distressing circumstances.²³

The Ladies Club was the first organization created without clerical patronage, receiving numerous criticisms and troubles from the Chilean elite, who were at odds with the feminine freedoms proposed by the entity, as they threatened the security and stability of the family. Inés Echeverría (1868-1949), known by her alias Iris and a prominent feminist writer, responded to the attacks with the following question: "What have been the worst enemies of the evolution of women? Naturally, those who believed themselves to be stripped of their secular dominion; that is, MEN [sic], in their capacities as Clerics, Fathers or Husbands."²⁴ High morality and feminine charity remained a bastion of domesticity, but on those notions the women of the Women's Artistic Society and the Ladies Club tried

to reformulate the gender relations housed in the social good, increasing the levels of education, culture and economic insertion beyond the household. The Club "will have its charity fund to help them and, when possible, will give them asylum in a comfortable house,"²⁵ in the style of European enlightened societies aimed at the aestheticization of society and everyday life. The long European stays of its members, whose lives passed between Chile and Paris, promoted contact with similar organizations, such as *Les Dames de France* or regional experiences such as *Entre nous* in Uruguay, the Professional School of Women in Argentina or women's clubs in the United States, in addition to the Frauen Kuntsverband (Feminine Artistic Union) created in Germany by the artist Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) in 1913. Women of the high bourgeoisie, such as the aforementioned Luisa Lynch and Delia Matte (1866-1941), founders of the Ladies Club, or of the nascent professionalized middle class, like Amanda Labarca (1886-1975)²⁶—journalist and writer, founder of the Reading Circle and her dissemination newspaper, *Acción Femenina*—acted as mediators for a network of creative women: painters, sculptors, writers and journalists, among others, activating connections of solidarity, affections, collaboration and exchange. However, we have little information about the relationships established by Chilean female artists with their foreign counterparts and the possible connections of these encounters. One of the few documented references is the work carried out by Eugenia Huici de Errázuriz (1860-1951),²⁷ an important patron of modern art living in Paris, who connected the Parisian scene—Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, Le Corbusier, Robert and Sonia Delaunay—with the wave of young artists who travelled in the first decades of the 20th century, among them Sara (Camino) Malvar (1894-1970) and Ximena Morla (1891-1987), daughter of Luisa

²² Guerin, *Actividades femeninas*, 30.

²³ María Cenicenta, "Con la señora Luisa Lynch de Gormaz. Directora del Club de Señora", *Revista Familia*, November 1915, 3-4.

²⁴ Felicitas Klimpel, *La mujer chilena (El aporte femenino al progreso de Chile) 1910-1960* (Editorial Andrés Bello, 1962), 236, 237.

²⁵ "El de lectura y el proyectado club de señoras", *La Revista Azul*, 1915, 431.

²⁶ Amanda Labarca was an outstanding writer, educator, intellectual and feminist Chilean. In 1919 she assumed the chair of Pedagogical Psychology at the Pedagogical Institute of the University of Chile, and between 1927 and 1931 she was the head of the General Directorate of Secondary Education of the Ministry of Education. In 1945

she was Chile's representative to the United Nations and twenty years later, she was distinguished as an Academic Member of the Faculty of Philosophy and Education of the University of Chile and of the Academy of Political, Social and Moral Sciences of the Institute of Chile.

²⁷ Eugenia Huici de Arguedas (1860-1951), also known as Madame Errázuriz due to her marriage to Chilean painter and diplomat José Tomás Errázuriz, was a well-known collector and patron of the arts, protector of artists such as Pablo Picasso, Blaise Cendrars and Igor Stravinsky, among others. Among her circle of friends were painters Jacques-Émile Blanche, Romaine Brooks, Charles Conder, Paul Helleu, Ambrose McEvoy and John Singer Sargent, who portrayed the Chilean aristocrat.

Lynch.²⁸ Also documented is the contact established by the poet Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) with Latin American intellectuals, which led to her partner Laura Rodig's discovery of muralism and the indigenous movement while traveling to Mexico in 1922, and with Maruja Mallo (1902-1995) in Spain, probably coinciding with the subsequent struggle of women against Franco. Rodig also takes part in the political/visual project of the Uruguayan painter Torres García (1874-1949) in the *Première Exposition du Groupe Latino-Américain de Paris* in 1930 at the Zak Gallery, where there was also the Argentinean Raquel Forner (1902-1988). Understanding the effects of these meetings is a pending task, but one that has been initiated by Latin American researchers, among them Georgina Gluzman in Argentina, who has sought to establish symbolic and formal links between Chilean and Argentinean artists of the 19th century, especially among the sculptors Rebeca Matte (1875-1929) and Lola Mora (1866-1936)²⁹.

The 1927 Women's Exhibition in the pavilions of Quinta Normal

The aim of the women's exhibitions organized by the Women's Artistic Society and the Ladies Club was to promote the circulation of works and the presence of women artists in the market, encouraging their professionalization and economic independence. Nevertheless, one of the first experiences that highlighted the long history of Chilean female artists was the 1927 Women's Exhibition, on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Amunátegui decree (Fig. 4). The exhibition coincided with the industrial progress of the country and the design of public policies on artistic education, where many women would find a symbolic support for their

tasks, especially in the possibilities offered by the blurry boundary between fine arts and applied arts.

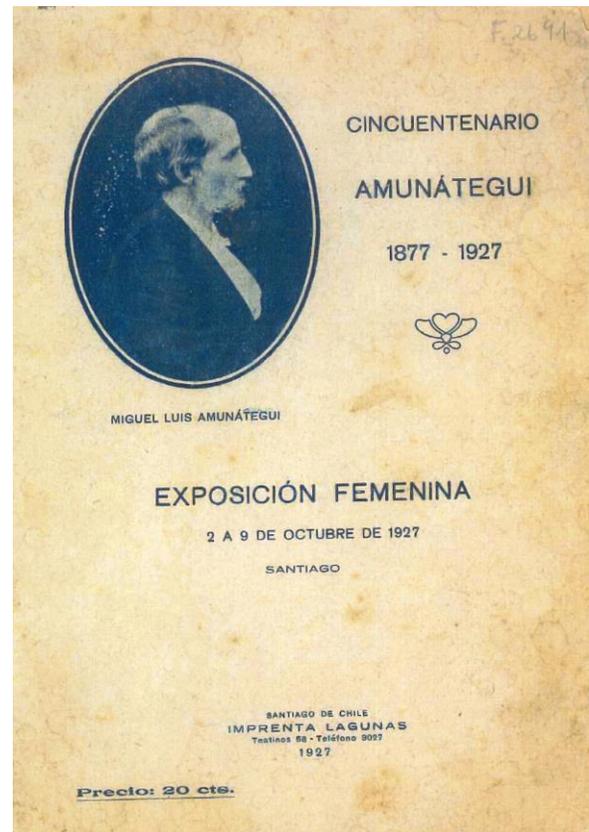


Figure 4. Women's Exhibition. Fifth Anniversary of the Amunátegui Decree, exhibition flyer, October 1927. Museo de la Educación Gabriela Mistral Collection.

The governments of Arturo Alessandri and Carlos Ibáñez del Campo, both anti-oligarchic and populist, promoted educational reform with the ultimate goal of social efficiency based on an impulse of a practical and industrial spirit. This led to the closure in 1929 of the School of Fine Arts where a selective number of professors and students were asked to retrain themselves to applied arts in Europe (France, Germany and Italy). This resolution responded to the interest of the Finance Minister and interim leader of the Education portfolio, Pablo Ramírez (1927-1929 term), in

²⁸ Sara Malvar, Ximena Morla, Henriette Petit, Judith Alpi, Elmina Moisan and Emma Formas, among other artists mentioned in the present investigation, constitute an important part of the group of women of the early twentieth century that "overflowed" the Chilean art scene. Nevertheless, many pieces by these artists are accessible only through archival work. This fact—together with the social situation and the educational conditions that marked their experience of the artistic system and

therefore their work—is configured as the main form of exclusion on the work of these women.

²⁹ Georgina Gluzman, "Matte/Mora: leyendas femeninas en el arte latinoamericano de entresiglos", lecture presented at the 3rd Coloquio de Investigación en Historia del Arte – CIHA, *Intercambios trasandinos. Historias del arte entre Argentina y Chile (siglos XIX - XX)*, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2017.

promoting industrial development to the detriment of fine arts education, which he considered as representative of the oligarchy. While in the aforementioned exhibition of 1927, Chilean women were proud of their advancement in terms of work, education and social assistance, the interest in other areas of female participation, such as the struggle for suffrage, was greatly diminished during this period.³⁰

“It has not even been attempted, until now, to make a history of the various activities in which the Chilean woman has had participation”, argued Sara Guerin de Elgueta (active in 1923-1928), curator of the Women’s Exhibition, turning the task of compiling the actions carried out by women into a long and extensive research exercise, “intelligent and diligent searches” that put on the table “real discoveries in the history of Chilean women.”³¹ The event took place in the pavilions of the Quinta Normal, created to house the Chilean International Exhibition in 1875 by the National Agricultural Society, including sections dedicated to education, charity, decorative arts and industry, as well as music and pure art in an extra-official salon for the fine arts. All sections were accompanied by activities such as colonial and creole songs and dances by Camila Bari de Zañartu (active in 1927-1943),³² scenes of the life of Santa Teresa de Jesús with musical accompaniment by Marta Canales (1895-1986)³³ and the “collaboration of numerous young ladies of our society.”³⁴ Among the presenters in the fine arts section were recognized artists such as Laura Rodig, who opened the pavilion with her sculpture *Maternity* (ca. 1927) located at the center of the room, and Blanca Merino with *Poem* (undated), a marble represent-

ation of a woman crushed by pain. There were noteworthy paintings by Dora Puelma, Judith Alpi, Elmina Moisan and Teresa Valencia (active in 1916-1938) with *Mother and daughter* (undated). There were also other artists about whom we do not have information, such as Matilde Castro, Elena Larrondo, Cristina Serveau and Adelaide Shanklin, among others.

Feminine Activities. Women in national life. The MEMCH exhibition in 1939

A change in the relations of women’s cultural organizations arose with the creation of the MEMCH—Pro Emancipation Movement of Women in Chile—in 1935. The multi-class and political movement led by Elena Caffarena (1903-2003), Olga Poblete (1908-1999), Marta Vergara (1898-1995) and Graciela Mandujano (1902-1984),³⁵ enabled the gathering of women “of all ideological tendencies and all religious creeds with the sole condition of being willing to fight for the social, economic and legal liberation of women.”³⁶ It became one of the main agents in women’s suffrage, especially in support of the Popular Front—a broad leftist bloc—and its presidential candidate Pedro Aguirre Cerda (1938-1941 term). But their struggle was mainly focused on women workers, becoming a discussion organ of vital importance for issues such as breastfeeding, abortion and infant mortality, among other public health issues. Class and sex were the main angle from which the *memchists* tackled issues of inequality or the decision on motherhood among women workers, noting the high rates of infant mortality, the deficient nutrition of mothers and children, the

³⁰ Asunción Lavrin, *Mujeres, feminismos y cambio social en Argentina, Chile y Uruguay (1890-1940)*. (Chile, Centro de Investigación Barros Arana, 2005), 372.

³¹ Sara Guerin, *Actividades femeninas en Chile. Obra publicada con motivo del cincuentenario del decreto que concedió a la mujer chilena el derecho de validar sus exámenes secundarios* (Datos hasta diciembre de 1927). (Chile, Imprenta y Litografía La Ilustración, 1928), 14.

³² Camila Bari was an outstanding Chilean folklorist, compiler of traditional music and dances, among which were the *cueca*, *tonadas* of the central zone of the country, and Mapuche and Andean music, among others.

³³ Marta Canales was an important national composer, standing out in the field of chamber music and choral conducting. She was also the first female director to perform at the Colon theater in Buenos Aires with a 120-voice chorus. She received an award at the 1936 Seville Exhibition and her productions include Gregorian-inspired madrigals and folkloric compositions applied to choral music.

³⁴ “Cincuentenario del Decreto Amunátegui”, *Revista Zig-Zag*, October 1, 1927, no pagination.

³⁵ This group of women is especially important for the women’s movement of the first half of the 20th century. Elena Caffarena, a lawyer and jurist, is perhaps the most relevant figure for Chilean feminism, becoming one of the key figures for women’s suffrage and the struggle of working women. Along with Amanda Labarca, she participated in the Association of University Women in 1931 and was a representative of the Federation of Women’s Institutions (FECHIF), a key group in the process of obtaining the female electoral vote. Meanwhile, Olga Poblete was a teacher, a social and political leader, as well as a promoter of the Global and National Movement in Defense of Peace. Marta Vergara, a journalist and editor of *La Mujer Nueva*, MEMCH’s promotional organ, and Graciela Mandujano, founder of the Feminine Civic Party (1922) and the Feminine Union (1927), conclude the circle of activists who along with Felisa Vergara, Maria Ramírez, Eulogia Román and Domitila Ulloa gave life to the MEMCH, while leading the organizations and the discussions related to the suffrage and women rights.

³⁶ MEMCH (Chile), *¿Qué es el Memch?: Qué ha hecho el Memch?* (Impr. Antares, 1938), 1.

miserable salaries of women and the absence of health care.³⁷

In cultural matters, the movement counted among its ranks the drawing teacher Amanda Flores de Perotti (active in 1928-1940), sculptor and painter Laura Rodig, photographer Adriana Piga (active in 1939), journalist Marta Vergara and writer Olga Acevedo (1895-1970). They involved the support of Latin American artists such as Uruguayan writer and poet Blanca Luz Brum (1905-1985) and Peruvian sculptor and painter Carmen Saco (1882-1948), both associated with the *Amauta* magazine, edited by the Marxist intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930); and Eugenia Crenovich (1905-1990), Argentine painter, illustrator and essayist, who at that time was part of the workshop of Chilean painter Hernán Gazmuri (1900-1979) at the School of Fine Arts of the University of Chile and in the free workshops that the painter did after his forced disengagement from the University. In 1939, following the path initiated by the 1927 Women's Exhibition, the MEMCH organized *Feminine Activities. Women in national life: their contribution to activities and the political, social, economic and cultural development of Chile*, announced in the *La Mujer Nueva* magazine—the official organ for the movement's dissemination—and in internal correspondence between the members. In July 1939, the note announcing the so-called *Women's Exhibition* was published, which aimed at highlighting women's progress in the aforementioned matters, as well as “the indifference and hostility they had to overcome in order to achieve this”. Accompanied by “graphics, photographs, newspaper clippings, etc., they will be exhibited in an orderly manner in this contribution to the struggle for women's rights,”³⁸ conceived as a response to traditional activities such as embroidery and charity work characteristic of the previous experiences. In the brochure of the exhibition, men and

male leaders were also invited to recognize women in their different, cultural, social, economic and political aspirations. The exhibition would finally take place between December 12, 1939 and January 12, 1940 in the premises of the National Historical Museum, today the National Archive, with the participation of teachers from the Liceo Manuel de Salas and members of the movement. It was curated by Amanda Flores de Perotti, with the collaboration of Laura Rodig, Elena Caffarena, Marta Vergara, Aida Parada, Olga Poblete and ten other MEMCH members, with works by I. Crispi, A. Badosa, Aurora Muñoz and Genoveva Ramos from the School of Applied Arts, about whom we have no further information.

We must acknowledge that women's history is something, more or less, unknown. The eminently domestic role assigned to them until the last century made one think of her through madrigals. Today modern society has fully incorporated them into all activities; then, it is of elementary justice that they may also have the corresponding rank in our national history.³⁹

The exhibition travelled in February to the Liceo de Niñas in the city of Viña del Mar and finally in April to Valparaíso, this time curated by Laura Rodig, who also created the backdrop accompanying the exhibition, showing “the most representative women in the field of the various social activities that constitute the essence of a country and of which we did a balance with all the exhibited material.”⁴⁰ (Fig. 5) Of the backdrop we only have the image published in the magazine that was used as its cover in 1940. Rodig herself had designed in 1936 the characteristic image of the MEMCH, a workingwoman holding her son in one arm and a flag in the other, which later would become the official emblem (Fig 6). The emblem was consigned in successive letters between Elena Caffarena and

³⁷ In Chile, therapeutic abortion was regulated in the Sanitary Code of 1931, under the government of Carlos Ibáñez who promulgated reforms to the Sanitary Code of 1875. However, during Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship (1973-1990) it was repealed in 1989 by Law 18,826. Those who channeled this last reform were the members of the Military Junta. That is, it was conceived on a State Defense point of view and not as a matter of public health and women's rights. Recently, in 2017, the government of Michelle Bachelet approved a new bill that decriminalizes abortion in only three cases: rape, fetal infeasibility and life risk for the mother.

³⁸ “La exposición femenina patrocinada por el MEMCH”, *La Mujer Nueva*, July 1939, II, no. 23, 4.

³⁹ “Las enseñanzas de nuestra exposición femenina La mujer en el progreso nacional”, *La Mujer Nueva*, September 1940, III, no. 26, 6. Although this note announces the publication of a book with the results of the exhibition, only a newsletter associated with the correspondence of the MEMCH, belonging to the Women's Fund, has been found. Genres of the National Archive of Chile. I am grateful to Francisca Luna Marticorena, in charge of the Fund, for providing the material related to the exhibition.

⁴⁰ “En el progreso nacional”, *La Mujer Nueva*, September 1940, III, no. 26, 1.

representatives of the local committees of northern and southern Chile from 1937 to 1940.⁴¹



Figure 5. Backdrop designed by Laura Rodig, who accompanied the exhibition *Feminine Activities*. *The woman in the national progress*, published in *La Mujer Nueva*, September 1940.

Defined by a culture of peace, the *memchists*, and especially Rodig, were fervent detractors of Franco's tyranny in Spain. They associated themselves with various international organizations like the World Committee of Antifascist Women or the Inter-American Commission of Women. They also participated in collective instances such as the Popular Conference for Peace in America, being represented by Marta Vergara, or the 6th Pan-American Conference, represented by Graciela Mandujano. They organized artistic activities in support of Spanish women like the act at the Recoleta Theater or the exhibition of numerous

⁴¹ Letter no. 163. Santiago, August 3, 1937. Comité Local MEMCH Corral. Letter no. 175. Corral, August 24, 1937. Comité Local MEMCH Corral. Letter no. 220. Santiago, October 15, 1937. Comité Local MEMCH Concepción. Letter no. 405. Rancagua, October 21, 1938. Comité Local MEMCH Rancagua. De: Carmela Aguilera (Secretaria General) and illegible name, corresponding to the Secretaria de Actas del

paintings by Laura Rodig, together with ten drawings made by Mexican children, drawings which would be sold with the proceeds going to benefit Spanish children.



Figure 6. Standard painted by Laura Rodig for the MEMCH, *La Mujer Nueva*, November 1936, *Poster of the 1st National Congress of the MEMCH, 1937*. Museo Histórico Nacional Collection.

The exhibition was scheduled for 1937, coinciding with the *Children Painters* exhibition of children's art organized by the artist at the National Museum of Fine Arts. The new political situation, such as the brief passage to a Socialist Republic in 1932, which had the adherence of teachers from the School of Plastic Arts—among them, the artists and teachers Ana Cortés (1895-1988), Amelia Astudillo (active in 1932) and María Valencia (1905-1982)—the arrival of the Popular Front government, along

Comité Local de Rancagua. Letter no. 492. Santiago, January 2, 1939. Comité Local MEMCH Potrerillos. Letter no. 498. Santiago, January 3, 1939. Comité Local MEMCH Chañaral. Letter no. 600. Santiago, April 12, 1939. Comité Local MEMCH Villa de Mora. Epistolario del MEMCH, Women and Genders Fund of the National Archive of Chile.

with the emergence of new social groups in the public arena, enabled the promotion of a new regionalism where the intention was to converge popular cultures with national societies.

Thus, the relationships between the artists of the time were expressed in the production of networks detached from institutions. Artistic practices within feminine workshops should have constituted a complex network of associativities and affections, constructing spaces for creation and reflection in which they transgressed and resisted upon the body—artistic, physical and emotional.

Final Thoughts

The MEMCH announced its dissolution in 1953, giving way to new political conglomerates. There is no news of the Feminine Artistic Society after 1917; the Ladies Club kept going through the 1920s but subsequently disappeared, and the old Reading Circle gave way to the National Women Council. Female groups enabled the reconstruction of new genealogies for women, intimate and in solidarity, lineages that dismantled paternal authority.

Their political action, rarely enunciated by local modern art historiography, refers to a diversity of sensibilities and ideological positions that, far from confrontation, find common ground on the universality of women's oppression, especially regarding legal rights: economic, civil and social. Conceiving women's organizations upon women's own experience, understood as thought and action, forces us to rethink the spaces of autonomous and collective creation, as well as the resignification of gender roles in the Chilean arts. Modern women who lived between 1914 and 1939 left evidence of their political and social position, memories of themselves in the material trace of their works and a significant organization of promotion, art market and social support that could only be generated on exclusion. They also allowed themselves to strain the conventions of the domestic dimension against public life, through the construction of an autonomous space of creation and reflection based on female subjectivity: Virginia Woolf's (1882-1941)

A Room of One's Own. The feminist knots, according to Chilean sociologist Julieta Kirkwood (1937-1985), signal times of recovery, openness, negotiation and return; the production of feminine knowledge incorporates words, linguistics. They name, enunciate and transform, to transfer what was believed to be personal, everyday experience, to the collective.

Translated by Sebastián Jatz Rawicz