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The Dance of Domesticity: How gender constructs obscure lived experience at museums

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THE DANCE OF DOMESTICITY: HOW GENDER CONSTRUCTS OBSCURE LIVED EXPERIENCE AT MUSEUMS

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to its subject, Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein, and to the many women whose commitment to multiple forms of work have yet to be fully appreciated, interpreted, or understood.

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This thesis was born of lessons from countless teachers over many years. Submitting it for publication marks a surprising and gratifying new chapter in my life.

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The Dance of Domesticity:

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ABSTRACT

My thesis focuses on Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein and Ernest L. Blumenschein, married artists born in the late 1860s. Ernest Blumenschein was an important regional artist and member of the Taos Society of Artists (TSA). Paintings by Blumenschein and other TSA members promoted tourism in the Southwestern United States through annual exhibitions and their use in advertising the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway (AT&SF). Mary Greene Blumenschein was an award-winning painter and illustrator whose work focused on images of women at the beginning of the twentieth century, however, she is now a secondary and obscure figure in art history. I compare Mary and Ernest's lived experience with how they are represented at the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum in Taos, New Mexico to examine how museums use the historical paradigms of domestic ideology and separate gendered spheres to amplify men's significance and diminish women's accomplishments and experiences.

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> As to Louisa's portrait or Frog, I do not want to be represented by anything so far back . . . I may never paint so well, and then again I may paint a darn sight more artistically. In any case they do not represent me in any way as I am at present and I do not want to exhibit them again.
>
> *Mary Greene Blumenschein, July 1, 1930*

> You're pretty fine as wives go now a-days – and I have no kicks to register. I suppose, in fact I have a suspicion, that I might have been improved upon in many delicate situations that required a less primitive nature than my crude one, where instead of using my natural "caveman methods" I should have said "you're right dearie; come here and kiss father." It takes time to train a husband!
>
> *Ernest Blumenschein, February 4, 1919*

INTRODUCTION

Though born in 1869, Mary Greene Blumenschein faced negotiations and dilemmas as a working artist and married partner that are familiar and still challenging to families today. The epigraphs illustrate two primary tensions in her life. Mary was committed to creating; making art was a fundamental part of her identity and an engaged life-long practice. Mary also valued her identity as wife and mother and saw herself in traditionally Victorian gendered terms as a taming or civilizing influence within her family. This thesis explores how Mary integrated these disparate roles, how she was guided by social structures and expectations in her decisions, and how those choices have been portrayed and employed, not as representations of her lived experience, but to amplify and institutionalize the gendered and raced forces that ultimately circumscribed her options.

Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein and Ernest L. Blumenschein were married artists born in the late 1860s who lived until the late 1950s. Along with their daughter Helen, (1909-1989), they are the subjects of the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum, a small house museum in Taos, New Mexico. Ernest is best known for his role as a founding member

of the Taos Society of Artists, a regional group of painters whose work toured nationally from 1915 to 1929 and was featured in publicity for the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway. Mary Greene Blumenschein first achieved success as an oil painter in Paris in 1900 and continued her career as an illustrator based in New York from 1909 to 1919. While Ernest's paintings have grown in import and popularity, Mary's paintings are now almost never exhibited. I began studying the Blumenscheins in part to explore why and how Ernest remains famous while Mary is merely a footnote in art history. I discovered that the issues of continued historical and artistic celebrity are complex and determined by the very structure of the society in which the Blumenscheins lived and which we inherit today. In her groundbreaking *ARTnews* article, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" written in 1971, Linda Nochlin argues that "the answer to why there have been no great women artists lies not in the nature of individual genius or the lack of it, but in the very nature of given social institutions and what they forbid or encourage."[1] Unfortunately, interpretations of artists, in historical monographs and in house museums like the E. L. Blumenschein House and Museum, have not changed significantly since Nochlin debunked the idea of male artistic genius and female artistic amateurism over fifty years ago.[2] The Blumenscheins' historiography is therefore worthy of examination as an example of how constructions of men and women, displayed in institutionally influential cultural locations like museums, continue to reflect and, more importantly, structure social expectations based in gender roles.

The little information available about Mary is dissonant. Though the museum displays evidence documenting her long career, Mary's domesticity and her roles as wife and

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[1] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," *ARTnews*, January 1971, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists-4201/.
[2] Nochlin, 11.

mother are the focus of the institution's narrative. Similarly, Ernest Blumenschein's two biographies, *In Contemporary Rhythm: The Art of Ernest L. Blumenschein* by Peter H. Hassrick and Elizabeth J. Cunningham, and *Ernest Blumenschein: The Life of an American Artist* by Robert W. Larson and Carol B. Larson, note Mary's career but overall each biography highlights her role as Ernest's supportive partner and Helen's mother.[3] To better understand these interpretations, I conducted primary research on-line in the Smithsonian Archives of American Art (SAAA) and in-person at the family's archives at the New Mexico History Museum's Fray Angélico Chávez History Library (FACHL) and the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives. I visited Taos and the museum many times conducting interviews with employees, board members, former administrators, and other members of the Taos community who either knew the Blumenscheins or were affiliated with the museum. Both the FACHL and SAAA hold large collections relating to Ernest, Mary and Helen Blumenschein including correspondence, unpublished biographies, memoirs, financial and business records, photographs and ephemera. For twenty-nine years, from 1910 until 1939, Mary, Ernest and Helen spent a minimum of at least three months to as much as entire years apart from each other. When separated, the family wrote regularly, often several times a week, and most of this correspondence is archived. Indeed, in a postscript on a May 3, 1927 letter to Ernest, Helen teasingly asks, "Would you be so kind as to place this letter in the archives of the B family." This note suggests that the family may have planned to retain and

[3] Peter H. Hassrick and Elizabeth J. Cunningham, *In Contemporary Rhythm: The Art of Ernest L. Blumenschein*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008); Robert W. Larson and Carole Larson, *Ernest L. Blumenschein: The Life of an American Artist*, Oklahoma Western Biographies, volume 28 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013).

make public their lengthy correspondence.[4] In these archives, I discovered a second compelling reason to reconsider their historiography – the Blumenschein family was far more complex, interesting and reflective of contemporary issues today than suggested by current accounts at the museum and Ernest's two biographies.

As I continued my research, I questioned the very fundamental choice to make Ernest the central character in the Blumenschein narrative with its invocation of what Nochlin calls the "golden-nugget theory of genius and the free enterprise conception of individual achievement."[5] The museum and books center Ernest, specifically his art and his experiences in the Southwestern United States. To date, no one has published a study of Mary Greene Blumenschein or cataloged her artwork. I began to wonder what the Blumenschein's lives might tell us if Mary were instead the central historical actor, if I made primary "the social and institutional structures within which [she] lived and worked?"[6] In exploring that central question, I found even more nuanced stories. The first is that of Mary Shepard Greene and her partnership with Ernest Blumenschein, which focuses on how women and men find agency and negotiate their lives to build singular identities that both fit and challenge the social constraints of their time. The second is that of historiography, how historians and other scholars write about their subjects' negotiations, what museums, historians, and art historians prioritize in that narrative and how that interpretation is itself a product and negotiation of the social constraints of its time.

One of the first obvious gaps I encountered was accessing Mary's paintings. Ernest was prolific and his works are readily seen in art museums throughout the world and in the

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[4] Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mary Greene Blumenschein to Ernest Blumenschein," May 3, 1927, Box 1, Folder 24: Helen Blumenschein, 1926-1927, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.
[5] Nochlin, 7.
[6] Nochlin.

Southwest where I live and produced this study. I have seen many of his paintings in person including *Star Road and White Sun* (1920) on which I comment later. In contrast, Mary seems to have produced fewer works and the whereabouts of most of her paintings are now unknown. Even works whose location are known are rarely if ever displayed. They are warehoused in museums, presumed to be in private collections or lost. I felt it was important to include analysis of several paintings by Mary and Ernest in this paper and had little choice but to use reproductions of their works found online and in books. While I would like to say that I deliberately chose which of Mary's paintings to analyze, that would not be accurate. The only available good-quality reproductions of her best works which were produced before 1919 are: *Un Regard Fugitif* (1900) (Figure 3) and *The Princess and the Frog* (1909) (Figure 4) at the Brooklyn Museum of Art; the *Portrait of Louisa Fletcher* (1913) at Newfields Indianapolis Museum of Art; and her *Self Portrait* (1915) at the National Academy of Design. Searching various archives and on-line sources, I found that there are at least twenty pre-1919 paintings whose locations are now unknown and which can only be seen in black and white reproductions and poor quality photocopies.(Figures 1 and 2) While Mary's artistry is not the subject of this paper, it would be virtually impossible to assess her skills at this point with so much of her work lost and unavailable. I begin with this dichotomy in how Ernest and Mary's paintings were preserved to provide the first example of the seemingly innocent actions that now act as structural forces reifying Ernest's primary place in the art historical record. Mary is one of many artists whose works fell out of favor and are now obscured, but how are we to understand why that happened and its lasting implications?

Nochlin spoke directly to the question of this disparity, writing that:

> . . .the question of women's equality – in art as in any other realm – devolves not upon the relative benevolence or ill-will of individual men, nor the

> self-confidence or abjectness of individual women, but rather on the very nature of our institutional structures themselves and the view of reality which they impose on the human beings who are part of them.[7]

Nochlin was at the forefront in recognizing the ways that social structures mediate our worldview. Since the E.L. Blumenschein Museum was founded in the early 1970s, feminist, deconstructivist, gender, African-American, LatinX, queer and intersectional theorists have encouraged a more holistic version of history, one that exposes hidden power dynamics and resists simple explanations to consider the complexities of lived experience.[8] Locations of public history, particularly house museums, historic and archaeological sites, and national monuments, struggle to incorporate new interpretations into exhibits that, because of their material nature, are static and require intensive and expensive efforts to recreate.[9] Using gender as my primary lens, I explore these dynamics and contribute to this interdisciplinary dialogue in two ways. I reconstruct the Blumenschein family history from a more holistic perspective recognizing the influence of traditional gender roles and examining them as social construction. Using this new narrative, I then examine displays at the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum that, because of their focus on Mary as a model of

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[7] Nochlin.

[8] Dydia DeLyser, "'Thus I Salute the Kentucky Daisey's Claim': Gender, Social Memory, and the Mythic West at a Proposed Oklahoma Monument," *Cultural Geographies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 63; Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez, "A Woman with No Names and Many Names: Lynching, Gender, Violence and Subjectivity," in *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 68–80; S. Saadiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (January 1, 2008): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1; Karen J. Leong, "Still Walking, Still Brave: Mapping Gender, Race, and Power in U.S. Western History," *Pacific Historical Review* 79, no. 4 (2010): 618–28, https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2010.79.4.618; Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015).

[9] Jane R. Glaser and Artemis A. Zenetou, eds., *Gender Perspectives: Essays on Women in Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); Amy K. Levin, ed., *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums: A Routledge Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010); Max Page, *Why Preservation Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

domesticity, miss opportunities to highlight the nuanced, multi-faceted reality of domestic life at the Blumenschein home. The displays diminish Mary's professional contributions, amplify the significance of Ernest's career and elide authentic depictions of the dual career couple in the early twentieth century. The museum exhibitions and Ernest's biographers also use domestic ideology as a frame without acknowledging its ontological location in a heterosexual male-female binary and its purposeful racial boundaries. Doing so, necessarily distorts the narrative and omits some of the most compelling and complex aspects of the Blumenschein's lives.

Within museology, there is a small but growing subset of literature focused on gender and museums that parallels and is informed by scholarship in gender studies, literary theory, sociology, anthropology, and history. The earliest articles linking museums and gender were written during the emergence of second wave feminism in the 1970s and 1980s.[10] The subject has recently received renewed attention in response to socio-political events including academia's broad adoption of intersectional theory, social movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter and, most recently, female retrenchment from the workforce in the United States during the Covid19 pandemic.[11] Feminist museum interventions often derive from international scholars, are explicitly interdisciplinary in nature, and use post-structuralist techniques of gender theory and analysis. These interventions explore how museums, as trusted authoritative centers of scholarship and learning, are steeped in

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[10] Arndís Bergsdóttir, "Museums and Feminist Matters: Considerations of a Feminist Museology," *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 24, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 128, https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2016.1182945; Tiffany Isselhardt and Lauren Cross, "You Love Them, but You Don't Know Them: Recognizing and Welcoming Lived Experiences," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 63, no. 4 (October 2020): 571–78.

[11] Ashley E. Remer, "Editorial," *Museum International* 72, no. 1–2 (January 2, 2020): 1–7, https://doi.org/10.1080/13500775.2020.1806586; Kerry Hannon, "In the #MeToo Era, Museums Celebrate Women," *New York Times*, October 23, 2019, nytime.com/2019/10/23/arts/design/museums-celebrate-women-metoo.html.

patriarchal and colonialist patterns of knowledge construction and production. Most articles or books offer versions of the following definitions as common starting points though specific references vary depending on academic discipline and the geographic region where the author is conducting their studies. My thesis is specifically framed by Judith Butler's theories of gender construction, Amanda Zink's examination of colonial domesticity in print culture and Gaby Porter's feminist analysis of museums. I use the following theoretical framework and assumptions drawn from their work and additional sources as cited.

Gender and race can be used as methods to explore how power is unevenly applied in society and historically has been denied to people and groups marginalized as other including those gendered as women. Gender and race are not fixed categories but are social constructions comprised of a spectrum of identities and learned behaviors. Though socially constructed, in Euro-American culture both categories are commonly understood to be natural or essential biological functions organized along binaries of male and female, White and other, rather than along a spectrum. Mono-normative heterosexuality is also an assumed construction linked to and helping to define gender. The naturalized conception of gender and a male-female binary form organizing principles and a framework that influence both individual psyches and social structures. How we create historical narrative, in texts including museums, is an important method of structuring control that maintains and reinforces these gender and racial ideals. Text has a broad meaning in this context and is drawn from the field of semiotics which proposes that text is not limited to written or verbal communication but is instead any organized system of symbols (commonly called "signs" in the field of semiotics) that can be "read" for overt and/or implicit meaning. Likewise, in this epistemological framework, objects do not hold intrinsic meaning or value instead meaning

and value are derived from how and where objects fit and are used within a larger system. Sometimes a pipe is not just a pipe. The semiotic definition of text is expansive and can be used to examine and interpret essentially all institutions, experiences, and systems. Within museology, the semiotic definition of text is utilized to examine how curation and stage craft combine with narrative to ascribe meaning to museum objects and museum experiences.[12]

My thesis deconstructs how the socially constructed ideals of gendered spheres and domesticity influenced Ernest and Mary Blumenschein's sense of self and their lives. I then examine how these same ideals influence exhibits at the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum and create gendered stereotypes of the Blumenscheins rather than interpreting their experiences with nuance and accuracy. I primarily focus on gender, but race is a second important element of analysis throughout the thesis. The Blumenscheins helped to colonize the town of Taos in the early 1900s when it was comprised primarily of New Mexican and Indigenous peoples. Ernest's paintings of Taos Puebloans and New Mexican Taoseños can be seen as a form of extractive economy like coal mining or cattle ranching. Colonial domesticity, as a tool used in that process, is also on display at the museum. Privileging gender identity as a singular phenomenon and ignoring the intersectional nature of social constructions would limit my arguments in the exact ways that I critique.

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[12] Gail Bederman, "Chapter 1: Remaking Manhood through Race and Civilization," in *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Judith Butler, *Gender Troubles: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Darlene E. Clover and Kathy Sandford, "Educating Epistemic Justice and Resistance Through the Feminist Museum Hack," *Museum International* 72, no. 1–2 (2020): 56–67; Darlene E. Clover, "Chapter 6: Women's and Gender Museums," in *Rethinking Communities and Adult Learning* (Brill, 2022), 94–109, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004518032_007; Tiffany R Isselhardt, Dr. Ruby Oram, and Dr. Elizabeth D. Worley Medley, "Introduction, Chapter 7, & Chapter 8," in *A Girl Can Do: Recognizing and Representing Girlhood* (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2022); Amy Levin, *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums*; Gaby Porter, "Seeing through Solidity," in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); Ashley E. Remer, ed., "Museums & Gender," *Museum International* 72, no. 1–2 (August 2020; Joan W Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 24;).

Race is itself another social construction and its manufactured nature can be seen in the words used to describe hyphenated American identities. Modern New Mexicans, with the persistent mythology of a tri-partite harmony among "Native," "Hispanic" and "Anglo" peoples, have a very specific history with the idea of race extending to sixteenth century explorations of the region by Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Fransisco Vásquez de Coronado. Though there are historical claims to purity of descent from Spain, recent DNA testing proves that most people living in New Mexico and Taos, now and at the turn of the century, are descended from a combination of both European-Spanish and Central American/New Mexican Indigenous ancestors.[13] I use the following terms because DNA clearly illustrates that race is based in cultural affiliation and its associated practices not in genetics. For people assumed to be of general European descent, I use White and Anglo, favoring Anglo when discussing experiences in the Southwest. White is the broader term and is helpful describing the original tenets of domesticity. As defined by the Oxford dictionary, Anglo is specifically orientated to language use and placed in binary opposition to Hispanic; "a white, English-speaking American as distinct from a Hispanic American."[14] For the other two groups, I take their names from land, community and/or practice-based identifiers. For people whose primary orientation is their role settling on and living in the Southwestern United States before all others, I use Indigenous, Native, Puebloan and Taos Puebloan. For people who maintained a link to and understood their communities to derive from European Spanish culture, I use the terms Taoseño and New Mexican and occasionally Hispano when necessary to address a larger context. To paraphrase Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Terminologies

[13] Keith Huntley, et al, "Colonialism and the Co-Evolution of Ethnic and Genetic Structure in New Mexico.," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 171, no. 3 (2020): 509, https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.23997.
[14] "Anglo," in *Oxford Languages*, n.d., accessed October 10, 2022.

demarcate a field politically and epistemologically. Names set up a field of power. . . [particular] terms ensure that by just mentioning [them] one enters a predetermined lexical field of clichés and predictable categories that foreclose a redefinition of the political and intellectual stakes."[15] I offer these definitions hoping that they will do the opposite and open new ways to consider definitions of self and social place.

[15] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 115.

SECTION 1: DEFINITIONS OF DOMESTICITY

"The culture of domesticity," "the cult of domesticity," "domestic ideology" or "true womanhood," are all terms created in the 1800s to describe an ideology and set of social constructions, expectations and behaviors based on women's reproductive labor. Domestic ideals and standards are still influential and reinforced by popular culture today. Catherine Beecher, the framer of this ideology, intended domesticity to empower all "American" women. In reality, this system was closed to women not perceived to be White, upper- and middle- class, or Protestant. The E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum uses female domesticity to magnify Mary Greene Blumenschein's domestic contributions and diminish her professional success. It's use as a framing device at the museum also limits other household members to neat categories and singular identities. Female domesticity is an example of gender performativity, Judith Butler's reconceptualization of male and female as a binary set of personal ideals, social rules and behaviors rather than fixed and organic biologic characteristics. In this section, I lay the theoretical groundwork for my thesis. I begin with Butler's analysis of gender to frame domesticity as a socially constructed system. I examine parts of Catherine Beecher's text to understand the original goals and tenants of domestic ideology and to illustrate its implicit bias. I then consider its use in scholarship on house museums. Lastly, I review a more recent definition of "domesticity" that broadens its applicability to contemporary historical analysis and interpretation.

Domesticity as a discursive boundary

Feminist critical theorist Judith Butler posits that expressions, like domesticity, are much more than simple figures of speech. Instead, they act as structuring systems by which

social rules are transmitted and enforced and through which individuals build identity and a sense of selfhood. Butler writes that "language assumes and alters its power to act upon the real through locutionary acts, which, repeated become entrenched practices and, ultimately, institutions."[16] "Locutionary acts" or rhetoric signify more than the words uttered; they are laden with implicit meaning drawn from the complex social conventions and rules in which each of us learn to operate. Locutionary acts both establish these rules and reinforce them eventually becoming so understood as to be unnoticed. The rhetoric of domesticity is one example. According to Amanda Zink, domestic rhetoric is "both mimicry and mimesis. It calls for the material emulation of habits of living and it interpellates the emulator into an ideology played out in discourse."[17] On first consideration, domesticity can be dismissed as an easily recognized synonym signifying women's roles as housekeepers, mothers and wives. However, consider other expressions used as shorthand for this social construction – culture of domesticity, cult of domesticity, domestic ideology, true womanhood, domestic reform, public housekeeping – although these expressions are almost all gender neutral, they need no gender articulation to be understood as intrinsically female in Euro-American cultural context. The idea of domesticity is thus an "entrenched practice" or "institution" nested or structured within larger ideas about being male and female. Domesticity, like other locutionary acts or discourse, is therefore more than a word, it is a process of socialization and identity building that establishes a standard of behavior and then regulates who, women or men, are expected to participate in those acts.

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[16] Judith Butler, *Gender Troubles* (Routledge, 1990), 116.
[17] Amanda J. Zink, *Fictions of Western American Domesticity: Indian, Mexican, and Anglo Women in Print Culture, 1850-1950* (University of New Mexico Press, 2018), 17.

Butler acknowledges that discourse is evident in speech acts pertaining to all aspects of socialization and identity, including race and class, but she is primarily concerned with how it is used to regulate, essentialize and institutionalize ideas about gender. She argues that gender's construction is dependent on a heterosexual binary consisting of two opposing categories of masculine and feminine and can be most easily observed in discourse and/or behavior that falls outside of these normative standards. Rather than being male or female, Butler writes that one "performs" gender through participation in gendered behaviors like domesticity. For example, the domestic expectation that women are primarily responsible for child rearing has translated into the idea that women are biologically more able to nurture, while this capacity is reduced in men. The convention or trope that men do not nurture then limits our ability to see and interpret male acts of nurturance because they fall outside of normative expectations. Nurturing acts, when engaged by men, are not "culturally intelligible" and are therefore elided or ignored as aspects of identity and in historical analysis of behavior. The idea that men are less natural at nurturing was widely accepted through much of the twentieth century and still influences if and how we discuss and recognize these behaviors. The resulting lack of scholarly discourse referencing men as nurturing is then a reifying constraint that amplifies the convention that women, not men, are nurturers and therefore more "natural" parents. I will first consider how discursive practices and assumptions, like gender conventions around nurturance, shaped Ernest and Mary's identities. I then look at how these same conventions were used to shape and limit narrative at their museum in Taos.

Domesticity, as an articulated ideology, began in the Victorian era in England and the United States. It was created for White, Protestant women of the upper and middle classes to

help balance men's roles outside the home during the Market Revolution of the 1800s. As agrarian labor diminished and more families moved to cities so that men could work in factories and businesses, women were increasingly relegated more responsibility within the home. Women were expected to manage both the practical work of domestic space and the emotional and moral development of the family. This expectation was situated within a complex social system that delineated separate spheres of influence along a gender binary: men were responsible for the public sphere as primary actors in politics and business, while women were responsible for the private sphere as primary actors in the home, child-rearing, education and religion. While this was the ideal, the realities and application of this system were far more complex and nuanced. In the United States, domestic ideology was written about and publicized in many sites from women's magazines to evangelical sermons, however Catherine Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe are credited as the most influential in articulating and popularizing the ideology.[18]

Mary and Ernest did not strictly adhere to domesticity's entrenched conception of separate gendered spheres. In fact, they stretched gender standards for their time, but the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum overlooks these behaviors and choices to emphasize actions that reinforce normative standards. Domesticity as a construct is used to limit more expansive interpretation of the Blumenschein's' lives and to reify gender performance and constraints. Butler writes that gender becomes "a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing

[18] Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Catharine Esther Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Nicole Tonkovich, ed. *The American Woman's Home* (Hartford, Conn.: Harriet Beecher Stowe Center; New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 151–74.

effects."[19] The frame of domesticity is a rhetoric of power that when left uninterrogated in identity formation is assumed to be an essential experience. In cultural locations such as museums, its power increases as it is institutionalized and codified.[20] Gaby Porter undertook a study in the 1990s to examine why and how museum "displays and collections did not represent the histories and experiences of women as fully and truthfully as men." She concluded that, "museums use sexual identity and difference as a firm and persistent referent on which to build the narratives of exhibition" and that displays are "formed around idealized and stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity, which are rendered as 'real.'" Museums commonly use gendered stereotypes like female domesticity to structure displays that present both women and men.[21] Though Porter's study is now thirty years old, museums have been slow to create gender equity in their narrative and displays. In 2020, feminist museum critics Darlene Clover and Kathy Sanford published the "Feminist Museum Hack," a series of questions designed to help visitors interpret museum exhibits and uncover gender bias in displays, staging and narrative. Using Clover and Sandford's questions trains visitors to see "the socialization of gendered common sense which is . . . manufactured in place through 'seen,' 'unseen' and discursive mechanisms that re-enforce dominant patriarchal views."[22]

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[19] Butler, *Gender Troubles: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 145.
[20] Butler, 147.
[21] Gaby Porter, "Seeing through Solidity," 107, 110.
[22] Darlene E Clover, and Kathy Sandford, "Educating Epistemic Justice and Resistance Through the Feminist Museum Hack," 58.

Domesticity as constructed by Catherine Beecher

Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe are credited with defining domesticity's core values and providing a comprehensive outline in their practical application. Catherine and Harriet were educated White women raised in Litchfield, Connecticut by influential Presbyterian minister and evangelist Lyman Beecher. Catherine wrote the *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (first published in 1841) and coauthored *The American Woman's Home* (first published in 1869) with Harriet. Both books went through multiple editions and were standard household texts beloved and popular for their everyday advice on everything from child rearing to treating illnesses to house design.[23] The books are more than practical however, Catherine Beecher sought to inspire American woman by redefining their homes as a place to find value, purpose, influence and meaningful identity. Her writings were a public entreaty to professionalize domestic work, for women to be seen as domestic managers, in order to create better balance or even parity between men and women. There was also a deeply nationalistic element to Beecher's work; she explicitly compared each individual home to the nation of the United States. She described "mother and housekeeper" as "the sovereign of an empire," who "wears the crown and professedly regulates the interests of the greatest nation on earth." Beecher's claims extended female responsibility to the very well-being of the American nation, and the world, writing:

> To American women, more than to any others on earth, is committed the exalted privilege of extending over the world those blessed influences, which are to renovate degraded man, and 'clothe all climes with beauty.' No American woman then, has any occasion for feeling that hers is a humble or insignificant lot. The value of what an individual

[23] Beecher, Stowe, and Tonkovich, *The American Woman's Home*, xxxviii.

> accomplishes is to be estimated by the importance of the enterprise achieved, and not by the particular position of the laborer.[24]

Beecher scholar, Katherine Sklar, writes that "the house exemplifies a new set of social boundaries constructed and inhabited by nineteenth-century Americans. It defines a new kind of space within which they forged their identities and around which they organized their social and political interaction."[25] Linking women to the domestic or home and the home to the United States, Beecher made a compelling case for women's responsibility as caretakers for the betterment of the entire nation. Beecher's attempts to empower women were ultimately unsuccessful because they negotiated within dominant patriarchal structures but did not challenge their essentialized foundation. Though women were ceded power within the home, that power was ultimately truncated by a social hierarchy and political structure that still assigned men the right and power to make decisions for women and other marginalized communities. Domestic ideology was a tradeoff, women were granted influence over their children and husbands in exchange for continued submission to men's political and public authority. By the time of Mary's birth in 1869, the cult of domesticity and the idea that women's role in the home was critical to the success of the American nation were well-established paradigms and were understood as sources of agency for women. Mary identified with some ideals of domesticity and saw her ultimate roles and responsibilities as an adult within a framework that empowered the domestic; however, her relationship with its specific ideals changed dramatically over the course of her life.

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[24] Catherine Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1850), 37; Sklar, *Catharine Beecher*.

[25] Sklar, *Catharine Beecher*, 163. Sklar does not specify in this quotation but the term Americans in this application is limited to White, Protestant families of the upper and middle classes.

Catherine Beecher's version of domestic ideology also assumed and privileged Whiteness, heteronormativity, and Protestantism. Nicole Tonkovich, in her introduction to the 2004 reprinting of *The American Woman's Home*, writes that "prejudices riddle the book" and provides explicit and implicit examples of how it centers and normalizes dominant White American culture. According to Tonkovich's reading, the book includes explicit anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic statements. Implicit assumptions about race and class are found in sections which justify "employing servants by imagining that their training and supervision is a charitable function of their mistress." Tonkovich outlines geographic bias in Beecher's ideology which assumes an Eastern American location for its subjects. Beecher's books include architectural designs for wood frame houses which were virtually impossible in many cities of that time and in the Western Plains and Southwestern desert. The books also assume easy accessibility and means to purchase consumer goods which was, in fact, often difficult in less populated and border regions. In designating specific attitudes and material purchases, Tonkovich argues that Beecher intended to create a "grammar of solidarity" that would universalize female experience. However, that universality was never meant to extend to those whose identities or locations - Black, trans, Indian, Italian, New Mexican, Jewish, Chicana, lesbian, Catholic, poor, less educated, Western –did not fit within its assigned characteristics.[26]

Amy Kaplan's groundbreaking 1998 article "Manifest Domesticity" extends the analysis of domestic ideology's inherent bias. According to Kaplan's reading of the 1869 publication of *The American Woman's Home*, Catherine Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe revised the text to amplify imperialist and colonialist aspects of domesticity.

[26] Beecher, Stowe, and Tonkovich, *The American Woman's Home*.

Kaplan argues that the Beechers were reacting to specific concerns about American identity and citizenship, questions that loomed large as the United States underwent significant social change. The country was simultaneously grappling with the racial and social divides of the Civil War, expanding its geographic and conceptual boundaries during westward expansion, and experiencing an increase in immigration. Kaplan contends that the Beechers saw these dynamics as threats to established White hierarchies and used the new edition of the popular book to recreate a domesticity that is "linked in complex ways that are dependent upon racialized notions of the foreign." Despite their residence in the United States before White Anglo settlers, Native Americans, New Mexicans and other Hispano-descended Americans were considered foreign. African Americans, whose residence in the United States dates back to its founding by Anglo settlers, were also deemed foreign. Kaplan makes explicit the Beecher's implicit assumption that the only proper American citizens were White, upper- and middle-class, and Protestant and that those from "other" races, classes, geographic locations, or religions were decidedly "foreign." At this same historical moment, the beginnings of a "scientific" construction and classification of race in the fields of biology and anthropology provided a rationale and justification to further deny full personhood and citizenship to those who were raced and/or labeled as foreign. The Beecher sisters' domestic ideology thus employed raced assumptions as a way to empower White women and engage them in, "domesticity's expansive potential to Christianize and Americanize immigrants" and those considered foreign throughout the entire nation.[27] In magazines, novels, newspaper articles, and other public discourse, domestic ideology became a proselytizing tool to

[27] Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (1998): 583, https://doi.org/10.2307/2902710.

differentiate White, American Protestant people and values from those considered, foreign and unwelcome in American society.

According to Amanda Zink, by the 1920s, the rhetoric of domesticity had grown from a presumptively benevolent teaching mechanism that empowered "women," into a more explicitly racist instrument. Amanda Zink describes a "popular print culture that sought to create and perpetuate a homogenous American society" using "apparently benign waldorf [sic] salad recipes and better babies contests [to] reproduce malignantly racist and eugenicist undertones in the Progressive Era's pop-culture scientific housekeeping movements."[28] In *Fictions of Western American Domesticity: Indian, Mexican and Anglo Women in Print Culture, 1850-1950,* Zink creates a nuanced analysis of how women who identified with these three cultures use domestic ideology in novels, magazines, advertising and memoirs to negotiate for power within a changing American landscape. In these texts, particularly those written by Anglo writers, White women were depicted teaching domestic work to women perceived as other, specifically African American, Native American, New Mexican and Hispano-descended American, to help them become proper "Americans." Though they teach domestic skills, Anglo women were not depicted as engaged in this labor. By passing the skills to "othered women," White women were then free to engage in more fulfilling activities outside of the home. Zink contends that White women's domesticity was a contradiction and conceit that relied upon the labor of the subaltern. Mary's and Ernest's assumptions about domesticity and how they performed the ideology shared these implicit and normalized racialized and biased assumptions. Mary's illustrations and paintings demonstrate perfectly the contradictory nature of White women's domesticity and, in later

[28] Zink, *Fictions of Western American Domesticity*, 27, 23.

sections of this thesis, I use them to show how she expressed the understanding that women's domestic role literally relied on appearance rather than engagement in providing domestic labor.

Domesticity and its use in scholarship

The E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum is an obviously domestic space. The nine-room antique adobe was the Blumenschein's primary residence beginning in 1920, and they lived there for at least part of each year until the 1950s. The house museum is distinctive among the museums in Taos, New Mexico because its subject is a family of three practicing artists. The museum is, however, typical among house museums in framing each family member's accomplishments by their gender. Ernest is featured by name as the central figure and the museum highlights his success as a painter and in competitive activities like tennis and bridge. Mary is described as secondary and displays and texts equate her with the physical structure of the home; her domestic role is used to subordinate her work and career. Helen, who engaged in historical and archeological work in Taos, is characterized as an exemplar of municipal housekeeping in the community.

House museums are commonly considered products of public domesticity and the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum bears hallmarks of its most traditional prototypes.[29] In *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums*, Patricia West

[29] Susan A. Dorko, "Public Careers, Private Spaces: Interpreting the Lives of Famous Women at American Historic House Museums: A Thesis" (State University of New York College at Oneonta, Cooperstown Graduate Program, 1999); Amy Levin, *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums*; Deborah L. Rotman, Ellen-Rose Savulis, and Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood, "Introduction & Chapter 1: Gendering the Creation of Green Urban Landscapes in America at the Turn of the Century," in *Shared Spaces and Divided Places* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 1–23, 24–61; Page, *Why Preservation Matters*; West, *Domesticating History*.

writes that "the preservation of historic "shrines"" was "consistent with women's private domestic role" and was part of women's involvement with "wider pattern of nineteenth-century social reform." Mount Vernon is considered the historical prototype for house museums which West defines as public history museums conceived of and created by women which recreate, mythologize, and memorialize a domestic environment of a White male figure known for his "founding role" in an American enterprise.[30] The E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum is consistent with this definition. The Ledoux Street home was donated to Taos in 1962 by Helen who was intimately involved in its establishment. The museum also used quotations from her book of childhood reminiscences, *Recuerdos: Early Days of the Blumenschein Family*, in exhibits and displays.[31] The museum is named for Ernest, the most famous member of the family, and the interpretation contains stories designed to highlight his significance as a civic lesson on American creativity and artistry.

Since the 1970s, scholars in literary studies, history, art history and museology have used the concept of female domesticity and separate gendered spheres as a paradigm in analysis and interpretation. In 1988, historian Linda Kerber published a critique of the paradigm of separate spheres concluding that "from the historiographer's perspective 'separate spheres' was at least in part a strategy that enabled historians to move the history of

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[30] West, *Domesticating History*, 2, 5.

[31] Helen Greene Blumenschein, *Recuerdos: Early Days of the Blumenschein Family* (Silver City, NM: Telacote Press, 1979). Helen Blumenschein's use of the Spanish word "recuerdos" is an obvious example of cultural appropriation. Based on Helen's memoirs and adult correspondence, she felt herself an integrated part of the Taos community entitled to use any aspect of Native or Taoseno culture she felt appropriate to her many projects. When read today, *Recuerdos* is a difficult text exhibiting an unexamined and paternalistic perspective. Interviews with several people who knew Helen personally have confirmed the impression that, although skilled as an artist and well-schooled in aspects of Taos history and archaeology, Helen's lifelong commitment to her parents led to a distracted self-absorption and Blumenschein-centric view of her community which are evident in transcribed interviews with her and articles and memoirs by her found in the SAAA and the FACHL.

women out of the realm of the trivial and anecdotal into the realm of analytic social history. . . the concept of separate spheres proposed a dynamic" to exhibit that women were indeed an important force in history.[32] West's book, published in 1999, continued a scholarly practice that emphasized and reinforced gendered spheres rather than interrogating this naturalized model. While West recognizes the marginalization and exclusion of people of color in her work, she does not question the use of a binary opposition of men and women. She instead analyzes accommodations and negotiations made within that essentialized model as did most scholars at that time. Her study remains important, however, for it provides necessary evidence and tools to dismantle the stranglehold of assumed gender binary and raced social formations. Although they remain within the gender binary, analyses like *Domesticating History* provide important historical data; they show the ways that those gendered as women and others at the margin negotiated within imposed limitations to exercise power and agency. As Butler suggests, such historical accounts both illustrate the existence of systems in place and show how those systems were used by historic subjects to "swerve from their original purposes and inadvertently mobilize possibilities. . . that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible."[33]

In 2019, Sklar, who has continued to study domesticity since her 1973 biography of Catherine Beecher, acknowledged the need to expand the historical idea of domesticity beyond women to all members of a household. She created a new definition that accomplishes this purpose and decouples the idea of domesticity from its Victorian origins in

[32] Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 37.
[33] Butler, *Gender Troubles: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 29.

both separate gendered spheres and Beecher's writing. The new definition describes domesticity as a universal human experience of constructed patterns, relationships and practices that change over time:

> Domesticity is not an easy term to define…. Domesticity is about intimate space, but it is also about the location of the space in a wider world. Domesticity is about women, but it is also about men and children. It defines and limits behavior, but it also creates space for innovation. Above all, because it seeks to reproduce daily life, it is a malleable process, a set of relationships that are ever-changing – along with the life course of those in its domain and their intersection with larger social forces. So, domesticity might be defined as the daily construction of patterns of intimate values and behaviors to govern the reproduction of domestic life in ways that shape both personal and social selves.[34]

Sklar begins her definition not in Beecher's idealized physical version of home but in the intimate and emotional space of home leaving completely open both physical and relational possibilities. She strips domesticity of Beecher's political intentions and, using a lens similar to Butler, outlines its constructed nature recognizing that domestic patterns shape and reproduce social structures *and* identity. The new definition also identifies domesticity's wide scope and this I would argue is its most salient point to any historical analysis. Domestic relations are a universal experience, and historical interpretations that elide, suppress, omit or strictly gender the impact of the domestic are fundamentally flawed for they discount this most fundamental aspect of being human.[35]

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[34] Kathryn Kish Sklar, "AHR Roundtable: Reconsidering Domesticity through the Lens of Empire and Settler Society in North America," *American Historical Review*, October 2109, 1249–66.
[35] Sklar.

SECTION 2: DOMESTICITY AND THE BLUMENSCHEINS

Section two of this paper explores how Mary and Ernest understood and performed domesticity in their lives to contextualize its static representation at their museum. Mary and Ernest Blumenschein lived at a time when ideals of female domesticity and separate spheres for men and women were considered natural biologic phenomena. Through textual analysis, I show how they each performed gender and include examples of their belief in this system in correspondence, magazine interviews, and readings of their paintings and actions. It is valid, indeed imperative, to question the validity of gender construction, however it is not valid to question the historical subject's belief in its "reality." Thus, it is important to note that while this thesis deconstructs gender and examines its impact on personal behavior and social institutions, it does not question or invalidate that Mary and Ernest held a naturalized view of gender that was, in fact, broad-minded for their time. Indeed, according to Zink, during the Blumenscheins' lives, domestic practices were recast as the scholarly field of home economics which bestowed modernity and importance upon "new 'scientific' methods of housekeeping and hygiene."[36] It is also important to note that research for this thesis shows that Mary changed in her relation to domestic ideals over the course of her life, particularly that of female submission. Ernest had little reason to change for as Linda Nochlin comments, "Those who have privileges inevitably hold onto them, and hold tight, no matter how marginal the advantage involved, until compelled to bow to superior power of one sort or another."[37]

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[36] Zink, *Fictions of Western American Domesticity*, 23–24.
[37] Nochlin, 6.

Section two is a combination of secondary and primary research on the Blumenscheins and the time period and locations in which they lived. First, I provide a brief chronology of Mary and Ernest's lives. Second, I contextualize their experiences in the American art community in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century. I then use this information to deconstruct specific moments and examine how Mary and Ernest's performance of gender changed over time and in response to their experiences.

The Blumenschein chronology in brief

Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein was born in Brooklyn, New York in September 1869 where she lived until she moved to Paris with her mother Isabel in 1886. Ernest was born in May 1874 in Pittsburgh, PA and he was raised primarily in Dayton, OH. From 1893-1903 he moved between New York and Paris before settling in Paris in 1903. Mary and Ernest met in Paris in 1903; both were already successful artists. Mary had won two prizes at the prestigious Paris art salons and had a growing reputation as a salon and portrait painter. Ernest was a popular illustrator of books and magazines with an established career in the United States. Both were in Paris because studying and working there was an important credential for success as a visual artist. They married in 1905, remaining in Paris to study, paint and further establish their careers. Mary began a second career as a book and magazine illustrator after they married. In 1909, the Blumenscheins moved back to New York City where their daughter Helen was born in November. Both Mary and Ernest continued to illustrate and paint and raise their daughter. Isabel died in 1917, and though Mary remained close with family in New York for the remainder of her life, she travelled with more frequency after her mother's death. Ernest first visited Taos in 1898 and began annual

summer trips there after 1910 spending a minimum of three to four months each year. His time away increased after Isabel's death. In 1918, he was in Taos for seven months from April to October and in 1919, he was in New Mexico for eleven months or virtually the entire year from January until November. In November 1919, Ernest purchased the first four rooms of the Blumenschein home on LeDoux St. in Taos, New Mexico. Most historical accounts of the family – at the museum, in Ernest's biographies, monographs and in books on art history – date their move to Taos to 1919. Only Ernest moved to Taos at that time. Mary and Helen continued to split their time between Taos and Brooklyn until 1939, spending much of the year on the east coast. In 1922, Mary returned to Pratt Institute to start a third career as an artist in jewelry design and fabrication. Between 1929 and 1931, Mary and Helen lived in Paris so that Helen could study painting at the Académie Julian. In 1939, when Mary was seventy years old, she and Helen settled in Taos permanently with the exception of Helen's WWII service.[38] Mary died in Santa Fe on May 24, 1958 and Ernest died in Albuquerque on June 6, 1960. In 1962, Helen donated the LeDoux Street home to the city of Taos and, in 1965, it was named to Landmark status on the National Register of Historic Places. It was used as an apartment building until the early 1970s when it was renovated and opened as the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum. Helen also had home in Nambe, New Mexico. She died on September 9, 1989 in a retirement home in Taos.

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[38] Mary Greene Blumenschein, Helen G. Blumenschein, and Ernest L Blumenschein, "Blumenschein Family Letters," 1944, Mary Greene Blumenschein Collection (AC 410);Family Letters: 1940-1944, 1900-1958, Folder: 2, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Helen served overseas in New Guinea, the Philippines and other locations from 1944 to 1946.

Maintaining American domesticity in Paris: 1886-1909

> I've had my fill of Paris and its bad air. . . If I'd live here a year I think I'd lose all the native refinement I ever possessed. I was improving rapidly in America, I thought, in the matter of development mentally and morally. I was just beginning to appreciate the comparative value of thoughts and their relative benefit. Here the atmosphere would cause a lily to droop her head and die of shame. I may be an idealist, but if that means to submerge to dirt and nastiness I'll remain one.
>
> *Ernest L. Blumenschein to Ellis Parker Butler, 1899*

> I had rather a magic birthday. For me "getting on" as I am, I must absolutely stop celebrating. . . four friends whom we have known all the time of this last stay of ours in Paris, came to say goodbye for good. That is one of the hard things of life in Paris. You meet pleasant people who become your friends, but sooner or later you part, and it is so improbable us meeting them again.
>
> *Mary Shepard Greene to Ernest L. Blumenschein, May 1904*

Based on correspondence, Ernest and Mary experienced Paris quite differently. Ernest writes of Paris as an outsider. To him, the city appeared in moral decay compared to American cities with which he identifies. Mary's writes of a social city where she finds emotional fulfillment from ex-patriot friends also living away from their native countries for varying periods of time. The following section contextualizes the Blumenscheins' experiences in Paris. It examines fin de siècle public discourse that links domesticity and gender with nationalism and considers how Ernest and Mary's communications and art production reflect this rhetoric.

Moving to Paris in 1886, Mary entered an American ex-patriot community at an inflection point for women who wished to become professional artists. The American female students of the 1880s and 1890s followed a first wave of artists who moved to Paris in the 1860s and 1870s and benefitted from fewer gendered restrictions than in the United States. Elizabeth Gardner wrote to her sister in 1865 that she and other female students were able to "hire our own models, buy our own *charbon*, and do just as we please." Likewise, May

Alcott Neiricker, Louisa May Alcott's sister, hoped "to combine painting and family and show that it is a possibility if let alone… in America this cannot be done, but foreign life is so simple and so free, we can live for our own comfort not for company."[39] Before 1870, American and European women had begun to succeed professionally as artists, however, their success created backlash against women's independence in the American community both stateside and in Paris.

Parameters were established on both American and Parisian fronts – in popular articles deriding women's artistic production, in critiques of popular women artists and by establishing the Paris art community as a place where "bohemianism" posed a distinctively gendered threat. An 1892 piece in the *New York Independent* written by Frank Weitenkampf provides an example of gendered discourse admonishing and disciplining women artists who appeared too independent.

> There has always been a fair sprinkling of ladies who painted flowers, still-life and the like, but they were represented by but little serious work. . . And how is it today? Things have changed much in the last two decades. Especially among painters is this the case. The prettiness and amateurishness, once so generally considered the almost inevitable attribute of women's work, is usually foreign to the methods of the modern young female enthusiast, who works side-by-side with her fellow student, with the same aims and the same methods.[40]

While supporting women's entry into the profession, with the statement that "things have changed" Weitenkampf's discourse simultaneously sets low expectations, diminishes women's art production, naturalizes men as a standard subjectivity and makes clear that women who wanted to be professional artists were acting outside of normative gender

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[39] Kathleen Adler, ed., *Americans in Paris: 1860 - 1900:* (Exhibition Americans in Paris 1860 - 1900, London: National Gallery Company, 2006), 84.
[40] Frank Weitenkampf, "Our Women in Art," *The New York Independent*, 1892. As quoted in Julie Graham, "Women Artists' Groups: 1867-1930," *Woman's Art Journal* 1, no. 1 (1980), 7-12.

expectations. “Prettiness and amateurishness” are established as “the almost inevitable attributes of women’s work” circumscribing, gendering, and differentiating female art production in terms that diminish and de-professionalize female potential and competence. Descriptions like “a fair sprinkling of ladies who painted flowers” and “the modern young female enthusiast” also downplay women’s parity with male artists. Most tellingly, Weitenkampf genders art production and art students; the women are the “enthusiasts” depicted studying “side by side with her fellow student” who remain unlabeled and presumptively male. “Male” artists were not only unencumbered by their assigned gender or attendant “inevitable attributes,” they were established as the standard or normative against which “female artists” will be judged.

Newspaper articles reminded female artists to perform within gendered boundaries. Women who became too successful were chastened for having stepped outside their femininity. Mary Cassatt was a common focal point of this discourse of control which used gender and nationality to question her well-established reputation. These public reprimands support Judith Butler’s contention that gender is used to signify “taboos and anticipated transgressions” and to delineate “the limits of the social.”[41] Criticism of Cassatt described her art and behavior as masculine and was intended to warn and regulate the growing numbers of female artists moving to Paris in the 1880s and 1890s. In 1891, Felix Feneon wrote that Mary’s Cassatt’s work broke gendered expectations of form, commenting “And always, the large hands, the beautiful masculine hands that Cassatt love to give to her women.”[42] In

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[41] Butler, *Gender Troubles: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 131.
[42] Ingrid Hollein and Max Hollein, eds., *Women Impressionists: ... In Conjunction with the Exhibition “Women Impressionists - Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Eva Gonzalès, Marie Bracquemond”, Schirn-Kunsthalle Frankfurt: February 22 to June 1, 2008 ; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco: June 21 to September 21, 2008* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 185.

1895, a New York Times article commented that Cassatt had a style that was "masculine, vigorous, and full of powerful personality" and had eliminated feminine elements in her work including "the lines of grace, beauty and delicacy. . . that were of the first importance" in women's painting.[43]

Publicity of this sort concerned and influenced the families of women who wished to study in Paris. Cecilia Beaux's aunt told her before leaving for the city; "Only remember that you are first of all a Christian then a woman and last of all an Artist."[44] The order of this statement sets the established priorities and values. Women, like Beaux, who were interested in pursuing a career, were literally exhorted to prove their religious adherence and gendered value before they could consider a professional life. Potential Parisian threats to American women's sexual purity became another focal point of concern and control. In an oblique reference to the noted "bohemianism" of Paris, Harriet Westcott wrote to her daughter, Lillian Westcott Hale, "Don't go off exploring on your own, you will never be taken for an old married woman. . . by those vicious frenchmen!"[45] Echoing Ernest's comment that the atmosphere of Paris "would cause a lily to droop her head and die of shame,"[46] Westcott outplaces and nationalizes her daughter's purity to "those vicious Frenchman" reflecting an emerging discourse in the 1890s which used gender as a metaphor to describe international political relationships between the United States and Europe. France was painted as effete, hedonistic and in decline and America as virile, morally superior and emerging. Historian Linda Kerber writes that gender has long "related to major issues of power, for we live in a

[43] unknown, "Miss Cassatt's Work -- John Singer Sargent and His Decorations Arrive in Boston -- New Art Museum in Springfield, Mass.," *New York Times*, April 21, 1895, sec. In the World of Art: Exhibitions of the Week and General Art Gossip.
[44] Adler, *Americans in Paris*, 34.
[45] Adler, 67.
[46] Lilies have a long history in painting as symbols of purity, chastity, and femininity. Ernest would no doubt have been aware of this iconography from his training as a visual artist.

world in which authority has traditionally validated itself by its distance from the feminine and from what is understood to be effeminate."[47] In this context, sexual purity represented more than years of reproductive control and the tenants of domestic ideology. America's ability to police and control its women not only reified patriarchy but became a potent symbol of the young nation's virility and a justification for United States ascension as a global force.

The most popular artwork of the time further reflected these combined nationalistic and gendered values. In her analysis of the American galleries at the 1899 Exposition Universelle in Paris, art historian Diane Fischer writes about a preponderance of "turn-of-the-century paintings of American virgins" as democratic manifestations suggesting that "any upstanding white Anglo-Saxon woman" could aspire to a paradigm of American moral superiority. The Exposition also featured paintings where women served as decorative reflections of their male gendered partners. Fisher argues that the many paintings of "women at leisure were reflections of their husband's material success" as their wives were depicted "[lounging] about in expensive dresses, just as ornamental as the art objects surrounding them."[48] The message of White women's role as decorative reflection is directly correlated to larger public discourse about domesticity and separate spheres. Women were equated with the home and were not intended to presume professional agency or power outside of a private realm. Paintings of women at leisure delivered the same implicit message as Frank Weitenkampf's statements about "the modern young female enthusiast" and the articles about Mary Cassatt's masculine attributes. Men could be artists without consideration of

[47] Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," 39.
[48] Diane Fischer, ed., *Paris 1900: The "American School" at the Universal Exposition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 49.

their gender. For women, feminine ideals including domesticity and marriage remained more important than profession.[49]

In the late 1800s, Americans ex-patriots in Paris formed social organizations because of the perception that the French art world created an existential threat to all American citizens and sexual threat to American women. The American Art Association of Paris (AAAP), the Paris Society of American Painters (PAP), the Franco-American Committee, the American Women's Art Association and the American Girls' Club (AGC) were all founded in the 1880s and 1890s and grew larger and more influential over the next several decades. The organizations both reflected and reinforced growing American insularity and nationalism. They were intended to act as American "homes away from home" and created facsimiles of American domestic spaces and activities for artists, art students and their families. The American Art Association of Paris (AAAP) was created to foster "Americanism" abroad and "to encourage young Americans in keeping trend with American ideas and developing on lines consistent with such ideas." The AAAP housed a library of English-language materials, hosted American games like bridge tournaments and held annual celebrations for Independence Day, Thanksgiving and George Washington's Birthday. Many of these organizations held similar activities and acted as dormitories for American women.[50]

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[49] Fischer, 49–61.

[50] Kathleen Adler et al., *Americans in Paris: Exposition, National Gallery, London, 22 February - 21 May 2006, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 25 June - 24 September 2006, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 17 October 2006 - 28 January 2007* (London: National Gallery, 2006); Emily C. Burns, "'Of a Kind Hitherto Unknown': The American Art Association of Paris in 1908," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-century Visual Culture* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2015), http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring15/burns-on-the-american-art-association-of-paris-in-1908; Emily C. Burns, "Revising Bohemia: The American Art Colony in Paris, 1890-1914," in *Foreign Artists and Communities in Modern Paris, 1870-940* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 97–110; Gabriel P. Weisberg and Jane R. Becker, eds., *Overcoming All Obstacles: The Women of the Académie Julian* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

Gender Ideals: Mary and Ernest in Paris

Mary and Ernest were both active members of the American Art Association of Paris (AAAP) and met there at an event in September 1903. Their organizational affiliation provides compelling evidence about their belief in American national identity even as they participated in Parisian academic art training. According to Emily Burns, an art historian who specializes in the American art community in Paris between the Civil War and WW I, "the AAAP was the nexus of US art practice in France, a place where hundreds of American artists met and exhibited." Fundamentally conservative and nationalistic, the members of the AAAP mirrored American artistic taste in technique and subject matter. They favored French academic traditions and training even as artistic trends in Paris at the turn of the century began to include transitional and modernist styles such as impressionism, fauvism, cubism, and expressionism. Mary and Ernest's painting during their time in Paris fit squarely within what Burns describes as this "juste milieau, or within the academic tradition but selectively appropriating more avant-garde styles only after they had become absorbed into popular taste."[51]

American artistic practice and style was not just a subject for the elite at the turn of the century as it is commonly perceived to be now. Artists and their images played a larger role in popular discourse than today. Art exhibitions were widely attended in most urban centers in the United States – at World's Fairs, museums, libraries, and art schools. National and local newspapers often printed reproductions of popular works from these events along with critique and commentary. Indeed "American" art became a source of political focus in

[51] Burns, "'Of a Kind Hitherto Unknown': The American Art Association of Paris in 1908."

the years from 1889 to 1900 because of critiques of the American Galleries at the influential and ultimately controversial 1889 Exposition Universelle. Both French and American art critics registered "concerns about the excessive 'Frenchness' of American art" or as one critic commented, "What is wanting in this American Exhibition is native painting on native subjects."[52] In response to widespread criticism, American artists were specifically exhorted to create works with a "national character" in the decade following the 1889 Exposition as plans were developed for the 1900 Exposition Universelle.[53] According to Diane Fischer, the American galleries at the 1900 Exposition explicitly politicized art so that it "not only projected the official image of the United States to an international audience; it also functioned as the [McKinley] administration's final frontier in achieving an empire." Domestic subtext underlay this national effort; the politicization of decorative and fine arts ultimately illustrates the enmeshed nature of American national identity and female domesticity. Fisher contends that images of men in the American galleries held "increased significance as a counter to the French-influenced femininity associated with the Gilded Age. They also communicated American supremacy by symbolizing vitality and virility." Fischer cites Charles Schreyvogel's *My Bunkie* (1899), a western cavalry portrait full of action and set in the open plains, as the ultimate version of gendered and nationalistic expression, noting that it stood in stark contrast to the confined, domesticated interiors of women's portraits in the same exposition.[54] Ernest's interest in painting the American southwest, which began early in his training and grew after several visits the American West in the late 1800s, was in part a response to these very public debates. By engaging this nationalistic call to produce

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[52] Burns.
[53] Fischer, *Paris 1900: The "American School" at the Universal Exposition*; Annette Blaugrund, *Paris 1889: American Artists at the Universal Exposiiton* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989).
[54] Fischer, *Paris 1900: The "American School" at the Universal Exposition*, 61.

"American" art, Ernest also fulfilled a more masculinized version of art production than the interior portraits of women that came to be Mary's specialty.

With an established career as a magazine and book illustrator, and a plan to shift his career to become a Southwest genre painter, Ernest had no intention of remaining and creating a home in Paris until he met Mary. He went to Paris in 1903 to gain additional skills in traditional beaux-arts painting and along with them the credentials necessary to sell paintings of the Southwest full-time. Peter Hassrick and Elizabeth Cunningham, his primary biographers, trace Ernest's interest in painting native scenes to his earliest training at the Art Students League in New York City where he studied with Kenyon Cox and J. Carroll Beckwith. The then recently established art school encouraged its students to depict "the landscape and people of the United States" and was representative of the growing nationalistic discourse surrounding art production.[55] Ernest's interest in Native American subjects was also reinforced by Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant, his teacher at the Académie Julien from 1894 to 1896, and by several subsequent trips to the Western United States on assignment for *Harpers* and *Century* magazines.[56] In 1898, Ernest and his friend Bert Geer Phillips "discovered Taos" on one of these trips, and the two formulated a plan to develop an American western art colony there. Citing the Barbizon school as model, Ernest wrote that in Taos, "living is cheap and inspiration on every hand. Nature is doing the best she can for me."[57] In 1901, he spent much of his summer in Montana, Wyoming and South Dakota

[55] Hassrick and Cunningham, *In Contemporary Rhythm*, 19.
[56] Hassrick and Cunningham, 18–34.
[57] Larson and Larson, *Ernest L. Blumenschein*, 42.

visiting the Lakota Sioux Reservation; sketches from that trip formed the basis for his illustrations of Charles Eastman's popular book *Indian Boyhood.* [58]

Though Ernest is now remembered for depictions of Taos Pueblo Indians and modernistic renderings of the Sangre de Christo mountains and the Rio Grande valley, his best-known early paintings are portraits set in domesticated interiors and adhere to conservative, academic standards of execution. Ernest's pre-1909 paintings created in Paris are decidedly different from his more well-known Southwestern themed works in both style and subject. In contrast to the change in Ernest's oeuvre, Mary's known works are set primarily in domestic locations and portray highly gendered activities. We know from reproductions and descriptions of her paintings, from her illustrations, and from magazine interviews with her that Mary preferred depicting the idealized turn-of-the-century woman. The following section will examine Mary and Ernest's artistic production from 1900 to 1909 in Paris to explore how ideas about gender and domesticity influenced early parts of their careers. Both Ernest's and Mary's paintings show how they depicted gender roles in their own work and how their work was reflective of larger trends in fin-de-siecle portraiture. Mary's works display idealized femininity while Ernest's explore idealized domesticity.

From 1896 to 1909, Mary showed at least six paintings at the Paris Salons and won prizes there twice: her first in 1900 for *Un Regard Fugitif* garnering a third-class prize and her second in 1902 for *Une Petite Histoire*[59] winning a second-class prize. Mary was the

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[58] Ernest L. Blumenschein, "Pocatello Idaho' & Our Camp on Bitch Creek," June 17, 1902, Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 1891-1970/Box 1, Folder 18: Blumenschein Family, 1902-1960, Smithsonian Archives of American Art; Hassrick and Cunningham, *In Contemporary Rhythm*.

[59] The location of *Une Petite Histoire* is currently unknown. The only image I have located for this work is a poor-quality photocopy in Elizabeth Cunningham's archive at the Lunder Center in Taos, NM which appears to be from a catalog of the 1902 Paris Salon. Most of Mary's best works are either warehoused, in private

third American woman to ever win a prize at the Paris Salon and was, therefore, in select company. Elizabeth Jane Gardner and Mattie Dube had each won second class prizes, Gardner in 1887 and Dube in 1896.[60] Winning at the Salon was a mark of success and distinction. Elizabeth Gardner wrote that it "gives one at once a position among foreign artists and raises the value of what I paint."[61] Winning twice at the Salon also ensured that Mary could enter future paintings there without going through the jury process. Mary's paintings were also finding success at exhibits in the United States; in 1901 *Un Regard Fugitif* was shown at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Seventieth Annual Exhibition. In 1904, she won a Silver Medal at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition at the St. Louis World's Fair.[62] Two of Mary's most popular paintings were her Salon prize winners *Un Regard Fugitif* (Figure 3) which captures a woman dressed in a fancy white gown stealing a quick glance in a mirror and *Une Petite Histoire* (Figure 1) which depicts a woman reading while sitting legs up on a bench. A third popular painting, entitled *The Princess and the Frog* (Figure 4) won the National Academy of Design's Julia Shaw Prize in 1915 though it was painted in 1909. It centers a princess in a scene from the Grimm fairy tale. By all the standards of her time Mary's career was promising, but what do these paintings and their success tell us about her? The works show that Mary painted women engaged in gender appropriate behaviors – reading, gazing in the mirror or searching for their prince. Indeed, Mary's choice to paint a tale of romantic love speaks to the deeply heterosexual, binary values she held. The style of the paintings show that Mary was artistically conservative. She

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collections or lost. Those on display at the Blumenschein Museum are from the end of her career after she had stopped painting to create jewelry for at least fifteen years.

[60] Lois Marie Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons* (Cambridge, England: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1990).

[61] Fink; Adler et al., *Americans in Paris*, 40.

[62] Hassrick and Cunningham, *In Contemporary Rhythm*, 46.

was aware of current trends in art but did not employ the emerging techniques of impressionism, pointillism, or other even more experimental modern styles. Throughout most of the 1910s, Mary was professionally rewarded in both Paris and New York for her subject matter and techniques. Her two Salon medals, won in 1900 and 1902 were matched by accolades and awards when she returned to New York. She was one of only a few women awarded membership in the National Academy of Design.[63] The *Princess and the Frog* was given high praise by American critics who said it had the "fragile gaiety" and "sensual beauty" of late-eighteenth century Rococo works by Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Jean-Baptiste Greuze.[64] Mary's paintings continued a long and socially comfortable tradition representing upper-class White women as decorative reflections of wealth and sociability even as they extended a newer trend which prized depictions of contemporary life.

Mary painted *Un Regard Fugitif* at least three years before she met Ernest. It combines an academic treatment with a modern subject and may have borrowed compositional elements from Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl*. Whistler's painting was completed in 1864 and shown at various galleries in Europe thereafter; it eventually won a grand prize at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle, the same year that *Un Regard Fugitif* won a third-class prize at the Paris Salon. The original painting of *Un Regard Fugitif* is not displayed by the Brooklyn Museum, so my commentary and analysis have relied on a computer rendition of the original and a copy of the painting held by the E.L. Blumenschein House. In both, Mary's palette is muted, the dominant tones are beige, brown, and white, and the small, detailed brushwork creates a soft and romantic effect.

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[63] Dean A. Porter, Teresa Hayes Ebie, and Suzan Campbell, *Taos Artists and Their Patrons, 1898-1950* (Notre Dame, IN: Snite Museum of Art, 1999).
[64] Teresa Carbone, *American Paintings in the Brooklyn Museum: Artists Born by 1876* (London: Brooklyn Museum; D. Giles, Limited, 2006), 316.

The subject is clearly a woman contemporary to Mary's time captured in a fleeting moment, a last check on her appearance before leaving for an evening out. The subject's off-center position and side to the viewer may reflect a concern with immediacy that is often associated with impressionism though the painting does not use an impressionist technique. *Un Regard Fugitif* is like other paintings of this time, including Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 2*, in its use of mirrors to reflect and double a female form.[65] It is also similar to Whistler's work in the subject's body position and clothing. In both, the female subject is offset in the frame, her left arm reaches forward and her face in the mirror occupies the center of the picture. Both Whistler's and Mary's subjects wear white dresses, a common choice because white was considered notoriously difficult and signaled a painter's skill. In *The Princess and the Frog*, painted for the 1909 Salon, Mary's style has matured; her work is less directly derivative of a contemporary master and based more in her own musings or interests. The Princess' billowing white gown takes up most of the frame as she bends down to discuss terms with the frog who holds her golden ball in his mouth. The overall palette is lighter and the work again highlights Mary's aptitude in painting fabric. The use of a fairy tale closely mimics academic painting's tradition of allegorical subject matter. Mary commented on the piece in a 1915 magazine feature saying, "My prize-winning picture, 'The Princess and the Frog,' [sic] is simply the reflection of my childish love of Grimm's fairy tales. After all, there are no tales like fairy tales."[66] Mary's paintings were clearly influenced by her training and life in Paris and upon her return to New York, her French influences were the subject of both praise and criticism.

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[65] Carbone, 315.
[66] Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mrs. Blumenschein on Women Artists," *Every Week Magazine*, May 10, 1915, University of Wisconsin Special Collections.

Unlike Mary's work which was primarily focused on women, the subject matter of Ernest's work at this time was varied. *Portrait of a German Tragedian* (1907) (Figure 5) was chosen for inclusion by the jury in the 1908 Paris Salon and subsequently hung at the 1909 Carnegie Institute's Annual Exhibition. *Portrait of Ellis Parker Butler and Family* (1909) (Figure 6) was shown to critical acclaim at the National Academy of Design's 1909 Winter Exhibit. Ernest completed both portraits in his last years of study in Paris, when he and Mary had been married for several years and worked side by side in a shared studio. Both paintings are also situated in the domestic; the German Tragedian's setting is the Blumenschein's parlor and the Butlers' painting as a family portrait.

Portrait of a German Tragedian portrays an out-of-work Austrian actor who had begun sitting for artists to earn money during his time in Paris. Ernest placed the portly, round-faced actor in the Blumenschein's parlor for the portrait, literally in Ernest and Mary's personal domestic space. His black suit, furred coat and top hat stand in marked contrast to the white walls behind him and to the light pink, blue and gold bench on which he is perched. The tip of his nose and his cheeks are ruddy, his mouth is parted in a smile and the small, round spectacles he wears offer indistinct reflections of light. While not a seemingly tall man, he seems oversize for the delicate bench and clearly not at home in this dainty space. Blumenschein biographer Elizabeth Cunningham interprets the sitter as wearing a "comedic expression" and writes that the juxtaposition with his background was meant to create "levity." I would add that the actor might be described as bemused to find himself in this refined parlor as if his outsize persona is uncomfortable off the stage and within the domestic. Though he is seated and smoking a cigarette, he has not removed his coat suggesting that he will only be in the apartment briefly, making just a quick visit to a space

where he does not fully belong. I read the actor as a fellow artist and stand-in for Ernest and interpret his bemused face as a response to Ernest's mixed feelings about domesticity. Mary's correspondence often describes Ernest's struggles with family time; how he wants to spend more time with Mary and Helen while also wanting to be free to paint. This conflict can be seen in two passages from the same November 1922 letter. At the beginning of the letter, Mary speaks to how much Ernest misses his family saying, "You are certainly beginning to sound pathetic so cold in the feet and lonely. I bet you do whilst I have our family spark of life here in school." At the end of the letter, she addresses his preference for Taos, "I shall be very glad to have you come [to Brooklyn], only in about four days you will begin to dislike things and then it will be awful and you will want to be in Taos. However, make the try. It is so much more of a family if we can be together most of the time. Helen would love it. You and she will enjoy the Saturdays and Sundays."[67]

The *Portrait of Ellis Parker Butler and Family,* an elegant family grouping, can be read as the very essence of fin-de-siecle domesticity. Ernest Blumenschein and Ellis Parker Butler, a popular early twentieth century humorist, met in 1897 in New York as young unestablished artists. They remained close friends throughout their entire lives. Ernest painted their family portrait in 1907 when the Butler family spent several months visiting Paris and living in an apartment adjacent to the Blumenscheins. Blumenschein was rightfully lauded for his use of tone to create dimension and balance in the portrait, but it is his compositional choices and the title that reveal how turn of the century gender expectations are evident in this painting. Ellis Parker Butler, for whom the portrait is named, stands in the

[67] Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mary Greene Blumenschein to Ernest Blumenschein," November 25, 1922, Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 1891-1970/ Mary Blumenschein 1922, Box 1, Folder 37, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

back of the frame, the lower portion of his face obscured by his wife Ida's hair. His dark coat fades into the scene's background bringing the rest of his face into stark relief. The sense that Ellis is in the background is magnified by his gaze which is to the right of and beyond the viewer as if something in the distance has caught his attention. Ida is gazing in the same direction, her dark hair also fading into the black background. Unlike Ellis, her figure is pulled out of the shadows by a beribboned white dress and coat. Their daughter Eloise sits in the center of the picture and is the jewel of the painting rendered in the lightest tones and with the most color. Eloise remains completely unshaded, and her frank gaze is the only one that greets the viewer. Her father's left hand is visible just to her left resting on the shadowed arm of the chair in which she sits. The three sitters can be read in hierarchical order. Ellis, looms largely in the background grounding and supporting the group with his hand reaching around wife and child as a strong protective presence. With his gaze to the distance, he can be understood as the authority who structures and guides the group. Ida and he gaze in the same direction indicating a marital team attuned to each other and attending to the same potential issues facing their family. Eloise faces the viewer directly able to do so despite her innocence and youth supported by her parents' protective embrace. The title is the final marker of domestic identification for the painting – *Portrait of Ellis Parker Butler and Family* – Ellis is the least legible figure, but the title makes clear his inchoate authority over the wife and child who remained unnamed. It is easy and no doubt true to explain the painting's name as merely a convention but what does that convention imply? How likely is it that one might read the painting differently if it were titled *Portrait of Ellis, Ida and Eloise*? Would Eloise, with her frank gaze, hold more authority?

Ernest's portrayal of the Butler family reveals turn-of-the-century ideals of masculinity and companionate expectations of women as mothers and wives. White Protestant marriage was a system of "reciprocal rights and responsibilities" within which men had authority over women and children.[68] From where did White, upper-middle class, Protestant men derive this authority? Economic and social changes in the latter half of the nineteenth century reinforced the idea that men and women were a binary pair meant to complement, or complete, each other. As agrarian life shifted to urban life during the Market Revolution of the 1830s and 1840s, it created a concurrent ideal domestic life parallel to industry. Father and husband was placed at the head of the household as its public face and financial director. It was thought that men's ability to dominate others in business was determined by their ability to dominate their own emotions or passions. Gail Bederman, an historian of gender who analyzes turn-of-the-century masculinity, writes that "by gaining the manly strength to control himself, a man gained the strength, as well as the duty, to protect and direct those weaker than himself: his wife, his children, or his employees."[69] I read Ellis Butler's shadowy but dominant presence in the family portrait as evidence of this self-control and authority.

Just as Mary's paintings reveal her engagement with feminine ideals, The *Portrait of Ellis Parker Butler and Family* is a visualization of how Ernest understood men's role in the domestic space of family in the early 1900s. Works of art illustrate artist's internalized social constructions and ideals. Ideals, however, are not lived realities. Correspondence between the Blumenscheins reveals more nuance than expressed in their painting. Letters provide a fuller

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[68] Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
[69] Bederman, "Chapter 1: Remaking Manhood through Race and Civilization," 11.

picture of how Mary and Ernest negotiated between the performance of gender ideals and the performance of behaviors necessary to meet individual and family needs. Butler writes that it is a common but false presumption "that to be constituted by discourse is to be *determined* by discourse, where determination forecloses the possibility of agency. . . The culturally enmired subject negotiates its constructions, even when those constructions are predicates of its own identity."[70] To read the Blumenschein's paintings as symbols of strict adherence to any socially constructed standard, including gender or domesticity, restricts potential interpretation and enforces the same binary empiricism this analysis disrupts. Instead, I conceive of gender constructions as a subtle and fluid dance that varies over time and context. As Mary identified with and utilized the aspects of domesticity that suited her needs at any given time, Ernest responded using aspects of masculinity to either challenge or assimilate her behaviors and vice versa. Bederman describes gender construction as "a continual, dynamic process" in which "individuals have no choice but to act" within the predefined social constructions of male and female, "to act upon these meanings – to accept or reject them, adopt or adapt them – in order to be able to live their lives in human society."[71] In other words, gender is a continually negotiated activity rather than a static, internal fixture *and* gender is constructed in relation to others not solely on the basis of individual ideals or conceptualizations. While Ernest and Mary were influenced by ideals of separate spheres and domesticity, their identities and their choices were not fully dictated by these external standards but changed depending on context. Understanding how Mary and Ernest negotiated these roles over time is critical to considering how gender was later interpreted at the museum, which behaviors were included or excluded to shape Mary and

[70] Butler, *Gender Troubles: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 143.
[71] Bederman, "Chapter 1: Remaking Manhood through Race and Civilization," 7.

Ernest's story so it reified social constructions that were not in fact aligned with their lived experiences.

Lived Realities: The 1904 letters

I have contextualized the social pressures experienced by Mary and Ernest to participate in idealized gendered behaviors. I now examine correspondence between them from early in their courtship to consider how they struggled to negotiate and fit those ideals within the realities of their lives.

The first correspondence between Mary and Ernest is a fragment of a letter dated June 15th, 1904, and labelled as "Letter to a." Though the label of a. seems odd, context makes clear that Ernest wrote this letter to Mary.[72] Written only nine months into their relationship, this is not an ideal love letter nor does it fit entirely within gender expectations. In it, Ernest clearly struggles to meet the masculine ideal of controlling his passion and acting as a breadwinner for the family while still fulfilling his personal ambitions as an artist. Idealized masculine identity was defined in part by self-control but romantic idealizations of artists and artistic "temperament" included passion and abandon in relation to artistic creation. Just as the "artist" was defined as male at the turn of the century, this "artistic temperament" or "genius" was also the sole privilege of those gendered as men.[73] Ernest writes about his dedication to pursuing a painting career saying,

> I'm simply helpless before some great Power that drives my little existence to it's fulfillment.[sic] The artist is artist to the death. . . art has the prior claims, art has the soul of the man and his conscience. All the struggles, the disappointments and discouragements have but bound me closer to my great

[72] Larson and Larson, 149: Ernest was known for using personal nicknames for his intimates. He called his daughter Helen by the name Bill in most of their life-long correspondence.
[73] Nochlin.

> love, my work, and all the pent up feelings, the unborn creations of my imagination, all the beauties my talent tries in vain to reflect demand and compel a life of servitude.

Ernest is equally tormented by potential financial concerns asking Mary in the last paragraph of the letter fragment, "Do you see ahead in the future? Do you see what can support the existence of two artists, as well as one? Do you see a possibility of trouble, sickness, of lack of financial success while we try to stick to the path of truth?"[74] Earlier biographers of Ernest have described this letter as a "preemptive strike against loss of control over his life" and as a method to dictate or cast "Mary's role in the marriage."[75] I would argue that these statements are less about controlling Mary and more indicative of the multiplicity of his identity as both an artist and a man at the turn of the twentieth century. These letters also display Ernest's vulnerability to Mary and his willingness to share his insecurities. Ernest was not the shadowy, strong, silent type as Ellis Butler appears to be in the family portrait, instead his writing reveals him as emotional and passionate, traits indicative of his artistic identity that did not fully align with normative masculine values at that time.

The first known letter from Mary to Ernest was written in September 1904 three months after the letter fragment by Ernest. Mary's letter was sent to Ernest in Trieste, Italy where, according to the text, he had gone after a conversation, likely a disagreement, about how or if to continue their relationship. Mary wrote the letter on two consecutive days, September 26 and 27. The September 26 letter is seemingly innocuous primarily discussing "domestic" events, the painting of Mary's apartment building, birthday gifts, and visits with

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[74] Ernest L. Blumenschein, "Ernest L. Blumenschein to Mary Shepard Greene," 1904, Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 1891-1970/ Mary Blumenschein, Box 1, Folder 32: Mary Blumenschein, 1904, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute.
[75] Larson and Larson, *Ernest L. Blumenschein,* 149; Porter, Ebie, and Campbell, *Taos Artists and Their Patrons, 1898-1950*, 321.

friends. The September 27 letter mirrors the intensity of Ernest's June letter to her and addresses her feelings about their relationship. I analyze both parts of the letter separately.[76]

I examine the first part of the letter to further contextualize Mary's lived reality in the late Victorian era. I believe it is important to dislodge contemporary assumptions and models of womanhood when analyzing this historical period. Mary lived at a time when being gendered female demanded bodily restraint in apparel and public appearances. I excavate this small bit of text to paint a picture of her day-to-day life and as a reminder that she experienced physical barriers and obstacles. These discursive and literal forms of control dictated what was deemed important and bound her behavior and sense of self. Mary's propriety, that she was dressed or decorated properly and behaved as "a lady," was a greater priority than the freedoms that would allow her to maximize career accomplishments as a painter. Indeed, these physical restraints paired with other mechanisms like the public critique of women who were perceived as too engaged in their career or too free in their behavior created implicit but resoundingly clear rules that were deeply internalized by Mary.

Mary's letter from Paris begins:

> We are in the midst of an immense quantity of painting. Men are sticking all over the front, sides and back of the house like flies, giving the place a fine coat of white paint. Even au 5^{me} we come in for a good deal of the new cleanliness, and the promenade on our balcony is immaculate. I am only sorry that it is too late in the season for me to sit out amidst all the neatness and whiteness.

Her comment "au 5me" likely refers to her apartment's location in the Latin Quarter of Paris also called the fifth arrondissement and colloquially expressed as 5me. This part of the city was favored by American artists and known for retaining its antiquity and gritty qualities

[76] Mary Blumenschein, "Mary Shepard Greene to Ernest L. Blumenschein" 1904, Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 1881-1970; Mary Blumenschein, Box 1, Folder 32, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute.

when other parts of Paris were modernized in the early 1800s using a plan conceived of by Napoleon Bonaparte and executed by Baron Georges-Eugène Haussman. Her statement, "it is too late in the season for me to sit out amidst all the neatness and whiteness," carries more import than might be obvious to readers today. At the fin-de-siecle, middle class and wealthy women like Mary did not venture out of their homes alone or until they were fully dressed. Women's public attire was complicated and included several layers of tops and skirts over a corset. Women wore "two or three piece garments consisting of a tight, boned bodice with skirt and overskirt... the bodice fit very tightly over the corset" as well as hats, veils, gloves and boots which had to be changed depending on the time of the day.[77] In this context, balconies, were important locations where women could be informally dressed and alone outside; they were intimate extensions of the interior or the domestic.

Mary Cassatt's 1868 painting *On a Balcony* exhibits one such space. Cassatt's sister Lydia is depicted on her balcony reading the paper in her morning dress, a garment worn in intimate spaces that "skimmed the uncorsetted body."[78] The painting, which now seems unremarkable, was unusual when originally created and displayed for its depiction of an upper middle-class White woman informally at leisure. Its title made explicit to a contemporary viewer in 1898 what might not also be obvious to one examining it today; that the subject's dress and the faint blue railing in the distance delineate this as a private space where Lydia is not dressed to go out in public.[79] The import of Mary's longing for her balcony is clearer with an understanding of its gendered spatial context; without it, Mary was

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[77] Mary W. Blanchard, "Boundaries and the Victorian Body: Aesthetic Fashion in Gilded Age America," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (February 1995): 21–50.
[78] Blanchard, 25.
[79] Mary Cassatt, *On a Balcony*, painting and descriptive text, c. 1878/79, Oil on canvas, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL, https://www.artic.edu/artworks/26650/on-a-balcony.

unable to do something as simple as spend time outside without the rituals of dressing and finding a companion with whom to be socially safe in public space. Mary's focus on her balcony, her domestic exterior, is a visceral reminder of how women's physical and psychic space was controlled by internalized gender rules.

Mary concludes her September 26 note on domestic matters saying, "Sunday I was just miserable, and now I am coming to the substance of my letter. This note has been a prelude to the serious matter." Mary begins again on September 27 by ceding Ernest control over the relationship even as she begins her plea for how the relationship would move forward. She writes, "I feel as if perhaps I was writing almost my last letter to you. It all depends so much upon what I find in your coming letter to me."[80] Mary and Ernest's letters signal an eventual pattern in correspondence between the couple that I interpret through a gendered lens. Mary is hesitant, unwilling to address important content, choosing to lead with descriptive passages of her life at home, and to avoid confrontation. Mary's reticence is her own negotiation with submission. There is no such reticence in Ernest's June 15, 1904 letter. In it, he centers himself and his career. He never questions his right to control the destiny of the relationship as he expresses his concerns writing: "I love you as much as it seems possible for me to love a woman, I respect and admire all of your beautiful qualities, but art is more necessary to my life than ~~women, you~~ [sic] a woman's love and companionship." Ernest has no doubt of his authority to decide the relationship's fate, the power to end or continue it was his patriarchal right, whereas Mary quite literally "depends" on his decisions.

[80]Mary Blumenschein, "Mary Shepard Greene to Ernest L. Blumenschein, 1904," 1904.

Mary's negotiation with presumed submission and evidence of her participation in gendered hierarchy is found throughout the text of her letter. Rather than citing practical concerns or even asserting her own needs in the September 27 letter, Mary appeals to Ernest to be "reasonable, and thoughtful of others." This is an appeal for kinship or family unity for Mary's mother was not pleased with the growing romance. Mary's request decenters Ernest and asks him to value her mother and the importance of fitting within the Greene family. "If you care for me as you say you do, you will bring yourself to see as I do in this matter. The rights of my mother and the necessity of conforming to others wishes besides our own." This request is both traditional and radical. Mary's request is traditional in its focus on creating and maintaining peaceful family dynamics and in her abnegation of power for herself. The request is also radical for it displaces Ernest as the ultimate authority in the relationship placing Isabel in a parallel role and thereby contesting his presumed masculine authority. Other passages reveal how Mary struggles to assert herself, a behavior then coded as masculine, "I have begged so hard for us both, and it seems dreadful to me that it is I, the woman who does the pleading." Later in the letter she writes, "I am doing much in words and actions for you; that you would value way above your inclinations if you knew this." I read both statements as protests against what Mary felt to be impositions on expectations of her as a woman and "good daughter."

Many gendered elements in the September 27 letter also center on Victorian ideals of marriage as based in friendship and complementary gender roles. Mary writes:

> Vindicate your truly good ideas and get from me some gentleness. I can teach you, and give to me a good man's view that may help me, as the other will you. That is as beautiful as art, for it is pure love – and the right foundation for such friends as I mean we shall be.

Mary's poetic appeal to Ernest as a friend and her presentation of separate and complementary attributes for men and women were ideas that predate and were further embedded in Victorian gender codes. Nancy Cott, feminist author of *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation,* cites numerous articles and treatises from the late eighteenth century which refer to the concept of "conjugal love" or marriage as a system of "reciprocal rights and responsibilities." She quotes John Witherspoon, president of the College of New Jersey, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and an influential Presbyterian cleric on the subject who described the ideal marriage as "the highest instance of human friendship."[81] More recent scholarship on marriage had reemphasized this construction including Sharon Marcus' excellent history on female friendship and marriage (lesbian and heterosexual), *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England.* Marcus uses queer social analysis and close textual readings to examine the history of women's friendships from 1830 to 1880 in England. Marcus argues that Victorian authors drew parallels between friendship and marriage and felt that "the emotions fostered by friendship were also those required for marriage." Marcus points to the ways that complementary gender characteristics specifically exhorted women to "cultivate moral values such as selflessness and empathy as counterweights to the male virtues of competitiveness and self-determination."[82] Mary's 1904 letter reflects a personal interpretation of that missive; that she will bring "gentleness"

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[81] Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 16.

[82] Sharon Marcus, *Between Friends: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); 43. Rebecca Davis, "'Not Marriage at All, but Simple Harlotry': The Companionate Marriage Controversy," *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 4 (March 2008): 1137–63. Many historians, including Sharon Marcus, use the term "companionate marriage" to describe the idea of complimentary characteristics for married men and women, however, Rebecca Davis writes that the term "companionate marriage" is more specific and was coined in the 1920s by Judge Ben. B. Lindsey, a social reformer from Colorado.

to Ernest and he will bring "a man's view" which, although unspecified, may be assumed as an opposing set of characteristics that value self rather than a consideration for others.

Mary and Ernest's 1904 letters reflect several tensions. While they were born in the late Victorian era and had been raised to believe in strictly separate gendered spheres, their lived reality did not match their trained identities. When Mary and Ernest met, she already had what might be considered two strikes against her adherence to gender norms; she was an established painter and was wealthier than Ernest through inheritance. Mary's 1904 letter and her paintings also make clear that she was conservative and strove to remain ideally feminine. Indeed, that was one of the reasons, Ernest found Mary attractive. He wrote of these qualities to his good friend Ellis Parker Butler in a 1904 letter describing Mary in the first paragraph as "really the most charming lady God ever made," and later saying she was "gentle and feminine" and "modest and sweet."[83] Ultimately, both Mary and Ernest's doubts were allayed, and they were married on June 29, 1905 in Paris with friends and fellow artists Raphael Collin, Elizabeth Nourse and Frederick Frieseke in attendance. They remained in Paris both working professionally as illustrators and continuing to enter works in the annual Paris Salon. From 1905 to 1909, Ernest received important and lucrative commissions to create magazine illustrations for stories and books by Jack London, Willa Cather, O. Henry, Joseph Conrad and Edgar Allen Poe.[84] Ernest's success in this period allowed the couple to live comfortably and maintained his designated position as the primary breadwinner for the Blumenschein household. To help support the family, Mary also began a career as an illustrator when they married and, like Ernest, created works for popular magazines including

[83]Ernest L. Blumenschein, "Ernest L. Blumenschein to Ellis Parker Butler," 1904, Ernest L. Blumenschein Collection, (AC 354); Ellis Parker Butler Letters, 1899-1909, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Santa Fe, New Mexico.
[84] Hassrick and Cunningham, *In Contemporary Rhythm*, 55.

The American Magazine, *Century,* and *The Delineator*. Though Mary received awards and recognition for her painting, her career was not lucrative before she began working as an illustrator circa 1907. Before marriage, Mary was supported by her mother's wealth and her career was entirely voluntary driven by her creative interests. In a 1905 letter to Ellis Parker Butler written shortly after they were married, Ernest wrote that though Mary "painted pictures for years, she made more money by marrying," due to "cash gifts" from her family. It was not until after she married and maintained her own home that Mary "needed" to work.

Transcontinental: Married negotiations and the 1919 letters

The year 1909 brought significant change to the Blumenschein's domestic arrangements – the couple moved from Paris to New York City where their daughter Helen was born. Their move back to the United States allowed Ernest to return to Taos each summer and initiated the events that would lead to the couple's next significant dance or negotiation. Mary began her life as a working mother, and she was featured in several newspaper articles and interviews for this dual identity and role. Interestingly, no such articles exist about Ernest, clearly there was no public consideration or curiosity about a child's impact upon their father's work and career.

A May 1915 interview with Mary in a progressive and short-lived magazine called *Every Week* highlights how she negotiated the idea of modern womanhood. Like Catherine Beecher, Mary adhered to gendered boundaries and male-female binary opposition while advocating for women's equality as long as women behaved in gender appropriate ways. Mary's discourse begins with the idea that women and men have gendered styles as artists:

> Women have something quite definite and special to contribute to the illustrative arts in America today . . . . Perhaps it is true, as many people assert,

> that women's work is less daring and strong than men's; but at the same time it is certainly more personal, spirited, and decorative. I believe there is such a thing as the woman's point of view. Women see different things than men, and they see them differently. Women are not exactly more sentimental; but they are sentimental at different moments and for different reasons.

Mary expresses both doubt and belief in early twentieth century gender ideals. She begins with skepticism saying "Perhaps it is true, as many people assert" but she continues her statement by gendering certain characteristics. She ascribes "daring and strong" to men and "personal, spirited and decorative" to women. Ultimately, Mary declares her belief in normative gender attributes concluding "there is such a thing as a woman's point of view" which she describes as based in sentimentality. After clarifying that she does indeed ascribe to the idea that there are distinct gendered emotions and behaviors, Mary reveals the ultimate purpose of her first comments saying,

> The thing for women artists to do is to avoid imitating men. Let them discover, during their student days, what type of work comes most naturally to them, and then stick to that. It is fatal to try to be bold and masterful, for example, if one is essentially careful and delicate. . . Personally, I love to paint young and pretty girls: not the merely 'pretty girls,' but the ideal American type of young womanhood, compounded of audacity, intelligence, and charm."[85]

The words Mary chose to describe women's painting – "care, delicacy, youth, prettiness and charm" — again fit idealized femininity which she pairs with the more powerful, but still acceptable qualities of "audacity" and "intelligence" when describing her own painting and illustration. Mary seeks a compromise that makes women's artistic production (and her own work) equal to but different than men's artistic production. Mary clearly believed in the value of her own work, but the overall tone of this interview is defensive. Did Mary feel compelled to express her participation in the ideals of separate and oppositional gendered

[85] "Mrs. Blumenschein on Woman Artists," *Every Week*, May 10, 1915, Univeristy of Wisconsin Special Collections.

spheres, where men's art is "daring" as opposed to women's art which is "delicate"? Like Beecher's domestic ideology which found agency for women within the home, Mary is stuck and can only negotiate the value of her work through a direct comparison to that which was considered normative and worthy – men's art. Mary's compromise is comparable to Beecher's plea for parity, limited by social constrictions that demanded comparison and never provided equality.

The 1915 interview was published as women were demanding equality on many fronts and were marching for women's suffrage throughout the United States. Articles, such as those highlighting Mary and her career, reflect a larger public discourse over whether and how much political power would be granted to women and what that power might mean to their domestic roles and "feminine" attributes. Public dialogue about career women came to represent a new set of gendered expectations that were a reaction to and adaptation of Victorian ideals of female domesticity. The idea of the "New Woman," repurposed female gendered expectations and was a counterpoint to the ideal Victorian woman. Rather than pious, pure, and submissive, the "New Woman" was independent, intellectual, sometimes political (particularly around suffrage), and potentially working at a career. The idea of the "New Woman," was not universally popular. She represented modernity but was also a cultural flashpoint and source of contention, derision, concern, and ridicule in contemporary discourse. The "New Woman," was also a new form of idealized femininity. Women who worked outside of the home were expected to balance this career with their work inside the home.[86] There is no evidence that Mary thought of herself as a "New Woman" or that she adopted its rhetoric, some of which was confrontational. Mary's artwork from 1909-1919

[86] Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, "Inventing the New Woman: Print Culture and Identity Politics during the Fin-de-Siecle: 1997 VanArsdel Prize," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 31, no. 2 (1998): 169–82.

coupled with the 1915 interview quoted above illustrate her continued belief in Victorian feminine ideals, including ideals which were no longer as popular as when she returned to New York in 1909.

Mary and Ernest's marriage characterized these broader social challenges. While Mary was moving into the busiest part of her career as an artist, Ernest seems to have seen her still as primarily in the role of his companion. In 1913, he executed a family portrait depicting Mary, Ernest, then three-year old daughter Helen, and Mary's mother Isabel. The portrait is a window into Ernest's "intimate space" or his view of domestic life. It was executed five years after the Butler family portrait and eight years into the Blumenschein marriage. The four figures are presented as two coupled groups; Ernest and Mary form one pair and Isabel and Helen form the other. Ernest sits at the back of the picture, leaning towards and looking intently at the viewer. His elbows rest on his knees and he holds a violin and bow. Mary is sitting to his left and is the least distinctly painted figure. She is drawn as a slight woman with her right side and head leaning into and against Ernest. At the front of the scene, Isabel sits in a red chair holding three-year old Helen in her lap. Both Isabel and Helen are the most finely rendered of the figures. The twosome can be read as a comparative study in age and youth. Isabel is dressed in dark tones looking pensively downward. Helen is wearing a white dress and gazes frankly at the viewer. The painted figures create an approximate isosceles triangle with the upper horizon line leading directly back to Ernest. Blumenschein creates pictorial balance and another pair by tilting his head and Helen's at the same angle and matching the direction of their gaze outwards. Catching the viewer's eye, Ernest and Helen are the central characters in the work while Mary and Isabel are presented as dependents in relation to the portrait's more important figures. Isabel

functions as a foil to Helen's youth. Mary reflects Ernest's role as father and husband. In Ernest's vision of his family, Mary is not given any props as he is, no indication that she has a career by adding paint brush or palette. Mary is not pictured as Helen's mother either. Instead, Ernest assigns Mary the role of his reliant partner. Indeed, Mary is depicted as almost one with Ernest sitting so closely to him that there is virtually no space between them.

What Ernest clearly depicted as intense intimacy became frayed however by his desire to spend time in Taos, New Mexico. From 1910 to 1917, he spent a minimum of three to four months there each year. In 1918, he was in Taos for seven months from April to October. In 1919, he was in New Mexico for eleven months or virtually the entire year from January to November. Functionally for 1918 and 1919, Mary was a single working parent. A series of letters written in 1919 between Mary and Ernest reflect how this separation changed power dynamics and negotiations in their relationship. In fourteen years of marriage, the Blumenscheins developed a sophisticated dance of domesticity or intimate set of communications in which they both understood the contours of engagement. The 1919 correspondence reflects this dialogue. It is more intimate and less formal than the 1904 letters where the couple was clearly still setting expectations and learning personal patterns. As their primary form of communication when separated for long periods of time, the 1919 letters also step quickly from intimate declarations of love to conversations about finances or Helen's education. Both Ernest and Mary often switch topics sentence to sentence. Although, there are clear differences in how they express emotions, Mary and Ernest seem to have cared deeply for each other as evidenced by teasing comments, pet names and direct statements saying that they love and miss each other. A reading of the complete set of letters

also shows tension between their individual goals and what impact achieving those goals will have upon the family. While Ernest showed little change in his assumption of authority, the letters also make clear that Mary had changed during their sixteen years as a married couple. She had learned to assert her needs and wishes though Ernest did not yet understand the strength of her resolve.

Ernest was steadfast in his passion for Taos and often wrote about the Southwest's beauty. In his letters there are many descriptions like:

> I really can't understand why people want to live so many months of the year in houses and cities. This great western country is so inspiring, makes your thoughts along large lines, and your life full of joy. You are living, sharing a thankful existence with all of nature, while out-of-doors in the deserts and mountains under a great sky. There is no gloom.[87]

He expressed support for Mary's continued career writing of it in multiple letters including this passage from February 11,

> I sincerely hope you will have a painting for this show [National Academy of Design], and get in the swing again. A bookstore here has your two last illustrated books and I show friends with pride the beautiful illustrations. One – of a girl (Sadie) in a little blue or green hat, about to open a door, is a peach! I never saw the original. Get to it, my best girl, and paint some corkers.[88]

Ernest's support for Mary's career, however, was not balanced with an expressed understanding of how time spent in Taos might impact her work. Ernest does not address this topic directly in their archived letters nor was he in New York long enough to have seen her actual painting. Instead, Ernest was focused on his own goals. He left Mary fully responsible for creating and maintaining the family's domestic life as he spent months

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[87] Ernest L. Blumenschein, "Ernest L. Blumenschein to Mary Greene Blumenschein" 1919, Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 1891-1970/Mary Blumenschein, Box 1, Folder 34: Mary Blumenschein, 1919 April-November, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.
[88] Ernest L. Blumenschein, "Ernest L. Blumenschein to Mary Greene Blumenschein" 1919, Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 1891-1970/Box 1, Folder 33: Mary Blumenschein, 1919 January to February, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

painting in Taos. In his letters, he advanced his wish to move to the Southwest acting within his traditional right to make decisions for the family that suit him. Mary wrote about her concerns for Helen's health and education and her wish that her immediate family all live in one location but Ernest did not address these issues in their archived correspondence.

In letters from January to September 1919, Mary's negotiations were again the inverse of Ernest's direct appeals. Like her 1904 letter, she avoided confrontation and was reticent to offer alternative plans. Instead, she kept Ernest apprised of Helen's well-being and of the many ways that Mary herself was busy and over-worked. She wrote of professional work as a painter and going to meetings as a member of the National Academy of Design. She wrote of domestic labor maintaining her house and responding to Ernest's many requested tasks and errands. She wrote of kinship labor visiting with extended family and supporting social connections important to the Blumenscheins as a couple. She wrote of parental duties, monitoring and ensuring Helen's progress in school and providing her with a religious education. Mary addressed her never-ending tasks in a letter to Ernest on February 9 saying, "Must stop. Will write – more often. The days are certainly much too short and as it is I have such a bunch of things undone."[89] Sounding very much like a contemporary working mother in a letter on March 2, Mary described juggling painting and parenting duties. She wrote: "Helen has been bursting through coats lately, to a horrifying extent largely due to mamma being busy painting & not thinking to have her change to second best at play time."[90] In some letters, Mary expressed her wish that Ernest would come to Brooklyn both to visit and to help. On February 19, she began a letter with this plea, "Why

[89] Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mary Greene Blumenschein to Ernest L. Blumenschein" 1919. Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 1891-1970/Mary Blumenschein/Box 1, Folder 34: Mary Blumenschein, 1919 April-November, Smithsonian Archives of American Art..

don't you come home for a month after you get this Academy picture off – & then go back again. It would be sort of human to do it and I should be so glad to see you and Helen would almost bust with joy! ? ? ? ? Come on!" She ends the letter by repeating the request, "I am enjoying my plantation [their nickname for the Brooklyn home] as I am running it now and am sorry you are not here to help enjoy things too …. to help wipe dishes – as Helen does, to set the table & make the bed."[91]

Mary's tone shifts distinctly in the Fall 1919 when Ernest fails to return to Brooklyn in September as she expected but instead remained in Taos to purchase the LeDoux Street home. In letters after November 1919, Mary asserted herself and set boundaries around where she and Helen would live rather than cajoling ("Would be almost human. . . Come on!") as she did the previous spring. On November 10, she wrote,

> I appreciate the regret with which you leave Taos, "Ville d'Amour" with its nature and lack of responsibility – but Helen and I get a lot out of the East. You will find her much improved I think. The change – the training of her mind, and the food do much for her. One realizes it more each year and that added to her life in Taos will be quite wonderful.[92]

Mary was compelled to become increasingly strong and self-reliant by Ernest's extended absences. His choice to purchase a home in Taos, far from the education and life that Mary felt best for Helen, forced Mary to act outside of scripted gender expectations. Ernest may have decided to move to Taos, but Mary had decided that she and Helen would live there when she chose and on her terms. Ernest seemingly ignored these contentious issues not understanding that Mary would be willing to break the domestic convention of submission to his authority. It was atypical for a family to live in separate locations for most of each year.

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[91] Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mary Greene Blumenschein to Ernest L. Blumenschein, 1-19 to 2-19," 1919.
[92]Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mary Greene Blumenschein to Ernest Blumenschein," Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 1891-1970/Mary Blumenschein, Box 1: Folder 35: 1919 April – November, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

Mary's choice to do so was ultimately a disruption that spoke more loudly than any of their written words. After 1919, Mary navigated her own trajectory, formally defying marital expectations that presumed male dominance. In doing so, however, her letters rarely show direct defiance. Mary remained understated, "lady-like," and cooperative in her protest simply doing what she felt important rather than engaging in prolonged arguments in writing.

In fact, there is compelling evidence that even after choosing to live separately for long portions of the marriage, Mary still believed in her partnership with Ernest and with the idea of companionate marriage generally. In 1944 when Helen was overseas during WWII, Mary experienced a health scare and wrote a letter to Helen to be opened in case she died. In it, she writes explicitly of her belief that women should marry saying, "We [Mary and Helen] have had happy days and experiences together that I hope you may repeat with some man of your choice. No woman is complete without a married life and I trust you may have that experience."[93] How are we to understand the contradiction between Mary's words and her actions? Butler writes that "the subject is not determined by the rules. . . the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable . . . possibilities that contest the rigid code of hierarchical binarisms."[94] Mary performed femininity in her letters, her artwork and much of her behavior, but she did not allow that identity to fully define or restrict her when it became uncomfortable for her. Mary's ability to advocate for herself only became stronger as she grew older. The 1919 letters are a turning point in this regard.

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[93] Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mary G. Blumenschein to Helen G. Blumenschein," August 27, 1944, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Santa Fe, New Mexico.
[94] Butler, *Gender Troubles*, 145.

Mary's family wealth was another arena in which she remained independent and which allowed her freedoms not possible for female contemporaries without financial means. She inherited directly and maintained control of the money without ceding it to Ernest or allowing him to use it as a joint or marital asset. To put Mary's ability to control her inheritance into perspective, while most states repealed coverture laws by the late 1880s, some forms of the doctrine of marital unity persisted until well into the twentieth century.[95] More research is required to understand if the inheritance directly funded the LeDoux St. house, or if Mary's financial independence simply allowed Ernest to use his own money to buy the home. In biographical sketches written in the 1940s for Mabel Dodge Luhan's book, *Taos and its Artists*, Ernest links the two events writing: "At the age of forty three [sic] my wife inherited an income sufficient to make her entirely independent. This was my lucky break. We decided to leave New York and make a home in New Mexico at Taos." Though this passage implies that the inheritance played a role in purchasing the Taos home, there is equal evidence that Mary and Ernest maintained separate bank accounts, filed separate taxes, and did not commingle most of their financial resources. The 1944 note written by Mary to Helen indicates that, 39 years into their marriage, Mary's inheritance was still sequestered from Ernest. In it she tells Helen that she will eventually be the recipient of Mary's inheritance adding "see that your father is financially taken care of as much as is practical for you."[96] It is notable that Mary maintained a matrilineal line of inheritance meaning that Helen, not Ernest, would remain in control of the family wealth. Additional analysis is needed to examine the extent to which Mary and Ernest shared funds and to better understand the impact of wealth on the entire family.

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[95] Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*.
[96]Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mary G. Blumenschein to Helen G. Blumenschein," August 27, 1944.

From her subsequent choices and from biographical statements written by Ernest, it is clear that Mary's wealth gave her the ability to live as she wished rather than complying with Ernest's wishes that the family live full time in Taos.[97] Mary's actions and choices after 1919 show agency and independence. She spent most of each year in Brooklyn where she enrolled Helen at an expensive private school for girls. Mary and Helen generally lived in either hotels or furnished apartments with domestic help. They travelled annually across the country and for two and a half years in Europe. Most significantly, Mary stopped working as an illustrator to experiment with different creative modalities. Against this backdrop, I read against the grain of gendered expectations in the next section of the thesis to highlight Mary's acts of agency and Ernest's acts of nurturance, both aspects of behavior that have been overlooked in earlier biographies.

From 1921 to 1929, Mary and Helen primarily spent summers in Taos and winters in Brooklyn. Mary was essentially a single parent for much of each year. Her activities were centered around taking care of Helen and she chose the extent of her engagement in other activities considered domestic.[98] The family seems to have had domestic help most of the time they were in Taos, including some of the time when Ernest was there alone. In Brooklyn and Paris, the amount of domestic help varied each year. When Mary and Helen lived in hotels that help was built into their housing. Helen began at Packer School for Girls in October 1922 when, according to a series of letters to Ernest, Mary's plans to enroll her elsewhere fell through. Fulfilling her proscribed domestic role as mother, Mary prioritized

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[97] Ernest L. Blumenschein, "Biographical Sketch for Luhan Book," 1946, Ernest Blumenschein Papers – Biographical Materials -- Box 1, Folder 2: Biographical Sketches, circa 1920s-1950s, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

[98] Ernest L. Blumenschein, Mary Greene Blumenschein, and Helen G. Blumenschein, "Blumenschein Correspondence," n.d., Smithsonian Archives of American Art, https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/ernest-blumenschein-papers-6744.

Helen's needs and spent several weeks getting her settled back on the East Coast. Mary,wrote to Ernest, "So far I have done nothing except establish her to my satisfaction which I think on the whole I did remarkably promptly but that was because I knew the ropes."[99] Expressing satisfaction with the independent mastery of her role amidst the tumult of a transcontinental move, Mary is not asking Ernest's permission or opinion on her actions. The next month in November, having gotten her house in order, so to speak, Mary announced to Ernest that she herself was back in school – enrolled at her alma mater Pratt Institute, "4 mornings x 1 afternoon for metal work jewelry – gold & silver in particular. Shall go all winter and expect by Spring to have a good practical knowledge of the use of those two metals. Anyway am having great fun with it all." This statement is again notable for the clear choice Mary has made to live on her own terms and seek a new creative expression that she finds interesting and engaging.[100]

Mary had the time to go back to school in large part because she did not need to work and had funds to hire domestic help or live at a hotel; she generally chose to remain unencumbered by the burdens of keeping a home and providing meals. She commented in the same November 2 letter that her room with Helen was, ". . .as reasonable an arrangement – with good food and a sunny room as I could find and is absolutely satisfactory . . . the table is good in fact excellent and at the Pratt there is a very good cafeteria for lunch so the feeding problem is very simple."[101] As Zink argues, domesticity was far more elastic and did not carry the expectation that a White woman of Mary's class would engage in housework

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[99] Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mary Greene Blumenschein to Ernest Blumenschein," November 25, 1922.
[100]Mary Greene Blumenschein.
[101] Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mary Greene Blumenschein to Ernest Blumenschein, April 2, 1922," Letter, April 2, 1922, Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 1891-1970/Mary Blumenschein, Box 1: Folder 35: 1919 April – November, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

herself. Tonkovich writes that Catherine Beecher "never owned a home." Likewise, Harriet Beecher Stowe could not have written books or toured to promote them without "depending heavily on domestic help, at times spending up to twenty percent of the family's income on servant's pay."[102] Mary's interpretation of her role was in complete alignment with contemporary visions of domesticity which promoted the idea that White women were meant to manage the home, employing "othered women" so they could be free to engage in activities related to but outside of the physical home. Beecher writes that "ladies, of property and standing, having families to educate and being well qualified for such duties, have relinquished a large portion of domestic labor and superintendence, which humbler minds could be hired to perform."[103]

Instead of focusing on the material aspects of caring for a home, Mary chose to spend her time on social and cultural activities also considered to be domestic mothering responsibilities. Letters from New York and Paris show that she and Helen regularly attended ballet, theater, museum exhibitions, gallery shows, art receptions and movies. The correspondence is also full of description of visits with friends and family. Indeed, Catherine Beecher addressed the American woman's responsibility to help "form character" for their children by teaching them appropriate methods of recreation including cultivating family and friends. Beecher wrote that "every person needs some kind of recreation; and that, by securing it, the body is strengthened, the mind invigorated, and all our duties more cheerfully and successfully performed." Beecher exhorted both men and women "to devote some portion of time to perpetuating and increasing family and neighborhood friendships and to

[102] Beecher, Stowe, and Tonkovich, *The American Woman's Home*, xv-xvi.
[103] Catherine Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (New York: Schoken Books, 1977), 195.

sustaining the various claims of domestic hospitality."[104] From letters, it is clear that Helen almost always accompanied Mary to these events allowing Mary to fulfill her domestic responsibility to raise a cultured child and teach her appropriate forms of recreation. As Butler points out, the negotiated identity adapts to include "constructions [that] are predicates of its own identity." Mary clearly chose which predicates would form her own performance of female domesticity.

Although they were apart for most of the year, Ernest's emotional role in helping to raise Helen is evident in family correspondence. The museum and earlier biographers do not address this correspondence; they elide Ernest's embrace of fatherhood because men in the early twentieth century were not typically ascribed that responsibility. On April 18, 1920, when Helen was ten, she writes to Ernest, "I wish I was with you to have the advenchers [sic] you had. . ." signing the letter with "1,000,000,000,000,000 kisses." She writes to him, as a child would, of books she is reading, lessons from school, and various plays, outings and exhibits she attended. In many letters, Helen and Ernest discuss the well-being and care of her beloved donkey which they called a "burrita." Ernest's letters to both Mary and Helen often have a teasing tone. In a 1923 letter to Helen, Ernest delivers a lesson on the spelling of burrita, which she had spelled burrito, threatening her with a penalty of a D+ and 49 kisses. A letter to Helen for her seventeenth birthday is also characteristic. He celebrates her milestone birthday, "So now you are sweet seventeen! I can hardly believe it. Do you feel any change – for the better – or worse?" He then launches into a meditation on the importance of a good education: "whether you develop taste for good literature, music and

[104] Beecher, 251.

art, and learn to concentrate your mind on your work; also learn to behave in a kind and considerate way towards others and not to hate or give pain to others."[105]

Ernest clearly enjoyed his daughter and openly discusses how much he wishes she were in Taos. In closing his letter on April 22, 1923, he writes "Miss you and Mamma always. Feel that you should be here to see the spring." In a noteworthy and sweet passage written shortly before they arrived for the summer when Helen was thirteen years old, he writes:

> One month from today your school closes and off you start for the Rocky Mountains, the beautiful valley of Taos, the new wonderful Cadillac and our old pal your dad! I tell you I'll be awfully glad to greet you in person and if Mamma consents will start right off for Cimarron Canon and fish and camp for a couple of days while Mamma sleeps and rests.

This last message, while written to Helen, is indicative of Ernest's sensitivity to his wife's habits and needs. There are several letters, by both Mary and Ernest, that reference Mary's use of her time in Taos as a respite from the busy life she led in New York. Additionally, Ernest and Helen enjoyed outdoor activities while Mary decidedly did not, so father and daughter travelled together leaving Mary to enjoy time to herself. Father-daughter excursions became a summer pattern. In early March 1926, Mary writes: "When I get to Taos I am going to bed and never get up for months so don't say Hopi to me. Wait for Helen."[106] Clearly responding to Mary's letter, Ernest writes to Helen on March 24, 1926, commenting that:

> . . . you forgot to mention how Mamma was in health. From the statements that she did not want to travel to Arizona with me and that she

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[105] Ernest L. Blumenschein, "Ernest Blumenschein to Helen Blumenschein" March 24, 1926, Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 1891-1970/Helen Blumenschein, 1923/Box 1, Folder 22, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.
[106] Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mary Greene Blumenschein to Ernest L. Blumenschein," March 19, 1919.

> wanted to sleep and eat for a month, I concluded that she wasn't feeling too fine and was looking forward to hibernating season. Well here's the place in this beautiful home and such a lovely spring.[107]

As Helen became an adult, she and Ernest continued to travel together for tennis tournaments and sketching expeditions. The archive also contains letters from Ernest and Helen to Mary about these trips.

Correspondence between the three family members also make clear the connections between themselves and their extended network of family and friends. In a letter dated Jan. 7, 1921 from Helen to Ernest, she included a picture of a boat building a breakwater with a message for her father's companion, model and handyman:

> Tell Jim [Romero] that the workmen are building a break water that keeps the tide from washing the town. Here is a picture showing them building it. The derack [sic] lifts the stone off the cars and puts them in the water. Tell Jim every word. Give my love to Jim.[108]

Several other letters mention Jim including one on April 8, "I bought Jim a fine hunting knife, it is a peach. I wish I had it myself."[109] Mary also regularly asks about household members, some who were from Taos Pueblo and some from the town of Taos. Her concern reveals both her emotional connection to those who worked for her and the ways that she depended on them to take care of Ernest in her absence. She regularly refers to Jim Romero (Taos Pueblo) as "the faithful" as in this quote, "Remembrances to Jim the faithful. Send me immediately size of his belt. [sic]" perhaps because Jim Romero seems to have been one of their longest and closest household members. Many of the same people are mentioned in

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[107] Ernest L. Blumenschein, "Ernest L. Blumenschein to Helen G. Blumenschein," March 24, 1926, Ernest L. Blumenschein Collection (AC 354)/1926-1959/Box 1, Folder: 1, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Santa Fe, New Mexico.
[108] Helen G. Blumenschein, "Helen G. Blumenschein to Ernest L. Blumenschein," January 7, 1921, Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 18891-1970/ Helen Blumenschein 1920-1922, Box 1, Folder 21, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.
[109] Helen G. Blumenschein,

letters and seem to have remained attached to the Blumenscheins over the years. Letters indicate that their work for the family was not necessarily consecutive in time. Cerilla is an example. In a May 1927 letter, Mary asks after Cerilla's pregnancy, adding, "Hope she will not have [father's name?] baby before I get back home."[110] Three years later in 1930, while Mary and Helen were living in Paris, Mary writes to a lonely Ernest, "Your troubles are many but I know you will be much better managed with Henrietta and Albert and especially if you get Cerilla who understands our ways very well. " Several paragraphs later Mary continues, "Give my best to Henrietta & Albert wish I could see them. *The Taos Valley News* continues to rejoice our hearts and sense of humour glad I have one. Imagine Taos quite giddy and going into the height of the season."[111]

The Blumenschein family, both immediate and extended, was emotionally connected when together and when apart. The annual separation, though neither Ernest's nor Mary's preference, was a negotiated compromise that allowed them to maintain the family unit. Ernest's time alone in Taos kept him in the mountains as he preferred and gave him dedicated time to paint. Mary and Helen's winters in Brooklyn allowed Mary to live most of the year where she preferred, near her extended network of family and friends, amidst the theater and culture she enjoyed, and in proximity to the schools she preferred for Helen. In considering new definitions of domesticity, the Blumenscheins were in many ways an innovative model of how family was constituted and understood in the early parts of the twentieth century when nuclear families were typically defined as fixed geographically and always together in that location. Before this analysis, the Blumenschein museum and

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[110] Mary Greene Blumenschein, "Mary Greene Blumenschein to Ernest L. Blumenschein," July 6, 1930, Ernest Blumenschein papers, 1873-1964/Series 2: Correspondence, 1891-1970/ Mary Blumenschein 1930, Box 1, Folder 47, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.
[111] Mary Greene Blumenschein.

Ernest's biographers framed the family narrative within conventions of domesticity including separate gendered spheres, and geographically fixed nuclear family. In doing so, they amplified Ernest's career and subordinated Mary's work and interests. In the next section of this thesis, I deconstruct how the museum flattened and recast this more interesting story of extended kinship bonds, negotiated compromise, transcontinental family structures and female agency.

SECTION 3: DOMESTICITY AT THE E.L. BLUMENSCHEIN HOUSE AND MUSEUM

Historic house museums typically interpret their owners' lives. Like any biography, they mix fact, assumption, and myth to create what they hope will be a compelling narrative for their audience. In this next section, I first provide a site description of the museum and then analyze the creation of narrative there in two parts. First, I trace the origin of the museum's interpretation to its 1965 application to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Next, I consider the institution's material objects, textual artifacts (brochures and text panels), and stagecraft (tour pathways and placement of objects and text). In this analysis, all commentary will describe the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum as it is presently configured in 2022. Additional research about the site from its original construction in 1797 to its purchase by the Blumenscheins in 1919 is recommended to better interpret the progression of the building's design, how it was utilized, and who lived in each part of the structure before 1919.

Site operations and description

The application to the NRHP describes the Blumenschein home as an "11-room adobe dating from Spanish times." Traditional adobe homes are highly flexible and were often built room by room around an inner courtyard. Sometimes, they were also "mixed use" spaces with homes, apartments, sheds and businesses coexisting in contiguous but not connected rooms. This was the case with the Blumenschein house in 1919 when the family began acquiring and assembling the property. In *Recuerdos,* Helen recounts the history this way:

> Father bought four rooms of this old place frum [sic] "Buck" Dunton, who had settled there several years before. As time went on and the old occupants of the rooms on either side of us died, we would purchase those rooms, until finally we had 11 rooms enough to supply a studio room for each of us and have bedrooms for our summer guests.[112]

The family adapted the space to suit their needs creating doorways, changing flooring, adding windows to provide more light, adding a kitchen and two bathrooms, and building and taking down working kiva fireplaces as they installed a furnace. In a private interview, Skip Keith Miller, who held a variety of position at the Museum in the 1990s including curator and assistant director, said that Mary was the principal architect and instigator of changes to the home. Miller commented that "Ernest just needed his studio, after that he didn't care about the space."[113] A non-profit organization called Taos Historic Museums now runs both the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum and the nearby Hacienda de los Martinez, a second house museum interpreting an 1804 Spanish colonial home and trading center. A Taos-based board of directors and three staff members manage both sites. The staff sit at an entry desk in each site, sell tickets to the location, manage the two small gift shops, and provide historical and site information to visitors from their gift shop location. Tours at the Blumenschein are self-guided using a one-page, double-sided brochure, object descriptions and text panels. Volunteer docents can provide other tours upon request. The collection at the Blumenschein house consists of European antiques, other furnishings, artwork, photographs, and books from the early 20th century. There are numerous paintings, sketches, and illustrations on the walls by all three Blumenscheins and by TSA and Taos friends. Copies of *McClure's Magazine*, encased in plastic covers, are

[112] Blumenschein, *Recuerdos: Early Days of the Blumenschein Family*.
[113] Marcy Botwick, Interview with Skip Keith Miller, July 1, 2022.

scattered in several places in the home. Several of the rooms hold built-in cabinets and walls that were hand-painted by Mary.

The building is shaped in a rough horseshoe with most rooms opening directly to the next. Figure 12 offers a diagram of the building to help augment the following descriptions. There are only two hallways each along the south wall leading to bedrooms. The entrance (and exit) are in a central courtyard inside the gate from LeDoux Street on the north side of the property. Visitors progress south from the entrance through five rooms in the east wing. Along the south wall of the structure, there are six rooms and along the west wall there are four rooms. The only working entrance to the structure is in the gift shop, which was renovated for this purpose and feels more modern than the rest of the home. According to the museum brochure, the Blumenscheins used this area as a carriage house, a storeroom and Mary's jewelry studio – it now holds no material trace of these functions. The next room, and entry to the formal interpreted museum, is a kitchen. Miller commented that artifacts in this space were intended to reflect its use over time so include two forms of refrigeration, a built-in California Cooler and an ice box, and two cooktops, one that burns wood and the other electric. The kitchen also displays early twentieth cooking implements, kitchen paraphernalia and two charcoal drawings by Helen. The next room is a large dining room with some furnishings made in Taos and several European antiques. The walls show works by Mary and Ernest as well as Taos artists, Joseph Henry Sharp, Kenneth Adams, Bert Phillips and Joseph Imhoff. Two doors on the south side of the dining room lead to the library which is also furnished with European antiques. A large painting by Ernest, *Railroad Yard* (c. 1950), is showcased here surrounded by bookcases and other ephemera. To the east of the library when heading south, there is a small hallway to the Blumenscheins' bedroom.

In addition to the bedroom furnishings, Mary's later paintings and illustrations, from the 1930s and 1940s are featured here. Exiting the bedroom, visitors move again through the library then into a large gallery space cleared of furnishings other than Ernest's easel and painting chair. This room had various uses at different times including as Ernest's studio and a living room; it now acts as a gallery to exhibit and sell paintings and sculpture. The next room is a small space that was originally a washroom. It contains glass display cases on either side with biographical text panels on each family member accompanied by ephemera, photographs and drawings. From there, the east hallway leads to two bedrooms. The room to the South is called the Green Room and was a guest bedroom and Mary's bedroom at various times. In addition to bedroom furnishings, several walls are covered gallery style with paintings by Taos artists. The room to the North is called the Blue Room and was Helen's bedroom. It holds bedroom furnishings, a built-in chest of drawers, charcoal drawings by Helen and a glass case with information about Helen's service in WWII and her activities as an archaeologist and outdoorswoman in Taos. Mary decorated the room's walls and built-in cabinet. To exit the building, one must retrace their way through the rooms to the gift shop.

Do historic house museums showcase domesticity?

On December 21, 1965, a National Park Service press release announced that "Sixty-five nationally significant sites and structures including. . . the homes of prominent educators, artists, and sculptors, have just been declared eligible for designation as

Registered National Historic Landmarks by Secretary of the Interior Steward L. Udall."[114] The E. L. Blumenschein House and Museum was one of the locations newly recognized under this nationwide effort to secure cultural heritage in the United States. The designation provided only a certificate and a bronze plaque, markers that seem ubiquitous in urban landscapes today, but in the history of U.S. landmark preservation receiving these markers in 1965 validated the site's authenticity and cultural import. As described in the May 19,1966 *Taos News*, "This important designation was made by the Secretary of the Interior and the National Park Service after the building had been found to possess exceptional value in commemorating or illustrating history in the United States." The town of Taos was rightfully proud of its inclusion in this process as the Blumenschein House was given the only such plaque in New Mexico at the time. The local paper reported:

> Adding to the importance of this designation and to Taos was the fact that the Blumenschein House is the only Registered National Historic Landmark under the "Painting and Sculpture" theme in New Mexico. The Blumenschein Home and the Charles Russell House, North Great Falls, Montana, are the only two sites in this category west of the Mississippi River.[115]

The article's references to the theme and category of "Painting and Sculpture" are curious because they assume that the contemporary reader, or even the reader today, would have known the categories considered significant to receive this designation. Indeed, this very idea of cultural significance and how it is determined and applied to the Blumenschein home's transition to public historical site is important to examine further. The nomination form for the NRHP, which has undergone scant change since its initial creation in 1965, uses

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[114] "National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form for Ernest L. Blumenschein House." (National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1964.), 41, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/77847030.
[115] Regina Cooke, "Blumenschein Home Dedication as Nat'l Landmark To Be May 29`," *The Taos News*, May 19, 1966, sec. Society Section.

two sets of eligibility criteria located under the heading of "Significance." One classification is time period by century and the other is the site's usage or material properties, e.g., landscape, architecture, art, commerce. According to the Blumenschein application, the home's eligibility as historically significant was based on its role in the nineteenth and twentieth century history of art. A narrative portion labelled "Significance" supplements these simple checkboxes. It's first two paragraphs read:

> Ernest L. Blumenschein was a co-founder in 1898, of the Taos Art Colony, which became the most important art center west of Mississippi River.
>
> The modern art movement in the Southwest was inspired by the "Famous Seven" Taos artists – of whom Blumenschein and Bert G. Phillips were the leaders—who in 1914 formalized their artistic and commercial association in the Taos Society of Artists. Exhibitions by these men, most of whom became National Academicians, spread the artistic attractions of the Southwest across the United States and into Europe. Soon Taos had become the most important art center west of the Mississippi, and the inspiration for other colonies in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Tucson, Arizona.[116]

Though the Blumenschein home was both a domestic and working studio space, the section on "Significance" focuses almost exclusively on its use as a work site. It discusses Ernest, his career, how he "discovered" the town of Taos while fixing a broken wagon wheel, the primitive nature and difficulty travelling to the town, and the Taos Society of Artists and their impact upon the small village. There are only three sentences in the application's section on significance about the house itself, and there are none which reference the Blumenschein family, Mary or Helen. The subsequent choice then to name the museum after Ernest only – E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum – seems a forgone conclusion given the application's emphasis on him alone. The museum's name, which can seem innocuous, makes explicit what is considered most important about the Blumenschein home. Though "house" is in its name, the museum does not present a story about home at all, instead its

[116] "National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form for Ernest L. Blumenschein House."

narrative centers a man's career, the conquest of "frontier" space and a confederacy of male artists. While counterintuitive to its role as a domestic space, in this way, the recreation of the Blumenschein home as an historic site is prototypical of house museums.

Why are stories and displays at house museums and other historic sites conventionally constructed in this way? Modern museologists, particularly those who examine the field through a feminist and/or decolonial lens, contend that museums are the product of colonial and gendered systems which have long used their authority as spaces of knowledge transmission to reinforce racist and patriarchal constructions. Darlene Clover contends that "the language of museums tends to reify a particular knowledge and represents a singular point of view. . . . The 'expert' pretext of neutrality hides in plain sight the dominance of patriarchal authority that shapes our ways of knowing and also our identities as objects or subjects of the world."[117] As discussed in section one of this thesis, the original house museums in the United States, Mount Vernon and Monticello, were created in the mid-nineteenth century with the same overtly political goals as Beecher's domestic ideology. Mount Vernon and Monticello were meant to reinforce gendered and raced social constructions disrupted by the Civil War, the rise of immigration and the push westward into Native and Hispano parts of the nation. Mount Vernon and Monticello established conventions that center White men and their careers and elide histories like slavery and colonial conquest that undermine a heroic narrative or might have been perceived as unpatriotic.[118] West writes that the exhibits at Mount Vernon were meant to teach "American" values to immigrants and othered peoples and that the women who recreated

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[117] Darlene E Clover, and Kathy Sandford, "Educating Epistemic Justice and Resistance Through the Feminist Museum Hack," 61.
[118] Eric Gable, "How We Study History Museums: Or Cultural Studies at Monticello," in *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2005).

these iconic locations had no intention or "notion of presenting a historically accurate picture."[119] Similarly Jack Boyer, the author of the Blumenschein home's nomination for designation on the NRHP, did not intend or need to present an accurate representation of Taos history or the Blumenschein's family life. Instead, the questions posed on the nomination form created a discursive demand to validate the home's significance through its proximity to a famous artist. The questions do not ask for reflections on how the home operated as a domestic space. Boyer wrote and submitted a story that highlights Ernest's importance, describes how he came to create art in Taos and celebrates the idea of the town as a "newly" discovered location and inspiration for Anglo artists. Indeed, it is likely that the application was successful, and the Blumenschein house received designation on the NRHP because Boyer understood the implicit values assigned to the question of significance. Historic locations were important, not because of their material nature or because they allow visitors to enjoy an accurate historical experience, but because they provide implicit civic lessons and are associated with White men who can be portrayed as famous or important.

The effects of this bias in NRHP applications are a persistent problem today. Dr. Ruby Oram, a public historian in Chicago, writes that "the language of National Register policy" privileges properties "associated with the lives of white male elites and contribute[s] to historical landscapes that often render marginalized groups invisible." Empirical evidence supports this finding; Oram's analysis of the 2017 nomination form showed that the categories of significance are virtually unchanged since 1965 and do not yet include categories for "women's history" or "gender history." As of 2020 only eight percent of buildings on the NRHP represent women and/or communities of color making clear the

[119] West, *Domesticating History*, 37.

results of this long-standing exclusion.[120] In his book *Why Preservation Matters*, Max Page addresses this phenomenon commenting on "what seems like a logical emphasis on preserving for only places that can be proven to have been or to continue to be 'significant.'" In being asked to make a case for significance, Page notes that applicants to the NRHP are discursively forced to focus on the "idol of origins" or celebrity – people or events that would make a location known. In so doing, he writes that sites on the NRHP have left out the "range of people over time who have lived in a place" and, like conventional house museums, left out histories that are inconvenient to the narrative of most significance. According to Page, correcting these problems is not merely an additive process, but requires "rethinking [the] stories places tell, trying to return the layers of history that have been scraped away with jackhammers, or in words spoken or left out." This is the case at the Blumenschein Museum where both the "words spoken or left out" need revision for historical accuracy and inclusion and to better contextualize the building and site's use before, during and after the Blumenscheins' purchase.

The nomination's request for a "Statement of Significance" makes explicit the power implicit in seemingly innocuous questions and the narrative choices and answers that they demand. Although an inherently domestic space, a home, is the subject of the nomination, Ernest and his career as an artist and member of an Anglo group of settlers became central to the story. The museum's subsequent interpretation reflects this same narrative and has had important consequences. Positioning Ernest as a founding member of the Taos community obscures the role of colonialism in the Anglo incursion of the town and other parts of the Southwest. Focusing on Ernest's career conceals his role in emotional and domestic aspects

[120] Dr. Ruby Oram, Chapter 7, 159.

of the home and obfuscates the support of domestic help that freed he and Mary to paint and create. For this thesis, however, the most critical effect is to reinforce a binary oppositional view of gender roles that diminishes Mary and Helen's accomplishments by utilizing their proximal role to domesticity. The museum reifies discourse that public acts are ultimately more important than domestic ones necessarily defining participants responsible for private space as less significant and their actions as secondary. Mary and Helen's work, both within and outside of the actual home, is diminished because they are identified with private space. When stepping back to objectively consider what kind of narrative might be written for a museum about a family home, it seems odd to privilege Ernest and his career and to minimize his family and virtually their entire domestic life. It is consistent, however, with overall museum practice where Porter found that in museums, "'woman' becomes the background against which 'man' acts." This creates a dynamic where:

> the roles of women are relatively passive, shallow, undeveloped, muted and closed: the roles of men are, in contrast, relatively active, deep, highly developed and articulated, fully pronounced and open. 'His' existence and ascendence depend on 'her' presence and subordination. Together, they provide a thread for museums in the histories and narratives which they make.[121]

The rest of the thesis explores this thread unpacking the implicit and explicit ways that the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum utilizes the idea of separate spheres and domesticity to lessen Mary and Helen's contributions.

[121] Gaby Porter, "Seeing through Solidity," 110.

Domestic frames = discursive boundaries

Written Text: "Words spoken or left out"

A self-guiding brochure, exhibition text panels and object descriptions are the museum's most obvious interpretive tools. The tri-fold brochure is organized into three sections. The first two sections are short histories titled "The Broken Wheel and the Taos Society of Artists" and "Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein." The third section is a map of the home with accompanying descriptions by room. Section one, "The Broken Wheel and the Taos Society of Artists," occupies the first page and contextualizes the house by centering Ernest's significance and providing a semi-chronological biography for him. In the following order, it recounts Ernest's introduction to Taos through fellow art student Joseph Henry Sharp, his first visit there with Bert Geer Phillips, his enthusiasm "about the incredible beauty of Taos" and his plea for "other artists to come and see for themselves." Halfway through the piece, Mary is introduced and her life before Ernest is summed up in the following, "Mary had lived in France since 1886 where she had become a well-recognized artist, winning medals in the famous Paris Salon d'Automne in 1900 and 1902." The biography then becomes mutual describing Mary and Ernest's work as illustrators in Paris, the family's return to the United States from abroad, the birth of children, and a short visit by the whole family to Taos in 1913. The next longer paragraph concerns the formation and work of the Taos Society of Artists. The last paragraph of this section discusses the LeDoux Street home between 1919 and 1931.

Section two is titled "Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein" and can be found on the inside second page. The text is very short, a total of six sentences in comparison to Ernest's page-and-half-long biography. The language displays a curious tension also found in the

museum's text panels. In both sets of writing, Mary's agency is undermined as her career and work accomplishments are simultaneously celebrated and diminished. For example, the brochure states that Mary's "painting career was eclipsed by her husband's artistic pursuits" continuing to say that "After 1922, Mary turned to jewelry design and utilized the room that is now our bookstore as her jewelry shop." Actions like turning her jewelry studio into a bookstore and phrases like "eclipsed" and she "turned to" portray Mary as passive and disengaged in choices around her life and career. They denote female coded submission rather than an honest account of the many social and personal forces that determined Mary's decision. Representing Mary, not as an individual but as a stereotype, is consistent with Porter's findings across all types of museums. Porter contends that women are typically "positioned at the margin" and "representations of women and the feminine are generally vague and idealized." When it is necessary to describe women who engage in non-normative gender behavior, such as Mary and her career, Porter found the narrative contained "moments of unease... hesitation, contradictions, unconscious slips and awkward silences."[122] Displays and the accompanying text that feature Mary exhibit all of these problems.

A map of the home with descriptions for the eight rooms comprises section three of the brochure. In this section, there are many examples of what Porter calls "moments of unease" and which Page describes as "words spoken or left out." The descriptions generally include year of purchase, former owner and overall age of the particular room, while some describe how rooms were modernized and what decorative elements were added or changed. The Dining Room, Room 3, features all of these components:

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[122] Porter, 113.

> Originally two rooms, this was part of the 1919 purchase from Buck Dunton. The west end served as the Blumenschein's first kitchen and dates to 1797 making it some of the oldest standing architecture in town. The ceiling here is made of large, ponderosa pine vigas covered by split rail rajas. The mock fireplace was designed by Mary to hide the first water heater, which was installed in the 1930s.

This text focuses on the materiality of the site; it makes note of the antiquity of the home, its distinctive Southwestern architectural features, its modernization and Mary's impact on its décor. The first two facets of the description, those that feature antiquity and regional architectural details, speak to conventions of historic preservation and reasons that such sites are valued. Max Page writes that "we crave in a historic building an authenticity that we don't have elsewhere in our lives" and that landmark spaces allow us to "touch on our personal memories" and "connect with people of different places and times."[123] The room descriptions in the Blumenschein brochure do all of these things at once in presenting rooms with familiar functions that are regional in their style and décor. The description of the mock fireplace highlights the idea of Taos as primitive in the early twentieth century and reinforces Mary's role as a domesticating or civilizing influence.

Stagecraft: Visitor pathways and narrative mis-directions

The following section looks at stagecraft – the pathway through the museum, the juxtaposition of objects, the placement of text panels and item labels. I also analyze written item labels and text panels. While written text is a more easily analyzed, museums communicate and reinforce implicit values in how they stage displays. According to Darlene Clover and Laura Sandford, "stagecrafting is its own form of representation and visual discourse that can be 'read,'" adding that it can "augment museum narratives and dictate

[123] Page, *Why Preservation Matters*, 7.

how visitors will interpret exhibitions, displays, dioramas and their meanings."[124] The visitor to the Blumenschein moves almost directly from one room to the next which seems ideal for creating a clear narrative arc – the building's pathway creates a physical beginning, middle and end. However, the interpretive labels and panels necessary to convey the narrative are not present at key points. There is no cohesive vision, no narrative arc, no "big idea" and the museum's story, is confusing particularly for visitors without background knowledge to understand the import of the Taos Society of Artists, the history of Taos and New Mexico, and the history of the Blumenschein family.[125] (Figure 12 may again be useful in envisioning the pathway through the building.) The pathway, exhibits, displays, item labels and text panels also flatten and remove dimension from the family members as they explicitly and implicitly reinforce the primacy of domesticity as a female gendered domain.

Visitors enter the museum through the gift shop. Though this space originally held Mary's jewelry workshop, there is no indication of this use, no text panel describing the studio, no pictures to show its appearance nor pictures of the jewelry created there. It is now devoid of Mary's creative presence as an artist. The choice to clear the material evidence of Mary's art production within the home is an example of how the museum minimizes rather than highlights Mary's professional work. Visitors next move to the kitchen. There is no formal transition from gift shop to museum, no larger introductory panel to contextualize the museum as a complete entity. One simply crosses the threshold of the gift shop into the kitchen to begin the brochure-led tour. Object labels on artwork and other items in the rooms vary in how much information they provide. Some labels merely name the painting or

[124] Clover, Darlene E. and Sandford, Kathy, "Educating Epistemic Justice and Resistance Through the Feminist Museum Hack," 63.
[125] Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

illustration, and some provide additional details and contextual information about the space or Blumenschein family. Two rooms provide in-depth information about Mary and Helen: Room 5 displays Mary's post-1930 paintings and illustrations accompanied by explanatory text panels and Room 8 has a small display case that highlights Helen's service in WWII and her accomplishments as an amateur archeologist and outdoorswoman.

The nearest approximation to an overview of the Blumenscheins as a family or as individuals is problematic in both placement and content. It does not appear until halfway through the museum in Room 6, "Original Washroom & Closet." Room 6 is a small, unceremonious space with two glass cases facing each other that contain brief biographies of Ernest, Mary and Helen. The display's location in the middle of the museum is too late and its content too diffuse, particularly for visitors who may not know much about the Blumenschein family or the TSA. The display, in both text and stagecraft, emphasizes Ernest's primacy in relation to his wife and daughter and sublimates women's professional contributions to highlight their domesticity.

Information on Ernest fills one entire glass case; the second is divided between Mary and Helen. (Figures 8, 9 and 10) Ernest's case (Figure 8) shows ephemera from and describes his career as an illustrator. It also describes his hobbies. The display contains several books open to illustrations, Ernest's violin, a photo of his high school football team, a contract bridge bidding mat, several trophies and his fly-fishing bag. One text panel uses versions of the word competitive three times over five sentences. It begins, "Ernest was, throughout his life, a strong competitor" and continues to say, "Blumenschein played tennis until his early 70s when he took up competitive bridge because he was no longer physically able to play tennis competitively." Another text panel, discussing his illustrations for famous

authors including Willa Cather, Booth Tarkington, Jack London, and Edgar Allen Poe ends, "Despite Blumenschein's success as an illustrator, he continued to strive toward becoming recognized as a fine artist. A stature he acquired by the early 1920s." Ernest is portrayed as a person successful in many fields with high energy, strong will, and dedicated passions. The chosen objects and the use of words like "competitive," "success," and "strive" denote idealized masculinity as constructed in the early twentieth century.

The case on the wall across from Ernest's is split - one half focused on Helen and the other on Mary. (Figures 9 and 10) Where Ernest received four sections to describe his life and accomplishments, Mary and Helen each receive two. The portion on Helen exhibits two self-portraits of her at age 21 from her studies in Paris, a book open to show both a dedication to Ernest and a woodblock print by Helen, several carved wood blocks, Helen's hunting rifle and a wooden paint box. The text domesticizes Helen's art and achievements by fashioning them as public housekeeping on behalf of the town of Taos, "Helen's real artistic accomplishments were the numerous portraits she did of her many friends and acquaintances from Taos Pueblo, the local Hispanic community, and the artist, [sic] writers, and business people of Taos." The other panel reads in part "Helen became interested in both the history and the prehistory of the valley and recorded hundreds of archaeological sites. Helen never married and devoted herself to her parents and the people of Taos Valley." Helen's "devotion" to the town through portraits of "local" people, archaeology and other acts of service denotes Helen's behavior as closed, intimate and female as opposed to Ernest's public success in sport and as a nationally known painter and illustrator. The word success is not used in any of the text describing Helen's achievements, though she was honored by the

New Mexico Archeological Associations for her contributions in that field and is known to have discovered important sites that have received further study and excavation.[126]

The side of the case displaying Mary's material is more explicitly focused on domesticity as a framework. Three framed pieces dominate the display; a self-portrait circa 1894, a photograph of Mary from 1948 and an illustration. The most prominent feature in the young self-portrait are Mary's eyes which blaze intensely. In the 1948 studio photograph, Mary is shown in profile as a properly dressed and coiffed middle-aged woman. Between the two portraits is the illustration featuring a gamine faced young woman with big eyes and perfectly curled hair. One arm is held aloft, a petit gloved hand with pinky finger extended out frames the figure's face. Her other arm cradles a bouquet of white roses. Two women stand behind the main subject, apparently dressing and preparing for a formal occasion. While this woman is clearly decorative, the title at the bottom of the illustration reads "The Housekeeper for Christmas." The image is at odds with most ideas of housekeeping unless one reflects back to Zink's analysis that domesticity for Anglo women was more about managing the home and directing others in the work of its maintenance and care.

The image and its title occupy and dominate the center of the display about Mary; it is both representative of her career and of the museum's recreation of Mary herself as an idealized image of White, upper-class, female domesticity. The text centered directly below the illustration confirms that Mary's domesticity is more important than her profession:

> After her marriage to Ernest Blumenschein in June 1905, Mary also took on illustrating commissions for both books and magazines. Mary worked for Grossett and Dunlap, *The Housekeeper*, *The Century* and numerous other publications. In 1913, Mary was awarded associate membership in the prestigious National

[126] "Collected Papers in Honor of Helen Greene Blumenschein" (Albuquerque, N.M.: Papers of the Archaeological Society of New Mexico, 1980).

> Academy of Design. However, when the Blumenscheins moved permanently to Taos in 1919, Mary devoted herself to providing a beautiful and comfortable home for her husband and daughter – her art took a back seat to the needs and desires of her family. In 1922, Mary began to design and fabricate her own line of jewelry—a craft she maintained through the remainder of her life. Additionally, the home is an important expression of her personal aesthetic and design sensibilities.

Phrases connoting domesticity as secular religion, female submission and sacrifice stereotype Mary and strip her of agency. Mary "devoted herself" and the object of that devotion was her home and her family. Mary is further flattened when equated with the materiality of her home in statements like "the home is an important expression of her personal aesthetic and design sensibilities." Myth supplants reality, as typical at many house museums, in the statement that "the Blumenscheins moved permanently to Taos in 1919." With this declaration, the narrative removes any possible mention of the family's continued life in Brooklyn. It thereby forecloses more nuanced depictions of Mary's years as a single parent travelling annually between Taos and the east coast to negotiate and facilitate the continuation of the family unit. While Ernest's drive and success are the theme of his display, Mary and Helen's displays downplay not only their achievements and careers but also the reality of their lived experience. Instead, the narrative ascribes greater importance to acts or behaviors aligned with domesticity. The dining room, library, bedroom, and washroom all display Mary's paintings, illustrations, and framed newspaper articles about her work. Room 5's walls display her later work dating from 1931 to 1945; the bedroom alone houses a total of 18 paintings and illustrations. Mary's Paris Salon medals, and a black and white photograph of two of her bracelets sit to the right side of the display in Room 6. However, the centerpiece of this same case highlights Mary's role as wife and mother, echoes the brochure's dismissal of Mary's career, creates contradictions and confusion about

the message of the museum and flattens the dimensionality of Mary's life. Ernest's display highlights and values his career and competitive nature, as a painter and member of the Taos Society of Artists and through his participation in sports and other competitions. Mary and Helen's display minimizes their accomplishments, framing their contributions to the home and the town as female gendered acts of domesticity.

The museum's narrative also overlooks Ernest's role in caring for Helen and nurturing her as a person and artist. As shown in the first section of the thesis, Ernest was an emotionally involved and supportive father, though he and Helen were apart many months of each year. They wrote frequently sharing small details about their daily domestic activities like what Helen was studying at school or what flowers were blooming in the Taos garden. Though the text of their letters may seem trivial, it helped connect father and daughter during long periods apart. In closing or opening many of these letters, Ernest and Helen often mention how they wished to be part of each other's activities and spend more time together making explicit their emotional bonds. Museum displays ignore Ernest's role in nurturing and parenting Helen save for one oblique sentence on a text panel in Room 6 which reads, "Helen, like her father, had an uncompromising passion for the outdoors and enjoyed hunting and fishing as well as painting in the mountains around Taos." The statement pairs their interests but does not describe the father-daughter trips which forged and strengthened these interests and Ernest and Helen's connection as parent and child. Reducing the family members – Mary, Helen and Ernest – to proscribed stereotypes makes the history less interesting. It flattens the networks of relationship which animate the true story of their

domesticity and is consistent with Porter's findings that museum narratives "construct and maintain the male order, with women at its margins."[127]

Several object descriptions also contain text about town and pueblo members who worked for the Blumenscheins. Unfortunately, these descriptions also flatten and stereotype rather than adding to a more nuanced understanding of domestic relations at the Blumenschein home. These texts, like those describing Mary, are uncomfortable and incomplete rather than accurately reflecting complicated socio-cultural dynamics between recently arrived Anglos, and local Native and Taoseño community members at the turn of the twentieth century. The museum highlights several of Helen's charcoal drawings with short biographies that portray community members– the Blumenschein's caretaker Gabriel Jeantete and cooks/housekeepers Emelia Montoya and Popsthelee Mirabel Romero. Blumenschein family archives include correspondence and photographs indicating that Emelia and Popsthelee both worked for and were emotionally connected to Ernest, Mary and Helen. A 1920s photograph of Popsthelee on a hunting trip with Helen is displayed in Helen's bedroom at the museum and additional candid shots of Popsthlee from the 1940s and 1950s are found in the Helen Blumenschein Archives at the New Mexico Palace of the Governors Photo Archives. These pictures suggest a long-standing personal relationship with the family, as do the many letters written by Mary and Helen from New York asking for news of and to be remembered to Jim, Cerilla and others. Barbara Brandenberg Brenner, Oscar Berninghaus' granddaughter, and Virginia Couse Leavitt, E. Irving Couse's granddaughter, confirmed the longevity and depth of the bonds between Taos artists and their models, cooks and helpers during a private interview I conducted on August 16, 2022.

[127] Porter, "Seeing through Solidity," 110.

Both women described similar relationships between their families and families from the Taos Pueblo and town of Taos who worked in their households. Both women also described instances where the family relationships and partnerships lasted for several generations.

Despite this evidence, object descriptions for these extended family members at the Blumenschein museum focuses on their function as domestic workers for the family. The text for Emelia Montoya reads:

> Emelia Montoya (1884-1944) was born in Taos. While raising her family she was a cook for Mabel Dodge Luhan for four years and for the Blumenschein family from 1931-1944. Emelia's daughters Rose and Theresa, grandchildren Reuben, Larry and Miguel, and great-granddaughter Julie still live in Taos.

The choice of contextualizing information about Emelia is unintentionally revealing. It forefronts Emilia's life as a working mother, caring for her own family as she cooked for another. It mentions her affiliation with Mabel Dodge Luhan and names family members who were still in Taos in the 1990s when these texts were written. One can glean from the text that Emelia died at the age of 60 when she was still presumably working for the Blumenschein family. For additional perspective, in that same year of 1944 Mary would have been 75, Ernest 70 and Helen 35. Luhan and the Blumenscheins were able to pay Emilia to do domestic work that they did not then do themselves. Economic disparities and potential hardship can be read through the dates provided in that short text and, although younger in years than Mary, the charcoal drawing of Emilia shows a thin woman whose health may already have been compromised. The problem lies not in the words on the text panel or in displaying the drawing; it is the subtext of the description, again what Page describes as, "words spoken or left out." So much is not said about Emilia's relationship with the Blumenscheins, and about Emilia's access or lack of access to money, health care

and power in Taos in the early part of the twentieth century. This portrait is an example of Zink's analysis of domestic ideology and practice as a form of intersectional gendered and raced oppression. Zink contends that there was "a double standard regarding American domesticity," in which White women "disavowed domesticity for themselves but then displaced it onto women of color."[128]

A text panel ostensibly about the living room shares similar issues; it describes Geronimo Gomez' work painting the walls of the room and describes him as "our fine Indian carpenter," "Taos War Chief," and "a model for father." Geronimo Gomez' translated Taos Pueblo name was Star Road, and he was, in fact, a much more influential and dimensional person in the Taos community than that brief bit of text implies. Gomez was the model for the central figure in Ernest's celebrated painting, *Star Road and White Sun (1920)* (Figure 11), a work noted for depicting and championing modern Indian life. Gomez was the leader of a group of younger men from Taos Pueblo, known as the "peyote boys" who wished to include the hallucinogen in religious practice at the Pueblo. Their use of peyote was controversial for it simultaneously challenged the control of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Catholic Church and the Native elders who all opposed the practices espoused by the "peyote boys." According to Ernest Blumenschein biographer Peter Hassrick, Star Road "was a proud resister of multiple social and cultural forces" who "wanted to be recognized as a modern Indian."[129] The text panel also elides ample evidence of a more personal relationship between Ernest and Star Road. Hassrick notes the "close bonds" and "abiding personal relationships" between the painter and model. Letters to Mary provide evidence of this relationship, describing trips Ernest took with Gomez to fish and camp. It seems likely

[128] Zink, *Fictions of Western American Domesticity*, 4.
[129] Hassrick and Cunningham, *In Contemporary Rhythm*, 135.

that descriptions accompanying the drawings and the one describing Gomez were meant to enhance authenticity and allude to kinship bonds when they were created, but these bonds are undercut by the way Emilia Montoya, Popsthlee Romero and Star Road are reduced and flattened to their roles and functions. It is tempting to ascribe some of this interpretation to Helen's influence, since the quotation about Star Road is drawn directly from her memoir *Recuerdos,* but this thesis has shown that historical narrative is not due to one person's interpretation. Instead, historical narratives are created by social constructions and expectations hidden in the ways we are trained to essentialize and stereotype people, specifically those who are raced and/or gendered female.

Small house museums face distinct challenges in creating and maintaining meaningful, informed, and current interpretation. According to the July 2022 interview with Skip Miller, he created the current interpretation in the 1990s which was also a time of great turbulence for museums he helped administer in Taos. Miller held a succession of jobs from 1988 to 2001 for the Kit Carson Historic Museums which then oversaw a total of five locations in Taos including the E.L. Blumenschein Museum. Miller was at various times, acting director, co-director, and curator for the organization. His office was situated in what had been Ernest Blumenschein's studio. Miller described his experiences there as fraught with economic and management difficulties, a common circumstance for small house museums and one which strongly impacts every aspect of their operations including the ability to research and create interpretation. He described having only a small staff to operate five historic buildings most of which had structural problems and needed extensive repairs. He also recounted very difficult relations with, and financial mismanagement by, the volunteer board which at times resulted in difficulty with payroll, building restoration and

maintenance despite successful fundraising efforts.[130] At roughly the same time that Miller worked at the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum, Susan Dorko conducted a study of the Susan B. Anthony House in Rochester, NY and Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House in Concord, MA for her master's thesis. She found that the Anthony House and Orchard House were typical of small house museums, specifically those whose central subject were women. Like the Blumenschein, these institutions faced difficult financial and staffing constraints that limited their capacity to operate. Dorko concluded that "without human or financial resources, museums cannot care for their collections properly or develop interpretations that incorporate new historical ideas."[131] According to Miller's account, it was within a similar context and limitations that he developed the current interpretation at the Blumenschein. He was tasked with many jobs and the collection's safety was as big a concern for him as its interpretation. Unfortunately, the museum still struggles with many of these same issues today.

Miller commented that although he had an overwhelming number of priorities, he felt compelled to fix the museum's earlier interpretation because it was disjointed and unprofessional. He cited typewritten and handwritten item labels that were not consistent, that were barely legible, and that were not related to one another. I have found several of these original labels in the archives. As was typical in 1990, Miller employed an additive strategy to the original curation featuring Mary's later work in the bedroom and adding the Taos artist gallery in the "Green Room." Miller is trained as an art historian and his interpretation no doubt benefitted from contributions by his late wife, Elizabeth

[130] Botwick, Skip Miller, July 1, 2022.
[131] Dorko, "Public Careers, Private Spaces: Interpreting the Lives of Famous Women at American Historic House Museums: A Thesis," 42, 45.

Cunningham, who was a primary biographer and leading authority on Ernest Blumenschein. Miller considers Blumenschein the most talented of the TSA artists. However, our conversation also revealed opinions about the couple that may have biased his interpretation. Miller perceived "Ernest as an exceedingly argumentative and difficult man to live with" and "Mary as a 'saint' who had sacrificed her career to help Ernest advance his own." Indeed, there is ample evidence of Ernest's volatile personality and fragile ego, however translating that reality into gender stereotypes removes nuance and flattens the entire family story. The thread underlying the narrative that Miller offered in our conversation and in the text at the museum is of male action and female passivity and submission, echoing Porter's findings. The interpretation at the Blumenschein is now thirty years old and was clearly created with the best intentions, however because it employs additive methods to combat gender and racial imbalance, patriarchy, and prejudice it ultimately fails to interrogate and counter essentialized gender stereotypes such as domesticity and racialized stereotypes of Taos community members including Taoseños and Taos Puebloans.

In a book chapter titled "Good Intentions gone awry: Fieldtrips and gender at a Georgia Museum," Dr. Elizabeth D. Worley Mendley wrote of a similar exhibition problem at a living history museum in Georgia where elementary school students were led in gender-based tours recreating farm experiences from the early twentieth century. Both genders were costumed in period dress boys with hats and suspenders and girls with long skirts. Girls engaged in domestic chores at several homesites washing clothes, sweeping, cleaning and cooking. Boys worked in fields, barns, a grist mill and other trade shops plowing, handling livestock, bagging grain, making barrels and other tasks. Worley Mendley describes the student workshops as "historically accurate" but not "historically true" because they

"directly stated or implied (through language portrayal and other methods) that a strict division of labor based on gender existed."[132] In speaking with the authors of this museum's interpretative activities, Worley found that the lessons had the opposite result of their intentions. The gendered experiences were created to ensure that women's contributions were validated and included, "that the museum did not present the male experience or gaze as the only perspective." The experiences were also intended to teach "girls and boys about the limitations of separate spheres and the oppressive feelings of patriarchy," not to reinforce gender stereotypes. By making these choices for the students, however, the interpretive team deprived both boys and girls of opportunities to learn about both spheres and to have agency over their own learning. They assumed authority, based in long-standing museological precedent, over how and what knowledge was most important employing "patriarchal ideas while simultaneously trying to undo them."[133]

[132] Dr. Elizabeth D. Worley Medley, "Chapter 8," 184 & 187.
[133] Dr. Elizabeth D. Worley Medley, 175–95.

CONCLUSION: THE POTENTIAL POWER OF A NEW NARRATIVE

In 2022, the Lunder Research Center at the Couse-Sharp Historic Site, a multi-million-dollar state-of-the-art archive, research library, museum, and exhibit space, opened in Taos to centralize studies of the Taos Society of Artists and the art colony. The emergence of this facility presents challenges and opportunities to other heritage sites in Taos. According to a tour and conversation with staff, the Center is already receiving significant donations of art, artifacts, and other important documentary evidence about the TSA displacing the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum from one of the goals in its brochure, "[to commemorate] the formation of the Taos Society of Artists and the establishing of Taos as world-renowned art colony." This displacement is also an opportunity to consider how best to highlight the unique aspects of the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum and bring additional value to it as a site of historical interest and meaning making.

I argue that seemingly innocent narrative choices like the question of significance on the NRHP nominations and the focus on Mary's domesticity at the museum and in Ernest's biographies hide and reinforce White, patriarchal privilege, but this bias can be undone. My thesis was purposefully constructed to demonstrate methods to redress inequities using a variety of tools and topics. I deconstruct the institutional history of house museums and historic sites in the United States examining their origination and purpose. I expand the idea of domesticity beyond its stereotypical static representation to show how the paradigm can instead help explore lived experience more truthfully and open interpretation to include a wider range of behaviors and household members. I redefine and revalue what counts as work to include parenting and other reproductive labor. I contextualize issues of identity/core values, place them in temporal frames, consider their origin and how they are

applied as structuring principles. I show the persistence of racism and sexism in museums and other cultural institutions. Most importantly, I highlight Mary and try to authentically center her perspective. Categories and stereotypes continue to perpetuate constricting normative standards even when their use is meant to challenge dominant hierarchies, therefore it is still critical to both expose biased social structures *and* include and amplify the voices of women and other marginalized groups.

This thesis raises both practical concerns and historical themes and ideas to consider in reinterpreting the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum. Assuming that budget will remain an issue at the institution, the following suggestions are designed to use the space as now curated without undertaking an entirely new and expensive remodel. I include two distinct sets of suggestions in this next section. I propose new historical themes and topics in combination with museum principles, techniques, and tools to amplify narration and display.

First, the museum should consider how it wants to address visitors. Porter critiques the traditional empirical model used at museums like the Blumenschein writing that it "positions the reader/visitor as consumer, who gazes at the finished product and appreciates the creativity of the maker or the authenticity or truth of the setting. The mode of address is declarative; the process of production is mystified or suppressed."[134] Lisa Roberts cautions those who create museum narratives to remember that what meaning visitors make of text "may not have anything to do with the messages institutions intend." Roberts also points out that museum exhibits and their "narrative constructions" "ignite memories, activate emotions and spark interchange" between visitors who are discussing and digesting what they are

[134] Porter, "Seeing through Solidity," 113.

viewing.[135] The following methods, some of which are further reflected in thematic suggestions below, are important ways to better engage visitors. Engaging museum narrative should: provide ample social and historical context for objects/locations/interpretations; present multiple cultural perspectives; and provoke questions and evoke surprise. Finally, and most importantly, the new text should share authority with the visitor. It does this by acknowledging its own construction and being explicit that the museum's interpretation provides a particular perspective. Visitors are more engaged by a stance of shared knowledge because it honors and recognizes that personal perspectives, opinions, and memories impact what and how each visitor learns at the museum.

Better visitor engagement also begins with better intellectual organization or what Beverly Serrell calls a "big idea." This organizing theme, broken into subthemes, guides the curation of objects and the creation of exhibits and written text. Big ideas help frame visitor experience and are simultaneously broad enough to encompass a wide variety of displays and information. They help visitors understand why the museum and the objects in it are meaningful and worthy of their time and attention.[136] Female domesticity as currently centered at the Blumenschein binds and limits potential interpretations. However, I would suggest that idea of family and domestic relations/negotiations would provide a compelling big idea that is consonant with museum's former role as a family home and is meaningful to many diverse visitors. Revised to include current scholarship and excise the use of stereotypes and ideals, the E. L. Blumenschein House and Museum could create an entirely new narrative that would address both historical and contemporary gender and domestic issues. The idea of change over time is another potential big idea. Mary and Ernest

[135] Lisa Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 137.
[136] Serrell, *Exhibit Labels*.

Blumenschein's lives spanned from the Victorian era to 1960. During that time, they experienced the rise of the United States as a world power, New Mexico statehood, first wave feminism as embodied by the suffrage movement, the growth of Taos' from a small village to a major tourist destination, the development and creation of both the national railway and highway systems, two World Wars, and the advent of the car, telephone and television. Rather than focusing on one historical period, the current displays could illustrate how the family adopted and adapted to these technologies and global shifts. With either proposed big idea, the text could highlight how the Blumenscheins' domestic patterns reflected changes and innovations and help visitors reflect on domestic life and how we adapt to change today. Placing new text panels in key locations and rewriting text in the brochure and on the website would be critical to the success of a new interpretation.

In the next section, I show how a "big idea" can guide the redevelopment of the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum. I have chosen to expand on the "big idea" of family and domestic relations/negotiations. From this central theme, I propose sub themes, questions, and topics to serve as a base for new interpretative text and programs. The new interpretation is intended primarily for items already on display at the museum and includes the potential use of photographs and texts that can easily be copied from existing archives.

Parenting: Helen & Mary/Helen & Ernest

There are many more letters between Helen and Ernest than between Helen and Mary. There is no way to know with certainty why there are fewer letters between Mary and Helen though it is likely that letters between them were infrequent, given that they were

together most of the time that they were apart from their husband and father.[137] The archive also reveals that Helen and Ernest shared more interests and hobbies than Helen did with her mother. Using photographs and portions of letters from the archives, as well as some of the material presented in Helen's bedroom, a new display could explore Helen's relationship with each of her parents. This display could use the letters to discuss Mary and Helen's years in Brooklyn and highlight Mary's choices in how she embodied the historical domestic expectation that women were responsible for the education and well-being of their children. It could also explore the ways that Ernest negotiated his role as a father who, though physically distant, maintained a close relationship with his child. It could display photographs and artwork created on father-daughter trips with accompanying descriptions from letters to Mary. It could use photographs already at the museum and others from the Palace of the Governor's Archives. The display could also explore Helen's role taking care of her parents as they aged.[138] The display could discuss Victorian gender expectations and compare them to lived realities for the Blumenschein's to show how child rearing and caregiving is a universal and persistent family negotiation.

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[137] Mary Greene Blumenschein, Helen G. Blumenschein, and Ernest L. Blumenschein, "Mary Blumenschein Corrspondence with Helen Blumenschein" Mary Greene Blumenschein Collection (AC 410); Family Letters: 1940-1944, 1900-1958, Folder: 2., Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Santa Fe, New Mexico. It is possible that Helen as the family historian or subsequent professional archivists may not have thought letters between Mary and Helen were as significant. That there are many letters between Mary and Helen, including postscripts from Ernest, from Helen's service in WW II suggests that there were simply not as many written between the Mary and Helen before the 1940s.

[138] Ernest L. Blumenschein, Mary Greene Blumenschein, and Helen Greene Blumenschein, "Blumenschein Correspondence," n.d., Smithsonian Archives of American Art, https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/ernest-blumenschein-papers-6744. More research is required to better understand the Blumenschein's living arrangements as they aged. As their only child, Helen would have necessarily been responsible for their care at this time. Letters show that both Mary and Ernest spent some of their winters in Albuquerque or Santa Fe when they were older because altitude and snow became difficult for them. It is not clear if Helen accompanied them, stayed in Taos or went to other locations. There are also letters in the archives between Helen and Ernest's doctors in the last few years of his life.

Help in the home

The museum features portraits of Emilia Montoya, Popsthlee Romero, and Jean Gentete. The Blumenscheins' 1920s letters discuss other members of the Taos community who were both extended household members and paid workers. These portraits, and perhaps other images and items from the museum's archives, are ideal starting points for a display highlighting the complicated and important relationships between Anglo artist families and Taos community members who worked in their households. Current portrait labels should be revised and supported by additional panels to introduce the perspectives of those who did the work, in addition to or rather than, the Blumenschein's perspective. Contextualizing information about Emilia, Popthslee and Jean drawn only from the Blumenschein's letters is not enough. Additional original research is required to engage this subject with the sensitivity and thought that it deserves. Though Star Road (Geronimo Gomez) and Jim Romero both played a pivotal role in the family's personal life and in Ernest's paintings, they are not pictured at the museum now. I recommend including them in this new display, using items and pictures that might be in the museum's archives or held by other museums/archives. Rewriting this text would provide opportunities to explore stories of original community members from Taos and Taos Pueblo and of how they experienced Anglo artists' tourism and emigration to their mountain village. The museum could serve as a location to open dialogue and create meaningful opportunities to learn more about the continued impact of tourism on Taos village and Taos Pueblo.

Taos Society of Artists and other Taos friends

Most of the artists who moved to Taos left extended networks of family and friends in other parts of the United States and, in several cases, other countries. As the twentieth century progressed, artists were able to reach Taos with increasing ease as railway and highway systems were built throughout the nation. Even as transportation made Taos accessible, the Taos artist community filled many roles for its members. It was a social network, a business arrangement, and an extended kinship structure providing emotional and even fiscal support for one another when needed. Several of Ernest's letters are quite poignant describing the health difficulties and deaths of Walter Ufer and Buck Dunton.[139] Mary and Helen's letters discuss Lucy Harwood, who lived several doors down on LeDoux Street. Barbara Brandenberg Brenner, Oscar Berninghaus' granddaughter, commented in our August 2022 interview that though there were many years between her mother and Mary, she thought her mother considered Mary "a surrogate mom" and the fondness was mutual.[140] Helen's archives contain a casual snapshot of the two women dated 1934. The dining room and green bedroom display many paintings by friends from the Taos community including Walter Ufer and Oscar Berninghaus. New text panels and item descriptions in these rooms could use these works of art as a starting point to explore the kinship networks created by the Taos artists and could explore the following themes and questions. What did it mean for families to move to the Southwest, far from extended family? How did the actual journey to Taos change over time? How is this experience similar or different from other stories of westward migration or migration within the American continent? How did the Blumenscheins build new networks of support and what did those relationships look like? What do Mary's letters

[139] "Ernest E. Blumenschein Papers Overview," Smithsonian Institute Archives of American Art, n.d., https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/ernest-blumenschein-papers-6744.
[140] Marcy J. Botwick, Barbara Brandenberg Brenner & Virginia Couse Leavitt - private interview at Barbara Brenner home in Taos. Alexis Kinney, of the Lunder Center also present., August 16, 2022.

reveal about how she negotiated multiple kinship networks over many years in New York, Taos and Europe?

Careers and Caretaking

The museum displays many of Mary, Helen and Ernest's paintings, illustrations, drawings and prints. There are several pictures of Mary at work in her New York studio in the 1910s. These pictures and other display elements (Mary's Salon medals, signed copies of books illustrated by Mary and Ernest, Ernest's easel and Helen's paint box and print blocks) provide items that can be utilized to discuss how the Blumenscheins combined careers and caretaking. New text could explore the following ideas and questions. While "domesticity" is commonly understood to mean women's role in the home, how did domestic help allow both Mary and Ernest to pursue their work and other interests? Between 1910 and 1930 Mary spent significant time as a single parent when Ernest visited Taos each summer from 1910 to 1919 and when Mary moved to New York and Paris for Helen's education. What did these choices mean for Mary and Ernest's careers? Did Helen's role as a single caretaker of aging parents alter her career? From 1907 to 1919, Mary illustrated for several magazines with a domestic focus, notably *The Delineator*, *Good Housekeeping* and *The Housekeeper*. How was domesticity portrayed and discussed in those magazines and what did domesticity mean at that time? Are those images and ideas still found in women's magazines today?

Practical issues and concerns in revisioning the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum

My critique of the museum was not limited to its themes. The museum could be improved by reevaluating its current name, its use of a take-away brochure as a primary

guide and its stagecraft, particularly the locations and subject matter of text panels. While the museum, as curated, focuses on Ernest's success; visitors expecting to see many of his paintings or develop a sense of his artistic life are likely confused at their experience. The museum's name signals Ernest as its main subject, but he is not. The "big idea" ultimately chosen to re-envision the museum should be reflected in the institution's name or in a subtitle. This "big idea" should also guide the creation of a series of text panels that introduce and contextualize the experience and creative a narrative arc. The museum might consider making one small but potentially important physical change. Entering the museum, there is the small space that was formerly Mary's jewelry studio. This area is now part of the gift shop, however, the museum could easily make this location the first room of the tour. Though small, it could include introductory information and timelines on the Blumenschein family, details of Ernest's role in the Taos Society of Artists, contextualizing information about the family's experience moving between the Southwest and New York, text commenting about the Blumenscheins' role in creating Taos as it is today and information about the physical space as Mary's jewelry studio. All other text in the museum would be much more meaningful when supported by a deliberately crafted introduction and background.

Rather than brochures, which create regular costs to be reprinted, laminated sheets, printed on both sides, could be added to each room to provide more in-depth contextualizing interpretation than is practical on text panels and item labels mounted on walls. Laminated sheets are also more easily replaced when text is outdated or new information is discovered. The museum should also update text panels and item labels currently affixed to the walls so that they are visually consistent and related to whatever "big idea" is ultimately chosen for

the institution. Adding QR codes to item labels or other texts (brochures or laminated sheets) is another option to provide more information. Finally, though it requires some initial expense, the sale of inexpensive professionally printed guidebooks at the location and on the website are yet another way to better contextualize the site and provide details highlighting noteworthy or important features. Guidebooks are also a potential souvenir for visitors at the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum.

There are other questions that might be engaged at the E. L. Blumenschein and Museum that either do not fit as neatly into the "big idea" of family and domestic negotiations or are not directly related to the current curation. These might be explored in special exhibits held in the open gallery that was Ernest's former studio, Room 7. What did domestic life look like in the "wild west" of Taos in 1919? What was the role of women in the West who maintained a transcontinental life, like Mary? How did gender impact female artists in the early twentieth century in the western United States, a place traditionally gendered male? Mary's pre-1919 paintings are radically different from those of the Taos Society of Artist; how might other Taos artists have perceived her paintings? What were the lived experiences of other women artists in Taos? What were the roles and lived experiences of other women, non-artist wives, daughters, and granddaughters, connected to TSA artists?

These proposed big ideas and questions are starting points, from which many entwined stories can emerge. In short, the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum is ripe with potential and its 1965 designation to the National Registry of Historic Places was well-deserved. A new, more relevant interpretation would highlight the location's enduring significance for a new generation of scholars, tourists and visitors interested in the history of

the Taos Society of Artists, the history of New Mexico, the history of gender, and the rich, complex story of a dual career couple in the early twentieth century.

ADDENDA

Figure 1: Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein, (American, 1869-1958). *Une Petite Histoire*, 1902. Oil on canvas, location unknown. Image from Elizabeth J. Cunningham Papers relating to Ernest L. Blumenschein, Lunder Research Center.

Figure 2: Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein, (American, 1869-1958),.presumed to be *Portrait of Isabel Shepard Greene*, circa 1905. Location unknown. Image from Elizabeth J. Cunningham Papers relating to Ernest L. Blumenschein, Lunder Research Center.

Figure 3: Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein,
(American, 1869-1958). *Un Regard Fugitif*, 1900.
Oil on canvas, 513/4 x 361/4. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of
Mr. and Mrs. Sidney W. Davidson, 57.95
(Photo: Brooklyn Museum, 57.95_transp4825.jpg)

Figure 4: Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein (American, 1869-1958). *The Princess and the Frog*, 1909. Oil on panel, 25 1/4 x 31 7/8 in. (64.1 x 81 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the Brooklyn Women's Club in memory of Mrs. Mary I. Greene, 18.44 (Photo: Brooklyn Museum, 18.44_framed_SL1.jpg)

Figure 5: Ernest Blumenschein (American, 1874-1960).
Portrait of a German Tragedian, 1907.
Oil on canvas, 57-1/2 x 33 in.
Indianapolis Museum of Art, https://discovernewfields.org/collections,
Gift of Booth Tarkington. https://library-artstor-org.libproxy.unm.edu/asset/13799485.

Figure 6: Ernest Blumenschein (American, 1874-1960). *Portrait of Ellis Parker Butler and Family*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 57-1/2 x 33, Private Collection.

Figure 7: Ernest Blumenschein (American, 1874-1960). *Portrait of Artist and Family*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 46 x 45 in. New Mexico Museum of Art. Gift of Helen Greene Blumenschein Collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe

Figure 8: E. L. Blumenschein House and Museum; Room 6 - Ernest case

Figure 9 & 10: E. L. Blumenschein House and Museum; Room 6 - Helen and Mary case

Figure 11: Ernest Blumenschein (American, 1874-1960), *Star Road and White Sun*, 1920. Oil on canvas, 45 x 54 in. Albuquerque Museum, museum purchase, 1985 General Obligation Bonds, Albuquerque High School Collection gift of classes 1943,1944, and 1945

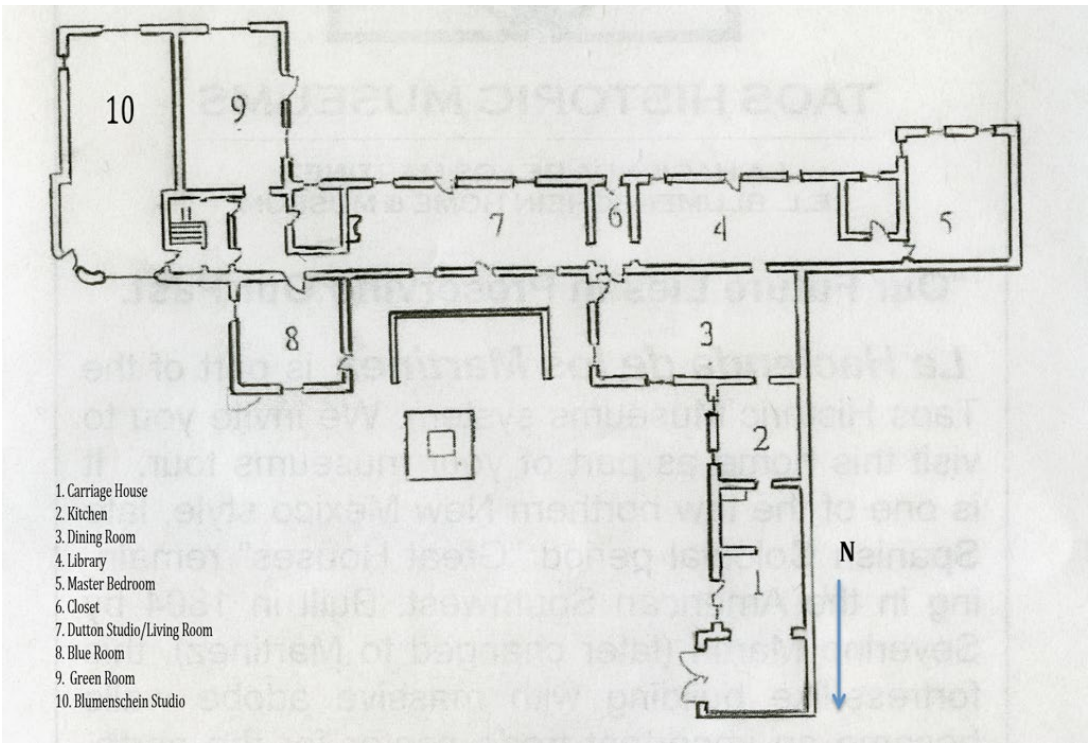

Figure 12: Schematic of E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum

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