MINA LOX

STRANGENESS IS INEVITABLE



EDITED BY JENNIFER R. GROSS

BOWDOIN COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

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MINA LON

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Frontispiece: Mina Loy, *Drift of Chaos II* (*Hermes*) (detail), 1933. Oil on panel, 36×47 in. (91.44 \times 119.38 cm). Private collection. Pages xiv–1: Stephen Haweis, *Mina Loy Holding Auguste Rodin Sculpture* (detail), ca. 1905–9. Gelatin silver print on paper, 5×8 in. Private collection. Front cover: Mina Loy, *Moons I* (detail), 1932. Mixed media on board, $26\frac{1}{4} \times$ $35\frac{1}{4}$ in. (66.68 \times 89.54 cm). Private collection. Back cover: Unidentified artist, *Mina Loy Dressed for the Blindman's Ball*. 1917. Gelatin silver print on paper, $5\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{7}{16}$ in.

(14 \times 21.5 cm). Private collection.

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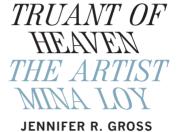
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CONTENTS



2



ANN LAUTERBACH 112



DAWN ADES 144

MINA LOY "

ROGER CONOVER 182 Editor's Acknowledgments 200

Notes 203

Further Reading 210

List of Contributors 210

Index 211

Photography and Copyright Credits 216

Director's Foreword ANNE COLLINS GOODYEAR

Selected Poems and Writings

Apology of Genius VII

Feminist Manifesto XIII

Moreover, the Moon 105

"The Starry Sky" of Wyndham Lewis 111

Brancusi's Golden Bird 121

> Lunar Baedeker 142

The Widow's Jazz 180

The Artist and the Public 199



Apology of Genius

Ostracized as we are with God— The watchers of the civilized wastes reverse their signals on our track

> Lepers of the moon all magically diseased we come among you innocent of our luminous sores

unknowing how perturbing lights our spirit on the passion of Man until you turn on us your smooth fools' faces like buttocks bared in aboriginal mockeries

We are the sacerdotal clowns who feed upon the wind and stars and pulverous pastures of poverty

Our wills are formed by curious disciplines beyond your laws

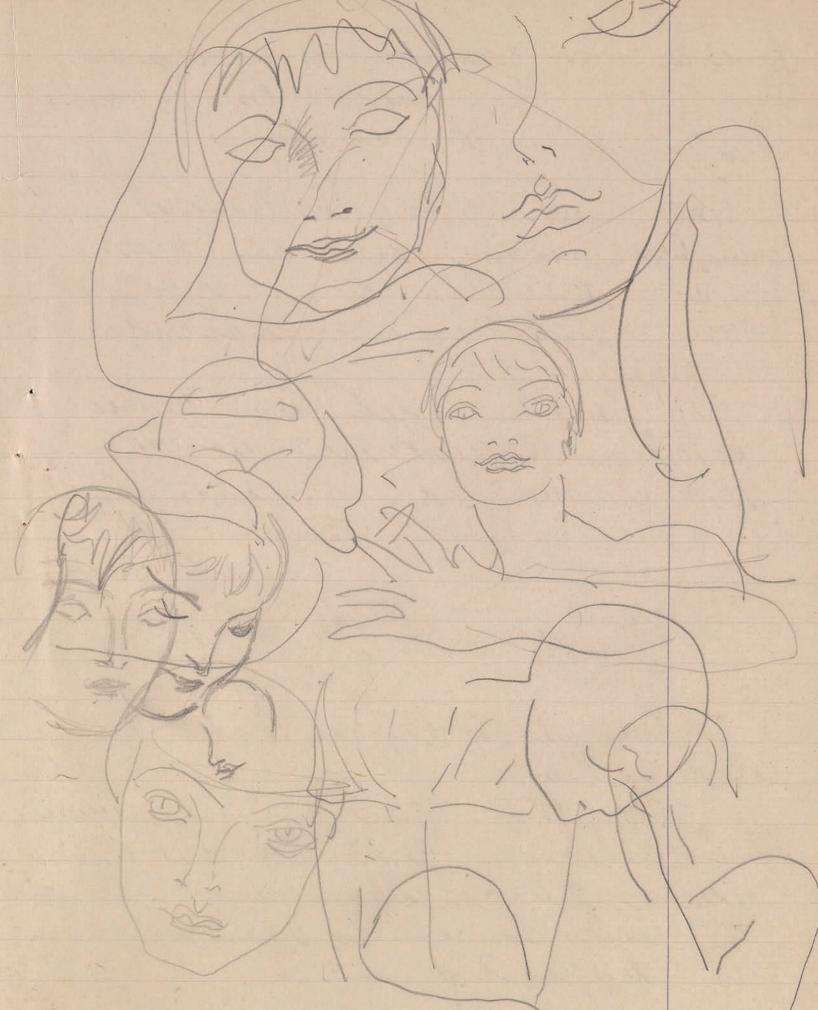
You may give birth to us or marry us the chances of your flesh are not our destiny—

The cuirass of the soul still shines— And we are unaware if you confuse such brief corrosion with possession

In the raw caverns of the Increate we forge the dusk of Chaos to that imperious jewellery of the Universe — the Beautiful—

Mina Loy, Untitled (Surreal Scene) (detail of fig. 1.111), 1935. Gouache with collage on panel, $20\frac{3}{4} \times 16\frac{3}{4}$ in. (52.71 × 42.55 cm). Private collection.

While to your eyes A delicate crop of criminal mystic immortelles stands to the censor's scythe.



DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

MINA LOY'S LONG REALITY

Writing late in her life, at an unspecified time, Mina Loy imaginatively conflated the challenges of growing older with questions about her own legacy. In "An Aged Woman," Loy noted in her opening stanza, "The past has come apart / events are vagueing / the future is inexploitable." The poem, which grapples with the specter of aging, concludes: "Dilation has entirely eliminated / your long reality."¹ Yet if Loy seems to allude to the terrifying possibility of another self, growing within and poised to consume the achievements of a younger, more able person, she adds a fictive compositional date, projecting herself decades into the future—July 12, 1984, when she would have been 101 years old—and suggesting the enduring reach of her creative activity. Possibly inspired by her friend Marcel Duchamp, who similarly posited and played with visions of his own pending transformation over the years, and asserted his desire to be assessed by future audiences, Loy implicitly raises questions about what her work would mean generations hence when she herself could no longer be present.² But her oeuvre's dilation—through publication and now, through this exhibition—has not eliminated but rather expanded her long reality, even as it has witnessed Loy's transformation from a colorful and vibrant human being into an intriguing, if often inscrutable, phenomenon.

Courageously defying the social and aesthetic conventions of her era, Mina Loy (1882–1966) forged a remarkable creative career that included daring poetry and experimental prose, visual art, and design. While the force of her visual expression, like that of her writing, was admired by such contemporaries as Berenice Abbott, Djuna Barnes, Constantin Brancusi, Joseph Cornell, Arthur Cravan, Marcel Duchamp, Mabel Dodge, Peggy Guggenheim, Julien Levy, Richard Mina Loy, Untitled (Sketches of Fabienne Lloyd) (detail of figure 4.12), from Mi and Lo, n.d. Ink on paper. Mina Loy Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Oelze, Gertrude Stein, Carl Van Vechten, and Beatrice Wood—each of whom is represented in the exhibition this book accompanies—it has never before been addressed as a whole. Mina Loy's work as a visual artist as distinct from her work a poet has long been acknowledged but has never before been documented. *Mina Loy: Strangeness Is Inevitable*, the first major retrospective exhibition of the complex images and objects that Loy created, owes its vision and character to the close examination of Jennifer Gross, the exhibition curator, of Loy's creative life, complemented by the nuanced perspectives of the poet Ann Lauterbach, the scholar Dawn Ades, and the writer and editor Roger Conover.

Together, these contributions testify to Mina Loy's transformative impact on the visual art and literary avant-garde of the twentieth century. In her lead essay, Gross weaves together Loy's lifelong commitment as both an artist and a poet and addresses the many factors that mitigated against earlier widespread recognition of Loy's artistic oeuvre. Lauterbach explores Loy's struggle with truth and beauty, arguing that her engagement with the emphatically "unbeautiful" materials of the Bowery-including rags and bottle caps-reflected her identification with the destitute and dispossessed. Ades considers Loy in both textual and art historical terms—as a contributor to the Dada magazine Rogue, and within the larger context of Surrealism. Conover speaks to his deep engagement with Loy's work, and its persistent relevance to and anticipation of contemporary culture, including music. Finally, a selection of Loy's poems and writings are woven into the book. Like the objects in the exhibition that accompanies this publication, these materials demonstrate Mina Loy's extraordinary contributions as an image maker, author, and cultural arbiter. Present implicitly in the volume, though not reprinted here, is Mina Loy's 1925 essay "Modern Poetry," which opens with the observation, "Poetry is prose bewitched, a music made of visual thoughts, the sound of an idea."³ Demonstrating the clear intersection Loy perceived between all modes of her creative thought and expression, the essay is the source of the exhibition's subtitle, Strangeness Is Inevitable.⁴ In acknowledging the syntactical "eccentricities" of modern poetry—and by extension, visual art—Loy points to this "strangeness" as evidence not of the disconnection of poets and artists from the real world, but rather of the "new manner" in which these creatives perceive and thus present that universe. As readers of this book and viewers of the exhibition will experience themselves, Loy's work retains a radical freshness, testifying powerfully to the artist's "long reality." On behalf of my colleagues at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, I express my deepest appreciation to Jennifer Gross and to each of the contributors to this publication for sharing their perspectives and insights to produce such a groundbreaking exhibition and publication.

This project was developed in large part during the moment of the recent global pandemic, adding further complexity to the already considerable challenges associated with conducting new research, viewing works of art, and crafting a touring exhibition. With this in mind, we are grateful to the many friends and colleagues at numerous institutions who supported this work by providing access to archives—including virtually when they could not be physically accessed—and who aided our work in tracking down drawings, correspondence, and articles related to Loy and helping us secure reproductions of

this material. In particular, we would like to recognize from the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library: Nancy Kuhl, June Can, Matthew Rowe, and Mary Ellen Budney; and from the Philadelphia Museum of Art: Jonathan Hoppe.

We are deeply appreciative to the private and institutional lenders who supported this exhibition through their generous loans and in making reproductions of works of art in their collection available to us. We offer our sincere thanks to Roger Conover, Marie Difilippantonio, Michael Duncan, Jessica and John Gordon, Francis M. Naumann, and Helen Zell, as well as our colleagues at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Special Collections and Rosenbach Library.

Numerous other colleagues supported the development of this publication and the related exhibition. We offer our heartfelt thanks to our colleagues at Princeton University Press, particularly Michelle Komie, publisher of art and architecture; and Terri O'Prey, Whitney Ravenhorst, Steven Sears, and their former colleague Kenneth Guay. Thanks too to copyeditor Kathleen Kageff. For their sensitive imaging of many of the works in the catalogue and the exhibition, we thank Luc Demers and Jay York. For their attentive work in the conservation of key objects, we are grateful to Rob Conzett, Matt Hamilton, Rebecca Johnston, and Brook Prestowitz of the Williamstown Art Conservation Center.

At the BCMA, this publication and exhibition would not be possible without the diligent and tireless work of Suzanne Bergeron, Leslie Bird, Michelle Henning, Jo Hluska, Sean Kramer, Laura Latman, Sabrina Lin '21, José Ribas '76, and Shannon Viola. For their support we also thank Casey Braun, Sean Burrus, Elizabeth Carpenter, Jim Higginbotham, Sean Kramer, Liza Nelson, Steve Perkinson, Amanda Skinner, Laura Sprague, Adam Talbot, and Anne Witty. We are enormously grateful to the Bowdoin students who have supported us through their work on this project as interns, particularly Cassie Jackson, '22. As always, I express, on behalf of all my colleagues at the BCMA, our thanks to the museum's Advisory Council, to Dean for Academic Affairs Jennifer Scanlon, and to President Clayton Rose.

We also wish to express our appreciation to Janine Mileaf, executive director of the Arts Club of Chicago, for her collaboration in sharing this exhibition with a broad national audience.

No project can happen without generous financial support. For the critical resources that have made possible the realization of *Mina Loy: Strangeness Is Inevitable* at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art and at the Arts Club of Chicago, together with the accompanying catalogue, we acknowledge, with our profound thanks, the Elizabeth B. G. Hamlin Fund, the Zell Family Foundation, the Wyeth Foundation for American Art, Peter J. Grua '76 and Mary G. O'Connell '76, Robert Freson, Selina F. Little, Furthermore: a program of the J. M. Kaplan Fund, Colby College Museum of Art, and the Roy A. Hunt Foundation. *Mina Loy: Strangeness Is Inevitable* is made possible at the Arts Club of Chicago through support from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Anne Collins Goodyear

Co-Director, Bowdoin College Museum of Art



Feminist Manifesto

The feminist movement as at present instituted is Inadequate

<u>Women</u> if you want to realise yourselves—you are on the eve of a devastating psychological upheaval—all your pet illusions must be unmasked—the lies of centuries have got to go are you prepared for the <u>Wrench</u>—? There is no halfmeasure—NO scratching on the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition, will bring about <u>Reform</u>, the only method is <u>Absolute</u> <u>Demolition</u>

Cease to place your confidence in economic legislation, vicecrusades & uniform education—you are glossing over <u>Reality</u>.

Professional & commercial careers are opening up for you— <u>Is that all you want?</u>

And if you honestly desire to find your level without prejudice—be \underline{Brave} & deny at the outset—that pathetic clap-trap war cry \underline{Woman} is the \underline{equal} of \underline{man} —for

She is NOT!

The man who lives a life in which his activities conform to a social code which is a protectorate of the feminine element— —is no longer masculine

The women who adapt themselves to a theoretical valuation of their sex as a <u>relative impersonality</u>, are not yet <u>Feminine</u>

Leave off looking to men to find out what you are $\underline{\text{not}}$ —seek within yourselves to find out what you $\underline{\text{are}}$

As conditions are at present constituted—you have the choice between $\underline{Parasitism}$, & $\underline{Prostitu}$ -tion—or Negation

Men & women are enemies, with the enmity of the exploited for the parasite, the parasite for the exploited—at present they are at the mercy of the advantage that each can take of the others sexual dependence—. The only point at which the interests of the sexes merge—is the sexual embrace.

Mina Loy, *Fille en robe rouge* (see fig. 1.24), 1913. Watercolor with graphite, $19\frac{1}{2} \times 15\frac{1}{2}$ in. (49.53 × 39.37 cm). Private collection. The first illusion it is to your interest to demolish is the division of women into two classes <u>the mistress</u>, & <u>the mother</u> every well-balanced & developed woman knows that is not true, Nature has endowed the complete woman with a faculty for expressing herself through <u>all</u> her functions—there are <u>no restrictions</u> the woman who is so incompletely evolved as to be un-self-conscious in sex, will prove a restrictive influence on the temperamental expansion of the next generation; the woman who is a poor mistress will be an incompetent mother—an inferior mentality—& will enjoy an inadequate apprehension of <u>Life</u>.

To obtain results you must make sacrifices & the first & greatest sacrifice you have to make is of your "virtue" The fictitious value of woman as identified with her physical purity—is too easy a stand-by—rendering her lethargic in the acquisition of intrinsic merits of character by which she could obtain a concrete value—therefore, the first self-enforced law for the female sex, as a protection against the man made bogey of virtue—which is the principal instrument of her subjection, would be the <u>unconditional</u> surgical <u>destruction of virginity</u> through-out the female population at puberty—.

The value of man is assessed entirely according to his use or interest to the community, the value of woman, depends entirely on <u>chance</u>, her success or insuccess in manoeuvering a man into taking the life-long responsibility of her— The advantages of marriage are too ridiculously ample compared to all other trades—for under modern conditions a woman can accept preposterously luxurious support from a man (with-out return of any sort—even offspring)—as a thank offering for her virginity

The woman who has not succeeded in striking that advantageous bargain—is prohibited from any but surreptitious re-action to Life-stimuli—& <u>entirely</u> <u>debarred</u> <u>maternity</u>.

Every woman has a right to maternity— Every woman of superior intelligence should realize her raceresponsibility, in producing children in adequate proportion to the unfit or degenerate members of her sexEach child of a superior woman should be the result of a definite period of psychic development in her life—& not necessarily of a possibly irksome & outworn continuance of an alliance—spontaneously adapted for vital creation in the beginning but not necessarily harmoniously balanced as the parties to it—follow their individual lines of personal evolution—

For the harmony of the race, each individual should be the expression of an easy & ample interpenetration of the male & female temperaments—free of stress

Woman must become more responsible for the child than man—

Woman must destroy in themselves, the desire to be loved— The feeling that it is a personal insult when a man transfers his attentions from her to another woman

The desire for comfortable protection instead of an intelligent curiosity & courage in meeting & resisting the pressure of life sex or so called love must be reduced to its initial element, honour, grief, sentimentality, pride & consequently jealousy must be detached from it.

Woman for her happiness must retain her deceptive fragility of appearance, combined with indomitable will, irreducible courage, & abundant health the outcome of sound nerves— Another great illusion that woman must use all her introspective clear-sightedness & unbiased bravery to destroy—for the sake of her <u>self respect</u> is the impurity of sex the realisation in defiance of superstition that there is <u>nothing</u> <u>impure in sex</u>—except in the mental attitude to it—will constitute an incalculable & wider social regeneration than it is possible for our generation to imagine.





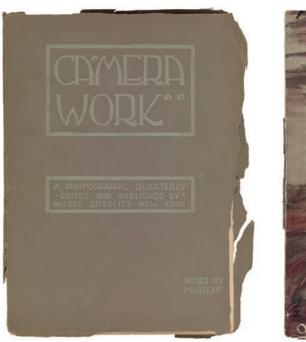
TRUANT OF HEAVEN THE ARTIST MINA LOY

JENNIFER R. GROSS

Not since Marcel Duchamp curated her final one-person exhibition in New York at the Bodley Gallery in 1959 has the artist Mina Loy risen above the obscuring cloud of mystery and notoriety that settled around her in 1914 when her writing was first published in *Camera Work* (fig. 1.1) and *Trend* (fig. 1.2). While literary historians have embraced the breadth and force of her written work,¹ art historians have yet to fully acknowledge the modern marvel that was Mina Loy. Her omnivorous creativity defied categorization, and her superlative, complex persona deflected focus. The artist Mina Loy was at once a shooting star, a lunar beacon, and a constellation unto herself.

While Loy the poet is known to the world, Loy the artist and cultural pollinator, who hybridized her ideas across media as a dedicated and innovative painter, portraitist, inventor, and industrial and fashion designer, remains less recognized. In fact, an understanding of the breadth of the term *artist* as defined by Loy and her peers stands to enrich the definition of modernism in the twentieth century as a phenomenon that was more aesthetically nuanced, media fluid, and culturally inclusive.

It is not a surprise that a woman of keen intellect and an unclassifiable aesthetic has remained an anomaly. She was a true Other, as published in *Others* magazine (fig. 1.3) by Alfred Kreymborg in 1915. She was a reluctant citizen of the British Empire, an assimilated Jew, a resident alien in Italy and France, and finally a naturalized American citizen. She spoke and wrote in four languages. If Loy had been born fifty years later, there is little doubt her polymathic aspirations would have found more enabling reception. The effervescent web of Loy's expression hung on what many identified as her "cerebral" nature. The term was applied by critics to her poetry as well as to her much desired dinner conversation. The machinations of Loy's intellect were precise and





unrelenting in their pursuit of truth. She was in fact too smart for her own good. To quote Loy's own "Feminist Manifesto" of 1914, included in this volume, "Leave off looking to men to find out what you are *not*. Seek within yourselves to find out what you *are*. As conditions are at present constituted you have the choice between Parasitism, Prostitution, or Negation." Loy elected negation.

Loy further positioned herself as an outlier in her modernist milieu through her ardent theism,² which affirmed her belief that to be an artist was a divine calling.³ An adherent to Christian Science, Loy blended her belief in God with her belief in science, resolving that the former was a natural evolutionary progression of the latter, which would lead to the redemption of humanity.⁴

She was an ephemeral presence in avant-garde circles, partially because she was tremendously busy—running a business; raising her children;⁵ writing poetry, prose, plays, and criticism; painting; and inventing—and also because she was often in retreat, managing the depression that came upon her in waves throughout her life. Her fortitude and authenticity as an artist were why Duchamp and the remainder of her Parisian (1923–36) cohort—Djuna Barnes, Robert Coates, Max Ernst, and Peggy Guggenheim—all attended Loy's Bodley exhibit in her absence. It was their salute to a fellow art warrior. Loy had remained true to her call as an artist and fought nobly against the world and its conventions, the heavens, and her circumstance. She was truly a modern (fig. 1.4).

*

If *painter* was Mina Loy's first and lifelong self-identification, her sustained preoccupation was reckoning with the human condition.⁶ She measured her personal experiences against the social conventions that constrained her, and

FIG. 1.1

Alfred Stieglitz, ed., *Camera Work* 45, January 1914. Private collection.

FIG. 1.2

Djuna Barnes, *Trend Magazine* 8, October 1914 (cover). Trend Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library.

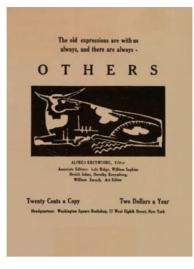


FIG. 1.3

Advertisement for *Others* magazine, ca. 1915–19. Private collection.

FIG. 1.4

George Platt Lynes, *Mina Loy*, 1931, printed 1959. Gelatin silver print on paper, $6\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ in. (16.6 × 11.6 cm) (image/paper); 14 × 11 in. (35.6 × 28 cm) (mount). Art Institute of Chicago, Photography Expense Fund (1960.509).



she fought to imagine herself anew through her art.7 What scholar Samuel French Morse has aptly written of her literary style also applies to her visual work: "The originality of Mina Loy is not merely a matter of typography or syntactical eccentricity; it seems to derive from a peculiar combination of fantasy and savagery ... a relentless attack on the ready-made explanations of human wastefulness."⁸ In both artistic practices, she sought to make sense of herself and others⁹ against the backdrops of her immediate context and the universe. Her creative process was fueled by the interplay of simultaneity, painting and writing harmonizing on key. "The two, writing and painting, go together with me," she wrote Julien Levy when working on her 1933 exhibition at his gallery.¹⁰ As a child, art enabled Loy to create a fantasy world she longed to inhabit. She described her early capacity to draw as sourced in her imagination rather than the world: "I could draw anything I longed to see provided I had nothing to look at."¹¹ During her student years and into midlife, this imaginative practice was redirected and disciplined through her close observation of people, particularly women, resulting in a highly developed capacity as a portraitist and as a recorder of genre scenes depicting women's roles in society.

As a young woman growing up in London, Mina Lowy could not reconcile her identity as the daughter of a nonobservant Jewish immigrant father and a conservative English mother in the socially constraining, middle-class world of Victorian England. Her father, Sigmund Lowy (fig. 1.5), a tailor, had married Mina's mother, Julia Bryan, under duress, as she became pregnant with Mina during their brief courtship. Mina's mother was socially timorous and struggled to keep her daughters in standing with the social conventions their financial means afforded (fig. 1.6). Mina's precociousness was an enigma to her mother, and they remained at cross-purposes throughout their lives.¹² Her father, however, enabled Mina to escape by enrolling her in art school.¹³ Once out of the house, Mina's independent streak gained momentum, as she discovered a world that affirmed her doubts about conventional society and revealed she had inherited her father's artistic inclinations. The following year, at the age of seventeen, she moved on to study in Munich at the Kunstlerien Verein. She was on her way to becoming an artist.

In 1903, after a reluctant return to London, Loy moved to Paris to study at the Académie Colarossi. It was an international school, enabling Loy to socialize with both English and American students. The study of plaster casts and cadavers was part of the curriculum, even for women, and Loy further developed her drawing practice.¹⁴ At Colarossi she met Wyndham Lewis and Jules Pascin, who would later inspire her writing and influence her burgeoning modernism. Loy recalled her student days (fig. 1.7, fig. 1.8) in a letter to Carl Van Vechten in 1915:

Paris in those days for everyone meant just learning to love the dear old impressionists—I had Manet and Monet on the spot—but Degas frightened me for a year—and I shall always feel grateful to the day I first "saw" the early Renoirs—But the most beautiful things in Paris were the Fêtes—and the Bal Bullier.¹⁵



FIG 1.5

Unidentified photographer, *Sigmund Lowy*, ca. 1890. Gelatin silver print on paper. Location unknown.



FIG. 1.6

Unidentified photographer, *Mina* Loy as a Girl, ca. 1886. Gelatin silver print on paper, $7\% \times 4\%$ in. (20 × 12 cm). Private collection.

FIG. 1.7

Stephen Haweis, *Mina Loy*, ca. 1905. Gelatin silver print on paper, $57_{16} \times 3\frac{1}{8}$ in. (13.8 × 8 cm). Private collection.

Loy found Paris enchanting, but life would not allow her to settle there for another decade and a half. Within the year she married a fellow English student, Stephen Haweis (fig. 1.9), a marriage they agreed suited them socially, if not amorously, after their discovery that Loy was pregnant. Their marriage freed Mina from the threat of her return to a stifling life in England, and her allowance would support them both. Haweis had a reputable family name, which would secure them a reasonable level of entrée in the world, and he was shrewd at negotiating the social and economic complexities of the art world. He admired Mina as an artist and was astonished to have secured such a beautiful and talented wife. This pride soon soured into humiliation, however, when he realized Loy surpassed him intellectually and artistically. Within the year he became involved in an affair.

Time revealed that Loy was naive about her legal standing in their arrangement, which empowered her husband and left her subject to his demands, under the threat that he would expose their continued deception to her father that they had a harmonious union. For a decade, Haweis resisted Loy's request for a divorce in order to receive a portion of her family allowance. During these years he ably negotiated both of their careers. He mostly likely secured her first one-person exhibition at Carfax Gallery in London in 1912. Later he entered her drawings in shows in America: one, in 1914, at the Architectural League of New York; and one, in 1915, in the Pan-American Exhibition in San Francisco.¹⁶



Early in their marriage, Haweis was successful as a photographer, opening an art photography business with a partner named Henry Coles. They secured Auguste Rodin as their client, producing over two hundred photographs of his sculptures. Their work was widely acclaimed, and their images of Rodin's *Balzac*, famously printed by Alfred Stieglitz in *Camera Work*, are renowned. Haweis photographed his wife around 1905, and these images stand as some of the most captivating made of her. One portrait depicts her holding a small Rodin sculpture in one hand, another provocatively smoking, and another in a sensuous full-length view of her nude back, her long hair falling to the floor. In all, Loy does not appear as a passive muse, but a sexually aware collaborator (figs. 1.10, 1.11, 1.12, 1.13).¹⁷

Through Haweis's connections, the couple made the acquaintance of Walter Sickert and critic George Moore. They met the protofeminist writer Colette, whose personal life may have contributed to Mina's rapid updating of her own perspective on social conventions. Mina continued to paint and draw at home during her pregnancy. She also began to create millinery and clothing designs. In his autobiography, Haweis credited Loy for introducing to Paris the uncorseted profiles (fig. 1.14) for women that later made designer Paul Poiret famous, her acumen for detail, texture, and color in cloth a certain inheritance from her father.

In May 1904, the couple's daughter Oda was born, and six of Loy's watercolors were selected for the Salon d'Automne. Loy registered for the salon

FIG. 1.8

Henri Joel Le Savoureux, Stephen Haweis and Mina Loy in Art School, c. 1905. Photograph on paper. Location unknown.