Mina Loy

Mina Loy, born Mina Gertrude Lowry, (1882-1966), was a British artist, designer, model, novelist, nurse, playwright and poet, with ties to the Dadaist, Futurist and Surrealist moments. Loy was one of the first generation modernists and was close friends with many leaders of the movement including Djuna Barnes, T.S. Elliot, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams. Her poetry was published in The Little Review and championed by Left Bank publisher Robert McAlmon.

Mina Loy was born in London in 1882, the eldest daughter of Sigmund and Julia Bryant Lowry. In 1899 at the age of seventeen Loy left school and moved to Munich to study art with the painter and graphic artist Angelo Jank. Jank, a member of the Munich Secession, introduced Loy to the work of newly emerging European thinkers, including Henri Bergson, Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzche. Upon returning to England to study painting in 1901 Loy met her first husband, Stephen Haweis. The couple married in Paris on December 31st 1903 and lived there until 1906. In 1903 Loy gave birth to a daughter, Oda Janet Haweis, who died on her first birthday in 1904. That same year Loy exhibited six watercolours at the *Salon d’Automne* and made the acquaintance of modernist writer Gertrude Stein. Loy was to become a regular at Stein’s literary salon where she met Pablo Picasso and Henri Rousseau. These early years in Paris were to provide the foundation for Loy’s lifelong friendship with writer and journalist Djuna Barnes.

Loy and Haweis moved to Florence in 1906 where they had two more children; Joella Synara Haweis (1907-2004) and John Giles Stephen Haweis (1909-1923). The marriage became strained and Loy had affairs with Filippo Marinetti, leader of the Futurist movement and author of *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, and the writer Giovanni Papini. Loy was inspired by the Futurism and published a number of poems about the movement. In 1914 Loy published her *Feminist Manifesto*, partly inspired by her disenchantment with Marinetti. 1915 saw the publication of *Songs to Joannes*, a collection of modernist, avant-garde love poems about her affair with Papini which shocked the reading public with its explicit depictions of erotic desire.

Loy served as a nurse with the Red Cross during World War One and then, following the breakdown of her marriage to Haweis, moved to New York City in 1916 where she worked in a lampshade studio as a designer and acted with the Provincetown Players. She made the acquaintance of Marcel Duchamp, Marianne Moore, Man Ray and William Carlos Williams through the experimental magazine *Others* and became a leading member of the Greenwich Village bohemian collective. During this time Loy met and fell in love with the poet-boxer Arthur Cravan. Loy and Cravan were married in Mexico City in 1918 and their daughter, Jemima Fabienna Cravan (1919-1994) was born the following year. Cravan disappeared in mysterious circumstances in 1918 and there is still come confusion over how he died as the only sources available are eyewitness accounts. Some biographers believe he was lost at sea while others suggest his body was later found in the desert. When *The Little Review* sent out a questionnaire to all previous contributors asking what their happiest moment had been, Loy responded with “Every moment I spent with Arthur Cravan.” For her unhappiest moment she wrote “the rest of the time”.

Following Cravan’s death Loy returned to Paris in 1923 and had her poetry collection *Lunar Baedeker* published by influential Left Bank publisher Robert McAlmon. This publication secured Loy’s place amongst the modernist contemporary writers such as T.S. Elliot and Marianne Moore. Her innovative use of spacing was said to influence e e cummings and as Cravan’s widow she maintained close connections with the Dadaist and Surrealist communities. Despite her literary success Loy continued to support her family through the design and manufacture of lampshades, these sold through a shop she opened with Peggy Guggenheim. Loy continued to publish throughout the 1920s, with the help of her agent Carl Van Vechten, including *Angelo-Mongrels and the Rose*, a semi-autobiographical work which was published in *The Little Review* and *The Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers.*

During the 1930s Loy exhibited her monochrome and sand paintings in New York City and worked on an unpublished novel: *Insel*. In 1936 Loy returned to New York where she lived for 20 years. Up until her death Loy continued to work on a series of collages made of materials found in back alleys and trashcans. Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables was republished in 1958. In 1959 Loy received the Copley Foundation Award for Outstanding Achievement in Art and exhibited her ‘constructions’ at the Bodley Gallery. Loy died in Aspen in 1966, following a short illness. Her novel *Insel* was published posthumously and a number of writers and academics have attempted to drawn attention to her work, both as a modernist and a feminist.

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