

Portrait of Young Genius

The Mind and Art of Marie Bashkirtseff

Joel L. Schiff

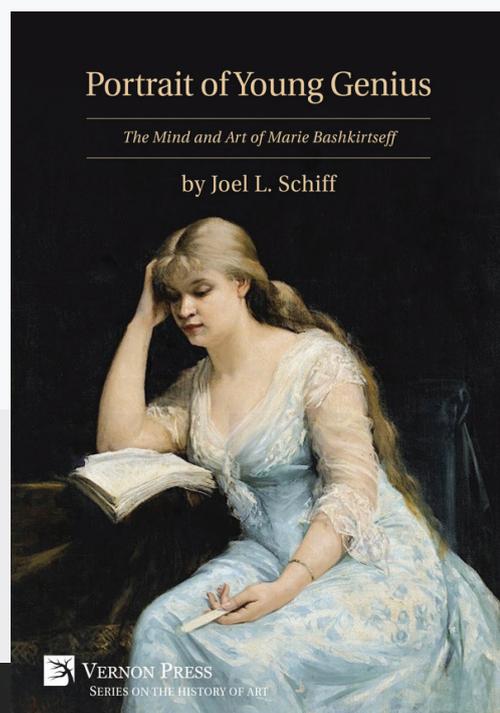
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Summary

Marie Bashkirtseff was one of the most extraordinary women of the 19th century. Her Journal (originally comprising some 20,000 hand-written pages but pared down to a few hundred for publication) was a cause célèbre after her death and continues to be an inspiration to the Women's Movement to this day. It also inspired such great writers as Anaïs Nin and Katherine Mansfield among many others.

Born into an aristocratic family in a village in Ukraine the family soon settled in France, first in Nice and later in Paris. Taught entirely by tutors Marie spoke multiple languages, played numerous musical instruments and longed for a singing career on the stage. An illness that affected her throat made her change course and she took up painting for which she had a latent talent. As a student at the Académie Julian in Paris she was soon exhibiting at the annual Paris Salon, the premier venue for artists.

But it was her personality that makes Marie Bashkirtseff such an exceptional individual. At a very young age she was already exhibiting in her Journal the thoughts of a learned philosopher, wrestling with the nature of God, the position of women in society, the politics of men. Having contracted tuberculosis in early childhood she ceaselessly strove to shrug it off in her quest to achieve greatness. In the end, a great tragedy unfolds.



The book is somewhat unique in format. The first part is a biographical section that describes Marie's unusual and fascinating life. Then a second section, consists of a single Journal excerpt (in English translation from the original French) on each left-hand page, juxtaposed with one of her outstanding works of art on the facing page. In this manner, we learn about her remarkable life and tribulations, enter her restive and brilliant mind via her Journal, as well as appreciate her exceptionally fine works as an artist.

About the author

Joel L. Schiff was born in Chicago and has a PhD in mathematics from the University of California, Los Angeles. He spent his career at the University of Auckland and has written three books on various mathematical subjects (published by Springer-Verlag and John Wiley & Sons). He has also been a successful part-time asteroid hunter and was the founder/publisher of an international journal on meteorites. Having a lifelong interest in art, he is also an artist who paints in oils and in 2014 had a book published about the New Zealand/ Australian/ British artist, Grace Joel. Research revealed that Ms Joel (no relation) studied at the well-known Académie Julian in Paris and it was then that the author discovered another Julian student, Marie Bashkirtseff, one of the most fascinating individuals of the 19th century. He has been obsessed with her ever since, traveling to Moscow, St Petersburg, Paris, and Naples in pursuit of the story of this extraordinary young woman.

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