



# **Mistress of Modernism: The Life of Peggy Guggenheim**

*Mary V. Dearborn*

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## **Mistress of Modernism: The Life of Peggy Guggenheim** Mary V. Dearborn

Peggy Guggenheim emerges in *Mistress of Modernism* as the ultimate self-invented woman, a cultural mover and shaker who broke away from her poor-little-rich-girl origins to shape a life for herself as the enfant terrible of the art world. Peggy's visionary Art of This Century gallery in New York, which brought together the European surrealist artists with the American abstract expressionists, was an epoch-shaking "happening" at the center of its time.

Dearborn's unprecedented access to the Guggenheim family, friends, and papers contributes rich insight to Peggy's traumatic childhood in German-Jewish "Our Crowd" New York, her self-education in the ways of art and artists, her caustic battles with other art-collecting Guggenheims, and her legendary sexual appetites: her lovers included Max Ernst, Samuel Beckett, and Marcel Duchamp, to name a mere few. Here too is a poignant portrait of Peggy's last years as l'ultima dogaressa -- the last duchess -- in her palazzo in Venice, where her collection still draws thousands of visitors every year.

*Mistress of Modernism* is the first definitive biography of a woman whose wit, passion, and provocative legacy come compellingly to life.

## **Mistress of Modernism: The Life of Peggy Guggenheim Details**

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Author : Mary V. Dearborn

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# **From Reader Review Mistress of Modernism: The Life of Peggy Guggenheim for online ebook**

## **Dave says**

I'm not sure I knew much of anything about Peggy Guggenheim. I did not know she was the queen of the Lost Generation in Paris in the 20s and the matron of mid-century American painting. She led quite a bohemian life floated by a relatively small slice of the Guggenheim fortune. Her father was the Guggenheim who died on the Titanic. Not as rich as other Guggenheims, it was enough to support her rejection of the staid but super-rich New York German-Jewish culture in which she was born. The book is not only a story about her but about the 19th Century art scene from Europe to New York and beyond, from Picasso to Pollack, who she championed and supported in his early years. Rising from an abused wife to a passionately committed bedder of men, she lived a life so outside of the norm -- and wrote about it all -- that it overshadowed her legacy as maybe the greatest incubator of art talent in the 19th Century. One of the best results of reading is picking up an unknown subject and discovering a new world that creates a fuller understanding of things you thought you knew.

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## **Alex says**

A thoroughly researched and thoughtfully written biography of a powerful and controversial woman, Dearborn's volume on Peggy Guggenheim is a good read. I was primarily interested in the second half of her life when she embarked on her collecting and gallery-managing endeavors, so the first half of the book was a little tedious. Still, definitely worth it for the fascinating view into the lives of various important figures of 1920s-50s culture, and the shaping of modern art institutions. I'm also impressed with all of Peggy's romances with famous people- Samuel Beckett! Marcel Duchamp! Max Ernst! What a lady!

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## **Xander Mitchell says**

A better read than I expected. Dearborn obviously holds Peggy near and dear to her heart, and the biography tends to offer more sympathy to Peggy than may be justifiable. Nevertheless, Dearborn created a fascinating, if sometimes overly-romantic, portrait of one of the greatest patrons and collectors of twentieth-century art. An easy and well-researched biography.

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## **Mariachiara Fardin says**

This Biography of Peggy Guggenheim tells her historic in cronologic way, for this it's full of events but it's not trasmit much pathos

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## **Andrea Stoeckel says**

Dearborn's bio of Peggy Guggenheim is also a biography of the times she lived in. A thoroughly modern woman, she championed causes that in some ways made the rest of her family just about disown her. But with her help, many important artists survived WW2 and she helped build on themes of modernist painting and sculpture as she promoted and protected people like Man Ray, Rodin, Jackson Pollock, Emma Golwin, Andy Warhol and even Phillip Glass and up to Yoko Ono. Many of her collection are now in the Guggenheim Museum system.

Mary Dearborn is a wonderful biographer. Hunt her down and read non-fiction that reads like fiction

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### **Keren Andrews says**

Finally finished!!!! This author makes the life story of a very interesting person so boring!!! I finished it as I was interested in Peggy Guggenheim, but this author just was not creative at all in making it easy to read!! It was tough going!

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### **Christina says**

Peggy Guggenheim was born in 1898 and died 81 years later, in 1979. She was born into the rich Guggenheim family although she was one of the 'poor' Guggenheims. She didn't want the traditional life of a Jewish girl in New York so she strived hard to find her place in life. She became an avid art collector, especially abstract and Surrealist art. She lived among the artists, paid artists regularly to help them, had various galleries where she showed her collection and also other works - among these works by Jackson Pollock, Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp and Wassily Kandinsky. She also lived life to the fullest, was married several times, had lovers and was very frank and open about her sex life. Although she wasn't very pretty, she seemed to have had something about her that attracted people to her.

There's no doubt in my mind that Peggy Guggenheim was a very special person, a woman who broke free of her family's expectations and through trial-and-error carved her own place in the world - and at least to some extent in art history as well.

Unfortunately, the book doesn't take full advantage of this. In fact, the book isn't very good. It has a lot of issues. First of, the first chapters are really confusing with lots of namedropping. Both Peggy's paternal and maternal family are rather big and both are mentioned in few pages and I never quite got the idea of who's who. In fact, the author never solves the problem of introducing new persons to the book. Peggy meets so many interesting people in her life but the continuity of the story is often broken when new people show up and we then get their life stories in a few paragraphs or pages - or in some cases, just get the one interesting fact from the life in a sentence or in parentheses (no matter if the fact has any relevance for Peggy's story and life or not). When you're writing a biography about a person who meets a lot of different persons, you have to make their introduction into the biography smooth - this didn't happen here.

Another issue was that the writing didn't make you really connect with Peggy. You felt distanced for most of the book - even when various heart breaking issues happened, you didn't feel any emotional reaction. You never felt like you got under her skin. Now, I know Peggy was a complicated woman who had issues with being close to people and who seems like an exceptional bad mother - but we still ought to be able to feel her, to sense her, not just get a rational idea about who she was.

As if this wasn't enough, this book was also very repetitive. The same thing was said over and over.

Sometimes in the beginning and end of a chapter, sometimes several chapters later. It made me feel that neither the author or the editor have done the final editing of the manuscript well enough.

I have no doubt that the author really likes Peggy. And I do too. But the author thinks that Peggy has been overlooked in art history books because she is a woman and because she had a rather healthy sexual appetite and wasn't afraid to talk about it. I'm not sure. I don't doubt that she was important in her day, that she made a difference in for instance Jackson Pollock's career. But I'm not sure that she was all that important when you look back. She had two important galleries, one in London and one in New York, but neither of them was open for more than a few years. She also had the museum in Venice but still. I think she had some impact but I don't think the author makes the point persuasively that she has been overlooked. I lean towards the thought that she has been given the credit she was due.

So - after all these negative things, I still gave the book 3 stars. The reason for this is Peggy. I'm not sure I liked her but she was extremely fascinating and I do like people who take their lives in their own hands and do something with it. Who fight against tradition and expectations and go after their bliss, so to speak. So even though I think the author makes a really bad job of writing about Peggy, Peggy herself makes the difference and thus, the 3 stars. I do also think the book becomes slightly better as it progress - but I'm not sure if I just got used to the badness.

I hope there are better biographies out there about Peggy because I think she deserves it. If not, then I recommend this one. Otherwise, I would definitely go for one of the other first.

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### **Melanie says**

<http://mdevrieze.tumblr.com/post/9644...>

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### **Susan says**

I learned so much about the various artists Peggy Guggenheim touched throughout her life. It was a fascinating way to increase my Modern Art knowledge. I truly enjoyed it because I recently taught an ArtLit course on Frank Lloyd Wright. I gained some special knowledge about the building of the Guggenheim Museum and was able to share it with the students. There were so many interesting background stories on her friends, lovers, husbands and artists - it kept my interest to the appendix! If you have an interest in art history, especially that of Modern Art - this is a wonderful book to read.

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### **Mary says**

Interesting to learn about how Peggy Guggenheim broke free of her family's traditional expectations and pursued a lifelong role supporting new art and artists in the US and Europe. The pace is rather breathless with event following event, but I appreciate Dearborn's discipline in limiting her analysis. Guggenheim was a flawed and complicated person but it is helpful to consider her in the context of her own time, she really forged new territory as a woman and as a patron of the arts.

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### **Christianne Hedtke says**

This is one of three bios on Peggy Guggenheim and it is the shortest, most vague, and doesn't spend much time creating atmosphere and placing her life in the context of history. It also tends to look at her actions

through rose-colored glasses when in fact some of her less savory characteristics are the most fun to read about, and also probably a more honest depiction of a very dynamic woman. If you want the real deal read Peggy: The Wayward Guggenheim by Jacqueline Bograd Weld.

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### **E. V. Gross says**

I felt that Dearborn's handling of Peggy's personal life was a little too melodramatic. She definitely played up the Perpetually-Wayward-Girl-Child angle a bit and dismissed a lot of her actions/relationships as just being a product of daddy issues. But, it was a fun read. And I did learn a few interesting things about the artists that she worked with that I didn't know before (although, I'm kind of upset that she was so dismissive of Lee Krasner...although, lets be serious, everyone was). Disappointing but not awful.

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### **Judy says**

Well-written biography of the woman who championed abstract expressionism, in particular Jackson Pollock, and collected the works of many modern artists before they were well-known. Her personal life was always in an uproar, but her canny acquisitions affected the entire course of art history in the 20th century. If you ever have the opportunity to visit the Guggenheim in Venice, \*go\*--it's her legacy to Venice and the world.

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### **Hannah says**

I wasn't sure that this was going to keep me engaged all the way through but it was interesting to read about the life and works of the Modernists and Surrealists. Although Guggenheim is interesting to a point because of her key role as investor, buyer and promoter of so many famous artists, it's the promiscuous and incestuous lives of these people that keep you reading.

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### **Carolyn says**

Fascinating story about the woman who promoted modernism and abstract impressionism with her money and influence. The book focuses on Peggy's friendships and affairs with the interesting and the notorious in the art world. She never had as much money as people thought she had; even though she supported several people with life-long subsidies, she was often accused of being stingy. She adored her father, who died on the Titanic, and she thereafter embarked on some disastrous and abusive relationships until she eventually found her footing and began acting on her own passions, though not always wisely. Through her many relationships in the art world she became interested in art history and developed her own tastes in the modern movements, which lead to her sponsorship of emerging artists and her successful galleries. The author seems to want to disprove many of the rumors regarding her relationship with Jackson Pollock, but had to conclude that many of these stories remain unknowable. Thoroughly enjoyable read about creative and destructive people pushing the boundaries of art and living in the 20th century.

