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Valentine de Saint-Point: Performance, War, Politics and Eroticism

Adrien Sina, ed.: *Feminine Futures: Valentine de Saint-Point. Performance, War, Politics and Eroticism = Tragédies charnelles: Valentine de Saint-Point. Performance, guerre, politique et érotisme*. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2011. 23,5 x 30 cm (hardcover) 512 pages (2500 colour ill.) € 48. ISBN: 978-2-84066-351-5. EAN: 9782840663515.

Feminine Futures is a book about the contributions women artists made to avant-garde performance, especially in the field of dance. It covers a broad spectrum of innovative choreographers, dancers and performers, ranging from Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis via the Expressionist Mary Wigman, Gret Palucca and Martha Graham to contemporary icons such as Orlan, Carolee Schneemann and Gina Pane (to name but a few). Altogether, some 65 artists are presented in this publication by means of word and image, the majority of them from the period 1900–1945, and within this field, nearly half of the book's 512 pages are dedicated to Futurism. This focus reflects the personal interests of the author, Adrien Sina, who is also documenting with this beautifully produced volume his own private collection of photographs, art works, autographs and literary documents.

I first met Adrien Sina some 15 years ago when he contacted me to talk about Valentine de Saint-Point. He was working on a project he called “Tragédies charnelles”, which linked Saint-Point's theories to her dances, performances and political actions. This ambitious venture finally came to fruition at the 2009 New York *Performa* Biennale. In 2003 we met in London to discuss a book he tentatively labelled *Twentieth-Century Body Politics*, but which never appeared in print. I can now see that both projects were eventually fused and brought to a successful conclusion in this large-size tome published by Les Presses du Réel. It also brought home to me that Sina, in his customary modesty, always remained very silent on the fact that his scholarly research had always been accompanied by a highly successful collecting activity. I received some insight into this side of him when I saw an exhibition on Valentine de Saint-Point which he organized at the Italian Cultural Institute in New York in 2009. Together with Sarah Wilson he also curated a room dedicated to Saint-Point at the 2009 centenary exhibition of Futurism held at the Tate Modern in London (June-September 2009). Other choice fruits of his activity as an avid collector were included in *Traces du sacré* (Centre Pompidou, 2008, and Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2008–2009) and *Danser sa vie: Art*

et danse de 1900 à nos jours (Centre Pompidou, 2011–2012). However, none of this prepared me for the splendid publication he has now brought onto the market. It is like a treasure chest for anybody interested in the complex “Futurism, women and dance in the early twentieth century”.



Fig. 1: Valentine de Saint-Point sitting at her desk in her Paris apartment, 9 avenue de Tourville, in 1914.

Apart from Adrien Sina’s short, monographic presentations of the women artists he included in this volume, there are a number of longer essays by scholars such as Nancy Moore, Barbara Ballard, Sander Gilman and Philippe de Lustrac. Texts are either in French or English, and there is little overlap between them as far as contents are concerned. In any case, they are always closely related to the impressive illustrative material (c. 2500 colour illustrations) that makes up a good half of the volume and that is always reproduced to a very high standard.

The Futurist section takes up pp. 9–245 and begins with Valentine de Saint-Point around 1904/05 when she was embroiled in a love triangle with Ricciotto Canudo and F. T. Marinetti. The Canudo expert Giovanni Dotoli supplies a short essay on this affair, and other scholarly contributions discuss Saint-Point and dance, Saint-Point and the theatre, Saint-Point and the Ballets Russes, Saint-

Point and the Orient. This artist is clearly the focal point of the first section of the book, and her life and œuvre is documented by a large number of photographs, works of art, samples of correspondence (e.g. with F. T. Marinetti) and essays by and on her.

Other Futurist women artists presented on the following pages include Enif Robert, Mina Loy and Giannina Censi. Further sections of the book are dedicated to Futurist writings on the women's question and on dance and music. As Adrien Sina is also the proud owner of a large number of books, artefacts and manuscripts by Futurist writers and artists, he availed himself of this opportunity to display material from his collection relating to Bertelli, Bragaglia, Mazza, Morpurgo, Munari, Papini, Prampolini, Severini, Soffici, Tato and others.

The *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies* is not the right place to discuss the second part of this volume. Suffice it to state that it contains many rare photographs of a whole phalanx of dancers and actresses that played a significant rôle in defining images of *La femme moderne* in both popular and artistic circles. The book is therefore to be recommended not only to Futurism scholars, but also to dance historians, to all those interested in the cultural history of the *années folles* and *années de guerre*, and to collectors and professional experts of photography.