

<b>Institution:</b> University of Cambridge		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 32		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Including Women Artists: Dorothea Tanning, Leonor Fini and Women of the Avant-Garde		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2015-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Alyce Mahon	Reader in Modern and Contemporary Art History	2000-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015-present		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>In the current REF cycle, Dr Mahon has worked extensively as a researcher, curator and curatorial advisor with world-leading art museums to bring about a fundamental transformation in attitudes to modern art – especially Surrealism – by including the work of women artists, which were previously neglected or ignored. This has led to more museum exhibitions of women artists; the elevation of women artists in the public eye; the bringing of Surrealism to new, diverse audiences; a significant increase in the market value of women artists; and the long overdue discovery and recognition of women artists by art critics, art collectors, and government officials responsible for the arts.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Mahon's work for these exhibitions was informed by her research and publications on gender, sexuality, and modern art over the past twenty years, resulting in three monographs, one co-authored book, one edited catalogue, and thirty-nine essays and journal articles, of which one monograph, the catalogue, and thirteen essays and articles were produced in the current REF cycle. Mahon's work on this research theme has most recently culminated in her monograph <i>The Marquis de Sade and the Avant-Garde</i> (2020) [R1], which documents and analyses the ways in which Sade's radical rethinking of female sexuality and libertinage inspired many female Surrealists and their questioning of patriarchy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It includes a chapter on Fini's illustrations for Sade's <i>Juliette</i> (1944) and etchings for the erotic novel <i>Histoire d'O</i> (1962), material which was included in the exhibition <i>Leonor Fini: Theatre of desire 1930-1990</i> held at the Museum of Sex (MoSEX) in New York in 2018-2019 because of Mahon's input as chief advisor to that exhibition.</p> <p>The questioning of patriarchy and the expression of female sexuality in modern art were also key themes in Mahon's research and publication of two of the four essays in the catalogue for the exhibition <i>Dorothea Tanning: Behind the door, another invisible door</i> at the Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid (3 Oct. 2018-6 Jan. 2019) and the Tate Modern, London (28 Feb.-9 June, 2019) [R2]. Mahon also edited the catalogue, published in Spanish and English editions, as a whole. The first of her two essays, 'Dorothea Tanning: Behind the door, another invisible door', examined the door motif as a talisman for space and sexuality as explored in many media across Tanning's seventy year career. Her second essay, 'Life is something else: Dorothea Tanning's <i>Hôtel du Pavot, Chambre 202</i>', offered the first scholarly analysis of Tanning's soft sculptures and installation <i>Poppy Hotel, Room 202</i> (1970-73), drawing on unpublished archival material and interviews. This research led Mahon to locate and inventory all Tanning's previously-unknown and never-displayed hand-crafted soft sculptures, fourteen of which she arranged to have removed from storage for exhibition.</p>		

Mahon's interest in avant-garde sculpture and its subversive play with both Freudian and consumer fetishism also informed her analysis of the avant-garde's turn to the hand-crafted doll and ready-made mannequin in her essay 'The Assembly Line Goddess: Modern art and the mannequin', a 10,000 word essay in the catalogue of the exhibition *Silent Partners: Artist and mannequin from function to fetish* (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 14 Oct. 2014-25 Jan. 2015, and Musée Bourdelle, Paris, 1 April-12 July 2015) [R6]. This theme was further developed in her analysis of Dada, Surrealist and Contemporary artists' uncanny use of the domestic object and space in 'Gender Politics and the Home: Place of intimacy', a 4,000 word essay in the catalogue of the exhibition *No Place Like Home* (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 25 Feb. 2017-19 Aug. 2017) [R4].

In 'The domestic as erotic rite in the art of Carolee Schneemann', a 9,000 word essay in the *Oxford Art Journal*, 2017 [R3], Mahon explored the domestic in Schneemann's film and performances, drawing on interviews she carried out with the artist. Thanks to Mahon's discussions with the curatorial team, Schneemann was included in the major exhibition *Sexology and the artistic avant-garde* (Wellcome Trust, London, 20 Nov. 2014-20 Sept. 2015) for which Mahon wrote a 6,500 word catalogue essay assessing the use of sexology and taxonomies of difference by the Surrealists, Schneemann and Zanele Muholi [R5].

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

**R1:** Mahon, A. (2020). *The Marquis de Sade and the Avant-Garde*, Princeton University Press, ISBN 9780691141619.

**R2:** Mahon, A. (2018). a) 'Dorothea Tanning: Behind the door another invisible door'; b) 'Life is something else: Dorothea Tanning's *Hôtel du Pavot, Chambre 202*', in A. Mahon (ed.), *Dorothea Tanning: Behind the door, another invisible door*, Tate Enterprises Ltd., pp. 15-35 and pp. 53-67, ISBN 9788480265751.

**R3:** Mahon, A. (2017). 'The domestic as erotic rite in the art of Carolee Schneemann', *Oxford Art Journal*, 40(1), pp. 49-64. [DOI](#)

**R4:** Mahon, A. (2017). 'Gender Politics and the Home: Place of intimacy', in *No Place Like Home*, The Israel Museum, pp. 24-36, ISBN 9789652784698.

**R5:** Mahon, A. (2014). 'Sexology and the artistic avant-garde', in *The Institute of Sexology*, Wellcome Collection, pp. 36-49, ISBN 9780957028562.

**R6:** Mahon, A. (2014). 'The Assembly Line Goddess: Modern art and the mannequin', in *Silent Partners: Artist and mannequin from function to fetish*, Yale University Press and Fitzwilliam Museum, pp. 191-248, ISBN 9780300208221.

Recognition of the high calibre and innovation of Mahon's research on this topic has come in the form of a British Academy/Leverhulme Trust Senior Research Fellowship, which she was awarded in 2017-18 for her research on Tanning, and her award of a 2018 Milliard Meiss Publication Grant by the College Art Association for her monograph on Sade.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Mahon's work challenges the orthodox history of the avant-garde, notably Surrealism, which has centred on white male European artists. Women are discussed by the majority of scholars and museums only as muses, lovers, and marginalized presences. High profile public exhibitions and events have raised the status of the work of women artists and have demonstrated how their recognition and inclusion is crucial for the history and appreciation of the aesthetic, socio-political, and emphatically collective ambitions of the avant-garde. As a result, new audiences have discovered women artists while museums, collectors, and critics have been catalysed into a newfound appreciation of their art.

#### Persuading Museums to Exhibit More Women Artists

At the Museum of Sex Mahon brought Fini's body of erotic art, especially works which challenged sexual hierarchies and gender binaries, to new audiences as well as empowering the typical visitor for this museum – '60% female and female-identifying individuals ... looking

to find new ways to express their desires or seek information about their own bodies' [E4]. The first museum show of Fini in the US, it was attended by over 150,000 visitors, and named one of the top ten exhibitions of 2018 by *Art News*. This led the Weinstein Gallery to receive 'more inquiries of acquisition for Leonor Fini's work than any other artist' [E4].

The Reina Sofia invited Mahon to curate a major Tanning exhibition as part of their commitment to avant-garde women artists 'whose voices were silenced by the historical periods in which they lived' [E1]. In press meetings, the Director spoke of the 'great necessity' for this overdue Tanning exhibition. The Spanish Minister of Culture and Sport praised the Tanning exhibition for supporting the Reina Sofia's aim to 'reformulate and reactivate the legacy of modernity' [E2]. He noted that the Reina Sofia and Tate Modern relied on Mahon's 'extensive scholarship', and he pointed to the collaboration of Mahon, the two museums, and the Spanish government as a 'model of institutional cooperation' [E2]. The retrospective received 429,000 visitors at the Reina Sofia and made a profit of EUR839,508 [E1]. Mahon spearheaded a lively public programme – public curator tours, and interactive workshops for teenagers exploring movement and Tanning's poetry within the exhibition galleries.

At Tate Modern, *Dorothea Tanning* attracted 115,000 visitors, with a significant increase in Tate membership [E3]. It was named one of the top ten exhibitions of 2019 in *The Guardian*. [E5] 6,503 copies of Mahon's edited *Dorothea Tanning* catalogue were sold at the Tate and 1,642 at the Reina Sophia (1,150 in Spanish, 492 in English). It helped prove the museum's new commitment to underrepresented women artists. The Director of the Tate Modern testified to Mahon's 'acute, intelligent and committed cultural vision' in bringing one of the first women artist shows to Tate Modern and ensuring 'a talented and visionary artist who had long been overshadowed by her husband, the surrealist Max Ernst' was redressed. It enabled five works by Tanning from the Tate collection to be showcased anew and shed 'fresh light on our understanding of surrealism and pointing to a broader geographical and historical scope of surrealist practice' [E3]. Mahon led two public curator's tours, a public conversation with Tanning's niece, Mimi Johnson, and an event on Tanning's *Family portrait*, all sold out. She made a *TateShots* video on Tanning (7 mins) which has received over 290,000 views [E9, p. 203]. One viewer commented: 'This just goes to show how sexist the world is that I didn't learn about this supremely talented artist back when I was an art major some time ago. Learned all about the usual boys, but not her. Crazy' [E9, p. 241].

### **Elevating Women Artists in the Eye of Critics and the Public**

Both exhibitions were met with overwhelmingly positive responses in the international press. With *Leonor Fini*, a reviewer in *Artforum* noted 'Today, MOMA has no paintings by Fini in its collection. It has 283 by Ernst ... That this retrospective is held at the Museum of Sex underscores institutional art history's missed encounter with Fini's work' [E4, p.187]. *Le Temps* wrote 'I had never heard of Leonor Fini before I entered the Museum of Sex and I noticed that it was really the first time that I saw the feminine represented in this way by an artist of that time' [E4, pp. 1-2]. *The Art Newspaper* invited Mahon to do a podcast interview on Fini in Nov. 2018; it has had 6,400 listeners to date. In Nov. 2020, Katy Hessel of *The great women artists* podcast invited Mahon to do a further podcast on Fini. It has had over 10,000 listeners to date [E6].

The Tanning retrospective was also perceived by the press and public as 'rescuing' an artist from the art historical obscurity to which she had been consigned because of her gender. A review in *El Norte de Castilla* was given the subtitle: 'The Reina Sofia has claimed the genius of a multi-talented, original artist excluded from the canon'; while *El País* called Tanning a 'woman surrealist against patriarchy' [E8, pp. 91 and 22]. *The Guardian* gave it a rare five-star review, noting 'it's easy to give Tanning a crucial place in the canon of feminist art' [E9, p. 26]. *ARTnews* described it as 'a superb Dorothea Tanning retrospective connected with present (and surely, future) controversies over sexism' [E9, p. 185]. Many commentators noted the nature of 'discovery' round the exhibition: it was described as a 'nonstop revelation' (*The Observer*) [E9, p. 101], 'an exciting revelation' (*The Brooklyn Rail*) [E9, p. 145], an 'absolute revelation' (*The Arts Desk*), a 'revelatory exhibition' (*Europhile*) [E9, p. 168] and a 'feast of

surprises' (*The Sunday Times*) [E9, p. 103]. The exhibition was featured in specialist dance and fashion publications including *The Dancing Times*, *Dance International*, *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *Stylist* and a *Whistles* blog [E9, pp. 30; 197; 75; 99; 130; 109]. It inspired a fashion shoot in *The Financial Times* – '10 ways to dress like a surrealist Artist' – and even a new hairstyle, invented by the London-based stylist Daniel Dyer [E11].

### **Celebrating Difference and Serving Diverse Audiences**

Mahon's exhibitions presented Fini and Tanning as exemplary of the 'modern woman', as noted by critics and the public. *Leonor Fini* was hailed in *The Art Newspaper* as 'a joyful exploration of freedom, creativity and gender non-conformity'. David Noh wrote in *Gay City News*, 'If and when I die, I would love to be resurrected in a world created by Leonor Fini — a realm where it is the female who is all powerful, holding complete yet salubrious sway over all men, being more nurturing, empathetic, infinitely sagacious, and rather more beauty-loving than the true weaker sex, exemplified by the treasurable show Leonor Fini: The Theater of Desire' [E4, p. 176].

Tate shared several Instagram posts on the Tanning exhibition, which accrued a collective 233,214 likes and where comments repeatedly featured the words: 'amazing', 'fabulous', 'fantastic', 'stunning' 'inspiring'. One Instagrammer commented: 'Genuinely one of the best exhibitions I've seen. Thank you'. There were private viewings for Brad Pitt and Madonna who publicized the show to her 14,100,000 Instagram followers and credited Tanning with providing inspiration for her most recent incarnation: Madame X [E12, p. 8]. Tanning's depictions of motherhood, in particular, touched visitors. The author of an article in *Oh Comely* magazine said: 'The first time I saw [*Maternity*, 1946] at Museo Reina Sofia, I felt a deep connection with it and my own internal debate about motherhood' [E9, p. 36], while a piece in *Elephant Magazine* said: 'At Dorothea Tanning's exhibition at Tate Modern, it comes as a great relief to see motherhood depicted in nightmarish glory ... Seeing this kind of depiction hanging in a major museum is vital' [E9, p. 183]. An article on the healing effect of art on mental health in *Dazed* cited the Tanning retrospective in particular: 'I feel a confusing juxtaposition of restless and disengaged; my palms are sweaty and there's a risk I might vomit. I soothe myself by remembering that in an hour or thereabouts, I can skip over Millennium Bridge to Tate Modern and lose myself in [Tanning's] "Endgame"...' [E9, p. 176]. Mahon also spoke on 'Women, Sex and Surrealism' at the Doyce Street Studios' pop-up exhibition (1-7 May 2019) organised by 'a group of diverse artists' and celebrating 'beauty and sex and a sisterhood' in response to Tanning [E7].

### **Increasing the Market Value of Women Artists' Work to Museums and Collectors**

Mahon's research on women Surrealists, notably Fini and Tanning, reached new audiences through her public talks at museums and auction houses and media coverage: MoSEX (2018), the Reina Sofia Madrid (2018), Tate Modern, London (2019), Fondation Giacometti, Paris (2019), Witte de With, Rotterdam (2019), Fine Art Museum, Sedona (2019) Christie's, Paris (2018, 2019). Mahon shared her research and promoted women Surrealists in a number of podcasts (three times for *The Art Newspaper*), and was prominently featured in a 2019 ARTE documentary on women Surrealists, *Gelebte Träume* (52 mins) [E6]. In 2020 a record price of USD980,000 for Fini was achieved at Sotheby's and Weinstein Gallery notes that between 2018-2020, 'From the website Artsy alone, we receive 3-5 inquiries from curious collectors per week. In most all cases, they have only recently learned of the artist' [E4]. In 2018 Fine Arts Brokers noted a dramatic increase in prices for Tanning with *The temptation of St Antony* (1945-46) selling for USD1,152,500 [E10, p. 6]. Gallerist Alison Jacques, noted the impact of Tanning's 'well deserved retrospective at the Tate Modern last year ... [now] her paintings can command prices between USD75,000 and \$1m' [E10, p. 11]. Further, Mahon advised Reina Sofia on the acquisition of 4 works – *Hôtel* (1988, collage), *Étreinte* (1969, sculpture), *Even the young girls* (1966, painting), *Les 7 Périls Spectraux* (1959, lithograph) – and National Galleries of Scotland on their bid to the Art Fund to purchase *Tableau Vivant* (1954). In 2020, Tate

bought *Murmurs* (1976) and *MOMA Notes for an apocalypse* (1976) – both paintings featured in Mahon's exhibition.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

**E1:** Testimonial: Director, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid.

**E2:** Endorsement, *Dorothea Tanning* exhibition catalogue: Minister of Culture and Sport, Spain.

**E3:** Testimonial: Director, Tate Modern, London.

**E4:** (i) Testimonial: Director and Curator, Weinstein Gallery, San Francisco.

(ii) Leonor Fini, Theatre of Desire Catalogue and Media Report.

**E5:** (i) Dorothea Tanning as Top show of 2019 for [Guardian](#).

(ii) emails on sales figures of the catalogue.

**E6:** (i) Mahon, A. (18 April 2019). Alyce Mahon on the enigmatic Dorothea Tanning. *Art UK*.

[\[Link\]](#)

(ii) Mahon, A. (2 Nov. 2018). Don't call me a woman artist. *The Art Newspaper*. [\[Link\]](#)

6.4k plays as of Nov. 2020. Audio file available on request.

(iii) Mahon, A. (10 July 2020). Alyce Mahon on Leonor Fini. *The Art Newspaper*. [\[Link\]](#)

Audio file available on request.

(iv) Mahon, A. (Oct. 2020). Alyce Mahon on Leonor Fini. Episode 47 of *The Great Women Artists Podcast* with Katy Hessel. [\[Link\]](#)

(v) Film: *Gelebte Träume - Künstlerinnen des Surrealismus. (Lived Dreams)*. Directed by Maria Tappeiner (2020). ARTE-Doku. [\[Link\]](#) Video file available on request.

**E7:** Programme: *3 streets away* extended information and happenings, 1-7 May 2019. [\[Link\]](#)

**E8:** Press and media dossier from Reina Sofia, Madrid.

**E9:** Press and media dossier from Tate Modern, London.

**E10:** Art market evidence: (i) Williamson, A. Dorothea Tanning and the market for female Surrealists. *Fine Art Brokers*, 15 Jan. 2020. [\[Link\]](#)

(ii) Gavin, F. The super-gallerist putting women in the picture: Alison Jacques is bringing a wave of marginalised artists who never 'got their dues' to international glory. *Financial Times*, 18 Nov. 2020. [\[Link\]](#)

**E11:** Dorothea Tanning inspired [fashion show](#).

**E12:** Tate Tanning Campaign Summary.