Art and Design Education, as a marginalised subsidiary of education today (non-core foundation subject with programmes of study and no statutory attainments) – together with the male dominance of artist role models at school, in the media (unless women artists are deemed newsworthy for alternative or additional reasons other than their work), in galleries and within mainstream art beyond school – has played and continues to play a significant role (alongside other historical and gendered factors discussed throughout the earlier sections of this book) in depressing female artistic ambition. Although Art and Design Education might be seen as the responsibility of schools, state funded public galleries also have a responsibility to provide the opportunity for the public to engage with and contemplate art at first hand; they therefore have a responsibility to provide a balanced and reflective view that also addresses issues of male dominance, ethnocentricity and Eurocentricity. Evidence of improvement in the celebration and promotion of women artists can be seen, for example, in three current (2015) women-only art exhibitions featuring the late Sonia Delaunay, the late Leonora Carrington, and Marlene Dumas (at the Tate Modern, Tate Liverpool, Tate Modern respectively) – but these artists have been overlooked for many years. In her lifetime, Sonia Delaunay, like many women artists of the early twentieth century, was over-shadowed by her arguably less talented husband Robert; Leonora Carrington was better known for her love affair with the much older Surrealist artist Max Ernst; and Dumas’ work, although generally well-known within artist and art-educated circles, has maintained a relatively marginal position in mainstream
art, in part because in her early career, her work was seemingly out-of-step with the work of male artist peers, such as the celebrated Julian Schnabell of the 1980s. However, with a further woman artist exhibition to follow (Barbara Hepworth, Tate Britain), it appears that the Tate Establishment has at last embarked upon an active exhibitions programme designed to rediscover and explore key figures in the story of modern art, especially women.

As Griselda Pollock points out in in the Sonia Delaunay exhibition catalogue (2015), the Modernist culture of the 1920s was liberating for ambitious and creative women, who were able to enjoy a new kind of independence particularly evident in Paris. Yet, as Kathleen Jamie reports (2015, Guardian online) citing the views of Pollock:

However, these modernists did not write their own history. The history of modernism was set down in the 1950s, a difficult decade for women, and it was written by masculinist fogeys. The contribution of women has been ignored, especially where a woman's work moved fluidly between art and design. Thus, for a long time, Sonia Delaunay was regarded as the helpmeet or wife-of-the-more-famous Robert.

Given the fanfare of appreciation and the fact that this is the first retrospective in 40 years, the question must be asked: Why has Delaunay (like many other female artists) remained virtually invisible for so long, given that she worked closely with her husband and his work is relatively well known? ‘The task’, the curators insist, ‘is not to assert that she was better than her husband, but to see her contribution clearly and fully, and in its own right’ (Jamie, 2015, Guardian online).

Moreover, another concern, according to Dalton (1995) is that current art education practices in schools and colleges have evolved from the thirties and forties ‘and are rooted in Modernist values and ideas’, (Dalton, 1995: 44). Although there have been subsequent changes in concepts and approaches to art (and design) education in schools which would challenge this assumption, these changes have oscillated between manifesting what might be termed a ‘masculinist’ knowledge and skills-based curriculum and arguably a more feminine sensibility that embraces expression in terms of feeling and emotion (Dalton, 1995). Where change has been slow it is in the area