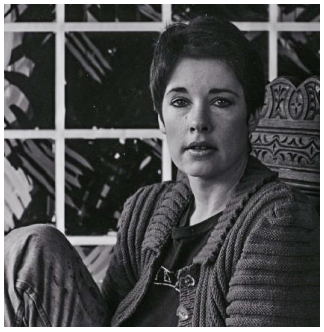


In Praise of Messy Lives:

Famous Artists Who Divorced

You could do a lot worse than to find yourself in the company of these twelve women.

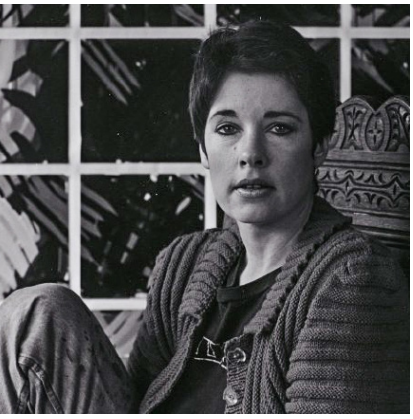
Can you name each of these artist?
Scroll down to read their stories

Since the mid-1970s, **Susan Rothenberg** has been recognized as one of the most innovative and independent contemporary artists. She met and married fellow artist George Trakas in 1971, and gave birth to a daughter in 1972. The couple divorced in 1979. She has said that "[her] series of "vomiting head" drawings of 1978 express the turmoil of her divorce." Today, she is living in New Mexico with she second husband, the artist Bruce Nauman.

After a five year relationship with the famed critic Clement Greenberg, **Helen Frankenthaler** married Robert Motherwell in 1958. Both born to wealthy families, the pair was known as "the golden couple" and threw lavish entertaining until they divorced in 1971. In 1994 she married investment banker Stephen M. DuBrul, Jr. and toward the end of her life, they lived together on Long Island Sound. She was quoted in the New York Times, saying "there is no formula…there are no rules."

Kara Walker studied at RISD where she met the German born jewelry designer Klaus Bergel. She finished her masters there in 1994 and the same year showed her work at a Drawing Center exhibit in New York. The piece, a mural titled "Gone: An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart," drew praise and controversy in the art world. In 1996, she and Bergel married. The following year, at age 28, she won a MacArthur "genius award," the second youngest recipient ever. The couple had a daughter and in 2006, moved from Providence to New York City. The following year, the couple split, although they share custody of their daughter. "I've never been a Bohemian in the sense of living outside the quotidien," she told Artworld magazine.

Joan Mitchell met and married Grove Press publisher Barney Rosset while on a graduate traveling fellowship in France in 1949. Their marriage lasted until 1952, when her career was just beginning to take off in NY. In 1955, she moved to France more or less full time, and lived with the French painter, Jean-Paul Riopelle until 1979. In 1967, she used an inheritance from her mother to buy an estate in the village of Vetheuil, a little town on the Seine, best known for being the home of Claude Monet. She lived there till the end of her life.



While getting a Master's in fine art from Yale in the mid-60s, **Jennifer Bartlett** married medical student Edward Bartlett, but the marriage ended eight years later in 1972. Two years afterward, she had her first major exhibit at the prestigious Paula Cooper Gallery. In 1983, she married German film actor Mathieu Carriere and split her time between Paris and New York. "I learned very early that if I made any attempt to please people, I would always fail madly," she says. "So my only alternative was to just go ahead with what I feel like doing." And doing and doing.

As a girl in 1929, **Frida Kahlo** introduced herself to the Mexican Painter Diego Rivera. He became her mentor and inspiration, and they married in 1929. Their marriage was turbulent–Kahlo had affairs with the likes of Isamu Noguchi as well as Josephine Baker–and the couple divorced in 1939. In 1940, they got back together, but lived in separate homes until Kahlo died at age 47. Rivera wrote that the day Kahlo died was the most tragic of his life and he would forever regret not loving her enough. Of Rivera, she wrote in her diary, "Don't wish away your cracked past, your crooked toes, your problems are papier mache puppets you made or bought because the vendor at the market was so compelling you just had to have them. You had to have him. And you did."

Louise Nevelson, daughter of a Russian timber trader, knew she wanted to be a sculptor, and by the time she was 6 she was already working with small pieces of wood that she had scavenged from her father's lumber yard in Rockland, Me. At twenty one, she married a shipper by the name of Charles Nevelson. They moved to New York, had a son, and after eleven years of bucking at the restraints of domestic routine, she separated from her husband in 1931. After that she supported herself working as a movie extra. At one point, the novelist Celine proposed to her, but she brushed him off for his anti-semitic sympathies." I was often depressed and alone," she said later of herself at that period," but I was functioning as my own person and that kept me going."

Elizabeth Murray married her Chicago Art Institute classmate Don Sunseri but they divorced in 1973, the same year she began showing her at the famed Paula Cooper Gallery. In the 1980's as a doyenne of the New York art scene, she met and married Bob Holman, founder of the Bowery Poetry Club. She also won a MacArthur award in 1999. Aware that she was one of few women in a fiercely male neo-expressionist scene, she once remarked tartly to a critic, "Cézanne painted cups and saucers and apples, and no one assumed he spent a lot of time in the kitchen."

Judy Chicago, who coined the phrase "feminist art," famously enshrined 1038 other feminist artists in her 1979 work "The Dinner Party," the same year she and her husband, Lloyd Hamerol divorced. They first married in 1969, and a year later, she publicly vowed to change her name, choosing Chicago, a nickname she earned for her tough talk and accent. Horrified that her husband was required to sign her name change papers, she took out and ad in the paper and appeared in boxer's garb at her gallery with a sweatshirt that read, "Judy Gerowitz hereby divests herself of all names imposed upon her through male social dominance and chooses a new name, Judy Chicago." She divorced Hamerol in 1979 and lives in New Mexico with her third husband and collaborator, Donald Woodman.

Cindy Sherman married French photographer Michel Auder in 1984, but her early success put a heavy burden on the marriage, and by 1999, they were divorced. She has since dated the likes of Richard Prince, David Byrne and even Steve Martin for a brief time. In 2012, she talked to Harper's Bazaar about the difficulty being with men who struggled with her success as an artist.

While she was a student at Brooklyn College, **Jane Freilicher** eloped at 17 with Jack Freilicher, a jazz pianist. Later she said she needed to do it or she "would've remained under the wing of her mother." Their marriage was annulled five years later, but her interest and talent in art brought her into a warm and exciting circle of artists and poets of downtown bohemian NY. Larry Rivers' famously slashed his wrists when she rejected him. But then she caught sight of a former dancer, Joseph Hazan, in a movie made by one of her friends. "I thought he was very attractive," she said of Mr. Hazan. On their first date, he took along his pet monkey and soon after they married. "My days as a party girl ended" she later recalled.

Marina Abramović married Serbian artist Nesa Paripovic in 1971, but they split in 1976, the year she left Yugoslavia for Amsterdam. There she met her greatest collaborator and lover, Ulay. Throughout the 1970's the two performed together in pieces that tested the boundaries of identity and intimacy. Great Wall of China, 1988 marked both their final performance and their breakup. Both walked from either end of the great wall met in the middle for a parting embrace and then turned and walked away. Ulay and Abramovic didn't see each other again until her solo exhibit at the MOMA in 2010, The Artist is Present. In 1997, she fell in love with Paolo Canevari who she married and divorced in 2009. Afterwards, at age 63, she decided to learn to drive. She told Judith Thurman at the New Yorker, "I'm doing this to be independent."