Frances Archipenko Gray. *My Life with Alexander Archipenko.* Munich: Hirmer Publishers, distributed by The University of Chicago Press, 2014. 280 pp. Illustrations. Notes. $24.95, cloth.

When they first met, Oleksandr Arkhypenko (Alexander Archipenko) was working on *Fifty Creative Years,* his ponderous self-published tome about his art and philosophy; he quickly enlisted the young student to do the typing. Now fifty years after his death, Frances Gray has written her own book with deftness and simple elegance. She has remained on the thirteen-acre property in Woodstock, New York, where Archipenko lived and worked, so the continuity and immediacy that are often missing in late-life memoirs animate her descriptions of the buildings and the colours and sounds of the surrounding landscape.

She was nineteen and a sophomore at Bennington College when she enrolled at the Archipenko Summer Art School in 1955; Archipenko was sixty-nine; in 1960 they were married, and in 1964 Archipenko died. Her account of how a sheltered upper-middle-class Jewish girl from Scarsdale became the lover and then the wife of the "Twentieth-Century Modernist Sculptor Alexander Archipenko" (49), as perceived by her young hero-worshipping self, is affecting in itself; it also provides a rich backward glance on the mores of 1950s America.

In the fall, her unsuspecting parents, more concerned about her marriage prospects than her education, raised no objection to her decision to commute daily to Archipenko's New York school. The idea that she might be romantically involved with a man the same age as her grandfather never crossed anyone's mind. For two years Archipenko also led a double life because he was caring for his wife who died after a long illness in December of 1957. After her death they were at liberty to travel to Europe together, where friends in Paris advised them to marry. This was done expediently and without fanfare in 1960.

Although to Frances he was "one all-powerful, magical being" (58)—that hardly describes Archipenko in the mid-fifties. While he had retrospective exhibitions in Germany and gallery representation in New York, his reputation as a modernist sculptor (the subject of this reviewer's doctoral dissertation) was based on his work in Paris in the years preceding the First World War. Stimulated by the creative and intellectual ferment surrounding Cubism, he had originated several sculptural innovations: the Cubist trope of the hole as a substitute for its very opposite—the mass of the head or the breasts; large free-standing constructions incorporating mixed materials and colour; and his signature melding of two media in his painted reliefs. His decade of success culminated in Berlin, but enticed by the promise of the New

World, he arrived in New York in 1923. Isolated in an unfamiliar culture and unable to find a market for his new work, he relied on teaching and occasional portrait commissions from leaders of the Ukrainian community that lionized him. But it was a lonely life, apparently disconnected from artists in New York and in the Woodstock art community. Although it is not likely that she was aware of this back then, with poignant self-irony Frances Gray now titles one of her chapters "My One-Person Cult." Without buyers for his new works, and having left behind all of his early ones, Archipenko felt he had no recourse but to mine his own past. This inevitably led to the vexing concerns that clouded, and still cloud, his reputation.

To her credit, Frances Gray addresses the problem head-on. An entire chapter is devoted to Archipenko's variants and replicas of early works. She revisits a known controversy with the Museum of Modern Art, involving antedated works included in *Cubism and Modern Art* in 1936, and she recounts the complicated affair of unauthorized casts of an early terracotta figure by a London dealer. She also does not refrain from admitting that Archipenko was careless about the numbering of bronze casts, and that when he needed money, he did not hesitate to start a new edition of a popular early work.

My Life with Alexander Archipenko ends with the following declaration: "When I knew he was dying, it never entered my mind that my life would continue to be about him after his death. It has" (193). Although promoting her late husband's work and legacy became her life's work, this long period is condensed in a short epilogue. Here Gray relates that she never remarried, had four children each with a different father, and started the Archipenko Foundation in 2000, with her children comprising the board. By limiting herself to the years they spent together, she leaves out the entire sum of her lifelong involvement with Archipenko's work. Readers expecting this information will not find it here because the book Frances Gray has written is the uncommon romantic tale of a free-thinking young woman's first love with a famous artist fifty years her senior. But she offers a welcome human dimension for those who know only Archipenko's work. Notwithstanding his recurring professional missteps, on the personal level Archipenko comes across in Gray's account as a kind, thoughtful, and gentle human being. The passage below is just one example of the many delightful vignettes in this nimble and candid book.

The occasion is a dinner party. Among the guests were Frances Gray's parents who had not seen Archipenko since before their marriage a year earlier. As they are readying themselves, Archipenko glances at himself in the mirror and asks, "What are you doing with this old dog?" (163). Frances replies simply, "Alexander, just please look at what I'm wearing" (163). To please him—and shock her parents—she had chosen a glamorous red dress

made of satin that he had brought her from Switzerland. This is her evocative flashback:

> The clean Chinese laundry smell of Alexander's shirt was still there. It had been over five years since I first took a whiff. Now he was mine. We were married and having a domestic moment—a couple about to host a dinner party and getting dressed for the event. I can still smell the face powder, the shirt, and the air current from Bedford Street as we headed downstairs to greet our guests. We forgot about wrinkles; they weren't mine and we both disowned his. (163)

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