

# The Aesthetics of Perception in Modernist Women's Poetry

**aesthesis (n.):** sense perception

## Project Summary:

This thesis explores how five modernist women writers used poetry to engage in philosophical and scientific debates regarding the nature of perception.

Archival research suggests that all five of the women featured in this thesis studied perceptual phenomena either formally or informally during the formative years of their poetic development. Yet there has been no study of their shared desire to cultivate an aesthetic of perception—a material response to the perceptual environment that is the product of both conscious and unconscious choices made regarding what and how to perceive.

## Research Questions:

What happens to our understanding of perception when the perceiving organism in question is not a man but rather a self-identified woman poet writing in the early twentieth century?

What particular interests, questions, and problems does she bring to her encounter with the perceptual environment?

What choices does she make as she uses the material of language to respond to that environment?

How can those choices deepen our understanding of the nature of perception, past and present?

*'Art is exact perception'* - Marianne Moore,  
*'Qui S'Excuse, S'Accuse'* (1910)

## Key Poets and Poems:

Gertrude Stein



*Tender Buttons*  
(1914)

Mina Loy



*Songs to Joannes*  
(1915-1917)

H. D.



*Sea Garden*  
(1916)

Hope Mirrlees



*Paris: A Poem*  
(1920)

Marianne Moore



*Observations*  
(1924)