

British Art Network Seminar Overlooked Women Artists and Designers, 1851-1918

Monday 7 December 2015
The Hunterian Art Gallery, Lecture Theatre

The British Art Network brings together professionals working with British art from the 16th century to the present day. The aim of the network is to contribute to the sharing of expertise, research and ideas across cultural organisations; to enable improvements in curatorial skills and collection knowledge; and to foster greater collaboration between partners leading to enriched understanding and enjoyment of British art for audiences across the UK.



Marianne Stokes, *Candlemas Day* c.1901, Tempera on wood,
Presented by the Trustees of the Chantry Bequest 1977,
© Tate

Nan West...Jessie Keppie...Beatrix Whistler...Mary Hill Burton...Florence Chaplin...Sylvia Lawrence... Marie Egner...Mrs. Bernard Darwin...Who is she? From the lone watercolourist to the Arts and Crafts partner, or the exhibitor under her husband's name, this question echoes through the history of art and design, and despite modern interest in women artists, many remain little known. This seminar will focus on a period when women benefited from a wealth of new opportunities for training, patronage and exhibition. In asking 'Why invisible?', it will reflect on exhibition and research projects that give attention to the methodological issues raised by women artists' work, as well as its analysis, display, and popular or critical reception.

The seminar will explore not only 'fine' but applied art, beyond as well as within Scotland. Sessions will cover 'Contexts and Networks'; 'Visibility, Reputation and Legacy'; and 'Display and Re-evaluation'. Seminar programmed by Dr. Patricia de Montfort and Prof. Clare A.P. Willsdon, School of Culture and Creative Arts, University of Glasgow.

Enclosed in your seminar packs is a British Art Network event evaluation form. We invite all delegates to kindly complete the form at the end of the seminar and return to organisers or email your completed copy to Britishartnetwork@tate.org.uk

Programme

- 10.30 – 11.00 Registration and welcome tea and coffee on arrival in the main Hunterian Art Gallery
- 11.00 – 11.15 Welcome and introduction to the day by Patricia de Montfort, Hunterian Art Gallery Lecture Theatre (located downstairs)
- 11.15 – 12.45 **Session One: Visibility, Reputation and Legacy**
Hunterian Art Gallery Lecture Theatre
- Chair: Robyne Calvert, Glasgow School of Art
- 11.15 – 11.30 Joanna Meacock
- A Lesser Known Glasgow Girl: The Case of Maggie Hamilton*
- Maggie Hamilton (1867-1952) was an embroiderer and painter of flowers and still lifes. Sister of Glasgow Boys painter James Whitelaw Hamilton and wife of the architect A. N. Paterson (the younger brother of Glasgow Boy James Paterson), she is little known as an artist in her own right, eclipsed by her brother, husband, brother-in-law and other Glasgow Boys. In this paper Joanna Meacock will discuss the artistic output of Maggie Hamilton and the extent to which she benefitted from or was hindered by her more famous male family members and friends.
- 11.30 – 11.45 Hannah Williamson
- Women Artists at the Ancoats Art Museum (1884-1953)*
- Women artists' work played a significant role in this museum which was set up in a densely-populated working class district of Manchester in 1884. The (female) curator relied heavily on the work of women artists to fill displays of botanical art, and to educate the people in art history. In this talk Hannah Williamson will draw attention to the artists Elizabeth Redgrave and Emily Gertrude Thomson, who both painted floral watercolours. She will go on to look at their work as Manchester Art Gallery displayed it in an exhibition in 2013, and the reception it received.

11.45 – 12.00

Sophie Hatchwell

A Silent Presence? Women artist and the Fitzroy Street Studios, London 1907-1916

Walter Sickert's Fitzroy Street Studios, home to the Camden Town and London Groups were a locus for professional and economic networking in late Edwardian London. Although the Studios hosted a number of important female artists (Ethel Sands, Nan Hudson, Sylvia Gosse for example), they have been subsequently viewed as a secondary and largely silent presence compared to their male colleagues. This paper will return to original archival documents (committee reports, personal letters) in order to trace the professional activities of women artists at the Studios. Drawing on the feminist art-history of Tickner (1988, 2000), and studies of the psychology of the Edwardian interior (Reed, 1996, 2010), this paper will propose an alternative methodology for establishing the critical status of women in professional art societies, a methodology that considers frequent physical presence in flexibly gendered spaces as evidence for critical agency.

12.00 – 12.15

Sally Woodcock

Charles Roberson's female account holders 1851-1918

Between 1820 and 1935 not a single woman was elected to the Royal Academy as a full Academician. During an almost identical period, 1820 to 1939, a quarter of the account holders of the artists' colourman Charles Roberson & Co. were female. The firm's archive, now housed at the Hamilton Kerr Institute in Cambridge, preserves over 2,000 of these women's accounts and gives a very different picture of female artistic activity than that suggested by the Academy's membership. This paper will introduce the archive and highlight the information it can offer about female artists working in the period 1851-1918, looking at regional spread, occupational diversity and the duration of women's careers, often cut short by marriage, childbirth and death. It will discuss the economic invisibility of female artists, whose accounts were often absorbed into those of their male relations, and assess the effect of the Married Woman's Property Act of 1870 on female artists' economic independence. The rise of the amateur artist and the problem of differentiating between professional and amateur in the context of female artistic activity will be discussed as well as the tendency to categorise women artists as the wives, daughters and sisters of their more celebrated male relations.

12.15 – 12.45

Group discussion

12.45 – 13.45

Lunch will be served in the main Hunterian Art Gallery

During lunch there will be the opportunity to visit the Hunterian paintings galleries and/or Print Room, where a selection of works by women artists and designers from the reserve collection will be on view.

Please note: Limited numbers can be accommodated in the Print Room at any one time – please sign up at morning registration. Visits will take place at 12.45 – 13.05, 13.05 – 13.25 or 13.25 – 13.45 during the lunch break.

Print Room visit hosted by Peter Black, Curator of Prints and Patricia de Montfort, Seminar Co-Convenor.

13.45 – 15.00

Session Two: Beyond the Studio: Context and Networks
Hunterian Art Gallery Lecture Theatre

Chair: Sabine Wieber University of Glasgow

13.45 – 14.00

Amara Thornton
Artists in Archaeology

Drawing on recent research into women artists interpreting and presenting the archaeological experience in visual form, this paper will explore archaeology as a platform for empowerment and visibility in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These artists exhibited and published the results of their investigations into ancient landscape, and benefited from opportunities for professional and personal development in the emerging field of scientific archaeology.

14.00 – 14.15

Alice Strickland

Women war artists of the First World War

The centenary of the First World War, 2014-18, offers the opportunity to highlight the work of British women war artists who practised 100 years ago. The art history literature of this period is currently dominated by an almost exclusive focus on the artistic careers of male artists. This paper will look at the commissioned work produced by Anna Airy (1882-1964), Flora Lion (1876-1958) and Lucy Kemp-Welch (1869-1958) and their contribution as women artists to the body of art held by the Imperial War Museum.

14.15 – 14.30

Meaghan Clarke
'Unity is Strength': Networks and Exhibitions c.1900

The fin-de-siècle offered exciting possibilities for women to exhibit fine and applied art. These opportunities ranged from mammoth exhibitions such as the Victorian Era Exhibition, to

the Paris Club of International Women Artists and the Society of Tempera Painters. Exploration of these exhibitions reveals the importance of often overlapping networks for women artists and intersects with debates about professionalism, internationalism and feminist politics.

14.30 – 15.00

Group discussion

15.00 – 15.30

Tea and coffee will be served in the main Hunterian Art Gallery

15.30 – 17.00

Session Three: Display and Re-evaluation

Hunterian Art Gallery Lecture Theatre

Chair: Pat Hardy, Curator of Paintings, Prints and Drawings, Museum of London

15.30 – 15.45

Jan Marsh

'Running down her own work': Rescuing the reputation of Marie Spartali Stillman (1844-1927)

Everyone in this field will be familiar with this concept, if expressed in other words: the female artist's reluctance or inability to boast or promote herself. The title quotation comes from the exasperated remark by a (male) colleague of Marie Spartali Stillman, British-born artist whose career more or less spans the whole period of this seminar. He lamented that she had 'ruined her reputation by running down her own work'. Yet as she herself noted: 'I have always been particularly disagreeable to the press. I cannot help it'.

Jan Marsh will also outline some of the scholarly strategies used to pull Spartali Stillman into view, through a solo exhibition and catalogue that allow for the first time, an objective appraisal of her work and achievement, but remain just one stage in a journey of recovery.

15.45 – 16.00

Alice Strang

Making Women Artists Visible: Curating the Modern Scottish Women: Painters and Sculptors 1885-1965 exhibition

As curator of the National Galleries of Scotland's current exhibition *Modern Scottish Women: Painters and Sculptors 1885-1965*, this presentation will examine the issues of selecting, researching and interpreting for public display the work of women artists. It will focus on Mary Cameron (1865-1921), Kathleen Scott Kennet (1878-1947), Bessie MacNicol (1869-1904) and Flora MacDonald Reid (1861-1938). The artists' reputations during their lifetimes and posthumously will

be analysed, questioning why these women who were once 'visible' are now all but 'invisible'.

- 16.00 – 17.00 **Breakout groups and final discussion**
All delegates adjourn to History of Art, 7/8 University Gardens
- 16.00 – 16.40 Breakout discussions:
- Group 1:* Room 101, History of Art building, 8 University Gardens;
- Group 2:* Room 308, History of Art building, 8 University Gardens;
- Group 3:* Hepburn Room, History of Art/Scottish Literature building, 7 University Gardens.
- 16.40 – 16.55 Final discussion and future directions chaired by Clare Willsdon
- All delegates adjourn for final discussion to Hepburn Room, History of Art/Scottish Literature building, 7 University Gardens.
- 16.55 Closing remarks by Clare Willsdon
- 17.00 Event close at History of Art building