



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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Johann Zoffany (1733-1810)
The Portraits of the Academicians of the Royal Academy
1771-72

23-16 VICTORIAN WOMEN ARTISTS

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This lecture examines the careers of women artists in Victorian Britain, tracing the institutional barriers that shaped, stunted, and sometimes silenced their work. From the Royal Academy's founding exclusions to the studios of Pre-Raphaelite London and the wartime factory floor, we follow painters, illustrators, and photographers navigating a professional world built to keep them marginal. Their achievements, often extraordinary, demand to be read against the structures designed to prevent them.

Johann Zoffany (1733-1810)

The Portraits of the Academicians of the Royal Academy

1771-72

Royal Collection



Johann Zoffany (1733-1810), *The Portraits of the Academicians of the Royal Academy*, 1771-72, Royal Collection

Johann Zoffany's painting of 1771, completed just three years after the Royal Academy's founding, stages an immediate contradiction. Every Academician crowds the life room in lively discussion — every male one, that is. The two women among the Academy's founders, **Mary Moser** and **Angelica Kauffman**, appear only as portraits hung on the wall. The Academy's Instrument of Foundation defined Academicians explicitly as men of fair moral character, and that clause excluded women from full membership until **1860**, from life drawing far longer, and from studying living nude models in any form until **1903**.

Kauffman herself navigated these barriers through exceptional breadth. Swiss-born and trained by her father, she mastered several languages, excelled as a musician, and built a celebrated career in London and Rome specialising in history painting. Her roughly twenty-five self-portraits, one held at the **National Portrait Gallery**, show her gazing directly outward, pencil or brush in hand — a sustained argument for the woman artist as intellectual equal. The institutional

walls were chipped away gradually. **Laura Herford** gained entry to the Royal Academy Schools in 1860 by submitting work under her initial only. **Laura Knight** was elected a full Academician in **1936**, nearly 170 years after Kauffman's portrait was fixed, mute, to Zoffany's wall.

Notes

Johann Zoffany (1733-1810), The Portraits of the Academicians of the Royal Academy, 1771-72, Royal Collection

George Romney (1734-1802), Mary Moser, 1770-71, National Portrait Gallery

Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807), self-portrait, 1770-1775, National Portrait gallery. One of 25 self-portraits as a mentally alert creative artist with pencil, paintbrush or harp. She gazes out forthrightly.

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Zoffany

Problem of being a woman artist: could not attend the RA School or attend life drawing or become Academicians

This is the Zoffany painting showing the portraits of the Academicians of the Royal Academy. It was painted in 1771, three years after the Academy was founded and it shows the two female founders of the Academy as portraits on the wall. One is Mary Moser (1744-1819) was one of the most celebrated artists of 18th-century Britain and the other is Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807) who was a Swiss-born Austrian Neoclassical painter with a successful career in London and Rome.

The RA excluded women until 1860 even though two of the founding members were women.

Slade took women from its founding in 1871.

Laura Herford's (1831-1870) in 1860 was accepted for the RA School based on a painting using her initial 'L. Herford'. This was at the suggestion of the President Sir Charles Eastlake. Thirteen other women were accepted over the next few years. Women were only allowed to draw from casts and the draped model. Women were excluded from the life class although there was some provision made in 1893. In 1863 the Council decided its constitution did not allow women painters (in the Instrument of Foundation, Academicians ... shall

all of them be ... Men of fair moral Characters'). In 1903 women were allowed to study living nudes in separate classes.

The Society of Female Artists was founded in 1856, it became the Society of Lady Artists in 1872 and the Society of Women Artists in 1899.

1870s and 80s women petitioned RA in vain to attend life classes.

There were private art schools 1880s and 90s like French atelier

Rich women attended classes in Paris, Munich, Dusseldorf and Antwerp

Lady Butler was nominated three times to the RA 1879-81 and turned down.

Annie Laura Swynnerton and Laura Knight (1877-1970, née Johnson, attended Nottingham School of Art 1890-4, aged 13) were made ARA in the 1920s and Laura Knight a RA in 1936.

Note

Kauffman on left, Mary Moser (1744-1819) on right.

Moser's father George Moser putting on the noose.

Richard Cosway (1742-1821, RA 1770), Moser's lover bottom-right with cane (the canvas was extended to include him). Cosway was separated from his wife Maria. Maria ('Mariah') Cosway (1760-1838, born Hadfield) was a gifted artist who gave up her career on the command of her husband. He did possibly to protect her reputation and in time she started to paint again. She was an Italian-English artist who had an affair with Thomas Jefferson, American Founding Father, principal author of the Declaration of Independence 1776 and third President of the US. They corresponded for the rest of their lives. She was a devout catholic all her life. It was thought to be a marriage of convenience as he was 20 years her senior and a libertine. Cosway was once a more famous artist than Gainsborough and his portraits were the rage in Regency London. He became Principal Painter to the Prince of Wales.

In October 1793, Mary Moser married Hugh Lloyd and retired from painting, only exhibiting as an amateur. Shortly after the marriage, in 1793, Cosway and Mary Moser had an open affair that lasted 6 months during which they travelled around Europe. Mary Moser was 50 and his ex-wife Maria 33 yet he described her as 'more sexually responsive' in bed.

Angelica Kauffman was Swiss born Austrian who was taught by her father. She

acquired several languages and was a skilled musician. It is not known how she learnt to paint the male nude as her speciality was history painting. Her first marriage was a disaster but in 1781 he died (she had been separated) and she married Antonio Zucchi a Venetian artist and retired to Rome where she met Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Zucchi died in 1795 and she continued to contribute to the RA her last exhibit was 1797 and she died in 1807. She was honoured at her funeral in the same way Raphael had been honoured.



Henry Singleton (1766-1839)
The Royal Academicians in General Assembly
 1795
 Royal Academy of Arts

Henry Singleton (1766-1839), *The Royal Academicians in General Assembly*, 1795, Royal Academy of Arts

Johann Zoffany's **Tribune of the Uffizi**, completed in **1778**, is one of the few paintings that documents the entire founding membership of the **Royal Academy** — though Zoffany plays fast and loose with reality. **Angelica Kauffman** and **Mary Moser**, the Academy's only female founding members, appear on the right — yet as portraits hung on the wall rather than figures present in the room, reflecting their exclusion from life-drawing classes. **Benjamin West** stands at centre-right as President, flanked by living and dead alike: **Joshua Reynolds**, who had died before the work was finished, appears as a portrait within the portrait, top right. **Sir William Chambers**, the architect who had also died, is seated centrally as though still presiding. **John Singleton Copley** stands in conversation with **Joseph Farington**, while **William Hodges** faces the young **Sir Thomas Lawrence** on the far left, with the Academy's architect members grouped behind them. The sculptor members cluster at the far right, anchored above by casts of the **Apollo Belvedere** and the **Laocoön** — the twin poles of antique

authority against which every Academy member measured ambition and achievement.

Notes

Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser are shown on the right hand of the President Benjamin West

Joshua Reynolds is dead but his portrait is top right

Sir William Chambers is central seated but had died

John Singleton Copley is standing facing Joseph Farrington

William Hodges is far left facing Sir Thomas Lawrence and behind them are the three architect members

On the far right are the three sculptor members and above them the Apollo Belvedere and Laocoön



Mary Moser (1744-1819)
A Vase of Flowers
c. 1792-7
Royal Collection

Mary Moser (1744-1819), *A Vase of Flowers*, c. 1792-7, Royal Collection

Mary Moser was one of the two founding female members of the **Royal Academy**, established in **1768**, the other being Angelica Kauffman. Trained by her father **George Moser**, a Swiss-born artist and the Academy's first Keeper, she showed exceptional ability early, winning a Society of Arts medal at fourteen. Her exhibited work centred on flower painting, though she also attempted history painting — a genre effectively closed to women because the Academy barred them from life drawing classes, preventing them from acquiring the foundational skills the genre demanded. Her most significant commission came from **Queen Charlotte** in the **1790s**: the floral decoration of the South Pavilion at **Frogmore House** in Windsor, for which she received nine hundred pounds. Painted both on canvas and directly onto the walls, the room survives today as the Mary Moser Room. She also taught drawing to the daughters of George the Third and Queen Charlotte, almost certainly at Frogmore itself. Moser married Captain Hugh Lloyd in 1793 and formally retired to exhibiting as an amateur. After her

death in **1836**, the Royal Academy elected no woman as a full member for a further hundred and sixty-eight years, until **Dame Laura Knight** in 1936.

Notes

Mary Moser

Mary Moser who was born in London, was trained by her father George Moser, a Swiss-born artist. She was talented at an early age and won her first medal from the Society of Arts when she was 14. She regularly exhibited flower paintings and occasionally history paintings. She became frustrated by her lack of recognition and joined with 35 other artists in founding the Royal Academy and she took an active role. Women were not allowed into life drawing classes with a male or female nude and so it was difficult for them to learn the skills needed to paint history paintings.

She was commissioned by Queen Charlotte in the 1790s to complete a floral decoration for Frogmore House in Windsor for which she was paid £900. One room, the South Pavilion, was entirely decorated with flower paintings some on canvas, some painted directly on the wall. This canvas formed part of the 'Mary Moser Room' where it remains today. Among her other duties Moser taught the daughters of George III and Queen Charlotte to draw, probably at Frogmore House.

Moser married Captain Hugh Lloyd, a widower, in 1793 and retired but continued to exhibit as an amateur painter. She had an open affair with Richard Cosway who had separated from his wife (Maria Cosway, Italian-English, an artist who exhibited at the RA, had a romantic friendship with Thomas Jefferson) and they took a six-month sketching tour in 1793. Richard Cosway was also an artist who was elected a full member of the Academy in 1770 and was a late addition to the composition, he was painted onto an extra strip of canvas attached to the right-hand side of the painting. He was 'well known as a libertine and commonly described as resembling a monkey' and in later life spent time in various mental institutions. After Moser's death in 1836 no women were elected to the Royal Academy as full members until Dame Laura Knight in 1936, 168 years later.



Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807)
El juicio de Paris (Judgment of Paris)
c. 1781
Museo de Arte de Ponce, Ponce,
Puerto Rico

Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807), *El juicio de Paris (Judgment of Paris)*, c. 1781, Museo de Arte de Ponce, Ponce, Puerto Rico

Angelica Kauffman, the Swiss-born Neoclassical painter, built her reputation through exceptional linguistic skill and relentless ambition — fluent in several languages, she charmed British grand tourists in Rome before **Lady Wentworth** brought her to London. There she painted **David Garrick**, forged a celebrated friendship with **Sir Joshua Reynolds**, and in **1768** became one of the founding members of the **Royal Academy**, exhibiting four history paintings in its very first show. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who knew her on the Continent, declared she worked harder and accomplished more than any artist he had met. Her painting **The Judgement of Paris** draws on one of antiquity's most consequential myths. The goddess **Eris**, excluded from a divine banquet, threw a golden apple inscribed "for the fairest one," igniting a dispute among **Hera**, **Athena**, and **Aphrodite**. Zeus delegated the judgement to **Paris**, a Trojan mortal. Each goddess offered a bribe: Hera, sovereignty over Europe and Asia; Athena, supreme wisdom and military skill; Aphrodite, the love of Helen, the

most beautiful woman in the world. Paris chose Aphrodite, and his pursuit of Helen triggered the Trojan Wars — a chain of events that, through the survivor **Aeneas**, ultimately led to the founding of Rome.

Notes

Angelica Kauffman

Angelica Kaufman (born Kauffmann) was a Swiss-born Austrian Neoclassical painter who had a successful career in London and Rome. Her father was poor but a skilled artist who taught her to paint. She learnt several languages, read incessantly and was a talented musician. By the age of 12 she was painting bishops and the nobility. She went to Milan and then Rome where, because she spoke English, she met British visitors to Rome and painted their portraits. She was persuaded by Lady Wentworth to come back to London with her where she painted David Garrick. Lady Wentworth introduced her to high society including the royal family where she was well received.

She became a great friend of Sir Joshua Reynolds who called her Miss Angelica or Miss Angel and in 1766 they painted portraits of each other. She was a founder of the Royal Academy and exhibited four history paintings in the first year. She exhibited annually at the Academy generally history paintings or allegorical subjects. She married twice, the first was unfortunate and the second was to Antonio Zucchi, a Venetian artist living in London. She was a history painter and disappointed by the English preference for portraits and landscapes and she eventually returned to the Continent.

Kaufman became a friend of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who said she worked harder and accomplished more than any artist he knew. On the Continent her reputation continued to grow and at her death the entire Academy of St. Luke (founded 1577, Rome) followed her coffin carrying two of her best pictures as they had done for Raphael.

Judgement of Paris

Eris, who was not invited to a party of the gods, got annoyed and threw a golden apple into the party inscribed 'for the fairest one'. An argument ensued and to avoid getting into the argument Zeus decided Paris, a Trojan mortal, should judge because he had just judged against his own prize bull in a competition against the gods. The golden apple was awarded by Paris to resolve a dispute between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite about which was the

most fair, Hera (Roman Juno, wife of Zeus and goddess of women and marriage) tried to bribe Paris by making him king of Europe and Asia, Athena (Roman Minerva was the goddess of wisdom, law, arts, warfare, etc.) offered wisdom and skill in war and Aphrodite (Roman Venus, goddess of love) offered the love of the world's most beautiful women Helen of Troy, wife of Greek king Menelaus. Paris chose Aphrodite and his love of Helen led to the Trojan Wars. Troy was defeated by the ruse of the Trojan Horse and Aeneas, a Trojan survivor, after falling in love with Dido of Carthage and then deserting her, founded Rome.



Lady Gordon (1775–1867)
Cottage at Wigmore, Kent
 1803
 Watercolour
 Tate Britain, London

Lady Gordon (1775–1867), Cottage at Wigmore, Kent, 1803, Tate Britain, London

Nochlin's argument about structural barriers finds a precise illustration in the career of **Lady Gordon**, born **Julia Bennet**, whose artistic life effectively ended with her marriage in **1805**. Two years before that marriage, in **1797**, she was studying under **J. M. W. Turner**, one of his few documented pupils. Turner's teaching method was characteristically direct — he would produce a drawing before the pupil and leave it for imitation rather than offering verbal instruction. Paul Oppé later established that Julia Bennet also trained with **Thomas Girtin**, and the evidence is visible in the work itself. She selected Girtin's preferred support, a coarse laid cartridge paper with a warm tint and slight surface flecks, and she inscribed the mount in her own hand as a **Sketch from Nature**, reflecting Girtin's commitment to open-air observation. The mount also carries her pre-marriage initials, a small documentary trace of the artist she was before social convention absorbed her identity into her husband's. General Sir **James Willoughby Gordon**, Quartermaster General during the **Peninsular**

Wars, and his wife became patrons of **David Wilkie** — yet the institutional world that enabled male artistic careers offered Julia Bennet no equivalent continuity.

Notes

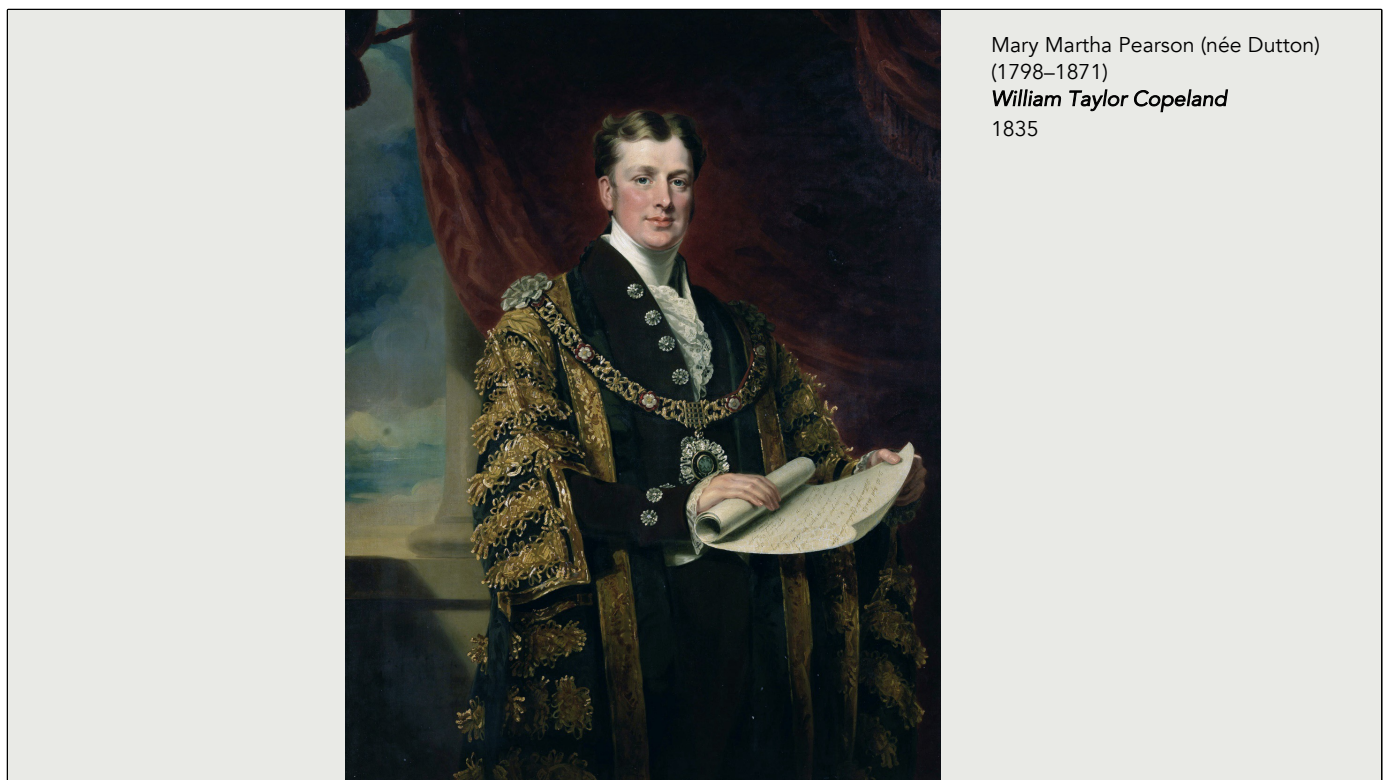
Problem of being a woman artist: stopped after her marriage

Tate Britain: Lady Gordon is remembered as one of J. M. W. Turner's few known pupils (1797). It was Paul Oppé who first speculated, correctly, that she may also have taken lessons from Thomas Girtin. For this watercolour she has selected Girtin's favourite paper, a coarse laid cartridge of a warmish tint containing slight flecks which give a subtle variety to the surface. Girtin enjoyed a reputation for making sketches in the open air, a practice he seems to have instilled in his pupils, for this watercolour is described by Lady Gordon on the mount as a 'Sketch from Nature'. The mount also bears her initials, Julia Bennet. Two years later (1805) she married General Sir James Willoughby Gordon. Patrons of David Wilkie although they refused their daughters hand in marriage to Wilkie. The latter was Quartermaster General during the Peninsular Wars.

Turner found it easier to show rather than tell and would make a drawing in front of his pupil and then leave it for him or her to imitate.

Not used:

Lady Wharncliffe (née Lady Caroline Mary Elizabeth Creighton) c.1776–1853, title not known, date not known, Tate Britain



Mary Martha Pearson (née Dutton)
(1798–1871)
William Taylor Copeland
1835

Mary Martha Pearson (née Dutton) (1798–1871), William Taylor Copeland, 1835

Trained under a drawing master named Lewis and awarded a **gold medal** by the **British Institution** in 1815 for a copy after **Claude**, Mary Martha Pearson developed her eye through rigorous study of the old masters before establishing herself as one of London's foremost portrait painters. Her marriage to Charles Pearson, a solicitor who became **MP for Lambeth**, placed her firmly within professional and civic life in Bloomsbury and Westminster, and her 31 Royal Academy exhibits reflect that world — nearly all portraits, many of them Lord Mayors. *The Times* remarked that the least the **Corporation of London** could do would be to present the fair delineator of their well-fed countenances with the freedom of the city, emblazoned on a rosewood palette. Her sitter here, **William Taylor Copeland**, was elected **Lord Mayor of London in 1835**, one of the youngest to hold the office. His father had partnered with **Josiah Spode** in the Stoke potteries, and Copeland eventually acquired the Spode interest outright, later becoming china and glass manufacturer to the **Prince of**

Wales. Pearson's portrait fixes this moment of civic elevation with the confident directness her reputation rested on.

Notes

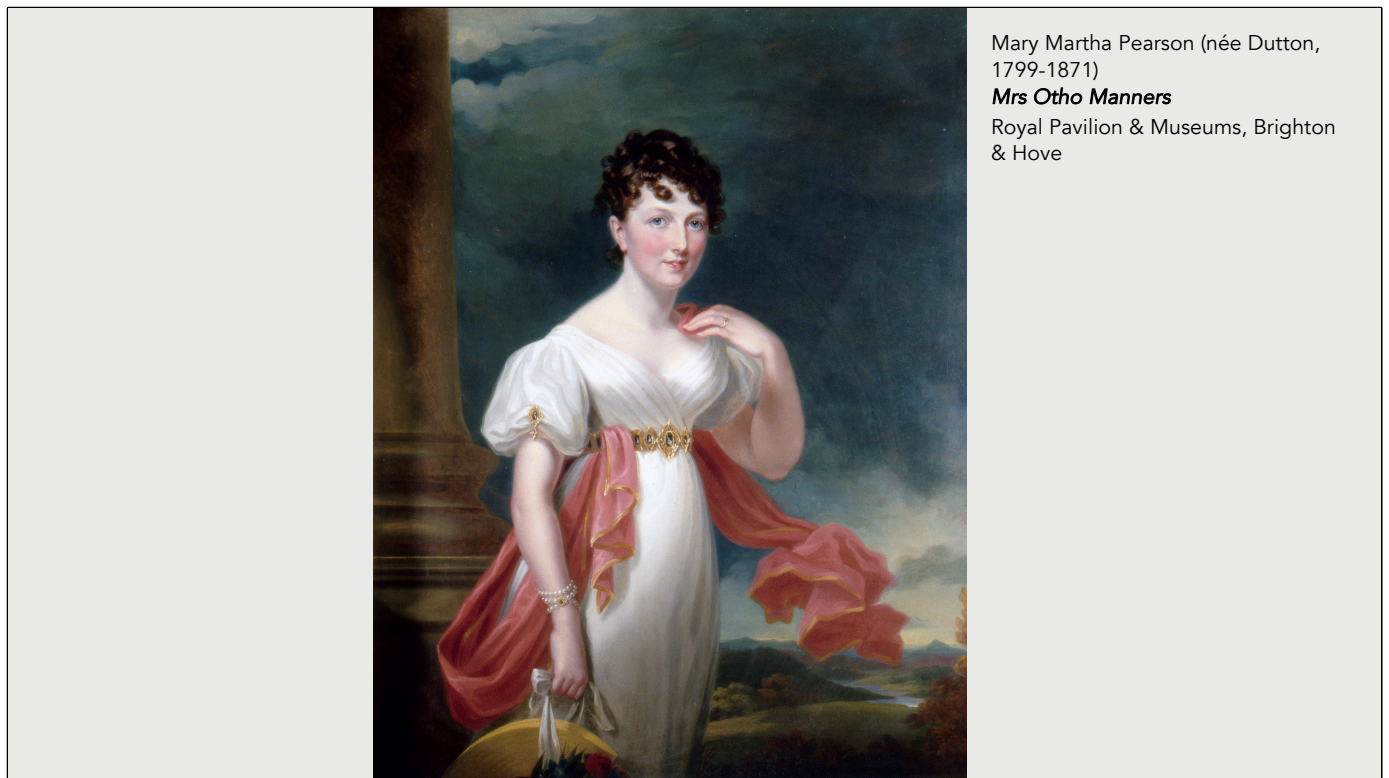
Mary Martha Pearson (née Dutton) (1798 –1871), William Taylor Copeland, 1835

Daughter of a bookseller in the City of London. She had a drawing master called Lewis and copied old masters in the British Institution and in 1815 was awarded a gold medal for a copy of a Claude. In 1817 she married Charles Pearson, a solicitor who became MP for Lambeth. They lived in Bloomsbury and Westminster. She exhibited 31 works at the Royal Academy nearly all portraits.

She many several Lord Mayors and of this one The Times wrote, 'the least the Corporation of London could do, would be to present the fair delineator of their well-fed countenances with the freedom of the city, emblazoned on a rosewood palette'. Her sister was a miniature painter who exhibited at the Royal Academy. Wikipedia lists 17 major portraits including six Lord Mayors.

Notes

William Taylor Copeland (1797-1868) was a businessman, Member of Parliament in Ireland and then Stoke-upon-Trent and in 1835 he was elected Lord Mayor of London (the third youngest). His father was a partner of Josiah Spode in the Stoke Potteries and William eventually bought out the Spode interest and became china and glass manufacturer to the Prince of Wales in 1866. He was director and Chairman of various railway companies.



Mary Martha Pearson (née Dutton, 1799-1871), Mrs Otho Manners,
Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove

This second portrait by **Mary Pearson** places us in the same accomplished domestic tradition as the last, but introduces a sitter who resists easy biographical recovery. The woman depicted is **Mrs Otho Manners**, and tracing her life proves genuinely difficult. What survives points toward her husband, **Otho Augustus Manners**, born in 1818 and living until 1897, who appears to have held land in **Goadby Marwood** in Leicestershire and made his home at **Goadsby Hall**. That landowning gentry context matters for reading the portrait: the sitter's presentation — her bearing, dress, and the considered formality of the composition — reflects the social register Pearson was working within and the expectations her clients brought to the sitting. Pearson was consistently engaged by families of precisely this kind, provincial but prosperous, seeking portraits that confirmed their standing. The difficulty of recovering Mrs Otho Manners as an individual, rather than as a wife attached to a named estate, is itself historically telling. Pearson's women sitters often disappear behind their husbands'

records, yet the portrait insists on her presence, her particularity, holding her there on the canvas long after the documents went silent.

Notes

Another example of a portrait by Mary Pearson.

It is difficult to trace Mrs Otho Manners but her husband may have owned land in Goadby Marwood in Leicestershire and lived at Goadsby Hall. Otho Augustus Manners was born in 1818 and lived until 1897 when he was 79.



Anna Atkins (née Children, 1799–1871)

*Cyanotype photogram from
Photographs of British Algae*
1843

Cyanotype photogram

Anna Atkins (née Children, 1799–1871), Cyanotype photogram from
Photographs of British Algae, 1843

Building on those twin stories of science and art, we turn to two women who helped define photography and art criticism in the nineteenth century. **Anna Atkins**, born in 1799, lost her mother at birth and was raised by her father **John George Children**, a scientist distinguished enough to have a mineral and a python named after him. That unusual upbringing gave Atkins a rigorous scientific education, and she became a skilled botanist. Her social world connected her directly to photographic pioneers: both her husband John Pelly Atkins and her father were friends of **William Henry Fox Talbot**. Through **Sir John Herschel**, another close friend, she adopted the **cyanotype process** he invented in 1842, using it to create contact prints of dried seaweed laid directly on photosensitive paper. Her resulting book on British algae, published the same year, appeared eight months before Fox Talbot's **Pencil of Nature**, making her the first person to publish a book illustrated with photographic images. **Elizabeth Eastlake**, also working in the 1840s, brought comparable rigour to art writing.

Photographed by **David Octavius Hill** in Edinburgh, she later published perceptively on photography as a new art form, wrote on Italian painters, and is recognised today as a pioneer of female journalism and serious art criticism.

Notes

Anna Atkins, her mother died in childbirth and she became close to her father, John George Children, a scientist who had a mineral and a python named after him. She received an unusually scientific education and became a botanist. She married John Pelly Atkins in 1825 and both he and her father were friends of William Henry Fox Talbot. She learned of photography and had a camera by 1841. She is said to be the first female photography although that may have been Constance Talbot, Fox Talbot's wife but no examples remain of either photographer. Sir John Herschel, a famous scientist, and friend invented the cyanotype process in 1842 and she used it to illustrate a book of algae, specifically seaweed. She made contact prints by placing the dried seaweed directly on the photographic paper. She is the first person to publish a book with photographic images as she was eight months ahead of William Fox Talbot's *Pencil of Nature*. Her book was privately published with handwritten text and Fox Talbot's was the first commercially published book illustrated with photographs.

Elizabeth Eastlake, British author, art critic and art historian known for her role in the London art world. Her father was a physician and classical scholar. She was fond of drawing when young and continued studying art into her twenties. She travelled abroad including Germany, Switzerland, Russia and Estonia and wrote articles and a travel book. In 1842 her father died and she went to Edinburgh with her mother and met David Octavius Hill who took 20 early calotypes of her. She published an article on the 'new and mysterious art' of photography. When she was 40 she married Sir Charles Eastlake and joined his social life and continued to travel abroad. She wrote prolifically and wrote a book on Italian painters. She is remembered for a scathing review of *Jane Eyre* and her attacks on John Ruskin assumed to be linked to her support for Effie Gray. She is considered to be a pioneer of female journalism and a perceptive art historian and writer.

Elizabeth Siddal (1829-1862)
Self-portrait
1854



Elizabeth Siddal (1829-1862), Self-portrait, 1854

Having established the broader obstacles facing women artists in this period, we turn now to one of its most striking examples. **Elizabeth Siddal**, born in 1829, began her adult life working in a milliner's shop in London, where **Walter Deverell** discovered her in 1849 and invited her to model for the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood**. She sat for Deverell, **William Holman Hunt**, and **John Everett Millais**, whose celebrated 1852 painting **Ophelia** bears her face. Her relationship with **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** proved the most consuming — her features appeared in nearly all his work across twelve years, and they married in 1860. This is precisely where the problem sharpens: her identity as a model consistently overshadowed her practice as an artist. **John Ruskin** recognised something in her work and from 1855 paid her one hundred and fifty pounds annually in exchange for everything she produced. William Gaunt described her verses as moving as ancient ballads, and her drawings as genuine in medieval spirit as far more finished Pre-Raphaelite works. She died in February **1862** from a laudanum overdose, aged thirty-three. Her fragile output — poetry,

sketches, and very few finished paintings — was absorbed into Rossetti's legend rather than standing beside it.

Notes

Problem of being a woman artist: her occupation as a model made it difficult to be recognised

Elizabeth Siddal

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal (born Siddall, 1829-1862, died aged 33) had respectable working-class parents and although she had no formal education her deportment was said to be 'like a queen'. In 1850 she was noticed by the artist Walter Deverell who asked her to model for him and his friends, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. She sat for Deverell, William Holman Hunt and for John Everett Millais as Ophelia. She then sat for Dante Gabriel Rossetti and her features appeared in nearly all his works until her early death 12 years later. After 10 years they married in 1860 after she returned from Paris and Nice where she went for her health.

She died from a laudanum overdose in early 1862. She had gone with Rossetti to join Swinburne at Sablonniere hotel restaurant in Leicester Square. He took her home and attended his usual teaching job at the Working Men's Club. On his return she was unconscious and could not be revived and Rossetti called a doctor then three doctors. She had a stomach pump but died the next morning in their home (which is now under what is Blackfriars Station). There are rumours of a suicide note destroyed by Rossetti but these can be traced to a imaginative account of her life by Violet Hunt (The Wife of Rossetti). He buried her with the original of some of his poems. In 1869, seven years later, when he was chronically addicted to drugs and alcohol he retrieved the poems.

The pen and pencil studies he made of her fragile beauty are unique in European art with her strange beauty and languor, a figure of melancholia. She was called Guggum or Sid and dropped the final 'l' in her name to please Rossetti.

In 1855, art critic John Ruskin began to subsidize her career and paid £150 per year in exchange for all the drawings and paintings she produced. She produced many sketches but only a single painting.

William Gaunt in The Pre-Raphaelite Dream wrote, 'Her verses were as simple

and moving as ancient ballads; her drawings were as genuine in their medieval spirit as much more highly finished and competent works of Pre-Raphaelite art.'

Modelled for Walter Deverell (who found her in 1849 working in a milliner's shop), William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais (including his notable 1852 painting *Ophelia*) and her husband, Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Her poor health has been attributed to anorexia, laudanum addiction and arsenic poisoning from drinking too much Fowler's Solution.



Elizabeth Siddal (1829-1862)

Lady of Shalott

1853

Pen and ink on paper

Jeremy Maas Gallery

Elizabeth Siddal (1829-1862), *Lady of Shalott*, 1853, Jeremy Maas Gallery

Dante Gabriel Rossetti described Elizabeth Siddal as possessing "real genius," insisting she would "paint such pictures as no woman has painted yet." She trained in Sheffield and developed a serious practice, earning the direct patronage of **John Ruskin**, who exchanged payment for whatever work her fragile health allowed. Her watercolours, though uneven, demonstrate genuine artistic ambition. Siddal's drawing of **The Lady of Shalott** engages one of the defining texts for **Pre-Raphaelite** imagery. **Alfred Tennyson** published the poem's definitive version in **1842**, loosely derived from a thirteenth-century Italian novella. Its lady, cursed to weave reflections of the world rather than face it directly, reads as an allegory of artistic mediation — shadow-images recalling **Plato's** cave. When **Sir Lancelot** rides past and she looks directly out, the mirror cracks and the curse falls: "The curse is come upon me." She drifts towards Camelot and dies before arrival. Siddal's own life moved towards a parallel isolation. Rossetti's repeated refusals to marry and his affairs drove her deeper into

laudanum dependency — a drug prescribed routinely to Victorian women across all social classes. She married Rossetti in **1860**, suffered a stillbirth in 1861, and died of a laudanum overdose in **1862**.

Notes

Siddal worked hard at drawing and attended an art school in Sheffield. Her early drawings show some proficiency but her later watercolours are not first rank. However, John Ruskin praised her watercolours and wished to settle money on her in exchange for any work her health permitted.

This shows her drawing of *The Lady of Shalott*, one of Tennyson's most well-known poems, which inspired a number of Pre-Raphaelite artists.

Siddal's health deteriorated and she became saddened by Rossetti's unwillingness to marry and his affairs. She turned to ever increasing doses of laudanum (opium) and finally in 1860 she married Rossetti in Hastings. A year later she gave birth to a stillborn daughter and she committed suicide in 1862 with an overdose of laudanum. Rossetti's feelings of remorse and guilt fluctuated over the years and in 1869 he opened her coffin to retrieve the book of poems he had laid beside her at death. Rossetti had been encouraged to open her grave by Charles Augustus Howell, an unscrupulous villain who sold fake copies of Rossetti's work, embezzled funds from Ruskin and manipulated Edward Burne Jones and his wife. Thanks to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Howell will forever be known as the inspiration behind *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton*, an evil blackmailer who tortured his prey unrelentingly.

Rossetti wrote 'she has real genius-none of your make-believe', she needs 'precision in carry-out' which needs health and strength to maintain. She will then 'paint such pictures as no woman has painted yet'.

Innumerable Victorian women were prescribed laudanum for relief of menstrual cramps and vague aches. Nurses also spoon-fed laudanum to infants. The Victorian era was marked by the widespread use of laudanum in Europe and the United States. Mary Todd Lincoln, for example, the wife of the USA president Abraham Lincoln, was a laudanum addict, as was the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott*, two versions of the poem 1833 and 1842

loosely based on a 13thC Italian novella. A lady isolated in a tower has a mysterious curse that means she must weave images on her loom without ever looking at the outside world except through a mirror. The mirror reflects a busy road and the people of Camelot. The reflected images are shadows of the world like Plato's Cave. Sir Lancelot rides by and is seen by the Lady who looks out of the window, the mirror cracks, the loom breaks and she leaves the tower, finds a boat and drifts towards Camelot. She dies before arriving. Lancelot sees her and thinks she is lovely. Some critics see it as representing the dilemma faced by artists, whether to represent the world or face the world directly.

Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892), *The Lady of Shalott*, 1842 version, Part III

She left the web, she left the loom, She made three paces thro' the room, She saw the water-lily bloom, She saw the helmet and the plume, She look'd down to Camelot. Out flew the web and floated wide; The mirror crack'd from side to side; "The curse is come upon me," cried The Lady of Shalott.



Elizabeth Siddall (1829-1862)
Pippa Passing Close to Loose Women
1854
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Elizabeth Siddall (1829-1862), *Pippa Passing Close to Loose Women*, 1854, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Transitioning now to a work that complicates the sympathetic male gaze we so often encounter in Victorian depictions of fallen women. **Elizabeth Siddal's** illustration of **Robert Browning's** poetic drama **Pippa Passes**, published in **1841**, refuses the victim narrative that dominates her male Pre-Raphaelite contemporaries. Where those painters present prostitutes as suffering objects of pity, Siddal locates the cause of the women's fall in bodily lust and moral weakness. This is a notably unsentimental position, and a pointed one: Siddal modelled **Pippa's** features on her own face, at the very moment she was **Rossetti's** mistress. The biographical resonance is sharp. Siddal had worked in a milliner's shop before the Pre-Raphaelites discovered her; Pippa is a silk-winder. Both women are destitute, yet Pippa stands upright and ordered among the prostitutes on the steps. Siddal refuses poverty as an excuse for moral collapse, separating Pippa from the crude sexuality around her through character, not class. The contrast draws directly from Browning's text, where one of the poor girls on the steps

addresses Pippa by recalling her own seducer, forging an uneasy mirror between innocence and experience that Siddal makes visually explicit.

Notes

Male artists encourage sympathy for the fallen woman and often present her as the victim. Male artists present prostitutes as suffering.

This is an illustration of a scene from Robert Browning's poetic drama *Pippa Passes*, 1841.

Siddal is not afraid of associating the loose women with sexual feelings and it is bodily lust and moral weakness that caused the women to fall. It is interesting that she modelled Pippa's features on her own when she was Rossetti's mistress.

Siddal worked in a milliners shop before being found by the Pre-Raphaelites and Pippa is a silk-winder.

Siddal distances herself from the other PRB models such as the notorious Annie Miller. Miller refused Holman Hunt's offer to take her out of the slums in favour of frivolity but even in this case there is no evidence that she became 'gay' (i.e. a prostitute).

Pippa is upright, orderly and pure. They are not separated by class and poverty is not offered as an excuse for prostitution. Pippa is presented as destitute. Siddal compares the innocent Pippa with the crude sexuality of the prostitutes.

Browning's poem contains the famous lines:

The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in His heaven—
All's right with the world!

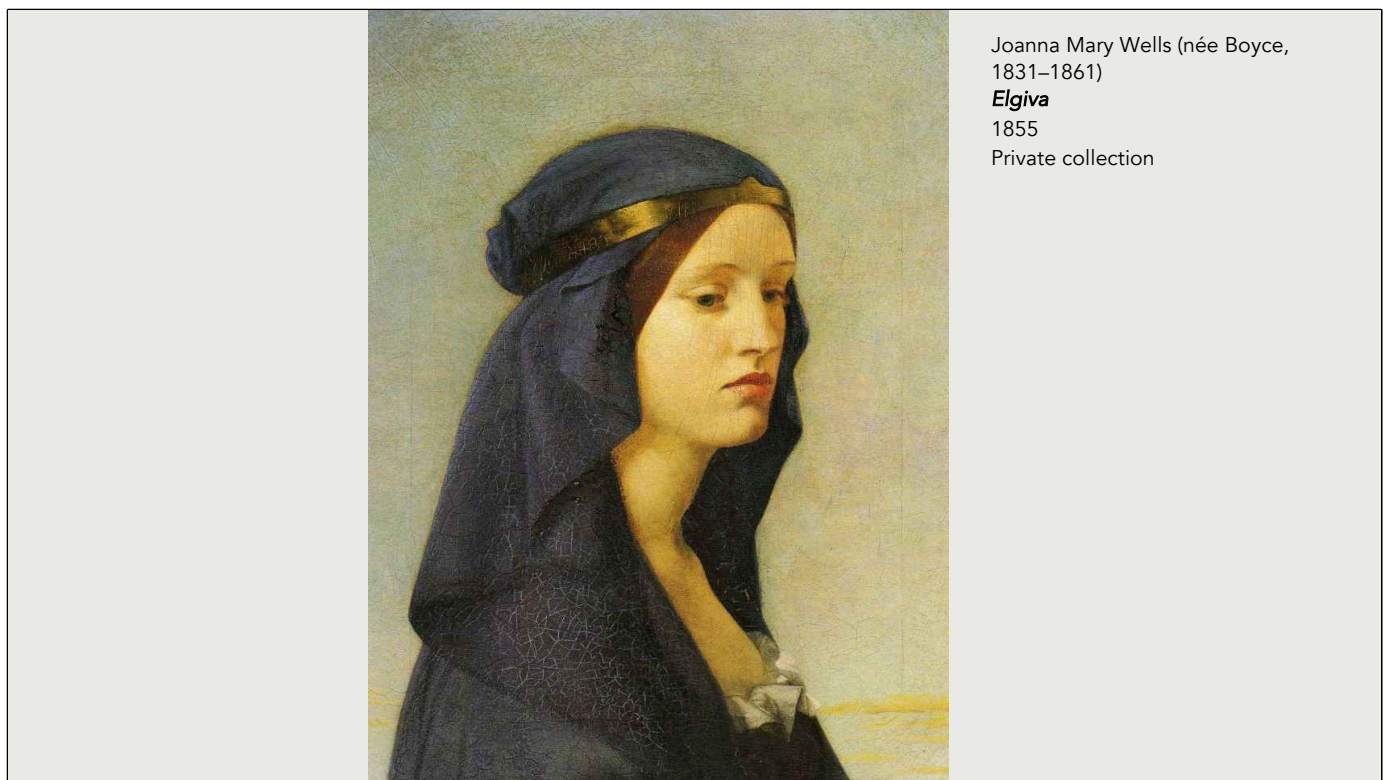
The relevant passage, is, I think,

Talk by the way, while PIPPA is passing from the Turret to the Bishop's brother's House, close to the Duomo S. Maria. Poor Girls sitting on the steps.

...

'He that seduced me when I was a girl

Thus high - had eyes like yours, or hair like yours, ...



Joanna Mary Wells (née Boyce, 1831–1861), *Elgiva*, 1855, Private collection

Being a woman artist in the Victorian era meant navigating a profession considered socially unsuitable, and for **Joanna Mary Boyce**, time itself ran out cruelly early. She died in 1861 aged twenty-nine during childbirth, her obituary calling her a genius — a rare tribute to a woman of her moment. Boyce, sister of Pre-Raphaelite painter **George Price Boyce**, worked in portraits and genre subjects. Her painting ***Elgiva***, exhibited at the **Royal Academy**, announced her immediately. **Ford Madox Brown** declared it the best head in the room. Where Rossetti's female studies shimmer with decorative intensity, *Elgiva* is stark, quiet, and serene. **John Ruskin**, writing in his Academy Notes of 1855, saw through that apparent coolness: he described how the slight arch of the lip seems to quiver and the eyes fill with ineffable sadness — a sorrow requiring patience from the viewer to penetrate. The subject herself, ***Elgiva***, was an Anglo-Saxon queen of the tenth century, consort of Edmund I, later a Benedictine nun known for redeeming condemned men and giving her garments to the poor. Her name is

pronounced ell-geeva. Boyce's choice of such a figure — quietly suffering, quietly dignified — mirrors the very constraints that shaped her own abbreviated career.

Notes

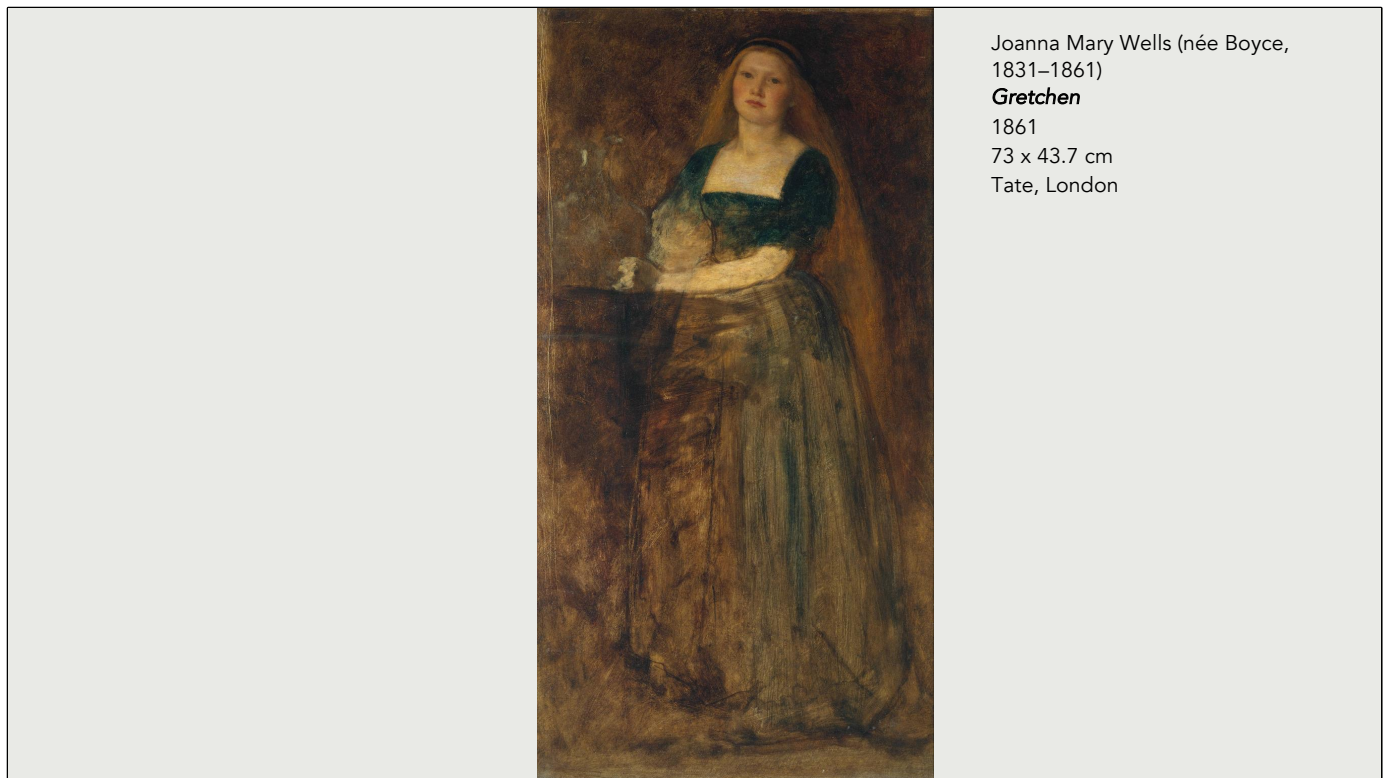
Problem of being a woman artist: not a suitable occupation, childbirth – early death aged 29, and the time required

Joanna Mary Boyce also known by her married name Joanna Mary Wells, English painter of portraits, genre pictures and occasional landscapes. Sister of pre-Raphaelite painter George Price Boyce. Died aged 29 during childbirth, described in her obituary as a 'genius'. Elgiva was her first painting to be exhibited at the RA. Ford Madox Brown described it as 'the best head in the room'. Elgiva was an Anglo-Saxon queen and compared to Rossetti female head and shoulders it is stark, quiet and serene.

John Ruskin wrote about Elgiva in his 1855 'Academy Notes':

"The expression in this head is so subtle, and so tenderly wrought, that at first the picture might easily be passed as hard or cold; but it could only so be passed, as Elgiva herself might have been sometimes seen, –by a stranger– without penetration of her sorrow. As we watch the face for a little time, the slight arch of the lip seems to begin to quiver, and the eyes fill with ineffable sadness and a look of despair. The dignity of all the treatment---- the beautiful imagination of faint but pure color, place this picture, to my mind, among those of the very highest power and promise."

Elgiva (924-944), also St. Elgiva or Saint Ælfgifu of Shaftesbury, is regarded as queen and married Edmund I although no document confirming this exists and the only document describes her as 'concubine'. She gave birth to two future kings (Eadwig and Edgar). Later she became a Benedictine nun. She redeemed condemned men, gave away previous garments to the poor and endured prolonged physical suffering. Her name is pronounced 'ell-geeva' or 'ell-giva' (to rhyme with Godiva).



Joanna Mary Wells (née Boyce, 1831–1861), *Gretchen*, 1861, 73 x 43.7 cm, Tate, London

Joanna Boyce Wells built her reputation through the 1850s as a painter of portraits, genre scenes, and landscape, while simultaneously writing art criticism for the *Saturday Review* — a rare dual practice for a woman of her generation. This painting demonstrates the full reach of that ambition. The subject draws on two possible sources: the innocent maiden from **Goethe's** tragic play **Faust**, or a nursery maid employed by the Wells household. Rather than resolving that ambiguity, the work holds both readings in productive tension. What makes the painting especially charged is its circumstance: Boyce Wells began it shortly before her death following the birth of her third child, leaving it unfinished. **D. G. Rossetti**, responding to that loss directly, described her as "a great artist sacrificed to bringing more kids into the world," and judged this work to be the peak of her output. The unfinished state is not a deficiency — the handling of the figure against the loosely resolved background reveals a painter in full command of tonal structure and psychological presence. Boyce Wells was thirty years old

when she died, in **1861**, and this work stands as the clearest evidence of what that loss meant for British painting.

Notes

Joanna Wells (née Boyce) established a reputation during the 1850s as a painter of portraits, genre and landscape. She also wrote art reviews for the Saturday Review. This painting may represent the innocent maiden from Goethe's tragic play Faust but could also be a portrait of a nursery maid in the employ of the Wells family. The painting was started shortly before the artist's death following the birth of her third child and is unfinished.

D.G. Rossetti, who described Wells as 'a great artist sacrificed to bringing more kids into the world', judged the painting to be her greatest work.

References

Tate website



Emily Mary Osborn (1828-1925)
Nameless and Friendless
 1857

Emily Mary Osborn (1828-1925), *Nameless and Friendless*, 1857

Painting during an era when the **Royal Academy** refused to elect women as full Academicians, **Emily Mary Osborn** built a remarkable career against structural resistance. She first exhibited at the Academy aged just seventeen, having trained under Mogford and then Leigh at his Maddox Street studio, where he taught her without charge for a year. She sold a portrait at that first showing for two hundred guineas and later sold another to Queen Victoria. Her 1857 painting **Nameless and Friendless** distils these professional pressures into a single scene. A recently widowed woman offers a picture to a dealer whose expression signals contempt, while two men to the left abandon their ogling of a ballet dancer print to leer at her instead. Her fingers twist a loop of string as she waits. The painting connects to **Mary Brunton's** novel *Self-Control*, first published in 1810, which follows a woman selling her art to rescue her father from debt. That same year, **1857**, the **Society of Female Artists** was founded, and Osborn became a member alongside figures in **Barbara Bodichon's** Langham Place circle, which actively campaigned for women's legal and educational rights.

Critics admired the Society's work while simultaneously explaining away its limitations as inevitable female deficiency — precisely the prejudice Osborn painted.

Notes

Problem of being a woman artist: selling their work, Emily Osborn was successful but was never made an Academician

The Art Journal on Emily Mary Osborn, Nameless and Friendless (1857):

'A poor girl has painted a picture, which she offers for sale to a dealer, who, from the speaking expression of his features, is disposed to depreciate the work. It is a wet, dismal day, and she has walked far to dispose of it; and now awaits in trembling the decision of a man who is to become rich by the labours of others.'

Emily Mary Osborn

Osborn began showing her work at the Royal Academy when she was just 17 and continued to do so over a period of 40 years. She was the eldest of nine and grew up in Tilbury, whose surroundings 'were not such as to develop artistic proclivities' but when she was 14 the family moved to London and she attended the Dickinson Academy and studied under Mr. Mogford and then Mr. Leigh at Maddox Street and then his gallery at Newman Street. He trained her without charge for a year. She sold a portrait at the Royal Academy for 200 guineas when she was 17 and sold another to the Queen.

This is her most famous work which has been called 'The most ingenious of Victorian widow pictures.' A recently bereaved woman is attempting to make a living as an artist by offering a picture to a dealer while two 'swells' on the left stare at her distracted from the bare legged ballet dancer they have been previously ogling. She nervously pulls on a loop of string while the dealer disdainfully judges her work.

It has been suggested that this painting relates to Mary Brunton's novel *Self-Control* published in 1810 but republished in 1850. This describes the struggles of a self-motivated female artist to sell her pictures in order to help save her father from financial ruin.

Mary Brunton (1778-1818), Scottish novelist. She was taught languages and music by her parents (Colonel Balfour) and eloped to marry a Scottish minister. They did not have children until she became pregnant at 40 and died after giving birth to a stillborn son. She wrote *Self-Control Discipline* and *Emmeline*. Popular at the time for their strong moral and religious stance combined with sexuality (what Jane Austen called 'vulgarity').

Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891), leading artist, educationalist, feminist and activist for women's rights. Extra marital child of a milliner and Whig politician Leigh Smith. Met at Langham Place North Regent Street (next to the BBC). Her summary of the laws concerning women (1854) helped with the passing of the Married Women's Property Act in 1882. In 1857 (aged 30) she married an eminent French physician (Bodichon) and from then on wintered in Algiers. She set up the *English Women's Journal* (1858). In 1866 she helped set up a scheme for giving women university education, first at Hitchin and this developed into Girton College, Cambridge. She studied painting under William Holman Hunt and exhibited at the Royal Academy and showed originality and talent and was admired by Corot and Daubigny. She was George Eliot's most intimate friend.

Society of Female Artists

The difficulties experienced by women in exhibiting and selling their works led to the formation of the Society of Female Artists in 1857, the year *Nameless and Friendless* was first exhibited at the Royal Academy. Emily Mary Osborn was a member of this group and one of the artists associated with Barbara Bodichon's Langham Place circle and campaign for women's rights.

Osborn was a member of the Society and a member of Barbara Bodichon's Langham Place circle that campaigned for women's rights. Despite the problems faced by women artists Osborn went on to develop a successful career.

Reviews of Exhibitions of the Society of Female Artists:

The Illustrated London News, 6 Jun 1857:

Strength of will and power of creation belonging rather to the other sex, we do not of course look for the more daring efforts in an exhibition of female artists: but observation, taste, or the art of selection, and various other

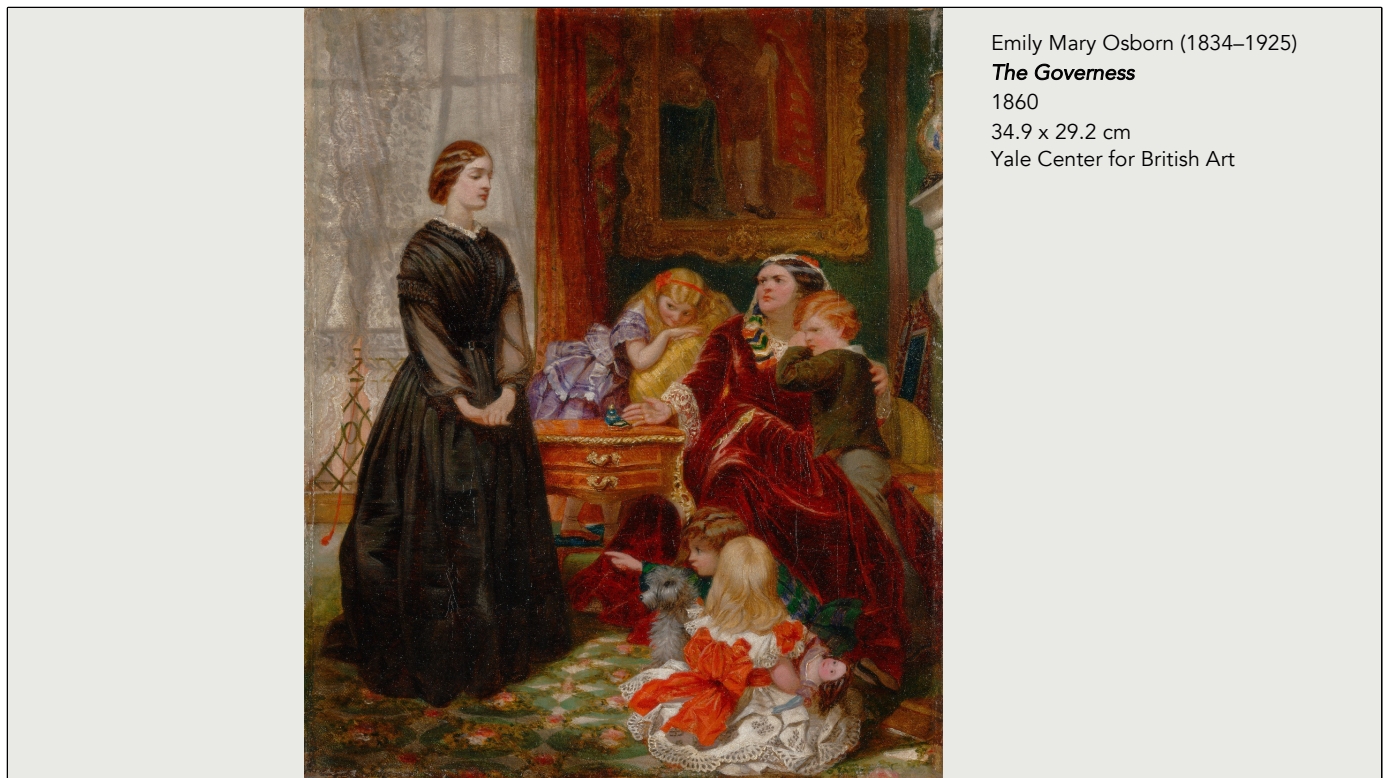
qualities adapted to the arts, are to be found in this Oxford-Street display.

The Art Journal, 1 May 1858:

...that which we see at the Egyptian Hall is the result of assiduous self-tuition, for we have no school for the instruction of ladies in painting from the living model. Labouring under such disadvantages as the female student does, we are not disappointed to see here so many drawings of flowers, fruit, and still-life objects – we are only surprised into exultation to see so much excellence in the higher departments of art...

References

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emily_Mary_Osborn



Emily Mary Osborn (1834–1925), *The Governess*, 1860, 34.9 x 29.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art

Emily Mary Osborn's **The Governess**, painted in **1860**, was bought by Queen Victoria herself — a royal endorsement that did nothing to soften its sharp social critique. The painting pairs naturally with **Nameless and Friendless** as an indictment of how Victorian society failed educated women. The governess occupied one of the cruellest social positions of the era: too refined for the servants' hall, too dependent to stand as an equal upstairs, and entirely at the mercy of employers who conflated poverty with inferiority. Osborn makes the moral hierarchy unmistakable. Her governess stands composed in a simple black gown, silhouetted against white curtains that signal her innocence. Her employer — fashionably overdressed, flushed with new money — berates her while four children look on in petulant triumph. **The Art Journal** in **1864** called it a bitter satire on 'the practice of treating educated women as if they were menial servants'. Osborn lived those structural inequalities herself. She never married, supported her family through her painting, and — alongside **Barbara Leigh Smith**

Bodichon — co-founded the **Society of Female Artists in 1857**, creating institutional space where none had existed. She died in **1925**, aged ninety-seven.

Notes

A counterpart to Nameless and Friendless called *The Governess* was bought by the Queen and it shows a governess badly treated by her vulgar-looking over-dressed lady of the house. 'The practice of treating educated women as if they were menial servants is but too common.' (The Art Journal, 1864, p. 262)

Osborn never married and died aged 97 in 1925.

She, with Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon helped set up the Society of Female Artists in 1857.

There were few ways for a single woman to earn a living. For an educated woman one of the few jobs available was governess. They occupied an uneasy position between 'upstairs' and 'downstairs' and part of neither. They were expected to be ladylike and their task was to prepare the girls in their charge for marriage.

'The genteel, well-educated but poor governess, forced by circumstance to work for an uncongenial employer, became a major theme in English art and literature in the 1840s and 1850s, when it was a mark of social prestige to employ one.'

'In this Victorian satire, members of a vulgar bourgeois family terrorise their gentle and ladylike governess. Her four young charges, who have evidently reported her to their mother, look on petulantly, or in mischievous glee, as she is berated for some supposed fault. With her simple black gown and proud, composed demeanour, the accused governess is entirely the innocent party, silhouetted against white curtains that symbolise purity. In contrast, her crass, fashionably dressed employer - perhaps the wife of a nouveau riche industrialist or merchant - is the embodiment of an ill-judging parent with more money than sense, who indulges her children's every whim and accepts unhesitatingly their account of this dispute. The contrast between the two women confirms the governess's superiority in everything but money and position. '

The Art Journal recognised it as a 'bitter satire on a too prevalent vice - the

practice of treating educated women as if they were menial servants'.

Notes

Richard Redgrave's *The Governess* (1844) predates this painting and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Redgrave regarded his painting as a 'fight for the oppressed'.

References

TES Newspapers, Anne French



Emily Mary Osborn (1828-1925)

Presentiments

1859

87.6 x 114.3 cm

Emily Mary Osborn (1828-1925), *Presentiments*, 1859, 87.6 x 114.3 cm

Osborn's social conscience extended well beyond women's rights, as this painting from **1859** makes immediately clear. The work takes its cue from **Charles Kingsley's** poem **Three Fishers**, written in **1851**, which **John Hullah** soon set to music in a setting that would later be recorded by artists including Joan Baez. Kingsley's verses follow three fishermen sailing west at sundown, each thinking of the woman who loves him, while their children watch from the shore. The refrain — **for men must work, and women must weep** — became a genuine catchphrase in **Victorian** Britain, and Osborn translates its weight into paint with unflinching directness. Her title tells us the fisherman is not returning; the painting does not soften that fact. In a coastal Britain where fishing communities regularly lost men to storms, this was not romantic tragedy but lived reality, immediately legible to contemporary audiences. Osborn anchors the scene in the bodies of the women left behind — their grief is physical, public, and unresolved. She refuses consolation, just as Kingsley's poem refuses it, making the work a precise visual argument about the structural costs borne by

working-class families whenever the harbour bar begins to moan.

Notes

Osborn dealt with a wide range of social issues not just women's problems. This painting of 1859 was inspired by Charles Kingsley's poem 'Three Fishers' of 1851. The poem was set to music shortly after by English composer John Hullah and has been recorded by many artists since, including Joan Baez.

The fisherman must go out, despite the storm, to feed his family. The title of the painting warns us that he is not coming back. This, in 1850s Britain, would have been a starkly realistic scene that would have been familiar to many.

Three fishers went sailing out into the West,

Out into the West as the sun went down; Each thought on the woman who
lov'd him the best; And the children stood watching them out of the town;
For men must work, and women must weep, And there's little to earn, and
many to keep, Though the harbour bar be moaning.

Charles Kingsley

'For men must work and women must weep' became a catchphrase in the Victorian period.

Notes

According to the Victorian Web, "And the harbour bar be moaning," refers to, "the belief that it was a bad omen if the tide made a moaning sound as it receded over the sand bar that kept the harbour waters still."

References

The Victorian Web website – www.victorianweb.org



Eleanor Vere Boyle (1825–1916)
Thumbelina on the Water-Lily Pad
1872
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Eleanor Vere Boyle (1825–1916), *Thumbelina on the Water-Lily Pad*, 1872, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Being a woman artist in the nineteenth century meant navigating social pressures that could silence a career entirely, and **Eleanor Vere Boyle's** story makes that tension vivid. Born in **1825**, Boyle became the foremost female illustrator of the **1860s**, producing delicate, luminous work that placed her at the front of British book illustration. Yet her marriage in 1845 to Richard Boyle, younger son of the **8th Earl of Cork** and later chaplain to **Queen Victoria**, imposed a rigid ceiling on her ambitions. Her husband's aristocratic standing made exhibiting or selling artwork socially unacceptable for a woman of her position — commerce was considered beneath her rank, and public self-promotion more so. Boyle's response was quiet but deliberate. She published under the initials **EVB**, concealing her identity behind three letters while still reaching an audience. Her **1872** edition of **Hans Christian Andersen's** fairy tales, featuring the celebrated image of Thumbelina adrift on a water-lily pad, demonstrates precisely what was at stake in that concealment: extraordinary technical and imaginative

skill, circulating in the world only because its author remained officially invisible. The initials were both a compromise and a form of resistance.

Notes

Problem of being a woman artist: not a 'suitable' occupation

Eleanor Vere Boyle, 'Thumbelina on the Water-Lily Pad', from Hans Christian Andersen's 'Thumbkinetta', Fairy Tales London, 1872, V&A

Eleanor Vere Boyle (1825–1916) was an English artist and the most important female illustrator of the 1860s. However, she married Richard Boyle in 1845, the younger son of the 8th Earl of Cork and he was later Queen Victoria's chaplain. His status in society prevented Eleanor Boyle from exhibiting or selling her artwork. In her books she used the initials EVB to hide her identity. Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875).



Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879)
Iago, Study from an Italian
1867
National Museum of Photography,
Bradford

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879), *Iago, Study from an Italian*, 1867, National Museum of Photography, Bradford

Having established the structural barriers women artists faced, we turn to one extraordinary photograph that defies them. **Julia Margaret Cameron** stands as one of the few women artists of the Victorian era to represent individual male beauty as a subject in its own right — not as portraiture, not as incident within a larger scene. **Colin Ford** identified the sitter as **Angelo Colarossi**, a studio assistant to the sculptor **Alfred Gilbert**. Angelo's son, also named Angelo, modelled for **Anteros** on the **Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain** in Piccadilly Circus at fifteen years old — Anteros being the god of selfless love, his winged figure commemorating the Earl of Shaftesbury's philanthropic devotion to the poor. More recent research proposes that the sitter is actually **Alessandro di Marco**, Angelo's uncle, who modelled in Rome for **Frederic Leighton** earlier in his career, and whose original trade was organ grinder. He is thought to be the only paid professional model Cameron ever used. The photograph survives in a single known original print, held at what is now the **National Media Museum** in

Bradford. The image reminds us that authorship, access, and subject matter were all contested ground for women working behind the lens in the **1860s and 1870s**.

Notes

Problem of being a woman artist: the husband's job takes priority

One of the few examples of a woman artist representing individual male beauty (not a portrait or a scene that includes men, such as Elizabeth Butler) Identified by Colin Ford as Angelo Colarossi, studio assistant to the sculptor Alfred Gilbert whose son, also called Angelo, modelled for Anteros (the god of selfless love, son of Ares and Aphrodite, brother Eros, with plumed butterfly wings, symbolises the selfless philanthropic love of Salisbury for the poor) on the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain in Piccadilly Circus at the age of 15. Very recent research suggest it is his uncle Alessandro di Marco who modelled earlier in Rome for Leighton. His original trade was organ grinder. This is thought to be the only paid model Cameron every used. The National Museum of Photography (now the National Media Museum) Bradford, has the only known original print.

Notes

Also see Eleanor Fortesque-Brickdale The Idylls of the King with a single medieval knight

Also Florence Caxton, illustrator, 'The Dance Domestic-The Gyration Archaic Post-Prandial'

Marie Spartali Stillman (1844-1927)
Self-Portrait
1871
Delaware Art Museum



Marie Spartali Stillman (1844-1927), Self-Portrait, 1871, Delaware Art Museum

Building on our exploration of Pre-Raphaelite women as subjects, we now turn to one who refused that passive role entirely. **Marie Spartali Stillman** was the most intellectually formidable model in Rossetti's circle — and far more than a model. Born in 1844 to a prominent Greek family in London, she studied painting under **Ford Madox Brown** from 1864, alongside his own children. Rossetti, on hearing the news, wrote to Brown: "box her up and don't let fellows see her, as I mean to have first shy at her in the way of sitting." The remark reveals exactly the problem facing women artists of the period: extraordinary beauty in a male-dominated world marked you as a subject, not a maker. Spartali refused the category. Over a sixty-year career she produced more than a hundred works, exhibiting regularly in Britain and the United States — the only Britain-based Pre-Raphaelite to do so. **William Michael Rossetti** called her "the most gifted intellectually" of all the women his brother admired. She sat for **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**, **Julia Margaret Cameron**, and **Edward Burne-Jones**, yet her 1871 Self-

Portrait asserts something those images of her never quite could: authorship. When she died in **1927**, she was the last surviving link to the original **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood**.

Notes

Marie Spartali Stillman (1844-1927), Self-Portrait, 1871, Delaware Art Museum
Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), A Vision of Fiammetta, 1878, collection of Andrew Lloyd Webber

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879), Marie Spartali Stillman as Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory and mother of the nine Muses, c. 1866.

Problem of being a woman artist: a beautiful woman in a male-dominated world was considered to be a model not an artist. A woman artist had to be seen to be submissive and modest to be accepted.

Marie Spartali Stillman

Marie Euphrosyne Spartali, later Stillman (1844–1927), was a British Pre-Raphaelite painter of Greek descent, arguably the greatest female artist of that movement.

During a sixty-year career she produced over one hundred works, contributing regularly to exhibitions in Great Britain and the United States.

It was in the house of the Greek businessman A.C. Ionides (1810–1890) at Tulse Hill, in south London, that Marie and her sister Christine (1846–1884) met Whistler and Swinburne for the first time. Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909, English poet, playwright, novelist and critic) was so overcome that he said of Spartali: 'She is so beautiful that I want to sit down and cry'.

Marie was an imposing figure, around 6 foot 3 inches (1.9 meters) tall and, in her later years, dressed in long flowing black garments with a lace hood, attracting much attention throughout her life.

Spartali studied under Ford Madox Brown for several years from 1864, with his children Lucy, Catherine and Oliver. Rossetti, on hearing that she was to become a pupil to Madox Brown, wrote to him, 'I just hear Miss Spartali is to be your pupil. I hear too that she is one and the same with a marvellous beauty of whom I have heard much talk. So box her up and don't let fellows see her, as I mean to have first shy at her in the way of sitting.'

"Of all the women who elicited Gabriel's (Rossetti) admiration, Marie Spartali was probably the most gifted intellectually. Of an ancient and noble race, austere, virtuous and fearless, she was not lacking in a caustic wit and a sharp tongue." William Michael Rossetti speaking of Marie Spartali Stillman

In 1871, against her parents' wishes, she married American journalist and painter William J. Stillman. She was his second wife, his first having committed suicide two years before. She continued working to supplement her husband's erratic income. The couple had posed for Rossetti in his famous Dante pictures, though it is not certain if that is how they first met. He first worked for the American Art Magazine, *The Crayon*. His later job was a foreign correspondent for *The Times*. His job as a foreign correspondent resulted in the couple dividing their time between London and Florence from 1878 to 1883, and then Rome from 1889 to 1896. She also travelled to America, and was the only Britain-based Pre-Raphaelite artist to work in the United States.

She first sat for him in 1867. He wrote to Jane Morris, 'I find her head the most difficult I ever drew. It depends not so much on real form as on a subtle charm of life which one cannot recreate.'

Rossetti used her as a model for *A Vision of Fiammetta*, *Dante's Dream* and *The Bower Meadow*. She was the most intellectual of his models. She also modelled for: Ford Madox Brown; Burne-Jones; Julia Margaret Cameron and Spencer Stanhope.

She and her cousins Maria Zambaco and Aglaia Coronio were known collectively among friends as "the Three Graces", after the Charities of Greek mythology (Aglaia, 'Agg-la-eea', goddess of beauty, Euphrosyne, 'You-fro-zenee', goddess of joy, and Thalia, 'Thea-lee-a', goddess of good cheer), as all three were noted beauties of Greek heritage.

Marie Spartali died in March 1927 in Ashburn Place in (South Kensington). Marie was cremated at Brookwood Cemetery, near Woking, Surrey, and is interred there with her husband. The grave is marked by a simple lawn headstone. She had three children.

Her last will and testament contains a letter where Marie wrote, "It seems rather absurd to make a will when one has neither possessions nor money to leave". She left £155 and various personal items, including some mementos

from her life as an artist. Her body of work is valued today at over \$690 million (is this correct? Her work has sold for \$10-100K and she produced 100 works so this is a maximum of \$10m).

She spoke perfect English though her parents spoke Greek at home and French, German and Italian. She learned to sing under one of the greatest nineteenth century tenors, Manuel Garcia.

She developed a lifelong friendship for G. F. Watts and Julia Margaret Cameron when visiting their family friends Toby and Sara Prinsep at Little Holland House.

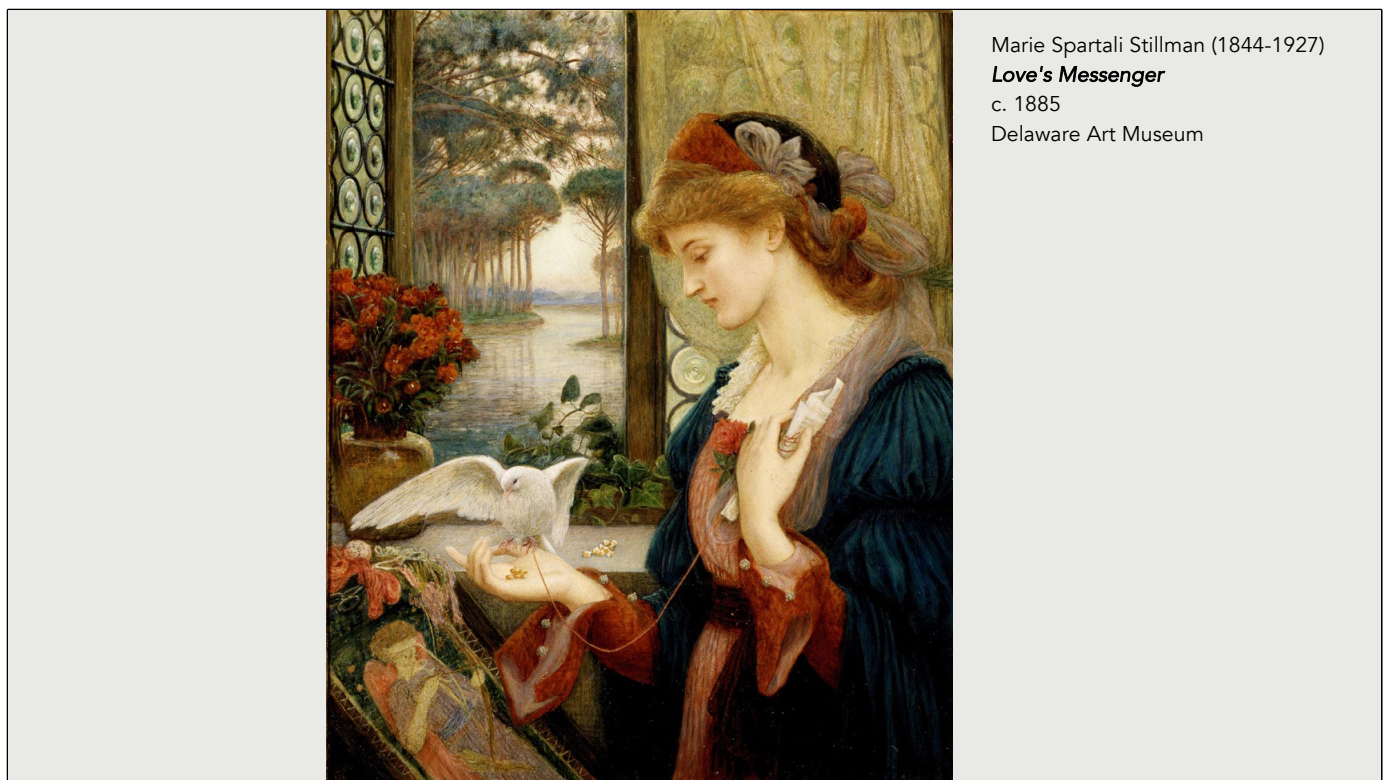
She was obsessed with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting but he was too busy to take her on as a pupil and recommended Luke Ionides who recommended Ford Madox Brown.

She fell in love with Lord Ranelagh but his reputation as a womanizer caused her father to call off the marriage. She married Stillman against her parents wishes as she felt pity for him. Lord Ranelagh was, for example, a friend of Annie Miller (Hunt's fiancé) and she married his cousin Captain Thompson in 1863.

When she died in 1927 she was the last surviving link to the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Charles Algernon Swinburne

Swinburne was an alcoholic and algolagniac (masochist). His health suffered and aged 42 he was taken into care by his friend and lost his youthful rebelliousness. Watts said it saved the man and killed the poet. Oscar Wilde stated that Swinburne was "a braggart in matters of vice, who had done everything he could to convince his fellow citizens of his homosexuality and bestiality without being in the slightest degree a homosexual or a bestialiser." He was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature every year from 1903 to 1907 and 1909.



Marie Spartali Stillman (1844-1927)
Love's Messenger
 c. 1885
 Delaware Art Museum

Marie Spartali Stillman (1844-1927), *Love's Messenger*, c. 1885, Delaware Art Museum

Marie Spartali Stillman dismissed this painting as "merely a study from a model" done for the "pleasure of painting" — a rhetorical modesty women painters deployed strategically to deflect accusations of arrogance. The work rewards closer attention than that self-deprecation suggests. The figure at the window has half-embroidered a blindfolded **Eros**, while feeding a dove with a letter tied to its foot — the image poised between receiving word from a lover and sending it. **Love's Messenger** draws on **Botticelli** and the early Italian Renaissance painters Spartali Stillman knew through her extensive contacts in the Roman art world. Her exhibition history shaped how audiences encountered the work. After early appearances at the **Royal Academy** and the Dudley Gallery, the **Grosvenor Gallery**, opened in **1877**, gave her far greater visibility. Living abroad for her husband's health complicated her public presence, yet she contributed consistently through most of the **1880s**. She completed this painting after returning to Britain in **1884**, then reworked it in Rome following her husband's

appointment as The Times correspondent in Italy and Greece. It eventually crossed to America when **Samuel Bancroft** acquired it, removing the painting from British view entirely.

Notes

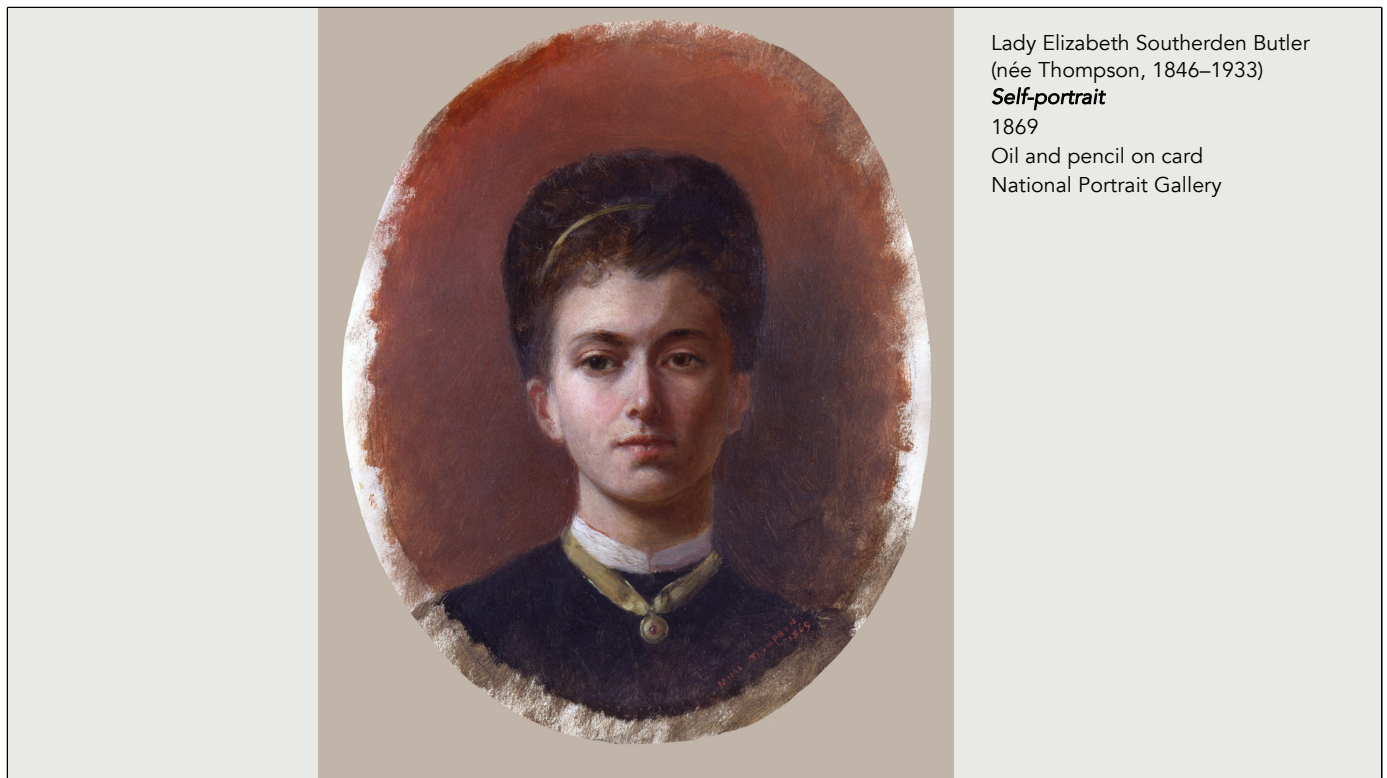
Spartali was typically self-deprecating about this and other paintings. She said, it was 'merely a study from a model' done for the 'pleasure of painting'. It is likely this was a rhetorical device used by women painters to appeal to the public by means of modesty in order to avoid any accusation of arrogance.

The woman at the window has half embroidered a figure of a blindfolded Eros and she is feeding a dove with a string on its foot attached to a letter. The letter has either just arrived from her lover or she is just about to send it. 'Love's messenger' refers to Eros or Cupid or sometimes a dove. The portrait is influenced by the early Italian Renaissance painter Botticelli and she had many contacts in the Roman art world where early Italian Renaissance artists would have been discussed.

Spartali Stillman was displayed at the Royal Academy and the Dudley Gallery but it was the Grosvenor Gallery that opened in 1877 that gave her much more visibility. As she then lived abroad for her husband's health it was difficult for her to maintain public awareness. She did not contribute in 1878, perhaps because she was pregnant, but sent two pictures in 1879 and continued to contribute through most of the 1880s including this painting. She returned to Britain in 1884 and completed this work but in 1886 her husband was appointed The Times correspondent in Italy and Greece and they left the country again. She reworked this painting while in Rome and before it was bought by Samuel Bancroft and taken to America.

References

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Spartali_Stillman



Lady Elizabeth Southerden Butler
(née Thompson, 1846–1933)

Self-portrait

1869

Oil and pencil on card

National Portrait Gallery

Lady Elizabeth Southerden Butler (née Thompson, 1846–1933), Self-portrait, 1869, National Portrait Gallery

Building on that broader struggle for recognition, **Elizabeth Butler** stands as the defining case of institutional exclusion at the peak of Victorian artistic ambition. Born in **1846** in Switzerland, Butler trained in Italy before enrolling at the **Female School of Art** in Queen Square, London, where she encountered both **Millais** and **Ruskin**. Moving from religious subjects into military painting, she found her métier at precisely the moment Victorian nationalism and imperial pride demanded heroic imagery of British forces. Yet her own stated purpose ran counter to that appetite. She said directly: "I never painted for the glory of war, but to portray its pathos and heroism." Her battle scenes drew enormous public attention and critical acclaim, covering conflicts from the **Napoleonic Wars** through to the **First World War**. In **1877** she married Lieutenant General Sir William Butler, managing his affairs alongside raising six children while continuing to travel and paint. When her husband retired, the family settled in Ireland. Despite all this, the **Royal Academy** never elected her to full

membership. She was shortlisted in **1879** and lost by just two votes — a margin that makes the exclusion feel less like oversight and more like a decision.

Notes

Problem of being a woman artist: never elected to Academician despite being a leading artist of her day. Had to travel, manage her husband's affairs and raise six children.

Elizabeth Butler

Wikipedia: Elizabeth Southerden Thompson, Lady Butler (1846–1933) was a British painter, one of the few female painters to achieve fame for history paintings, especially military battle scenes, at the end of that tradition. She was married to Lieutenant General Sir William Butler in 1877, and is still often referred to as Lady Butler. Some of her most famous military scenes come from the Napoleonic Wars, but she covered most major 19th-century wars and painted several works showing the First World War.

She was born in Switzerland and received her art training in Italy and then South Kensington, London and she entered the Female School of Art where she met Millais and Ruskin. She initially concentrated on religious subjects and later switched to war paintings.

She was very popular as she painted scenes of battle at a time when Victorian pride and nationalism for the growing British Empire was at its height. She said, 'I never painted for the glory of war, but to portray its pathos and heroism'.

On her husband's retirement they moved to Ireland. Despite being one of the most famous and leading artists of her day she was never elected an academician. She was short-listed in 1879 but lost by two votes.

Notes

The Government School of Design was founded in 1837 and in 1853 became the National Art Training School with the Female School of Art in a separate building. In 1896 it became the Royal College of Art. During the 19thC it was often referred to as the South Kensington Schools.

Female School of Art. In 1866 students were allowed to draw the clothed

figure for the first time. Also known as School of Design for Females/Female School of Design/Gower Street School/Metropolitan School of Art for Females/Royal Female School of Art/Queen Square School of Art/Royal Female School of Art/Government School of Art for Ladies. Originally (1842) in Somerset House, then Gower Street (1852) then Queen Square (1861). It became part of the Central School of Arts and Crafts whose successor institution is Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design. If the pupils at the Female School of Art in Queen Square were good enough, they were sent for examination at South Kensington, hence the confusion in some biographical sources, which mistakenly locate the school itself in South Kensington.



Elizabeth Butler (1846–1933), *Scotland Forever!*, 1881, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds

Elizabeth Butler (1846–1933), *Scotland Forever!*, 1881, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds

Lady Butler's **Scotland Forever!**, painted in 1881, throws the viewer directly into the opening seconds of the **Royal Scots Greys'** charge at the **Battle of Waterloo**. Heavy grey horses surge forward at full gallop, their riders leaning into the assault — though historians note the actual advance was likely a quick walk across broken ground. Butler was not chasing documentary accuracy alone; she was making an argument. Having visited the **Grosvenor Gallery** and found its aesthetic paintings deeply unsatisfying, she returned to the subject matter she had made her own. Her reputation rested on unflinching military scenes: **The Roll Call** of 1874, drawn from the Crimean War, and **Remnants of an Army** of 1879, depicting the catastrophic 1842 retreat from Kabul. *Scotland Forever!* was exhibited at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly before entering **Leeds Art Gallery** in 1888, a gift from Colonel Thomas Walter Harding. The question this lecture series keeps returning to is who gets taken seriously and on what terms. Butler built an undeniable public following, yet the institution of the Royal Academy repeatedly

made her feel her gender before her achievement. Her position exposes exactly how professional legitimacy was rationed in Victorian Britain.

Notes

Problem of being a woman artist:

Scotland Forever! (from Wikipedia)

"Scotland Forever! is an 1881 oil painting by Lady Butler depicting the start of the charge of the Royal Scots Greys, a British cavalry regiment that charged alongside the British heavy cavalry at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. In actuality, it appears that Scots Greys never started the charge at a gallop, due to the broken ground, and instead advanced at a quick walk. The horses which dominate the picture are the heavy grey mounts used by the regiment throughout its history until mechanization. Two hundred men and 224 horses of the Greys were killed or wounded during the charge portrayed. Butler was inspired to paint the charge as a response to the aesthetic paintings that she saw - and intensely disliked - on a visit to the Grosvenor Gallery. She had developed a reputation for her military pictures after the favourable reception of her earlier painting *The Roll Call* of 1874, on a subject from the Crimean War and her 1879 painting *Remnants of an Army*, on the 1842 retreat from Kabul. The painting takes its name from the battle cry: "Scotland for ever!"

The painting was exhibited at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly in 1881. It is now housed at the Leeds Art Gallery, having been one of its earliest acquisitions, a gift from Colonel Thomas Walter Harding (1843–1927) in 1888. It was also an inspiration for the depiction of the same charge in the film *Waterloo*."



Elizabeth Butler (1846–1933)
*The Remnants of an Army,
 Jellalabad, January 13, 1842*

1879

132.1 x 233.7 cm

Tate (on permanent loan to Somerset
 Military Museum)

Elizabeth Butler (1846–1933), *The Remnants of an Army, Jellalabad, January 13, 1842*, 1879, 132.1 x 233.7 cm, Tate (on permanent loan to Somerset Military Museum)

Elizabeth Butler painted **Remnants of an Army** in **1879**, at the height of the **Second Anglo-Afghan War**, a conflict that lent the image an urgent contemporary resonance. Butler had already established herself as Britain's foremost painter of military subjects following the enormous public success of **The Roll Call** in **1874**, her Crimean War scene that drew crowds at the Royal Academy. The subject here is **William Brydon**, assistant surgeon in the Bengal Army, who rode alone to the gates of **Jalalabad** in January **1842** — the solitary figure emerging from the dust of the **First Anglo-Afghan War's** catastrophic retreat from Kabul, in which some sixteen thousand soldiers and camp followers perished or were taken captive. Butler centres the composition on Brydon's exhausted horse, barely keeping pace, to externalise the psychological weight of survival and catastrophe simultaneously. Brydon was not, in strict fact, the sole survivor; other stragglers arrived later, and Afghan forces eventually released a

number of captives. Butler's image compresses that messy reality into a single figure of haunting isolation. **Sir Henry Tate** acquired the painting and presented it to the **Tate Gallery** in **1897**, where it remains one of Butler's defining achievements.

Notes

It shows William Brydon, assistant surgeon in the Bengal Army, arriving at the gates of Jalalabad (eastern Afghanistan) in January 1842. The walls of Jalalabad can be seen in the background and riders from the garrison gallop from the gate to reach the solitary figure bringing the first word of the fate of the "Army of Afghanistan".

Supposedly Brydon was the last survivor of the approximately 16,000 soldiers and camp followers from the 1842 retreat from Kabul in the First Anglo-Afghan War, and is shown toiling the last few miles to safety on an exhausted and dying horse. In fact a few other stragglers from the Army eventually arrived, and larger numbers were eventually released or rescued after spending time as captives of Afghan forces.

The painting was made in the middle of the Second Anglo-Afghan War. Lady Butler was developing a reputation for her military pictures after the favourable reception of her earlier painting *The Roll Call* of 1874, on a subject from the Crimean War.

Notes

Acquired by Sir Henry Tate and given to Tate Gallery in 1897.



Evelyn de Morgan (1855-1919)
Flora
1894
The De Morgan Foundation,
Wandsworth

Evelyn de Morgan (1855-1919), *Flora*, 1894, The De Morgan Foundation, Wandsworth

Evelyn de Morgan stands as one of the most compelling figures in British **Pre-Raphaelite** painting, though her reputation has long been overshadowed by her husband **William de Morgan**, the ceramicist and designer for **Morris & Co.**, who draws seventeen times more Google references than she does — a disparity that says more about how art history has treated women than about the quality of her work. Born Evelyn Pickering into an upper-middle-class family, she showed fierce determination from adolescence. At seventeen she wrote in her diary, "Art is eternal, but life is short — I have not a moment to lose," and persuaded her parents to enrol her at the **Slade School of Art**, which accepted women from its founding in **1871**, seven years before UCL did so more broadly. She was among the Slade's earliest students and won a scholarship in **1873**. Her uncle, **John Roddam Spencer Stanhope**, a second-wave Pre-Raphaelite associated with **Edward Burne-Jones** and **George Frederic Watts**, became her primary teacher and influence. Equally formative was her deep engagement with

Sandro Botticelli, whose sinuous, allegorical figuration runs throughout her mature paintings. She married William de Morgan in **1887**, and her earnings consistently subsidised his pottery.

Notes

Problem of being a woman artist: overshadowed by her husband's art (a ceramicist who designed tiles and stained glass for Morris & Co. He has 17 times more Google references)

Evelyn de Morgan

Evelyn de Morgan (born Pickering) was an English Pre-Raphaelite painter born to upper middle-class parents. Her mother was the sister of the artist John Roddam Spencer Stanhope and a descendent of the Earl of Leicester.

She was educated at home and started drawing at the age of 15. When she was 17 she wrote in her diart 'Art is eternal, but life is short ... I have not a moment to lose.' and she persuaded her parents to let her go to the Slade School of Art.

She was influenced and taught by her uncle, John Roddam Spencer Stanhope (1829-1908), and was particularly fond of the work of Sandro Botticelli (c. 1445-1510). In 1887 she married the ceramicist William de Morgan and they lived together until his death in 1917. Her work is on permanent exhibition a the De Morgan Centre in Wandsworth (closed since 28 June 2014). Augustus de Morgan (his father) was a brilliant mathematician, appointed the first professor of Mathematics at UCL in 1828 aged 21, the year after he graduated. He resigned twice on principle.

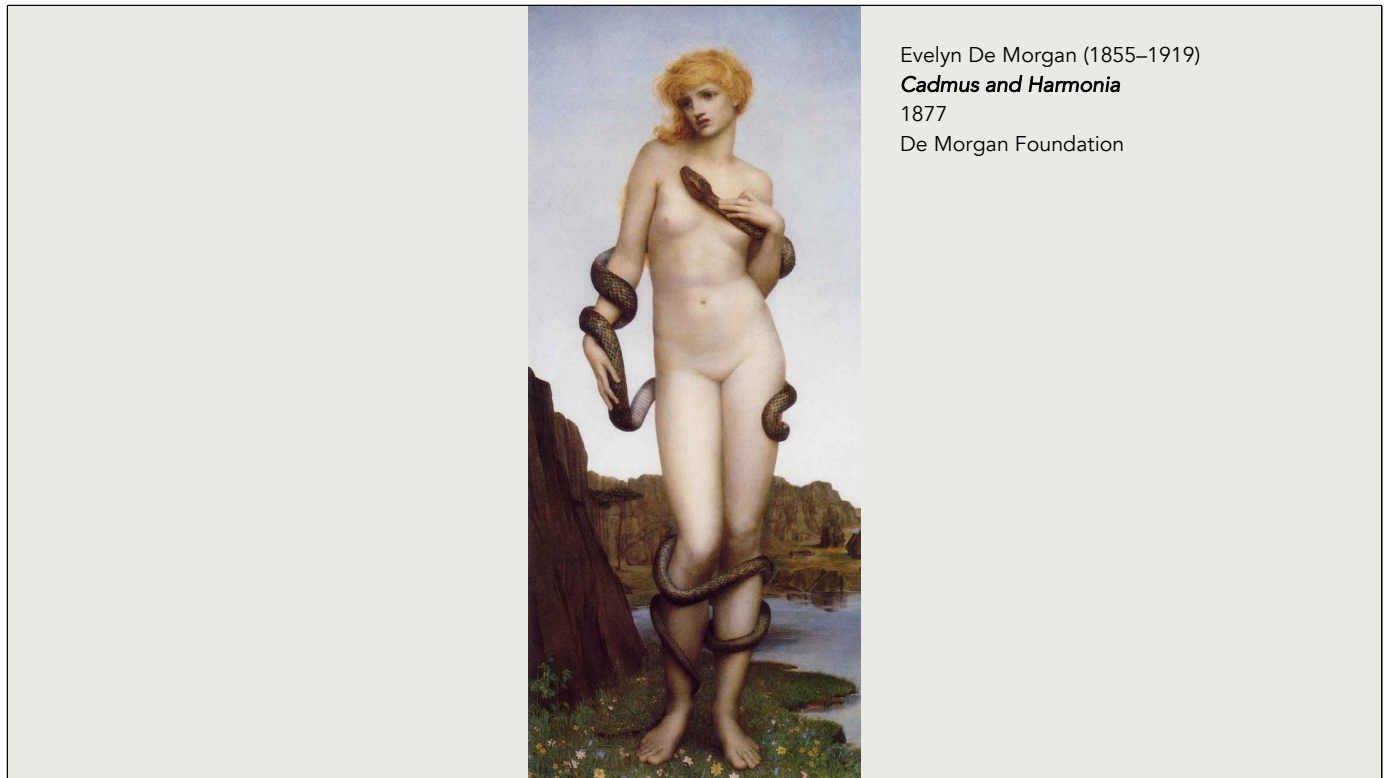
Note

John Roddam Spencer Stanhope is an English artist associated with Edward Burne-Jones and George Frederic Watts and often regarded as a second-wave pre-Raphaelite. His work is also studied within the context of Aestheticism and British Symbolism. As a painter, Stanhope worked in oil, watercolour, fresco, and mixed media. His subject matter was mythological, allegorical, biblical, and contemporary. While a student at Oxford, he sought out Watts as a teacher and was Watts' assistant for some of his architectural paintings. Spencer-Stanhope travelled with Watts to Italy in 1853 and to Asia Minor in 1856–57. Upon his return, he was invited by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

to participate in the Oxford murals project. Spencer-Stanhope's house Sandroyd (now called Benfleet Hall), near Cobham in Surrey, was commissioned from the architect Philip Webb. Finished by 1861 it was Webb's second house, the first was The Red House, designed for William Morris.

Slade School of Art, the art school of UCL established in 1871 from a endowment by the lawyer Felix Slade. It taught men and women from the beginning, seven years before UCL allowed women. Classes were co-educational except for life drawing classes. Women draw clothed or half-draped models. Evelyn de Morgan was one of the first students and won a scholarship in 1873. It also taught Kate Greenaway and Gwen and Augustus John. Roger Fry taught at the Slade.

William de Morgan designer, potter, inventor (glazes and a duplex bicycle gear) and novelist was a lifelong friend of William Morris. His pottery was supported by cash injections from his wife. In 1907 he wrote 'All my life I have been trying to make beautiful things, and now that I can make them nobody wants them.' He took up writing novels and Joseph Vance (1906) became a best seller in the US and UK, followed by three other novels.



Evelyn De Morgan (1855–1919)
Cadmus and Harmonia
1877
De Morgan Foundation

Evelyn De Morgan (1855–1919), *Cadmus and Harmonia*, 1877, De Morgan Foundation

Building on our survey of Victorian classical painting, we turn now to **Evelyn De Morgan's** treatment of a myth most of her contemporaries overlooked. When De Morgan exhibited this painting in **1877**, she included an excerpt from **Ovid's *Metamorphoses*** in the catalogue, signalling her command of classical literature and her ambition to be taken seriously as a history painter. Ovid frames **Cadmus** as the tragic hero: he slays a sacred serpent, incurs a curse, marries **Harmonia**, and watches disaster after disaster befall his family until he is himself transformed into a snake. Harmonia then implores the gods to transform her as well. De Morgan fixes on the charged instant between Cadmus's transformation and Harmonia's own, placing Harmonia at the absolute centre of the composition. As **Elise Lawton Smith** argues, this is a deliberate inversion of Ovid's hierarchy. Her choice of oil paint rather than watercolour, the medium then expected of women painters, reinforces her claim to parity with male history painters. The serpent here carries no connotations of decadent

sexuality. It signals **renewal**: the creature that sheds its skin to be reborn. Harmonia, on the point of metamorphosis, becomes a figure of female agency and spiritual transformation, not passive suffering.

Notes

The classical writer Ovid wrote about an encounter between Cadmus and a serpent he managed to kill after it had killed one of his attendants. The serpent was sacred and he heard a curse that he would be turned into a serpent. His married Harmonia and their life was filled with disasters which he eventually put down to the serpent's curse. He wished he could be turned into a serpent to stop the disasters and Harmonia implored the gods to turn her into a serpent as well. De Morgan is showing the moment after Cadmus has been turned into a serpent and before Harmonia is also turned into one. There was an excerpt from Ovid included in the 1877 exhibition of the painting.

De Morgan is showing her skill at the depiction of the nude and declaring herself to be a serious history painter. She uses oil paints rather than watercolours which were traditionally associated with women painters and she is demonstrating her deep classical understanding as she chose an obscure story. Although superficially following the male traditions for representing the female nude as a passive object De Morgan hints at a deeper spiritual message of female power. Ovid presents Cadmus as the tragic hero and Harmonia's role is secondary but De Morgan presents Harmonia as the central tragic figure. Following the tragic deaths of her two daughters and two grandchildren and the metamorphosis of her husband Harmonia asks the gods to change her form and we see her on the point of transformation. The snake is not a symbol of decadent sexuality but of rebirth as it sheds its skin to emerge as if reborn. Harmonia is thus a symbol of renewal.

References

Elise Lawton Smith, Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and the Allegorical Body, pp. 65-66

A self-portrait of Gwen John, a young woman with reddish-brown hair pulled back, wearing a red patterned blouse with a dark collar and a small brooch. She is looking directly at the viewer with a neutral expression. The background is a dark, mottled brown.

Gwen John (1876-1939)
Self-portrait
1902
Tate Britain, London

Gwen John (1876-1939), Self-portrait, 1902, Tate Britain, London

Entering a profession shaped almost entirely by men, and measured constantly against a celebrated sibling, defined **Gwen John's** entire career. John trained at the **Slade School of Art** alongside her younger brother **Augustus John**, whose personal glamour made him a celebrity even as a student. Gwen was quieter, and her reputation has grown steadily since her death. Her meticulous preparation reflects her time studying under **James McNeill Whistler** at the **Académie Carmen** in Paris, and her Slade training in copying Old Masters shows in the naturalism and carefully controlled colour range of her paintings. To survive in Paris she worked as a model, posing for **Auguste Rodin**, who later became her lover. Her diaries record repeated harassment: hours of waiting, shouting, propositions, and dismissal. The self-scrutinising intensity of her self-portraits, and the isolation of each figure, registers that experience directly. From **1910 to 1924**, American collector **John Quinn** purchased nearly all her output, freeing her from modelling. Her total catalogue runs to only **158 oil paintings**, though she produced thousands of drawings. Augustus himself predicted the eventual critical

reversal, declaring that in fifty years he would be known as the brother of Gwen John. That moment has arrived.

Notes

Problem of being a woman artist: an art world dominated by men (and a famous brother)

Gwen John

Gwen John was a Welsh artist who worked in France most of her life. She trained at the Slade School of Art where her younger brother, Augustus John, had already begun his studies. They lived together on fruit and nuts and even as students her brother's personal glamour made him a celebrity. Gwen was quieter and her reputation has steadily grown since her death. She neglected her health throughout her life and in 1900-01 she lived as a squatter in a derelict building.

She and was taught in the traditional manner, which involved copying Old Master paintings. This training shows in the naturalism and carefully controlled colour range of this picture. As a woman in a career still largely dominated by men, including her successful brother Augustus, Gwen had to struggle for recognition. The self-scrutinising intensity of this image, and the isolation of the figure, registers some sense of this struggle.

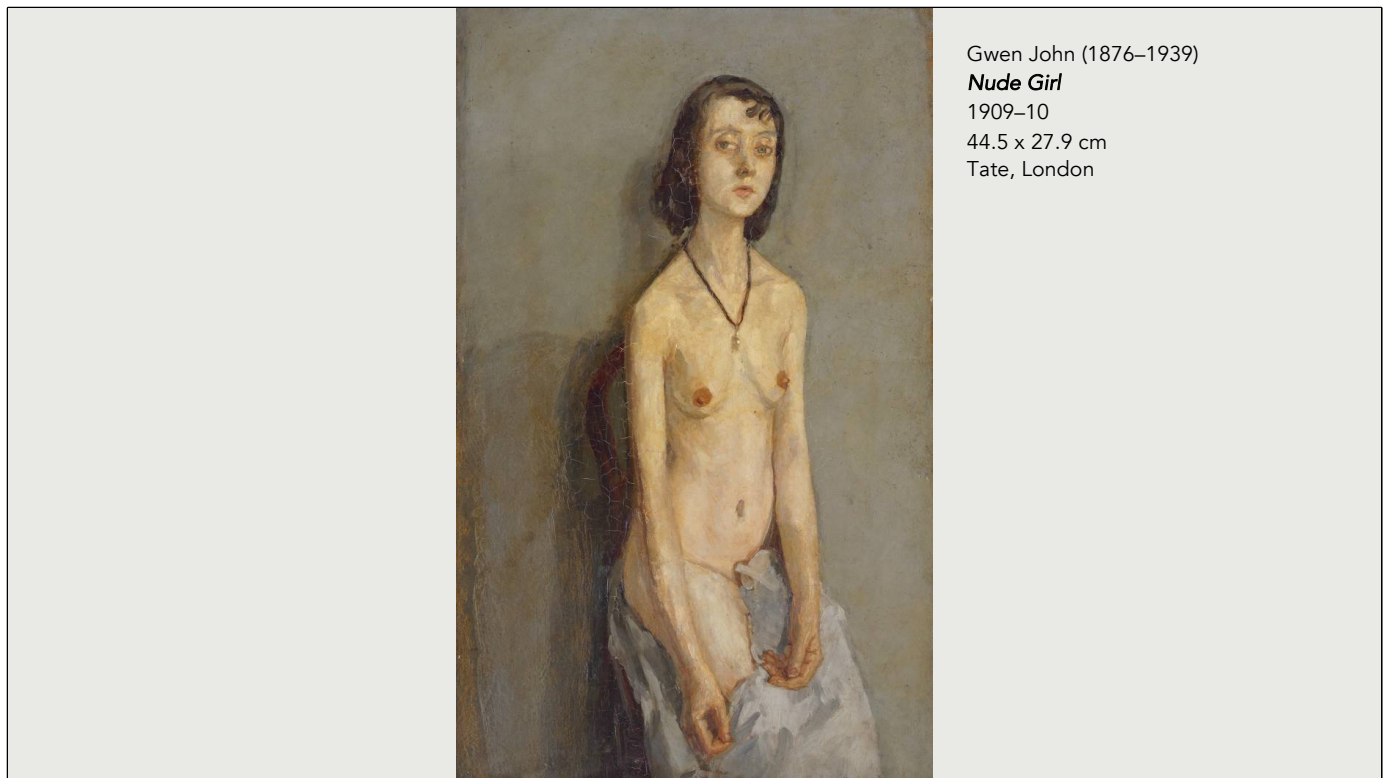
From 1910 to 1924 nearly all her work was purchased by her patron John Quinn an American art collector and this freed her from having to work as a model, mostly for women artists. The majority of her work is portraits, mainly of female sitters and her oeuvre is small, consisting of only 158 oil paintings. She drew thousands of drawings and thought a painting should be finished in one or two sittings and 'For that one must paint a lot of canvases probably and waste them'. Her meticulous preparation shows the influence of James McNeill Whistler who she trained under in Paris at the Académie Carmen.

Like many women artists she tried drawing her own body in the mirror but she complained in a letter to her brother about how difficult it was. Even the Slade imposed restrictions of women drawing from female models and so friends would draw each other but kept silent about the practice as 'the respectability of these middle-class women students would have been jeopardised if they had acknowledged at the time that they had worked from studies of their own bodies rather than those of anonymous working-class

models'.

When she lived in Paris she had to work as a model to survive. She posed nude for Auguste Rodin and for other artists, mostly women. In her dairies she wrote of many occasions when, working as a model, she felt harassed or abused by both men and women artists. For example, one woman artist was kissing a man all afternoon and then told her not to tell anyone if she wanted to keep her job as a model, treating her as a child and discussing her as if she was not there. As a model she would be kept waiting for hours, shouted at, ignored, given no breaks, and propositioned by male artists. She developed fierce attachments to both men and women that worried some people and she later became Rodin's lover.

Gwen John's quiet art with its subtle colour relationships, stands in contrast to her brother's far more assertive work. She was once overshadowed by his work but critical opinion now tends to view her as the more talented. Augustus predicted this reversal, saying 'In 50 years' time I will be known as the brother of Gwen John.'



Gwen John (1876–1939)
Nude Girl
1909–10
44.5 x 27.9 cm
Tate, London

Gwen John (1876–1939), *Nude Girl*, 1909–10, 44.5 x 27.9 cm, Tate, London

The tension between John's personal feelings and her professional rigour defines **Nude Girl** entirely. **Gwen John** painted **Fenella Lovell** while privately writing that the sittings were a great strain and that she found the model, in her own words, dreadful. That dislike sharpens rather than distorts the image. John strips away setting and biographical detail, flattening the colour range to focus attention on the body itself, yet Lovell's discomfort under the gaze reads unmistakably across the canvas. The result, as **Wyndham Lewis** observed, is a feeling of revulsion from nakedness, an Eve after the Fall. For women artists working around **1909**, the nude was a fraught subject, hedged by expectations of morality and decorum, and John's unflinching treatment was genuinely unusual. A friend wrote to her that the painting was rare in its conception and wonderfully choice in treatment, recognising something that institutional criticism took longer to acknowledge. The Tate frames it precisely: the viewer encounters this not as an idealised nude but as a portrait of a

contemporary woman without clothes, uncomfortable at being seen. That quality of unblinking honesty in depicting the body does not resurface in British art until **Stanley Spencer** and **Lucian Freud**.

Notes

Tate website: 'The human body, a traditional theme in western art, was a tricky subject for women artists at the turn of the century because of questions of morality and decorum. By using a narrow colour range and minimal setting, and suppressing biographical details, John draws attention to the naked body. At the same time, the character of the model, Fenella Lovell, comes across powerfully. So the viewer experiences this painting, disconcertingly, as a portrait of a contemporary woman with no clothes on, who seems to be uncomfortable that we are looking at her. '

Her friend wrote to her, "The little "Nude Girl" is quite exquisite in its subtle simplicity - a gem of the first water - rare in its conception, wonderfully choice in treatment - felt I must write to you after seeing what depths you can feel'.

We know from her letters that John disliked the model Fenella Lovell, she wrote, 'I shall be glad when it is finished, it is a great strain doing Fenella. It is a pretty little face but she is dreadful' and later 'I shall pay her what I owe her and never see her again'. The unblinking realism possibly enhanced by her dislike creates what Wyndham Lewis described as a feeling of a 'revulsion from her nakedness – an Eve after the Fall'.

Such honesty in painting the nude body is not found until it resurfaces with Stanley Spencer and Lucian Freud.

References

Tate website

Museum of Modern Art website



Laura Knight (1877-1970)
Self-Portrait with Nude
1913
National Portrait Gallery, London

Laura Knight (1877-1970), *Self-Portrait with Nude*, 1913, National Portrait Gallery, London

Returning to the Royal Academy, we meet **Laura Knight**, the first woman elected a Royal Academician since **1868**, admitted in **1936** and made a Dame seven years earlier. Knight's path was shaped by financial precarity from the start. Her father died shortly after her birth, yet her mother found the means to send her to a Paris atelier and enrol her at the Nottingham School of Art at thirteen. Knight was teaching by fifteen, won a scholarship and gold medal from the South Kensington Museum, and married the painter **Harold Knight** in 1903. She became a central figure in the **Newlyn colony** alongside **Alfred Munnings**. In **1913** she painted **Self Portrait with Nude**, showing herself at work before the model **Ella Naper**, the composition framed as if seen by someone entering the studio. The work made an explicit argument: as a student, Knight had been barred from life classes, permitted only to draw from casts, a restriction she deeply resented. The **Daily Telegraph** called it vulgar. The **Royal Academy** rejected it. Knight exhibited it throughout her career regardless, and after her

death the **National Portrait Gallery** acquired it as a landmark in female self-portraiture and a statement about women's exclusion from professional artistic training.

Notes

Problem of being a woman artist: cannot learn to draw and paint figures at art school until the twentieth century

Returning to the Royal Academy and looking at the first woman to become an Academician since its foundation.

Laura Knight (born Johnson) was an artist who worked in the figurative, realist tradition and was an English Impressionist. She was created a Dame in 1929 (aged 52) and was elected a Royal Academician in 1936, the first since 1868. Her large retrospective at the RA in 1965 was the first for a woman.

Her father died shortly after she was born and her mother struggled financially but managed to send her France to study in a Paris atelier. She returned and her mother managed to enrol her at the Nottingham School of Art aged 13. She started teaching art when she was 15 and her mother fell ill and won a scholarship and gold medal from the South Kensington Museum (which became the V&A in 1899). She met Harold Knight when she was 17 and they married in 1903 when she was 26.

She became a central figure in the Newlyn artists colony with Alfred Munnings.

In 1913 she painted a first for a woman, Self Portrait with Nude showing her painting the artist Ella Naper. Using mirrors she painted herself and the model as seen from the point of view of someone entering the studio. As an art student she she was not permitted to paint nude models, only casts, which she deeply resented. It was first shown in Newlyn and was well received but rejected by the RA. The Daily Telegraph art critic called it 'vulgar' and suggested it 'might quite appropriately have stayed in the artist's studio.' She continued to exhibit it throughout her career and it continued to receive criticism but it was purchased by the NPG after her death and is now considered both a key work in the story of female self-portraiture and as symbolic of wider female emancipation.

She painted the world of theatre and ballet and was a war artist during WWII. She was also interested in marginal groups, such as gypsies and circus

performers.

A woman artist painting a nude was very difficult during the nineteenth century as few art schools allowed women students to attend life classes. One of the first was the Slade towards the end of the century. It was one thing to paint a working class model another for a middle-class Slade woman student to pose naked. Women students painted themselves in the mirror and other women students but did not acknowledge this.

Edward Poynter, first principal at the Slade, in his inaugural address in October 1871:

'There is unfortunately a difficulty which has always stood in the way of female students acquiring that thorough knowledge of the figure which is essential to the production of work of a high class; and that is, of course, that they are debarred from the same complete study of the model that is open to the male students...But I have always been anxious to institute a class where the half-draped model might be studied, to give those ladies who are desirous of obtaining sound instruction in drawing the figure, an opportunity of gaining the necessary knowledge...It is my desire that in all the classes, except of course those for the study of the nude model, the male and female students should work together.'



Laura Knight (1877-1970)
Ruby Loftus screwing a Breech-ring
 1943
 86.3 x 101.9 cm
 Imperial War Museum

Laura Knight (1877-1970), *Ruby Loftus screwing a Breech-ring*, 1943, 86.3 x 101.9 cm, Imperial War Museum

Laura Knight's painting of Ruby Loftus scraping a Breech Ring, completed in 1943, places two exceptional women within a single wartime image — one at the lathe, one behind the canvas. The **War Artists' Advisory Committee** had flagged Loftus as an outstanding factory worker, and the **Ministry of Supply** insisted Knight paint her at the **Royal Ordnance Factory in Newport** rather than in a studio. The detail matters: making a Bofors breech ring was the most demanding job on the factory floor, normally requiring eight or nine years of training. Loftus was twenty-one, with no prior factory experience, and her presence at that machine was itself a publicity coup. Knight arrived at the commission fresh from painting circus performers and ballet dancers. Industrial machinery was entirely new territory, yet contemporary reports praised her technical accuracy. The painting ran in most of the daily newspapers. But as **Brian Foss** argues in *War Paint*, published in 2007, neither Knight nor Loftus was widely read as evidence of what women could routinely achieve. Both were framed as

remarkable exceptions — which quietly reinforced, rather than challenged, the assumption that the factory floor and the Royal Academy alike were male by default.

Notes

Miss Ruby Loftus had been brought to the attention of the War Artist's Advisory Committee as 'an outstanding factory worker'. Laura Knight was expected to paint a studio portrait but the Ministry of Supply requested that she be painted at work in the Royal Ordnance Factory in Newport.

Making a 'Bofors Breech ring' was the most highly skilled job in the factory, normally requiring eight or nine years training. Loftus was aged 21 at the time of the painting and had no previous factory experience. Her ability to operate the machine presented a considerable publicity coup at the time and she was probably placed at this machine for this reason.

Knight had been painting circus performers and ballet dancers; industrial machinery was a wholly new element in her work but her technical accuracy was praised in contemporary reports.

The painting received enormous publicity and was reproduced in most of the daily newspapers. Laura Knight was the most outstandingly successful women artist of the inter-war years and she was the best-known and most honoured woman artist. She did not conform to gender expectations and campaigned actively and vocally to become the first female Royal Academician since the founding membership. She wrote, 'Can Women Succeed as Artists?' and identified inequality of opportunity between men and women as the basis for the latter's near exclusion from the centre of the British art world.

It could be said that Knight, like Loftus, was proving herself in a traditionally male environment. However, the press and society at large identified Knight and Loftus not as beacons of gender equality but as outstanding exceptions whose achievements highlighted the limitations rather than the potential of other women.

References

Imperial War Museum website

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Laura Knight (1877-1970)
Ruby Loftus screwing a Breech-ring
1943, Imperial War Museum

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