

## Between art and commerce

Thomas, Zoe

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## BETWEEN ART AND COMMERCE: WOMEN, BUSINESS OWNERSHIP, AND THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT\*

To date, scholars of the English Arts and Crafts movement, which blossomed across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, have focused their energies on a small elite group of male designers and architects.<sup>1</sup> An avalanche of books and exhibitions have enriched understanding of the visionary ingenuity of designer William Morris, who, with friends, established Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in 1861, alongside the later role played by figures such as C. R. Ashbee, who formed his Guild of Handicraft in 1888.<sup>2</sup> Their designs, writings, socialism and anti-commercial posturing proposed a radical alternative model for living and working that rejected the corrupting demands of capitalism and elevated the decorative, arguing for its equal importance to society as the fine arts.

Yet a confluence of elements during this era — developments in print culture; urbanization; mass consumerism; the women's movement; a reaction against industrialization; widespread interest in medievalism and domestic crafts — created a fertile environment in which a wider pool of people played a role in the

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<sup>1</sup> The Arts and Crafts movement in England developed in reaction to industrialization, but the movement had wider significance, spreading across the United Kingdom, Europe, Japan and North America where it was shaped by different regional and national contexts. In the Vienna Secession, for instance, artists were inspired by the Arts and Crafts ethos of uniting the fine and applied arts in their desire to rescue Austrian society from the horrors of industrialization, but in Scotland and Ireland the Arts and Crafts had a more overtly nationalistic focus. Wendy Kaplan (ed.), *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America: Design for the Modern World, 1880–1920* (London, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London, 1977); Peter Stansky, *Redesigning the World: William Morris, the 1880s, and the Arts and Crafts* (Princeton, 1985); Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London, 1995); Fiona MacCarthy, *Eric Gill* (London, 1990); Alan Crawford, *C. R. Ashbee: Architect, Designer and Romantic Socialist* (New Haven, 2005).

movement than has been accounted for. In this article I address this lacuna, reframing understanding of the movement's breadth and largely hidden, entrepreneurial elements. I do so by providing the first comprehensive account of the women who established businesses between the 1870s and the 1930s in fields such as metal and leather work, bookbinding, stained glass and textiles. I take as my focus the leading network of women business owners in the English Arts and Crafts movement. Although scholars have emphasized the prominence of certain Scottish, Irish, North American and New Zealand women in Arts and Crafts cultures in their respective contexts, women business owners in England remain strikingly unstudied.<sup>3</sup> These women were members of 'professional' organizations such as the Women's Guild of Arts, which was the most prestigious group for women in the country.<sup>4</sup> The majority were based in South East England, although one or two members did live in the North West, and in Ireland and Wales. There appear to have been no members from Scotland, presumably due to the vibrancy of the

<sup>3</sup> Women at the Glasgow School of Art, such as the designers Frances and Margaret Macdonald, are particularly well researched. Jude Burkhauser (ed.), *Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design, 1880–1920* (Edinburgh, 1990); Janice Helland, *The Studios of Frances and Margaret Macdonald* (Manchester, 1996); Janice Helland, *Professional Women Painters in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commitment, Friendship, Pleasure* (London, 2000); Nicola Gordon Bowe and Elizabeth Cumming, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Dublin and Edinburgh, 1885–1925* (Dublin, 1998); Elizabeth Cumming, *Hand, Heart and Soul: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2006); Annette Carruthers, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Scotland: A History* (New Haven, 2013); Paul Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland* (Belfast, 1992); Vera Kreilkamp (ed.), *The Arts and Crafts Movement: Making It Irish* (Chestnut Hill, Mass., 2016); Catherine W. Zipf, *Professional Pursuits: Women and the American Arts and Crafts Movement* (Knoxville, 2007); Ann Calhoun, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in New Zealand, 1870–1940: Women Make their Mark* (Auckland, 2000). There has been little written about the Arts and Crafts in Wales (aside from architecture) but there were prominent art workers there such as the jeweller Violet Ramsay. Ramsay was based in the Welsh coastal town of Porthmadog for many years. She was also a member of the Women's Guild of Arts.

<sup>4</sup> An archive pertaining to the Women's Guild of Arts was recently discovered and is now at the William Morris Society, London. Out of approximately sixty members I have found evidence that one-third had businesses. The women discussed rarely have surviving archives but a prosopographical approach has enabled me to piece together photographs, handmade advertisements and art manuals. Recent digitalization projects also offer new insights into how women's 'artistic' businesses were marketed across print culture. Some of these women do have artworks in public collections but several do not, and my interest here is in tracing the textual, visual and material worlds in which these women were immersed.

Arts and Crafts world in Glasgow. Throughout, I emphasize that the relatively privileged women business owners this article foregrounds were situated amidst a much wider national growth of small-scale entrepreneurship in creative fields across this era, which has been largely ignored in the historiography.

This article uses women business owners in the Arts and Crafts movement to argue that over the last fifty years disciplinary divides have led to three discrete bodies of scholarship on the history of artistic culture, 'professional society' and business ownership that do not reflect the historically interwoven nature of these categories.<sup>5</sup> 'Artistic' entrepreneurship, for instance, has been largely ignored by art-historical scholarship due to the implied focus on commercial aspirations and profit, with scholars preferring to emphasize artworks or the designer's creative outlook. This is not to say that there were not contemporary efforts to classify types of skilled work: the late nineteenth century marked an era when there were considerable attempts to demarcate 'serious' artistry; to separate 'amateurs' from 'professionals'; and to cast aspersions on the morality of business owners. But the persistency of contradictory discourses around these terms emphasizes the porous nature of such categories in lived experience, particularly for those working in 'new' creative fields, which were undergoing rapid expansion.

Moreover, when drilling down into area-specific scholarship, particularly on professionalization, it becomes apparent that what it meant to engage in these processes has been narrowly defined. Scholarship has prioritized higher education, income and organizational access when determining professional status, and has yet to adequately explore how people sought to construct professional roles away from institutional mechanisms.<sup>6</sup> There has been a failure to fully consider how individuals used social

<sup>5</sup> For a rare exception, see Julie Hipperson, 'Professional Entrepreneurs: Women Veterinary Surgeons as Small Business Owners in Interwar Britain', *Social History of Medicine*, xxxi (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Famously, Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989). Feminist art-historical scholarship has devoted considerable energies into trying to delineate what it meant to be a professional woman artist during this era, with much focus on the fine arts. In 2017, Nicola Moorby claimed that the 'mark of the professional artist ... was the sale of work'. Nicola Moorby, at <[www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/nicola-moorby-her-indoors-women-artists-and-depictions-of-the-domestic-interior-r1104359](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/nicola-moorby-her-indoors-women-artists-and-depictions-of-the-domestic-interior-r1104359)> (accessed 1 Jan. 2017). Most recently, Maria Quirk's 2019 monograph

(cont. on p. 154)

and cultural strategies such as print culture, language, space and praxis to piece together public reputations.<sup>7</sup>

Those working in the Arts and Crafts exemplify the insights that can be unveiled by unpicking late-twentieth-century frameworks to trace how historical actors sought to construct working lives across multiple fields. Many men and women in the movement — business owners and non-business owners alike — asserted roles as ‘art workers’ or ‘craft workers’, encompassing labels that prioritized the artistic and disguised engagement with professionalizing, commercial currents. In an art world and professional society dominated by exclusionary, male-focused institutional mechanisms, the ‘art worker’ model offered enticing prospects for women ‘pioneers’. Art worker Charlotte Newman (*née* Gibbs), for instance, who established a jewellery business in London in the 1880s, was lauded in the *Woman’s Signal* as ‘far more than the clever businesswoman, or even the skilled worker’. Instead she had been ‘for years a student of ancient history and art ... She has exalted the ordinary craft of the jeweller into a fine art’.<sup>8</sup> Constructing positions through a range of guises — here as businesswoman, skilled worker, student, historian and artist — made women like Newman appear culturally sophisticated to contemporaries, even if these tactics came partially from positions of instability.

Examining the activities of Newman and her peers emphasizes that rather than simply having incidental roles in history, those working *across* skilled cultures (and at the fault lines of modern historiographical fields) could play a critical role in fostering social and cultural change. These women were shaped by gender hierarchies throughout their lives: they were not allowed to join the movement’s premier organization, the Art Workers’ Guild until 1964, and tended to produce art for the home, in contrast to the many men who became architects.<sup>9</sup> But although few

(n. 6 cont.)

also adheres to this view. Maria Quirk, *Women, Art and Money in England, 1880–1914: The Hustle and the Scramble* (London, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Sociologist Anne Witz has, however, written about the fluidity and rhetorical self-fashioning inherent in ‘professional project[s]’. Anne Witz, *Professions and Patriarchy* (London, 1992), 5. Also, Celia Davies, ‘The Sociology of Professions and the Profession of Gender’, *Sociology*, xxx (1996).

<sup>8</sup> Sarah A. Tooley, ‘A Lady Goldsmith’, *Woman’s Signal* (9 May 1895), 289.

<sup>9</sup> Several of these women also made large-scale works not intended for the home, such as church furniture, memorials and sculptures.

people could afford an 'Arts and Crafts house', growing numbers could afford a necklace or bound book. Women business owners, therefore, carved out a leading role in directing cultural taste towards artistic domestic consumerism, and influenced a range of audiences seeking to ameliorate the impact of industrialization, capitalism and modern society by filling their homes and adorning their bodies with handmade, artistic and 'historic' objects. Furthermore, unlike their male peers who tended to scorn 'popular' culture, women cultivated a close relationship with the public. They regularly sold work at cheaper prices, wrote accessible manuals and articles, staged special workshop events, and curated their own exhibitions. In so doing, I argue that these women changed the very ethos of the movement, democratizing and opening up the Arts and Crafts to a wider range of incomes, social backgrounds and interests on a local, national and international scale.

Reconceptualizing the movement to incorporate the centrality of women's businesses shatters the traditional periodization of the Arts and Crafts. At the moment women's engagement was expanding in the early twentieth century, the movement was being dismissed as losing relevance by men such as C. R. Ashbee and Eric Gill, a viewpoint that has remained remarkably pervasive in the scholarship. Both had real anxieties about the state of modern society and believed artists needed to play a greater role beyond working for (in the words of Ashbee) 'a narrow and tiresome little aristocracy'.<sup>10</sup> But their arguments were bound up with a chauvinistic apprehension about the movement's transformation to include greater access for women, who were clamouring to use the movement for their own needs.<sup>11</sup> By offering this alternative account I contribute to the wider move away from simplistic depictions of the uniform dominance of 'modernist' art in twentieth-century Western

<sup>10</sup> This quote from Ashbee's memoirs is often used as evidence that he felt that the movement had 'failed'. Rosalind P. Blakesley, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London, 2006), 51. Gill promoted trade unions and the Labour Party over guilds and workshops. He asserted in 1909 that 'For everyone, save a few "artist-craftsmen" who get some advertisement by exhibiting their wares at Arts and Crafts exhibitions, the Arts and Crafts movement is now more or less discredited'. Eric Gill, 'The Failure of the Arts and Crafts Movement: A Lesson for Trade Unionists', *Socialist Review* (Dec. 1909), 289.

<sup>11</sup> This is not to deny that many women fused their artistic skills with philanthropic interests, and showed considerable commitment to building inter-class relationships.

society, traditionally portrayed as emerging in reaction to the 'Victorian era', to provide instead a more nuanced account of the era spanning the 1870s to the 1930s.<sup>12</sup>

My argument unfolds in four parts. Section I addresses the wider milieu of professionalizing, capitalist society amidst which Arts and Crafts protagonists defined their positions, emphasizing the centrality of the workshop and the performance of artistic masculinities in the making of the movement. The breadth of businesses women established is delineated in section II. Section III, rather than following the tendency to focus on an 'exceptional' woman painter or designer, instead considers the cultural processes — often gendered — that women engaged in.<sup>13</sup> The final section IV considers the ramifications of these strategies, illuminating the social interest and asserting that women business owners played a crucial role in remaking the Arts and Crafts. By the early twentieth century the movement was focused less on an idealistic rhetoric of radically dismantling class hierarchies and more on a pragmatic cultivation of the public obsession with obtaining artworks for the home, which ultimately made the Arts and Crafts more accessible to a wider stratum of modern society.

## I

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the art world across Europe and North America was markedly shaped by the professionalization of society.<sup>14</sup> The meaning of 'professional' sharpened, becoming closely associated with a cluster of

<sup>12</sup> Stella Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism, 1900–1920: Early Modernism and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Edwardian England* (London, 1988); Michael T. Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Scholarship routinely offers detailed biographical accounts of 'exceptional' figures in the movement that focus on their roles as artists rather than as business owners. Books and exhibitions looking at Arts and Crafts women have also prioritized those whose relevance can be ascertained through their close association by marriage or kin to celebrated men, such as embroidery designer and jeweller May Morris, daughter of William Morris. Jan Marsh, *Jane and May Morris: A Biographical Story, 1839–1938* (London, 1986); Anna Mason et al., *May Morris: Arts and Crafts Designer* (London, 2017); Lynn Hulse (ed.), *May Morris: Art and Life, New Perspectives* (London, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Groseclose, *Nineteenth-Century American Art* (Oxford, 2000); Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870–1930* (Chapel Hill, 2001); Laura R. Prieto, *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America* (Cambridge,

(cont. on p. 157)

occupations that demanded training, qualifications and expert knowledge, and expanding beyond the triumvirate of law, the clergy and medicine to incorporate fields from science to art.<sup>15</sup> 'Professional artist' began to circulate as a term as artists grew in numbers, joined clubs, gained qualifications, and stressed markers of status such as possessing studios.

Still, artists who dedicated their lives to the arts rarely wanted to be understood solely as professionals. Arts and Crafts participants espoused an anti-commercial and anti-professional language, seeking to portray themselves as offering a more harmonious and fulfilling model of working and living. C. R. Ashbee asserted in his *Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry* that he and other 'men of this movement' were involved in a mission that was 'serious and ... sacred', which would lead to the 'destruction of the commercial system, to discredit it, undermine it, overthrow it'.<sup>16</sup> Many men in the movement were architects, and their response to an 1891 Registration Bill is equally telling. The Bill proposed that only those who had qualified through examination should have the right to use the title 'architect', which provoked outrage from those identifying as 'art architects' who felt architecture would lose its inherent creativity if the Bill was applied, unlike the 'professional architects' who proposed the measure.<sup>17</sup>

Instead, the primary aim of disciples of the movement was to be seen as 'serious'. This term was repeatedly used in the anglophone context to delineate status and dedication. The prevalent opinion was that artists should be guided by creative calling rather than adhering to the supposed uniformity of professional society. Alongside this, there was growing concern

(n. 14 cont.)

Mass., 2001); L. G. Svensson and J. Evetts (eds.), *Sociology of Professions: Continental and Anglo-Saxon Traditions* (Gothenburg, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> David Crook, 'Some Historical Perspectives on Professionalism', in Bryan Cunningham (ed.), *Exploring Professionalism* (London, 2008). Also, Penelope J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700–1850* (London, 1995); Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*.

<sup>16</sup> C. R. Ashbee, *Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry: Being a Record of the Workshops of the Guild of Handicraft, and Some Deductions From Their Twenty-One Years' Experience* (Camden, 1908), 10.

<sup>17</sup> See the letters in *The Times* from A. W. Blomfield *et al.*, 'Architecture — A Profession or an Art?', *Times*, 3 Mar. 1891, 9. Also Mark Crinson and Jules Lubbock, *Architecture: Art or Profession? Three Hundred Years of Architectural Education in Britain* (Manchester, 1994).

about how artists ought to approach the business of selling art.<sup>18</sup> Satirical papers such as *Judy* were quick to inform readers that the artist should be 'a simple creature, devoid of business instincts'.<sup>19</sup> Being seen to — rhetorically at least — reject commercial and professional interests was viewed as a core component of artistic self-fashioning. Indeed it has been a feature of 'authentic' artistry across the modern era, with the arts positioned as offering a creative respite from the capitalist obsession with money making.

This anti-commercial, creative world attracted considerable attention in the late nineteenth century, a moment of heightened anxieties about the perceived squalor, ugliness and inequalities provoked by industrialization, urbanization and mass consumption. There was growing interest in the supposed simplicity and beauty of the medieval workshop system, fuelled by an acute societal nostalgia and sentiment that 'English' culture was to be found in the past, a pre-industrial past that was romanticized and loosely defined.<sup>20</sup> The public clamoured to purchase (and make) artistic and historic objects for the home, as incomes grew, the middle classes expanded, and the home became closely associated with the construction of self to an unprecedented extent.<sup>21</sup> Handcrafted art was viewed as offering a unique way to showcase wealth and sophistication, but also morality, taste and even one's liberal values, to society.

Despite their posturing, those seeking to tap into this cultural interest had to cultivate a range of professionalizing and commercial strategies. The movement was largely made up of workshops, which functioned as businesses, whilst the main organization, the Art Workers' Guild, emulated professional

<sup>18</sup> Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850–1939* (Manchester, 2012); Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède, *Marketing Art in the British Isles, 1700 to the Present* (London, 2012); Susanna Avery-Quash and Christian Huemer, *London and the Emergence of a European Art Market, 1780–1820* (New Haven, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> 'Social Studies', *Judy*, 17 Oct. 1900, 495.

<sup>20</sup> Billie Melman, *The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past, 1800–1953* (Oxford, 2006); Paul Readman, 'The Place of the Past in English Culture c.1890–1914', *Past and Present*, no. 186 (Feb. 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven, 2006); Jane Hamlett, *Material Relations: Domestic Interiors and Middle-Class Families in England, 1850–1910* (Manchester, 2010); Judith A. Neiswander, *The Cosmopolitan Interior: Liberalism and the British Home, 1870–1914* (New Haven, 2008). For crafting at home, see Talia Schaffer, *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New York, 2011).

society in its obsession with regulation: only architects and designers could join, not makers. The figures who carved out the most prominent, respected roles then were those who managed to navigate professional and entrepreneurial currents, whilst ensuring they were still primarily understood to be serious and creative workers.

Establishing a business, and in particular a workshop, played a critical role in the making of reputations. Anxieties about critically engaging with the 'right' sort of art dominates the historiography: Imogen Hart has discussed the difficulties of ascribing the label of 'Arts and Crafts' to objects, as many pieces were produced by savvy companies aware of the movement's popularity; an 'Arts and Crafts object' was not necessarily made or designed by someone with Arts and Crafts ideas.<sup>22</sup> But what has yet to be studied in the English, or British, context is the centrality of the material environment when contemporaries sought to make value judgements about artistic authenticity and the objects on display.<sup>23</sup> As Tag Gronberg has shown through her work on the Austrian fashion designer Emilie Flöge, the interior of her business, the Schwestern Flöge (which she established with her sister Helene) played a central role in signalling 'their participation in a larger aesthetic project — that of Viennese modernism'. While for the Flöge sisters there was much focus on providing ornate full-length mirrors and rows of expertly stitched dresses to assure visitors that they were participating in a 'world of high art', in the English context customers were also encouraged to inspect artistic workshops, meet the designers and workers, and touch the objects.<sup>24</sup> Leading figures encouraged an understanding of the importance of

<sup>22</sup> Imogen Hart, *Arts and Crafts Objects* (Manchester, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Kate Smith's research has argued that in the eighteenth century, sensory interactions with products when browsing was crucial in making value judgements about skilled work, and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century participants felt similarly. Kate Smith, 'Sensing Design and Workmanship: The Haptic Skills of Shoppers in Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of Design History*, xxv (2012).

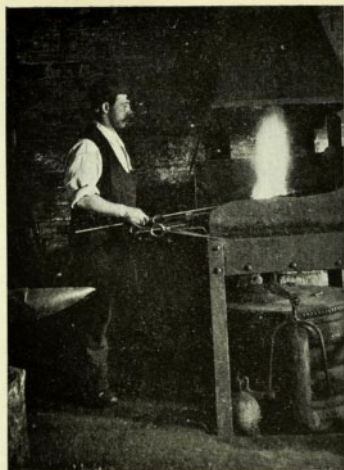
<sup>24</sup> Feminist scholarship has emphasized the cultural power of women designers in the Secessionist movement in Vienna and Budapest, although like in the English context the art-historical historiography more generally tends to prioritize leading male figures such as Gustav Klimt. Tag Gronberg, *Vienna: City of Modernity, 1890–1914* (New York, 2007), 140. Also, Julie M. Johnson, *The Memory Factory: The Forgotten Women Artists of Vienna 1900* (West Lafayette, 2012).

their sites of work, waxing lyrical about the workshop's 'medieval' environment, whilst also strategically taking advantage of modern technological innovations such as photography to market themselves to the world. Ashbee's *Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry* included many photographs for readers to scrutinize, largely distanced shots of anonymous labouring men in flat caps and aprons, positioned in the workshop, hard at work, surrounded by the dirty authenticity of wood chippings, offcuts of work, and the smut of coal (see [Plate 1](#)).

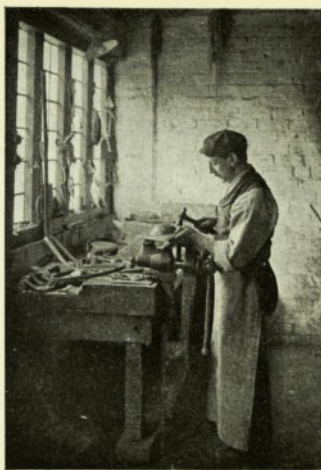
Threaded throughout these strategies of representation was a desire to restrict women's participation. There has been little consideration of how dominant ideas about masculine behaviour shaped the ways men in the Arts and Crafts movement performed their artistic positions.<sup>25</sup> This is surprising as asserting masculinity played a central role, albeit re-envisioned with a bohemian twist. Moreover, these men worked in a society obsessed with class hierarchies and the persistent associations of the 'minor arts' with trade made artists anxious to continue to be associated with the middle classes (and the customers who could be found in such settings). Painter and art critic Roger Fry presented this as a common problem, writing: 'Among professional artists there is a certain social class-feeling ... a vague idea that a man can still remain a gentleman if he paints bad pictures, but must forfeit the conventional right to his Esquire if he makes good pots or serviceable furniture'.<sup>26</sup> As such, male art workers were often keen to adhere to middle-class gendered social codes to maintain their reputations as 'gentlemen'. In a similar manner to the male-only enclaves of elite 'club land', women were barred entry to the Art Workers'

<sup>25</sup> Scholarship on masculinity and artistic culture is limited (as is scholarship on masculinity and the professions), although recent publications suggest that this could be an area of fertile future enquiry: Amelia Yeates and Serena Trowbridge (eds.), *Pre-Raphaelite Masculinities: Constructions of Masculinity in Art and Literature* (Farnham, 2014); Laura Morowitz and William Vaughan (eds.), *Artistic Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century* (Farnham, 2000); John Potvin, *Material and Visual Cultures Beyond Male Bonding, 1870–1914: Bodies, Boundaries and Intimacy* (Aldershot, 2008). See also Andrew Stephenson, 'Leighton and the Shifting Repertoires of "Masculine" Artistic Identity in the late Victorian Period', in Tim Barringer and Elizabeth Prettejohn (eds.), *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity* (New Haven, 1999). For craft, see Freya Gowrley and Katie Faulkner, 'Making Masculinity: Craft and Material Production in the Long Nineteenth Century', *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, xiv (2018).

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity* (New Haven, 2004), 114.



*The Guild Smithy.*



1. 'The Guild Smithy', in C. R. Ashbee, *Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry* (Campden, 1908), 99.

Guild and there were rarely working-class members.<sup>27</sup> Members, or Brothers as they liked to call themselves, instead cultivated a distinctly homosocial and elite atmosphere at their Hall — based for many years at Clifford's Inn and then from 1914 at 6 Queen Square — with much drinking, smoking and revelry.<sup>28</sup>

Others portrayed women as lacking the inherent creative character of the male art worker; C. R. Ashbee's interview process for employing men consisted of 'a steady gaze into their eyes and a firm grasp of the hand', an approach intended to judge character rather than measure skill.<sup>29</sup> During this era the

<sup>27</sup> Amy Milne-Smith, *London Clubland: A Cultural History of Gender and Class in Late-Victorian Britain* (London, 2011). For brief histories of the Guild, see Lara Platman, *Art Workers Guild: 125 Years* (Norwich, 2009); Gavin Stamp, *Beauty's Awakening, The Centenary Exhibition of the Art Workers' Guild, 1884–1984* (Brighton, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> In so doing, the Guild mirrored the Royal Academy of Arts, which had no elected female members between the eighteenth century and the 1920s, and many other artistic and professional institutions across the world which refused women's formal participation during this era.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Crawford, 'The Object is Not the Object: C. R. Ashbee and the Guild of Handicraft', in Margot Coatts (ed.), *Pioneers of Modern Craft: Twelve Essays Profiling Key Figures in the History of Twentieth-Century Craft* (Manchester, 1997), 2, 10.

term 'amateur' increasingly became positioned in the cultural imagination as connected to women's pursuits, even though across the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the 'gentleman amateur' had been a respected term for learned men. Ashbee framed the growth of women's participation in artistic culture as being on a par with the horrors of industrialization, writing that the two forms of competition strangling the crafts were 'the machine' but also the 'lady amateur':

In the Guild's workshops our fellows are rightly nervous of this competition of the amateur, especially the lady amateur, and albeit with the utmost consideration they speak of her generically as 'dear Emily'. I have seen a great deal of her work in the last ten years, she is very versatile, she makes jewellery, she binds books, she enamels, she carves, she does leatherwork, a hundred different graceful and delicate crafts. She is very modest and does not profess to any high standard, nor does she compete in any lines of work where physique or great experience are desired, but she is perpetually tingling to sell her work before she half knows how to make it, and she does compete because her name is legion and because, being supported by her parents she is prepared to sell her labour for 2d. an hour, where the skilled workman has to sell his for 1s. in order to keep up standard and support his family.

Ultimately, he declared: 'It is difficult to see how this is to be stopped, especially as there is so much that is good in "dear Emily". But it must be stopped somehow'.<sup>30</sup> Like at the regulated meetings at the Guild Hall, Ashbee positioned his workshop as a key site for masculine artistic self-actualization.

This belief in the benefits offered by workshop cultures (for individual men, in bolstering a sense of male social-connectedness on a national and international scale, and in advancing society and artistic culture) was widely felt. For the North American proselytizer of the movement, Gustav Stickley, who ran the Craftsman Workshops in upstate New York, the purpose of the workshop was 'not the work itself, so much as the making of the man; the soul-stuff of a man is the product of work, and it is as good, indifferent or bad, as is his work'.<sup>31</sup> As Stickley's quote illuminates, many in the movement repeatedly foregrounded processes of making at the workshop over finished artworks, asserting that a return to historic methods of

<sup>30</sup> Ashbee, *Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry*, 37–8.

<sup>31</sup> Gustav Stickley, 'Art True and False', in *The Craftsman: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine for the Simplification of Life*, viii (Apr.–Sept. 1905), 686.

production held the key to restoring integrity and satisfaction in modern capitalist society. Positioned in these workshops, figures such as Stickley and Ashbee held up their sites of work on both sides of the Atlantic as material examples of their dedication to the movement. Here, different men could form close bonds of solidarity and commitment to a world that seemed to be slipping away.

Yet framing Arts and Crafts processes as the creative interactions between men consolidated a view that women did not have the same intrinsic seriousness or authenticity as their male peers. Later in his book, Ashbee added a frantic note, illustrating in clarifying detail the gendered anxieties shaping how certain leading men behaved, and which befits the ending of this section: 'As these sheets are going to press I am informed of another case of a wealthy lady ... who has some skill in enamelling. She devotes the proceeds of her craftsmanship ... to the maintenance of cripple homes'. Ashbee sternly informed his readers 'I also happen to know the craftsmen whose livelihood she is destroying and whose Standard she is bringing down'.<sup>32</sup> Solely portraying women as philanthropists or amateurs, who were destroying the 'Standard', he sought to deny understanding that women could be engaged participants in Arts and Crafts workshop cultures, a perspective that has remained remarkably consistent ever since.

## II

In 1979, art historian Anthea Callen concluded — in the only monograph on women's participation in the English movement — that the Arts and Crafts ultimately reinforced dominant Victorian patriarchal ideology.<sup>33</sup> Ten years later she again argued that 'Because of family ties or of the need for chaperoning, many craftswomen ... tended to avoid production-oriented tightly-knit

<sup>32</sup> Ashbee, *Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry*, 88. The apathy towards women in workshops was commented upon regularly in the women's press: *Myra's Journal*, when discussing bookbinding, warned that 'Men won't admit ladies as a rule: and it's a frightfully jealous trade, but a delightful craft all around'. 'Employments for Gentle-women', *Myra's Journal*, 1 Dec. 1897, 57.

<sup>33</sup> Anthea Callen, *Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement, 1870–1914* (London, 1979).

workshops'.<sup>34</sup> Others have highlighted the hostility towards women in workshops owned by certain male Arts and Crafts designers.<sup>35</sup> Lynne Walker and Stella Tillyard have, however, persuasively suggested that despite this, women were still active at multiple levels. In Tillyard's words in 1988 (although she did not give examples): 'Women craft workers ran all the way from utopian socialists, through professional but not idealist craft workers, to semi-professionals and amateurs'.<sup>36</sup> More recently scholars have focused on the input of women in the philanthropically focused Home Arts and Industries Association. Founded in 1884 by Eglantyne Jebb, the Association revived traditional crafts, often in rural areas, and educated the working classes about the beauty of craft.<sup>37</sup>

Despite these insights, there remains a dominant impression that, as Tillyard herself asserted, in the English context at least, the 'common denominator' of women's artistic pursuits was that they 'did not use cumbersome and expensive equipment, they were "clean" and they could be carried on in the home. They did not require a studio or workshop'.<sup>38</sup> Women undoubtedly faced considerable difficulties, but there has been a failure to account for the women who, like Morris, Ashbee, Stickley, and others, independently established businesses to position themselves as authoritative spokespersons. In this section I illuminate the growth of women-owned Arts and Crafts businesses in fields from metalwork to toy design, and reveal that these women were leading lights in a much wider national outpouring of women's decorative arts entrepreneurship.<sup>39</sup> In so

<sup>34</sup> Anthea Callen, 'Sexual Division of Labour in the Arts and Crafts Movement', in Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (eds.), *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* (London, 1989), 160.

<sup>35</sup> Jan Marsh, 'May Morris: Ubiquitous, Invisible Arts and Crafts-Woman', in Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland (eds.), *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts, 1880–1935: The Gender of Ornament* (Aldershot, 2002), 36. Marsh points out that two of the best-known workshops in London — the Royal School of Art Needlework and the Morris & Co. embroidery department — were staffed and managed by women.

<sup>36</sup> Tillyard, *Impact of Modernism*, 7; Lynne Walker, 'The Arts and Crafts Alternative', in Attfield and Kirkham, *View from the Interior*.

<sup>37</sup> Janice Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries 1880–1914: Marketing Craft, Making Fashion* (Sallins, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> Tillyard, *Impact of Modernism*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> A small number of 'exceptional' artistic women have been the subject of scholarship, as have specific fields. Deborah Cohen has stressed the role played by 'lady art advisors', the female house decorators and writers who were 'foot

doing, this research offers a new artistic angle through which to consider women's historic business ownership. Although there has been an influx of interest in histories of women-owned businesses in recent years, particularly from economic historians, there is an ongoing tendency to focus on the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and to ignore cultural fields due to perceived disciplinary divides.<sup>40</sup>

Women had owned businesses across the eighteenth and early-to-mid nineteenth centuries in fields like jewellery, but it was in the 1870s that a cluster of pioneers began to set up independent artistic workshops and businesses to materially augment their commitment to the nascent Arts and Crafts movement.<sup>41</sup> Regularly moving from across England, and from middle- and upper middle-class backgrounds, women strategically rented rooms in streets bordering the department stores, art galleries, and the Royal Academy in the fashionable West End, and in wealthy, reputable artistic boroughs such as Kensington, Chelsea and Hammersmith. After the cousins Rhoda and Agnes Garrett had trained for three years at an architectural firm, 'calling themselves simply house decorators, and taking a small flat, they commenced business' c.1874 in Gower Street, London and were celebrated as the first interior decoration firm registered by

(n. 39 cont.)

soldiers' and played an influential role in linking the 'spheres of high art, home decoration, and the shops'. Cohen, *Household Gods*, 64. See also: Marianne Tidcombe, *Women Bookbinders, 1880–1920* (London, 1996); Elizabeth Crawford, *Enterprising Women: The Garretts and Their Circle* (London, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> As Alison Kay has argued, the traditional, narrow definition of the term 'entrepreneur' must be overturned. The activities of the many women who historically provided for themselves and their families 'need to be examined as businesses, rather than as minor extensions of their domestic lives. Anything less would be to ignore the economic evidence and diminish the achievements of female proprietors'. Alison C. Kay, *The Foundations of Female Entrepreneurship: Enterprise, Home and Household in London c.1800–1870* (London, 2009), 5; Robert Beachy, Béatrice Craig and Alastair Owens, *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Rethinking Separate Spheres* (London, 2005); Hannah Barker, *The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England, 1760–1830* (Oxford, 2006); Nicola Phillips, *Women in Business, 1700–1850* (Woodbridge, 2006). Jennifer Aston's recent work has extended knowledge of the substantial nature of women's entrepreneurship across the nineteenth century, and has emphasized that women did not solely engage in business as inter-generational caretakers. Jennifer Aston, *Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century England: Engagement in the Urban Economy* (London, 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Toni Lesser Wolf, 'Women Jewelers of the British Arts and Crafts Movement', *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, xiv (Autumn 1989), 28.

women.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Charlotte Newman worked for the jeweller John Brogden in Covent Garden but she only set up her business, 'Mrs Newman', at 18 Clifford Street, off Bond Street when he died in 1884, advertising widely that she had learnt her craft from a male jeweller, an astute strategy which indicated her ability to use 'the old traditions by herself' (and to retain Brogden's workmen and materials). In 1897, she moved to 10 Savile Row, positioning herself at the heart of the men's tailoring district.<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere, stained-glass designer Mary Lowndes co-founded Lowndes and Drury with Alfred Drury in Chelsea in the late nineteenth century; in 1906 they set up The Glass House at Lettice Street, Fulham, a series of stained-glass workshops for independent artists, many of whom were female.<sup>44</sup>

By the twentieth century there was a network of women business owners in the capital invested in Arts and Crafts cultures. Unlike the wider economic trend for women to often, although by no means always, work with husbands or in family businesses, in the arts women routinely worked independently or with a female partner (Lowndes was very unusual in setting up a business with Alfred Drury).<sup>45</sup> Metalworker E. C. Woodward ran Woodward and Withers with Agnes Withers at 5 and 7 Johnson Street, Notting Hill Gate c.1905–1913.<sup>46</sup> The objects they produced included a chalice and paten for church use, a christening bowl and spoon, 'an exquisite little crucifix', two trowels for the Prince of Wales, and the helmet worn by the Australian actor Oscar Asche in the popular Henrik Ibsen play *The Vikings*.<sup>47</sup> Another woman, M. V. Wheelhouse, established

<sup>42</sup> 'Interview: Miss Agnes Garrett', *Women's Penny Paper*, lxv (1890), 145; Maude Parry, 'Pen and Ink Sketches: Rhoda Garrett', in Alice A. Leith (ed.), *Routledge's Every Girl's Annual* (London, 1882), 302.

<sup>43</sup> 'Classified Advertising, Mrs Newman', *Times*, 26 Mar. 1897, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Initially, Lowndes and Drury contributed thirty pounds each of the needed capital of sixty pounds, but this was later supplemented by an additional loan of £200 from Lowndes, her partner Barbara Forbes, her aunt Alice Vivian Kaye and a Miss J. F. Pearson. Peter Cormack, *Arts and Crafts Stained Glass* (New Haven, 2015), 96.

<sup>45</sup> Hannah Barker, *Family and Business during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> John Culme, *The Directory of Gold and Silversmiths, Jewellers and Allied Traders, 1838–1914: From the London Assay Office Registers* (Woodbridge, 1987), 497. 'Notice of Dissolution of Partnership: Woodward and Withers', *London Gazette*, 5 Dec. 1913, 9023.

<sup>47</sup> Prices for trowels 'range from any price from fifteen guineas' whilst the silver christening bowl and spoon 'were made specially for the donor for six guineas'.

Pomona Toys close by with Louise Jacobs in c.1915, turning from illustration to capitalize on the new opportunities for women in 'artistic' toy design after the outbreak of the Great War (the toy trade had supposedly been 'practically a German monopoly' before 1914).<sup>48</sup>

Many women remained unmarried but the relative flexibility of artistic business ownership did offer opportunities for certain married women. Charlotte Newman was married to fellow artist Philip H. Newman and they had two children, but this did not stop her managing the business.<sup>49</sup> Fellow metalworker, Edith B. Dawson (*née* Robinson), who was also married and had two children, was one of several women who worked in partnership with her husband. Unlike Newman's central London business premises, Nelson and Edith B. Dawson worked together at their West London home, in two separate rooms: 'Edith Dawson for her enamelling, Nelson Dawson for his drawing'. Readers of the *Architectural Review* were reassured that their workshop — staffed by a group of men — was based in a street close by, 'surrounded by the studios of the Chelsea painters and sculptors — so close that they are able to watch the progress of their work'.<sup>50</sup>

Women business owners promoting an Arts and Crafts ethos emerged across England, in cities, towns and rural areas. The sisters, Phyllis and Delphis Gardner, like many women, worked from home. Although first based in London they later moved to Maidenhead and founded The Asphodel Press in 1922, which produced woodcut prints, broad sheets and books.<sup>51</sup> For some,

(n. 47 cont.)

Constance Smedley, 'A Guild of Craftswomen', *World's Work: An Illustrated Magazine of National Efficiency and Social Progress*, ix (Dec. 1906–May 1907), 319.

<sup>48</sup> The *Studio* informed readers that although the war had initially badly affected 'lady artists', and they had 'found leisure forced upon them', women had quickly begun to make and sell toys. 'Studio Talk', *Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art*, lxxii (1917), 80.

<sup>49</sup> A report of an 1893 burglary gives further insight into the daily practice of the business. Two men were charged with having stolen a diamond bracelet valued at £120 from the shop, and Newman was the person to greet, help the men select the bracelet, and make out an invoice for them. 'Police', *Times*, 5 July 1893, 13.

<sup>50</sup> 'Nelson and Edith Dawson', *Architectural Review* (Dec. 1896), 35. Other prominent couples who worked together included the potters Louise and Alfred Powell and the metalworkers Georgina 'Georgie' and Arthur Gaskin.

<sup>51</sup> Asphodel Press announcement for *The Tale of Troy*, n.d.: British Library, London (hereafter BL), Add. MS 89076/3/5.

the countryside offered an amenable location: bookbinder Katharine Adams began by taking a room in Lechlade, the Cotswolds, above a saddler's shop. With second-hand equipment she 'worked very hard, alone, for a year' before she had enough commissions to form her own bindery, the Eadburgha Bindery.<sup>52</sup> Annie Garnett meanwhile had a thriving business in the Lake District, The Spinners, which produced textiles and embroideries. In this conservative rural environment Garnett asserted her philanthropic desire to help local women and disguised her role by calling herself 'Honorary Manageress'.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, Pamela Colman Smith, who established the short-lived Green Sheaf Press c.1904 with a 'Mrs Fortescue' at 3 Park Mansions Arcade, Knightsbridge, part of an 'artistic little group of lady shop-keepers' in the area, found little success after moving to the Lizard Peninsula in Cornwall.<sup>54</sup> She wrote to the theatre director, Edith Craig, in 1928 offering prints and drawings of Edith's mother, the actress Ellen Terry, with a price list and mentioned she had turned a room at home into a shop to sell her illustrations — but had sold nothing that year.<sup>55</sup> Her home had become the only space available to exhibit her art and make money, but she had little success in this remote location.

My particular interest here are the workshops and businesses of leading women in the English Arts and Crafts movement. These women, however, occupied a prestigious position amidst a wider national growth of women's business ownership in the decorative arts, which ranged from the exquisitely artistic to those interested in tapping more generally into the fashionability of the Arts and Crafts, such as London-based Louisa Avant & Co., employer of several hundred women art workers devoted to painting china and fans with designs 'to rival . . . olden time[s]'.<sup>56</sup> There also emerged women-led enterprises selling impoverished women's needlework and promoting charitable intentions in locations including Leeds, Liverpool and Southport, or the

<sup>52</sup> Tidcombe, *Women Bookbinders*, 132.

<sup>53</sup> Jennie Brunton, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in the Lake District: A Social History* (Lancaster, 2001), 129.

<sup>54</sup> *Olivia's Shopping and How She Does It: A Prejudiced Guide to the London Shops* (London, 1906), 59.

<sup>55</sup> Pamela Colman Smith to Edith Craig, 29 Oct. 1928: BL, Add. MS EC-Z3, 149.

<sup>56</sup> 'Fan Painting', *Ladies' Treasury: A Household Magazine* (1 July 1889), 427.

fashionable activities of Aleksandra Pogosskaia ('Madame Pogosky').<sup>57</sup> A prolific exporter of Russian crafts, she transported items 'directly from the Russian villages' to be sold at her business 'Russian Peasant Industries', based first in Edinburgh and later in London.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, print culture offers intriguing insights into the wider development of a little-explored world of women's small-scale entrepreneurship in creative fields across this era, as women sought roles not simply as artists but as 'lady' milliners, house decorators, photographers and antique dealers.<sup>59</sup>

The breadth of examples discussed here reveals the inadequacy of portraying the movement as coalescing simply around a cluster of male workshop owners. Still, it is difficult to neatly quantify this phenomenon. Economic historians have used trade catalogues, or fire insurance records, to calculate the percentage of women business owners in comparison to their male peers, but artistic women often avoided trade records and besides discourse has a greater role to play when assessing both how artists sought to position themselves and their cultural impact. The feminist writer Vera Brittain wrote reflectively in *Women's Work in Modern England* in 1928 that 'never before has the craft worker had such good opportunities ... the simultaneous establishment of art and craft shops all over the country shows that the demand for craft work is increasing'.<sup>60</sup> Turning to the 'Handicraft Productions' column in *The Times* in

<sup>57</sup> H. Coleman Davidson's *What Our Daughters Can Do for Themselves: A Handbook of Women's Employments* (London, 1894) lists forty-one businesses, societies and depots selling women's work across the United Kingdom, many of which focused on needlework.

<sup>58</sup> 'Madame Pogosky', *Hearth and Home: An Illustrated Weekly Journal for Gentlemen* (31 Aug. 1899), 652; A. L. Pogosky, *Revival of Village Industries in Russia* (London, 1918).

<sup>59</sup> In 1908, for instance, *Votes for Women* enthusiastically suggested that over a hundred female proprietors of curio and antique dealing shops in the West End were carrying out 'a thriving trade'. 'Curio Dealing as a Business Opening', *Votes for Women* (10 Sept. 1908), 439.

<sup>60</sup> Vera Brittain, *Women's Work in Modern England* (London, 1928), 89. Although there can be problems in using the census to capture patterns of work (particularly when assessing women's working lives), there was clear growth in women's artistic engagement more generally across this era. In 1851, there were approximately 934 female artists, whereas by 1911 there were at least 8,923. For males: in 1851 there were 9,175, and in 1911 27,423. Data kindly supplied by Harry Smith and extracted from K. Schürer *et al.*, *Integrated Census Microdata, 1851–1911, version 2* (2016), UK Data Service, SN: 7481, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7481-1>>.

1924, the growth in women's artistic entrepreneurship is unmistakable: out of thirty-two advertisements listed on an average day that year at least fifteen can be identified as managed by women.<sup>61</sup> Most striking though in emphasizing the saturation of the decorative arts with women is the ironically titled *Notable Londoners: An Illustrated Who's Who of Professional and Business Men* (also published in 1924), which included twenty-two individuals under 'Industrial Art'. The editor profiled eighteen 'professional' women (and only four men), the majority of whom owned businesses — such as M. V. Wheelhouse, heralded as 'Principal' of a 'most successful' company — in contrast to other fields in the book dominated by male figures. Evidently, by the inter-war era women's artistic businesses — in a range of guises — had grown substantially in contrast to the pioneering workers active in the late nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup>

### III

In an 1887 article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* titled 'Ladies as Shopkeepers', women's rights campaigner and publisher Emily Faithfull reflected on the irony that although 'polite society' would now be proud to have a published female author in the family, 'the most daring innovation in England at this moment is the lady shopkeeper'. Reprimanding potentially disapproving readers as out of touch with modern life, Faithfull stated that 'the old world moves faster than it did in former days ... before the end of the nineteenth century it is probable a gentlewoman will be recognized in spite of her having entered on commercial pursuits'. Continuing, she offered reassuring examples of 'successful' women shopkeepers who had carved out 'respectable' roles such as a milk-shop owner and a 'lady' house decorator.<sup>63</sup> Faithfull's comments take us to the heart of the anxieties about middle-class women's entrepreneurship in the

<sup>61</sup> 'Handicraft Productions', *Times*, 1 Nov. 1924, 1.

<sup>62</sup> *Notable Londoners: An Illustrated Who's Who of Professional and Business Men* (London, 1924), 59.

<sup>63</sup> Emily Faithfull, 'Ladies as Shopkeepers', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 Dec. 1887, 11. Even *Punch*, in 1891, somewhat satirically informed readers about the 'large and rapidly-increasing body' of women with financial need being advised that a shop could be started, 'a *nom de commerce* adopted, and a circle of friendly customers be acquired by discreet advertisement'. 'Modern Types', *Punch*, 4 July 1891, 5.

late nineteenth century, which permeated across a rapidly expanding print culture: in novels, newspapers and the women's press.<sup>64</sup> In this section I turn to consider how artistic women business owners negotiated the wider cultural anxieties discussed by Faithfull, and the specific strategies they used to construct pathways in the Arts and Crafts movement.

My focus is twofold. In the first section I argued that art workers (with emphasis on men) were embedded in a range of entrepreneurial and professional currents, although they sought to position themselves, first and foremost, as serious artists. Now I show how this multiplicity of dimensions to the 'successful' construction of the art worker offered new opportunities to women as they did not have to focus on attempting to gain entry to one regulated area, but could instead partially engage in a range of porous cultures: professional, intellectual, entrepreneurial, artistic. My second, interconnected point, is to argue for the need to move away from unreflexively designating 'professional' status or the centrality of historical actors to their respective milieus as determined through educational background, organizational access or steady income, to the detriment of considering the role played by self-fashioning. In the Arts and Crafts, although the Art Workers' Guild undoubtedly shaped how male participants envisaged 'the Movement', art workers (men and women) pieced together reputations through a broader range of tactics. Their working lives were largely maintained by cultural practices, which women could more fruitfully engage in. Alongside designing and making art, this included rhetoric, print culture, continuing to cultivate middle-class networks, hiring staff, and establishing workshops to convey artistic intent.

Still, these strategies had to be navigated carefully, particularly by women. The 'shop girl', the 'New Woman' and the 'lady philanthropist' are all well-recognized cultural stereotypes of the *fin-de-siècle* landscape, yet the surge of anxieties about 'lady shopkeepers' and 'business women' remains unexplored.<sup>65</sup> This

<sup>64</sup> See, for instance, Amy Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), which centred on the poverty-stricken Lorimer sisters who established a photography business after their father's death.

<sup>65</sup> It is important to note that even though many of these women would have accepted the term 'professionals', they would have rejected the term 'entrepreneurs'. As F. M. L. Thompson has observed: 'enterprise culture is a very recent ideological and managerial construct... Victorians themselves never

is largely due to the ongoing historiographical tendency to prioritize histories of how pioneering middle-class women gained entry to regulated professional fields such as medicine, teaching or local government.<sup>66</sup> Gillian Sutherland has, however, recently argued that public visibility for women writers brought about 'fierce and sometimes condemnatory scrutiny', repeatedly limiting the genres they worked in and 'never cost-free in social terms'. The intensity with which Faithfull sought to frame shopkeeping as respectable echoes these concerns.<sup>67</sup>

But amidst these debates, artistic businesses — in the decorative arts in particular — were often positioned as a lesser evil for those women needing to work, particularly when considered in relation to the chastisement of 'unsexed' female journalists.<sup>68</sup> This was due to prevalent, essentialized ideas that women were 'naturally' suited to domestic crafts; 'dabbling' at art already played a central role in the performance of being a 'lady'. Newspaper magnate Alfred C. Harmsworth, writing in the *Young Folks Paper*, was one of many to enthusiastically discuss the supposedly winning combination of those with 'capital and artistic tastes' who could 'make a very good income by starting a business'.<sup>69</sup> The press often overemphasized the prospects for quick success, and many businesses appeared and then disappeared without trace. Some writers did occasionally

(n. 65 cont.)

used such an expression'. F. M. L. Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture* (Oxford, 2003), 75. 'Business woman' was, however, used during this era. See various examples such as 'An Interview with a Successful Business Woman', *Woman's Signal* (11 Mar. 1897), 154, and 'Every Girl a Business Woman', *Girl's Own Paper* (2 Oct. 1886), 5.

<sup>66</sup> Krista Cowman and Louise A. Jackson, 'Introduction: Middle-Class Women and Professional Identity', *Women's History Review*, xiv (2005); Krista Cowman and Louise A. Jackson (eds.), *Women and Work Culture: Britain c.1850–1950* (Farnham, 2005), editors' intro. The professionalization of women in the fine arts has also been a topic of considerable interest: see Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London, 1993); Helland, *Professional Women Painters in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*; Laurence Madeline et al., *Women Artists in Paris, 1850–1900* (New Haven, 2017).

<sup>67</sup> Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain, 1870–1914* (Cambridge, 2015), 160.

<sup>68</sup> Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, 2004), 153.

<sup>69</sup> Alfred C. Harmsworth, 'What Shall I Be?', *Young Folks Paper: Literary Olympic and Tournament* (24 Sept. 1887), 203. In the growing number of columns intended for middle-class young women looking for work, such as 'Our Employment Bureau' in *Hearth and Home* and 'What Shall I Be?' in the *Woman's Signal*, readers were repeatedly guided towards the decorative arts.

warn of the difficulties. Mary Lowndes cautioned women to 'consider in the first place whether among the circle of her friends and acquaintances there are likely to be people who might be in a position to entrust her with such orders'.<sup>70</sup> Such comments reiterate the necessity of class status, with the associated social networks and potential for familial support, in enabling artists to formulate and maintain these lifestyles. Yet despite ongoing hierarchies, a palpable shift did take place between the 1870s and the twentieth century, with artistic entrepreneurship being repositioned as a tolerable alternative to domesticity. These businesses were unlikely to be perceived as morally dubious and those closely associated with the Arts and Crafts were held up as exemplars of working women who had maintained respectability.

For figures like Mary Lowndes or Charlotte Newman the interest in 'lady shopkeepers' was undoubtedly helpful in fostering a milieu where they could present themselves as leading artistic representatives (particularly as they were rarely discussed in such detail in art journals). But, importantly, these women were often also supportively labelled as 'professionals' by wider society, in contrast to the 'bohemian' 'Brothers' at the Art Workers' Guild who eschewed the label. The term 'professional' held greater weight for pioneering women, due to its ability to convey one's serious credentials. At the International Congress of Women conference in 1899, the section on 'Women in Professions' included four 'professional' Arts and Crafts women. They had all been involved in running businesses, again reiterating the overlapping, blurred relationship between the professional and entrepreneurial for these women and their contemporaries: May Morris provided a paper on needlework, Charlotte Newman on metalwork, Mary Lowndes on stained glass, and Julia Hilliam on woodwork. Hilliam even proclaimed

<sup>70</sup> 'Glass Painting as a Profession', *Sheffield Independent*, 30 Nov. 1915, 7. The writer Constance Smedley also detailed the difficulties facing 'the worker with no capital' who could not 'tie up all her money in material for work, which if it does not sell at once may leave her with no further capital to expend on the metal and gems she requires for the pursuit of her craft'. Women with limited means often had to buy cheaper artistic materials as a consequence. Smedley advised 'the genuine wage-earner' to consider that alongside materials, and 'the great wear and tear of her tools', one had to pay for rent and extra servants 'for if the artist works all day she has no time for housework'. Smedley, 'A Guild of Craftswomen', 320–1.

to the audience: 'Do we realize what an influence we have on the taste of the future, as our work lives after us?' She also lamented — similarly to Ashbee — about the outpouring of women making "nice little things for the house and bazaars, but they are only amateurs", and how we wish there were only half the number'.<sup>71</sup> Such blatant framing was rare, but Hilliam was using an approach common amongst her 'professional' contemporaries, of signalling to the audience that she was a 'serious' worker, who should not be understood as part of the wider growth of 'amateur' feminine interest in the Arts and Crafts.

Despite the benefits offered within the women's movement — or even, surprisingly, in the mainstream press — women in the Arts and Crafts movement first and foremost sought to be understood as art workers, rather than simply as professionals, with its focus on regulation rather than 'innate' creativity, or as 'shopkeepers', a term perilously close to associations of trade and mass produce. Like their male peers, they realized that to claim greater cultural authority — alongside being written about — was to publish extensively. They wrote articles, manuals and guides targeting amateurs, students and fellow designers, and positioned themselves as serious artists, invested in educating and beautifying the world.<sup>72</sup> Avoiding discussions of gender, these writings blended together practical tips with a prominent intellectual current, framed around teaching readers about long-lost craft traditions. E. C. Woodward wrote about the history of enamelling across Asia, India and Europe, and offered advice about hallmarking and getting licensed. She detailed that she

<sup>71</sup> Ishbel Maria Hamilton-Gordon (ed.), *Women in Professions: Being the Professional Section of the International Congress of Women, London, July 1899* (London, 1900), 201.

<sup>72</sup> Manuals and books include, amongst many others: May Morris, *Decorative Needlework* (London, 1893); Mary Seton Watts, *The Word in the Pattern* (London, 1905); S. T. Prideaux, *An Historical Sketch of Bookbinding* (London, 1893); S. T. Prideaux, *Bookbinders and their Craft* (London, 1903); S. T. Prideaux, *Modern Bookbindings: Their Design and Decoration* (London, 1906); Annie Garnett, *Notes on Hand-Spinning* (London, 1896); Eleanor Rowe, *Hints on Wood-Carving: Recreative Classes and Modelling for Beginners* (London, 1891); Eleanor Rowe, *Practical Wood-Carving: A Book for the Student, Carver, Teacher, Designer, and Architect* (London, 1907); Edith B. Dawson, *Enamels* (London, 1906); Mary Lowndes, *Banners and Banner Making* (London, 1909); Elizabeth Ellin Carter, *Artistic Leather Work* (London, 1921). There were even collaborative all-women collections such as *Some Arts and Crafts* (London, 1903). This had a chapter by Elinor Hallé on 'The Art of Enamelling' and by Maria Reeks on woodcarving.

had learned about the jewellery of the Middle Ages by reading churchwarden and parish register accounts of donations and bequests, whilst also inspecting with a magnifying glass ‘delicate, inlaid gold and jewellery made by the Egyptians’ at the British Museum.<sup>73</sup> Like her peers, Woodward encouraged readers to take a similarly independent approach to learning about artistic and historic cultures.

Those who could afford to do so used advertisements to augment their artistic positions — and to position themselves strategically in the market. High-profile publications such as the *Studio* and *The Times* were popular. The unique, handcrafted nature of the art was always stressed. Newman’s regular advertisements in *The Times* (ironically) proclaimed that her ‘Artistic Jewelry Designs are Not Published in Trade Catalogues’. Readers were informed that she ‘employs her own skilled workmen, alloys her own gold, and selects the finest precious stones’.<sup>74</sup> Pomona Toys included photographs of a staged medieval joust with toy knights wielding swords to symbolize a commitment to historical tradition and skilled artistry (see [Plate 2](#)). The supportive feminist publication the *Englishwoman* (Mary Lowndes was on the editorial board) included advertisements by Lowndes and Drury and Woodward and Withers, their metalwork competitors Florence M. Rimmington, Alice S. Kinkead, Beth Amooore, and needlework artist Ruth Cross, amongst others. These advertisements all stressed cultural signifiers such as West London addresses, workshops, apprentices, and a commitment to handcrafted work (see [Plate 3](#)). Others, such as Pamela Colman Smith — perhaps unable to afford press advertisements — instead produced hand-printed versions.<sup>75</sup> This array of ‘artistic’ advertisements, so quotidian that they have escaped the interest of researchers, played a central role in enabling art workers to self-actualize modern working lives.

This is not to say that traditional markers of ‘professional’ status were not useful. Although many artistic women received

<sup>73</sup> E. C. Woodward, ‘Jewellery and Metal Work’, in *Mrs Strang’s Annual for Girls* (Oxford, 1921); E. C. Woodward, ‘Enamelling and Hallmarking’, in *Mrs Strang’s Annual for Girls* (Oxford, 1922).

<sup>74</sup> ‘Classified Advertising: Mrs Newman’s Artistic Jewelry’, *Times*, 9 Jan. 1895, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Advertisement for The Green Sheaf, c.1904: Pamela Colman Smith Collection, Bryn Mawr College Library Special Collections, Philadelphia.

little or no formal training, those who overcame the odds repeatedly advertised this as a testament of perseverance and learned knowledge.<sup>76</sup> The difficulties of gaining access to training, and the tendency for women to be placed in segregated rooms at men's businesses, meant most women hired female staff once they had progressed in their own careers, creating an expanding network of women's workshops by the twentieth century.<sup>77</sup> Employing women was beneficial for numerous reasons: women could be paid less; journalists often approvingly noted these businesses offered a solution to anxieties about the 'surplus' of unmarried, impoverished women; and, finally, managing female staff in specialized sites helped women to avoid being seen as 'taking' men's jobs, a circulating anxiety which reached its zenith after the Great War.<sup>78</sup> Katharine Adams had two to three assistants, 'artistically dressed ladies organized and paid in the conventional way' whilst E. C. Woodward's apprentices were bound for three years, working five days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Apparently 'she teaches them all that she knows, and arranges for them to have expert lessons and lessons in designing in addition'.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Charlotte Newman, who trained at the South Kensington Schools, for instance, began working at Brogdens seated away from the main business, upstairs: 'sitting in my little room, out of sight, designing' although she was slowly 'drawn more into the business, and eventually became the manager' because of her skills at dealing with customers, such as Princess Louise, the sculptor, who visited the shop wanting a locket to be made. Tooley, 'A Lady Goldsmith', 289.

<sup>77</sup> The women's press provides a wealth of information about the growing opportunities for women to work at a range of decorative art businesses from around the 1880s onwards. One such article in 1887 suggested readers should contact: Agnes Garrett of 2 Gower Street who offered three years' training (at the cost of a prohibitive £300) from ten to four each day; a Miss Collingridge of 9 Beaumont Street, Portland Place, who received pupils daily from half-past nine to four; Messrs Simpson of 100 St Martin's Lane, who 'employ many ladies in various kinds of decorative work' with salaries beginning at forty pounds a year working from nine to six, or Louisa Avant at 13 Queen's Mansions, who had a centre for producing 'every kind of decorative work' and employed 'ladies for all the orders she undertakes, and keeps a register of workers in all departments'. Harmsworth, 'What Shall I Be?', 203. The British Library holds a rare surviving 'Indenture of Apprenticeship' to Mary Lowndes signed by Gertrude Esther Young from 1900: BL, Add. MS 72833, fo. 47.

<sup>78</sup> Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, 'Performing Work: Gender, Class, and the Printing Trade in Victorian Britain', *Journal of Women's History*, xvi (2004); Kathrin Levitan, 'Redundancy, the "Surplus Woman" Problem, and the British Census, 1851-1861', *Women's History Review*, xvii (2008).

<sup>79</sup> Fiona MacCarthy, *The Simple Life: C. R. Ashbee in the Cotswolds* (Berkeley, 1992), 105; Smedley, 'A Guild of Craftswomen', 319.



**M. V. WHEELHOUSE & LOUISE JACOBS**  
**POMONA TOYS,**  
**64, CHEYNE WALK,**  
**CHELSEA, S.W.**  
**PRICE LIST ON APPLICATION.**



2. Advertisement for 'Pomona Toys', *Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art*, lxviii (1916), iii.

Annie Garnett and Charlotte Newman were unusual as they employed male staff, whom they used to garner interest and further enhance their own statuses. Using their male employees as unnamed ciphers, they constructed a heightened sense of the tradition of the workshop and the male craft worker, who symbolized a long-lost culture. Garnett told *Atalanta* her male weaver was a 'delightful old Welshman, at work the year round, and he is able to weave all the yarns the spinsters bring in'.<sup>80</sup> Newman confidently informed the *Woman's Signal* that she had 'a competent set of workmen, and take apprentices. I am my own foreman, and never have any trouble with my employés — indeed, I fancy that they like a lady boss. I alloy all the gold myself, and tell the men what is to be done'. Despite claiming to receive many letters from women seeking work, she employed only one woman — a pearl stringer, hired to prepare necklaces due to her perceived competency at this dainty task — because she did not have 'a separate room for training girls'. Newman instead favoured male apprentices with family connections to the craft, proudly discussing one apprentice who was 'fifth in direct line who has followed the trade, and the others are sons or grandsons of goldsmiths'.<sup>81</sup> Intent on forging prestigious reputations, Newman and Garnett promoted a model of male craftsmanship handed down across the generations, and although subverting social norms to promote the power they now held over their male employees, they still upheld traditional gender hierarchies in the management of their staff.<sup>82</sup>

The most important strategy when seeking to be understood to be a 'serious' art worker was not, however, apprentices or

<sup>80</sup> Winifred M. Jones, 'The Revival of an Old-World Industry', *Atalanta* (1 June 1898), 497.

<sup>81</sup> Tooley, 'A Lady Goldsmith', 289.

<sup>82</sup> In contrast to men such as C. R. Ashbee, whose commitment to employing working-class men was central to his vision of the radical potential of the arts, female employers had less to say about class — at least in publications. Their energies appear directed instead towards the task of trying to overturn their own subjugated roles. When pressed there was even emphasis that working-class women were not popular. Annie Garnett told one interviewer that such women were too 'hemmed in by tradition'. She instead preferred to employ 'village girls and tradesmen's daughters'. Newman expressed similar anxieties, equating 'educated women' with 'reliability and carefulness', who could be trusted with her expensive materials, and were more 'teachable than those in the classes below'. Linda Cluckie, *The Rise and Fall of Art Needlework: Its Socio-Economic and Cultural Aspects* (Bury St Edmunds, 2008), 154; Tooley, 'A Lady Goldsmith', 289.

**E. C. WOODWARD & AGNES WITHERS,**

METAL WORKERS AND ENAMELLERS,

**5 & 7 JOHNSON STREET, NOTTING HILL GATE, W.**

DESIGN and EXECUTE

Churchwork, Personal Ornaments, Spoons, Boxes, &amp;c.

LESSONS GIVEN IN PRACTICAL WORK.

APPRENTICESHIP, THREE YEARS.

**RUTH CROSS,** *DECORATIVE  
NEEDLEWORK.***1, MOSCOW ROAD, BAYSWATER, LONDON, W.**Designs and Executes Churchwork, House Decoration,  
Dress, Banners, &c.Stock kept of Decorative Needlework, prepared, &c., for working, of good old and new  
designs, Cushions, Curtains, Quilts, &c.Lessons Given. Pupils taken. Terms: £10 per year, or payment by giving time.  
Apprenticeships arranged.**Florence M. Rimmington****Jewellery, Enamels,  
Decorative and Ecclesiastical Metal Work.**.. PUPILS RECEIVED ..  
APPRENTICES TRAINED.

Terms and Full Particulars on Application.

**67 PERHAM ROAD, WEST KENSINGTON, W.****BETH AMOORE** (*Exhibitor in London, Liverpool, Paris, Glasgow, &c.*)

CRAFTSWOMAN IN REPOUSSÉ &amp; ENAMEL.

Designs Prepared and Commissions Executed in various metals. Pupils and Apprentices  
taken at her studio in Chelsea.**10 ALBANY MANSIONS, ALBERT BRIDGE, S.W.****ALICE S. KINKEAD.****23 CLAREVILLE GROVE,  
ONSLow GARDENS, S.W.****WORKER IN METALS AND  
ENAMEL.****Personal Ornaments,  
Caskets, Spoons, &c.**

When Replying to Advertisements in this Magazine please mention 'The Englishwoman.'

staff, but was the environment of the workplace.<sup>83</sup> Taking a similar approach to discerning gallery owners, a shop front was often avoided to enable a non-commercial atmosphere to be established even whilst visitors stood on the street.<sup>84</sup> This tactic allowed women to play with gendered understandings of appropriate 'public' and 'private' spheres, as they worked behind closed doors in upmarket environments. The Garrett cousins advertised their establishment simply by placing 'a neat brass plate upon the dark green door' of 2 Gower Street, London.<sup>85</sup> Charlotte Newman, at this point based just off Bond Street, implemented the same approach. When her interviewer Sarah Tooley visited in 1895, she had initially been puzzled because Newman had 'nothing to indicate her occupation but her name simply inscribed across the window'. Contending with a competitive male-dominated jewellery trade, where lavish shop fronts were increasingly expected — and seeking to avoid what one contemporary writer described as 'the commercial and industrial banalities of Town' — Newman kept her shop front intriguingly bare.<sup>86</sup> She openly boasted that customers 'come to me without advertisement; and, as a designer, I have no wish to exhibit my things in a window and run the risk of having them copied'. Only once inside could customers gain access to her showrooms of 'dazzling beauty'. 'Mrs Newman' could be found seated behind glass cases filled with objects such as a bracelet 'designed from a Greek one found at Pompeii' and a 'renaissance-style' crystal dolphin with a black pearl in its mouth.<sup>87</sup>

For women in rural locations the natural world played a more substantial role in marketing the business. Workshop owners

<sup>83</sup> Courtney J. Campbell, 'Space, Place and Scale: Human Geography and Spatial History', *Past and Present*, no. 239 (May 2018); Kathryn Beebe, Angela Davis and Kathryn Gleadle, 'Introduction: Space, Place and Gendered Identities: Feminist History and the Spatial Turn', *Women's History Review*, xxi (2012); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge, 1994); Daphne Spain, 'Gendered Spaces and Women's Status', *Sociological Theory*, xi (1993); Lynne Walker, 'Home and Away: The Feminist Remapping of Public and Private Space in Victorian London', in Rosa Ainley (ed.), *New Frontiers of Space, Bodies and Gender* (London, 1998).

<sup>84</sup> Samuel Shaw, '"The New Ideal Shop": Founding the Carfax Gallery, c.1898–1902', *British Art Journal*, xiii (2012).

<sup>85</sup> 'Interview: Miss Agnes Garrett', 145.

<sup>86</sup> Alan Montgomery Eyre, *Saint John's Wood: Its History, Its Houses, Its Haunts and Its Celebrities* (London, 1913), v.

<sup>87</sup> Tooley, 'A Lady Goldsmith', 289.

advertised that their workplaces offered a rare respite from the modern bustle of the city, seeking to attract those lamenting the ramifications of industrialization. Annie Garnett had several photographs taken of The Spinnery, surrounding gardens and wild woodland in the heart of the countryside in the Lake District (see [Plates 4 and 5](#)). These images were then cannily used to visually advertise the business in popular national newspapers such as the *Daily Chronicle*.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, local newspapers across the country, writing rapturously about the ‘good work being done’ there included simple illustrations which gave readers a flavour of this rural idyll, foregrounding the old buildings, spinning wheels, drystone walls, and industrious workers always positioned away from the viewer, head down, hard at work.<sup>89</sup> Although women working in rural locations could have greater difficulty in attracting customers, for those who had the means to market these sites, the countryside had the ability to considerably enhance women’s reputations, and disrupted the prominent metropolitan/provincial hierarchy that so often shaped understanding of artistic worth.

Whilst all Arts and Crafts business owners asserted that they had workshops on site, or close by, for women the dirty reality of life in the workshop was rarely photographed or discussed, particularly in the early years. This has undoubtedly influenced the later historiographical framing of women’s lack of participation in workshop cultures. Sarah Tooley, who interviewed Newman, even suggested gloves might be useful for ‘lady goldsmiths of the future’ as it would solve ‘the difficulty of the “hands” ’ — women’s hands being a key marker of their class status.<sup>90</sup> A need to assert status, respectability and ‘appropriate’ gender roles continued to influence how women participated in artistic culture. But women could still tap into the widespread understanding of the cultural significance of the workshop, and use its material ambience to associate their work with the ‘authenticity’ of the Arts and Crafts. The term ‘workshop’ was a signifier that imbued artistic objects and owners with an enhanced sense of authenticity before people were invited for carefully staged visits. This is exemplified in the

<sup>88</sup> ‘The Lyceum Club and its Crafts Guild’, *Daily Chronicle*, 23 May 1907, 8.

<sup>89</sup> See for instance, ‘Home Arts and Industries’, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 24 May 1904, 3.

<sup>90</sup> Tooley, ‘A Lady Goldsmith’, 289.

*Studio* in 1909, where E. C. Woodward's workshop is used by the journalist as a helpful example of a 'true' 'Arts and Crafts' culture: 'There is nothing of the amateur about the studio of Miss Woodward, whose little ornaments in silver and enamel are eminently calculated to please a public that is not satisfied by the conventional machine-made produce of the shops'.<sup>91</sup> A desire to convey the authenticity of these women's activities by supportive writers offer revealing snippets. Woodward for instance was described by the writer Constance Smedley in the *World's Work* as committed to encouraging her employees to enjoy the physicality of workshop life: 'her' employees were 'engaged in the practical making of all sorts of articles: every sort of work, big and small, passes through their hands'. They could feel 'that the professional credit of the workshop rests to some extent in their hands' as she taught them 'to hammer with a poker-head, to use the tool at hand'.

Cultural cachet was bolstered further through reference to the workshop's 'medieval' atmosphere, conjuring a sense of established historical traditions. Smedley informed readers that Woodward's workshop provided 'a good example of what the mediaeval workshop of a craftsman must have been'. Similarly, Edith B. and Nelson Dawson's 'workshop party' was described as 'delightful and mediaeval'.<sup>92</sup> Together these pseudo-medieval environments played a critical role in enabling women business owners to situate themselves in contrast to the plethora of shopkeepers selling cheap, mass-produced goods. Workshops and businesses also offered women a way to redirect the growth of public interest into spaces where they had greater independence to put forward their own ideas about the Arts and Crafts, a topic this article now turns to consider in greater depth.

#### IV

In 1913, the Committee of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, which held its first exhibition in 1888, and has consistently been positioned in histories as the 'public face' of the movement, hotly debated whether or not to establish a

<sup>91</sup> 'Studio Talk', *Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art*, xlvii (1909), 62.

<sup>92</sup> Smedley, 'A Guild of Craftswomen', 318–19. Letter from Josephine Webb to Edith B. Dawson, 20 July 1904: Private collection.



4. 'The Spinners', Annie Garnett's sketchbook, undated but 1890s. Reproduced by courtesy of Museum of Lakeland Life and Industry, Lakeland Arts Trust.

saleroom. In contrast to their triannual exhibitions, a saleroom would offer the Society a permanent, profit-making presence in the capital. They ultimately decided against this, feeling such overt commercialism would be detrimental to the Society's artistic vision. This decision has been used as a key example in the master narrative portraying the movement as in decline (and even failing) by the early twentieth century.<sup>93</sup> But away from this rarefied, carefully regulated exhibition — the Committee was largely composed of Art Workers' Guild Brothers — as this article has shown, a more informal, public Arts and Crafts culture was being cultivated across the country, in which the activities of women business owners played a central role. In this final section I argue that, through their independent strategies and development of a network of alternative cultural spaces, women business owners ultimately changed the very ethos of the English Arts and Crafts movement to become more amenable to domestic consumerism. In so doing, they fostered a new hybrid artistic, 'popular', and more democratic environment where

<sup>93</sup> Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, 1999), 22.

both women art workers and a wider array of participants could engage in artistic culture.

When considering the movement through this lens there appears little sense of failure. In fact, there was growing momentum.<sup>94</sup> Well into the 1930s, newspapers reveal an ongoing public obsession with this expansive Arts and Crafts world, which intersected with widespread interest in small-scale art ventures, ranging from philanthropic to self-consciously 'modernist' art workshops.<sup>95</sup> The substantial nature of this attention functions as a barometer of the movement's perceived success, but the fact that this culture has been ignored indicates that traditional scholarship would see this as a troubling dilution of the movement's early aims. Yet it is only by considering this later period and by listening to the views of a wider range of participants that we can fully grasp how people engaged with and sought to make sense of the Arts and Crafts across England. Rather than a teleological narrative of decline, the early to mid-twentieth century marked an era when Arts and Crafts ideas and objects continued to have powerful reach, involved a diverse range of participants — from the highly skilled to the 'amateur' — whilst also becoming increasingly interwoven with a range of inter-war cultural currents.

Women consumers played a critical role in cultivating and reshaping social interest. Erika Rappaport has cogently emphasized that women shoppers fuelled consumerism by the late nineteenth century, keeping grand department stores in business, and redefining shopping as the quintessential leisure activity for the modern woman.<sup>96</sup> Many women just as actively

<sup>94</sup> In newspapers, like in art journals, there was often a focus on alerting readers to the 'true' Arts and Crafts scene, amidst a much wider flowering of 'amateur' Arts and Crafts exhibitions and events. As *The Scotsman* told its readers in 1928, when describing an exhibition organized by Mary Lowndes: 'The term "arts and crafts" may mean anything nowadays, but here the description more than justifies itself'. 'Woman To Date', *Scotsman*, 19 Nov. 1928, 12.

<sup>95</sup> There has been a small body of scholarship on the role played by 'modern' craftswomen in the 1920s and 1930s — such as designer Elspeth Little of Modern Textiles — but the pre-history to inter-war design is crucial, as is the array of individuals who continued to be embedded within Arts and Crafts networks. Harrod, *Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*; Barley Roscoe, 'Artist Craftswomen Between the Wars', in Gillian Elinor et al. (eds.), *Women and Crafts* (London, 1987); Suzette Worden and Jill Seddon (eds.), *Women Designing: Redefining Design Between the Wars* (Brighton, 1994).

<sup>96</sup> Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, 1999). For the growth of interest in housewives as consumers in



5. 'The Designing Room', Annie Garnett's sketchbook, undated but 1890s.  
Reproduced by courtesy of Museum of Lakeland Life and Industry,  
Lakeland Arts Trust.

supported the small businesses established by women artists, spreading word through female friends, family, professional acquaintances, suffrage networks and the wider women's movement. Charlotte Newman's customers were described as 'grand dames', and her jewellery gave them 'a certain satisfaction in the knowledge that they will not see similar designs in catalogues or shop windows'.<sup>97</sup> Jeweller Amy Sandheim was similarly described as working for 'a very distinguished circle of patrons'; Lady Feodora Gleichen — a noted sculptor herself — was 'one of the most constant'.<sup>98</sup>

Artistic businesses offer new insights into the extensivity of the cultural and commercial topology of the women's and suffrage movements by the early twentieth century, and how women's artistic networks became entangled with this wider sphere, using

(n. 96 cont.)

the twentieth century, see Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge, 2003), ch. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Alfred Whitman, 'The Jewellery of Mrs Philip Newman', *Magazine of Art* (London, 1902), 467.

<sup>98</sup> *Notable Londoners*, 59.

this feminized interest to spread knowledge about Arts and Crafts cultures. The women's press provided shopping routes directing readers straight to their favourite artistic businesses in the capital. In 1910, the *Englishwoman* encouraged readers to journey across the West End, visiting, amongst others, a 'Mrs Wright' at 49 Old Bond Street, maker of 'beautiful hand-pierced and embossed silver casement teapots', the artistic dresses and 'purely hand-embroidery of the best craftsmanship' at The Studio, 31 York Place, Baker Street, and finally to see the 'Artistic leatherwork' of Roberta Mills.<sup>99</sup> Mills crafted ties, bags, belts and cushions out of leather, and advertised in *Votes for Women* that there was 'Nothing like leather for suffragettes wear'.<sup>100</sup> The position of several women business owners as suffragists in their own right, such as Lowndes, Woodward and Wheelhouse, further sweeps away simplistic narratives of the depoliticization of the Arts and Crafts by the twentieth century.<sup>101</sup>

In the 1930s, several women writers continued to offer women-centred routes for visitors shopping for art in London and in the surrounding countryside, as can be seen in Thelma Hilda Benjamin's *A Shopping Guide to London*, intended for American tourists. Benjamin included a chapter on 'Arts, Crafts, and Exhibitions' where she discussed her thirty-four favourite 'artist craftsmen', at least twenty-seven of whom were women, many of a younger generation to earlier pioneers. Elizabeth Ellin Carter at her West End Leather Craft Studio made portraits in leather and leather waste-paper baskets and stationery for smaller budgets.<sup>102</sup> The Australian artist Ruth Bannister, who established a workshop in Maida Vale, could 'show you original hand-carved and painted wooden floral umbrellas, door stops, pencils, powder boxes' and other curiosities, for which there is always 'a ready sale'. She had 'cleaned and repaired the whole of the wood-carving' in the library of The Queen's College, Oxford

<sup>99</sup> 'Notes by the Way', *Englishwoman*, vi (1910), 121.

<sup>100</sup> 'Nothing Like Leather for Suffragettes Wear', *Votes for Women* (22 Oct. 1909), 63.

<sup>101</sup> Most recently Cheryl Buckley, *Designing Modern Britain* (London, 2007), 15.

<sup>102</sup> Thelma Hilda Benjamin, *A Shopping Guide to London* (New York, 1930), 143–5. It was evidently popular as four years later she published Thelma Hilda Benjamin, *London Shops and Shopping* (London, 1934). See her chapter 'Arts, Crafts and Exhibitions That Matter: A Wealth of Unusual Ideas and Skilled Artistry'. See also Montizambert's chapter on 'Artistic Shops' in Elizabeth Montizambert, *London Discoveries in Shops and Restaurants* (London, 1924).

and the 'Grinling Gibbons' carving above the altar of St James's Church, Piccadilly, but unfortunately the war had 'stopped these "big" works'. Artistic women business owners — in contrast to their male peers — were particularly likely to advertise their flexibility in working across a wide range of fields, offering all sorts of pieces for the home, large and small. This enabled them to tap into the interests and purses of different customers and attempt to ensure a steadier income for themselves at times of national economic hardship.

Although not explicitly politicized (in contrast to suffrage papers) it is evident that Benjamin — who was editor of the women's page for the *Daily Mail* — was still supportively encouraging consumers to buy art specifically from women. Moving away from the nineteenth-century rhetoric of dismantling class hierarchies, the Arts and Crafts had developed into a protean milieu that could be moulded to fit both progressive but also more conservative agendas, and functioned as a prominent artistic strand in an environment which Alison Light — through her work on popular women writers — has termed the dominance of 'conservative modernity' in England during the inter-war era.<sup>103</sup>

This feminization of the movement, and the ongoing interest in decorative art cultures, sits in contrast to developments in the mainland European art scene and 'modern', stripped-back artistic styles of the early to mid-twentieth century. These movements clearly partially developed in reaction to the popularity of this women-dominated Arts and Crafts culture (this can be seen in much of the overtly masculinized language of 'Modernism' where the 'feminine' and the 'decorative' are often dismissively conflated and denounced).<sup>104</sup> But as Cheryl Buckley has argued in her assessment of inter-war ceramics, although the English decorative art scene of this later era tends to be ignored or rejected in scholarship of modern design, this erases the contemporary interest in the decorative.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, it fails to account for the belief that the Arts and Crafts also

<sup>103</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London, 1991).

<sup>104</sup> See the introduction to Elliott and Helland (eds.), *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts*.

<sup>105</sup> Cheryl Buckley, 'The Decorated Object: Gender, Modernism and the Design of Industrial Ceramics in Britain in the 1930s', in Elliott and Helland (eds.), *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts*.

represented a modern current, or the growing nationalistic thread to the movement. Magazines such as *Homes and Gardens* repeatedly framed businesses like Pomona Toys as 'truly representative of the taste of the modern child', as well as being 'truly British in idea and execution' in the 1930s. M. V. Wheelhouse also began to advertise that the shop sold 'English Toys for English children, designed and made in Chelsea, from 2s. to £5'.<sup>106</sup>

Furthermore, women such as Wheelhouse and her peers were not just reliant on feminized networks. Customers and patrons sought out their art from a myriad avenues, in the process expanding the movement's reach and disrupting notions of a neatly segregated women's world of Arts and Crafts. Several women advertised that they sought to make the Arts and Crafts more financially accessible: Pomona Toys repeatedly advertised its toys were sure to 'appeal to all classes' and 'Wooden toys, large and small, to suit all purses'.<sup>107</sup> Even Newman stressed that she sold 'at moderate prices, a selection of the most Artistic Jewelry'.<sup>108</sup> But, similar to their male peers, where possible, wealthy, or at least middle-class, customers continued to be attractive. Pomona Toys designed items for the Royal Family (including a 'gipsy caravan' for Princess Elizabeth), alongside supplying prestigious London businesses such as Harrods, Fortnum & Mason, Liberty, and providing nursery-school bricks for the London County Council.<sup>109</sup> Newman was even commissioned to design diplomatic gifts to foster bonds between nations; in 1899 the French Government paid her to design twelve gold medallions for the Empress of Russia, each bearing the portrait of a celebrated French woman, beginning with the first Christian Queen of France, and ending prior to the French Revolution.<sup>110</sup> Many of these objects have since disappeared, undoubtedly due to the gendered acquisition choices of museums

<sup>106</sup> 'Modern Toys', *Homes and Gardens* (Dec. 1931), 34; 'Classified Advertising: Pomona Toys', *Times*, 4 Dec. 1928, 29.

<sup>107</sup> *Notable Londoners*, 59; 'Advertisements', *English-Speaking World*, xix (1937), 286. A surviving 1919 Pomona Toys price list (with illustrations by Louise Jacobs) lists prices ranging from a Noah's Ark for £3. 15s. to small wooden animals for 2s.: Sheffield Educational Settlement Papers MS91, Special Collections, University of Sheffield.

<sup>108</sup> 'Classified Advertising: Mrs Newman, Goldsmith', *Times*, 9 July 1892, 1.

<sup>109</sup> Several Pomona toys are mentioned in A. C. Benson and Lawrence Weaver, *Everybody's Book of the Queen's Doll's House* (London, 1924), 74.

<sup>110</sup> 'An Interesting Commission', *Illustrated London News* (15 July 1899), 29.

and galleries in the twentieth century, but also because such items were eagerly purchased for private households and collections.

Customers based in North America were particularly keen to purchase art that portrayed them as taste-makers back home across the Atlantic. Annie Garnett told interviewers that 'The Americans are good customers'. She sent out 'parcels of embroideries every day' from the Lake District and 'the sale of them last season was extremely large'.<sup>111</sup> The leatherworker Roberta Mills proudly informed *Penrose's Pictorial Annual* in 1913 about the American interest in her work, drawing on an anecdote about an American gentleman who described it as the 'dandiest' he had seen, telling her 'his friends on the other side would be interested'. He commissioned a cabinet with leather panels, asking for the wood to be as old as possible.<sup>112</sup> In the inter-war era, Phyllis and Delphis Gardner, alongside managing their printing press, designed hand-carved chess sets depicting famous historical scenes for their American customers such as the pharmacist and industrialist Gustavus A. Pfeiffer (these are now held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).<sup>113</sup>

By the early twentieth century, in contrast to the reticence about attracting consumer interest at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, women business owners tended to have a more optimistic perspective about the ability of the Arts and Crafts to productively shape consumer habits and public taste. In Constance Smedley's view, women art workers were the most involved in 'helping the public here, by beginning to regard their studios more and more as workshops, and keeping them always open and accessible'. She stated that encouraging workshop visits was seen to be critical for the 'master craftswomen who have large workshops ... who regard their work as a serious profession, and are always engaged in creating new objects for sale and exhibition'.<sup>114</sup> This approach was evidently widespread as publications continually discussed how women actively welcomed visitors.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Jones, 'The Revival of an Old-World Industry', 497.

<sup>112</sup> Roberta Mills, 'Leather Craft', in William Gamble (ed.), *Penrose's Pictorial Annual, The Process Year Book for 1912-13* (London, 1913), 71-2.

<sup>113</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Accession numbers: 53.71.11a-p, aa-pp, 53.71.188a-p, aa-pp, q, and 48.174.143a-p, aa-pp, q, r.

<sup>114</sup> Smedley, 'A Guild of Craftswomen', 319-20.

<sup>115</sup> The *Art Workers' Quarterly* informed readers that visitors were 'always welcome' at Garnett's Spinnery and that 'things are mostly for sale', although the

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As part of the drive to encourage interest, women business owners were more forthcoming in advertising and offering educational and cultural activities for visitors. This undoubtedly had financial benefits but also helped to put into practice their belief in the need to open up the movement's social potential. Alongside lessons (ranging from short courses to apprenticeships), it became common to hold free demonstration days where the workshop was open to see women artists in action hammering with tools, weaving and sketching, in the process expanding knowledge about craft cultures, historical and contemporary. Leatherworker Elizabeth Ellin Carter, who described herself as conveniently based 'opposite Bond Street Tube' and an exhibitor at the 'Paris Salon and London' when advertising in the *Studio* in 1925, was one of many women who made sure her advertisement listed when her work was available to be viewed publicly, every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.<sup>116</sup> Workshop events could command large numbers: E. C. Woodward hosted one in 1907 that had over five hundred visitors in less than a week.<sup>117</sup>

Women workshop owners widened knowledge about the Arts and Crafts further by exhibiting locally, nationally and internationally, at exhibitions spanning a range of artistic, local and commercial contexts. Newman and John Brogden's artistic union reached its pinnacle at a Parisian exhibition where Brogden received the famed *Croix de la Légion d'Honneur* and Newman received from the French jury the unique award of *Médaille d'Honneur* as *collaboratrice*.<sup>118</sup> Pomona Toys received 'much favourable attention at the several Exhibitions of Arts and Handicrafts' spread across the country.<sup>119</sup> By the inter-war era, a

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usual caveat was given that 'selling is not by any means the chief motive in displaying them'. 'Windermere Industry', *Art Workers' Quarterly: A Portfolio of Practical Designs*, xiii (1905), 56–7.

<sup>116</sup> 'Advertisements: Art Leather Work', *Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art*, lxxxix (1925), xix.

<sup>117</sup> Letter from the illustrator Alice B. Woodward (sister of E. C. Woodward) to George Bell & Sons, 6 Nov. 1907: University of Reading Special Collections, MS 1640/321/287–288.

<sup>118</sup> Whitman, 'The Jewellery of Mrs Philip Newman', 466. Annie Garnett was awarded the gold cross, 'the highest award of the Association' for an embroidered linen tablecloth she exhibited at the Home Arts and Industries Exhibition at the Albert Hall. Jones, 'The Revival of an Old-World Industry', 497.

<sup>119</sup> *Notable Londoners*, 59.

number of women had established hugely popular exhibitions: Mary Lowndes's Englishwoman Exhibition of Arts and Handicrafts annually showed the works of approximately one hundred and fifty artists across the 1920s and 1930s and there were also the wood engraver Margaret Pilkington's comparable Red Rose Guild exhibitions.<sup>120</sup> Deviating from the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society's regulated glass cases, these exhibitions were more accepting of the commercial, although were still framed around only showing the work of 'professional' artists. Catalogues included advertisements for Cadbury's chocolate and the exhibitions largely constituted stalls operated by women workshop owners, who would give craft demonstrations and interact with spectators (see [Plate 6](#)).

Others travelled regularly, in the process learning about regional craft cultures, and contributing to the blossoming of national and international interest in the Arts and Crafts. Cecile Francis-Lewis, author of manuals such as *The Art and Craft of Leatherwork* (1928) — which she claimed to have written at the 'repeated, I may say, almost insistent request of hundreds of my pupils and clients overseas' — was based in Hanover Square, London.<sup>121</sup> Yet she was one of many women who travelled between different workshops and studios seeking to teach the public. Described by the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* as 'exceedingly well known in the art world', in 1913 alone she gave demonstrations on the art of pen painting, 'an old craft which had historically been used in the Convents of Italy and France', at a 'Miss Brown's' artist's repository in London before travelling south to cities such as Plymouth to give demonstrations, which kept her 'exceedingly busy'.<sup>122</sup> This 'clever Yorkshire-craftswoman' was still being extolled in the press in the late 1920s. From her workshops, now in Soho Square, London she sent 'to all parts of the world ... the most exquisite examples of modern craftwork to be found in this country'. In a comment strikingly similar to those of the 1880s, readers were assured that, in contrast to mass-produced objects

<sup>120</sup> A small collection of materials pertaining to the Englishwoman Exhibition is held at the Women's Library, London School of Economics, whilst the Crafts Study Centre Archives, University for the Creative Arts, Farnham, Surrey holds the Red Rose Guild's papers.

<sup>121</sup> Cecile Francis-Lewis, *The Art and Craft of Leatherwork* (London, 1928), 6.

<sup>122</sup> 'City Chat', *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 11 Feb. 1913, 8.

that 'don't-bear-too-close-inspection', Francis-Lewis offered her customers unique works 'in the manner of the ancient work when time was no object and the craftsman loved and took a pride in his work'.<sup>123</sup> In the process, across this network of women's workshops and businesses, England's artistic scene was opened to a wider range of participants, beyond the museums and grand galleries, or even the new department stores, where it is commonly understood people viewed, discussed and bought *objets d'art*.

Independently travelling the country, showing off their artistic skills — alongside the myriad other strategies discussed throughout this article — women like E. C. Woodward, M. V. Wheelhouse, Annie Garnett and Charlotte Newman established expert positions during their lifetimes and opened up a new cultural pathway that women clamoured to participate in, to various levels of 'success', well into the 1930s. Making their mark on society through industrious self-fashioning, Arts and Crafts women (and men) demonstrate that terms such as 'professionals' and 'entrepreneurs' should not be assumed to be neatly separated categories or to signify a fixed identity. For women, in particular, the ability to slip between different categories furnished them with new prospects, and it is only by reconnecting these strategies that we can understand the breadth of their contributions to the arts and processes of social and cultural change. Entrepreneurship could be precarious, short-lived and required start-up capital, but together these businesses and workshops offered a new model for a substantial network of women to forge expert reputations, lead creative lives and make an income.

This reliance on asserting status through alternative, often transitory practices, has, however, in the long term, contributed to a tendency to denigrate women's work as 'arty-crafty' rather than part of the radical male craftsmanship perceived to have constituted the 'Arts and Crafts Movement'. This has been compounded further by the high status and curatorial focus subsequently reserved for the objects, buildings, institutions and publications pertaining to 'exceptional' male figures across the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>124</sup> Gendered suspicions

<sup>123</sup> 'A Leeds Craftswoman in London', *Leeds Mercury*, 1 June 1927, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Cheryl Buckley's 1986 survey of design literature, theory and practice led her to announce that the omission of women has been so 'overwhelming ... that

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about authenticity did deeply influence contemporaries, and although this article has provided an account of the increase in rewarding opportunities for artistic women, as the number of women establishing businesses in the decorative arts grew in number, anxieties about amateurism and the 'wrong sort' of art continued to grow, far beyond the movement, and across artistic culture.<sup>125</sup> The lack of regulation, alongside the close associations between the decorative, the feminine, and the domestic, which at once ameliorated societal concerns when women claimed new 'artistic' entrepreneurial roles, also meant the threat of the label of dilettantism was never far away.

Despite having their own anxieties about amateurism and an awareness that the Arts and Crafts reified certain capitalist currents, women business owners, like many others, continued to feel the pull of the movement well into the twentieth century. They sought to rhetorically and materially uphold the dominant perspective in the public imagination of the 'art worker' and the Arts and Crafts movement as being diametrically opposed to commerce and mass consumerism, whilst, in practice, they navigated between different professional, commercial, popular and artistic cultures. Shaped by their marginalized positions, women became particularly invested in seeking to entertain and educate diverse publics about the social, moral and aesthetic values of the Arts and Crafts. This was often through informal means such as performing their crafts at popular workshop events or by advertising that they sold a variety of artworks suitable for the home that fit a wider range of budgets and interests.

But it is important not to position 'the public' and 'the art world' as clearly differentiated categories here as this

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one realizes these silences are not accidental or haphazard; rather, they are the direct consequence of specific historiographical methods'. Cheryl Buckley, 'Made in Patriarchy: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design', *Design Issues*, iii (1986), 3.

<sup>125</sup> Octave Uzanne declared in *The Modern Parisienne* that 'The twentieth century will witness the emancipation of women in art and letter. We are at the dawn of a new era, which will give facilities to women for the development as far as possible of their intellectual facilities ... One may even say that they are too much in favour, too much encouraged by the pride and ambition of their families, for they threaten to become a veritable plague, a fearful confusion, and a terrifying stream of mediocrity'. Octave Uzanne, *The Modern Parisienne* (London, 1912), 129.



6. Pomona Toy's stall at the Red Rose Guild exhibition in the 1920s. Image kindly provided by the Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts, RRG/2/1.

simplistically portrays women as losing integrity by becoming swept up in a commercialist public culture in contrast to the disillusionment of certain 'radical' male designers by the dawn of the twentieth century. Positioned amongst a backdrop of a wider hinterland of feminized interest — which played a critical role in keeping the movement alive — 'professional' women continually disrupted prominent hierarchies between the artistic and the commercial. They exhibited, wrote about, and sold their work to fellow art workers, American tourists, supporters of the women's movement, the Royal Family, literary and bohemian circles alike and, occasionally, to those with a spare penny.

James Fox asserted in 2015 that the Great War constituted the most critical moment in the modern era, which 'encouraged the art world to reach out to the public, so they encouraged the public to reach out to art'. However, if the lives of artistic women are included in this assessment (something Fox does not do), we must amend such a judgement. Women across England played a critical role in democratizing the arts beyond elite, masculine urban cultures throughout the period spanning the 1870s to the 1930s and fostered the development of an immersive new Arts and Crafts world that innovatively sought to bridge the artistic and the commercial, the professional and the popular.<sup>126</sup> I contend that it was this burgeoning field of cultural activity that did so much to shape the contemporary public conception of 'the Arts and Crafts', and fed the success of a movement that captivated the minds and hearts of larger numbers of people than any other art movement before or since in the English context.

*University of Birmingham*

*Zoë Thomas*

<sup>126</sup> James Fox, *British Art and the First World War, 1914–1924* (Cambridge, 2015), 9. Fox caricatures the nineteenth-century British art scene as one in which there was little interest in forging a public profile, with the art world remaining 'Self-contained if not self-interested: its dealers catered only to the wealthiest members of society; its exhibiting societies attracted small and rarefied audiences; and its ageing Academicians continued to paint mythological subjects that had little to do with the realities of their time'. *Ibid.*, 159.