

**Review of 'Christiana Herringham: Artist, Campaigner, Collector',
Royal Holloway, Emily Wilding Davison Building**

Maria Alambritis

Christiana Herringham (1852–1929) dedicated her life to a range of artistic, philanthropic, and political causes, fashioning a career as multifaceted as her collection. She was an expert copyist of early Renaissance paintings and ancient Indian cave paintings, active in the suffragette movement, a supporter of fellow women artists, and an influential figure on both the revival of tempera painting and emerging debates concerning heritage preservation. 'Christiana Herringham: Artist, Campaigner, Collector' (14 January–8 March 2019) shines a welcome spotlight on her life and legacy, both of which have historically been overlooked.

Herringham trained as an artist, though as a woman she faced restrictions as to the level of training she could access and the range of subject matter available to her. Examples of her flower paintings, which she exhibited at the Royal Academy alongside intimate portraits of women, including fellow suffragette Rhoda Garrett, show that, despite the barriers to accessing a full art education, she sought ways tactfully to circumvent them and further her own artistic progression. It was to be through the means of the medium of tempera, and specifically through copying examples of early Italian painting, that she found a way of asserting her artistic authority and expertise. Herringham's copy after Fra Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* in the National Gallery opens the exhibition (*Fig. 1*), foregrounding an aspect of

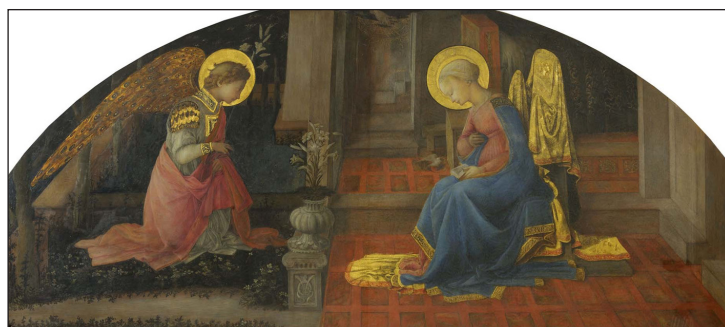


Fig. 1: Christiana Herringham, *The Annunciation* (copy of Filippo Lippi), tempera and gilt on panel, 80.5 × 167 cm, Newnham College, University of Cambridge, VPC-PP-018.

her artistic activity that has seen renewed scholarly focus in recent years: her intrinsic role in the British tempera revival during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹ Herringham was trained as an artist, and her copies document her important influence in furthering knowledge of early Renaissance painting technique. As Meaghan Clarke has argued, by interweaving her practice of copying with critical articles and publications detailing the specific processes by which such copies were achieved, Herringham liberated the conception of copying from the litany of appropriate feminine accomplishments to a professional practice that anticipated developments in the field of conservation studies.²

Herringham's translation of Cennino Cennini's *Libro dell'arte* (1899) exerted a major influence on contemporary artists experimenting with tempera, such as Roger Fry and George Frederic Watts. It inaugurated a period of intense investigation into historical technical knowledge, as Herringham detailed her own experiments with the medium, and this personal investment and resulting expertise eventually led to the establishment of the Society of Painters in Tempera in 1901, of which she was a founding member.³ For Herringham and her co-founders of the society, Joseph Southall (1861–1944) and Marianne Stokes (1855–1927), the use of tempera — a medium employing a mix of finely ground pigment with a binding liquid usually in the form of egg yolk — was seen as a marker of greater artistic satisfaction and ability, as the method required far more precision and patience than oil. These qualities were to prove particularly pertinent for women artists, not only as a means of validating their own artistic expertise, but also for the way in which the specific qualities of tempera resonated with newly emerging ideas about the nature of aesthetic experience.⁴

¹ Christiana Herringham, *The Annunciation* (copy of Filippo Lippi), tempera and gilt on panel, 80.5 × 167 cm, Newnham College, University of Cambridge, VPC-PP-018. The original had been presented to the National Gallery in 1861 by the gallery's first director, Sir Charles Eastlake, while Herringham's copy was given to Newnham College by her husband Sir Wilmot Herringham on her death in 1929. This is also the first time that items from Herringham's Bedford and Newnham collections have been reunited. Newnham College also holds Herringham's copies of *The Salutation* (copy of Giacomo Pacchiarotti), VPC-PP-019 and a 'Cambridge' *Madonna and Child*, VPC-PP-017.

² Meaghan Clarke, "'The Greatest Living Critic': Christiana Herringham and the Practice of Connoisseurship", *Visual Resources*, 33 (2017), 94–116 (pp. 96–97).

³ See also, Michaela Jones, "'If there is no struggle there is no victory': Christiana Herringham and the British Tempera Revival", in *Tempera Painting 1800–1950: Experiment and Innovation from the Nazarene Movement to Abstract Art*, ed. by Patrick Dietemann and others (London: Archetype, forthcoming 2019).

⁴ Meaghan Clarke, 'On Tempera and Temperament: Women, Art, and Feeling at the *Fin de Siècle*', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 23 (2016) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/ntn.767>>.

The presence of Herringham's personal and annotated copy of Mary Philadelphia Merrifield's first English translation of Cennino Cennini (1844) foregrounds the connection with an earlier generation of women art critics who paved the way for these turn-of-the-century innovations.⁵ The importance of female networks is a dominant theme running throughout the exhibition, traced through a range of contemporary ephemera and portrait sketches that link Herringham with other women of her circle who worked across the interwoven circles of the Arts and Crafts Movement, suffragette campaigns, and the tempera revival. Herringham was the recipient of a considerable inheritance after her father's death and she employed these funds as a patron to promote a range of philanthropic and artistic activities to further women's professionalization and self-actualization. She was a founding director in 1888, together with Agnes Garrett, of the Ladies' Residential Chambers & Co., providing living quarters for women who wished to remain single and pursue professional careers.⁶ Herringham was also a founding member of the Women's Guild of Arts, and the exhibition draws together fascinating archival material in this regard, such as a handwritten list of the Members of the Women's Guild of Arts (c. 1912). Established in 1907, the guild aimed to provide a space of social and professional support for women artists; the names of Evelyn De Morgan, Marianne Stokes, Mary Watts, and Marie Spartali Stillman are present, providing an immediate and illuminating glimpse into a thriving artistic female network.

Furthermore, Herringham was an important patron of other practising women artists of her extensive circle. Works of art from her personal collection include fellow tempera artist Margaret Gere's (1878–1965) *Garden of the Slothful* (c. 1905), which was exhibited at the Society of Painters in Tempera, and *Oceanid* (before 1908) by Annie Swynnerton (1844–1933), an astonishingly lush and arresting depiction of a nude sea nymph, which, as the exhibition label suggests, demonstrates Herringham's progressive tastes.

Japanese woodblock prints, Indian miniature paintings, and Chinese ceramics from her private art collection are interspersed with Herringham's own tempera copies, showcasing the global reach of her wide-ranging interests in craft and artistic production that led to her major project late in life — copying the fragile Buddhist frescoes of the Ajanta Caves, India, some of which are also included among the exhibits. Her extensive Continental travel is further represented in watercolour and tempera

⁵ See Zahira Véliz Bomford's article on Merrifield in the current issue of *19*.

⁶ Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866–1928* (London: UCL Press, 1999), p. 283. See also, Emily Gee, "Where Shall She Live?": Housing the New Working Woman in Late Victorian and Edwardian London', in *Living, Leisure and Law: Eight Building Types in England 1800–1941*, ed. by Geoff Brandwood (Reading: Spire, 2010), pp. 88–109 (pp. 92–93).

sketches of architectural features of the European cathedrals at Verona and Chartres. An active campaigner for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Herringham was vocal in debates concerning the merits of restoration or conservation and advocated for a more informed approach to the repair of ancient buildings that respected the integrity of their original design and materials.

Thanks to the innovative research and dedication of its co-curators Dr Laura MacCulloch and Michaela Jones, this exhibition expands on the better-known aspects of Herringham's life, such as her role in the formation of the National Art Collections Fund (NACF), and brings fresh new insights drawn from Jones's current PhD research.⁷ Presenting a vital contribution to knowledge of women's multifaceted involvement in the arts, 'Christiana Herringham: Artist, Campaigner, Collector' is the first exhibition in seventy years dedicated to Herringham and is testament to the extraordinary range of her interests and achievements, illustrated through the remarkable objects she acquired throughout her life.

⁷ Michaela Jones, 'Christiana Herringham and the Art Collection of Royal Holloway and Bedford New College' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College, forthcoming).