Afterword

Kate Hill

Women collectors have been hiding in plain sight. As this issue of *19* reveals, tropes about the 'invisibility' of women collectors, patrons, visitors, and curators of art in the nineteenth century ignore the inconvenient fact that such women were often well known at the time. They faded from view after their death or in the pages of scholarly evaluations, regardless of whether their own contribution was art historical, touristic, aspirational, personal, or uncategorizable. The fact of their femininity itself was the key lens through which their engagement with art was perceived — even more so in the twentieth century, in many ways, than in the nineteenth.

This issue of *19* reveals how strongly the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries form a critical period both for women and for art collecting; similarly, Meaghan Clarke has said of women writing on art that the period was crucial: 'In the late nineteenth century the convergence of connoisseurship and empiricism enabled several women to stake a claim for themselves as professional art writers.'[1] The changes in women's lives — and the determination to create more changes and permanently alter the gender balance of power — were marked through gendered engagement with art in a way which has rarely been so strong. Many of the women considered here supported the vote for women, enhanced education for women, and increased opportunities in public life for women, from a variety of political perspectives; and these views did not just sit alongside their cultural philanthropy, but were deeply intertwined with it. Art both enabled and reflected changes in women's lives.[2] Similarly, the period is one where collecting, viewing, and supporting the arts were transformed by social, economic, and cultural factors, and art collecting was also channelled into transforming the world. Some of these changes favoured women, but others did not. While women's increasing wealth, power, education, and

[1] Meaghan Clarke, 'Women in the Galleries: New Angles on Old Masters in the Late Nineteenth Century', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 28 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.823>.

[2] Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects: American Women Collectors and the Making of Culture, 1800–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); see also, Beverly Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives 1890–1940* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

independent travel were factors in their favour, the increasingly institutionalized nature of art scholarship may well have created barriers to lasting appreciation of their collections.[3] Thus, as is shown here by, for example, Caroline McCaffrey-Howarth's article on Lady Dorothy Nevill, the erudition of women's art collecting was often the equal of men's, but they were, in a sense, ad hoc scholars and outside the key institutions creating intellectual prestige, even where they had social prestige. This exclusion took a number of forms. Women's colleges were in no sense seen as the intellectual powerhouses that elite men's colleges were; women's contributions to major institutions were swallowed up without a trace; husbands were given credit for collections formed jointly with their wives (or even solely by their wives); and women's collections were very frequently seen as domestic, frivolous, and decorative, whatever their actual nature. Thereafter, women's exclusion from or occlusion within prestigious elite institutions acted as further confirmation that they were not worth taking seriously or engaging with. Women's flexibility in working round the gatekeepers of nineteenth-century art did not help them as much in the long run as in the short term; a temporary period of relative visibility at the end of the century faded as art history became a 'proper' discipline — proper in the sense that it was legitimized by a narrow set of institutions, practices, and 'founding fathers'.[4]

It is, however, important not just to work within these categories of serious versus frivolous, scholarly versus decorative, seeking merely to move women's contribution from the latter to the former grouping; instead, we should go beyond this very categorization. Such binary oppositions were themselves discursively produced through the manipulation of space, institutional practices, and the shaping of reception through public and private writing. Whether or not women's cultural philanthropy was scholarly or not is maybe less important than how the legacy of their work reveals the constructed nature of these judgements, and the hierarchies which they produced. As several articles here suggest, public and private is one of the key judgements supporting a hierarchy of value. This division, though, dissolves with the kind of in-depth examination of collecting and cultural philanthropy undertaken in these articles. In-depth research is imperative and possible, as shown here, despite the particular

[3] A similar pattern where the development of scholarly institutions acted to exclude women amateurs has been noted in scientific disciplines. See, for example, Ann B. Shteir, 'Gender and "Modern" Botany in Victorian England', *Osiris*, 12 (1997), 29–38.

[4] This sense of the masculinization of art history as it became a self-conscious discipline is well demonstrated by Meaghan Clarke in her work on women art critics — though plentiful and significant during the nineteenth century, twentieth-century accounts of the development of art history wrote them out ('Women in the Galleries').

difficulties in researching women collectors, whose papers were not preserved and whose names were often hidden behind those of their husband or agent. Close focus suggests that women's collections, like men's, could be based variously and even simultaneously on expertise and knowledge, memory, aesthetic pleasure, a shopping fever, or a desire to own the best for status reasons. Collections ranged promiscuously across domestic and public settings, sometimes changing, sometimes remaining the same, but increasingly either losing their identity as a woman's collection, or being framed as a non-serious collection, or both.

An interesting point is the extent to which these articles focus primarily on the individual biographical approach, which serves very clearly to reverse the fade out which these women collectors experienced, either in relation to their husbands or in relation to the institutions which benefited from their philanthropy. At the same time, the issue reveals the potential of a collective biographical approach, or one focusing on the social links between institutions and portraits, in the articles by Helen Jones and Imogen Tedbury. All of these, even the more traditionally biographical, are intensely social approaches, tracing people, their relationships, and the ways in which objects could bring and tie them together or keep them apart. Work on women in the history of science similarly suggests that individual and collective biography, and the study of women's support networks and alternative female organizations, are particularly important to recover the extent, meaning, and significance of women's work in this area.[5] These approaches, which start from the biographical but always foreground the relational (whether relations between people and objects, or among people) resist the tendency to attribute absolute qualities to objects and even more so to collections; collections are made up of a changing combination of objects, and it is difficult to say that the objects themselves are inherently scholarly or frivolous.[6] Such a biographical or network focus also serves to de-privilege institutional histories, which tend to emphasize absolute value in objects. This is not to say that objects and institutions are not important in the history of women's collecting and cultural philanthropy. While, as Tom Stammers says in his introduction, there is nothing about the materiality of the collected items which is intrinsically gendered ('masculine'

[5] Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, 'Women in the History of Science: An Ambiguous Place', *Osiris*, 10 (1995), 39–58.

[6] The ways in which institutional discourses can be more fully contextualized through the analysis of social and material networks is well illustrated by two works from the history of anthropology and archaeology: Chris Gosden and Frances Larson, *Knowing Things: Exploring the Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum 1884–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Sarah Byrne and others, 'Networks, Agents and Objects: Frameworks for Unpacking Museum Collections', in *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum*, ed. by Sarah Byrne and others (New York: Springer, 2011), pp. 3–26.

versus 'feminine' objects), it is nevertheless true to say that some visual and possessive desires were distinctively new and modern and came into focus at this point, and women helped to legitimize these desires, though their collecting of traditionally valued objects is also important (Macleod, esp. Chap. 5). It is crucial as well to investigate institutions in order to recognize the methods they used to bolster their status, which had side effects of devaluing women's contributions. As shown here, though, starting with the people and their relationships, in order to demystify absolute ideas of object value and institutional hierarchies, brings significant benefits in the search for women collectors.

If collections have been categorized by the social identity of the collector, rather than the nature of the collection itself, and if the way to better understand how under-researched groups engaged with art is to look at their social and material networks, then an important lesson is that we need to examine critically the social and material networks of *all* collectors, not just women. Men as well as women collected as part of a household or a single-gender grouping — the ascribing of collections to, for example, husbands alone hides their (in)activities as well as their wives'. Understanding Lady Wallace, Joséphine Bowes, and Alphonsine Bowes de Saint Amand refines our knowledge of Sir Richard Wallace and John Bowes, and vice versa. Men as well as women mixed 'scholarly' and personal collecting, moved their objects between domestic and public settings, and used their art for fun, for the public good, for social advancement, or to contest or confirm gender values (as well as other social identities). While focusing on women's collecting, we must be careful not to leave men's collecting unexamined as just generic 'collecting' — it was as inflected by gendered assumptions and relationships as women's was.[7]

Work on women in the history of science tells us that an examination of women's roles leads to a widening of the places and practices which might count as 'science', and this naturally has meant a rethinking in,

[7] There have been some excellent studies of queer and non-normative masculine identities in collecting but less engagement with dominant masculine models which are often glossed as based on classification and system. See, for example, John Potvin, *Bachelors of a Different Sort: Queer Aesthetics, Material Culture and the Modern Interior in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); and Victoria Mills, 'Dandyism, Visuality and the "Camp Gem": Collections of Jewels in Huysmans and Wilde', in *Illustrations, Optics and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Literary and Visual Cultures*, ed. by Luisa Calè and Patrizia Di Bello (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 147–66. Some important work looks at masculinity and violence in collecting. See, for example, Merrick Burrow, 'The Imperial Souvenir: Things and Masculinities in H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* and *Allan Quatermain*', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18 (2013), 72–92; and Simon J. Harrison, 'Skulls and Scientific Collecting in the Victorian Military: Keeping the Enemy Dead in British Frontier Warfare', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50 (2008), 285–303.

and expansion of, the historical development of science (see Kohlstedt). Similarly, understandings of archaeology as a whole are changing as a result of recovering and incorporating women's activities previously seen as only marginal to the discipline; beyond excavation itself, the way women-led networks moved objects round the world into museums and exhibitions had a fundamental impact on the interpretations of those objects.[8] The same may be true for the study of art collecting and patronage — investigating women's activities, by making us revisit the categories, spaces, and practices which are included within it, leads to a revision of our understanding of the entire discipline.

[8] See, for example, Amara Thornton, '"... a certain facility for extricating cash": Collective Sponsorship in Late 19th and Early 20th Century British Archaeology', *Present Pasts*, 5 (2013) <http://doi.org/10.5334/pp.55>; Amara Thornton, 'Exhibition Season: Annual Archaeological Exhibitions in London, 1880s–1930s', *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology*, 25.2 (2015) <http://doi.org/10.5334/bha.252>; and Alice Stevenson, *Scattered Finds: Archaeology, Egyptology and Museums* (London: UCL Press, 2019).