

Women Collectors and Cultural Philanthropy, c. 1850–1920

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At the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, one of the finest university art museums in the country, signs of its founding matriarch are few. As an anniversary publication makes clear, Lady Barber — née Martha Constance Hattie Onions (1869–1933) — was ‘no great intellectual force or major collector of fine art’.¹ What she bequeathed to the University of Birmingham in 1932 was not a corpus of masterpieces but rather the funds to enable the construction of a building and a major purchasing spree. While subsequent male curators — like Thomas Bodkin — deserve the credit for the astonishing old masters assembled for the institute, Lady Barber’s own creative interests during her lifetime were centred on the home. At Culham Court, near Henley-on-Thames, where she lived with her property developer husband from 1893, Lady Barber introduced neo-Georgian decorations and dramatic alpine gardens. Furniture and especially textiles formed the most substantial part of her collecting, whether historic lace — sourced from the Midlands and Europe — or sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Flemish tapestries and cushion covers. These rich fabrics formed the backdrops in several of the twenty-five portraits that Lady Barber commissioned from the Belgian artist Nestor Cambier between 1914 and 1923. These range from highly theatrical full-length portraits in fancy dress, through to evocative sketches of the drawing room at Culham Court, depicting Lady Barber among her cherished possessions (*Fig. 1*). It appears Lady Barber was determined for the ensemble of portraits to be kept together after her death, since she arranged them into a privately printed book and lobbied (unsuccessfully) for their exhibition in London. Their presence at the Barber Institute remains jarring, even embarrassing, for those who query the aesthetic merits of Cambier’s work or the ‘social climbing’ of his favourite sitter.²

¹ Ann Sumner, ‘“An Unparalleled Opportunity”: Early Influences on the Development of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts’, in Sophie Bostock and others, *Foundations of a Collection: The Barber Institute of Fine Arts* (London: Scala, 2012), pp. 10–17 (p. 12).

² The sculptor Francis Derwent Wood and James Jebusa Shannon also depicted Lady Barber at home. See Jesse Campbell, ‘The Story of the Barbers: Country Life, Art and Patronage’, in Bostock and others, pp. 23, 31–43.



Fig. 1: Nestor Cambier, *Portrait of Lady Barber by a Leopard-Skin Rug*, c. 1923, oil on canvas, 168 × 132 cm, Barber Institute of Fine Arts. © The Henry Barber Trust.

Lady Barber emerged out of a Victorian culture in which women's collecting was typically associated with the decorative and domestic arts; while she gloried in embellishing her private residence, and clearly took great pride and pleasure in her things, only a fraction of these interests were inscribed within the museum created in her name. Her reticence speaks volumes about the enduring institutional, epistemological, and academic barriers facing women at the dawn of the twentieth century. These barriers helped marginalize women's role within public collections and, by extension, served to minimize their place in art historical scholarship.

As Susan Pearce has summarized, the notion that while women may accumulate objects, they do not show sufficient discrimination to truly collect in ways comparable to men, explains ‘why there have been relatively few “major” women collectors with “important” material [...], and why their collections do not emerge into the same sharp-eyed sunlight of public recognition and esteem’.³ Aside from the predictable example of one or two ‘exceptional’ women — like Lady Charlotte Schreiber (1834–1922) — a review of the literature might conclude there was a dearth of female collectors across the long nineteenth century. Two trends, however, suggest that this assessment is in urgent need of revision.

The first is the broader rediscovery of women’s role within the nineteenth-century art world. Four decades of feminist scholarship have revealed the dynamism of women in many different sectors of the visual arts. Professional female artists numerically proliferated in late Victorian Britain: the Society of Lady Artists counted just 20 members in 1880; by 1899, renamed the Society of Women Artists, it had 35 members and 22 associates; by 1918 this had climbed to 36 members and 52 associates.⁴ In France the growth was even more dramatic, with 1081 female artists accepted for exhibition in the 1880 Salon, and over five hundred members in the Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs in 1890.⁵ Some of them obtained exceptional critical and commercial success, such as Rosa Bonheur, Louise Jopling, and Elizabeth Thompson, Lady Butler, each of whom flouted ideas about gender-appropriate genres.⁶ At the same time, women were involved in the reproduction and retail of artworks and, through criticism, profoundly shaped their intellectual reception. The rediscovery of female art critics and art historians like Emilia Dilke, Vernon Lee, and Maud Crutwell in the nineteenth century has been one of the most exciting trends in recent years, emblemized by the 2019 issue of *19* dedicated to women and the old masters.⁷ Whether as painters, writers, or scholars, such studies

³ Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 207.

⁴ Julie Codell, ‘Artists’ Professional Societies: Production, Consumption and Aesthetics’, in *Towards a Modern Art World*, ed. by Brian Allen, *Studies in British Art*, 1 (London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 169–87 (p. 184, n. 9). See also classic studies by Charlotte Yeldham, *Women Artists in Nineteenth-Century France and England*, 2 vols (New York: Garland, 1984); and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists* (London: Women’s Press, 1987).

⁵ Tamar Garb, ‘Revising the Revisionists: The Formation of the Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs’, *Art Journal*, 48 (1989), 63–70 (pp. 65, 68).

⁶ Recent biographies include Catherine Hewitt, *Art is a Tyrant: The Unconventional Life of Rosa Bonheur* (London: Icon, 2020); and Patricia de Montfort, *Louise Jopling: A Biographical and Cultural Study of the Modern Woman Artist in Victorian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁷ *Old Masters, Modern Women*, ed. by Maria Alambritis, Susanna Avery-Quash, and Hilary Fraser, *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 28 (2019) <<https://19.bbk.ac.uk/issue/116/info/>> [accessed 24 October 2020].

raise fascinating issues about how women occupied and appropriated public spaces of display, in the process developing new ways of ‘looking like a woman’.⁸ Around 1900, Meaghan Clarke has demonstrated that female journalists frequently reviewed collections in the pages of the *Connoisseur* — such as the gallery of old masters assembled by Harriet, Lady Wantage (1837–1930) and her husband — thereby demonstrating their knowledge of both art history and the art market.⁹ As comparable inquiries for nineteenth-century France have asserted, the work of retrieving female Salon critics must be followed by reflection on why this vibrant strand of cultural production so swiftly vanished from the historical record.¹⁰

The second cause for revision is the transformation in the history of collecting itself over the past four decades. No longer a specialist sub-field, charged with corroborating the lineage of high-prestige objects, the study of collecting has been revitalized by the input of sociologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, museologists, and historians of science. The focus has shifted from laudatory accounts of the lives and taste of great men to an analysis of cultural transfers, networks of influence and association, and the mechanisms by which value is conferred. The definition of what counts as a collection has also expanded dramatically. In this spirit, the domain of material culture, broadly conceived, carries crucial insights about female experience and identity formation. As one important recent volume has articulated, ‘women’s consumption, often perceived as the height of frivolous and distracted non-productive activity, can be understood from a sociological viewpoint as engaged in display of social status and class differentiation.’¹¹ Literary scholars like Deborah Wynne and Lori Merish have embraced the concept of ‘sentimental materialism’ to explore the sense of independence Victorian women cultivated through their possessions.¹² Trailblazing scholars like Dianne Sachko Macleod have insisted that col-

⁸ Hilary Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century: Looking Like a Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See also the special issue, *Women’s Expertise and the Culture of Connoisseurship*, ed. by Meaghan Clarke and Francesco Ventrella, *Visual Resources*, 33.1–2 (2017).

⁹ Meaghan Clarke, ‘The Art Press at the Fin de Siècle: Women, Collecting, and Connoisseurship’, *Visual Resources*, 31 (2015), 15–30.

¹⁰ Véronique Chagnon-Burke, ‘Women Art Critics during the July Monarchy (1830–1848)’, in *Women Art Critics in Nineteenth-Century France: Vanishing Acts*, ed. by Wendelin Guentner (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013), pp. 93–116.

¹¹ Beth Fowkes Tobin, ‘Introduction: Consumption as a Gendered Social Practice’, in *Material Women, 1750–1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices*, ed. by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 1–13 (p. 7).

¹² Deborah Wynne, *Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); and Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

lecting allowed women in Gilded Age America to convert private concerns into public talking points, forming a powerful vehicle for feminine consciousness which still resonates over a century later. ‘Women continue to view their collections as a means to console their psyches,’ Macleod argues, ‘clarify their identities, and foster their empowerment.’¹³

This issue of *19* picks up on some of these claims to examine the varied roles collecting could play in the lives of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women, and the different types of agency it afforded them. Chronologically, the focus falls on the years 1850 to roughly 1920. This periodization is in keeping with recent studies of the art market, whose growth correlates with expanding opportunities for women; it points to the fact that many ‘Victorian’ collectors lived into the early twentieth century and only addressed the fate of their possessions at the end of their lives; furthermore, this extended chronology allows for cultural trends often presented as ruptures — such as the embrace of modernism — to be situated within longer cultural patterns.¹⁴ Geographically, the case studies are centred primarily on Britain, but also feature France, the United States, or — just as common — the interaction between these three cultural poles. This means placing the rich scholarship which has emerged around women and the arts in each context into a more transnational conversation, as recommended by Julie Verlaine.¹⁵ One small ambition of these articles is to underline how women promoted the cosmopolitanism of Victorian and Edwardian culture — and how operating across borders in no small part helped to obscure their reputations.¹⁶ Objects housed in Britain today were the result of extensive travels, periods of residence, and intellectual encounters far beyond British shores: for many women discussed here, collecting was a feat of cultural translation, one which required navigating different legal parameters and risked misrecognition by different national audiences.

Victorianists have much to learn methodologically from the surge in work on female collectors and patrons in the early modern period, whether in Renaissance Italy or at baroque courts and religious houses

¹³ Dianne Sachko Macleod, ‘Introduction’, *Women’s Studies*, 39 (2010), 514–17 (p. 514). See also, Macleod, *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects: American Women Collectors and the Making of Culture, 1800–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁴ This extended chronology is adopted in *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850–1939*, ed. by Anne Helmreich and Pamela Fletcher (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Julie Verlaine, *Femmes collectionneuses d’art et mécènes de 1880 à nos jours* (Paris: Hazan, 2014), p. 20.

¹⁶ Andrew Stephenson, ‘Edwardian Cosmopolitanism, ca. 1901–1912’, in *The Edwardian Sense: Art, Design and Performance in Britain, 1901–1910*, ed. by Morna O’Neill and Michael Hatt, *Studies in British Art*, 20 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 251–84.

across Europe.¹⁷ Such studies point out the slender distinction separating collectors from patrons — not to mention the overlap between male and female tastes — and recognize collecting as an expression of agency for elite women, despite the denigration they often received. ‘Through the ages, female collectors, whatever their rank in society, chose to collect and what to collect’, as one anthology observes; ‘they chose how and where to present the collection; they also decided when to dispose of objects, thereby taking on a curatorial role.’¹⁸ Yet so far in nineteenth-century studies, the shape of the phenomenon has been rarely mapped. To begin doing so means confronting two interpretive challenges, very common to all periods of women’s history: namely, absence and silence. Each deserves to be discussed in relation to the history of collecting.

By *absence* I mean the relative minority of women who merited the title of collector according to contemporary sources, compared to their male counterparts. When Gustav Waagen surveyed the treasures of English collections at mid-century, he found only three female collectors worthy of mention (even if his work was translated from German by Elizabeth Eastlake): this trio were Sarah Rogers (1772–1855) (sister of collector Samuel Rogers), Maria Denman (sister-in-law of John Flaxman), and Angela Burdett-Coutts (1814–1906) (honoured for her purchases at the Horace Walpole sale of 1842).¹⁹ Equally, women were entirely absent from the survey of forty-seven principal collectors featured in the columns of the *Art Journal*, the *Athenaeum*, and the *Magazine of Art*, prompting Macleod to conclude that with ‘so little information available to document the involvement of female patrons, we are left with an incomplete image of the mid-Victorian woman’.²⁰ The minimal space accorded to female collectors in print was replicated in other surveys of the art world on both sides of the Channel. In Clément Ris-Paquot’s encyclopedic *Répertoire des collectionneurs de la France et de l'étranger*, of the 3197 collectors listed for 1895–96, fewer than 9 per cent of the total were women (and most of these women were inheritors of collections built by their husbands or fathers).²¹ Surveying

¹⁷ *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs*, ed. by Cynthia Lawrence (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); and *Women and the Art and Science of Collecting in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Arlene Leis and Kacie L. Wills (London: Routledge, 2021).

¹⁸ Adriana Turpin, ‘Foreword’, in *Women Patrons and Collectors*, ed. by Adriana Turpin, Andrea M. Gáldy, and Susan Bracken (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), pp. xiii–xv (p. xiv).

¹⁹ Gustav Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*, trans. by Lady Eastlake, 3 vols (London: Murray, 1854), II, 96.

²⁰ Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 215–16.

²¹ Cited in Véronique Long, ‘Les collectionneurs d’œuvres d’art et la donation au musée à la fin du XIX^e siècle: l’exemple du musée du Louvre’, *Romantisme*, 112 (2001), 45–54 (p. 49).

museum bequests in Britain in his final magnum opus, *The People's Galleries*, the late Giles Waterfield underlined that there were 'relatively few major women collectors in the nineteenth century' and that even women with exceptional wealth and intellect could only 'with great difficulty breach male bigotry'.²²

Accounting for this absence can only be done through recognizing the power of legal discriminations. Under the system of 'couverture', married women in Britain were considered ineligible to own property, or enter into contracts, independently from their husbands.²³ Only after 1870 was this system relaxed, culminating in the Married Women's Property Act in 1882. Such restrictions explain why female collecting has been stereotyped as the preserve of spinsters, unmarried sisters, widows, or, more questionably, childless women in search of an emotional substitution. The failure to recognize married women as autonomous economic actors undeniably restricted their ability to count as collectors; as Jordanna Bailkin has insightfully argued, the overhaul in the status of women's property in the 1880s heralded much bigger shifts in the logics of liberalism and the conception of national heritage.²⁴ Although in the United States women's economic independence was legally recognized sooner — with the 1848 legislation in New York an important benchmark — the situation in France, by contrast, was arguably even bleaker, owing to the remarkable endurance of the Code Napoléon from 1804. Under this paternalistic legislation, although women retained the revolutionary innovation of equal inheritance rights, they were barred from acting as legal witnesses, and married women could not enter into contracts without spousal consent. Moreover, according to the *régime de communauté*, many husbands gained exclusive control over the couple's joint assets, a situation only relaxed in 1907.²⁵

Alongside these legal barriers, though, the cultural obstacles facing women were also considerable. In the closing years of the nineteenth century, collecting was increasingly coded as a male pursuit, a sport which relied on forms of erudition, quasi-scientific expertise, and moral self-mastery. To that extent, it was perceived as the antithesis of feminine consumption. To cite one influential summary of the problem: 'masculine collecting is informed and serious and feminine shopping, while requiring certain skills of selection and communication, is uninformed, trivial and can never

²² Giles Waterfield, *The People's Galleries: Art Museums and Exhibitions in Britain, 1800–1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 260, 261.

²³ Margot Finn, 'Women, Consumption and Coverture in England, c. 1760–1860', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), 703–22.

²⁴ Jordanna Bailkin, *The Culture of Property: The Crisis of Liberalism in Modern Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 118–58.

²⁵ H. D. Lewis, 'The Legal Status of Women in Nineteenth-Century France', *Journal of European Studies*, 10 (1980), 178–88; Verlaine, *Femmes collectionneuses*, p. 30.

lead to greatness without stepping outside of gender roles.²⁶ The growing focus on learning and discernment departed from an earlier masculine trope, that of the romantic quest: Victorian literature often typecast male collectors as bachelors, with their cherished objects doubling up as their mistress.²⁷ In France the tenacious stereotype of the collector as an eccentric, even a pervert, made the category an uncomfortable one for respectable women to inhabit.²⁸ The women who frequented museums in the pages of French fiction by Paul Bourget or Philippe Burty typically appropriated the picture galleries as a space for erotic assignations rather than self-instruction. Aside from the influx of female copyists, the female tourist pausing in the Louvre was styled by James Tissot in *L'Esthétique* (1883) less as an art lover than as one more beguiling artwork to be scrutinized and admired (*Fig. 2*).²⁹

The male bias in collecting matters also came through the reverence for tradition: Victorian collectors patterned themselves on illustrious predecessors, from Roman emperors and Renaissance banker–princes to later humanists and antiquarians. The Victorian cult of antiques, to cite Anne Anderson, converted ‘ancestors into objects’ and ‘objects into descendants’, spawning lineages of possession that connected masculine elite proprietors across time.³⁰ An exclusive atmosphere infused collectors’ meetings, which were typically homosocial in spirit, if not in letter. The hugely influential Collector’s Club founded by Henry Cole in 1857 held public meetings that were open to women to attend, but few gained formal membership: they made up eight of its 201 members in 1867.³¹ This was nonetheless an advance on the Society of Antiquaries, which only admitted its first female member in 1920.³² The situation was mirrored outside of London: at the Liverpool

²⁶ Sarah Cheang, ‘The Dogs of Fo: Gender Identity and Collecting’, in *Collectors: Expressions of Self and Other*, ed. by Anthony Shelton (London: Horniman Museum, 2001), pp. 55–72 (p. 57).

²⁷ See Terri Baker, ‘Nation and Narration in Victorian Women’s Collections’, in *Contemporary Collecting: Objects, Practices and the Fate of Things*, ed. by Kevin M. Moist and David Banash (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013), pp. 173–92.

²⁸ Dominique Pety, ‘Le personnage du collectionneur au XIX^e siècle: de l’excentrique à l’amateur distingué’, *Romantisme*, 112 (2001), 71–81.

²⁹ Luce Abélès, ‘Roman Musée’, in *La Jeunesse des musées: les musées de France au XIX^e siècle*, ed. by Chantal Georgel (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994), pp. 316–31 (pp. 320–22).

³⁰ Anne Anderson, ‘The “New Old School”: Furnishing with Antiques in the Modern Interior: Frederic, Lord Leighton’s Studio-House and its Collections’, *Journal of Design History*, 24 (2011), 315–38 (p. 317).

³¹ Ann Eatwell, ‘The Collector’s or Fine Arts Club 1857–1874: The First Society for Collectors of the Decorative Arts’, *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society*, 18 (1994), 25–30 (p. 27).

³² Ann Eatwell, ‘Private Pleasure, Public Beneficence: Lady Charlotte Schreiber and Ceramic Collecting’, in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. by Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 125–45 (p. 131).



Fig. 2: James Tissot, *Au Louvre (L'Esthétique)*, 1883, oil on canvas, 100 × 144 cm, Museo de Arte de Ponce. Wikimedia Commons.

Art Club, eighteen of 213 listed members were women in 1894.³³ No wonder that those women who did emerge as major collectors, pre-eminently Lady Charlotte Schreiber, have often been interpreted as bending or subverting gender roles, wilfully playing with ‘masculine’ attributes such as competitiveness and self-assertion.³⁴ In France too, women found themselves on the outside of the vibrant homosocial culture of local antiquarianism and *sociétés savantes* at the origin of many provincial museums. Hortense Cornu (1809–1875), an overlooked but central figure in shaping collections policy during the Second Empire, was tellingly described by Ernest Renan in androgynous terms: ‘She thought like a man but she felt like a woman.’³⁵

³³ Dongho Chun, ‘Collecting Collectors: The Liverpool Art Club and Its Exhibitions 1872–1895’, *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 151 (2002), 127–49 (p. 140).

³⁴ Dianne Sachko Macleod, ‘Art Collecting as Play: Lady Charlotte Schreiber (1812–1895)’, *Visual Resources*, 27 (2011), 18–31.

³⁵ Bonnie Effros, “Elle pensait comme un homme et sentait comme une femme”:

This presumption that women could *not* be collectors hardened across the *fin de siècle*, as male practitioners endowed their own efforts with pedigree, utility, and academic rigour. The categories and narratives these male connoisseurs crafted to exclude women from ‘true’ collecting have been reinforced by documentary omissions and distortions. Here we move from the issue of the comparative absence of female collectors to the relative *silence* about their activities in the historical record. Time and again, women’s contributions have been concealed behind that of their male relatives. Sarah Rogers has failed to be recognized as a collector of English art in her own right, independent of her poet brother; just as Martha Combe’s (1806–1893) role in nurturing the careers of the Pre-Raphaelites has been overshadowed by that of her publisher husband Thomas Combe (despite the fact that it was she who donated Holman Hunt’s *Light of the World* to Keble College, Oxford and paid for the chapel to house it) (Macleod, *Art*, pp. 28, 156–58). This misrecognition, which began in these women’s lifetimes, has passed into institutional memory. To cite another example I know well, the label for Edward Burne-Jones’s monumental painting *The Golden Stair* in Tate Britain describes it as a gift from Lord Battersea. In fact, the painting was gifted to the Tate in 1924 in memory of Lord Battersea by his widow, Constance Battersea (née Rothschild) (1843–1931), who had loved the painting, and which had hung in the entrance hall of their mansion Surrey House at Marble Arch. A donor to the National Gallery of London, as well as Norwich Castle Museum, Constance Battersea was profoundly active in multiple forms of social and cultural philanthropy, quite independently of her husband.³⁶

Innovative studies have emphasized that female collectors may have been more numerous than anticipated, but that we need to ‘read around’ the existing sources to recover their occluded role. Bonnie Effros has spotlighted the extraordinary influence exerted by Hortense Cornu in the 1850s and 1860s on the acquisition of the Campana collection by Napoleon III and the foundation of the Musée des antiquités nationales at Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1862. Yet this influence was informal and thereby poorly documented, and she has been omitted from institutional histories (Effros, p. 27). Similarly, Elizabeth Emery has remarked on the striking omission of any mention of women from the autobiographies of the leading Parisian collectors of Japanese art at the start of the twentieth century, such as Raymond Koechlin and Gustave Migeon. Yet she contrasts the

Hortense Lacroix Cornu (1809–1875) and the Musée des Antiquités Nationales de Saint-Germain-en-Laye’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 24 (2012), 25–43.

³⁶ Thomas Stammers, ‘L’exception anglaise?: Constance Battersea et la philanthropie artistique des Rothschild d’outre-manche’, in *De la sphère privée à la sphère publique: les collections Rothschild dans les institutions publiques françaises*, ed. by Pauline Prevost-Marcilhacy, Laura de Fuccia, and Juliette Trey (Paris: INHA, 2019) <<https://books.openedition.org/inha/11212>> [accessed 24 October 2020].

silence of these memoirs with the abundant loans made by women on both sides of the Atlantic to pioneering exhibitions at the Musée des arts décoratifs. Women such as Mary Ainsworth (1867–1950), Marie Gillot (1861–1941), or Sally Cassie Thayer (1856–1925) appeared as outsiders to male connoisseurs, although their tastes were indistinguishable from their own, and sometimes they even lived under the same roof as their colleagues: nonetheless, these women were screened out from the standard narratives of *japonisme*.³⁷ Yet by widening the type of evidence consulted, we can gain a different perspective on female participation.

Such a widening of perspective also characterizes Kate Hill's important monograph on women, modernity, and museums. Hill's study breaks new ground in considering many different aspects of female engagement with museums in the period 1850 to 1914: not just as donors but as visitors, curators, benefactors, attendants, and trustees, considered holistically through the concept of the 'distributed museum'.³⁸ Adopting a perspective which is as interested in the provinces as the metropolis, and in objects far beyond the categories of 'fine art', Hill brings the history of collecting into closer conversation with urban and social history. Within this more demotic framework, she demonstrates that women did play a major role in the formation of some museum collections, making them more 'home-like', often making bequests in memory of beloved family members (just like Constance Battersea). In so doing, 'they actively used donation as a way of further blurring the boundary between the two spheres [...] bringing private, or domestic and familial, valuations and relationships into public view, and thus of creating a wider value for them' (Hill, *Women and Museums*, p. 68). By comparing many different types of museum, as well as their internal structures, Hill's book offers a richer understanding of the prospects and limits upon the agency of female collectors in late Victorian Britain.

Drawing inspiration from such studies, all the contributions to this issue of *19* seek to uncover the stories of female collectors, or custodians of collections, whose activities have so far been hidden from view. Doing so means mobilizing different kinds of sources — press reports, bills and invoices, notarial records, photographs, not to mention the objects they collected — to obtain a portrait of women who often left little in their

³⁷ Elizabeth Emery, 'Women Collectors of Japanese Prints: The 1909–14 Paris *Expositions des estampes japonaises* at the Musée des arts décoratifs', in *Collecting Prints, Posters and Ephemera: Perspectives in a Global World*, ed. by Ruth E. Iskin and Britany Salsbury (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 61–78. My thanks to Elizabeth Emery for sharing her brilliant work and ideas.

³⁸ Kate Hill, *Women and Museums, 1850–1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 6. The term 'distributed museum' is taken from Chris Gosden and Frances Larsson's work on the Pitt-Rivers collections.

own words. Figures like Charlotte Schreiber and Louisine Havemeyer (1855–1929) were exceptional not just for the scope of their collecting but also for leaving extensive journals or memoirs documenting their passion.³⁹ Since many of these women were avowed cosmopolitans and travellers, or lived and collected across borders, the sources documenting their lives and their purchases are often geographically dispersed. Emery tellingly describes the networks of women who collected Japanese prints as ‘shadow economies’, and the analyses that follow are often forced to acknowledge the fragmentary state of the archive (‘Women Collectors’, p. 70). Yet the effort of recovery is ultimately justified by the insight — and occasional dissonance — that these examples can bring to our assumptions about women’s role in the shaping of cultural institutions. Following the suggestion of Julie Verlaine, it is our belief that the renewed study of female collectors promises to reconfigure the history of art and the history of gender alike.⁴⁰

The gender of collecting

What did — or did not — nineteenth-century women collect? The range of activity is enormous, although it has often been grouped within characteristic genres. These genres were inherited from much older norms regarding feminine accomplishments, in which certain types of object were correlated to the presumed qualities of women’s minds and corporeal sensibility. Hence typically ‘female’ collections have included embroideries, lace, and textiles; varied quotidian items like buttons and ribbons; childhood mementos, like dolls; sentimental keepsakes, including jewellery, ornamental boxes, shellwork, and objects fashioned out of hair; ‘fragile’ pieces of porcelain or pottery; or the more amorphous realm of ephemera. Alongside Charlotte Schreiber’s famed collection of English eighteenth-century ceramics, she also bequeathed to the British Museum her remarkable range of fans (1891), historical games (1893), and playing cards (1895). Like another female donor of a previous generation, Sarah Sophia Banks

³⁹ *Lady Charlotte Schreiber’s Journals: Confidences of a Collector of Ceramics and Antiques*, ed. by Montague Guest (London: John Lane, 1911); Louisine W. Havemeyer, *Sixteen to Sixty: Memoirs of a Collector* (New York: privately printed for the Metropolitan Museum, 1961).

⁴⁰ ‘The development of art collectors’ practices and of their social and cultural visibility offers an original and reliable window on to transformations in the condition of women in the West, but also on to what collecting means’ (Verlaine, *Femmes collectionneuses*, p. 20). (‘L’évolution des pratiques des collectionneurs d’art et de leur visibilité sociale et culturelle offre un miroir fidèle et original des transformations de la condition féminine en Occident, mais aussi de ce que ‘collectionner’ veut dire’.) Translation is my own.

(1744–1818), Schreiber saw in paper culture evidence of how major historical and political events resonated on an intimate level.⁴¹ Far from regarding such materials as trivial, it might be argued that throughout the act of salvaging and organizing such diminutive or delicate objects into a collection, women were making a broader claim for their unexpected cultural value (as well as valorizing the labour that went into creating them).⁴²

Within these broad contours, there were numerous exceptions as well as adaptation to new trends. If Victorian women were frequently engaged in curating family memory, they eagerly responded to the advent of photography. The albums of amateur photographers are rich with insights into female agency and sociability.⁴³ The vibrant public interest in the sciences also consolidated women's long-standing participation in the culture of natural history, whether botanical collecting, fossil hunting, seaweed gathering, or, more surprisingly, the grisly art of taxidermy.⁴⁴ Kate Hill suggests that 52 per cent of all the donations made by women to provincial British museums in the period 1880 to 1914 fell into the category of natural history.⁴⁵

Collecting tastes were rarely exclusive, though, and the slender partition between different types of interests is captured in the remarkable figure of Kate Marsden (1859–1931). Missionary, explorer, nurse, and writer, Marsden undertook a pioneering expedition to Siberia in 1891 (supported by Queen Victoria) to create a leper treatment centre. Some of the ethnographic Siberian material she acquired on the trip — including leather mats, or vessels for holding fermented milk — she presented to the British Museum. Other items, including a saddle, a fur coat, and black bread, she exhibited as part of the British section of the Woman's Pavilion at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.⁴⁶ Her collection of shells formed part of the found-

⁴¹ See Arlene Leis, 'Ephemeral Histories: Social Commemoration of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in the Paper Collections of Sarah Sophia Banks', in *Visual Culture and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*, ed. by Satish Padiyar, Philip Shaw, and Philippa Simpson (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 183–99.

⁴² On women and craft, see Talia Schaffer, *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 145–75; Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1996).

⁴³ Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁴⁴ Beth Fowkes Tobin, 'Women, Decorative Arts, and Taxidermy', in *Women and the Material Culture of Death*, ed. by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 31–30.

⁴⁵ Hill, *Women and Museums*, p. 80. See also Kate Hill, "'He knows me ... but not at the museum": Women, Natural History Collecting and Museums, 1880–1914', in *Narrating Objects, Collecting Stories: Essays in Honour of Professor Susan M. Pearce*, ed. by Sandra H. Dudley and others (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 184–95.

⁴⁶ I first discovered Kate Marsden on the blog of Sushma Jansari, 'From Siberia to London: The Sakha Collections at the British Museum', in *The Wonder House*

ing bequest for Bexhill Museum in East Sussex that she helped establish in 1913–14, and for which she also solicited friends to donate Egyptian antiquities. However, she was driven off the board of trustees under a cloud of rumours about financial and sexual impropriety, and the museum refused to accept a portrait donated in her memory.⁴⁷ Marsden's story is mirrored by those of other Victorian female travellers, for whom collecting acted as a commentary on their truly global adventures. Anna (Annie) Brassey (1839–1887) found fame as the author of *A Voyage in the Sunbeam* (1876), a record of the journey she and her husband, Hastings MP Thomas Brassey, took on board the luxury yacht *Sunbeam* (named after their recently deceased daughter). These travels afforded Annie Brassey with the chance to indulge her passion for photography, but also to pick up natural history specimens and ethnographic objects acquired from contacts in Myanmar and Papua New Guinea. These exotic items were displayed in the couple's home on Park Lane in the grand Durbar Hall the Brasseys acquired from the Colonial & Indian Exhibition in 1886. This striking interior and the collections were all donated to Hastings Museum in 1919 (*Fig. 3*).⁴⁸

In this issue of *19* the focus will be largely on objects of cultural value, since it is here that the literature is most developed, and remains intensely topical.⁴⁹ But within this broad category, many scholars have posited that the hierarchical ranking of the fine over decorative arts has strongly gendered connotations. According to one account, the deepening connoisseurship around fine arts was predicated on 'sequestering the decorative to conspicuous consumption and hence gendering it as feminine, antithetical to the masculinist ethos of highbrow moral elitism associated with bourgeois collecting practices'.⁵⁰ In defiance of this intellectual snobbery, Dianne Sachko Macleod has insisted that American female collectors expressed special affinity for the decorative arts in the nineteenth century, advocating the cause of handcrafted and ornamental objects which dignified the domestic realm. In one especially bold move, Macleod draws on alternative psychoanalytic models (derived from Winnicott) to suggest that female collectors regarded their possessions as transitional or therapeutic

<<https://thewonderhouse.co.uk/from-siberia-to-london-the-sakha-collections-at-the-british-museum>> [accessed 24 October 2020].

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Baignet, 'Kate Marsden', in *Geographers*, ed. by Hayden Lorimer and Charles W. J. Withers, *Biobibliographical Studies*, 27 (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 63–92 (p. 74).

⁴⁸ Alison Clark and others, 'More than Souvenirs: Lady Annie Brassey's Curated Collections', *Journeys*, 19 (2018), 82–105.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, the essays gathered together in *Women Artists, Collectors and Patrons: National Trust Historic Houses & Collections Annual* (London: National Trust, 2018).

⁵⁰ John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, 'Introduction: The Material of Visual Cultures', in *Material Cultures, 1740–1920: The Meanings and Pleasures of Collecting*, ed. by John Potvin and Alla Myzelev (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 1–17 (p. 7).



Fig. 3: Photograph of the Durbar Hall in Hastings Museum (donated by the Brassey family in 1919). © Hastings Museum and Art Gallery.

objects, playful prompts to reverie, rather than steps in the quest for mastery associated (via Freud) with their masculine counterparts (*Enchanted Lives*, pp. 12–16). When men acquired antiques, she reasons, they did so typically from worldly ambition or market calculation; women, by contrast, tried ‘to weave artworks into the fabric of the home to comfort them, satisfy their fantasies, and allow them to express their self-identify’ (p. 10).

Macleod’s position tallies with other studies, both sociological and historical, on women’s unique relationship with material things in modernity.⁵¹ Looking at the dawn of the twentieth century, Beverly Gordon has argued that the ‘types of collections that are disproportionately identified with women typically do not involve sets [as male collections often do] at all; they are open-ended and are likely to be based primarily on affective criteria’.⁵² When men and women cooperate in the formation of collections,

⁵¹ As well as Susan Pearce, see the influential work of Russell W. Belk and Melanie Wallendorf, ‘Of Mice and Men: Gender, Identity and Collecting’, in *The Material Culture of Gender: The Gender of Material Culture*, ed. by Katherine Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 7–27.

⁵² Beverly Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women’s Lives, 1890–1940* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), p. 15.

therefore, they bring different emotional needs and perspectives into play. In the case of Charlotte Schreiber, Macleod alleges that the pleasure and playfulness — even ‘foreplay’ — that characterized the hunt for objects with her second (much younger) husband was sublimated when she became a widow, and placed a greater focus on objects that satisfied intellectual criteria (‘Art Collecting’, pp. 24–25, 27). Such a hypothesis represents a bold foray into the psychology of collecting, although in less sensitive hands it can risk slipping into an ahistorical generalization; moreover, there is a danger of consistently ascribing sentimental motives to women collectors that might not be deployed vis-à-vis men. The strong-willed Isabella Stewart Gardner embraced collecting, so it has been argued, due to the traumatic death of her only child, a miscarriage, and a string of family bereavements, so that she turned to beautiful things in search of ‘reinvention’, ‘comfort’, and ‘permanence’.⁵³ However plausible or illuminating this specific claim might be, the assumption that women’s collecting necessarily fulfilled a ludic or a therapeutic function is difficult to sustain.

The gendering of things was never an absolute cultural code, and the broad categories can start to founder under the weight of contrary examples. While collecting fashion and textiles may seem a uniquely feminine interest, historical dress was also avidly sought by male genre painters in late Victorian England — such as John Seymour Lucas, Ernest Crofts, and Talbot Hughes; through their donations, these men were able to promote a much deeper engagement with costume in the Victoria and Albert Museum and London Museum.⁵⁴ These anomalies regarding fashion could be repeated many times over: such as the male passion for gilded snuffboxes, decorated fans, and Renaissance jewels (think Ferdinand de Rothschild and his love of Renaissance fancy dress balls).⁵⁵ Conversely, visitors to Waddesdon Manor today remain startled to learn that the array of firearms and swords lining the corridors of the Bachelor’s Wing were acquired by Ferdinand’s formidable sister, Alice de Rothschild (1847–1922). Historical weaponry was one of her great passions, along with the collection of matchboxes and pipes, which she donated to the museum in Grasse.⁵⁶

It is important, then, to recognize that the gendered conventions around different types of collecting remained supple and subject to change.

⁵³ Rosemary Matthews, ‘Collectors and Why They Collect: Isabella Stewart Gardner and Her Museum of Art’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 21 (2009), 183–89.

⁵⁴ Julia Petrov, ‘“The habit of their age”: English Genre Painters, Dress Collecting, and Museums, 1910–1914’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 20 (2008), 237–51.

⁵⁵ Phillippa Plock, ‘Rothschilds, Rubies and Rogues: The “Renaissance” Jewels of Waddesdon Manor’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 29 (2017), 143–60.

⁵⁶ Phillippa Plock, ‘The Post-Bequest New Smoking Room Collection at Waddesdon Manor’, in *A Rothschild Renaissance: A New Look at the Waddesdon Bequest in the British Museum*, ed. by Pippa Shirley and Dora Thornton (London: British Museum Press, 2017), pp. 61–64.

The decorative arts were a field of widespread intellectual enthusiasm in the later nineteenth century, as the deepening fascination with archaeology and the history of everyday life prompted men to start amassing collections of utilitarian artefacts. As Inge Reist has noted in her otherwise admiring review of Macleod's book, the author's equation between special types of collecting and gender difference 'results in a certain denial of her subject's individualities' and 'seems to oversimplify the issue'.⁵⁷ Far from a sharp demarcation between fine and decorative arts, many female collectors happily explored both, crossing back and forth between the two fields with breezy self-confidence. Take the famous Conn sisters from Baltimore, Etta (1870–1949) and Claribel (1864–1929), who travelled through Europe in the early years of the twentieth century, buying major works by Van Gogh, Matisse, and Picasso. But as revealed by their letters, the sisters were from their first visit to Europe in 1901 also immersed in the art and architecture of Renaissance Italy and felt a compulsion to acquire other kinds of artefacts. As Claribel confessed to her sister in 1924:

I am beginning the buying all over again — but shall stop — how these abayas [Arab robes] wind about me. How the saris [Indian dresses] wind themselves about my very heart — 'throat' would be better for they strangled out all other impulses — and then metal bowls and the beads — now that I stop to reason about it, it is silly foolishness this collecting of things! But it must have some solid foundation — some foundation deep in the hearts of peoples — for look at the thousands who are moved by this same impulse — and look at the museums that have been formed to satisfy this impulse — It is the craving for beauty that is such a vital function of the human soul.

In this passage we can see that the sisters took a common delight in beauty in all its manifestations, whether modern painting, textiles, metalwork, or non-European exotica; as Claribel stated in a letter the previous year: 'I hope to spend a part of each day seeing something beautiful — and the decoratif [*sic*] arts collections can help me as much as any.'⁵⁸

The assumption that women were particularly or uniquely drawn to the decorative arts represents an outgrowth of the bigger connection drawn between women and domesticity and, ultimately, the notion of separate spheres. Over the past thirty years this key concept within feminist history has seemed both intolerable and indispensable, continually propped back

⁵⁷ Inge Reist, review of Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects: American Women Collectors and the Making of Culture, 1800–1940* (2008), *Journal of the History of Collections*, 22 (2010), 162–63.

⁵⁸ Cited in Ellen B. Hirschland and Nancy H. Ramage, 'Bucking the Tide: The Cone Sisters of Baltimore', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 8 (1996), 103–16 (p. 108).

up if only to be subject to another round of critique.⁵⁹ For our purposes, one way out of this circularity is to consider that the domestic was not a secondary concern in the Victorian period, screened off from public debate. Rather, as Deborah Cohen has emphasized in the British context, how a home was furnished became a matter of national importance under the impact of post-incarnationist theology, which saw in material things the expression of moral truths. In its first wave interior decoration carried the stamp of a secular religion, imparting to those pioneering ‘lady advisors’ who were charged with correcting Victorian taste — like the famed Mary Eliza Haweis (1848–1898) — some of the zeal of their clergyman relatives.⁶⁰ If the domestic interior had become a barometer of moral character in the mid-Victorian period, then it naturally preoccupied both sexes. However, handbooks of the time credited women with special sensitivity and skills in this regard. “Art at home” appealed strongly to women because it offered to all women, regardless of their political persuasion or their views on female suffrage or women’s rights, a greater sense of control over their environment’, Judith Neiswander has observed.⁶¹

The advent of the Aesthetic Movement in Britain in the 1860s has therefore appeared as a turning point for women’s assertive engagement with the arts. The female patrons Macleod discusses — notably Mary ‘Eustacia’ Dalrymple Smith (1835–1919) and Frances Dawson Leyland (1834–1910) — were distinguished both by their support for contemporary artists and bohemian disregard for Victorian mores (*Art*, pp. 289, 291–95). If, as Charlotte Gere has argued, the Aesthetic Movement heralded the era of ‘rooms as autobiography’, then domestic spaces were believed to be singularly revealing of an individual’s identity, no matter their sex.⁶² To that extent, it can be difficult to disentangle the history of collecting from the history of interior design; as one scholar puts it: ‘The home interior is the collection “en masse”. It is the hub of a wheel of connections that link personal relationships, objects and spaces.’⁶³ How men and women approached the task of curating the interior could vary considerably: contemporary discourse pictured the male connoisseur selecting antiques for a room as

⁵⁹ See the classic revisionist statement by Amanda Vickery, ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres?: A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History’, *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), 383–414.

⁶⁰ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 1–31.

⁶¹ Judith A. Neiswander, *The Cosmopolitan Interior: Liberalism and the British Home, 1870–1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 84.

⁶² Charlotte Gere, *Artistic Circles: Design and Decoration in the Aesthetic Movement* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010), p. 81.

⁶³ Clive Edwards, ‘Women’s Home-Crafted Objects as Collections of Culture and Comfort, 1750–1900’, in *Material Cultures*, ed. by Potvin and Myzelev, pp. 37–52 (p. 50).

specimens of taste and education, whereas the female collector was more attracted to their sentimental value and associations (Anderson, “The “New Old School””, p. 323). Yet portraiture from the period suggests the self-confident symbiosis between women and their carefully selected things: take the 1879 William Blake Richmond portrait of Elfrida Ionides (1848–1929), member of the celebrated Ionides collecting dynasty, framed by a piece of Japanese kimono silk, wearing a Pre-Raphaelite style dress, and sitting on an elegant Empire-style sofa endorsed by Mrs Haweis (*Fig. 4*).⁶⁴

The long-term impact of this breakthrough, though, was to produce a backlash; at the end of the nineteenth century the British home became linked to women in a derogatory manner, as middle-class men sought to disassociate themselves from Aestheticism’s homosexual associations, and backed away from what seemed an idolatry of material things (Cohen, pp. 89–121). At the same time, a bigger cleavage opened between



Fig. 4: William Blake Richmond, *Mrs Luke Ionides*, 1879, oil on canvas, 102.2 × 115.2 cm, V&A. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

⁶⁴ Mark Evans, ‘An Aesthetic Sitter on an Empire Sofa: William Blake Richmond’s Portrait of Mrs Luke Ionides’, in *Burning Bright: Essays in Honour of David Bindman*, ed. by Diana Dethloff and others (London: UCL Press, 2015), pp. 171–79 (pp. 176–79).

the purposeful realm of collecting and mere shopping, a binary shaped in response to the expanding urban opportunities of the West End precincts and department stores.⁶⁵ While this binary bore only the vaguest relation to actual behaviours, it is nonetheless true that collectors were wary of seeming to follow fashion giddily and instead placed heightened importance on the age, provenance, and authenticity of their purchases over their surface appeal. Scholars of ceramics have revealed how the once supremely popular Old Blue china came by 1900 to connote not just gentility and refinement — especially in the hands of the reliable male art expert — but also effeminacy, over-acculturation, and excess.⁶⁶ At that moment, the field of Chinese ceramics was subject to reclamation by elite men, whose scholarly approach to the topic was explicitly constructed against the long-standing decorative appeal such objects held for women.⁶⁷ In other words, the changing status of oriental porcelain over this period suggests that the gendered associations of a thing did not inhere in its material properties, so much as in the gaze and questions turned upon it. What changed at the dawn of the twentieth century was less the number of female collectors, or what they bought, than the rhetoric through which certain types of (male) collecting were valorized as intellectually serious and socially beneficial.⁶⁸

Women collectors came from a broad range of groups and professions: royal and aristocratic women were joined by *salonnières*, hostesses, travellers, even courtesans. Aesthetic and worldly motives were often muddled together: the involvement of Lady Caroline Blanche Lindsay (1844–1912) in the Grosvenor Galleries, that hub of English Aestheticism opened in 1877, represented an extension of her sway over London society, ‘another stop on the ritualized merry-go-round of elite social life’.⁶⁹ In Twickenham, Frances, Countess Waldegrave (1821–1879) restored and extended Strawberry Hill, turning it into a major hub of Victorian political sociability. Her tastes extended from contemporary portraitists like James Sant to Renaissance cassones and reacquiring pieces from the fabled Horace Walpole collection. Interestingly, Lady Waldegrave had a strongly theatrical background and a Jewish father, the cantor and opera singer John Braham.⁷⁰ The role of Jewish women in promoting

⁶⁵ Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 108–41.

⁶⁶ Anne Anderson, ‘“Chinomania”: Collecting Old Blue for the House Beautiful, c. 1860–1900’, in *Material Cultures*, ed. by Potvin and Myzelev, pp. 109–28 (p. 126).

⁶⁷ Stacey Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums: The Field of Chinese Ceramics in Britain, 1560–1960* (Bern: Lang, 2007), pp. 99–100.

⁶⁸ On this point, see Elizabeth Emery, *Reframing Japonisme: Women and the Asian Art Market in Nineteenth-Century France, 1853–1914* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

⁶⁹ Jacqueline Yallop, *Magpies, Squirrels & Thieves: How the Victorians Collected the World* (London: Atlantic, 2011), p. 44.

⁷⁰ Claire Leighton, ‘Designing a Political Space’, in *Narrating Objects*, ed. by Dudley and others, pp. 153–66.

literary and artistic salons has been recognized as a pan-European phenomenon.⁷¹ For many female collectors, the intrinsic quality of any single work of art was balanced against its contribution to a harmonious or ‘poetic’ interior. By the later nineteenth century, owning a collection was a prerequisite to styling oneself as a bohemian, a leader of fashion, or a creative personality. Victoria Mills has underlined not just the ubiquity of bric-à-brac in the homes and novels of Victorian writers, but also correlated it with forms of non-normative gender identity.⁷² Female artists and performers were no exception: in addition to her work as a photographer, sculptor, and theatre manager, actress Sarah Bernhardt presided as a queen over her domestic realm, filled with exotic bibelots and lavish furniture, as captured in the 1879 watercolour by Marie-Désiré Bourgoïn (*Fig. 5*).⁷³

Generalizations about the gender of diverse branches of material culture need to be carefully contextualized. Differences between male and female collecting were often of degree, rather than of kind. A systematic comparison of donors to the Louvre and the Art Institute of Chicago in the period reveals a similar proportion of historical and modern paintings bequeathed by women when compared to men, with only a slight increase when it came to the decorative arts, such as ceramics and textiles (50 per cent from women donors versus 40 per cent from men) or particular genres (20 per cent of portraits from women versus 15 per cent from men).⁷⁴ Beyond this note of caution, two other observations are pertinent for this issue of *19*. The first is that female collectors belonged to family units that often shaped and supported their own efforts. While it is crucial to recover the agency of women whose actions have been concealed behind the names of their husbands, it can be ahistorical to go to the other extreme of treating women in isolation, or in adversarial terms, pitting them against their family networks. Some intriguing rediscoveries of Victorian female artists and collectors — such as the Swinburnes: Emily (1798–1882) and Julia (1795–1893) — have occurred by highlighting the

⁷¹ See Emily D. Bilski, Emily Braun, and others, *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (New York: New York Jewish Museum, 2005).

⁷² Victoria Mills, ‘Bricabracomania! Collecting, Corporeality and the Problem of Things in Victorian Fiction’, in *Literary Bric-à-Brac and the Victorians: From Commodities to Oddities*, ed. by Jonathon Shears and Jen Harrison (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 33–47.

⁷³ See Carole Ockham, Kenneth Silver, and others, *Sarah Bernhardt: The Art of High Drama* (New York: Jewish Museum of New York, 2005), p. 46.

⁷⁴ Véronique Long, *Mécènes des deux mondes: les collectionneurs donateurs du Louvre et de l'Art Institute de Chicago, 1879–1940* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007), p. 159.



Fig. 5: Marie-Désiré Bourgoïn, *L'Atelier de Sarah Bernhardt*, 1879, watercolour and gouache over graphite, 67.8 × 53.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum, New York.
© Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

role of intergenerational transmission.⁷⁵ The family often represented the origins and parameters of women's collecting, and also proved an invaluable resource for its success.

A second observation concerns the cosmopolitanism of these women's horizons. British women's collecting was catalysed by the encounter with Europe. The memoirs of Mary Elizabeth Lucy (1803–1889) record the dramatic impact of the grand Continental tour she took with her husband from 1840 to 1842, during which she visited artists' studios in Rome and inspected Lord Hertford's collection at Bagatelle in Paris.⁷⁶ In intellectual terms women could act as key relays in the transmission of scholarship

⁷⁵ Kathryn Moore Heliak, "The "Swinburne Ladies" and the Arts", *Journal of the History of Collections*, 16 (2004), 267–84.

⁷⁶ *Mistress of Charlecote: The Memoirs of Mary Elizabeth Lucy, 1803–1889*, ed. by Elsie Burch Donald (London: Orion, 2002), pp. 50–51, 60, 67, 70.

about the visual arts: alongside the handbooks about painting — such as Lady Eastlake on Johann David Passavant and Gustav Waagen, or Louise Richter (1852–1938) on Giovanni Morelli — in the decorative arts there were Fanny Bury Palliser's (1805–1878) translations of Jules Labarte and Albert Jacquemart, or Mrs M. P. Nickerson's 1891 translation of Louis Gonse's seminal work on Japanese design.⁷⁷ Well aware of the challenge of finding cultural role models in the past, female collectors could seek inspiration by looking across the Channel, across the Alps, or across the pond. Macleod begins her survey of American female collecting with the extraordinary figure of Eliza Bowen Jumel (1775–1865), the auction of whose collection allowed New York audiences to enjoy the first (temporary) exhibition of old masters at the American Academy of Fine Arts in 1817. During her years living in Paris, Jumel found a model of female collecting in figures like the Duchesse de Berri (1798–1870), and her friend the Comtesse Tascher de la Pagerie.⁷⁸ In this act of European self-fashioning, Jumel looked ahead to later American female collectors like Alva Vanderbilt (1853–1933), whose 'cultural tourism' borrowed elements from the Gothic, the Venetian Renaissance, and the courts of Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette to style herself as an arbiter of New England society.⁷⁹ Paragons of women patrons and collectors, just like networks of artistic advice, operated across borders, moving through different museum landscapes.

Cultural philanthropy and public collections

In an important edited volume from 1995, Clarissa Campbell Orr called on scholars to reflect on women's entry into the 'enlarged public sphere', in turn feminizing a range of professions and changing the dynamics of the cultural marketplace.⁸⁰ Already in the late eighteenth century, women were involved in the production, reproduction, display, and even restoration of works of art.⁸¹ The significance of female curiosity dealers awaits further analysis, although their names crop up in Lady Charlotte Schreiber's

⁷⁷ See Rosemary Mitchell, 'Palliser, Fanny Bury (1805–1878)', *ODNB* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/21164>>.

⁷⁸ Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'Eliza Bowen Jumel: Collecting and Cultural Politics in Early America', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 13 (2001), 57–75 (pp. 65–66).

⁷⁹ Paul F. Miller, 'Alva Vanderbilt Belmont, *arbiter elegantiarum*, and her Gothic Salon at Newport, Rhode Island', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 27 (2015), 347–62.

⁸⁰ Clarissa Campbell Orr, 'Introduction: Women in the Victorian Art World', in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. by Campbell Orr, pp. 1–30 (p. 13).

⁸¹ Noémie Étienne, 'La pensée dans la pratique: le cas de Marie-Jacob Godefroid, restauratrice de tableaux au XVIII^e siècle', in *Plumes et pinceaux: discours de femmes sur l'art en Europe (1750–1850)*, ed. by Melissa Hyde, Mechtilde Fend, and Anne Lafont, 2 vols (Paris: Les Presses du réel, 2012), 1, 77–98.

journals.⁸² Female dealers seem to have been more acclaimed in nineteenth-century Paris than in London: consider Laurentine-Françoise Bernage, known as Madame Camille Lelong (1840–1902), who traded from the quai de Béthune, and whose posthumous sale in 1903 was one of the most spectacular of the belle époque. The *Burlington Gazette* was full of admiration for Madame Lelong, who had ‘accumulated during her life, with jealous but enlightened ardour, so many beautiful or charming objects!’⁸³ London was ahead of Paris, though, in having the first interior design company run by women. R. & A. Garrett opened behind Baker Street station in 1875. Agnes Garrett (1845–1935), a central figure in the Queen Anne revival, was also a passionate suffragist, like her sisters Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Millicent Fawcett, suggesting the potential links between forms of artistic and political activism.⁸⁴

Right across Europe women were clearly making advances in art training, professional organization, and in public exhibition, especially from the 1880s. Between the notorious case of Lady Butler’s failed bid to enter the Royal Academy in 1879 and Annie Swynnerton’s election as an associate of the same body in 1922, the visibility and commercial practice of female artists in Britain had transformed.⁸⁵ Despite the enduring problem of unequal pay, Maria Quirk has proposed that women artists’ versatility and savvy enabled them to successfully cater to the demands of ‘middle-brow’ customers in the 1880s and 1890s, even if this ultimately damaged their long-term reputation.⁸⁶ On the other hand, however, while we see a growing number making and consuming art, these changes were only very slowly reflected in the constitution of public, as opposed to private, collections. ‘A collection is a language of the community in the case of a public collection,’ Julie Codell has glossed, ‘and all collections are selective in

⁸² In Mark Westgarth’s invaluable dictionary of antique dealers, the journals of Charlotte Schreiber are the source for Flaudin (‘a female curiosity dealer in Paris trading in the 1870s’) and Stern (‘a female curiosity dealer in Wex Strasse, Hamburg, Germany’). The dictionary also records Mrs Matilda Arnell running a ‘tobacconist and curiosity shop’ in 1860 in Lisson Grove and Mrs Jemmina Clement, a ‘curiosity dealer’, on Brownlow Street, Holborn around the same date. See Mark Westgarth, *A Biographical Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Antique and Curiosity Dealers* (2009) <<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/42902/6/WestgarthM1.pdf>> [accessed 24 October 2020], pp. 64, 80, 102, 168.

⁸³ Georges Riat, ‘Foreign Sales I — Paris’, *Burlington Gazette*, August 1903, pp. 153–55 (p. 155).

⁸⁴ Emma Ferry, ‘“Decorators May be Compared to Doctors”: An Analysis of Rhoda and Agnes Garrett’s *Suggestions for House Decorating in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture* (1876)’, *Journal of Design History*, 16 (2003), 15–33.

⁸⁵ For a European overview, see Linda L. Clark, *Women and Achievement in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 83–98.

⁸⁶ Maria Quirk, *Women, Art and Money in Late Victorian and Edwardian England: The Hustle and the Scramble* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

what they define as collectible and how they group those collectibles into a public language of things.⁸⁷ To that extent, the difficulty for women to gain a foothold within public institutions — to speak, as it were, the public language of things — is indicative of persistent restrictions on female participation. The analysis in this section explores women's uneven efforts to shape public collections, and notes that while they were still excluded from senior roles in museum governance, there is evidence that collecting was increasingly enmeshed with national affairs.

One avenue for doing so was through participation in exhibitions. In 1851 London socialite Harriet Elizabeth Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, Duchess of Sutherland (1806–1868) summoned other elite women such as Countess Greville and Lady John Russell to Stafford House to work out how to support the planned Crystal Palace Exhibition. The fundraising committee they presided over raised through subscriptions within a few weeks 'an astounding £975'.⁸⁸ On a more intimate scale, exhibitions shaped by members were the heart of the Burlington Fine Arts Club, founded in 1866. Although excluded from official membership, the club's historian insists that women made a 'significant' contribution as lenders in their own right to the organization throughout its long history and should not be reduced to mere 'secondary collectors'.⁸⁹ Beyond winning scholarly recognition, exhibitions could be the springboard for a bigger intervention into political affairs. In the late 1870s female art lovers such as Charlotte Schreiber, her daughter Lady Enid Layard (1843–1912), and Angela Burdett-Coutts were keen supporters of the display and sale of textiles made by female war refugees under the auspices of the Turkish Compassionate Fund (Baikin, *Culture of Property*, p. 128). At this same moment the United States pioneered the formation of women's committees within museums, first trialled at the Centennial Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876. The women's committee there was headed up by a great-granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin, Elizabeth Duane Gillespie (1821–1901), a formidable fundraiser and organizer who was dubbed the 'imperial wizard, the arch-tycoon' working behind the scenes.⁹⁰

In a broader canvas there is no doubt that the biggest stage of all was represented by the Universal expositions. In Julie Verlaine's analysis, these mammoth attractions catalysed the artistic interests of American visitors coming to Paris. In 1889 Bertha Honoré Palmer (1849–1918) acquired

⁸⁷ Julie F. Codell, 'Collecting and Iconography: On Art's Means and Media — Introduction', *Visual Resources*, 27 (2011), 13–17 (p. 15).

⁸⁸ Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 66.

⁸⁹ Stacey J. Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London: The Burlington Fine Arts Club* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 30.

⁹⁰ Gary B. Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 271–73.

not just Gobelins tapestries but Edgar Degas's *On the Stage* for \$500, and she returned to the United States with twenty-nine Monets and eleven Renoirs (*Fig. 6*). What is more, the agent she left on the spot, Sarah Tyson Hallowell, oversaw the export of further Impressionist paintings to the Chicago Interstate Industrial Exhibition of 1890. It was an arrangement echoed by that of Louisine Havemeyer — who also visited Paris in 1889



Fig. 6: Anders Zorn, *Mrs Potter Palmer*, 1893, oil on canvas, 258 × 141.2 cm, Chicago Art Institute. Wikimedia Commons.

and found it ‘enchanting’— and her appointed intermediary, the painter Mary Cassatt.⁹¹ Following American precedents, Verlaine also signals the growing role of women on the organizing committees of European exhibitions by the *fin de siècle*. The Union centrale des arts décoratifs in 1896 formed a *comité des dames* made up of forty female volunteers to assist with fundraising and coordination; it featured some glittering names in Parisian society (the Comtesse Rénée Béarn, the Duchesse d’Uzès, the Comtesse de Greffulhe, Julie Siegfried, as well as photographer Antoinette Bucquet and painter Madeleine Lemaire). ‘During this period when women were still considered minors from a political and legal standpoint, taking part in such ladies’ clubs was a form of civic involvement, a space for female collective action and self-fulfilment’, Verlaine writes (‘Expositions and Collections’, p. 37). Soon, exhibitions were not simply organized by women, but were also championing women’s contribution as their central theme, whether the 1889 Loan Exhibition of Women’s Industries in Bristol, the 1892 Paris Exposition des arts de la femme, or the much touted Women’s Building at the Columbian World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893 (borrowing from Philadelphia’s first Woman’s Pavilion in 1876). Its driving force had been Bertha Palmer, elected president of the Board of Lady Managers to oversee the creation of a structure designed and decorated exclusively by women. As Mary Cassatt reflected, ‘I suppose it is Mrs Palmer’s French blood which gives her organizing powers and her determination that women should be *someone* and not *something*.’⁹²

Whatever the problems in its execution, including negative response to Cassatt’s own (lost) murals, the 1893 Women’s Building typifies what some scholars have seen as a mode of ‘matronage’, namely the support of women patrons for women artists. Deborah Cherry has claimed evidence of this can be found in mid-Victorian Britain, starting with the Queen herself (who acquired works by Emily Mary Osborn) and extending to Lady Angela Burdett-Coutts (who bought works by Mary Ann Criddle, Anna Mary Howitt, and Rebecca Solomon) (*Fig. 7*). Such purchases were an extension of these women’s philanthropic commitments, so that while matronage might sometimes involve ties of kinship, it was ‘primarily organized on the axis of class’.⁹³ It is important to remember that Burdett-Coutts, although interested in female issues (witness the support for the

⁹¹ Julie Verlaine, ‘Expositions and Collections: Women Art Collectors and Patrons in the Age of the Great Expositions’, in *Women in International and Universal Exhibitions, 1876–1937*, ed. by Myriam Boussahba-Bravard and Rebecca Rogers, Routledge Research in Gender and History, 28 (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 27–47 (pp. 31–32, 35). My thanks to Julie Verlaine for sharing her chapter with me.

⁹² Cited in Charlotte Gere and Marina Vaizey, *Great Women Collectors* (London: Wilson, 1999), p. 131.

⁹³ Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 102–03.



Fig. 7: James Drummond, *Portrait of the Baroness Burdett Coutts and Her Companion, Mrs Brown, Edinburgh*, 1874, oil on canvas, 52.1 × 73.7 cm, private collection. © Christie's.

Art Students' Home for Women in Brunswick Square in 1879), was no supporter of female suffrage, and her collecting instincts were in line with 'conservative mid-Victorian values' (Macleod, *Art*, p. 348). Indeed, a thesis based on her remarkable collections underlines that contemporary women painters played a relatively minor place within it, compared to the importance of the old masters that she acquired, especially the nineteen canvases she bought at the 1856 Samuel Rogers sale. In his diary for May that year, Henry Crabb Robinson recorded:

I dined again at Miss Coutts ... An interesting subject to talk on was the sale of Rogers' pictures, of which Miss Coutts has been a very large purchaser; and she gains credit by the good taste she showed in her selection. Some half dozen of my favourites were there, *The Mob-Capped Girl*, *The Lady Sketching*, *the Cupid and Psyche* ... *The Raphael Christ In the Garden*, *the Paul Veronese Festival*. There would be no end should I go on ...⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Cited in Susan S. Lewis, 'The Artistic and Architectural Patronage of Baroness Angela Burdett Coutts', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway, 2012), 1, 80.

While owning a Raphael, a Murillo, a Poussin, and a Guercino won her esteem among male peers, she was not simply assimilating to their tastes. In her rather precocious delight in eighteenth-century portraits by Reynolds, she also celebrated artists with links to her grandparents and wider family. Nonetheless, these historic paintings were central to her reputation as a collector, whereas her public support of women's causes stemmed as much from moral welfare matters as from artistic sympathy (Lewis, 1, 105).

Cherry's work has also looked at the separatist agenda among female artists, eager to carve out their own, exclusive spaces of female solidarity and support. Consider the series of artworks bequeathed to all-female Oxbridge colleges, such as Emily Ford's *Towards the Dawn*, presented to Newnham by Millicent Fawcett in 1899, or Emily Mary Osborn's portrait of Barbara Bodichon for Girton. 'In these institutional spaces women were surrounded by, and could construct meanings for, images of the women who in the past and the present had been active in the struggles for women's education, employment and civil rights', Cherry notes.⁹⁵ Feminist organizations were eagerly forming their own pantheons of illustrious forebears. Helen Blackburn (1842–1903), secretary to the London branch of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, and editor of the *Englishwoman's Review*, assembled 190 photographs and engravings for a 'portrait gallery of eminent women' throughout the ages that she exhibited at the British section of the Women's Building at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, and ultimately donated to the Women's Student Room of University College, Bristol.⁹⁶ Another important example would be Christiana Herringham (1852–1929), a close friend of Millicent Fawcett, who not only supported living women artists like Annie Swynnerton but, with her husband Wilmot Herringham, another supporter of women's education, donated many of her books, albums, and paintings to what was then Bedford College (today, they form one third of Royal Holloway's fine-art collections).⁹⁷

How far, though, could female collectors change the face of national institutions, or persuade them to accommodate an explicitly feminist vision? Here the picture is rather mixed. Nationally, there were no official female curators until the end of the Victorian era, with Kate Marion Hall at Whitechapel (1894–1909) and then Bertha Hindshaw at Manchester Art Museum in 1912.⁹⁸ Nor were there any female trustees at any major national

⁹⁵ *Painting Women*, pp. 108–09. See also, Deborah Cherry, 'Women Artists and the Politics of Feminism', in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. by Campbell Orr, pp. 49–69 (pp. 61–67).

⁹⁶ Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850–1900* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 195.

⁹⁷ Christiana Herringham's contribution to Bedford College was explored in an exhibition at Royal Holloway, 'Christiana Herringham: Artist, Collector, Campaigner' (14 January–1 April 2019).

⁹⁸ Hill, *Women and Museums*, pp. 23–25; Campbell Orr, 'Introduction', p. 23.

institution before 1956 (a situation remedied at the National Gallery only in 1962, with the first female curator appointed only in 1978). At the British Museum, women had been allowed to be temporarily employed as reading-room attendants during the First World War, although the first woman to become a curator was only appointed in 1931.⁹⁹ Nor was the situation any better at South Kensington. ‘Alas for the V&A’s reputation among feminists,’ the recent institutional history has concluded, ‘the only significant woman who worked on the site in the nineteenth century was Mrs Cottan, who ran the restaurant for 20 years.’¹⁰⁰ Any influence exerted by women over the management of museums had to be done through informal channels, where it was more easily discounted. The advice the widowed Lady Eastlake continued to supply about the administration of the National Gallery — including the nepotistic promotion of her nephew — earned her an enduring ‘reputation for interference’.¹⁰¹ Bailkin’s claims for an insurgent ‘feminist museology’ from the 1880s and 1890s can be overstated.¹⁰²

Women did play a role as donors at some national museums, however, most notably Lady Wallace, whose donation to the British state in 1897 founded the Wallace Collection. Exciting work by Susanna Avery-Quash and Christine Riding has also begun to map the significance of their contribution at the National Gallery. The authors have profiled the women from different social backgrounds (royal, aristocratic, Jewish, relatives of artists or sitters, Americans, etc.) who have given paintings or financial gifts to the gallery since its foundation. Some well-known names, such as Rosalind Frances, Countess of Carlisle (1845–1921), coexist with overlooked figures such as Emilie Yznaga (1859–1944), the New York-born, Paris-resident, plantation heiress, and owner of French eighteenth-century paintings. While many collectors of both sexes have quickly faded from institutional memory, the survey concludes that the vast majority of gifts from women in particular are currently languishing in store, just as past bequests from women donors like Lady Lindsay or Mary Venetia Stanley (1887–1948) were partly turned down on qualitative grounds; other gifts have been hidden through transfer to the Tate or obscured through simple mislabelling.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ David M. Wilson, *The British Museum: A History* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), p. 216.

¹⁰⁰ Anthony Burton, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publishing, 1999), p. 123.

¹⁰¹ Julie Sheldon, ‘“His Best Successor”: Lady Eastlake and the National Gallery’, in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. by Kate Hill (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 61–74 (p. 71).

¹⁰² Jordanna Bailkin, ‘Picturing Feminism, Selling Liberalism: The Case of the Disappearing Holbein’, *Gender & History*, 11 (1999), 145–63 (p. 147).

¹⁰³ Susanna Avery-Quash and Christine Riding, ‘Two Hundred Years of Women Benefactors at the National Gallery: An Exercise in Mapping Uncharted Territory’,

At the V&A, Charlotte Schreiber aside, women donors played a much lesser role, despite their supposed affinity for decorative arts — although some did succeed in preserving the achievements of male relatives: Isabel Constable (1823–1888) was the main inheritor of her father’s studio, and in 1888, along with her sister Maria Louise and brother Bicknell, she left South Kensington no less than 97 paintings and 297 drawings and water-colours (she presented other works to the National Gallery); upon her death in 1938, May Morris — founder of the Guild of Women’s Artists in 1907 — left to the V&A drawings, textiles, ceramics, and embroideries by her father and his associates, Philip Webb and Evelyn De Morgan, as well as jewellery belonging to her mother Jane Morris.¹⁰⁴ Emilia Dilke’s impressive art history library was formed with a view of it going to the museum, which it did after her death in 1904. But even here there is a family pattern, as she continued a precedent set by her husband’s father, Sir Charles Dilke, who gave books and pamphlets related to the Great Exhibition to the museum throughout the 1860s.¹⁰⁵

Of course, we rarely have any idea whether such donors saw themselves as advancing a female agenda in the arts or education, either through the act of giving or what they gave. Scholarship has been more detailed about self-conscious feminists, although their impact on national art collections was generally marginal. It is striking that Blackburn’s campaign in 1891 — backed by luminaries like Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Frances Power Cobbe, Annie Swynnerton, and Emily Ford — to have the National Portrait Gallery accept a portrait of Lydia Becker, founder of the Manchester Suffrage Society, was a failure.¹⁰⁶ In her wide review of women at the National Portrait Gallery in the nineteenth century, Lara Perry has noted that the fascination with British queens and ‘history’s beauties’ did not extend to space for more political women or contemporary female portraitists.¹⁰⁷ Outside of London too, the progress of work by women hung in public collections was slow: although the work of a woman — Sophie Anderson’s *Elaine* (Fig. 8) — first entered a civic museum collection, that of Liverpool, in 1871, the same institution had acquired by purchase or

Journal of Art Historiography (forthcoming, 2020). I am grateful to Susanna Avery-Quash for sharing her revelatory research.

¹⁰⁴ *V&A Archive Research Guide: Donors, Collectors and Dealers Associated with the Museum and the History of Its Collections* <https://vanda-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/2019/05/02/14/01/30/203468f3-777f-48b1-8b7e-13551dc47462/Donors_collectors_research_guide.pdf> [accessed 27 October 2020].

¹⁰⁵ Rowan Watson, ‘The Growth of the Library Collection, 1837–1909’, in *Word & Image: Art, Books and Design from the National Art Library*, ed. by Rowan Watson, Elizabeth James, and Julius Bryant (London: V&A Publishing, 2015), pp. 27–44 (p. 40).

¹⁰⁶ Instead it was exhibited in the offices of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women’s Suffrage (Cherry, *Beyond the Frame*, p. 248, n. 183).

¹⁰⁷ Lara Perry, *History’s Beauties: Women and the National Portrait Gallery, 1856–1900* (New York: Routledge, 2006).



Fig. 8: Sophie Anderson, *Elaine*, 1870, oil on canvas, 158.4 × 207 cm, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. Wikimedia Commons.

donation only thirteen works by women by 1900 (Cherry, *Painting Women*, p. 100). At the Mappin Art Gallery in Sheffield, female artists accounted for nine of 217 artists in the collection by 1914 (Waterfield, *People's Galleries*, p. 216).

Kate Hill has shown that museums which did tend to afford more opportunities for female leadership were more closely related to social reform than to the cult of fine art. Already in the 1880s the Ruskin Museum in Sheffield was in the charge of female caretakers, despite Ruskin's own notorious pronouncements about women's capacities (*Women and Museums*, pp. 183–216). Other institutions with a Ruskinian ethos also provided a platform for female initiative, such as Harriet Barnett's energetic promotion of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, a civilizing mission for the slums that she christened 'a daring social blending of East and West'.¹⁰⁸ Of all such initiatives, the gallery in the Manchester suburb of Ancoats, directed from the 1870s by Thomas Horsfall, was in a league of its own in making women welcome, since it included a Mother's Room, intended for small children and their mothers, and accordingly furnished (Waterfield, *People's Galleries*, p. 243). Women's engagement with such public institutions was a by-product of the wider wave of women's social activism. From the 1860s, charity was increasingly seen less as a private matter than a woman's virtuous public duty, driving the construction of distinct cultural spaces in

¹⁰⁸ Cited in Brandan Taylor, *Art for the Nation: Exhibitions and the London Public, 1747–2001* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), p. 89.

which women could discuss matters of policy together.¹⁰⁹ At the South London Gallery founded in Camberwell in 1879, women experienced more opportunities for decision-making than they would at the more conservative Royal Academy. Of thirty-eight artists listed as donating their work to the South London Gallery exhibitions in 1895, eight were women, including Louise Jopling (1843–1933), Evelyn De Morgan (1855–1919), and Clara Montalba (1840–1929). Other friends and lenders to the gallery counted the authors Anna Swanwick and Susanna Winkworth, both keenly interested in working-class reform, as well as Baroness Burdett-Coutts, Georgiana Burne-Jones (1840–1920), Mary Watts (1849–1938), Constance Battersea, and Octavia Hill (1838–1912). Most telling of all, in 1890 a quarter of its twenty-strong council were female.¹¹⁰

If such philanthropic museums were one key exception to the general, male-dominated trend, another is house or collection museums. ‘Women founded or co-founded half of all collection museums’, notes Anne Higonnet in her international survey of the phenomenon. ‘Few, if any, types of institution enabled such equal access to the public sphere.’¹¹¹ Higonnet has pinpointed their founders’ odd blend of exhibitionism and reserve:

The entire type of the collection museum was an exception to the polarities between a public institution and a private home. It offered a kind of space in between: a space in which the usual gender roles could be adapted. It appealed to unusual men, whose identity sought shelter from public life while still founding a public institution. And it appealed to unusual women, whose identity sought exposure while still pretending to stay at home.¹¹²

In an era in which the house museums for writers, composers, and painters were multiplying across Europe, women artists (whether amateur or professional) saw the appeal of such memorial spaces. Painter N lie Jacquemart (1841–1912) created not one but two: her Paris townhouse on boulevard Haussmann that she shared with her banker husband  douard Andr , and the evocative country estate of Chaalis that was her

¹⁰⁹ Andrea Geddes Poole, *Philanthropy and the Construction of Victorian Women’s Citizenship: Lady Frederick Cavendish and Miss Emma Cons* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

¹¹⁰ Giles Waterfield, ‘Art for the People’, in *Art for the People: Culture in the Slums of Late Victorian Britain*, ed. by Giles Waterfield (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1994), pp. 31–63 (pp. 51–52).

¹¹¹ Anne Higonnet, *A Museum of One’s Own: Private Collecting, Public Gift* (Pittsburgh: Periscope, 2009), p. 192.

¹¹² Anne Higonnet, ‘Self-Portrait as a Museum’, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 52 (2007), 198–211 (p. 210).

own achievement, bequeathed to the Institut de France in 1912.¹¹³ Through marriage, Swiss-born Adèle d’Affry (1836–1879) became the Duchess Castiglione-Colonna, although it was only after her husband’s death that she discovered her artistic vocation in Rome. Known as Marcello, she emerged as a major sculptress in the Second Empire, patronized by the imperial court and exhibited at the Royal Academy. In her final years she sought to set up a memorial within the cantonal museum of her birthplace, Fribourg, in which her own work and collection of paintings were shown alongside her furniture, tapestries, and mementos from friends (*Fig. 9*).¹¹⁴ Such a mixed mode of display associated with the ‘period room’ craze was in general far more common in Europe – and in the United States – than in Britain. Here, it was far more standard to divide up different branches of the visual and decorative arts, either between different institutions or, as at the Bowes Museum, at least between different floors of the same building. The fact that the Lady Lever Art Gallery and especially the Wallace Collection break from this rule only underlines the fact that the mix of decorative and fine arts there might speak to an un-British way of proceeding.¹¹⁵

The comparison with France in this period is revealing: despite a legal situation which was more unfavourable than that in Britain, French women did fare better in shaping the museum landscape.¹¹⁶ This was mirrored in



Fig. 9: Georges Clairin, *Marcello dans son atelier*, 1871, oil on canvas, Musée d’art et d’histoire Fribourg (MAHF). © MAHF.

¹¹³ See Virginie Monnier, *Édouard André: un homme, une famille, une collection* (Paris: Les Éditions de l’amateur, 2006), pp. 178–214.

¹¹⁴ Caterina Y. Pierre, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Musée Marcello’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 18 (2006), 211–23.

¹¹⁵ Giles Waterfield, *Palaces of Art: Art Galleries in Britain, 1790–1990* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1991), p. 24.

¹¹⁶ On French female artist collectors, see Tom Stammers, ‘Social Enterprise’, *Apollo*, September 2020, pp. 44–49.

the higher respect and training facilities accorded to female painters in Paris, and the role of the visual arts in education and urban culture. In the eyes of British feminists, 'France therefore inevitably gained a position as a country favouring women's art.'¹¹⁷ Beyond the celebrated case of N lie Jacquemart, there is much work to be done on female collectors beyond Paris: on Marie Grobet (n e Labadi ) (1852–1944) who in 1920 gave to the city of Marseilles the collection formed by her father, herself, and her two husbands, taking great interest in its opening to the public, and providing supplementary funds for its upkeep; or on Jeanne Magnin (1855–1937), an artist who, along with her brother Maurice, created the collection of paintings and drawings from the Northern, Italian, and French schools (which she catalogued), now in the Dijon museum.¹¹⁸ Perhaps most remarkable, as it occurred fifty years earlier, was the collection of 556 Italian, French, Dutch, and Flemish paintings bequeathed by the Comtesse d'H ricourt de Valincourt (n e Gabrielle Le Maistre de Sacy) (1798–1875) to the town of La F re. If she had shared her collecting passion with her husband, she substantially expanded its reach during her decades as a widow. A pious monarchist and music lover, the comtesse preferred to create a public gallery in her birthplace rather than enrich her 'unworthy' son (who outraged her by marrying a Protestant). She pledged the entire collection on the condition that the town of La F re would create a museum named after her mother, Jeanne d'Aboveille, 'who allowed her to dedicate herself to the arts'.¹¹⁹ It is tempting to see Jos phine Bowes or Am lie Julie Castelnau, Lady Wallace, whose outlooks can seem eccentric in a British context, as extending forms of female cultural philanthropy more familiar across the Channel.

The last dimension to briefly consider is women's contribution to the formation of national collections through subscription. In the late nineteenth century, the possession of art was increasingly pulled into other forms of geopolitical rivalry, and European citizens were urged to support their national institutions against foreign, especially American, challengers. In 1890 it seemed as if Jean-Fran ois Millet's pastoral masterpiece *The Gleaners* was about to be lost across the Atlantic until Jeanne-Alexandrine Pommery (1819–1891), champagne maker, stepped in to buy it at a record-breaking

¹¹⁷ Edward Morris, *French Art in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 105.

¹¹⁸ For Marie Grobet, see *  la d couverte du mus e Grobet-Labadi  — une vie de collectionneuse: les cahiers de Marie Grobet*, ed. by Beno t Coutancier (Marseilles: Illustria, 2019).

¹¹⁹ See Carole Blumenfeld, 'La comtesse d'H ricourt, fondatrice du mus e de La F re', *La Gazette Drouot*, 15 February 2019 <<https://www.gazette-drouot.com/article/la-comtesse-d-hericourt-fondatrice-du-musee-de-la-25C2%25Aofere/4625>> [accessed 25 October 2020]. My thanks to  leonore D rison for informing me of this remarkable collection.

price, bequeathing it to the Louvre in her will.¹²⁰ As prices and competition continued to soar, in 1897 the Société des amis du Louvre was founded and, after an extensive advertising campaign, within a year it had 301 subscribers. Gifts from female donors were crucial to replenishing funds in the early years, such as the 20,000 francs from Madame Alexandre Weill and her son David Weill in 1909.¹²¹ Although women were absent from the council — a situation that endured until 1963 — the société benefited hugely from the support of female members like the so-called ‘marquise rouge’ Marie Peyrat, Marquise Arconati-Visconti (1840–1923). This ardent republican and anticlerical, with estates across Europe and a formidable salon held in her home on rue Barbet de Jouy, was described by Gustave Lanson as a ‘professional philanthropist’ (*bienfaitrice professionnelle*). Alongside major gifts to the Université de Paris, the Musée Carnavalet, the Musée des arts décoratifs, and museums in Lyons and Angers, she also presented some of her medieval and Renaissance collections to the Louvre in 1914, where she had built up close relations with the curatorial staff.¹²²

These French initiatives were the explicit inspiration for the National Art Collections Fund (NACF) in Britain. The initial planning meeting occurred in Christiana Herringham’s drawing room on Wimpole Street in 1903. ‘For about a year I had been trying to get all sorts of people I knew to start an Amis du Louvre in England’, Herringham wrote in one letter. ‘They all said it would be impossible in England because of cliques and jealousies.’¹²³ The daughter of art collector and stockbroker Thomas Wilde Powell, Herringham was also an artist leading the tempera revival, a translator, and keen traveller in India where she copied Buddhist wall paintings.¹²⁴ In addition to providing the initial £200 to cover expenses at the NACF, the organization also benefited from her family connections: co-founder Robert de Witt was a cousin, and her sisters Agnes Dixon (1865–1918), Eleanor Powell, and Theodora Powell (1871–1920) were all

¹²⁰ Bradley Fratello, ‘France Embraces Millet: The Intertwined Fates of “The Gleaners” and “The Angelus”’, *Art Bulletin*, 85 (2003), 685–701 (p. 696).

¹²¹ *Des mécènes par milliers: un siècle de dons par les Amis du Louvre* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1997), pp. 29, 33–34, 36.

¹²² See Geneviève Bresc-Bautier, ‘La marquise Arconati-Visconti, “bienfaitrice professionnelle”’, in *Société des amis du Louvre* <<https://www.amisdulouvre.fr/sites/default/files/fichiers/publication/arconati-visconti.pdf>>, p. 98; and *Marquise Arconati-Visconti: femme libre et mécène d’exception* (Paris: Éditions Beaux Arts, 2019) <<https://en.calameo.com/read/0051132625d3602ba275b?page=2&volume=0>> [both accessed 25 October 2020].

¹²³ Cited in Juliet Gardiner, ‘Rebels and Connoisseurs’, in *Saved! 100 Years of the National Art Collections Fund*, ed. by Richard Verdi (London: Scala, 2003), pp. 16–25 (p. 20).

¹²⁴ Meaghan Clarke, ‘“The Greatest Living Critic”: Christiana Herringham and the Practice of Connoisseurship’, *Visual Resources*, 33 (2017), 94–116.

early supporters, the latter leaving £1000 to the fund in 1920.¹²⁵ Unlike its French original, women could sit on the fund's executive committee — where Herringham was joined by the classicist Eugenia Sellers Strong (1860–1943) — as well as on the council. For the price of a guinea subscription, women could therefore join on the same footing as men, and no less than a quarter of the early members of the NACF were female (including women passionate about contemporary art too, like Vanessa Stephen and Lady Ottoline Morrell (1873–1938)).¹²⁶ In the most celebrated episode of fundraising, namely the campaign to keep *The Duchess of Milan* by Hans Holbein in Britain — and thereby deny it to an American purchaser — the contribution of women was especially remarkable: from the mysterious donor who came through with an eleventh-hour gift of £40,000, through to the women who constituted one third of all donors to the fundraising campaign.¹²⁷ 'At a time when women did not have the vote,' Andrea Geddes Poole has observed, 'the NACF offered them a way to display their stewardship — in a sense, even their citizenship' (*Stewards*, p. 122).

The upswell of women involved in heritage politics at the dawn of the twentieth century was remarked on by contemporaries, if not always welcomed. In his tribute to Octavia Hill, a prime mover in the establishment of the National Trust in 1895, C. R. Ashbee admitted he sometimes resented 'the dear old lady's way of ordering things' which he compared to 'a seaside lodging-house landlady'.¹²⁸ Yet building on women's prior experience of administering charities and philanthropic trusts, women's voices were being heard at the senior levels of specialist musical and arts organizations too, such as Ottoline Morrell's seat on the board of the Contemporary Art Society (founded in 1910, and whose president was her cousin, Howard de Walden).¹²⁹ National museums, as we have seen, were much more resistant to such inroads, although certain types of unconventional institutions were more accommodating. In women's bid to create enduring memorials, there were many failures on the way. Elizabeth Emery has analysed the case of Clémence d'Ennery (1823–1898), who turned her home near the Bois de Boulogne into a museum of East Asian art, bequeathing it to the Ministère des Beaux-Arts in 1892–93. The product of many decades of patient acquisition, beginning in the 1840s, the contents of the Musée

¹²⁵ 'Christiana Herringham', in *Saved!*, p. 52.

¹²⁶ Andrea Geddes Poole, *Stewards of the Nation's Art: Contested Cultural Authority, 1890–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 106.

¹²⁷ Bailkin has speculated that this mysterious donor was Lady Carlisle ('Picturing Feminism', pp. 156–57), although the more secure identification today by Andrea Geddes Poole and Susannah Avery-Quash is 'Miss Tupper of Romford'.

¹²⁸ Cited in Merlin Waterson, *The National Trust: The First Hundred Years* (London: National Trust Publications, 1997), p. 54.

¹²⁹ Peter Stansky, *On or About December 1910: Early Bloomsbury and Its Intimate World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 83.

d'Ennery were mistakenly conflated with oriental luxuries bought from department stores, and were deemed fundamentally feminine and unscholarly. By 1905 the display was written off as 'a compendium of exotic, commercial junk', and the first curator wrote out the contribution of Clémence d'Ennery altogether, changing the displays and instead attributing the collection to her playwright husband.¹³⁰

The difficulties in creating their own, public collections in different cities and national contexts can illuminate the formal and informal obstacles facing women at a time of considerable gender anxiety. The situation in Britain and France, for instance, contrasts with the female house museums and galleries that can still be found in Northern Europe, whether the opulent historicist interiors and family collections of Countess Wilhelmina von Hallwyl (1844–1930) in Stockholm (donated in 1920) or the gallery of modern paintings, including eighty-two Van Goghs, assembled by Hélène Kröller-Müller (1869–1939) from 1906 onwards at her home in Gelderland, half an hour east of Amsterdam.¹³¹ Comparisons between Britain and the Continent can be developed further by bringing in the United States, since transatlantic connections were an unavoidable dimension of the period. Here, women became the driving force behind museum foundations in a way that has little parallel elsewhere: whether Louisine Havemeyer's and Berthe Palmer's transformational bequests in New York and Chicago, the role of Abbie Rockefeller (1874–1948) and Lillie Bliss (1864–1931) in the genesis of the Museum of Modern Art, or the Rodin collector Alma de Bretteville Spreckels's (1881–1968) munificence to the Légion d'honneur in San Francisco. Her portrait by Richard Hall from 1924 depicted Spreckels enthroned on an ornate chair owned (and part designed) by Queen Marie of Romania, which she bought two years previously, and eventually gave to Maryhill Museum of Art, her other great passion (*Fig. 10*). Such individuals were less pioneers than the inheritors of several generations' efforts to promote women's culture in nineteenth-century America.¹³² In 1914, sailing on the *Lusitania*, sculptress and heiress Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942) recorded in her journal: 'I wish to have certain power, and to have that power I must be someone, not only through my private and artistic

¹³⁰ Elizabeth Emery, 'The Musée d'Ennery and the Shifting Reception of Nineteenth-Century French Chinoiserie', in *Beyond Chinoiserie: Artistic Exchange between China and the West during the Late Qing Dynasty (1796–1911)*, ed. by Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Jennifer Milam, East and West: Culture, Diplomacy, and Interactions, 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 204–34 (p. 206, 231).

¹³¹ For a short introduction, see James Stourton, *Great Smaller Museums of Europe* (London: Scala, 2003), pp. 158–67.

¹³² See Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Macleod, *Enchanted Lives*; and *Power Underestimated: American Women Art Collectors*, ed. by Inge Reist and Rosella Mamoli Zorzi (Venice: Marsilio, 2011).



Fig. 10: Richard Hall, *Alma de Bretteville Spreckels in Queen Marie of Roumania's Audience Chair*, 1924, oil on canvas, Maryhill Museum. Wikimedia Commons.

life, but through the influence which by reason of my position I can exert' (cited in Gere and Vaizey, p. 180). Collecting was a central means by which Whitney became a somebody in American life and thereby influenced her compatriots of both sexes.

Overview of the articles

This issue of *19* emerged in the wake of a study day around Lady Wallace and women collectors held at the Wallace Collection in March 2019, timed to coincide with the bicentenary of Lady Wallace's birth and International Women's Day. In the articles that follow, the authors have tried to reconstruct the motives and achievements of a diverse group of female art

collectors. While some undoubtedly did make major contributions to the public culture of Britain, France, and the United States, it is important to avoid pitching their stories in a narrowly compensatory or celebratory vein. Not only were female collectors not immune from the self-interest, vanity, or greed found among their male peers; the failures of women collectors, and their eclipse within institutional memory, can be just as revealing as the relative successes of a figure like Gertrude Whitney.

The notebooks of Lady Dorothy Nevill have been cited regularly as an invaluable source on Victorian high society, political entertaining, and the artistic scene, although her own profile as a collector has been strangely ignored. Caroline McCaffrey-Howarth offers a new perspective on Dorothy Nevill (1826–1913) through investigating her loans of pieces of Sèvres and Vincennes porcelain to the 1862 Special Loans Exhibition, her antiquarian learning and knowledge of the eighteenth century, along with her lesser-known role in negotiating Sussex ironwork for the South Kensington Museum in the 1880s. If Dorothy Nevill can be rescued from the footnotes to be reinstated as an actor in her own right, the next three articles deal with female collectors who have been almost entirely overlooked, partly on account of their complex, cosmopolitan identities. In contrast to the better-known figure of Joséphine Bowes (1825–1874), co-creator of the Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle, Lindsay Macnaughton uncovers the second wife of John Bowes, Alphonsine, Comtesse de Saint-Amand. The unknown Alphonsine has either been vilified or omitted entirely from the narratives of the Bowes Museum, as her marriage with John Bowes ended in an acrimonious separation. However, by returning to notarial records, Macnaughton sheds light on the ambivalent place of the couple in Parisian society, the politics of divorce, and the peculiar persistence of objects related to domestic and private life within the framework of the public museum.

Yolande Lyne-Stephens (1812–1894), who like Joséphine came from a Parisian performance background, has only begun to attract scholarly attention in very recent years. Yet as Laure-Aline Griffith-Jones reveals, she was one of the most impressive collectors of the nineteenth century, assembling an astonishing collection of old masters — now hanging in museums around the world — using her husband's vast fortunes, and continuing to buy as an independent woman at sales in Paris long after his death. Tainted by scandal, and living between Britain and France, Mrs Lyne-Stephens nearly became one of the most important donors to the National Gallery, but for a dramatic and complex change of heart, which has condemned her activities to oblivion. Dismissed as a foreigner, or ridiculed for her lack of intellect or manners, Amélie Julie Castelnau, Lady Wallace (1819–1897), also remains an unknown figure for most visitors to Manchester Square. Yet Suzanne Higgott makes a strong case for her engagement in British philanthropy, and her crucial role in ensuring that the collections of the Hertford family passed to the British state in 1897. Moreover, Higgott explores how

she came sometimes to be denied due recognition for this foundational act in subsequent decades — indeed, credit was sometimes even given to her secretary and the first custodian of the collection John Murray Scott — and how initial prejudice has led her to be consistently underestimated in the scholarship.

The next article approaches the Wallace Collection from a different perspective: this time, as a site of curiosity for Victorian and Edwardian women. Through an investigation of the Visitors' Book for Hertford House, kept by Sir Richard and Lady Wallace from 1876 to 1897, Helen Jones maps the profile of the remarkable women from many different fields of endeavour who passed through the doors, and notes their engagement with the arts and wider social reform. Her study underlines the appeal of art as a metropolitan leisure activity in this period, complementing other work on women museum visitors.¹³³ Galleries as a site for feminine sociability is taken up in the next article by Imogen Tedbury, which looks closely at the portraits of founders commissioned for pioneering women's institutions of learning, such as Newnham College and Bedford College. Tedbury thinks about institutional collecting and patronage by groups of women and considers how male portraitists like James Jebusa Shannon (who also painted Lady Barber) and Philip de László constructed women's learning and authority in visual terms, providing a feminine spin on the traditions of academic portraiture.

The movement of objects and ideas across borders forms a common theme in the final three articles. In 1894, when she landed in Baghdad, Ellen Georgiana Tanner (1847–1937) became one of the first women to travel solo in the Middle East, as described by Catrin Jones in her article. Today the Holburne Museum in Bath contains lacquerwork, textiles, and decorative metalwork that she donated from her many years of travelling and shopping in the bazaars of Iraq and Persia. Benefiting from British imperial hegemony, female travellers in the region helped endow provincial museums with a truly global complexion, such as the Egyptian antiquities found today in Bolton and Macclesfield thanks to the intrepid Annie Barlow (1863–1941) and Marianne Brocklehurst (1832–1898), respectively. In fact, in 1899 and 1900, more than half of the twenty-nine local honorary secretaries of the Egyptian Excavation Fund were women.¹³⁴ By contrast, Rebecca Tilles focuses on the transatlantic passions of Florence Meyer Blumenthal (1873–1930), an important collector and mediator of European art and architecture in Gilded Age New York, and a patron of fashion and modernism in post-war Paris. Tilles reclaims Florence Blumenthal's

¹³³ Helen Rees Leahy, *Museum Bodies: The Politics and Practices of Visiting and Viewing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Hill, *Women and Museums*, pp. 103–26.

¹³⁴ Alice Stevenson, *Scattered Finds: Archaeology, Egyptology and Museums* (London: UCL Press, 2019), p. 57.

independence as a tastemaker, often obscured behind her husband; moreover, through the furnishing of interiors and the commissioning of portraits, she explores how collections allowed Blumenthal to refashion her public identity.

Finally, Frances Fowle introduces us to Mrs Elizabeth Workman (1874–1962), wife of a Scottish shipyard owner, who can rank as one of the greatest ever collectors of Impressionism and post-Impressionism in Britain. While she collected in partnership with her husband, Fowle makes clear that she also exercised her taste for the avant-garde independently. Fowle places Mrs Workman in a landscape of other pioneering collectors of modern French painting in Britain, drawing out her similarities and differences from the more celebrated example of the Davies sisters, major benefactors to the National Museum of Wales (yet who were snubbed by curators in London).¹³⁵ Mrs Workman's unstudied and astonishing collection of modern masterpieces was dispersed following the ruin of her husband's business across the 1920s, leaving few records behind. Yet as Kate Hill's concluding afterword suggests, these ephemeral galleries call on us to develop new methodologies for tracking women's presence in the art market, and to reconsider collections' capacity to shape men and women's cultural identities.

Embracing different countries and genres of artefact, this issue of 19 is a necessarily partial overview of a huge topic. Its diversity is intentional, exposing the limits of some narrowly national or sex-specific generalizations. It can be unhelpful to heroize these women as exceptional. Every female collector still operated through networks of family relations, like Alphonsine Bowes's ties to Hippolyte Lucas. The most independent female collector still took advice from art experts and connoisseurs, such as Yolande Lyne-Stephens's relationship with Frédéric Reiset, or Mrs Workman's collaboration with the dealer Alexander Reid. While these women were in most cases passionate about beautiful things, their gifts to museums sometimes represented only one strand of wider philanthropic initiatives, as with Florence Blumenthal or Lady Wallace. Nonetheless, all these articles indicate why collecting should not be treated as an issue of merely biographical concern. Rather, and echoing similar work on the topic, nineteenth-century collecting is also a subject that deals with 'power, art, and the ways in which women have historically structured their public lives' (McCarthy, p. xvi).

¹³⁵ Mark Evans, 'The Davies Sisters of Llandinam and Impressionism for Wales, 1908–1923', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 16 (2004), 219–53.