CDF II International Congress
BARCELONA JUN. 2015

Strand 1. Breaking the Art Nouveau Glass Ceiling: The Women of Art Nouveau

Re-evaluating the Glasgow Girls. A timeline of early emancipation at the Glasgow School of Art.

Alison Brown, Curator of European Decorative Art from 1800, Glasgow Museums, Glasgow Life

Abstract

This paper will delve into the context for the sudden explosion of female creativity at the Glasgow School of Art from about 1890. It aims to place the 'Glasgow Girls' and their work - particularly those studying and working in the School's Technical Art Studios and in the decorative arts and design between 1890 and 1910 - within a wider chronological picture within Glasgow. This chronological approach produces pleasant surprises: the dynamics of contemporaries, friendships and shared exhibition and studio spaces paint a broader picture of collaboration. Visually we see influences for the formation of the 'Glasgow Style'. What emerges from this timeline is a design history based on British education policy, wealth and class, industrial ambition and the sometimes surprisingly progressive views of some of the male elite then running the City and the Art School.

Keywords: The Glasgow Girls, Art education, technical instruction, Glasgow School of Art (GSA), needlework, metalwork, Jessie Newbery, Jessie Marion King, Ann Macbeth, Dorothy Carlton Smyth

'The Glasgow Girls' is the popular collective title now given to the women who studied and worked at the Glasgow School of Art from 1880 until 1920. It was first used prominently in a feminist art historical context by Jude Burkhauser in 1988 for a small exhibition she curated at the Glasgow School of Art based on her postgraduate studies. She took the phrase from a line in a catalogue accompanying an exhibition about the visual arts in Glasgow at the Third Eye Centre in 1986.[1] The authors identified the need to bring back to light the work by these 'Glasgow Girls'. Burkhauser was a feminist art historian and was angry - once respected female artists and designers had been written out of art and design history during the second and third quarters of the 20th Century by male historians. In 1990 Burkhauser curated *The Glasgow Girls - Women in Art and Design 1880-1920* at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. This exhibition, part of Glasgow's European City of Culture programme, was the first large-scale gathering of work by Glasgow's Art Nouveau ladies and their fine art contemporaries.[2]

Through the endeavours of many more historians - female and male - the work of some of these important individual women from this Glasgow group - particularly those active during the Art Nouveau period - is now well-known internationally. From the late 1890s many of these lady artists had their work featured in the contemporary publications, *The Studio* and *The Art Journal*, where gender does not appear to be an issue. The women were treated as equals. Some broke convention and after wedlock continued to work using their maiden name, thus creating a distinction between their married life and their own career. If we look beyond Glasgow art and design practitioners the best example of this was Mrs. John Cochrane. She forged her tea room business empire under her maiden moniker - Miss Catherine Cranston - champion of the new art interiors and their designers.

But what caused this sudden explosion of female talent at the Glasgow School of Art

[1] Jude BURKHAUSER, *Glasgow Girls - Women in the Art School 1880-1920*, Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art, 1988, p. 6. citing *The Visual Arts in Glasgow* (exhibition catalogue essay *Women Artists In Glasgow*) Lynch, MacGregor and Parry, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, 1986, p. 8.
[2] The exhibition was accompanied by a major publication: Jude BURKHAUSER (editor), *Glasgow Girls - Women in Art and Design 1880-1920*, Edinburgh, Cannongate, 1990.

from 1890? To look at the positioning of women designers and artists we have to look back to the bigger picture of women in relation to Art education in Britain prior to 1884.

In 1872 the Education Act passed in England and Scotland made it compulsory for all children aged 5-12 to attend school. School Boards were formed across the country to roll out the implementation of the new educational system. It is worth noting that Charles Rennie Mackintosh would be in the first waves of children entering school at this time. Despite basic education now being a right for all, the school curriculum was inherently unequal. Art was not a compulsory subject. In those schools that taught Art, only boys received instruction, with a focus on mechanical and technical drawing, whereas girls were taught plain sewing. Only the fee-paying private High Schools taught girls Art. Immediately we see not only a gender but a class and economic divide in relation to the subject.

In its formative decades from the 1840s the Glasgow School of Art (hereafter referred to as GSA) was the institution to provide elementary art instruction within the City. Through this institution Art education was an optional extra for those who could afford it. At a time of economic depression the overall figures of attendance were poor. The GSA's annual report for 1879 shows the disparity in its teaching: 165 ladies studying classes on landscape, figurative work and flowers compared with 230 men taking mechanical and architectural drawing, modelling and life study. Mixed elementary and advanced classes were held for the more trades-orientated subject of ornament and figure study: 104 attended in the daytime, 334 in the evening.[3] In 1880 an Art Master's Certificate course was introduced for teacher training - attracting both men and some women. During these early years a few women's names connected to 'the Glasgow Style' stand out on the School roll: Helen Muir Wood, Jessie R Allan and Margaret Gilmour. By the 1881/2 academic year 28% of pupils at the School are women.[4]

Things began to change after 1884 when, following a two-year study, the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction published its report which recommended bringing the teaching of technical and vocational subjects into the compulsory elementary

[3] *Glasgow School of Art and Haldane Academy*, Annual Report 1878/9, December 1879, p. 4.
[4] Jude BURKHAUSER, *Glasgow Girls - Women in the Art School*..., p. 25.

education system. In a move designed to improve Britain's trained workforce, Art would become a subject free of discrimination. This would happen slowly because of the length of time it would take to train the required numbers of Art teachers.

It is interesting how quickly the GSA positioned itself as an enlightened mind on the matter when others were objecting to the move. On the 9th February 1885 at its Annual General Meeting for the 1883/4 academic year Sir James Watson, chair of the GSA Board of Trustees, makes a fascinating speech. "I utterly discard the extraordinary view expressed by Sir Fettes Douglas in his address to the students of the Edinburgh School of Art as to the work and capacities of women. Sir William declares 'she has no talent for drawing, speaks of her relative failure in art and asks why is women's work like a man's work, only weaker and poorer? Among her characteristics used to be beauty, grace, purity, smartness, a fine vividness of mind and a quick perception. Most of these qualities are required and can be expressed in art, yet where are they to be found in her work?' I answer, you will find them at the Glasgow School of Art. (Applause!)".[5]

The equality-minded GSA Board made a progressive move that same year, with the appointment of Francis Newbery as its new Director. At Newbery's first AGM in 1886 Watson comments on the progress the new education system is making: "Drawing has become an essential part of education. Great progress has been made both in drawing and painting by the ladies attending this institution and I fondly hope that their number will largely increase under Mr. Newbery, together with all those who wish to acquire these valuable accomplishments."[6] The gates of equal opportunity had been opened.

In the first five years of Newbery's tenure – a formative period - we gradually see change happening. The names of future female Glasgow Style forces appear on the 1885/6 student register: Jessie Rowat (who will later become the influential embroiderer) and Marion Henderson Wilson (who will become one of the most skilled female metalworkers in Glasgow). In 1886/7 the first and only woman listed on the teaching staff of six is ex-pupil Jessie R Allan. In 1887/8 the first female student

[5] Proceedings at the Annual General Meeting of the Glasgow School of Art, 9th February 1885, *Glasgow School of Art*, Annual Report 1883/4, p. 11.
[6] Proceedings at the Annual General Meeting of the Glasgow School of Art, 11th January 1886, *Glasgow School of Art*, Annual Report, 1884/5, p. 13.

receives an award for course work at National Competition. By 1888/9 the male to female ratios accelerate: two out of eight teachers are female; nine out of the twenty pupils receiving National awards are female; more Glasgow Girls names stand out - Jessie Keppie and Bessie MacNicol. The women are gaining ground. In 1889 Miss Rowat marries the headmaster and becomes Mrs. Jessie Newbery.[7]

The innovative work coming out of the art school over the next five years 1890-1895 would be dominated by the group of artistic friends and GSA pupils known as 'The Immortals'. Members of this group included Margaret and Frances Macdonald who joined the school in 1890 and evening class pupils Charles Rennie Mackintosh and James Herbert McNair.[8] Ultimately these friendships led to the formation of 'The Four'. Other significant Glasgow Style women begin to attend classes over successive years: De Courcy Lewthwaite Dewar in 1891; Marion Thomson Wilson, Emily Arthur and Jessie Marion King in 1892; Helen Paxton Brown in 1894. These women will go on to shape the stylistic conventions of the Glasgow Style alongside a number of their male friends and colleagues. These ladies will gain prominence particularly for their designs and metalwork. This is no accident as their attendance at the School coincides with a significant new educational development: technical training in the decorative arts.

This initiative starts in 1892 when the GSA receives £387 4s 8d from Glasgow Town Council specifically to be used for Technical Education. The money comes from Custom and Excise duties on the taxation of alcohol. This annual income will be used over successive years to develop teaching of the technical, decorative and industrial applied arts, including glass staining, pottery, repousse and metal work, wood carving and bookbinding - "a complete cycle of Technical artistic education applicable to the Industrial Arts of the City of Glasgow ".[9] At this time the GSA is operating from rented rooms in the Corporation's Municipal Galleries. In the summer of 1893 an extra room is fitted out for instruction. The staff list shows appointments for specialist instructors in

[7] All information and that for subsequent names and dates taken from GSA Annual Reports.
[8] Other members of 'The Immortals' were Katherine Cameron, Janet Aitken, John Keppie, Agnes Raeburn and Jessie Keppie.
[9] *Glasgow School of Art,* Annual Report, 1892/3, p. 7.

glass staining and wood and stone carving and "Artistic Needlework taught by a lady".[10] Women now make up 35% of the GSA's roll.[11]

When we look at the bigger picture we see that 1893 is a pivotal year for the Glasgow Style. *The Studio* magazine is launched with the first influential publication looking at the work of Aubrey Beardsley; the Glasgow Society of Lady Artists moves to larger premises right in the centre of Glasgow on Blythswood Square and expands their membership to women non-artists; former student Margaret Gilmour establishes one of the first private female-run studio and teaching premises at 179 West George Street; and the Lord Provost of Glasgow champions a new focus on Industrial Technical Education for the City. The GSA reorganises its teaching departments to reflect the new subjects available. Four out of thirteen women teach fine art, four out of nine teach decorative arts, including two for needlework - Mrs Newbery for design and colour and Miss Dunlop for execution - and Helen Walton, the older sister of Glasgow Boy painter E.A.Walton and upcoming furniture and interior designer George, is the instructress for ceramic design and decoration. By 1894/5 Mrs Newbery is also teaching mosaics and enamelling.

To demonstrate Jessie Newbery's influential position as a design instructor at this time we should look to the catalogue entries of the 5th Exhibition of The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in London in late 1896. Four works exhibited were to her designs - a cushion cover, mantle border, quilt and book binding - though all were executed by pupils and by a fellow, male, teacher at the GSA. She exhibited exactly the same number of pieces as Charles Rennie Mackintosh, who presented two works he designed and two he fully designed and executed. Other past and present female students of the Glasgow School of Art made and exhibited their work, including Lucy Raeburn, the Macdonald sisters and Jessie Keppie.[12] It is the work of the Macdonald sisters, however, that is singled out in *The Studio* - "nothing in the gallery has provoked more decided

[10] The teacher is Miss Dunlop. *Glasgow School of Art,* Annual Report,1893/4, p. 3-7.
[11] Jude BURKHAUSER, *Glasgow Girls - Women in the Art School*..., p. 25.
[12] *Catalogue of the 5th Exhibition of The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society*, The New Gallery, Regent Street London, October 5th - December 5th, 1896.

censure than these various exhibits".[13]

The early posters of The Four produced between late 1894 and 1896 and the work of Talwin Morris[14] show the influence of Aubrey Beardsley's work on early Glasgow Style. This undated work by Jessie M King, *The Secret of the Wondrous Rose* [Fig. 1], is a direct compositional response to Beardsley's frontispiece illustration for Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, published in *The Studio* in 1893. We see here the early development of King's characteristic linear style. Her interpretation draws clearly from the figurative form and drapery of Ancient Egypt. Interestingly Egypt was an influence that the Macdonald sisters would not be drawn upon to acknowledge for their own work.[15]

An almost direct contemporary at the GSA to the Macdonald sisters, King won a number of awards and medals at National Competition. She was most definitely an up and coming talent with an original approach that would influence her peers. . She recounted later in life a response to her student work: "I always remember a very delightful Frenchman who came to the GSA when I was there – whose design was based on the literal translation of the plant form shall we say – he looked at some of my drawings…and said I hate her work – she draws things which God Almighty never made, she puts tulips on chrysanthemum leaves and makes chrysanthemums have tulip leaves – I hate her work but it fascinates me!"[16] Perhaps indicating the high regard in which she was held in the GSA, King was given the task of designing and lettering the scroll on the history of the GSA to be placed in the new building's foundation stone, laid on 25th May 1898.

The years 1896 to 1901 see another influx into the School of future lady designers in the Glasgow Style. The GSA will now be receiving young women as students who have learnt Art throughout their schooling. A few significant names stand out. Annie French

[13] "The Arts and Crafts Exhibition 1896 (Third Notice)", *The Studio*, 1896, p.189-204.
[14] Though the posters were not displayed at the exhibition, though notably mentioned in *The Studio* for their absence, three of Morris's book-cover designs for Blackie were also exhibited at the 1896 exhibition.
[15] Gleeson WHITE: "Some Glasgow Designers and their Work. Part I", *The Studio*, Volume X-XI, 1897, p. 87- 100. White makes the observation in an interview with them.
[16] Jessie Marion KING: Lecture notes for the design of batik or pottery, Glasgow University Library Special Collections, undated (after 1924).

arrives in 1896 – her detailed, seemingly rapidly penned illustrative work of figures and ornament heavily influenced by King. Ann Macbeth and Dorothy Carlton Smyth arrive in 1897- both quickly becoming important and ground-breaking tutors at the School. These ladies all appear at a critical and exciting time when the School's teaching initiatives continue to expand, the unique design style emerging from Glasgow begins to receive national, sometimes controversial, recognition and publication; and the building of the first phase of Mackintosh's new school premises begins. Metalwork starts to be taught in earnest under the tutelage of silversmith and technical instructor, Peter Wylie Davidson. Davidson will go on to make the metalwork department an internationally revered teaching department, with some significant Glasgow Girls as design instructors working alongside him, including De Courcy Lewthwaite Dewar, Dorothy Carlton Smyth and Frances Macdonald. Students Emily Arthur and Margaret Thomson Wilson, whose work utilises more Continental flowing-haired feminine forms realised in a softer Glasgow Style, receive awards at National Competition.

1897 is the year the Glasgow Style begins to be recognised in publications. Gleeson White, editor of *The Studio,* publishes a series of features on the work emerging from Glasgow titled *Some Glasgow Designers and their Work. Part I* focuses on the work of Margaret and Frances Macdonald and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The work of the Macdonald sisters had been pondered over in the pages of *The Studio* previously, where a review of the 1896 exhibition decided that these ladies' work needed a 'Rosetta Stone' in order to understand it. White recounts a telling anecdote, revealing that the judgmental views expressed some twelve years earlier by Sir Fettes Douglas in Edinburgh were still prevalent: "There is legend of a critic from foreign parts who was amusing himself by deducing the personality of the Misses Macdonald from their works, and describing them, as he imagined them, 'middle-aged sisters, flat-footed, with projecting teeth and long past the hope (which in them was always forlorn) of matrimony, gaunt, unlovely females.' At this moment two laughing, comely girls,

scarce out of their teens, entered and were formally presented to him as the true and only begetters of the works that had provoked him".[17]

In *Part III* White focuses on the work of Jessie Newbery, the Head Instructress for needlework and embroidery at the GSA. Gleeson quotes Newbery freely in the article, thus presenting her personal design ethos in her own words. This appliqué linen collar[18] [Fig. 2] illustrates one of her points: "I like the opposition of straight lines to curved, of horizontal to vertical, of purple to green, of green to blue. I delight in correspondence and the inevitable relation of part to part". Newbery's work is part of that Glasgow Style approach of creating designs from a deceptively simple arrangement of lines, arcs, circles and a harmonious sub-division of the surface plane. White perceives Eastern influences (Newbery's husband Francis was known, in lectures, to champion the riches that could be learned from Persian design) and lavishes praise upon her designs: "Designers will soon discover that their apparent simplicity is the result of real power...it is possible to praise them very highly, without once over-stating the case, and still less without regarding them patronisingly as a woman's work". [19]

By the 1899/1900 academic year, needlework, under the guidance of Newbery and with the appointment of her student Ann Macbeth as assistant instructress, had sealed its position as one of the GSA's most highly regarded technical instruction departments. That year more key Glasgow Style ladies are recruited to the teaching staff of the GSA - all whilst they are still completing courses of instruction - Jessie M King is appointed design instructress for book decoration and Dorothy Carlton Smyth for gesso and scraffito design. In the same year King is recommended by Director Francis Newbery to German publisher Globus Verlag of Berlin who had written asking for a good designer in the emerging style of the Glasgow School. This commission effectively starts King's career as a prolific book designer and illustrator - over the course of the next 50 years she designs for over 200 titles for a variety of publishers. From 1905 King will go on to make commercial designs for department store Liberty of London for their Cymric

[17] Gleeson WHITE: "Some Glasgow Designers and their Work. Part I", *The Studio*, Volume X-XI, 1897, p. 87- 100.
[18] It is probable that this collar is of an earlier date than that usually attributed of circa 1900.
[19] Gleeson WHITE: "Some Glasgow Designers and their Work. Part III", *The Studio*, Volume XII-XIII, 1897, p. 47-51.

silver and enamel range, printed textile designs and later batik. She exhibits farther across the globe than Mackintosh or the Macdonald sisters during her lifetime, including Calcutta, Paris and New York.

1902, and the core influential female Glasgow Style teaching staff of the GSA is complete. De Courcy Lewthwaite Dewar is appointed as instructor in the newly established enamels department. Female staff appointments do not stop here, though - by the 1908/9 academic year mosaics and stained glass are the only subjects without a female instructor. Even wood carving that year is now taught by a lady: Miss C Carlyle Tucker.

To indicate the standing of these instructors at this time it should be noted that the work of Dewar, Newbery, Macbeth and Smyth was prominently represented at the second Glasgow International Exhibition, which opened in Kelvingrove Park in 1901. The Applied Art Division of the Women's Industries section displayed many items of metalwork, stained glass and needlework made by these teachers, students and former students of the GSA. Margaret Gilmour, one of those very early female students of the GSA, displayed a range of copper and brass metalwork made at her own teaching studio.

These ladies' studios - spread across the city centre but distinct from the GSA - are important. We understand through the evidence of The Immortals and The Four how collaborative friendships are at the heart of the development of the Glasgow Style. It is an ongoing exercise to plot and map the connections between many of these individuals - Glasgow's art and design scene has an exceptionally strong interconnected network of relationships and employment. Friendships are difficult to trace through research but those we can connect - particularly through the activities of the Lady Artist's Club or through shared and adjacent personal studio spaces - allow us to build up an idea of the networks beyond Mackintosh and the Macdonald sisters.

Whilst a teacher at the GSA, Jessie M King was sharing a studio at 101 St Vincent Street with Helen Paxton Brown. They would exhibit work together throughout their artistic lives. Dewar's personal studio was not far away, at 93 Hope Street, which she

shared on an informal basis with Dorothy Carlton Smyth. Upstairs at this same address was the studio of the Davidson brothers, Peter Wylie and William Armstrong. This large presentation quaich made at the GSA in 1904 [Fig. 3] is an example of how these friendships can manifest themselves in artwork. Designed by Smyth, made by William Armstrong Davidson with the central enamel by Dewar, the design draws upon the knotted lines of the Celtic Revival with a Gaelic inscription around the bowl and in the enamel. Originally designed as a commission for the Scotch Education Department - the organisation overseeing Art education across Britain - to present to its retiring head Sir Henry Craik, this example is one of at least two variants made. Such a prestigious commission gives an indication of the regard in which the GSA's technical tutors were held.

Work from the Art Schools around Britain was displayed at the Glasgow 1901 Exhibition. By now a full graded system of Art Instruction from the ages of 5 to adult was in place across Britain. Art and Design Schools like the GSA were focused on the tuition of a higher level of art instruction, taught by practising artists and makers. *The Studio* magazine observed the positive progress this new system was having on design output: "the students recognise that decorative art promises to open up for the skilled and trained modern worker many possibilities of profitable occupation. It would seem that the schools are resolved to move with the times, and do what in them lies to advance design and ennoble the decoration of our industries. …Students at the Schools of Birmingham and Glasgow are now brought more directly under the influence of the teachers, and are impelled to turn to best account all the freedom of view that they posses. They are led to strive to accentuate and increase their qualities of observation and expression…"[20]

Through these changes in the education system, more women went to Art School, many trained as art teachers and took jobs in schools, others followed in the footsteps of Gilmour and set up their own studio. From 1902/3 the number of teachers studying at the GSA to receive training at special Saturday and summer classes outstripped the

[20] "Glasgow International Exhibition (Part III)", *The Studio*, Volume XXII-XXIII, 1901 p. 238-9.

number of students studying in the four main School departments.[21] By this date 47% of the students at the GSA are female[22], many are teachers or are training to be teachers. In the 1903/4 academic year alone, 22 of the 37 teaching appointments from GSA graduates are women. These qualified teachers could choose to stay on at the GSA and attend post- diploma certificate advanced classes in the fine and applied arts in their own time.

A two-year post-certificate programme for teachers in Art Needlework, under the instruction of Ann Macbeth, was launched in 1905/6 – the first such applied art course. Within six years, her specially graded syllabus in needlework instruction for children between the ages of six and 14 established itself as the School of Art's most progressive and influential teacher-training course. Macbeth developed the course with Ayrshire primary school teacher Margaret Swanson, who became assistant instructress of the scheme at the GSA from 1910-12. Their book *Educational Needlecraft* detailing the scheme was published in 1911. Teachers attending the Saturday and vacation classes applied the methodology learned to create their own pieces of needlework. Macbeth declared that this scheme would "make needlework in our schools, not merely a craft, but a National Art".[23] A visit to one of her GSA Saturday classes was featured in *The Studio* magazine: 'In one of the fine classrooms in the new section at the top of the great building, where the thoughtful architect has introduced an abundance of light, there sit about a hundred young women, drawn from the teaching staffs of the Board Schools in the West of Scotland, sacrificing well-earned leisure weekly in the interests of the advancement of a scientific system of art education'.[24]

The needlework department was the first of what could be called a 'Glasgow Style' teaching department. It was also the last. *Educational Needlecraft* would be the medium

[21] For more about the teaching of this new system of education at the Art School see, Alison BROWN: "'A much needed stimulus'. The Glasgow School of Art's contribution to elementary and secondary education in Scotland 1900-1918." In Ray McKENZIE (Ed.):*The Flower and the Green Leaf, The Glasgow School of Art in the time of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Luath Press, Edinburgh, 2009, p. 131-148.*

[22] Jude BURKHAUSER, *Glasgow Girls - Women in the Art School*..., p. 25.

[23] Ann MACBETH: "A New Presentment of Sewing for Schools", *The Educational News*, 20 May 1910, p. 518.

[24] J TAYLOR: "The Glasgow School of Embroidery", *The Studio*, 1910, p. 125-7.

that carried the Glasgow Style beyond the end of the First World War. It was taught in some schools in Scotland until the 1950s. The School of Art also sent examples of work out around the British Empire. The most advanced sections of the scheme featured embroidery designs for the older pupils – and it is this part of the course that effectively gives Glasgow Style its longevity.

It was a sad convention in Britain then that marriage effectively halted a woman's career. Women school teachers, for example, were obliged to retire once they married. One such lady is Eliza Kerr who designed and embroidered the peacock and floral panels on this folding screen in 1910 [Fig. 4].[25] Kerr was a teacher of physically disabled pupils at Shields Road Public School. The handiwork produced enthusiastically by her class was highly commended by School Inspectors. She studied at the GSA, on the Saturdays in her own time, gaining her Teaching Diploma, taking the Art Needlework advanced classes and transferring her enthusiasm and skills to the children she taught so thoughtfully. All of this had to stop when she married.

As Kerr would go on to do, many of those who studied and taught Ann Macbeth's scheme continued to create personal pieces of needlework using the characteristic motifs and lines of the Glasgow Style. Some pieces of their work are embroidered with threads utilising green, white and purple – the colours of the Women's Social and Political Union. A silent protest ? Surely no mere coincidence whilst the Suffrage Movement was gaining ground.

[25] One panel of this folding screen was published in The Studio, 1910 p. 125.