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### SISTERS OF THE BRUSH: WOMEN ARTISTS IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICA LECTURE FINDING AID & TRANSCRIPT

- Speaker:** Erica Hirshler
- Date:** 8/12/2007
- Runtime:** 1:09:13
- Camera Operator:** Christopher Williams
- Identification:** VL06; Video Lecture #06
- Citation:** Hirshler, Erica. "Sisters of the Brush: Women Artists in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America." CAM Video Lecture Series, 8/12/2007. VL06, Cape Ann Museum Library & Archives, Gloucester, MA.
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- Language:** English
- Finding Aid:** Description: Karla Kaneb, 4/14/2020.  
Transcript: In process.

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#### Video Description

As the second lecture in a series of three around the exhibition *Fitz Henry Lane and Mary Blood Mellen: Old Mysteries and New Discoveries* held at the Cape Ann Museum from July 7, 2007, through September 16, 2007, this video features Erica Hirshler, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, senior curator of American Paintings. Hirshler presents an extensive survey of notable 19th century female American

27 Pleasant Street, Gloucester, Massachusetts 01930 USA

+1 978-283-0455

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artists and traces the evolution of the issues they faced as women working in a field dominated by men and ruled by shifting societal norms. Hirshler also discusses the limited information available about female artists from this period because they were not evaluated and collected in the same way as male artists. As a result, fully understanding their art can be hindered by not knowing more about what they did. Many of the artists Hirshler references were from the New England area, including Cape Ann.

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### Subject list

Henrietta Deering Johnston	Anne Whitney
Anna Claypoole Peale	Mary Cassatt
Jane Cooper Sully	Bessie Potter Vonnoh
Jane Stuart	Anna Hyatt Huntington
Sarah Goodrich	Virginia Demetrios
Susanna Paine	Ellen Day Hale
Lilly Martin Spencer	Cecilia Beaux
Fidelia Bridges	Edgar Degas
Frances Flora Bond Palmer	Erica Hirshler
Harriet Hosmer	Lane Lecture Series
Edmonia Lewis	

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### Transcript

Kermit Birchfield 0:17

Good afternoon, and it's a beautiful day outside. So those of you that are here really must love art. I mean, I know the stripers are running, the blue fish, and the beach. I mean, goodness gracious. So thank you all so much for coming. My name is Kermit Birchfield. I'm a trustee at the museum here and also Chair of the Collections Committee. I see another fellow trustee back here and there are a lot of people in the audience that are familiar. That's wonderful. There is a great show upstairs. If you haven't seen it, after the lecture, I hope you will go up and take your time and go through both the Fitz Hugh Lane...Henry! Galleries (Sorry. It's gonna be a long time before I adjust.) on the first floor, as well as John Wilmerding's show, which I think is absolutely fantastic. And I'm happy to say that in a large part that happened as a result of a lecture that John gave several years ago, when he actually redid his book, first printed in 1971. And you'll

note that we did change the name on it. It's also available for purchase and we can use all the funds we can get, as is the catalog upstairs. It's right here, and it's a great catalog. There is also a brochure upstairs, which I would encourage you to take a look at. It lists future lectures. There's one left coming up, and then the show moves in October to Spanierman Gallery in New York and will be there until the first of December. But there're lots of details of other things that are happening vis-à-vis Fitz Henry Lane.

2:07

We have with us a wonderful lecturer and art historian as well as curator in Erica Hirshler. And she is going to lecture today on "Sisters of the Brush: Women Artists in 19th Century America." She was nice enough to bring along not only her husband, Harry, but her father, Eric, and they're sitting in the audience here. And we're delighted to have them. Thank you both for being here.

2:40

Mary Mellen is just one of the women painters whose story has come to light in an understanding of the art world in the 19th century. Erica, Dr. Hirshler (Am I pronouncing that correctly, I hope?), Croll Senior Curator of Paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts, is going to be, I think, terribly interesting. She's going to be talking about painters from Anna Claypoole Peale and Jane Stuart, both daughters of artists, to Cecilia Beaux and Mary Cassatt. Erica joined the paintings department of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1983 and was named Croll Senior Curator of Paintings, Art of the Americas in 2001. She has done some wonderful shows. She did "A Studio of Her Own: Women Artists in Boston 1870 – 1940". I hope you saw that. It was a great show. And she was responsible for the show "Americans in Paris 1860 – 1900", which she organized in partnership with the National Gallery in London and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. There will be one final lecture series coming up on August the 23rd at 7pm, and that will be at City Hall. That will be presented by Tim Barringer, The Paul Mellon Professor, Department of Art History at Yale University. He will be looking at the transatlantic comparison of what was happening here at the time of Fitz Henry Lane and what was happening in Europe, primarily England. So it's with great pleasure that I give you for all of our entertainment tonight, Erica.

Erica Hirshler 4:37

Thank you very, very much. I'm thrilled so many of you are here. It really means a lot to me, because I was on the beach this morning and I wouldn't have come.

4:47

I have been letting you look at two images of women painters that I'm not really going to talk about in any great detail, but I hope you can see that from the perspective of the woman artist, there's being alone in your studio, as you see the woman on the left in a painting of 1872 by a painter named Edwin White, and there's being with other people and trying to get your art

done, so to say, in this beautiful painting by John Singer Sargent from 1907 called The Fountain. And they both show a lot of... they can both be analyzed to give you a lot of insights about women artists, and what I want to do today really is give you an introduction and a survey about the history of women painters in America. I've chosen some artists to talk about in a little more depth than others. And I've also selected some issues concerning women and the fine arts that I want to bring to your attention. And I hope at the end when we come back around to look at Mary Mellen's work, that you'll have a lot of questions that you can apply to the beautiful paintings that you see in the galleries upstairs.

6:05

Women were involved in art making in America from the very beginning, although we have as yet little information about the earliest practitioners. Can I have the next please? Many of the first American women artists were miniature painters working in watercolor on ivory or women who worked in pastel, both media that were considered much more acceptable for women painters than oil on canvas. Both media were new in the 18th century and there was a European role model in the form of painters like Rosalba Carriera who made her living in Europe, both in painting in miniature on ivory and also in pastel. I'm showing you one of the earliest American women artists, on the top a pair of pictures by a woman named Henrietta Deering Johnston of Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Bacot from 1708 to 1710, both in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum. Johnston was the first woman artist that we know of in the colonies, and she made pastel portraits in both Charleston and in New York in the early 18th century. We know about 30 of them and we see two here. They're very much of a style that was popular during this period with both men and women artists, the poses, the wigs, the costumes, and the format of the pictures drawn very much from English examples.

7:38

We know of other early women practitioners of the arts, although images of their accomplishments are very hard to find. We know that there was a woman active in Charleston named Mary Roberts, who advertised her accomplishments at what she called "face painting" in the South Carolina Gazette in the 1740s. She worked in watercolor on ivory, but there are only three of them that we know about. During the 1770s Patience Wright, whose work you see at the bottom, worked in New York City and later in London, making wax profile portraits like this one of General Howe from about 1770 we see at the bottom of the screen. And then there was Hetty Sage Benbridge who worked in Philadelphia, her life dates even as yet unknown until somebody as intrepid as your own Stephanie Buck gets to the vital records and figures it out. She was the wife of the portraitist Henry Benbridge, and she is described in a 1773 newspaper as a "paintress", who was trained by Charles Willson Peale.

8:52

At the beginning of the 19th century, Philadelphia's Peale family was especially important. Charles Willson Peale, who was a leading portrait painter and genre painter in Philadelphia, had three wives and 17 children, most of whom he managed to name after famous European

painters, including his daughters. And among Charles Willson Peale's daughters are Angelica Kauffman Peale, Sofonisba Anguissola Peale and Rosalba Carriera Peale.

9:23

But while Peale was clearly aware of women's accomplishments in the arts in Europe, it was his brother James Peale who actually trained his own daughters to be painters. And the first I want to tell you about is Anna Claypoole Peale, who you see here on the right in a portrait by her father James Peale from about 1825, a very new acquisition of the MFA in Boston. Anna Peale lived from 1791 to 1878. She began her career at age 14 and apprenticed in her father's studio at age 16, where she specialized in miniature paintings like the two that you see on the left. If you focused on the head after all, which is all you could do in a portrait miniature, you didn't have to deal with any of the issues that daunted women artists that surrounded how to represent the entire body, especially the body of a man.

10:29

Anna Claypoole Peale exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy, at the Boston Athenaeum, and at the National Academy of Design in New York and really became nationally known. I'm showing you at the top left her miniature of Anna Landis from 1822 recently on the art market, and on the bottom left her portrait of Colonel Richard Johnson from 1818 in the MFA's collection. If you look very, very carefully, you can see some white sort of scratching just above his shoulder. You can see that's Anna Claypoole Peale's signature. She was very proud of her accomplishments and made sure to sign her work in a way that people could see it. She was successful. There are about 200 known examples of Anna Peale's work, and she showed men and women according to the typology that was popular in American fiction. The men are usually ruddy with high foreheads that denote intelligence. The women have large eyes, paler complexions, emblematic of their modesty and refinement. And she was active as a painter until the early 1840s when the bottom dropped out of the market for many miniature paintings after the invention of photography.

11:43

Anna Claypoole's sister Sarah Miriam Peale lived from 1800 to 1885. She too was a painter. You see her here, her self portrait from 1830 on the left. The two sisters were both elected to membership in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and they were the first women ever to be so recognized in the United States. Sarah worked mostly in Baltimore, and she was especially admired for her portraits in oil on canvas. Big pictures, not little miniatures, and many of her portraits were of significant Washington politicians, some of whom expressed discomfort, both posing for and conducting business with a woman. The charming image that you see on the right is Sarah Peale's portrait of Mary Leypold Griffith from 1841 in a private collection. It seems so very lively, this little child with scissors, but in fact that portrait is a posthumous one. The circumstances were described in the girl's mother's diary. Sarah Peale worked from a plaster mask that had been made of the dead child's face, and you see symbolism in the portrait that makes you understand it's a posthumous work. The chair in the left background is overturned. The scissors she holds are blunted, cut off, one tip cut off, and

the alphabet that unfolds at her feet shows not the beginning of the alphabet but x, y and z. Sarah Peale moved to St. Louis in 1847, on the western frontier, and she continued her career there for almost 30 years, working not only in portrait but also as a still life painter. She returned to Philadelphia in 1878, presumably to help care for her elderly sister Anna, who died later that year.

13:45

Many women artists, as we've seen already were related to other artists. It was certainly true of the Peales, but also in Philadelphia we have Thomas Sully, whose daughter Jane was a painter and the third woman to be elected to the Pennsylvania Academy. I'm showing you two works by Jane Sully here, three children on the left, again a picture fairly recently at auction, and on the right her portrait of a woman, a copy after one of her father's paintings. Jane Sully lived from 1807 to 77. And I'd like to mention that her work is very difficult to sort of pick out from her father's. Bad paintings by Thomas Sully are often attributed to Jane, and it was a typical fate for women artists, like Mary Mellon, I might add, to whom compositions are assigned that don't seem quite good enough to be by Fitz Henry Lane.

14:45

Jane Stuart is another daughter of an artist who had a career of her own. Like Jane Sully, Jane Stuart is best known today for her copies of her father's work. And here at the center you see a figure of George Washington that was based on a famous composition by her father, Gilbert Stuart. Jane Stuart learned her craft in her father's studio, although her father refused to give her formal instruction and encouraged her instead to help him by grinding his pigments and filling in the backgrounds for his canvases. Gilbert Stuart died when Jane was 16. And in order to support her family, she set up a studio in Boston and painted miniatures, also large scale portraits such as the one you see on the right of Caroline Tilley from 1832. She made copies of her father's images of famous men. Her work like Jane Sully's is often mistaken for Gilbert Stuart's, and Jane Stuart was actually among the best of the many, many people who made copies of Gilbert Stuart's well known images. Jane Stuart also made genre scenes and religious pictures like the one you see on the left, called The Weeping Magdalene, now in the collection of the National Museum of Women in the Arts. Jane Stuart's Boston studio burned down in the 1850s along with a lot of her work, much of hers, and her father's correspondence, so it's difficult to put all the pieces back together.

16:20

Another woman artist in the Boston area who is associated with Gilbert Stuart is Sarah Goodridge, who you see here on the left in a self portrait painted in watercolor on ivory made in 1830 in the MFA's collection. I should point out that the image on the left hand screen is about the size of a playing card. So keep that in mind. Goodridge was a prolific miniature painter in the Boston area in the 1820s and 30s, and she made small versions of some of Gilbert Stuart's portraits for his clients. Miniature painting, as I'm indicating to you, was always perceived as appropriate for women. I'm showing you on the right Sarah Goodridge's portrait of Gilbert Stuart, a small portrait on ivory which was meant to be set in a bracelet. Goodridge

grew up on a farm in Templeton, Massachusetts. She worked largely as a portraitist, and in 1820 she had opened a studio in Boston. She was eventually commissioned to paint a number of prominent New Englanders and she was able to support her family as a painter. Among her sitters was Daniel Webster, the great legislator in New Hampshire. And Sarah Goodridge is said to have had a love affair with Webster, something that's often said about women artists and their models. But in this case, there's some evidence, if I could have the next please, because Sarah Goodridge sent Daniel Webster a small miniature painting that she made of a woman's breasts, though it's not clear whether they were her own. This painting was called Beauty Revealed. It dates from 1828. It's in the Manning Collection now at the Metropolitan Museum.

18:10

By now you're beginning to see that there are a lot of women artists active in the United States in the early and mid 19th century. But there's a tremendous amount of work to do to discover more about them. Women worked in both folk and academic styles. And you can see that here in the two images I'm showing you, the one on the left by Susannah Paine and the one on the right by Lilly Martin Spencer. Susannah Paine, whose work you see on the left, lived from 1792 to 1862. And she's one of a number of itinerant folk painters who worked in New England, both men and women, although it was of course much more difficult for women to be itinerant folk painters, since it was hard to travel by yourself, problems that Susannah Paine described in her autobiography which was written in 1854. She was born in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. She left school at age 11 to care for her family, something that was usually expected of girls. She married and divorced an abusive husband, and she began to paint portraits to earn her living. She worked at various times in Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and also in Massachusetts in Boston, where she was finally able to study art at the Boston Athenaeum. She worked in Cape Ann and in Salem for a few years beginning in the in the summer of 1833. And this museum owns a couple of her portraits, which you'll see on display in the galleries upstairs. She eventually settled in Providence. You see in her work the flat pattern compositions that are typical of American folk portraitists, and you see in this family group of Eliza, Sheldon, and Thomas Battey of Providence, Rhode Island, painted in 1830, a typical subject matter for women artists, a family group.

20:04

You see another family group on the right, this one by Lilly Martin Spencer, who lived from 1822 to 1902. Another woman who was the breadwinner for her family, Spencer grew up and began her career in Ohio. Her parents were immigrants from France who settled in this country in the hope of establishing a utopian community. They believed in abolition, in temperance, and in women's rights, so their daughter was allowed to have a career of her own. She studied briefly in Cincinnati, and then she married in 1848 to an unusual man who took on complete domestic responsibility for their household, which was not easy because they had 13 children, seven of whom survived to adulthood. The family moved to New York in 1848, where Lilly Martin Spencer exhibited and studied at the National Academy of Design. She was known mostly for her popular genre paintings. You see two of them here, on the left a painting called We Both Must Fade from 1869 of a woman and the flower she holds and on the right a painting

called Shake Hands from 1854. If you can't quite make it out, the woman is extending a hand. It's completely coated with flour and dough. Lillie Martin Spencer's painting sold well. They earned prices equivalent to those of some of her male colleagues, and she was able to support a family with the income that she earned for most of her life, although it became much more difficult for her in her later years when sentimental genre scenes like these had gone out of fashion. Some of her works are very funny like this pair, *The Young Husband: First Marketing* on the left, showing him embarrassingly making his way through the street while the chicken falls out of his market basket, and on the right a painting called *The Young Wife: the First Stew*, where she's looking extremely unhappy and spilling everything on the floor. These were companion pieces, humorous works, that often satirized expected gender roles. The painting that you see on the right ... the reason it looks sort of grubby is because it was lost for years. And it showed up in a small auction in Maine in 2002. I don't know what has happened to it since then. The photograph is from the auction catalog.

22:34

Well, at this time, relatively few women devoted themselves to landscape painting, which had become very popular in the United States in the 1820s. And that's one of the things that makes Mary Mellen so interesting and unusual. It was not as easy for women to make landscapes. There were the difficulties of traveling, the propriety of traveling alone, the difficulty of finding a decent place to stay where people wouldn't think that you were a woman of so-called "easy virtue" if you were traveling by yourself and staying in a hotel. So it was indeed unusual for women to paint landscapes. One of the exceptions was a woman named Fidelia Bridges, whose work you see here, on the left *Bird's Nest and Ferns* from 1863 in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago and on the right her *Thissel in a Field* from 1875. Bridges was a native of Salem, Massachusetts, but she studied painting in Philadelphia with the landscapist William Trost Richards, who was a partisan of the Pre-raphaelite Movement that espoused complete attention to every single detail of the landscape and devoted to showing ferns and flowers in their natural settings rather than in vases in parlor still lives. Bridges was able to find in the tiny details of the natural world of her own surroundings all of the sacred beauty that her male colleagues were recording in their extended travels to the West, to South America, and other parts of the world. Bridges, as you can see in the watercolor on the right, eventually devoted herself to watercolor painting and began a very successful business arrangement with the lithographer Louis Prang in Boston, who reproduced a lot of her work.

24:26

Many women are successful as illustrators, and here's the most famous of them. Frances Flora Bond Palmer, known as Fanny Palmer, lived from 1812 to 1876. I'm showing you two of her prints here, drawings by Palmer then reproduced in this case by Currier and Ives, *Midnight Race on the Mississippi* from 1860 at the top and *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* from 1868 on the bottom. Palmer was one of the most prolific artists for Currier and Ives. She was educated in England and came to the United States with her husband in the 1840s. Her husband was a drinker, and it was Fanny Palmer who supported the family with her work. The lithograph that you see on the bottom *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* was her

most famous one, and you can see how civilization is spreading across the plains with the train, with the railroad, as America settles its continent. But while a male artist in America succeeded in taking on the West as a subject, creating large oils on canvas of the splendors of the West, of the Rocky Mountains, women were, by and large, unable to capture the commissions that those male artists got, many of which came from large companies, particularly the railroad corporations or also from the federal government, for a lot of those male artists were involved in government surveys.

22:57

Some women artists turned to Europe where they felt they could work outside of the customs that were expected of them within American society. And among the best known of them were a group of women sculptors, many of them from the Boston area, who settled in Rome in the 1850s, an event described by the novelist Henry James as, and I quote in a not entirely favorable quote, I might add, James described them as “that strange sisterhood, who at one time settled upon the seven hills in a white marmorean flock”. The most famous of them was Harriet Hosmer, whose work you see on the left, her work Puck from about 1854. Hosmer was the daughter of a Watertown physician, who encouraged both her physical and her mental development. Hatty Hosmer was said to be able to run faster and shoot straighter than any boy in Watertown. She traveled to Rome at age 22, and she stayed there for the rest of her career, not only for the marble and skilled carvers that she was able to work with in Italy, but also for the freedom from rules about how women should conduct themselves that bound her in America. She was described by her compatriot the sculptor William Wetmore Story, another American sculptor who worked and lived in Rome. Story wrote, “Hatty Hosmer takes a high hand here with Rome, and she would have the Romans know that a Yankee girl can do anything she pleases, walk alone, ride her horse alone, and laugh at their rules.” But Harriet Hosmer didn't perish like Daisy Miller did when she broke all the rules in Henry James' novel some years later, and instead Hosmer was remarkably successful, winning commissions from both Americans, British, and other Europeans.

28:02

Another member of “The Flock”, the so-called flock, was Edmonia Lewis, whose work you see at the center. Lewis has become very popular in our own politically correct age, since her mother was a Chippewa Indian and her father was African American. But in her own day, that was not a stylish advantage. Lewis was raised in upstate New York in her mother's Chippewa community. And then with the help of abolitionists, she was enrolled at Oberlin College in Ohio, the first co-ed and interracial school in the United States. But even at Oberlin she was subject to an unpleasant episode in which Lewis was falsely accused of attempting to poison her white roommates. And she left Ohio, came to Boston, and was inspired to become a sculptor, where she received much support from the abolitionist movement in Boston. She was always an outsider, and many of her most successful works refer to her position. She did works like Hagar in the Wilderness or a lot of sculptures of Native Americans, many of which were based on Longfellow's poems. And I'm showing you here in the center her portrait bust of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, this version of it in the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool.

29:27

On the right, you see another one of these women sculptors, Anne Whitney, who came to Rome and hated it. She found it to be a dirty city that didn't lead any more in the arts but rather was simply a shadow of its former self. She left Rome and went to Paris and worked then mostly in bronze, and you can see that in the sculpture on the right, called *Le Modele* from 1875 in the MFA's collection. Whitney followed the art capital which shifted from Rome to Paris in the third quarter of the 19th century and also followed the interest in working in bronze, which was a much more hands-on material than marble was. And so she was following stylistic innovations in sculpture, unlike some of her sisters who stayed in Rome. And this new fashion, the new fashion for Paris, the new fashion for bronze, is not the only thing that changed in the late 19th century. There was also a new fashion for art, and you can see women out of the pages of a fashion magazine in the image on your left, a French fashion magazine from 1883, and you can see women both painting and admiring a picture there. Art was often regarded during this period as an antidote to industrialism. It was credited with moral and spiritual powers to uplift and to inspire. And since the art of this period, especially in America, was more likely to be made for the home rather than for a big public commission, women were able to become more active as connoisseurs, as collectors, and even as artists.

31:16

The period also coincides with a tremendous shift in the role of women in American society after the Civil War. Women had been tremendously active in the abolition movement in the United States, and many of them continued their battle for reform in the context of the suffrage movement. And you can see here the man's worst fears in the photograph, the popular photograph on the right. See? He's doing the laundry, while she's reading a news magazine. I'd remind you that the last third of the 19th century coincides with the founding of many women's colleges particularly in New England, Wellesley, Radcliffe, Wheaton, among them, and with education came the rise in the number women professionals in many fields, in medicine, in architecture, and in the arts. This had all gotten to the point where it became quite comical by the turn of the 20th century. And you see it satirized here in this wonderful Charles Dana Gibson illustration from *Collier's Weekly* which is called *The Weaker Sex*. If you look carefully under that magnifying glass, being poked at with a pen, is a small kneeling man.

32:29

One of the new educational opportunities demanded by women was for academic training in the fine arts, and there were new schools and new opportunities created for them. I'm showing you here two images from the MFA School which opened in 1877, on the left a very early picture of women art students at the MFA gathered around a plaster cast of *The Venus de Milo*, which would have been used for early art classes in order to teach people how to draw, and on the right what women who were serious about art really wanted, which was an opportunity to learn how to draw the human figure from life. And I'm showing you on the right from about

1900 the women's sketch class at the MFA. Here you can see them studying from a not nude but almost nude male model. Women also had more access to travel during this period, and they were allowed to study in Paris. I'm showing you here a wood engraving by Winslow Homer of art students and copyists at the Louvre in the Grand Gallery of the Louvre.

33:43

In Paris, artists of both men and women sought to get education in the traditional art of the past, but women often found that the situation in Europe was by no means better than it was in the United States. Women were not allowed to study life drawing at the Royal Academy in London until 1893, and they were not admitted to the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris until 1897. So it's 20 years after women were allowed to study art here in the Boston area. Instead, women students in Paris turned to independent academies like Julian's or Colarossi's, following popular advice written in special guide books for women, like May Alcott, sister of Louisa May, May Alcott Nieriker's book "Studying Art Abroad and How to Do It Cheaply," a guide for women published in 1879.

34:40

But whatever city a woman was in, and no matter how much society had changed, a woman's decision to pursue art as a profession rather than as a diversion was still difficult. Many women artists, for example, did not marry. Harriet Hosmer stayed single and wrote in a letter that she was a faithful worshipper of celibacy, adding, and I quote, "An artist has no business to marry. For a man it may be well enough, but for a woman on whom matrimonial duties and cares weigh more heavily, it is a moral wrong." The local historian and painter Winthrop Peirce noted some of these hardships when he wrote about the history of the MFA School. Peirce wrote, "the art student girl was a fresh creation. Like the college girl of her day, she was one of a perfectly new and very small class. As in all previous times, it was not questioned that the only place for an unmarried girl was in the home of her parents or as the helper for her married sister until such time as she should marry. If she did not marry, her life was a failure. If she went out into the world to make a place for herself from a prosperous home, it was a reflection on the family who should have provided for her." The girls who were the leaders in the early art classes were a picked group of young women vividly alive, keenly intellectual, full of the desire to create the beautiful, but whose whole social environment and family influence still discouraged the use of their powers in a serious breadwinning profession. If a woman did work, she was not expected to marry, and if she did, she was expected to leave her profession and to devote herself to her family. In 1900 in an article in a popular women's magazine, the painter Anna Lea Merritt noted some of the difficulties facing women painters. She wrote, and I quote, "the inequality observed in women's work is probably the result of untoward domestic accidents. Some near relative may be ill and a woman will give her care and thought, where a man would not dream of so doing and where no one would expect it of him. By many smaller things, a woman's thoughts are distracted when a man's more easily keep on course. Women who work must harden their hearts, and not be at the beck and call of affections or duties or trivial domestic cares. The chief obstacle", she wrote, "to a woman's success is that she can never have a wife."

37:35

Women artists who did marry also opened themselves up to another condition that usually spelled the end of woman's career, and that's of course, getting pregnant. On the left, I'm showing you a cartoon that was sent to Lilian and Philip Hale when Lilian Hale, the painter, announced that she was pregnant in 1908. It shows Philip Hale painting in his studio, holding a squalling baby under his arm, while a half-naked model does a sort of hoochie-coochie dance in the background. The caption reads, "Lilian better not leave you to mind the baby." So even artist friends made it clear that the baby would be Lilian's job. But when Lilian had her daughter Nancy in 1908, she combined her maternal and artistic needs, making amazing works of art out of it, such as the beautiful charcoal drawing called Flower that you see on the right, which she did in 1908, a wonderful sinuous drawing with the dramatic use of negative space. That white area in the middle is just blank paper left to define the baby's gown, so that the infant's face and her little hands become one of the flowers that ornament this composition.

38:58

Despite these pressures from society about marriage, about having children, about traveling alone, about conducting business in public, many women artists gained remarkable success, although a lot of them are still little known outside the field. At the right you see the work of Jennie Gardner, who was born in Exeter, New Hampshire in 1837. She studied in Auburndale, Massachusetts, and then went to Europe in 1864, two years before her better-known compatriot Mary Cassatt. When Gardner went, she was unable to gain entrance to any art school. So she went and got permission from the Chief of Police to dress in male clothing. And she studied at one of the private art academies, where her teacher was one of the leading French academic painters, William Bouguereau, who admired her talent and arranged for her to become the first woman art student at the Academie Julian, one of those private schools. You see Jennie Gardner's Daphne and Chloe from 1882 on your right. If you're wondering why you've never seen this painting before, it's because it's in a tiny museum in Florida. That's what's happened to a lot of these works. Jennie Gardner was the first American woman to show at the important Paris Salon. She showed there in 1866. In 1877 she became the first woman to win a medal there, and she was best known for allegorical, mythological, and biblical subjects, such as the one you see on the right in a very tightly finished academic style. She had a long love affair with Bouguereau, her teacher who was a widower, and after 20 years they married. His mother didn't approve, and they waited until his mother died. Bouguereau lived for nine more years, and during that time, Jennie Gardner Bouguereau didn't work. She admitted that marriage and a career, especially as the wife of one of the best-known painters in France, was incompatible.

41:02

On the left you see the work of Elizabeth Nourse, another woman artist who achieved success in Paris, and a woman who never married but instead lived with her sister, who managed all of their domestic affairs. This is Elizabeth Nourse's La Mere from 1888 on the left. Nourse first studied in Cincinnati then moved to Paris in 1887 and was accepted at the Paris Salon the

following year with the painting you see on the left. You can see the strength of her drawing and her mastery of the academic style. You can see why these women wanted to learn how to paint the human figure, because that's the kind of art that was most highly admired during their day. Elizabeth Nourse lived in France until her death in 1938, just like Cassatt did, and she returned to the United States only once in 1893. The careers of these two women typify those of the many successful American women painters who chose to excel in traditional styles, breaking traditions by being professional, by dealing with the art market, with exhibitions, with patrons, etc.

42:12

But it was even harder for women to also become stylistic innovators. And that's exactly what Mary Cassatt did and why she became so well known. You can see how different these two paintings are, although they were painted only two years apart by two American women artists working in Paris, both showing mothers and children, Nourse's on the left from 1888, Mary Cassatt's *Mother and Child* from 1890 on the right. They're different in every way except for one key feature, their subject matter which was always considered appropriate for women artists. Cassatt was born in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania. She was first trained at the Pennsylvania Academy. She went first to Italy and then to Paris and settled there permanently in 1866 but always maintain close ties to the United States and, in fact, most of her work was purchased here. For her inspiration Cassatt looked not toward tradition but at modern French art. Could I have the next please. In 1877 Degas visited her and invited her to exhibit with the Impressionists. And Cassatt was the only American to be invited to show with that innovative French group. I'm showing you here Cassatt's *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* from 1878. And you can imagine how radical this painting must have looked to people, when you remember that it was painted during the same decade as some of the Mary Mellen paintings upstairs.

43:49

Well, Degas and Cassatt had a very interesting relationship, and I'm showing you here Degas' portrait of Cassatt on the left from about 1884 and on the right a Degas called *Visit to the Museum* from 1879, which shows Cassatt and her sister in the galleries at the Louvre. These two artists admired each other tremendously. They learned from each other and they sparred with each other constantly. They were both extremely intelligent and liked nothing better than to sort of poke each other to get them each to do their best work. You can see though that their works are really very different. Cassatt's *Tea* from 1879, you see on the left. Cassatt represents almost exclusively a woman's world, a world of domestic interiors. And on the right you see Degas' *In the Cafe of the Absinthe*, absinthe being that nasty French drink that people said made you go insane here on the right from 1873. Cassatt was often damned for being too much like Degas, called merely his pupil. And she was also damned for not being enough like Degas, for staying inside and showing unimportant subjects like women at tea instead of the modern world of the Paris cafe like Degas did. Cassatt's *In the Loge* on the left from about 1879, on the right Degas' *Ballet Rehearsal* from 1874.

45:32

Even though women artists were professionals and exhibited regularly, dealt with the art market, and strove to be accepted as not just good women painters but as good painters, their goals did not include the subversion of social custom most of the time. Thus, Mary Cassatt and also her French colleague Berthe Morisot, both of whom used very radical painting styles, did not paint the same kinds of pictures as their male counterparts like Degas' Rehearsal you see on the right. Cassatt would never have painted a rehearsal. It was inappropriate for a woman to go backstage, and we know it's backstage because you can see the director standing there in the middle of the ballerinas. That was something that a woman of Cassatt's class would never have done. But at the same time, Cassatt's In the Loge is one of her most interesting, innovative, and interactive compositions. You see it on the left and a detail on the right. Can you see that little guy up on the left with his opera glasses staring at Cassatt's subject? And she's not looking at the stage, because she would be looking down, if she were looking at the stage. So she's looking across the loge at somebody else. So this picture is all about looking and being looked at in a very vibrant way that's very much about the modern world. Now Cassatt wouldn't have gone to nightclubs or raucous cafes, and she wouldn't have painted the kinds of women that you see at the bottom in these two nudes by Degas, Woman Having Her Hair Combed from the mid-1880s at the lower left and Degas' Tub from the mid-1880s on the lower right. And I'm showing you a portrait of Cassatt in the center. You can see just how upright a lady she was, especially in that fabulous hat. She never would have painted women like this. She wouldn't. She just wouldn't do it. Cassatt, like many women, was very progressive in her desire to be accepted as man's equal in terms of her painting talent but not willing to accept any diminishment of her own social stature. That would have put a crimp in her market and in her ability to make sales.

48:04

But she did promote Degas' work to an American audience, and these two pictures were bought by women, American friends of Cassatt. Cassatt played an unusual role in American art. Her painting style is completely French, and she lived her whole life in France. But she maintained an American identity and remained an important influence on American art through her participation in such events as the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. And I'm showing you at the top the Women's Building at the World's Fair in Chicago, which was a great locus for women artists to show their work. Cassatt painted a mural for that building, which you see at the lower left. It's lost, but it was called Modern Women, and you see an old photograph of it on the lower left and a related easel painting called Women Picking Fruit from 1891 which probably gives you an idea of what the palette of this picture was like -- very bright. Cassatt was one of the first American women to paint on a monumental scale, and this mural covered the whole end of one of the walls of that enormous building. And she was probably especially attracted to the idea of painting on this scale, because her friend Degas told her not to do it. When I was putting this lecture together, I began to think about the influence of Cassatt's mural, which was reproduced and well known, and a lot of people, of course, went to the fair. And I'm showing you here on the bottom two works by women who worked in Cape Ann, Gabrielle de Vaux Clements, whose mural study you see at the lower left, and Ellen Day Hale's Dragonfly at the right, both of them brightly colored, brightly keyed, and sharing a lot of the compositional attributes of Cassatt's mural above them.

49:55

Relatively few public monumental artistic commissions went to women. They simply didn't get them. And their work was much more often on a domestic scale. An exception was Anne Whitney, who did the large Leif Erikson that's at the end of Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, among other pieces of public sculpture. And I don't want to forget Anna Hyatt, who did the Gloucester Joan of Arc that's right around the corner. Most women sculptors did tabletop works like Bessie Potter Vonnoh, who's the best-known woman sculptor in the period but whose works are seldom over 18 inches tall, like this young mother on the right from 1896.

50:43

If women were engaged to make large scale works, they were often intended for gardens or other parts of the home, like Anna Hyatt's Young Diana here at the left, but garden sculpture provided a tremendous outlet for women to make monumental figure pieces, and gardens, too, allowed women to be creative in landscape architecture like Beatrix Ferrand, one of America's most important landscape designers. I'm showing you two famous books about gardens, one by Celia Thaxter and one by Edith Wharton, just to remind you the central role that gardens played for women and how gardens, too, could inspire some oils on canvas like this beautiful work by Maria Oakey Dewing called Garden in May.

51:32

Along with gardens, many women were also active as interior designers, because the decoration of the home was considered to be an artistic endeavor appropriate for women. And I'm showing you here Catherine Beecher's famous book *The American Woman's Home* from 1870 and reminding you on the right, if you've ever been to the Gardner Museum, that it was Isabella Stewart Gardner and not her architect who decided what was going where in that courtyard. The idea of the house beautiful with its emphasis on artist-designed handcrafted goods was a response to the dehumanizing effects of industry, and that it was an idea involving social reform that made it acceptable for women. And women became tremendously involved with decorative arts. I'm showing you here two examples, one from 1885 on the left, one from 1957 on the right, which I hope everybody in this room recognizes. Both of them are fish. Both of them are fabric designs, on the left one by Candace Wheeler, a leading artist in New York and the head of Associated Artists who made this embroidered denim image of the fish, as I said in 1885, and on the right a sort of rebirth of that movement to make textile designs here in Gloucester with the Folly Cove Designers, this one by Virginia Demetrios, *Fish Story* from 1957, but again an outgrowth of what women have been doing all along, decorating the home.

53:15

Part of what affects our knowledge and interpretation about women's accomplishments is our traditional hierarchy of art in which the status of paintings was given primacy, and other arts were confined to a secondary status and dismissed as decorative but not fine arts. But the arts and crafts and work in a variety of media was a tremendous outlet for any number of women artists who worked in a great variety of media, metal, portrait miniatures, photography, and

stained glass, such as you see here. But there were some women who just wanted to paint, and I'm showing you here Ellen Day Hale's wonderful Self Portrait from 1885. Hale was the only daughter of the well-known minister and abolitionist Edward Everett Hale who wrote the book, the story *A Man Without a Country*. She was the sister of the painter Philip Hale. She studied art in Boston and in Paris, and I think you can see that her self portrait shows the influence of the French academic style. But the uncommon directness of her presentation is unusual. And in fact, when this painting was shown in Boston in 1885, a local newspaper said that Hale, quote, "displays a man's strength in the treatment and handling of her subjects." Ellen Hale went on to have a long career as a painter. She lived in Folly Cove in a house you may know called *The Thickets*, and she turned more towards Impressionism later in her career. You see a later work on the left, *Morning News* from 1905 and on the top right a view of Folly Cove. Her career was often interrupted by family obligations, but it was central to a network of artists in the family including Philip Hale and Lilian Hale, whose work we looked at a little while ago. Ellen Hale was also active as a printmaker and working with her partner Gabrielle Clements. And you see both of them here in this wonderful painting by Theresa Bernstein, which you can see much better person in the galleries here at Cape Ann. Ellen Hale is the second from the left.

55:26

The best-known American woman painter after Cassatt is probably Cecilia Beaux, who also lived and worked during the summer on Cape Ann. I'm showing you here her *Last Days of Infancy* from 1885 on the right and a painting made in her summer studio in Gloucester on the left, *Charles Sumner Bird and His Sister Edith Bird*. Beaux studied in Paris and in Philadelphia, and she was known primarily for portraits, earning her something from the well-known painter William Merritt Chase, who called her, "not only the greatest living woman painter, but the best who has ever lived."

56:09

I want to mention an issue that's been discussed at length by other scholars and that is the language of criticism, the words used in contemporary press reports to describe the works of women artists. On the left again the Beaux and on the right a very similar painting by John Singer Sargent. They seem quite similar in intent and style, but contemporary critics called Sargent a genius and Beaux an earnest, untiring worker. Women artists were penalized for not demonstrating enough strength and vigor in their work. But if they did, their work was criticized for being too masculine and therefore belying the truth of their more so-called sensitive and feminine nature. So when we're reading these press reports, you need to be aware of such issues to properly judge their achievements.

57:05

I'd like to close by just asking the question, where does all this leave us with Mary Mellen? Well, there's a lot more to learn, I think. And I'm showing you here Mary Mellen. I'm going to give you a quiz. Which one is the Mary Mellen? Mary Mellen's *Owl's Head* on the top, Fitz Henry Lane's on the bottom. Besides those statistics gleaned from Stephanie Buck's excellent sleuthing into the legal records, who was Mary Mellen? Who were her patrons? What exactly

was her relationship with Lane? Why did she make copies of his work? And did she ever copy other artists, too? What was Mellen's relationship to other copyists of Lane's work, like the FL Palmer, whose painting you see upstairs or another one named Elwell who's just got some literature? What was Mary Mellen's relationship with other women artists like Eliza Campbell Minor, whose image of a state fair in New York you see in the lower right. The FL Palmer is at the upper left. Like other women artists who recorded the landscape around them whose stories are little known, what is the context for Mary Mellen's achievements? And do we even really know what the works are? This exhibition goes a long way towards honing our eyes to be able to distinguish what paintings Mary Mellen made, which, of course, we need to know before we can figure out who she was all about. But both of these paintings I noticed upstairs are now assigned to Mary Mellen, but they seem so completely different to me. And perhaps they're a third or fourth hand involved here, somebody else who is making similar pictures, somebody who knew, for example, about sandpaper drawing, which often favored these kinds of spooky, moonlit scenes and was often the kind of medium that many women did. The one on the right is by Mary Springer. It's called Solitude from 1857. And would technical studies help us? We know that Lane did these fabulous drawings that are on view upstairs, including the one at the bottom of the screen, which he then used in the painting Coffin's Beach from 1862, a Lane in the collection of the MFA. The Lane painting shows the complete drawing underneath the paint, if you analyze it with the proper spectrum of light with infrared analysis, and it would be wonderful to know if Mary Mellen did that, too, or if that's a way to tell Lane's work from Mellen's. I'm looking forward to learning more about an artist who is capable enough to do a beautiful painting like this one of Dana Beach in Manchester and to separating her work more from the work of Fitz Henry Lane. This show is, of course, a wonderful step in that direction. Thank you.

1:00:40

Thank you very much. I'm happy to take questions, if you have any. I will freely admit that I am not an expert in Mary Mellen. So I might need to defer to my Cape Ann colleagues. Yes?

Unknown Speaker 1:00:52

Did you find anything about Elizabeth Boott, who was Frank Duveneck's wife?

Erica Hirshler 1:00:56

Yes. She's a wonderful, wonderful painter, Elizabeth Boott. She studied in Boston with William Morris Hunt, and then against her family's better judgment she married Frank Duveneck, who was a well-known painter and sort of a rascal from Cincinnati, very much of a bohemian who her parents didn't approve of. Her father didn't approve of. Her mother had died by this point. Lizzie spent a lot of her life in Italy. She was very much admired by Henry James, and there's a great deal of material about her. She was a very good painter. And after she married Frank Duveneck she got pregnant. She had a baby in Paris, and she died. Infection never went away after childbirth. She's memorialized most touchingly, I think, in the sculpture that her husband Frank Duveneck made for her tomb in the Protestant Cemetery in Florence. And there are

marble copies of it at the MFA. There's one at The Metropolitan Museum, and there's one in Cincinnati, but a beautiful image of her as a martyr with a palm branch lying across her. Yes?

Unknown Speaker 1:02:10

What is meant by painting on ivory?

Erica Hirshler 1:02:15

What is meant by painting on ivory is the question, and the answer is it is it's painting on ivory. But the images that I showed you, the little round ones, are really little bits of ivory. And ivory is a material, if you think about it in jewelry, if you've ever picked it up, it repels water, so it's hard to paint on, and you have to coat it with sort of a gum. And then you paint those fabulous little portraits with watercolor using a tiny, tiny brush, maybe one with only one or two hairs, often by doing what's called stippling. In other words, making little dots to pull the figure together. And the reason people used it, even though it was so hard to use, is because it's translucent, and when you put it in the case with some metallic paper behind it, it made the whole image much more radiant than a little tiny portrait that would have been done on paper or parchment. So painting on ivory is really painting on ivory. Yes?

Unknown Speaker 1:03:24

Who were the two women to whom Mary Cassatt sold her pictures?

Erica Hirshler 1:03:30

The question is, who were the two women to whom Mary Cassatt sold her pictures, the Degases that I showed you. One went to Louisine Havemeyer in New York, who was a great collector of Impressionism and a good friend of Cassatt. The other went to Theodate Pope, another friend of Cassatt who was an architect. You might know her from the building she designed for her parents called Hill-Stead in Farmington, Connecticut, which is now a museum of the Pope family Impressionist collection. She also did an Avon Old Farms School, if you're familiar with that. So both Pope and Havemeyer and a number of other women, like Mrs. Palmer in Chicago and Sarah Sears in Boston, were encouraged to collect Degas' work by Cassatt. Yes?

Unknown Speaker 1:04:30

Is there a book on all these women?

Erica Hirshler 1:04:34

No.

Unknown Speaker 1:04:39

Get to work..

Erica Hirshler 1:04:44

Get to work. Exactly! There are some books about women artists in America. They tend to be sort of a little more dictionary-like, although there are some essays about them. I've put a lot of my thoughts into a book called "A Studio of Her Own", which accompanied the exhibition I did in 2001. That only dealt with artists who worked in and around Boston, and I did that on purpose not only to, you know, cut down the number of women to put in the show, but because I kept thinking about something that Cecilia Beaux said. And that is "I'm looking forward to the day when the term 'women in art' will be as strange as the term 'men in art' is today." And so I did "A Studio of Her Own", because I thought that there was something coherent about Boston style that held the group together besides the fact that all the artists were women. So I don't know whether I would do a book that was every woman artist in America, but I sure think somebody should. People are working on these artists harder now. As you can tell with the amount of information we know about Mary Mellen, it's not easy. Yes?

Unknown Speaker 1:06:03

What do you think are the challenges for young up-and-coming artists today? Are they different?

Erica Hirshler 1:06:08

I think they're exactly the same, to be honest with you. One of the things that fascinated me again when I did the women artists show a few years ago was how many women from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, young women, art students, were transfixed by the show and kept telling me it's just the same. I think there's a lot more support for professional women now. I think that people don't question women who work and also have families in the way that they did in the 19th century. I don't think it's easier, but I think society questions it a lot less. So that's the biggest advantage that women professionals have today. But it's still hard. Ask a woman artist. Yes?

Unknown Speaker 1:07:01

Many women like the wife of Thomas Eakins stop painting after getting married. Is there enough of her work left to form an idea of her style?

Erica Hirshler 1:07:14

It's a good question. The question is about Eakins' wife, who was a painter. Her name was Susan Macdowell. She studied in Philadelphia. She worked in a style similar to Eakins', very tight, carefully wrought figure studies, portraits. There's just about enough maybe to get an idea of her work. She didn't paint much after she got married, and there are endless numbers of women artists who put their careers aside when they do get married. Lilian Hale was an exception. She worked in the early 20th century and was better known as a painter than her husband, so it does happen both ways. But a lot of women ... one of the most touching, I think, is Maria Oakey Dewing. I showed you that fabulous picture of roses that went all across. She was the wife of Thomas Wilmer Dewing, who is best known for these sort of ethereal figures. And after she got married, she stopped painting figures and mostly did still lifes. They're easy. You can pick them in the garden and bring them in and work on them in your own time. And

you don't have to hire a model and so on and so forth. And then at the end of her life, she wrote how much she regretted it.

1:08:28

I'm going to take one more question.

Unknown Speaker 1:08:32

Just a comment. Peggy Macdowell, when she died, left most of Susan Macdowell's papers and so forth to the Roanoke Museum. So it's there to be studied.

Erica Hirshler 1:08:38

There are wonderful things there to be studied. And people have started to work on that material. So if anybody wants to go do a research trip, I think you absolutely should. Thank you very much.