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WOMEN AND CHINA PAINTING AT THE TURN OF THE  
TWENTIETH CENTURY: AN  
ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF *THE ART AMATEUR* AND  
*THE ART INTERCHANGE*

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Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

The Aesthetic Movement had a profound effect on America at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century. There was a renewed interest in the decorative arts and all things handmade to adorn the home. Some of the handmade objects that began to receive greater status in the art world were those that had traditionally been utilitarian and created by women, such as painted china. Painted china, and those that participated in this form of art, began receiving positive attention and greater status. Key publications of the time period, particularly *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange*, sought to elevate and legitimize china painting as equal with fine art mediums. As the popularity of china painting grew, some towns had clubs or studios where students, who were mostly women, could learn to create beautiful painted designs on blank, white pieces of china. Akron, Ohio, a growing city at the turn-of-the-century, had a china painting studio. The studio was called Spicer Studio, named after its proprietor, Lizzie Spicer. Lizzie Spicer and her studio remained in business for over forty years, outliving the domestic art trends of the Aesthetic Movement. She was able to do this by adapting the art of china painting to the latest design styles and even modifying painting techniques to glass, which had become more popular than china in later years. There are many surviving examples of china and

some glass pieces from this studio, with its distinctive mark on the back. They have become collectable items. The longevity of the Spicer Studio and the fact that a single woman, who never married, owned the studio and earned a living from it, was rare for the time period, but serves as a notable success story for women and their role in domestic art.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

I initially became interested in studying women china painters as I began a research project in a Material Culture Studies course. While documenting a porcelain vase that had belonged to my grandmother, I found a collector's book on porcelain that listed a china-painting studio in Akron, Ohio. The author mentioned the Spicer Studio and the fact that it was owned by a woman between the years 1885 and 1910. Here, local Akron women learned to paint blank, white pieces of china under the direction of the owner or other instructors. If the pieces were exceptional, the women signed their own names near the Spicer Studio label, which was stamped on the bottom.<sup>1</sup> I found it gratifying to know that china painting was more than a hobby for some women. They seemed to believe that their art form was serious enough to warrant their signature pieces, something any artist would add to their finished piece.

I decided to look into the general Aesthetic Movement, led by the English Aesthetes, with a focus on the traditionally feminine decorative arts. I hoped to learn how some women, even locally, used their artistic talents to their advantage, and what part these efforts played, if any, in gradually leading the way for women to be taken seriously in the art world.

## Women and the Decorative Arts

At the turn of the twentieth century in America, women had limited opportunities for earning an income. Although particular occupations were considered suitable for women, there were some who desired to become successful in professions traditionally linked with their male counterparts, such as art. The art world consisted mainly of male painters, sculptors, and other artists who participated in the realm of “fine art” as a profession or a hobby. They were taken seriously as artists and were regarded as highly skilled in their respective mediums. Women, on the other hand, had difficulty acquiring respect in the fine arts and mainly participated in forms of the applied or domestic arts considered to be acceptable to their gender.

Between 1880 and 1920, the height of the Aesthetic Movement in America, great numbers of women became involved in different aspects of domestic arts. They participated in mediums that would have been considered suited to women at this time. The predominant theory among the patriarchal society suggested that women were much more adept at working in feminine art forms and crafts such as needlework. In a section of *The Art Amateur* called “School and Studio,” editors suggested that women would also be suited to designing wallpapers, book-covers, carpets, and fabrics.<sup>2</sup> American society in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries promoted such traditionally feminine forms of art. Although considered secondary to fine art, the domestic arts offered women a unique opportunity

to be taken more seriously as artists rather than only as crafters of the necessities of life.<sup>3</sup>

I began my study by looking at several factors which contributed to the importance of the domestic arts. Some of these included the ideas associated with the Aesthetic Movement, the aftermath of the Civil War, exhibitions held in American key cities, and publications of the era.

I recognized that magazines, in particular, held significant influence since they could reach a wide audience, they were inexpensive, and they were entertaining. *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* were two publications specifically devoted to household arts. With a wide variety of domestic arts in vogue during the time period, magazines like *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* offered women a means of participating in the arts from home. China painting was one of the most popular and well represented forms of art in magazines like *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange*. It quickly became evident that china painting was heavily promoted and generated great interest among women readers.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was first to understand the Aesthetic Movement and to gain some insight into women's influence and extensive participation in this movement in America. Although women participated in many of the art forms supplied by the movement, china painting was one of the most prevalent and popular mediums and is the focus of this research.

I decided to analyze *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* during their years of publication to investigate how, and to what extent they promoted the decorative arts, particularly china painting. This analysis provided an understanding of the impact *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* had on average rural and small-town women and how such magazines perpetuated the aesthetic ideals of the time period. By promoting beautification of the home and engagement in artistic endeavors, these publications had great influence on the hobbies and creative activities that women adopted. By limiting the study to two publications within a specific time period, an analysis of the extensive content related to china painting could be performed in depth. Understanding and interpreting the Aesthetic Movement themes, philosophies, and influence in homes throughout America allowed me to draw conclusions about how the Spicer Studio in Akron, Ohio, was able to exist during a time when women were usually relegated to the home and busy with household duties and child-rearing.

Through this analysis it became clear that women participating in the domestic arts, such as china painting, achieved greater acknowledgement and respect than in previous decades. Despite the fact that these women appear to have remained in their “place” in the arts by participating in forms deemed acceptable for women, some were beginning to achieve recognition in these art forms, even if it was short-lived.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Joan Van Patten, *The Collectors Encyclopedia of Nippon Porcelain* (Paducah, KY: Collector Books, 1982), 49.

<sup>2</sup> "School and Studio," *The Art Amateur*, October 1890, 105.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Warner Blanchard, *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University, 1998), xv.

## CHAPTER II

### THE AESTHETIC MOVEMENT AND THE DOMESTIC ARTS

The Aesthetic Movement began in England in the 1850s and 1860s. It was characterized by a high interest in art and beauty in the everyday lives of people. Beautification of all aspects related to living, including the home and the way one dressed, became a central theme of this Movement.<sup>1</sup> The Aesthetic Movement set the stage for the interest in a variety of decorative arts.

The Aesthetic Movement has been described as a movement emphasizing “tasteful, artistic, and sincere design.”<sup>2</sup> This movement and its supporters rejected the mass-produced products of mid-nineteenth-century Victorian interiors and promoted the Aesthetic Movement’s ideas of hand-made, beautiful objects to adorn the home. The ideals of the movement could be applied to the home in the forms of art needlework, metalwork, furniture, wallpapers, and china or ceramics, just to name a few.<sup>3</sup> According to Bradley Brooks, “Among its goals, the Aesthetic Movement sought to unite art with design and workmanship, to return them to the Edenic relationship that was thought to have existed between them before the fall precipitated by industrialization.”<sup>4</sup>

## Industrial Revolution and Reformers

The Industrial Revolution, which began in England in the late-eighteenth century, was significant in drastically altering society. The introduction of mass-produced goods made numerous objects available to the public at reduced costs. This did not occur, however, without criticism. Reformers, including artists, architects, essayists, poets, and theorists, among others, spoke out against the ugliness associated with industrialization, extolling ideas related to beautification, and fueled the basic concepts leading eventually to the Aesthetic Movement.<sup>5</sup>

According to reformers, industrialization had created numerous problems as well as opportunities. The machine-made objects that were being rapidly produced contributed to or resulted in a depleted countryside, exploited workers, and an over-abundant supply of low-quality goods. Because of the assembly-like manner in which craftsmen produced these goods, the reformers also stressed the fact that craftsmen no longer worked with their hands and therefore pieces had no creativity or individuality. Furthermore, industrialization also led to crowded, dirty cities, and “evils” of society, like capitalism. To help rectify the situation, reformers sought to bring back the principles of the master craftsman and eliminate machine-made mentality. They believed that the world could be a better place if craftsmen had the ability to return to the creative, individual process of hand-crafting objects from natural materials. This would allow one to see a project through from start to finish, giving the crafter control over the process and uniqueness

in design.<sup>6</sup> The Movement served the purpose of providing a retreat from divisive social issues by offering a new interest in artistic objects, especially in residential settings.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the well-known reformers included A. W. N. Pugin, John Ruskin, and Oscar Wilde. Pugin, the British architect and advocate of Gothic design, found the post-industrial cityscape of England to be unsightly and he sought refuge from it. Pugin extolled good design based on Christian foundations. John Ruskin, an evangelist, promoted concepts associated with beauty in nature and sought a return to quality and workmanship in the man-made environment. He believed that beautification through art would lead to a healthier society. Natural materials and hand-crafted objects served as important ideas for Ruskin's philosophy.<sup>8</sup> Oscar Wilde, an outspoken lecturer and flamboyant proponent of the belief that art and beauty should be the goal of life, began popularizing the Aesthetic Movement in England and eventually brought his views to America.<sup>9</sup>

#### Crystal Palace Exhibition

Under the leadership of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, the first world's fair, provided a showcase to promote technological and artistic advances from around the world. The exhibit space, designed by Sir Joseph Paxton, became known as the "Crystal Palace" because the huge structure, framed with wood and iron, was completely covered in glass.



This exhibit attracted over six million visitors from around the globe. Because of its success, it also served as a model for other international fairs including those later designed in America.<sup>10</sup> As millions of people traveled to London to view the exhibition, wealthier Americans journeyed abroad and also had the opportunity to view the latest in technology and art. Written records and illustrations of the Crystal Palace Exhibition made those who could not attend aware of the impressive event. Women contributed to the numbers visiting the fair, as a cartoon sketch from *Punch* indicates (see Figure 2.1). The Crystal Palace Exhibition, with its major focus on the arts, had an extensive representation of the decorative arts as well as the latest in technology.

English reformers and critics of the event believed England to be the world leader in technology but not in aesthetics. At the culmination of the Crystal Palace Exhibition, reformers and critics retained the belief that although England was more technologically advanced than other countries, it had fallen behind in aesthetics. The products of its factories did not compare aesthetically to other countries' products. This fueled reformers efforts to push Aesthetic Movement ideals. The movement grew rapidly in the 1850s and 1860s.

### America

The Aesthetic Movement in America, due to different circumstances than those found in England, was an entirely different phenomenon. During



No. XIII.—THE LADIES AND THE POLICE—THE BATTLE OF THE CRYSTAL PALACE.

Figure 2.1. Ladies at the Crystal Palace. Cartoon sketch by John Leech, from *Punch*, 1851. "Memorials of the Great Exhibition," picture 13. Online. (Accessed 29 January 2006). <http://john-leech-archive.org.uk/>.

the time that the Aesthetic Movement was gaining momentum in England, Americans were still struggling with politics, conflict, and war. In the late 1860s, Americans, recovering from a terrible Civil War, were glad to put those memories behind them, and an interest in art and beauty served as an escape. Americans were ready to embrace the concept of an idealized “simpler, innocent world, without conflict or stress.”<sup>11</sup> The Aesthetic philosophy that stressed beauty in everyday life held wide appeal. Jonathan Freedman suggested that Americans also grew preoccupied with “high culture.” What they knew of it came principally from England, where Aestheticism was already in full swing.<sup>12</sup> Americans had always looked to England for design inspiration, so it is not surprising that English Aesthetic ideas would eventually make their way to the states.

An interesting aspect of the Aesthetic Movement is that it filtered into the lives of average Americans. Most homes had seemingly limited access to design trends because of their fairly isolated locations. Yet, in part due to the information from magazines and books, large numbers of people across the country began taking up different forms of art. No longer reserved for the wealthy, interest in art achieved a “broad popular appeal” and a “large number of people engaged in the production of art.”<sup>13</sup> Most importantly for the purpose of this study, women had major influence in these arts and the Aesthetic Movement. In contrast to women’s limited opportunities in the fine arts world, the domestic arts allowed women atypical autonomy and attracted an unprecedented number of participants.<sup>14</sup> The Aesthetic Movement fueled

the popularity of the decorative arts. It provided the bigger picture into which smaller trends, like china painting, fit.

### The Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition

The Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, considered to be one of the biggest cultural influences of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, attracted millions of American visitors (see Figure 2.2). It also served as a catalyst for the dissemination of Aesthetic Movement ideas. It was here (and at other subsequent exhibitions) where, for the first time, large numbers of Americans, were able to view the latest trends in design from all over the world.<sup>15</sup> The Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition drew an astounding ten million people, or one-fourth of the population of the United States.<sup>16</sup> Given the challenges of long-distance travel, clearly the Centennial was a popular and important event. Following the Centennial, other major cities also held their own exhibitions, allowing people in most areas of the country to view the latest in art and design trends.

Nothing of this magnitude had ever occurred in the United States. These exhibitions of technological advances and new ideas made the Centennial Exhibition a remarkable event.<sup>17</sup> It acted as a unifying celebration while showcasing the latest in industrial and design trends. Many Americans for the first time observed objects from different cultures, facilitating an interest in all things exotic.<sup>18</sup> According to Dr. Virginia Gunn, professor of Clothing, Textiles, and Interiors at The University of Akron, it served as the

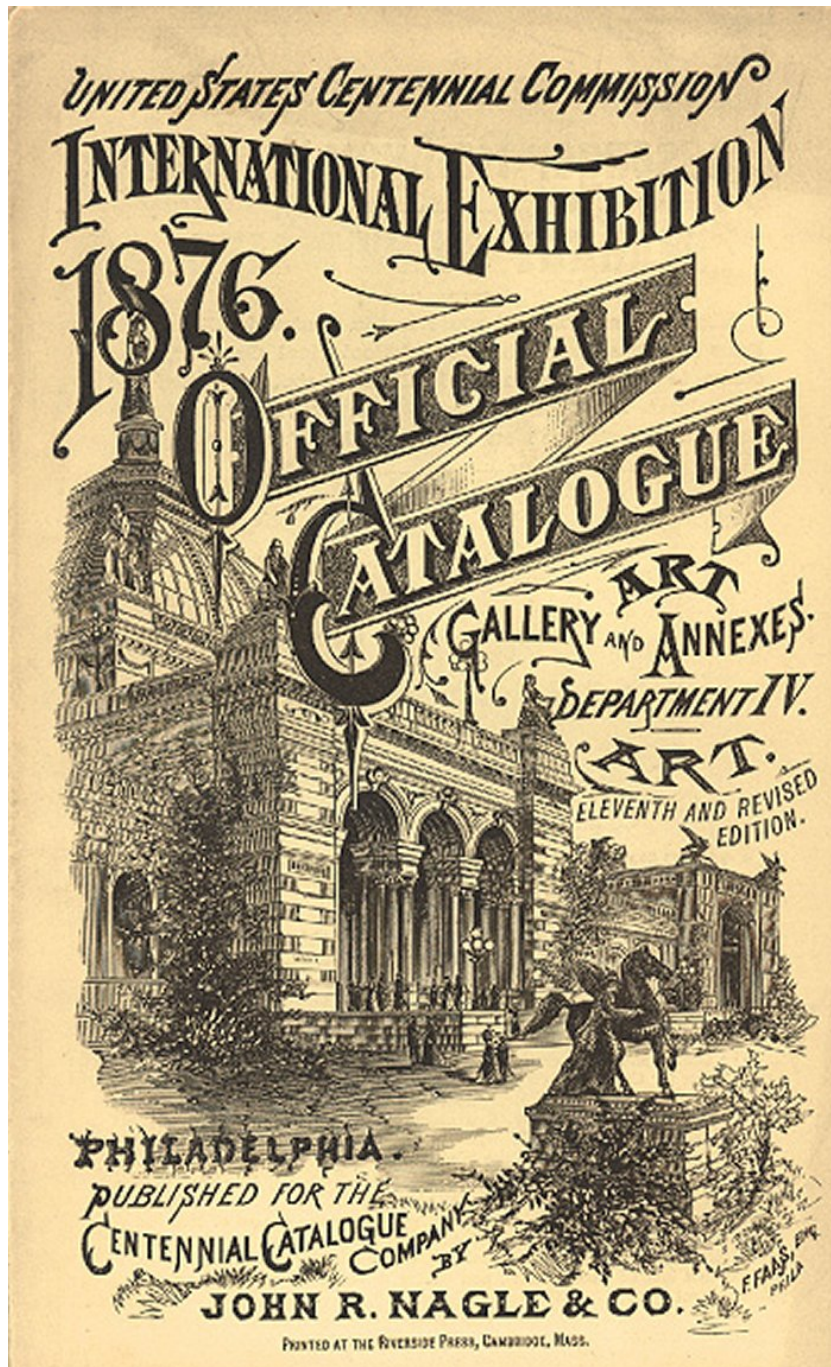


Figure 2.2. Official catalogue. United States Centennial Commission, Philadelphia: Published for the Centennial Catalogue Company by J. R. Nagle, 1876. Accessed 10/22/05. <http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/images/fairs/76offcl.jpg>.

“watershed event which brought the Aesthetic Movement to the United States.”<sup>19</sup> Author Roger Stein, called it a “vehicle for the communication of British ideas.”<sup>20</sup>

The heightened interest in art in the United States occurred in conjunction with the founding of museums in the later half of the nineteenth century. Some of these museums included major institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Cincinnati Museum of Art, the Detroit Institute of Arts, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington.<sup>21</sup> Again, Americans had the opportunity to view art and design in various cities, broadening interest in the subject across the country.

#### Oscar Wilde's Visit

During the 1880s, Oscar Wilde arrived in America, bringing the “aesthetic gospel in flamboyantly theatrical form to the United States.”<sup>22</sup> Wilde's views caught on in part due to a highly publicized and well-documented lecture tour of the United States in 1882 and 1883.<sup>23</sup> He and his unusual ideas often became the target of jokes and criticism. His views on Aestheticism were frequently mocked in publications of the time period (see Figure 2.3). Despite the fact that Wilde often was not taken seriously, he and his philosophy did attain wide exposure.

Perhaps the interest in art and beauty could be attributed to the timing of these particular circumstances. Nevertheless, Americans of all levels embraced the Aesthetic Movement in America. This democratic response



Figure 2.3. Oscar Wilde. Oscar Wilde was frequently satirized in cartoons of the time period. This cartoon is titled, "As happy as a bright sunflower," from *Punch* June 1881. Online. (Accessed 24 October 2005) <http://images.cornell.edu>.

differed from that of Europe. As author Mary Warner Blanchard notes: “The broad popular appeal of the new emphasis on art and beauty represents an important aspect of American aestheticism, and one that significantly distinguishes it from the somewhat earlier Aesthetic Movement in England.”<sup>24</sup>

### Magazines

Publications geared toward the rural housewife had significant influence in spreading the Aesthetic ideals throughout the country, in areas where families may have otherwise been isolated from the latest trends in design. While American cities were in the headlines, most Americans still lived in smaller towns and rural areas. Art journals, catalogues, and greeting and advertising cards presented the Aesthetic ideals to people across the country.<sup>25</sup> According to D. Bolger Burke, “New periodicals, often profusely illustrated, extolled the beauties and benefits of art.”<sup>26</sup>

Magazines marketed to women became more prevalent and widely subscribed to in the late-nineteenth century. Several magazines began publication around this time period, including *The Art Amateur* in 1879, *The Art Interchange* in 1878, *The Ladies Home Journal* in 1883, and *Good Housekeeping* in 1885. The taglines of *The Art Amateur* throughout the years embodied the Aesthetic philosophy. At its beginning the magazine was titled, “*The Art Amateur; Devoted to the Cultivation of Art in the Household*” and later, “*The Art Amateur; Devoted to Art in the Household.*”<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, national journals and newspapers often included articles focused on art and the beautification of the home.<sup>28</sup> Even the older



women's magazines such as *Arthur's Home Magazine*, *Godey's Lady's Book*, *Peterson's Magazine*, and the *Ladies' Garland*, encouraged the domestic arts for women.<sup>29</sup> All of these publications focused on marketing to a similar demographic: rural or small-town middle-class housewives with an interest in art. They had considerable influence in helping to increase the popularity of aesthetic concepts. Americans throughout the country became familiar with different ways to incorporate beauty in their own homes.

Specifically, *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* had significant influence in bringing trends in design and the arts directly into the home. These two publications differed from others aimed at women during this time period since their entire focus centered on the arts. They included sections devoted to the fine arts as well as to the domestic arts, but promoted gender equality in both. Some critics suggested that there was an obvious attack on domesticity and the role of women in the home throughout the many years that the publications ran.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, both the *Art Amateur* and the *Art Interchange* provide insight into many of the forms of art that women were participating in at the turn of the century.

#### Choices in Domestic Arts

With a renewed interest in all things handmade and personalized as part of the foundation of the Aesthetic Movement's philosophy, the "domestic arts" received more attention and somewhat greater prestige. Author Lionel Lambourne stated, "The main achievement of the Aesthetic Movement was to place new and powerful emphasis upon the importance of the decorative

arts.”<sup>31</sup> The definition of art, which before had included only those objects considered to be fine or major art such as painting and sculpture, became more inclusive.

The Aesthetic Movement offered various ways to incorporate its philosophy, so if one form or idea did not appeal, there were numerous others to choose from. Women could choose to pursue needlework, china painting, woodcarving, writing, or other creative outlets. Americans had the opportunity to do something they enjoyed or were skilled at and to find pleasure and support in crafting pieces to incorporate into their Aesthetic interiors.

Women were already quite familiar with domestic arts such as needlework and collecting china, because they had been participating in these pastimes for decades. As objects that had once been thought of as strictly utilitarian became mediums of artistic expression, American women were eager to take advantage of opportunities.<sup>32</sup>

#### China Painting as Hobby

The domestic art of hand painting on blank pieces of porcelain or china enjoyed much recognition and extensive participation during the Aesthetic Movement. Author Bradley Brooks suggested: “Following Aesthetic Movement principles, china painting combined the fine and industrial arts, bringing together easel painting, the quintessential fine art, with the products of modern industry.”<sup>33</sup> It seemed ideal for women to cultivate their painting skills utilizing china as a medium since it would nicely fit into the realm of domesticity. The blank pieces, also referred to as “white china,”

were widely available in a variety of sizes and shapes, generally imported from Europe or Japan. The choices seemed to be unlimited; blank plates, teacups, saucers, vases, and any other imaginable form could be painted in a variety of colors and motifs.<sup>34</sup>

China painting became a hobby, particularly for middle-class and wealthier women seeking to add hand-crafted objects to their homes. The craft showcased aesthetic ideals while producing an appropriate form of art. An article from *The Art Interchange* pointed out, “Many rich women paint china for the mere pleasure of it, and find mental health and happiness in the practice of the art.”<sup>35</sup> This phenomenon, which began as a fashionable hobby for genteel women, became more common for middle-class women as the Movement developed.

#### China Painting as a Source of Income

Women’s choices were limited in what to do with the hand-made objects like painted china. While most women painted china for their own domestic use or to use as gifts, some women hoped to sell their painted china.<sup>36</sup> Despite the fact that selling hand-painted pieces of china was not the most lucrative means of earning money, talented china painters occasionally did carve out modest businesses for themselves. With few options for making money available to women during this time period, the selling of painted china offered an acceptable means of income for those with the skill and confidence to do so.

With the help of art publications like *The Art Interchange* and *The Art Amateur* geared toward the average homemaker, women were inspired and encouraged to create art objects for their own use and, in some cases, even to sell for supplemental income.<sup>37</sup> While some women did generate a good income for themselves, the majority, despite testimonials in such publications, probably created pretty pieces of china as a hobby and to decorate their own homes.

### Women's Exchanges

Women who wished to sell their pieces searched for outlets. The Women's Exchange Movement offered some opportunities. In the mid-nineteenth century, America had much financial instability and the Exchanges were basically created to allow women who fell on hard times, namely through a spouse's death or failed business venture, to earn money by making items at home and selling them on consignment. The first Women's Exchange, originally called the Ladies' Depository Association, was founded in Philadelphia in 1832. Exchanges were formed to help women in financial hardship by taking items on consignment to resell to those that could afford such household items.<sup>38</sup> The Exchange Movement idea really began to expand after the Civil War.

Candace Wheeler, who became an important textile and interior designer, provided leadership for this effort after seeing women's art at the Centennial. She founded the Society of Decorative Art in New York in 1877. A year later, in 1878, she co-founded the New York Exchange for Women's

Work.<sup>39</sup> The success of this venture led other cities to open their own exchanges.

By the late 1800s Women's Exchanges had emerged in many larger cities in America. Author Kathleen Waters Sander stated, "The Exchange Movement accelerated in the 1880s, when homework was once again promulgated as an attractive option for women who could earn income while still performing domestic duties."<sup>40</sup> These women could anonymously sell their hand-made items through the Exchanges, with the management taking a percentage and the consignor making the remainder as profit.<sup>41</sup>

Women began to notice the appeal of and demand for handmade goods and the Woman's Exchange served as a place where one might actually earn money by creating artistic goods. Painted china was in demand during this era and became a popular item at the Women's Exchanges. Frances E. Willard suggested in 1897 that hand-painted china of good quality could be a viable source of supplemental income at the Women's Exchanges.<sup>42</sup> The Exchanges were appropriate venues for women to go through when trying to generate an income from their artistic objects. The Exchanges demonstrated that there was a market for hand-crafted objects to adorn the home and plenty of women wanting to sell their work to this market.

### Chinamania!

There was tremendous interest in china and china painting from the late-nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. One of the biggest draws at the Philadelphia Centennial consisted of exhibits of china and

pottery from around the world. Author and artist Stephen Willis Tilton stressed the importance of these exhibitions to china painting, asserting, “Those who have visited the Centennial cannot have failed to observe the interest taken in the different exhibitions of decorated pottery.”<sup>43</sup>

By the late-nineteenth century, with a growing middle-class society, many more people owned china, and it was no longer just a symbol of wealth for prosperous families. A set of fine china was now considered to be “one of the necessaries of civilized life.”<sup>44</sup> The late-nineteenth century is characterized as a time of “conspicuous consumption,” and while entertaining, presentation with china became essential to a hostess.<sup>45</sup> Not only could one serve meals on fine china, but displaying it on walls, shelves, and sideboards demonstrated that one had a fashionable home.

The excessive use of china at the turn of the century popularized the word “chinamania.”<sup>46</sup> Blanchard summarized this idea in stating, “Every woman . . . and every man . . . in the depths of his inner consciousness loves [china]. A passion . . . takes possession of one for life.”<sup>47</sup> The popularity of china ware was evident in magazines and other publications, and the craze often took the form of satire. One popular humorous summarization of the china craze came from the December 12, 1879 issue of England’s *Punch’s Almanac for 1880*. In a cartoon, a woman is standing with porcelain plates attached to her gown and a teapot on her head. The caption reads, “Chinamania made useful at last! ‘Hand painted china is all the rage as a trimming for Ladies’ Dresses.’-*Paris Fashions*” (see Figure 2.4).<sup>48</sup>



**CHINAMANIA MADE USEFUL AT LAST!**

"Hand-painted china is all the rage as a trimming for Ladies' Dresses."—*Paris Fashions.*

Figure 2.4. "Chinamania Made Useful at Last!" *Punch's Almanack for 1880* (12 December 1879).

Since Americans embraced this craze, both collecting fine china as well as decorating blank pieces became acceptable creative channels. The hand-painted pieces also added to the personalization of one's home, one of the ideals of the era. Author Dorothy Kamm emphasized, "Many women turned to creative occupations which allowed them to beautify their homes with their own artistic creations, and painting on porcelain was one such outlet."<sup>49</sup>

### Chinamania! As Part of the Domestic Arts

Although the majority of those that participated in painting china viewed it as a hobby that allowed them to produce hand-crafted items for the home, there were others who wished to be taken seriously as artists. *The Art Interchange* summarized the state of china painting in 1903:

China painting has won a respected place in the field of art. The untiring enthusiasm of the ceramic workers, and, possibly, the mistakes of some of the enthusiasts, have brought them into prominence, and better and worse together have received attention. Criticism has inspired progress; attention called to fruitless decorations has stimulated study. The workers who were content awhile ago with mediocrity are earnestly studying now. If we get into new ruts we will probably stumble out of them again with some knowledge clinging to us that will help wonderfully when we get time to stop and think. To feel in touch with the art world is a great inspiration: it influences ceramic workers immensely to their good.<sup>50</sup>

Two publications, *The Art Amateur* and the *Art Interchange*, focused on china painting as an important part of the decorative arts of the Aesthetic Movement. An analysis of these two magazines provided evidence of how publications promoted the Aesthetic Movement and how china painting became a viable form of art within it.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mary Warner Blanchard, *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University, 1998), *xiii*.

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Creveling, "London 1851." Online. (Accessed 29 January 2006). <http://www.lib.umd.edu>.

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<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Freedman, "An Aestheticism of Our Own: American Writers and the Aesthetic Movement," *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*, ed. Doreen Bolger Burke (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 386.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, *xiii*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, *xii-xiii*.

<sup>16</sup> Kathleen Waters Sander, *The Business of Charity: The Woman's Exchange Movement, 1832-1900* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 44.

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<sup>26</sup> Burke, 19.

<sup>27</sup> *The Art Amateur, 1880-1903*.

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<sup>44</sup> Charles Venable et.al., *China and Glass in America 1880-1980* (Dallas: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2000), 21.

<sup>45</sup> "From the Life Class to Ceramic Painting," *The Art Interchange*, June 1904, 152.

<sup>46</sup> Frelinghuysen, 199.

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<sup>48</sup> Frelinghuysen, 201.

<sup>49</sup> Dorothy Kamm, *American Painted Porcelain: Collectors Identification and Value Guide* (Paducah, KY, Collector Books, 1997), 14.

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### CHAPTER III

#### ANALYSIS OF KEY PUBLICATIONS: *THE ART AMATEUR* AND *THE ART INTERCHANGE*

*The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* were two of the most important publications with the domestic arts as their focus at the turn of the twentieth century. They both offered a means for Americans to observe trends in design and art in an easy and convenient way. They encouraged middle-class women with limited time and money to engage in artistic efforts at home. Because they primarily targeted middle-class homemakers, the artistic interests of this demographic had extensive representation.

During the height of Aestheticism and the domestic arts, both *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* were published. Both magazines had practical applications related to the domestic arts. Sparked by an interest in art and beauty, an important tenet of the Aesthetic Movement, women found these publications interesting and useful.

*The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* helped disseminate practical advice and notes on the latest trends for the domestic arts, particularly china painting. Information on china painting became so widely available through outlets like *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* that

virtually any middle-class woman in America could learn enough about the art of china painting to practice it in her own home.

Without the mass electronic media that we are accustomed to in modern society, magazines had enormous influence. Magazine subscriptions offered women a means of keeping informed about significant trends in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Periodicals also served as one of the primary forms of entertainment during this era. Magazines, including *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange*, had the ability to reach almost anybody in the country.

An analysis of *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* revealed the extensive promotion of china painting. A close examination of the content of these two magazines throughout their years of publication provided information about their influence and about how they disseminated trends to women in both urban and rural areas.

### *The Art Amateur*

*The Art Amateur*, a monthly magazine devoted to household arts, existed between 1879 and 1903. It was published and edited by Montague Marks at 23 Union Square, New York, New York.<sup>1</sup> *The Art Amateur* strived to be a high-end publication priced to be affordable for middle-class families. It targeted women interested in the arts at some level.

### Cost and Focus

The cost for an American subscription in 1886 was four dollars per year, including postage, or thirty-five cents per copy. *Economic History*

*Services*, a cost comparison tool website, states that at present the price would compare to about \$80.00 for a yearly subscription, or a little over \$6.00 per copy.<sup>2</sup> *The Art Amateur* would be comparable to some of the finer art magazines of today.

The title of the journal itself reveals the purpose it attempted to fulfill. It reads: “*The Art Amateur: Devoted to the Cultivation of Art in the Household.*” Later, the title was shortened to read: “*The Art Amateur: Devoted to Art in the Household.*” It is very clear that the magazine was geared toward housewives who found beautification of the home through art, part of the Aesthetic Movement ideal, important. According to magazines such as *The Art Amateur*, all American women should strive for and could achieve homes with artistic interiors.

#### Layout

The layout of *The Art Amateur* presented it as the sophisticated magazine that it strived to be. *The Art Amateur* was an oversized magazine, measuring sixteen inches by eleven inches, allowing for a great deal of space to include the numerous articles, illustrations, and samples of color and design plates intended for copying (see Figure 3.1). The cover always featured some type of decorative illustration, composed of items such as paintbrushes, portraits, or painted china along with the title and other

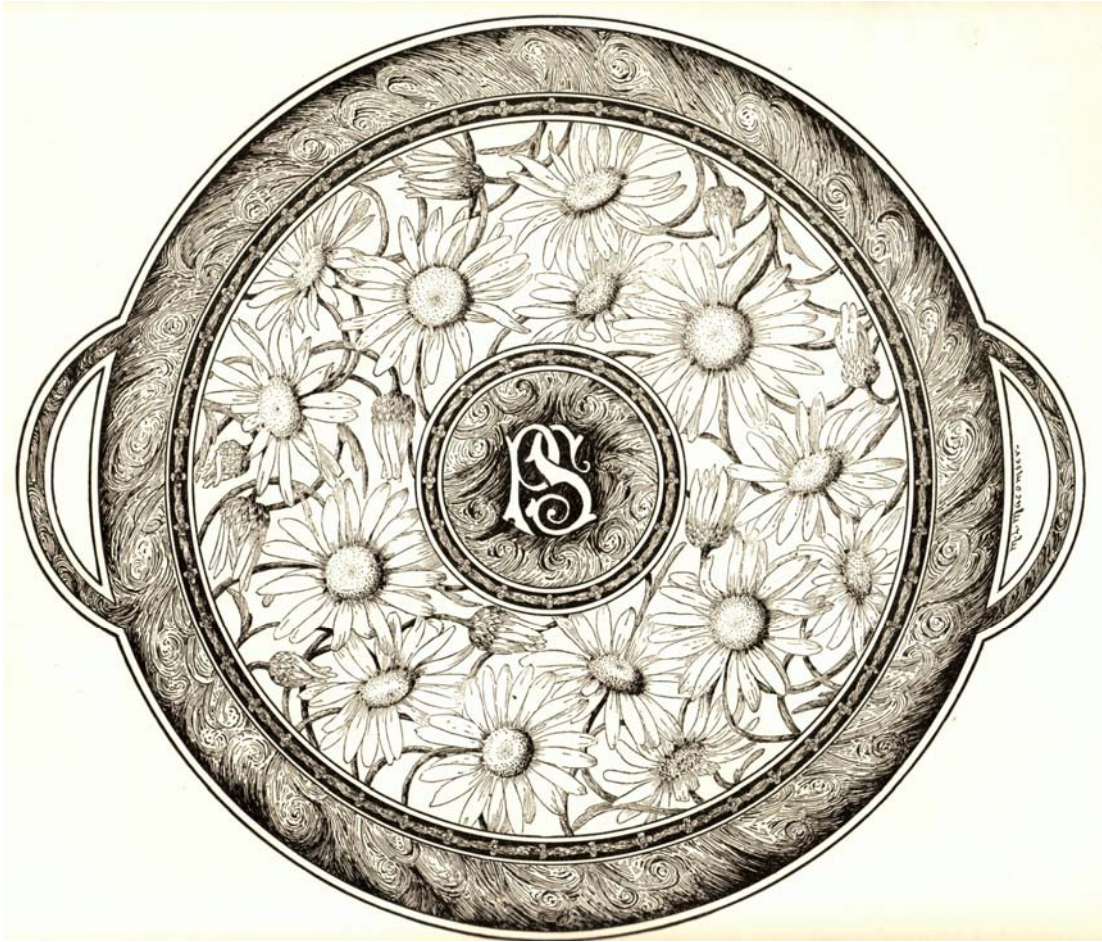


Figure 3.1. Sample of a design plate. The color and black and white designs appeared in both *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* and could be copied by the china painter. *The Art Amateur*, April 1886.



informational text. This stylized cover set the tone of the magazine as one dedicated to the arts (see Figure 3.2).

The first several pages contained advertisements for various products and services. Some of the advertisements featured antiques, artist brushes, paints, and china, as well as places where one could partake in art lessons of all kinds. Following ad pages, articles on various artistic interests appeared. Some discussed the state of a particular form of art, such as needlework, wood-carving, or china painting. Other articles offered instructions on specific topics such as which motifs to use in art needlework, which tools to use for particular carving techniques, and color and design selection for a blank piece of china. *The Art Amateur* offered a variety of topics related to domestic art in its columns; some were continuations from the previous month.

### Content

Although the content of each issue varied somewhat, *The Art Amateur* featured sections that remained consistent. The first section titled "My Note Book," penned under the name Montezuma, featured short snippets about people, events, and accomplishments in the art world and commentary by the author. The projected plans for *The Art Amateur's* content for the current year also appeared in a regular column. This allowed subscribers to be aware of the content they could expect in forthcoming months. In 1892, for example, *The Art Amateur* proposed to include more color studies in addition to black and white illustrations. The October 1891

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 Entered at the Post Office at New York as Second Class Matter.

**NO** TRAVELLING AGENTS are employed by THE ART AMATEUR. All persons wishing to subscribe should send the money directly to the publisher, or pay it to some local dealer or established agent whom they know to be personally responsible.

Figure 3.2. Cover of *The Art Amateur*. April 1886.

issue stated, “we recognize the necessity of giving most of our studies for the coming year, so complete as actual pictures, that they may be suitable for framing as well as copying.”<sup>3</sup>

The “Gallery and Studio” section focused on the technical aspects of different forms of art. It offered hints, illustrations, and suggestions on how to execute designs in all mediums including crayon, oils, pencil, and water-colors. Occasionally a column titled “Art Schools” highlighted some of the major art schools in America and abroad and stories about those who attended them. Interestingly, the plight of women in the art world sometimes became the focus of these short articles. One such article centers on young people, including women, who travel to major cities in hopes of carving out a career in the realm of art:

The young woman who comes to New York is not often in exactly the same position as the young man. Hers is less substantial. It is not likely that she has had that absolute encouragement which the momentary success of the young man’s career has given him. It is the exception, not the rule, if she has earned much by her crayon or brush; while studying, she is generally supported by her parents or some other members of her family. Although she comes to New York with a less definite purpose than the youth, still in many cases she hopes to educate herself as a drawing teacher. For years she has been able to give very great pleasure to her relatives and friends with presents and gifts painted by her own hand. She has received compliments and flattery for these, and is ambitious to cultivate her talent in the hope of acquiring fame. Or perhaps her position is such that, having to earn her own living, she hopes to find in art an easier method than in any other of the few channels open to women.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, the predicament of women attempting to be recognized in the art world, and also in other fields, was evident and even confronted at

times in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. *The Art Amateur* often called attention to these issues.

*The Art Amateur* also featured a section devoted to the interiors of the home, appropriately named “The House.” It included articles offering suggestions for decorating all the different rooms in a house, giving advice on how to implement objects and design features within these rooms. Columns addressed topics such as making hand-crafted furniture, incorporating electric lighting in the home, and utilizing textiles and other decorative objects in creating artistic interior spaces. The range of topics provided the reader with numerous options for beautifying the home.

Following these regular sections, articles dedicated to specific forms of design often had their own sections in the publication. As the domestic arts became increasingly popular, especially among housewives, art needlework and china painting were regularly highlighted in *The Art Amateur*. Both of these mediums had their own sections in the journal, giving practical lessons in the design and technical aspects of both, offering illustrations of designs, and describing use of materials. Although the section titled “Art Needlework” had just as much presence in the journal, the section of “China Painting” is of particular interest for the purposes of this analysis.

*The Art Amateur* featured an entire section devoted to china painting in every issue beginning in 1888. Prior to this, the publication had offered information scattered throughout the magazine, but in November 1888 the editor stated, “recognizing the undoubted fact that China Painting is more

popular then ever, the subject will receive special attention.”<sup>5</sup> Each month the publication offered technical advice, designs that could be copied, and a question and answer section. In addition, several pages of advertisements listed china painting classes in various cities as well as sources where one could purchase supplies such as paints, brushes, glazes, and blank china pieces (see Figure 3.3).

The section devoted to china painting focused primarily on the applied or technical aspects of performing the art, but also included supplemental articles of importance related to the art form. For example, a short article insisted that the popularity of china painting is not a “craze,” but a viable form of fine art. *The Art Amateur* stressed, “It is as legitimate as painting in oils or in water-colors, and therefore should not be subject to mere caprice of fashion.”<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that *The Art Amateur* was mainly committed to teaching the practical techniques in the domestic arts, pushing the credibility of the domestic arts was also an important part of the agenda.

*The Art Amateur* section titled “New Publications” included reviews of art publications, anything ranging from books about the art of a particular country to those about the artists themselves. It also reviewed publications of essays, fiction books, and other magazines. This section offered sources for those interested in the arts in particular and literature in general.

Each month, *The Art Amateur* usually featured one large color design that could be easily copied by the subscriber. The colored plates could be utilized in numerous ways. They could be adapted for needlework, painted



screens, porcelain pieces, or other objects. This significant feature was accompanied by suggestions on how to execute the design with particular colors and materials. Frequently, these color plates were extra large, sometimes encompassing the space of two pages. The plates were extremely popular because they helped subscribers replicate the trends, as seen in magazines, in their own homes through whichever medium suited their interests or skills. Including these stylish designs made the magazine worth its high price.

*The Art Amateur* developed a regular section devoted to the questions of subscribers. Readers could write to the publication with a question about any medium of art handled by *The Art Amateur*, and particular questions would subsequently be chosen and answered in the issue of that month. This gave those receiving the magazine an opportunity to learn about many of the technical aspects of a particular form of art through the advice of the experts of the time period.

*The Art Amateur* appealed to people throughout the country who liked the variety of topics it represented and the simplicity of the instructions on various projects. With its style of presentation, *The Art Amateur* could be easily understood and entertaining to diverse audiences. One did not have to be wealthy or seek private lessons to participate in these forms of art. With the advent of publications like *The Art Amateur*, the middle-class homemaker could achieve beautiful artistic pieces by following simple, concise instructions. The

arts were no longer reserved as a wealthy person's hobby, but could be carried out in the middle-class home.

### *The Art Interchange*

*The Art Interchange*, another influential publication that ran in the late-nineteenth century and early twentieth century, also had significant readership throughout America. This magazine, also an oversized publication, measures thirteen and one half inches by ten and one quarter inches. *The Art Interchange*, published between the years 1878 to 1904, initially ran bi-weekly. After 1880, the magazine published only once a month, but became more substantial in content and even grew in size to fourteen and one half inches by eleven and one quarter inches.<sup>7</sup>

The Art Interchange Co. published the magazine from September 18, 1878 to January 21, 1880. Between February 4, 1880 and 1883, Arthur B. Turnure and William Whitlock published *The Art Interchange* at 37 and 39 West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York, New York. Beginning in 1883 and until 1904, The Art Interchange Co. published the magazine at 7 and 9 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, New York.<sup>8</sup>

### Cost and Focus

The cost of the magazine was three dollars per year, or three dollars and seventy-five cents if one chose the option of delivery in tubes. After publication shifted from bi-weekly to monthly, the price changed to thirty-five cents per copy or four dollars a year. The cost of this magazine was the same as *The Art Amateur*. Given the content, layout, and price, it is clear that both



publications were competitors for the extensive market of American women interested in the decorative arts.

The magazine obviously tried to find a niche in the market as it went through several title changes through the years. Although *The Art Interchange* remained consistent, numerous sub-titles were tested. Initially, the complete title of the publication read, *The Art Interchange; A Household Journal*. Later, *A Household Journal* was dropped from the title, and the interior title page included a more descriptive extended title which read: *The Art Interchange: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine For Artists, Amateurs, Students and Art Lovers, With Hints on Artistic Decoration*. In its later years of publication, the magazine's title changed again to read: *The Art Interchange: An Illustrated Monthly Journal Devoted to Fine and Applied Art, Architecture, and Decoration*. Similar to *The Art Amateur*, with its diverse content, this magazine targeted as wide a demographic group as possible including anyone interested in adornment of the home.

#### Layout

The actual layout of the publication also changed throughout the years. The earlier bi-weekly journals had very minimal decoration and illustration, and were mostly filled with articles in small text. The magazine had more of a journal appearance with the title and publication information at the top of the front-page and very little ornamentation. Advertisements also appeared on the first page and several pages thereafter. They promoted various goods and services,

everything from art supplies of all kinds, antique furniture, tapestries and art schools to new books and magazines.

The major difference between the earlier publications and the later ones is that the earlier editions featured mostly questions and answers and omitted the different areas of focus like needle working, china painting, and interior decoration. It appears as though the bi-weekly editions of *The Art Interchange* sought to provide information on the arts to the average American, but struggled to find a niche among the other art publications. The change to monthly editions demonstrates how the magazine grew and became an important resource for those that had specific interests in the applied arts, architecture, and decoration.

The overall appearance of *The Art Interchange*, as it became a monthly publication, was vastly different than the previous editions. Larger in size, it had glossier paper, sections devoted to the applied arts, and more illustrations and color plates that made the monthly magazine more attractive to look at (see Figure 3.4). Much of the content remained similar to the bi-weekly editions, but the monthly editions included more illustrations within the text and sometimes full-page pictures. Topics that *The Art Interchange* covered included, “Modern Symbolism,” “Etiquette of Afternoon Teas and Receptions,” “Tapestries Old and New,” and “Applied Design and Industrial Art.”<sup>9</sup> A wide range of subject matter appealed to people of different interests.

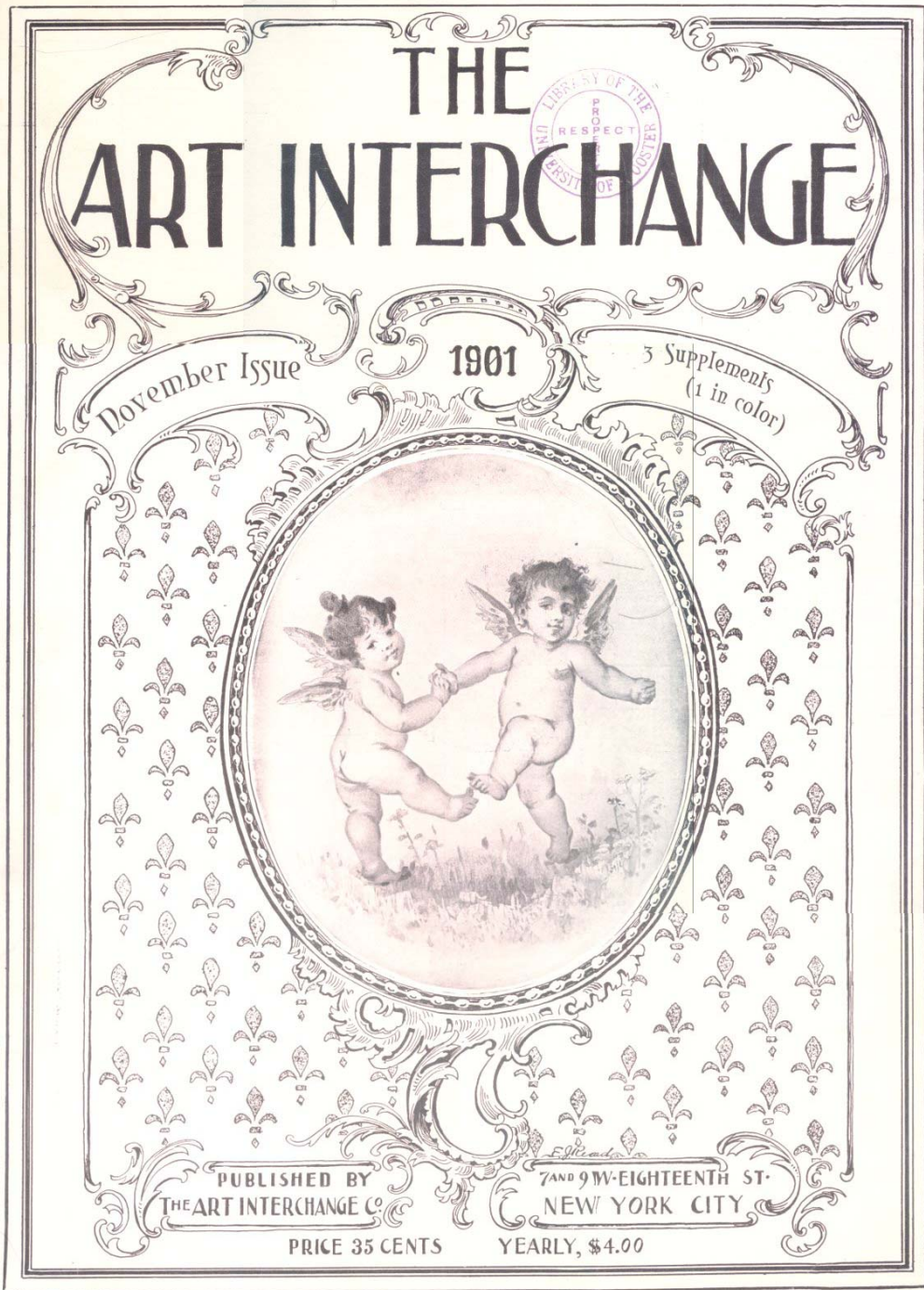


Figure 3.4. Cover of *The Art Interchange*. June 1903.

## Content

One of the standard sections, entitled “Editorial Comment,” highlighted different opinions of the readers. In discussing women in the work force, one reader wrote, “The fact is, however, that there never has been a time when occupation was so free to women as it is at present.”<sup>10</sup> Obviously some women believed that fields that had been closed to them in the past were beginning to slowly allow women to participate in certain socially acceptable parts. In retrospect we often have the perception that women were the victims of subjugation in late-nineteenth-century society. When we look more closely at primary sources, such as these publications, we have a clearer understanding that women actually believed they had opportunities open to them that were not available in the past.

The “Exhibition Notes” section summed up the exhibitions that were occurring and described the artwork that was displayed at them, both nationally and internationally. “New Books” provided the latest information on publications that were available, ranging from dictionaries and art books to fiction and novels. This section was later renamed “The Library Table.” The section “Art and Art School Notes” had much information about what particular art schools were doing in regard to exhibitions and work. Art Schools were highly regarded and offered a vast array of subjects to study. More importantly, the fields of applied art were now considered appropriate for women to enter and schools of art were therefore widely promoted in *The Art Interchange*.

Following the general sections of *The Art Interchange* were those devoted to specific forms of art. “Hints on House Decoration” advised on aspects of the home including choice of paint color, selection of fabrics and how to utilize them, furniture placement, and even how to decorate according to the type of light in a room. Given the importance of an aesthetic interior for this time period, it is easy to understand how a subject such as this was given in-depth coverage. “Notes for Needleworkers” offered specific information and suggestions related to art needlework. The “Instruction Department” appeared as a shortened version of the earlier “Question and Answer” section where readers could pose their questions to the magazine.

*The Art Interchange* established a section dedicated to china painting titled, “The China Decorator,” beginning in 1901. In September 1901 the publication described the objectives of the new segment:

In establishing a Special Department devoted to the Decoration of China, we shall be more than pleased to hear from our added subscribers in regard to their special wants and requirements in this branch of work, as this will enable us to give them the instruction they may need.<sup>11</sup>

This section answered queries and offered suggestions in addition to providing articles on various aspects of the art form. Similar to *The Art Amateur*, *The Art Interchange* also ran several pages of advertisements, offering considerable information on where to obtain supplies or how to locate teachers and classes for china painting (see Figure 3.5).<sup>12</sup>

Finally, china painting had a significant presence in this publication. This section included articles on topics such as the application of lustres, firing




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 Catalogue sent on receipt of 50c, which sum is deducted from the amount of first order for China. Address, mentioning the Art Interchange.  
**Boston China Decorating Works**  
 L. COOLEY, Proprietor  
 28 Tenneyson Street, Boston, Mass.  
 A specialty made of matching broken sets of decorated china.

**WILLETS' BELLEEK CHINA**  
 For amateur painters can be had of dealers in over 500 different shapes.  
 Catalogue sent upon mention of THE ART INTERCHANGE.  
**THE WILLETS M'FG CO.**  
 MANUFACTURERS  
 TRENTON, NEW JERSEY

Figure 3.5. Sample of art supply advertisements. *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* had several pages of advertisements for art supplies and schools, particularly for the domestic arts. This page appeared in *The Art Interchange*, August 1901.

techniques, color and form choices, and the choice of blank china pieces to use for painting. Although the major focus rested on the practical aspects of china painting, similar to *The Art Amateur*, this magazine also had an agenda. It endorsed china painting as comparable to any of the fine arts and especially appropriate for women who were better suited to the domestic arts. This viewpoint is demonstrated in much of the commentary present in the articles related to china painting.

Observing the status of china painting in 1903, *The Art Interchange* suggested, "China painting has won a respected place in the field of art."<sup>13</sup> Perhaps this notion reflected the time period and the fact that china painting was a fashionable pursuit of the era, for most likely it was not viewed by the art world as on the same level as traditional mediums. Moreover, the magazine stated, "There is no more refined, absorbing, fascinating or valuable occupation to-day adapted to woman than china painting . . ."<sup>14</sup> Obviously, as china painting became an auspicious pastime for a woman, promoted in decorative arts magazines, it also made sense to promote it as a serious art form.

In addition to the articles and suggestions on carrying out painted designs on china, *The Art Interchange* offered illustrations and plates in color that could be copied and used for individual pieces. The colored pages, similar to those in *The Art Amateur*, helped to justify the high cost of the magazine. An artist did not necessarily have to come up with a unique design, but could sharpen his or her skills by replicating these designs on a piece of china. The

plates offered a means of creating an attractive object without the pressure of having to develop an innovative design.

*The Art Interchange* evolved throughout its time period to finally find its place in the art world and it became a great resource for artists interested in the domestic or applied arts. Its extensive content on the technical aspects of the arts and the articles related to the state of the art world and the role of women in it were of particular interest to its target audience. By offering a variety of articles on these topics, *The Art Interchange* appealed to a wide audience, influencing how the domestic arts, including china painting, were viewed and utilized during this time period.

#### *The Art Amateur and The Art Interchange Themes*

China painting, primarily considered to be a hobby suitable for women, became an important component of bigger themes that developed and flourished in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. Publications such as *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange*, focused on domestic arts such as china painting, but they also promoted general themes about the decorative arts, their function in the home, and women's roles related to the trends. These themes addressed the importance of handmade objects, the democratization of the arts, the feminization of the arts, the push for domestic arts to be taken seriously in the art world, and domestic arts as a career.

Because of the popularity of these key publications, they can be used to provide insights into what was happening throughout America and how women and the domestic arts and china painting fit into the greater



movement. Studying the regular sections on china painting in-depth allowed for a close examination of its popularity and influence and reflected some of the ways that women used this art form to hone their skills as artists and even to generate income.

### Handmade Objects

One of the most noticeable themes cultivated by both *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* emphasized the underlying philosophy of the importance of hand-crafted objects to adorn the home. This philosophy, generated by the Aesthetic Movement, first in England and later in America, permeated most American homes to some extent and gained even more influence as magazines of the time period promoted it. *The Art Amateur* and *The Art interchange* both underscored Aesthetic philosophy by offering articles denigrating the idea of using mass-produced decorative objects and accessories and by providing the tools to help readers create the hand-crafted goods important to the Movement. According to *The Art Amateur*, “the dismal fact remains that in these degenerate days there yawns a pretty big gulf between most that we profit by as industry and all that we reach after in art.”<sup>15</sup>

It was the fashion during this era to be active in some form of art. China painting happened to be one of the more widespread pastimes. In fact, according to Dorothy Kamm, “By the turn of the century, over 25,000 Americans painted on porcelain, and their artistic styles and designs were as diverse as their numbers.”<sup>16</sup>

## Democratization of Art

The emphasis on household adornment within the larger umbrella of the Aesthetic Movement, reinforced a trend toward democratization of the art world. Democratization meant that anybody, male or female, wealthy or of the middle-class, from urban or rural areas, had the ability to participate in some form of the domestic or applied arts. Supplies and instructions for these arts were readily available and relatively inexpensive, and the array of mediums available to pursue gave many different options to individuals. The fine art world was still mostly comprised of a small group of men and a few women who had exceptional skills in their medium and most likely had sufficient time and money for learning their art. On the other hand, those participating in the domestic arts movement could copy designs and learn the skills necessary to create handcrafted pieces in their own homes at their leisure.

Under leadership of magazines like *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange*, the definition of art expanded to include forms that could be embraced by middle-class Americans and the publications specifically targeted such homes.<sup>17</sup> The periodicals stressed that practically all women could take part in some form of art, and that they had the ability to make their homes more attractive and beautiful, an important value in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

## Feminization of Art

Women had always been active in different types of art used in the domestic setting. While men continued to dominate the fine arts, women began to take their traditional “feminine arts” to another level and *the Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* served as proponents of the trend.

An important parallel of the democratization of art was the feminization of applied art. Although there certainly were men that took part in the applied or domestic arts, women greatly outnumbered them. These creative areas were ones that most women of the time period would have already been accustomed to, since they would have most likely been skilled in some aspect of domestic art. Magazines like *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* offered women opportunities to become involved in the art world through skills that most already possessed. Although *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* endorsed participation in art in numerous ways, they still encouraged women to excel in the areas that were appropriate to them.

Any woman of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries desiring to become active in the fine art field probably felt much pressure from society to remain outside of what was traditionally a man’s domain. While china painting began to achieve greater status than it had in the past, it and other decorative art forms did not infringe on the “fine arts” that men dominated. Because applied arts fit into the sphere of domesticity, relegated to and controlled by women during this time period, it became acceptable for them to participate in the art associated with their domain.<sup>18</sup>

*The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* were geared toward homemakers who were interested in art and beautifying their homes, yet had domestic obligations to attend to. The magazines helped women to take part in the trends of hand-crafted art at home. Needlework, sketching, wallpaper painting, wood-carving, and china painting, were all part of the domestic art movement and were all widely represented in both *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange*.

Society stressed the fact that decorative arts used in the domestic sphere, like needlework and china painting, were especially appropriate for females. There are examples of this in much of the literature of the time period. Both *The Art Amateur* and *Art Interchange* promoted china painting, stressing that women had the patience for painting the delicate details on the fragile pieces and had an eye for color. *The Art Interchange* suggested, "One difficulty that ladies have to contend with in decoration, and which is most wanted, is bold work, large in design and treatment, whilst they lean rather towards refinement and finish than breadth."<sup>19</sup> *The Art Interchange* also commented on areas they thought women were adept at: "Women's natural trend is towards small designs. Breadth and simplicity are what women should especially aim at in keramics."<sup>20</sup> Domenic Mathews Campana, the author of *The Teacher of China Painting*, also held the belief that women had a keen eye for color choices. He noted, "Good taste for color in dressing, a good combination of veils, flowers, and ribbons, denotes a certain education

in the wearer, and we must concede that ladies are superior to men in this special gift of color selection.”<sup>21</sup>

By deeming china painting and the domestic arts appropriate for women, society appeared to give women greater standing in the art world; yet their involvement in these particular creative outlets did not threaten the status quo. The ideology of society was such that it would have been extremely difficult to break into the fine arts for a woman during this period of time. It is an interesting dichotomy that although women were making strides in elevating the status of the domestic arts, at the same time they were being relegated to art that was considered gender appropriate.

Interestingly, even Candace Wheeler, a pioneer in interior decoration who formed a textile firm, The Associated Artists, and also helped to launch the New York Exchange for Women’s Work, acknowledged the lower status of women in the art world.<sup>22</sup> Though she was a successful woman in the field of decorative arts and design, she accepted the reality of male domination in the arts. She even stated, “where architecture LEADS, decorative art will follow” and “its first principle. . . is SUBORDINATION.”<sup>23</sup> Perhaps by playing up the fact that women were better suited to domestic creative outlets with their small hands and attention to detail, the patriarchal society was able to keep women out of the fine art world.

#### China Painting as Fine Art

Even if the art world was not ready to embrace china painting as a viable fine art at the time, the women involved in the art took it extremely

seriously, even if some considered it a hobby. They believed that the principles used in painting on canvas should be applied to china and studied in the same manner. *The Art Interchange* stated, “Ceramic painters must study art. Learn grand art principles and adapt them to decoration.”<sup>24</sup> The publication also touched on the marketability of china painting: “whether it is the rumor that china painters are the most financially successful as a class among artists or the fascination of the work when one gets in touch with it, there is an unusual influx of art workers into the field of ceramics.”<sup>25</sup> In the section of *The Art Interchange* titled, “China Decorator,” the artistic value of china painting is stressed: “I want you to realize that this branch of art work is really an art. Technical skill is to be combined with art study. Good taste and a sense of the fitness of things guide it all.”<sup>26</sup>

Magazines including *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* promoted china painting as a legitimate art form with the same fine art qualities as painting on canvas. These publications emphasized the intrinsic artistic value in creating these pieces, and stated the similarities between china painting and the fine art of painting on canvas. In several articles, the idea that the painted china should not be used for utilitarian purposes was stressed. An article from *The Art Interchange* states, “Very complicated work is scarcely ever on china that is to be much used. The decoration makes it too precious.”<sup>27</sup>

The pages had advertisements endorsing fine schools and academies that taught domestic arts, and articles and instructions on

choosing the colors and shapes of china. It is obvious that both publications took the decorative arts and china painting very seriously and sought to legitimize them in their high-quality magazines.

Identifying the artist who painted a piece of china from this time period is usually a challenge. Generally the china painter left no signature on the object. Many women would have given painted pieces of china as gifts and since whoever would receive a piece as a gift knew the artist, a signature was not necessary. Furthermore, if a woman did sign her work it was most likely a piece consisting of perceived artistic value. Perhaps china painting artists did not have the confidence that their work was good enough or perhaps they thought that the domestic arts did not fit into the same category as the fine arts and did not warrant a signature.

Following the lead of the art world, *The Art Interchange* began encouraging the signing of pieces. The editor stated, "Inscriptions on china add interest and value to the work."<sup>28</sup> According to a column in *The Art Amateur*, pride should be taken in the work: "What a good thing it would be if every one would put either an initial or monogram on the back of every piece!"<sup>29</sup> *The Art Interchange* stated, "The public does not always recognize real merit, but if it sees your work where there is only that which is excellent, your being included in such collections puts value upon your signature on a piece of china."<sup>30</sup> Although women often excelled in painting on china, it is obvious that most women still hesitated to sign their work in the way that fine art paintings were signed.

## China Painting as a Career

Women began advocating for themselves in the art world by insisting on being taken seriously as artists even in the realm of the domestic arts. Most women enjoyed partaking in art forms like china painting for the mere pleasure of creating a beautiful piece of work, while some sought to take it a step further. They believed that pieces of art like painted china were worthy of being exhibited on the same level as fine art works and also hoped that producing beautiful hand-painted china could provide a viable source of income.

Ironically, while *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* often asserted that china painting was a legitimate form of art, they also discouraged women from taking it too seriously. After all, American society still expected that women would perform the household chores and take care of the family as a first priority. *The Art Interchange* noted: "A woman, if she be in dead earnest and intends to succeed, must give up everything else but her art, as a man does."<sup>31</sup>

Despite the fact that there were more opportunities in the art world available to women, society expected their main focus to remain the home and family. According to author Marilyn Ferris Motz, "Throughout the nineteenth century, and to a lesser extent during the first half of the twentieth century, women were expected to devote themselves to home and family."<sup>32</sup> Becoming successful in a career demanded a great deal of time to sharpen these skills and most women could not afford to interrupt their daily domestic



routines for any length of time. In 1883, Susan N. Carter in *Harper's Bazar* suggested, "A few hours a week may make a pleasant amateur artist; but the work which can rank as professional, and which will insure pecuniary reward, has to be pursued through long, steady interest, and application."<sup>33</sup> The reality of the situation was that most women could not commit to the time necessary to carve out careers in such endeavors with families to care for. In most cases, creative outlets such as china painting would remain an entertaining hobby for nearly all women active in them. The notion that a woman could be preoccupied with something other than household duties was also probably a very threatening idea in this society.

In the November 1904 issue of *The Art Interchange*, students were discouraged to think of taking up china painting for the sole purpose of earning a profit:

If the student takes up the study with the idea of making china painting a means of self-support, she will find the process slow compared to a business career, but if the student take up the work from love of it she will find it congenial to follow seriously. At least, she will enjoy every moment of the time, and she may make a financial success. Furthermore, I should not advise students to delude themselves with the idea that they can make a living by china painting, or any other art work, in a hurry. Do not take it up for the sake of making a living – I am writing of it as a pleasure, an advancement in knowledge. As one of the arts and crafts it is delightful to understand. It may develop into an occupation.<sup>34</sup>

While publications of the time period may have suggested that china painting provided a respectable way for a woman to earn a living, such cases were the exception rather than the rule. Although some women considered themselves

professional artists within the domestic arts, it is clear that most only engaged in the activity as a hobby.

Both publications were important in supporting the art of china painting. They both conveyed advanced ideas stating that creative outlets comprising the domestic arts should be considered as relevant and important as the fine arts. The agenda of both *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* appears to include endorsing the domestic arts by legitimizing them through articles, advertisements, and techniques.

#### Decline of Household Arts

After considerable significance and status during the height of the Aesthetic Movement, a tapering off of activity in the domestic arts began to occur after the beginning of the twentieth century. The art of china painting was also affected by this decline and fewer people remained involved in it. After popularity in the late-nineteenth century and continued success through the early twentieth-century, interest in the domestic arts inevitably, yet slowly, waned and gave way to other trends that began emerging. *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* also followed suit as readership declined and interest in these publications, so heavily devoted to the aesthetic interior and domestic arts, decreased. Both *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* ceased publication in the early twentieth century.

Perhaps there existed a threat to artists working in the realm of fine art or perhaps the field became saturated. As exemplified in “The Art Needlework Movement,” the domestic arts in general fell subject to this occurrence. Virginia

Gunn stated, "As people at every level of society began to participate in the decorative art craze, the standards set in sophisticated art centers could not be maintained."<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, "With amateur work flooding the market, leaders in the decorative art movement tried to distance themselves from popular interpretation."<sup>36</sup> *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, in regard to china painting, asserted, "Exceptionally beautiful work of this kind is always well paid; but among the quantities offered for sale the stamp of genius is often not found."<sup>37</sup>

*The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* both offered advice that middle-class American women were seeking in the art world of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. American women had adopted Aesthetic ideals and publications such as these catered to their interests. The Aesthetic Movement provided the philosophy that promoted artistic interiors, and art publications like *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* helped the ideas to disseminate to the larger population in both urban and rural areas.

China painting was one of the most prominent components of both magazines, and it seems likely that its popularity became widespread partially due to the extensive interest in these publications. *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* acted as both catalyst of and a response to the popularity of domestic art.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dianne H. Pilgrim, "The American Renaissance: Decorative Arts and Interior Design from 1876 to 1917," *Art & Antiques*, January/February 1980, 47.

- <sup>2</sup> "What is Its Relative Value in US Dollars?" in *Economic History Services*, online, (accessed 25 September 2005). <http://eh.net>.
- <sup>3</sup> "The Art Amateur for 1892," *The Art Amateur*, October 1891, 103.
- <sup>4</sup> "Art Schools," *The Art Amateur*, October 1891, 105.
- <sup>5</sup> "The Art Amateur for 1889," *The Art Amateur*, November 1888, 124.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Art Amateur*, December 1891, 11.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Art Amateur*, 1880 – 1904.
- <sup>8</sup> Email correspondence, online, (accessed 15 November 2005). <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu>.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Art Interchange*, September 1901, 61; 28 August 1886, 70; November 1903, 112; November 1901, 111.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Art Interchange*, September 1901, 68.
- <sup>11</sup> "The China Decorator," *The Art Interchange*, September 1901, 78.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Art Amateur*, October 1891.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, November 1903, 121.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, September 1901, 78.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, April 1886.
- <sup>16</sup> Dorothy Kamm, *American Painted Porcelain: Collectors Identification and Value Guide* (Paducah, KY: Collector Books, 1997), 27.
- <sup>17</sup> Mary Warner Blanchard, *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University, 1998), 193.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.
- <sup>19</sup> *The Art Interchange*, August 1901, 51.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, December 1903, 149.

<sup>21</sup> Domenic Mathews Campana, *The Teacher of China Painting* (Chicago: the author, 1910), 94.

<sup>22</sup> “Candace Wheeler: The Art and Enterprise of American Design, 1875 – 1900,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art – Special Exhibitions*, online. (accessed 19 March 2004).  
[http://www.metmuseum.org/special/Candace Wheeler/Wheeler more.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/special/Candace_Wheeler/Wheeler_more.htm), 2-3.

<sup>23</sup> Blanchard, 76.

<sup>24</sup> *The Art Interchange*, January 1904, 18.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, June 1904, 152.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, August 1904, 54.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, June 1904, 153.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, January 1904, 18.

<sup>29</sup> *The Art Amateur*, October 1889, 99.

<sup>30</sup> *The Art Interchange*, June 1903, 144.

<sup>31</sup> *The Art Amateur*, October 1890, 105.

<sup>32</sup> Marilyn Ferris Motz, “Introduction,” *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women & Domestic Material Culture 1840-1940* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), 1.

<sup>33</sup> Susan N. Carter, “Women Who Should not Study Art for a Living,” *Harper’s Bazar* 16, 3 February 1883, 66-67, quoted in Virginia Gunn, “The Art Needlework Movement: An Experiment in Self-Help for Middle Class Women, 1870-1900,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 10, (Spring 1992): 60.

<sup>34</sup> *The Art Interchange*, November 1904, 138.

<sup>35</sup> Gunn, 59.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> “Money – Making for Ladies,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 65, June 1882, 115.

## CHAPTER IV

### SPICER STUDIO, AKRON, OHIO

During the Aesthetic era, most American women participated in the domestic arts as a leisure pursuit in addition to their daily responsibilities. A small number of women, however, had an interest in making a career out of these activities. Lizzie Spicer of Akron, Ohio, was one example of an exceptional woman who took her talent in china painting to the next level and made a living out of it.

The extensive circulation of publications such as *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* exposed women in smaller towns and growing cities like Akron, Ohio, to the trends in design. China painting studios and clubs emerged initially as a place for socializing, but they also offered a place for amateur china painters to exchange ideas. *The Art Interchange* states, “A little social club of a few painters may be intensely stimulating.”<sup>1</sup> China painting became a favorite hobby of genteel women during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even in Akron, Ohio, there was enough interest and desire to learn china painting to create a need for teachers of the art.

In Akron, Lizzie Spicer carved out a career in the decorative arts with her skill at china painting and sustained it for almost a half of a century. Spicer began her career by painting china and selling it out of her home. Eventually

she opened the Spicer Studio, turning her initial modest sales into a long-standing business. At this studio, women learned to paint blank pieces of imported china and even signed them if they thought they were good enough.<sup>2</sup> Examples of the work that was done at this studio still exist and have now become collector items. Many pieces from the Spicer Studio can be found in antique stores and on internet auctions. Leo Walter, an Akron, Ohio, antiques dealer, said that he had seen and handled many pieces of painted china with the Spicer Studio stamp, but only a few with signatures in the several decades that he has had his store (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2).<sup>3</sup>

Spicer's story was unusual for the era and deserves recognition and attention. Tracing the development of the Spicer Studio provided insight into grass roots responses to the greater trends that were occurring around the country.

#### China Painting Technique

The most common technique of the era for painting on imported blank pieces of china involved applying mineral colors to the previously glazed piece and re-firing it so that the colors fused with the piece (see Figure 4.3).<sup>4</sup> There is little information of the china painting techniques that were used by Lizzie Spicer and her students at the Spicer Studio, but by looking at articles in magazines like *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange*, it can be assumed that the techniques used in Spicer's Studio would have been



Figure 4.1. Spicer Studio stamp. The marking on the bottom of this Bavaria china plate reads, "Spicer Studio, Akron, Ohio." From author's personal collection.



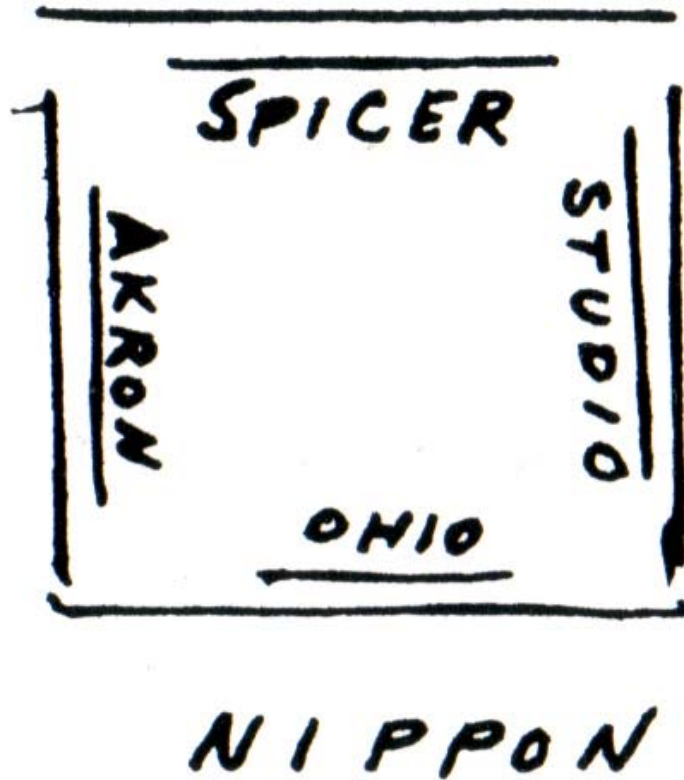


Figure 4.2. Spicer Studio stamp. Detail of stamp found on bottom of a Nippon piece of painted china from the Spicer Studio in Akron, Ohio.



Figure 4.3. Fry's Mineral Colors. Example of a box of typical paints used for china painting. Item number 220016237366, from *Ebay*. Online. (Accessed 22 October 2006).

similar. For example an article in *The Art Interchange* suggests that the artist draw, rather than trace, the motif to be painted. Then, specific mineral colors should be used for the designs. Finally, proper instruction for firing the piece is necessary to avoid mistakes.<sup>5</sup>

The Spicer Studio would have likely been a place where all of the components of painting a piece of china could be carried out. It would have been equipped with the proper space and equipment, including china, paints, and probably a kiln. A woman could leave with a piece of hand-crafted art without the expense of purchasing all of the needed tools and could avoid the clutter of painting materials in her own home.

#### Lizzie Spicer

Lizzie B. Spicer was born February 27, 1865 in Summit County, Ohio.<sup>6</sup> She lived on a farm in Coventry Township, west of Akron. The 1870 federal census of Summit County provides information about the Spicer family. Her father, Austin Spicer, age 36, was a farmer and his wife Julia A., age 35, was keeping house for her three children, H.E., age 8; Albert, age 7; and Lizzie B., age 5.<sup>7</sup>

A decade later when the 1880 census was taken, Lizzie, age 15, and her brother Albert, age 17, were still in school. Her older brother Ernest (H.E.), age 18, was now listed as a farm worker. All three lived with their parents and two servants in Coventry Township.<sup>8</sup> Sometime shortly before or after Austin Spicer died in 1889, the family relocated to Akron proper.<sup>9</sup>

In 1890 Lizzie Spicer and her mother Julia appear in the *Akron City Directory*; their residence is listed as 270 Carroll Street. At this point Lizzie would have been age 25. Sometime between 1880 and 1890, Spicer would have most likely finished school and received some training as an artist. Interestingly, her residence on Carroll Street was within walking distance of Buchtel College. Perhaps she took some courses in art or she may have been self-taught. Either way, by the close proximity to Buchtel College, Spicer most likely would have had some interaction with the academic community in Akron.

Two years later, by 1892, at age 27, Lizzie had begun to carve out a career for herself. She still lived at the Carroll Street residence, but her occupation read: "artist, Arcade Block."<sup>10</sup> She now worked at her art outside the home. The Arcade block was located on South Howard Street and was occupied by many artists, particularly photographers. Virginia Gunn pointed out that galleries and studios in Akron were located, "in key locations near the middle of the central business district, usually at the intersection of Howard and Market Streets."<sup>11</sup>

Many Akron artists also had studios in the same building as the Spicer Studio, allowing Spicer to further interact with the artist community. Photographers in the Arcade Block building included George W. Chandler, F. E. Courtney, A. T. Durant, C. A. Goddard, and Howard & Co., all working in the late 1880s and 1890s. Furthermore, Saunders Art Gallery was located in the Arcade Block during the same time period. The Saunders brothers were

known for their crayon and pastel portraits.<sup>12</sup> It is very likely that artists working close to each other exchanged ideas and learned from one another. Lizzie Spicer would have likely been a part of the Akron artist population.

From 1892 through 1895, Lizzie's listing in the *Directory* remained the same although her studio room number changed from 22 to 35. The 1896 *City Directory* is more specific. Lizzie B. Spicer is now listed as a "china decorator" in place of the original title of "artist."<sup>13</sup> From 1896 through 1907 she had a presence in the *Akron Directory* with a studio listing and title of "china decorator."<sup>14</sup>

In 1908 the *Akron City Directory* begins listing "china painting studio" under Lizzie Spicer's occupation, differentiating her from other china painters who were involved in the art from their homes. From that point until about 1933, Spicer had a listing that varied from "china decorator," to "china painter," to "china studio," in the *City Directory* as her occupation. Her studio and her residence were listed separately and had different addresses.<sup>15</sup>

Obviously Spicer had some success in creating a business for herself since the directories consistently list her occupation as "china decorator" between 1890 and 1937, totaling almost fifty years. During particular years of the directories, Spicer was the only name listed as a china painter, demonstrating that although she did maintain employment as an artist, it would have been an unusual circumstance for most women.<sup>16</sup>

A search of the *Akron City Directories* published between 1890 and 1935 revealed that there were a few women working in the arts. Miss Ellen A.

Newberry and Miss Nellie M. Zealand were both listed consistently between 1896 and 1904 as “china decorators,” along with Lizzie Spicer.<sup>17</sup> These were the years that the Aesthetic Movement ideals would have influenced a smaller town like Akron, Ohio. Newberry’s and Zealand’s careers, according to the *City Directories*, were shorter than Spicer’s as she was listed as a china decorator or painter from 1890 to 1937. Furthermore, as early as 1893, Spicer had a separate address for her work, while the other women artists worked out of their homes.<sup>18</sup>

There is evidence in the directories that Spicer’s studio changed location several times throughout the years. She started in the “Arcade Block” in Akron and later had listings at “Woods Block,” the “Everett Building,” and the “Central Office Building.”<sup>19</sup> The fact that she worked from many different studios through the years may not be extremely significant, although it may indicate moving to larger or more fashionable spaces. The fact that she persevered over time also demonstrates something about this woman. Spicer obviously never gave up. She worked in her chosen field throughout her life and was willing to take risks in her occupation. It was unusual enough to be a working woman during this period, and the fact that she moved around to various studios and persisted in her endeavors leads to the belief that she was a very motivated, forward-thinking, hard-working individual.

Lizzie Spicer ran her studio until 1937. As trends began to change, Spicer offered designs that reflected current taste and new trends. For example, at the turn-of-the-century, the painted china with the label of the

Spicer Studio was in line with late-Victorian and Edwardian designs that were featured prominently in both *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange*.

Many of the early Spicer Studio designs were simple floral or natural motifs that exemplified what was in vogue at the height of the Aesthetic Movement. According to Janet Bryers, “many china painters strove to make their subjects look as natural as possible.”<sup>20</sup> In the late 1800s and early 1900s, flowers, fruits and nuts were popular subjects for china painting. Most often, the pieces were plates, bowls, cups, and saucers, and would be painted with a spray of flowers in soft, muted colors. Sometimes the pieces would also be painted with gold accents, especially around the rims and on handles.<sup>21</sup> The plates illustrated in Figure 4.4, a representation of plates from the Spicer Studio, illustrate the simple, natural motifs popular during this period of design. They include delicately painted cattails, cherry blossoms, forget-me-nots, poppies, and violets in subtle colors. The motifs are usually painted on one side of the plate with soft, wispy brush strokes. The Spicer Studio chocolate set in Figure 4.5 has similar natural motifs with gilded handles, typical of the late 1800s and early 1900s.

As Edwardian styles fell out of favor, Spicer began to introduce patterns that reflected the new style, now known as Art Deco. A painted plate found on Ebay, with the stamp of the Spicer Studio, is clearly in the style of Art Deco, much different than the realistic floral patterns of Victorian and



Figure 4.4. Spicer Studio plates. Designs typical of 1890-1910. These plates are examples of blank or white china that was painted by women at Spicer Studio in Akron, Ohio. From author's personal collection.





Figure 4.5. Spicer Studio chocolate set. Designs typical of 1890-1910. This set is an example of blank or white china that was painted by women at Spicer Studio in Akron, Ohio. Item number J-000374, from *Ruby Lane Antiques*. Online. (Accessed 23 October 2006).

Edwardian times (see Figure 4.6). Here the small floral motifs are utilized and contained in the outer geometric bands. This plate was probably produced in the later years of the studio as it reflected design trends popular in the 1910s and 1920s.

As interest in painted china diminished and the popularity of glass increased, Spicer began decorating glass as well as china. Iridescent glass became especially popular and the iridized glass that was produced in the 1920s all came from decorating studios like the Spicer Studio. The A .H. Heisey Company of Newark, Ohio, produced glass between 1896 and 1957. Heisey glass became very popular in the early twentieth century and was nationally known for its elegance. It was expensive in comparison to other glassware. Some Heisey glass is colored, but the company also produced numerous clear shaped pieces that could be decorated by studios like Spicer's.<sup>22</sup> Tom Felt, a researcher for the Library of Congress, states that, "The Spicer Studio in Akron, Ohio (distributed by Howard Selden in New York) also decorated some Heisey blanks with 'Amethyst, Amber, Blue, and Rainbow luster,' according to an ad from 1921."<sup>23</sup>

An advertising brochure for Howard G. Selden, a New York company distributing Spicer Studio products, features a wide variety of glassware decorated by Spicer's studio. Pieces included candlesticks, candy dishes, champagne flutes, compotes, cups and saucers, punch bowls, nut bowls, relish dishes, salt and pepper shakers, toothpick holders, vases, and many

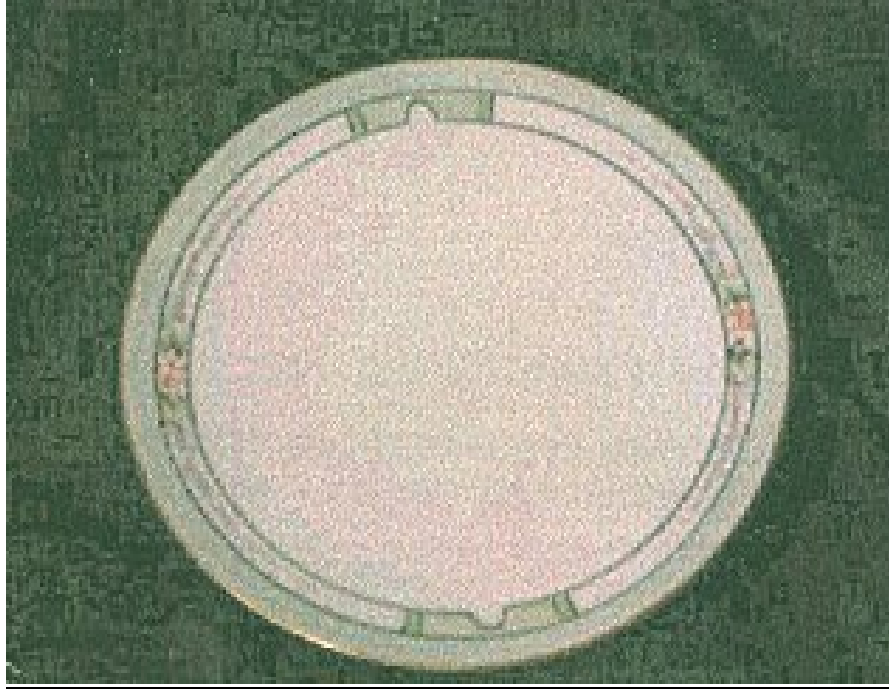


Figure 4.6. Plate with Art Deco motif. Painted china piece from Spicer Studio, Akron, Ohio, which demonstrates the way the studio adapted to current design trends. Design typical of 1910 – 1930. Item number 3763022862, from *Ebay*. Online. (Accessed 22 November 2004).

other pieces (see Figures 4.7 and 4.8).

Lizzie Spicer's involvement with the Heisey Company took her work to another level. Although she had been catering to the local Akron market to generate an income for herself, through Heisey she was recognized across the country. Her work was now sold nationally and Spicer Studio was advertised to a much wider audience.

Lizzie's mother, Julia Spicer died in 1923.<sup>24</sup> Sometime after that, Lizzie's brother, Ernest, lived with her at the East Buchtel address.<sup>25</sup> According to the 1930 Census, Spicer was still a "china decorator" and the head of the household, with Ernest, a "meats dealer," taking up residence with her.<sup>26</sup> She continued working to support herself all through the Depression years. The last listing of the Spicer Studio in the *Akron City Directory* occurs in 1937, five years before her death on October 13, 1942. She is buried with her family in the Glendale Cemetery, Akron, Ohio.

Lizzie Spicer helped carry out the ideals of the Aesthetic Movement. Her career reflects the major themes of Aestheticism that were heavily promoted by media such as *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange*.

Women frequenting the Spicer Studio in Akron, Ohio, wanted to add hand-crafted touches to their homes. Some wanted to purchase pre-painted chinaware like that shown in advertisements of the time period. Others wanted to learn the art of china painting and create their own pieces to



Figure 4.7. Spicer Glass advertisement, ca.1920s. This advertisement features a pamphlet of the dealer, Howard G. Selden, in New York highlighting Spicer glassware. Item number 3762054889, from *Ebay*. Online. (accessed 21 November 2004).

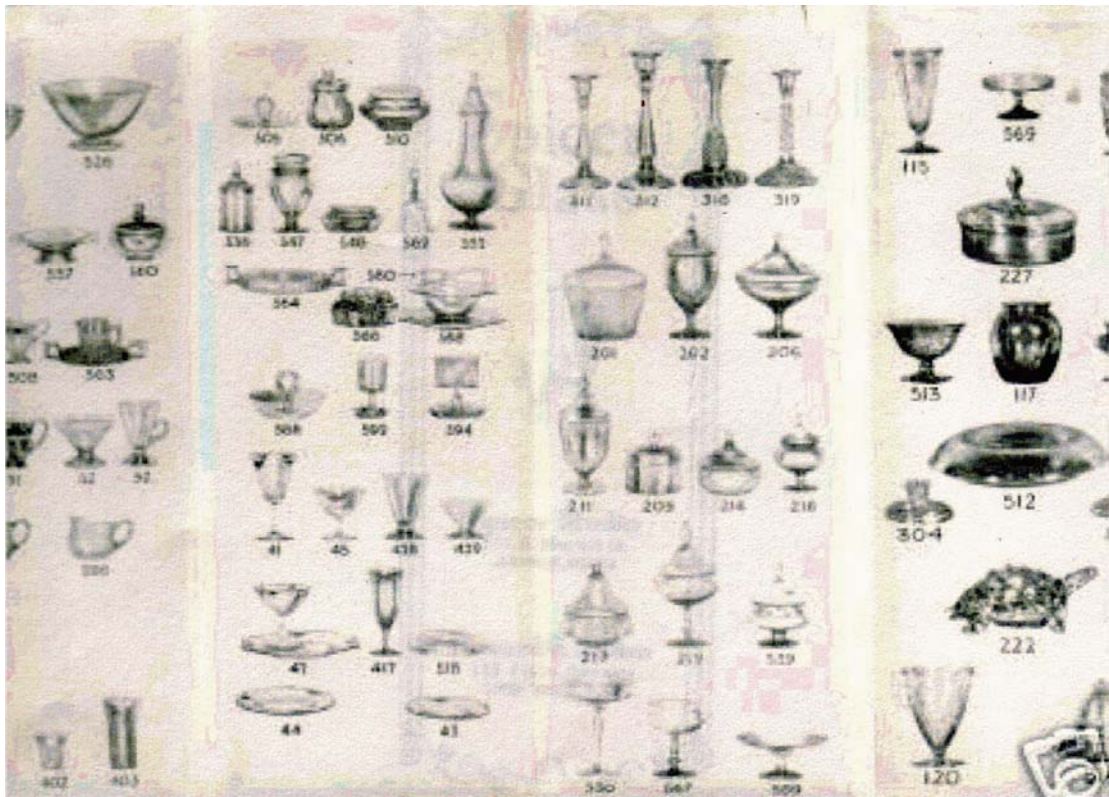


Figure 4.8. Selections from Spicer Glass advertisement, ca. 1920s. This advertisement features a pamphlet of the dealer, Howard G. Selden, in New York highlighting Spicer glassware. Item number 3762054889, from *Ebay*. Online. (accessed 21 November 2004).

personalize their homes or to give as gifts. The Spicer Studio had the ability to fulfill both needs.

Lizzie Spicer also exemplified both the democratization and feminization of art through her career. Spicer came from a modest farming family and used her talent to support herself financially. Although women were typically expected to become homemakers, this era began to allow women to be active and supported in areas of the domestic arts, like china painting. Although having a life-time career was very unusual for females of her era, Spicer did remain in a socially acceptable field of art for women.

China painting reached a more elevated status during this era. It is evident through the hundreds of pieces that can be found in antique shops and online auctions that it was an art form that women embraced. The signed pieces from the Spicer Studio convey the idea that a painted piece of china was as worthy of a signature as an oil painting would be. Whether one participated in china painting as a hobby or sought to be recognized in the realm of fine art, there is no doubt that there was a demand for the hand-painted pieces and china painting did become a form of artistic expression for those involved.

Finally, that the art of china painting could be adapted to a career was a new idea for the era. The cases where women turned their artistic talents into careers were rare, but the Spicer Studio in Akron, Ohio, is one example of a successful endeavor. Lizzie Spicer used her skills as a china painter to support herself throughout her life. She was able to carve out a successful

career by keeping up with changing taste and trends and by expanding into other mediums like glass as it became more popular than china. Spicer was an entrepreneur who thought ahead and followed the trends. By the end of her career she had gained a national reputation as an artist in the domestic arts. The Spicer Studio served as a model for what women could do if they had the drive, confidence, and business sense that Lizzie Spicer demonstrated.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Art Interchange*, January 1904, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Joan Van Patten, *The Collector's Encyclopedia of Nippon Porcelain* (Paducah, KY: Collector Books, 1982), 49.

<sup>3</sup> Conversation with Leo Walters, owner, *Stagecoach Antiques*, Akron, OH, May 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Cynthia A. Brandimarte, "Somebody's Aunt and Nobody's Mother: The American China Painter and Her Work, 1870-1920," *Winterthur Portfolio*, (Winter, 1988), 203-224.

<sup>5</sup> *The Art Interchange*, September 1901, 78-79.

<sup>6</sup> "Lizzie B. Spicer," *Find A Grave Cemetery Records*, online (accessed 10 May 2005). <http://www.findagrave.com>.

<sup>7</sup> Census of Summit County, Coventry Township, OH, 20 June, 1870.

<sup>8</sup> Census of Summit County, Coventry Township, OH, 7 June, 1880.

<sup>9</sup> "Austin Spicer," *Find A Grave Cemetery Records*, online (accessed 10 May 2005). <http://www.findagrave.com>.

<sup>10</sup> 1892-1893 *City Directories*, Akron, OH.

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Gunn, "Commercial Photographers in Akron, Ohio, 1850 – 1900," online (accessed 1 June 2006). [www.cwru.edu/edocs/4%2f259.pdf](http://www.cwru.edu/edocs/4%2f259.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



<sup>13</sup> 1896 *City Directories*, Akron, OH.

<sup>14</sup> 1896–1907 *City Directories*, Akron, OH.

<sup>15</sup> 1908–1934 *City Directories*, Akron, OH.

<sup>16</sup> 1890–1946 *City Directories*, Akron, OH.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Bryers, 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> “Heisey Glass,” online, (accessed 8 September 2006).  
<http://www.myantiquemail.com/Heisey.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> “A. H. Heisey Glass Company,” online (accessed 19 February 2006). [www.carnivalheaven.com](http://www.carnivalheaven.com).

<sup>24</sup> “Julia A. Spicer,” *Find A Grave Cemetery Records*, online (accessed 10 May 2005). <http://www.findagrave.com/cgibin/fg.cgi?page+gr&GSln=spicer&GSfn=liz&GSbyrel=all&GSdyrel=all&GSob=n&GRid=5498669&>

<sup>25</sup> 1890 – 1946 *City Directories*, Akron, OH.

<sup>26</sup> Census of Akron City, OH, 16 April 1930.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

The ideals of the Aesthetic Movement, and the response to industrialization, created a desire for handmade objects in the home. The trend toward using hand-crafted objects to personalize a modern home helped to increase women's participation in the arts, particularly the domestic arts. Women had been involved in the domestic arts already, so these arts were suitable endeavors for them to become more active in.

The domestic arts had wide appeal in both urban and rural areas. With many mediums to choose from, there was something for almost everybody to take an interest in. Art was no longer a hobby reserved for the elite of society as domestic arts grew in popularity. Anyone in the country could participate in them regardless of income, age, social status, or gender. China painting was one of the most popular mediums of the era.

Magazines like *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* promoted the popularity of the domestic arts, particularly china painting, during turn-of-the-century America. Both were serious publications devoted to art in general, but more specifically to women and the domestic arts. Their wide readership demonstrated that there was a market for these kinds of publications.

Both publications strongly supported the art of china painting and had extensive coverage of the subject. These magazines endorsed the idea that that the domestic arts should be considered as relevant and important as the fine arts. Both *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* sought to elevate the status of the domestic arts and china painting by presenting them in a professional and sophisticated manner. The agenda of both *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* was to endorse the domestic arts by legitimizing them through articles, advertisements, and techniques.

Both *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* offered complete instruction tools for one taking on the art of china painting. Any subscription holder to either of these publications could begin to cultivate the skill of china painting simply by following the instructions and suggestions offered.

Women began receiving recognition and were being taken seriously in certain art circles. As women became skilled at an art form such as china painting, they may have become more comfortable with painting in general and sought other avenues to explore. Conceivably, such recognition and encouragement allowed them to build the confidence and motivation necessary for further pursuit in the world of art.

Most women took part in activities like china painting as hobby while others sought to generate some income out of their work. Despite the fact that there were more opportunities in the art world available to women, their main focus remained the home and family. The reality of the situation was that a woman could not commit to the time involved in carving out a career in

such endeavors with a family to care for. In most cases creative outlets such as china painting would remain an entertaining hobby for nearly all women active in them.

A small number of women, like Lizzie Spicer, of Akron, Ohio, took the opportunities available to them as far as they could and developed their skills into profitable endeavors. In the case of Spicer, she was able to devote a significant amount of time to her business and she also adapted to the changing trends, allowing for her business to grow and last for almost half a century.

The elevated status of the domestic arts was a relatively short-lived phenomenon. After the height of the Aesthetic Movement, a tapering off of activity in the domestic arts began to occur after the beginning of the twentieth century. The art of china painting was affected by this decline and fewer people remained involved in it. Both *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* had ceased publication by the early twentieth century.

The Aesthetic Movement and the arts making up the movement paved the way for new ideas and philosophies in design and art. That is not to say that women abandoned the domestic arts completely, rather that much of the interest declined as other trends took precedence.

The domestic arts have still never achieved the same status as the fine arts. Publications like *The Art Amateur* and *The Art Interchange* sought to eliminate the perception of the domestic arts as secondary art forms through their stylish, artistic magazines.

In general, women artists have typically been subject to criticism when compared to male artists through history. Women have gained more recognition in the fine art mediums, yet there seems to still exist a stigma with objects traditionally utilitarian and crafted by women in American society. In order to change the perception of the domestic arts, it is important that we shed light on past women groundbreakers in fields like china painting. This can help us understand that we have benefited from extremely talented women who went virtually unknown, but still helped to create a foundation in art. As we learn more about women like Lizzie Spicer, and the setbacks and successes they experienced, we can give the deserved credibility to these women, and also begin to move forward in our society with its own challenges and issues related to women in the art world.

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