

CHAPTER 2 - FROM NEEDLEWORK TO WOODCARVING: THE FAIRFAX WOMEN AND THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT, 1899-1914

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the various campaigns of the women's movement had begun to affect the lives of non-campaigners. As seen in the previous chapter activists directly encouraged individual women who would profit from and aid the acquisition of new opportunities for women. Yet a broader mass of women had already experienced an increase in educational and professional freedom, had acquired constitutional acknowledgment of the right to national womanhood suffrage, and in some cases had actually obtained state suffrage. While these in the end were qualified victories, they did have an impact on the activities and lifestyles of middle-class Australian women. Some women laid claim to an increased level of cultural agency. The arts appeared to fall into that twilight zone where mid-Victorian stereotypes of feminine behaviour were maintained in some respects, while the boundaries of professionalism and leadership, and the hierarchy of artistic genres were interrogated by women. Many women had absorbed the cultural values taken to denote middle-class respectability in Britain, and sought to create a sense of refinement within their own homes. Both the 'new woman' and the conservative matriarch moved beyond a passive appreciation and domestic application of those arts, to a more active role as public promoters or creators of culture. Where Miles Franklin fell between the two stools of nationalism and feminism, the women at the forefront of the arts and crafts movement in Sydney merged national and imperial influences with Victorian and Edwardian conceptions of womanhood. The result was a broader band of support for practitioners in the arts and crafts movement in the first and second decades of the twentieth century. This chapter will explore the types of female patronage offered to the movement and draws its examples from the ranks of the Fairfax family.

It is possible that the arts and crafts movement reinforced conservative class values, and was thus seen by women of the upper classes as an aspect of the arts that was worth cultivating. In the first decade of the twentieth century an unprecedented interest was taken in Australia's craftsmen and women. Parallel movements also emerged in continental European countries as the influence of the original English movement spread in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The movement had evolved from earlier artistic reactions to the Industrial Revolution. A.W. Pugin (1812-1852), the Gothic revivalist, followed by John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris successively led this reaction. Moving from Pugin's strict design principles, which aimed at beautifying industry, Ruskin advocated the individuality of the human touch in architectural ornamentation and the moral function of art. Morris relied on traditional, manual methods of artistic production and the use of motifs drawn from nature or the immediate stylistic environment.¹ Although the British leaders of the new aesthetic movement drew on utopian socialist values, abhorred the mechanisation that followed the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent decline in the role of the artisan, it quickly found patrons among the new capitalist elite. Its expensive handcrafted items suited the pockets of the wealthy, as did its nostalgia for the pre-industrial, which evoked the heyday of the British aristocracy.² The movement also accompanied the 'professionalisation of the intelligentsia [taking place] throughout

¹ Andrew Montana has recently argued that the trustees of Australia's first art gallery (the National Gallery of Victoria) modelled itself on ideals espoused by 'British design reformers' such as Henry Cole in London during the 1830s and '40s, ideals that in London led to the Great Exhibition of All Nations in 1851 and the foundation of the Museum of Ornamental Art (later the Victoria and Albert Museum) in 1852. Although the long process of raising the Melbourne institution coincided with the emergence of newer design principles in Britain, the trustees held to the imperatives that accompanied the original interest in Gothic, Greek, Japanese and Egyptian design principles that were born as a reaction to the rise of capitalist, industrial society. While the need to apply art in industry hardly mattered in mid-nineteenth century colonial Australia, the notion of the moral function of art, of art as handmaiden to society, held particular potency in a society conscious both of its lack of tradition, and its convict roots. See Andrew Montana, *The Art Movement in Australia: Design, Taste and Society 1875-1900*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000), pp.2-3. See also Grace Cochrane, *The Craft Movement*, (Kensington, NSW: NSW University Press, 1992), p.10.

² Adrian Tinniswood, *The Arts and Crafts House*, (New York: Watson-Guipill Publications, 1999), p.9.

the western world in the 1880s and 1890s'.³ For the women of Britain's landed and moneyed elite, the founding of guilds for the instruction of applied arts was considered a fruitful and suitable activity. Through the guilds women in need could acquire a respectable means of earning a living, and a diversion from less healthy, physically and morally, sources of income. For those who sought professional recognition for their skills, or financial independence on principle, the renewed taste for hand-worked articles similarly provided a suitable occupation. In Australia, the arts and crafts movement thus represented an aspect of bourgeois British culture that provided an opportunity to create its own quality applied arts industry with nationalistic overtones, and an avenue for local middle-class women to begin their transition into professional and public spheres without compromising their social acceptability.

While the arts and crafts represented a respectable hobby or object of patronage for leisured women, the public and professional involvement of a range of women in the local movement also reveals feminist influences. The art historian Helen Topliss has explained the prominence of Australian women artists in the applied arts and later the modern fine arts in terms of the educational and political gains of the women's movement. The idea has some merit. As a result of the evolving British view of the role of art and artists, which initially advocated the marriage of art and industry through design reform and later the separation of the male genius from industrial society, women artists were rhetorically designated as painters of still-life, flowers, and interiors; subjects at the less prestigious end of a new artistic hierarchy. Conversely, art represented a drawing room accomplishment for leisured women, and crafts a part of the domestic role of wives, mothers and daughters, not an occupation. It possessed moral overtones in its demonstration of the effective use of leisure time to enhance domestic comfort and

³ Cochrane, *Craft Movement*, p.15.

aesthetic pleasure, or a healthier option to factory work or other sources of income. This gendered separation of artistic roles was also applied in Australia. Patricia McDonald, pointing to the initial public isolation of women's work at the 1879 Sydney International Exhibition, asserted that from the last decades of the nineteenth century the message was that women's artistic work served a distinct moral and domestic purpose.⁴ In perpetuating these practices as professionals in the twentieth century, Topliss has argued, informed female artists made a deliberate and political decision.⁵ This could explain the energy and determination with which Ellis Rowan pursued an unconventional career painting a large range of wildflowers in a botanically accurate manner. It may also apply to middle and upper class women who took up or patronised the arts and crafts movements in Australia in the first decade of the twentieth century. The search for artistic and professional recognition of women's work may have represented something of a defiant gesture. It was, however, a gesture made possible through the force of the intelligence, artistic skill and confidence that those women vested in both themselves and the ideals of the arts and crafts movement.

Prosperous women or feminist practitioners did not single-handedly introduce the local arts and crafts industry to Sydney. Interest in the applied arts first obtained public expression in Australia in the magazine, *Arts and Crafts*, (1895-1898). Propounding Ruskin- and Morris-inspired ideals, including the application of art for domestic purposes, the need for an art education system, for guilds and exhibitions, it retained the original British vision. Arts and Crafts Societies were formed in Tasmania, New South Wales,

⁴ Patricia R. McDonald, 'What to do with our girls' in Historic Houses Trust, *Home & Hearth: Women's Decorative Arts and Crafts 1800-1930*, catalogue, Elizabeth Bay House, December 1988 - May 1989, p.37.

⁵ Helen Topliss, *Modernism and Feminism: Australian Women Artists 1900-1940*, (Roseville East, NSW: Craftsman House, 1996). The vast majority of professional female artists of the interwar years fell under the general label of modernist. According to Topliss, the majority of these deliberately rejected the artistic traditions taught and favoured by the male-dominated art establishment, and chose to follow movements that gave validity to their own practices.

Victoria and Brisbane between 1903 and 1912, the ideological separation of the fine and applied arts making a small exhibit in an art society exhibition unacceptable. In addition to an emphasis on the hand-made object, and a respect for the quality of the material, participants in the Australian arts and crafts movement substituted the native Australian flora and fauna for the English country symbols propounded by Morris. Most early advocates of this nationalistic approach hailed from Sydney: Lucien Henry, a teacher at the Sydney Technical College since 1881; Richard T. Baker, a curator at the Technological Museum; and Eirene Mort, the London-trained designer and etcher.⁶ Henry had for many years 'attempted to incorporate Australian motifs into decorative schemes and encouraged his students to do likewise'.⁷ The idea of using native images in home decorations reached Australian women before the turn of century through lessons offered by Henry at the Technical College, and articles in women's magazines.⁸ Prior to federation, Richard Baker, who was originally appointed an economic botanist by the government, had argued for the selection of the waratah as the national floral emblem. Over the ensuing years he too encouraged the use of native flora in design. In 1915 he published *The Australian Flora in Applied Art* and offered 'Part I The Waratah' 'as a contribution to the foundation of a National School of Applied Art or Design'.⁹ While undertaking studies at South Kensington, London, in the earliest years of the new century, Eirene Mort developed her 'Australian Alphabet'. She returned to Sydney in 1905 and in 1906 formed the Australian Guild of Handcrafts. None of these early leaders in the search for Australian design principles took on the socialist imperatives of Morris's teachings, but stylistically they

⁶ Cochrane, *Craft Movement*, pp.161-7.

⁷ Margaret Betteridge, Anne Graham and Janette Thompson, *Australian Flora in Art*, Museum of Applied Art, exhibition catalogue, Nov. 1977, Elizabeth Bay House, p.5.

⁸ McDonald, 'What to do with our girls', p.34. McDonald, discussing the increasing importance of the woman's role in home decoration from the 1880s, refers to 'characteristic works' from the period including 'a plushwork pelmet appliquéd with English roses, wattle and very realistic flannel flowers; and a Sturt Desert Pea curtain embroidered jointly by Mrs Richard Arnold and Dame Maud Macarthy about 1887'.

⁹ Richard T. Baker, *The Australian Flora in Applied Art, Part I. The Waratah*, (Sydney:

understood his preference for the native and local and applied it in their use of Australian images.¹⁰

In the emergence of a female dominated arts and crafts movement in Sydney, the introduction of wood-carving classes, the foundation of the Society of Arts and Crafts in Sydney in 1906, and the Exhibition of Women's Work held in Melbourne in 1907 were significant transitional events. In each of these, the women of the wealthy and influential families of Sydney's eastern suburbs played an important role. Through their active participation in such events, the women of the Fairfax family provide an enlightening example of the different ways in which such women were able to offer their patronage. They provide for a better understanding of the avenues open to women in early twentieth century Sydney to express the lessons of the women's movement in terms of an increased cultural agency. It is thus with the Fairfax family that the story of the arts and crafts movement in Sydney begins.

The Fairfax Women and the arts, 1899-1909

The family headed by Sir James Reading Fairfax symbolised, collectively, what Sydney-siders thought of as Society. Sir James Fairfax, proprietor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was described on his death, in that same paper, as a 'doyen of Australian journalism'.¹¹ While his eldest son, Charles, appears to have detached himself from the newspaper empire and spent most of his adult life in London, Fairfax's second and third sons, Geoffrey and James Oswald (J.O.), became permanent directors of John Fairfax and Sons Ltd in 1916. The fourth son, Harold, died in 1912. The next, John Hubert (known by his second name) was a grazier and divided his time between properties in New South

Technological Museum, 1915), 'Preface, n.p.

¹⁰ Cochrane, *Craft Movement*, pp.14-15.

¹¹ 'A Long Chapter Closed – The "Sydney Morning Herald" Leading Article of Saturday, March 29,

Wales and Queensland, and a house in Sydney. The youngest, Edward Wilfred (also known by his second name) distinguished himself during the war as 'senior physician of the first Australian General Hospital in France'.¹² Geoffrey and J. O. married the Hixson sisters, Lena and Mabel, respectively. Sir James R. Fairfax, and his wife, Lucy, had only one daughter, their eldest child, Mary Elizabeth. She remained single throughout her life.

All the members of the Fairfax family at one time or another, usually between lengthy periods on rural properties or travels abroad, resided in the eastern suburbs. Home of some of Australia's wealthiest and most influential families, and a stronghold of both imperial conservatism, and fashionable Society, the shores of the southern side of Sydney Harbour, to the east of the city itself, boasted large homes and lush gardens. Comprised of the suburbs of Rushcutter's Bay, Elizabeth Bay, Darling Point, Point Piper, Double Bay, Edgecliff, Woollahra, Bellevue Hill, Rose Bay, and Vaucluse, the area, together with the newer settlements at Mosman, and a small pocket at Hunter's Hill, was the home of a large proportion of Sydney's ruling elite.¹³ Even in the 1920s when the real estate boom saw sprawling Sydney suburbs divided up and sold off, sub-divisions in Woollahra and Vaucluse remained minimal. Newly released slices of the 'grounds of mansion houses' were generously sized, possessed harbour views, a cool breeze, and perhaps most importantly, 'neighbours of like substance and standing'.¹⁴

Sir James Fairfax, Lady Lucy Fairfax and Miss Mary Fairfax occupied *Ginahgulla*, at Bellevue Hill. The sisters, Lena and Mabel Hixson, had also grown up in the area. For

1919', C. Brunson Fletcher (ed.), *Sir James Reading Fairfax: Born October 17th, 1834. Died, March 28th, 1919*, Sydney, 1919 (for private circulation), p.5.

¹² Gavin Souter, *Heralds and Angels*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991), pp.40-41.

¹³ Most of the land originally comprised the estate of Captain John Piper. When in debt, he had mortgaged his properties as security for a £20 000 loan from the merchants, Cooper & Levy. Inevitably, Thomas Cooper acquired the properties bounded by Ocean Street and Jersey Street, Woollahra, Oxford Street and Old South Head Road to the south, and Hay Street, Vaucluse, in the north. The new Cooper Estate encompassed the villages that eventually became the suburbs of Double Bay, Edgecliff, Woollahra, Bellevue Hill, and Rose Bay, through a series of subdivisions. See G. Nesta Griffiths, *Point Piper: Past and Present*, (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1947), for a full and interesting history of the area and its inhabitants.

¹⁴ Max Kelly, 'Pleasure and profit: the eastern suburbs come of age 1919-1929', in Jill Roe (ed.),

many years, Geoffrey and Lena Fairfax lived at *Elaine* in Double Bay. James Oswald and Mabel Fairfax initially lived in *Koorali*, at Point Piper, shortly afterwards moving to *Fairwater*, Double Bay. Situated next door to *Elaine*, *Fairwater* boasted a large drawing room paneled in Australian timber, and beautiful gardens that sloped down to the water's edge. Many of the individuals that the Fairfaxes associated with lived near-by. Sir Francis Suttor, President of the Legislative Council and his family resided at Point Piper earlier in the decade, and later moved to *Wiston*, Darling Point. Mr Thomas and Mrs Louisa Hughes, Mayor and Mayoress of Sydney for 1903, 1907 and 1908,¹⁵ lived at *Cranbrook Cottage*, next to the then State Government House, *Cranbrook*, at Rose Bay. Lady Darley resided at *Quambi*, Woollahra, for many years, while the various members of the Knox and Stephen families also remained in the Bellevue Hill-Double Bay area. During the same period, Mr T.H. Kelly, and his socially prominent wife, Ethel Kelly owned *Glenyarrah*, an impressive residence on the spur of land that divided Double Bay into two.¹⁶ It appears the Fairfaxes were in select company.

The Fairfaxes' tastes, interests and commitments conveyed their education, wealth and social status. Charles Brunsdon Fletcher, editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, wrote of the Fairfax family, '[t]hey were of the best British stock; and their English mind and ways were reflected in their sturdy faith in the Empire'.¹⁷ This was reflected in Sir James R. Fairfax's interest in the visual arts. Like the men of Bristol's cultural renaissance of 1865-1875 who aimed to educate and civilise the people through the foundation of cultural and educational institutions,¹⁸ James Reading Fairfax contributed dutifully and

Twentieth Century Sydney: Studies in urban and social history, (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1980), p.8.

¹⁵ Peter Spearritt, 'John Francis Hughes and Sir Thomas Hughes', *ADB*, vol. 9, pp.392-3.

¹⁶ Helen Rutledge's family history and collection of personal reminiscences in *My Grandfather's House* also provides valuable insights into the exclusive nature of the Eastern Suburbs, and the wealth and status of the families residing in the area. See Helen Rutledge, *My Grandfather's House*, (Sydney: Doubleday, 1986).

¹⁷ Fletcher, *Sir James Reading Fairfax*, p.2.

¹⁸ See H.E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914*, (London: Routledge and Kegan,

significantly to the development to the artistic life of Sydney. He attended the founding meeting of the National Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1871 and remained a member of the board of trustees until his death in 1919. Through careful study at European galleries conducted during his many trips abroad, his obituary claimed that Fairfax had 'acquired a highly cultivated taste in painting, and became recognised as a connoisseur whose judgement was always sound and reliable'.¹⁹ He abhorred post-impressionism and cubism, and promoted drawing and draughtsmanship as the true foundation of sound artistic technique. To encourage such skills, he offered generous prizes for pencil drawing.

While the newspaperman was loyal to his homeland, he saw Australia's future in the perpetuation of the 'imperial connection', and the 'faith and traditions' representative of Britain. Thus he upheld the 'principles of truth, honesty and fair dealing', was a 'pillar of the [Congregational] Church', and served numerous institutions that perpetuated the spirit of Victorian charity.²⁰ As such, he co-founded the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, and the Boys' Brigade, and was associated with the early years of the Ragged Schools, the Mission to Seamen, the Royal Naval House, the Queen Victoria Home for Consumptives, and the Carrington Convalescent Home. He was also linked with the National Shipwreck and Relief and Humane Society, whose name is appropriately evocative of the self-righteous civility of mid-nineteenth century liberalism.

Likewise, the philanthropic activities and cultural products and practices sanctioned by the Fairfax women echoed the ethics propounded and upheld by British Society in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The daughter of John Armstrong, surveyor to the Australian Agricultural Company, and grand-daughter of the First Fleeter,

1976), pp.50-1.

¹⁹ *SMH*, 29 March 1919, in Fletcher, *Sir James Reading Fairfax*. Note that the gallery, founded during colonial times, bore the adjectival 'National' in its official name. The misnomer was officially retained throughout the period of study, and therefore has been used in any references to the institution in this thesis.

²⁰ Charles Brunson Fletcher, 'The Late Sir James Fairfax – An Appreciation'; and *SMH*, 29 March 1919, both in Fletcher, *Sir James Reading Fairfax*.

Francis Oakes, Lucy Fairfax wife of Sir James R. Fairfax was born in Sydney in 1835, 'when Australia was still wrapped within the swaddling-clothes of the infant Crown colony'.²¹ Her conduct and interests conformed to all that was expected of a woman of the period in England. She was 'strong-minded and gracious' and tempered 'intelligence with sympathy'.²² Further, she was a woman:

whose energies were ever employed in the alleviation of the harshnesses [sic.] which life imposed upon her less fortunate fellows. She seized every opportunity that came to her hand – and sought out many that did not come – to aid, and in some cases inaugurate, the many philanthropic and patriotic institutions of this city.²³

Among the institutions to benefit from her service were the Queen's Jubilee Fund, the Boys' Brigade, 'the Queen Victoria Homes, the Sydney City Mission, the Female Refuge, the Children's Hospital', the District Nursing Association, the London Missionary Society, and the Congregational Church.²⁴ Her interest in health and nursing is clear. One day she would open new rooms at the Sydney Medical Mission. On another she would attend the opening of the Norland Institute, a fund-raising concert for the District Nursing Association, or a fair held to raise funds for a nurses' home at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. At *Ginahgulla*, she hosted meetings of the University Students' Christian Union, and the Young Women's Christian Association, in order to introduce international guests associated with those organisations. Together with her husband, Lady Fairfax attended dinner parties, receptions and musical events hosted by a series of naval personnel, and state and federal governors.

Lady Fairfax also participated in events of a more cultural nature. In 1888, she served on the committee formed by Lady Carrington, wife of the Governor at the time, to

²¹ 'A Broken Tie', *SMH*, 30 Nov. 1925 and 'Late Lady Fairfax', *SMH*, both cuttings in J.M. Forde, Australian newscuttings, scrapbook in ML Q990.1/110; and Caroline Simpson, 'Sir James Reading Fairfax', in *ADB*, vol. 8, p.460.

²² 'Lady Fairfax Dead. A Life of Service', *Daily Telegraph*, 30 Nov. 1925.

²³ 'A Broken Tie'.

²⁴ 'Lady Fairfax Dead'.

organise the “Exhibition of Women’s Industries and Centenary Fair”. Together with her daughter, Mary, she also attended numerous musical entertainments. The two chose to attend Melba’s second Sydney concert in 1907, Madame Calves’ concert in 1910, a concert aimed at raising sufficient funds to enable the promising young singer Miss Eva Champion to study music in London, and to subscribe to a chamber music scheme initiated by the wife of the Sydney conductor, Joseph Bradley. They rarely attended the balls and dances held for purely social causes. Nor did they show any interest in the series of musical comedies that regularly appeared at the theatres. When Lady Lucy and Miss Mary Fairfax attended large scaled social functions, their apparel was rarely, if ever, reported in the women’s press. The female residents of *Ginahgulla* were committed Congregationalists, and neither overly fashion-conscious nor socially outgoing women. Instead they were conservative figures with the cultural and philosophical sophistication born of exposure to the museums and concert-halls of Britain and Europe, and a moderation of interest and temperament bred by strict adherence to evangelical ethics.

Lena and Mabel Fairfax, as the wives of the permanent directors of John Fairfax and Sons, Ltd, were also active and well-known members of Sydney Society. The newspapers of the day leave no doubt as to their social prominence, or enjoyment of social occasions. Together with her sister and an assortment of other women, Lena Fairfax, for example, attended the opening night of each of the latest shows at the theatre. She attended dinner parties or musical evenings at government house, held dances at her residence, *Elaine*, Double Bay, during race week festivities, and attended functions hosted by other women from the eastern suburbs. She participated in a plethora of both social and philanthropic activities, and through regular trips to Europe with her husband, was fully informed of the trends abroad.²⁵ It would appear, therefore, that Lena Fairfax was fashion-

25Information on social appearances of the Fairfax women drawn from regular columns in *Sydney*

conscious, and receptive to new and novel ideas – a ‘new woman’. This willingness to embrace innovative practices may have played a part in her attraction to the idea of woodcarving as a feminine pastime, or even as a professional accomplishment, at a time when most Sydney-siders remained unaware of the acceptance of its practice by European women.

During the summer of 1898-99, some ‘leading society ladies of Sydney’, including Lena Fairfax, and her sister Mabel, stayed at Dunedin, New Zealand. They discovered that their host and her husband had developed woodcarving skills. Their hosts, and many of the women of Dunedin, had acquired their skills at a class run by Suzanne Gether, a woman from Denmark. Although Gether herself was on holidays, the Fairfax women sent off a telegram asking, ‘Will you go take class in Sydney if arranged for you?’ Though receptive to the idea, the wood-carver chose to continue her holiday, intending to reply after her return. Wryly, Gether later commented that she quickly learned that ‘what is done by Sydney people must be done at once or never’. Repeated requests by telegram persuaded her to take immediate action. By the winter of that year, 1899, she found herself in Sydney.²⁶

At that time, it appears that Sydney had neither taken up the arts and crafts movement with great vigour, nor fully comprehended the cultural implications of the campaign for the advancement of women. Gether found, to her surprise, that woodcarving ‘was practically unknown as a useful and interesting pastime for ladies’. She quickly assured the women of Sydney, as she had the people of Dunedin, that in Denmark

Mail, 1907-12.

²⁶ Suzanne Gether, ‘Our Australian Craftswomen - No.2: Miss Suzanne Gether’, *Art and Architecture*, vol. V, no. 2, Mar-April 1908, pp.50-56. Gether appears to have sold her studio in 1913 and left Sydney permanently. Nothing more is known of her. See also Louise Giacco, ‘Suzanne Gether’, Joan Kerr (ed.), *Heritage, The National Women's Art Book*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.356-7.

‘woodcarving, embossed leather-work, [and] pyrography, had long been recognised as a proper pastime for the highest lady in the land’.²⁷

A Press Bazaar, the highlight of the 1899 winter season for Sydney Society represented Gether’s first opportunity to exhibit her work. Sir James R. Fairfax was naturally involved in the organisation of the event. The Fairfax women, including his wife Lady Lucy, his daughter Mary, and the two sisters Lena and Mabel Fairfax, together with the Misses Watson, Martin and Garran, happened to run one of the event’s most popular and successful stalls. Their “Fancy and Useful Articles” stall boasted ‘the choicest importations from India, Russia and France’, and included a screen designed by the noted British designer, illustrator and close friend of William Morris, Walter Crane, embroidered by ‘Mrs Cecil Stephen and Miss Church’.²⁸ Although Gether did not directly relate her involvement in the Bazaar to the agency of Lena Fairfax, it is likely, considering the close connection between Lena and the organisers of the event, and the prominence of the Fairfax women as participants, that the demonstration resulted from Lena’s intervention.

When Lena and Mabel Fairfax had insisted that Gether move to Sydney, they had promised to make the arrangements for the woodcarving classes. Lena, true to her word, arranged pupils who ‘were ready to commence’ when Gether arrived in Sydney, and obtained rooms for her at the Victoria Markets. She was among Gether’s first students in Sydney, together with Mabel Fairfax, the wealthy philanthropist Miss Eadith Walker²⁹, Miss E.P. Walker, two Misses Martin and Miss Cox, all of whose names appeared semi-regularly in the social columns of the Sydney papers of the time.

Mrs Geoffrey Fairfax’s support of Gether, and involvement in the move of the craft worker to Sydney also reflected her more general interest in the arts. Indeed, she had

²⁷ Gether, ‘Our Craftswomen’, p.50.

²⁸ *Sydney Mail*, 19 Aug. 1899, p.437.

²⁹ See J. MacCulloch, ‘Dame Eadith Walker’. *ADB*, vol.12, pp.356-7.

gained mention on separate occasion for her artistic interests. Nesta Griffiths in her detailed though not always accurate book on Point Piper recalled that Mr Geoffrey Fairfax had purchased *Elaine*, in Double Bay, some time after 1888, and that 'he and his beautiful wife lived there many years'. Griffiths continued:

He bequeathed her wonderful collection of Oriental porcelain to the National Art Gallery of N.S.W. She had a great flair for decoration, and her additions to the original house were most artistic.³⁰

Note that the tribute paid by Griffiths was to the application of Lena Fairfax's artistic taste in a domestic context. Yet, whether or not the idea appealed simply for its novelty, by persuading Gether to conduct classes in Sydney, Lena Fairfax was able to take her interest a step further. Few would have classed her action as direct patronage, due to its similarity to the organisation of charity work, for example. Yet, through this action numerous Sydney women, many from the eastern suburbs or lower north shore, obtained the opportunity to learn woodcarving. Many women such as Mrs Davenport from Darling Point, and Mrs Munday from Edgecliff later entered specimens in the 1907 Australian Exhibition of Women's Work, winning prizes and acclaim for their work.³¹

Further, Gether was a woman with vision. Drawing on the ideal of national efficiency, she spoke seriously about engaging the talents of the women of Sydney in useful pastimes. She consistently encouraged them to believe in their ability to tackle the applied arts in a professional manner. Within a decade woodcarving had become an acceptable and popular craft among Sydney's middle class women. In 1908 Gether proclaimed:

The practice of wood-carving is now an established craft among Sydney ladies: so is embossed leather, pyrography etc; but we have begun a new kind of home

³⁰ Griffiths, *Point Piper*, p.82.

³¹ The former demonstrated her loyalty to the wood carver years later, when, as President of the Society of Arts and Crafts, she proposed that the Society buy Gether's business for its own premises. Half the funds were to be donated anonymously if the Society would pay the rest. Davenport resigned when the Society did not accept the proposal. See Society of Arts and Crafts of NSW (SA&C) Papers, Annual Reports, 1911, ML MSS 3645, MLK 2075.

industry lately, of which nothing, or very little, is known here as yet, and that is art weaving. Some of our Sydney ladies now make their own furniture, and decorate it with carving or pyrography; they make their own door-plates, candlesticks, and trays in metal; their own book-covers, belts, bags and furniture covering in leather; and they paint their china according to their fancy. What they want now is to make their own carpets, cushions, wall hangings, portieres, and table coverings. There are hands, brains, energy, and understanding for it all, for, whatever may be said, women of this country do not care to be classed as unemployed.³²

Gether's suggestion that even leisured women could use their time productively would have appealed to the conscientious, the progressive, the skilled and the educated among Sydney women.

While Lena Fairfax imported a woman of capacity and vision, capable of sparking a change in attitudes through her own example, other women from the eastern suburbs, including her mother-in-law, Lady Lucy Fairfax, offered their patronage to larger scaled movements aimed at highlighting the work of female practitioners of the fine and applied arts, such as the Exhibition of Women's Work. Initiated by Lady Alice Northcote, wife of the Governor General, the First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work, held in Melbourne in 1907, provided unprecedented exposure to women who had already embarked on such career paths. An 'adopted daughter of the Canadian railroad tycoon Lord Mount Stephen', Northcote was known to be a 'dignified consort'³³ and evoked much affection in the women of Australia.

Through the Exhibition of Women's Work, Northcote sought to convey her emphatic endorsement of the idea that women could work for their livelihood. The Official Souvenir Catalogue stated that '[i]t will be seen that a competent, respectable livelihood may be earned by any women with health and energy and the wish to be independent'. It also explained:

As one chief object of the Exhibition has been to encourage originality and initiation, special attention has been paid to these points, and it will be found that

³² Gether, 'Our Craftswomen', pp.55-6.

³³ Chris Cunneen, 'Northcote, Sir Henry Stafford', *ADB*, vol. 11, p.40.

such latent talent has been brought to light. The effects of the technical training, which women are now receiving in all branches of art, are beginning to show. Until recently women with a leaning towards art have been content with producing pictures, for many of which there has not been much demand. Now they can put their skill and ingenuity to profitable use in the various branches of design, and many a woman who might have starved as a picture painter may earn a competent living in a congenial way as an original designer or as a skilled draughtswoman.³⁴

Cultural agency, professionalism and respectability all constituted aims of the exhibition, as stated in the catalogue. Certainly the idea that paid craft work was acceptable, partly due to its 'congenial' nature, and partly because of its purposeful use of time, talent and training, is inescapable. The belief in the capacity possessed by women to make decisive contributions to public life, as artists, must also be noted. Also implicit in the reams of reportage on the exhibition was an acceptance of the notion of paid work for women. The 'opening up of new avenues of employment to women' was observed and endorsed; 'every opportunity should be afforded them to determine for themselves the occupations for which they are best qualified' whether the desire to work was driven by economic necessity or 'devot[ion] to various artistic pursuits'.³⁵

Many thousands of men and women attended the exhibition, and many more read about it in newspapers, magazines and journals. To all was conveyed this confidence in the abilities of women, encouragement of the exploration of new artistic practices, and endorsement of their right to educational opportunities and financial independence. Afterwards, Queen Alexandra an enthusiastic patron of students studying the various arts and crafts in London wrote to Northcote expressing her joy at the success of the exhibition. She had heard 'from all sides' that it:

was the greatest possible success – thanks to your untiring exertions and uncooling energy. It must indeed have been a wonderful sight and it is marvellous to think that from beginning to end it was entirely worked contracted [sic] and carried out

³⁴ First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work, 1907, *Official Souvenir Catalogue*, Exhibition Building, Melbourne, 23 Oct.-30 Nov. 1907.

³⁵ 'First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work 1907', document in Keep, Mrs Douglas, 'Historical Material relating to First Exhibition of Women's Work 1907, Melbourne', Latrobe, SLV, MS 10964, MSB 353.

by women. Indeed you deserve the highest possible credit – It must be a source of great pride to you to think that you were the creator and author of such a Unique and Epoch-making undertaking.³⁶

By involving women of influence from around the world, Lady Northcote brought additional weight to her message. Through both personal and indirect requests to the Queens of England, Spain, Portugal and Norway, various British and European Princesses and Duchesses, and numerous other women of importance, she secured expressions of good will and support, and loans of specimens of work from around the globe. While petitioning the British Ambassador to Germany, Sir Frank Lascelles, for assistance in obtaining some German exhibits, perhaps even from the 'Empress or any Princess', Northcote explained that 'Australians would so appreciate such a kind thought'.³⁷ Responding to an encouraging report from Lascelles, Northcote detailed the progress made in collecting contributions from other European nations:

Nearly every part of the world will be represented and from France and Spain very fine exhibits. The Spanish shipping are carrying theirs free as far Columbo. All our British Princesses are sending us specimens of their handiwork and this is giving much pleasure to Australians.³⁸

Not all met with the hopes of Lady Northcote. Despite her efforts, those of Alfred Deakin, and the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Elgin, it was not possible to arrange for a Princess to attend and formally open the exhibition.³⁹

As part of the preliminary activities, a committee organised the 'first exhibition of Australian women's work in London'. The opening ceremony 'was performed by her Royal Highness Princess Louise', who also sent a specimen of her own work, 'in the

³⁶ Queen Alexandra to Lady Northcote, 1 March 1908, Iddelsleigh Papers, 50033, British Library, Manuscripts Collections, p.21.

³⁷ Alice Northcote to 'Sir Frank' [Lascelles], 21 Nov. 1906, Public Record Office, London, Lascelles Papers, F.O. 800/13, pp.268-9.

³⁸ Alice Northcote to 'Sir Frank' [Lascelles], 1 July 1907, Public Record Office, London, Lascelles Papers, F.O. 800/13, pp.452-53.

³⁹ Lord Elgin to Lord Northcote, 7 June 1907, Public Record Office, London, Northcote Papers, P.R.O. 30/56, vol.1, pp.106-08.

shape of a screen beautifully embroidered with a design in pink hollyhocks'. The Patronesses of the London exhibition included, among others, the Duchesses of Somerset, Sutherland, and Westminster, the Countesses of Pembroke, Belmore, Onslow, Jersey, Lindsay, Darnley, Carrington and Beauchamp, and the Ladies Brassey, Battersea, Tennyson, Fremantle, Talbot, Cooper, Robinson, Hamilton, Clarke, Onslow, Hutton, and Nelson. The range of exhibits, from needlework, to leather, metal and woodwork, and examples of more exotic crafts, contributed by these women would have alerted Australian women to the different types of acceptable work that they had not previously associated with their own gender, and shown that the recognition accorded their work at the exhibition, reflected a world-wide movement.⁴⁰

The enormous organisational feat that the exhibition entailed was achieved through a series of State working groups headed by the wives of state governors, and in New South Wales, by Alice Rawson, the daughter of the Governor, Sir Harry Rawson. The state committees represented a selection of prominent women, and well-known business and professional men. A full profile of the NSW Committee would prove tedious. Inevitably, however, it included Sir James R. and Lady Fairfax. Other residents of the eastern suburbs included on the membership lists were Lady Suttor, wife of Sir Francis Suttor, Rose Scott, and Mrs Louisa Hughes, the Lady Mayoress.⁴¹ These people, through their involvement in the organisation of the event, also endorsed the clear message that women's work was respectable and worthy of professional recognition.

The New South Wales Committee held a preliminary state exhibition in September 1907. Although special diplomas were to be awarded at Melbourne, the various states judged the entries at their own exhibitions. The winners of special prizes were also chosen

⁴⁰ 'Social Gossip', *Sydney Mail*, 14 Aug. 1907, p.436.

⁴¹ For full committee list see Australian Exhibition of Women's Work - New South Wales Display, *Official Catalogue*, RAS Showground, Sydney, 9-14 Sept. 1907. See also *Official Souvenir Catalogue*,

at the state exhibition. The catalogue of the NSW Exhibition shows that Sir James Fairfax offered £5 for the 'best Original Design in Bas Relief', while Lady Fairfax offered £5 for the 'best Hand-made set of Ladies Underwear' (which included a nightdress, combination, slip-bodice, and white petticoat). Lady Suttor sat on the judging panel for 'Plain, Fancy and Art Needlework', and 'Doll Dressing'. She also contributed £1 is for the 'best Hand-made Single Article of Under-Clothing', and the same amount for the 'Best Completely Dressed Doll'. Lady Hughes contributed three loan exhibits, including a watercolour portrait of Roger Hughes by Mrs Stoddart, one of the few women painters recognised by the Sydney art establishment before the turn of the century. Rose Scott expended great energy collecting exhibits, resulting in more than thirty separate specimens of lace, embroidery, needlework, knitting, darning and painting miniatures, many of historical as well as artistic value.⁴²

While many other women contributed prizes for other applied arts such as woodcarving or leather or metal repousse, the fact that the above women focused their attention on the more traditional activity of needlework is instructive. Beverley Kingston in *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor May Ann*, outlined the economic value attached to needlework performed by a young woman prior to marriage. If not required to work for a living, she would have sufficient time on her hands to prepare a large trousseau in preparation for marriage. By sewing a collection of underwear and linen, she could reduce the time and cost of setting up a home, and add a personal touch to its overall presentation. Furthermore, Anthea Cullen argues in *Angel in the Studio*, that the use of such skills in employment 'would enhance rather than erode the role designated as 'natural' for

Melbourne.⁴² Australian Exhibition of Women's Work, NSW Display, catalogue.

Victorian womanhood'.⁴³ Regarding the Melbourne exhibition, Ann Stephen noted that 'needlework represented the largest single area', and that promoters placed 'strong emphasis' on 'plain and useful needlework rather than ornamental kinds'.⁴⁴ Unlike the more adventurous and fashion conscious Lena and Mabel Fairfax, it would thus appear that Lady Fairfax, Lady Suttor and others offered their patronage to the most conservative aspect of women's work, a field that firmly endorsed and promoted conservative class values. This does not counter the impact of their involvement in an event that gave so much confidence to women aspiring to artistic excellence and aesthetic innovation, but demonstrates the presence of conservative values in the emergence of female cultural activism.

The Women of Sydney and the Society of Arts and Crafts, 1906-1913

Representatives of the newly formed Society of Arts and Crafts of New South Wales were also among the key organisers and contributors to the NSW Exhibition of Women's Work. Prior to the Exhibition the Society of Arts and Crafts had maintained a low profile. It originated in Mosman in 1906, when eight amateur craft workers, men and women, met to establish a society aimed at stimulating 'artistic work'. Intending members were required to obtain formal nomination and submit specimens of work for inspection before the society executive would permit them to join.

Within a year the society had attracted three influential professional artists, Suzanne Gether, Ethel Stephens and Eirene Mort. Both Gether, and the well-known artist, Ethel Stephens, attended meetings before the end of 1906. They promptly involved

⁴³ Anthea Callen, *Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement 1870-1914*, (London: Astragal Books, 1979), p.25. See also Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia*, (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1975), p.102.

⁴⁴ Ann Stephen, "'With one pair of hands and with a single mind": The First Australian Exhibition of women's work 1907', *Lip*, no. 2, 1977, p.76.

themselves in the Society's affairs, revealing their commitment to its welfare, and their readiness for leadership of the Society. Gether offered the use of her studio in St James' Chambers in the centre of Sydney, and the Society held meetings there from December 1906. Stephens had also offered her Darlinghurst studio for meetings in November of the same year. In December she became Vice-President of the Society. By the following February, she had assumed a guiding role, and in March hosted the Society's first visitor's evening.⁴⁵ It is likely that the third professional, Eirene Mort, first became aware of the Society's existence at that Visitor's evening, and herself promptly became a member. Within eight months, the Society had thus acquired the experience, skill and commitment of three established art and craft workers. Through their leadership of the Society of Arts and Crafts they substantially advanced the arts and crafts movement in Sydney.

Suzanne Gether, of course, came to Sydney in 1899 at the insistence of Lena Fairfax. By the time the Society of Arts and Crafts emerged, she was well established, with a permanent studio and large number of students. Ethel Stephens was born in Sydney, the daughter of William Stephens, former headmaster of Sydney Grammar School. He built and opened the private 'New School', later *Eaglesfield*, at Darlinghurst in 1867, and later became Professor of Natural History at Sydney University. Indulging her artistic flair, William Stephens built his daughter a studio at the end of the garden at their home at *Eaglesfield*. During the 1880s and 90s, Ethel Stephens earned a reputation for painting flower subjects in oil and watercolour. She was Julian Ashton's first student, became involved in the Council of the Art Society of NSW, founding member of the Society of Artists, and teacher at Sydney Church of England Girl's Grammar School, at Rose Bay. The NAGNSW first bought one of her pictures in 1900, and bought more during the

⁴⁵ For more details concerning the inception and early years of the society, see: Annual Reports, SA&C Papers, ML MSS 3645, MLK 2075; Minutes of Committee Meetings (MOCM), 9 Aug. 1906 to 17

decade. In the early twentieth century she began to paint more portraits, gaining a reputation for them as well, and painted one of her father that was later hung at Sydney University. By the time she joined the Society of Arts and Crafts, she had won the admiration and respect of the art world.⁴⁶

Eirene Mort was the daughter of Canon Henry Wallace Mort. His uncle was the famous Thomas Sutcliffe Mort of Goldsborough, Mort & Co.⁴⁷ At an early age Mort distinguished herself for her artistic skills, and was one of the first students of the Italian art teacher, Antonio Dattilo Rubbo. Mort lived in London 1899-1905, and acquired training and experience in design, black and white art, various crafts, a teaching certificate, and a sound knowledge of art history. She was also exposed to contemporary concerns such as the teachings of William Morris and the directions of the arts and crafts movement, and received the encouragement of Princess Alexandra a patron of the movement.⁴⁸ During this period Mort developed her 'Australian Flora and Fauna Children's Alphabet'. In line with the contemporary rejection of romantic decorative design and return to classical realism Mort's alphabet designs logically utilised Australian subject matter.⁴⁹

Mort and a fellow Australian student, Nora Kate Weston, a woodcarver and great granddaughter of the First Fleet Lieutenant George Johnston, returned to Australia in 1905. They soon established a studio at the corner of Hunter Street and Angel Place in

Dec. 1907, SA&C Papers, ML MSS 3645, MLK 2078; and G.P. Allen, H.G. Hirst and J. Mackenzie (ed.s), *Historical Sketch of the Society of Arts and Crafts of NSW*, Part I, Sydney, 9 Aug. 1931.

⁴⁶ See Angela Philp, 'Ethel Anna Stephens', Kerr, *Heritage*, p.455; Cliff Turney, 'William John Stephens' *ADB*, vol. 6, pp.197-98; no author, *Sydney Church of England Girls Grammar School, 1895-1955* (Sydney, 1958), pp.102-3; and Caroline Ambrus, (compiled by) *The Ladies' Picture Show: Sources on a century of Australian women artists*, (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1984), pp.244-6.

⁴⁷ See Eirene Mort papers, ML MSS 1462, for a family tree, and stories of Mort's relatives, based on their correspondence, executed in Mort's precise calligraphy, also for papers on the Weston family.

⁴⁸ Biographical material from Penelope A. Starr, *Wielding the Waratah - Eirene Mort: A study of an artist/craftswoman's training and working experiences from 1879 to 1910*, Thesis, Fine Arts IV, Sydney University, no date; and John McPhee 'Mort, Irene (Eirene)', in Kerr, *Heritage*, pp.410-11.

⁴⁹ John McPhee and Joan Kerr, 'First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work, Melbourne 1907: Pen and Ink Work', in Kerr, *Heritage*, p.13.

Sydney. By 1906, Mort was ready to pursue her vision of an Australian School of Design. She distributed a Circular concerning the establishment of an Australian Guild of Handcrafts in October of the same year. It urged an arts and crafts revival, and appealed exclusively to women. Only a handful of women responded, and the subsequent Australian Applied Art Exhibition, held in December, featuring the work of six women represented the highlight of the Guild's existence. The exhibitors were M. Cleone Cracknell, Miss Dagmar Ross, Eirene Mort, Miss Beatrice Pearson, Dorothea Adams, and Sarah Yeomans. Unknown to Mort, a society with similar aims, though not gender-specific, had been founded in Mosman during the same year. When Mort joined the Society of Arts and Crafts in March 1907, the other artists who had become established craftswomen in their own right and exhibited with Mort, also became members of the Society, thus adding to its professional core.⁵⁰

Thus reinforced, the Society of Arts and Crafts contacted Alice Rawson, of the executive committee for the NSW contribution to the Exhibition of Women's Work, informing her of their presence, and proposing their involvement in the Exhibition. As key members of the Society of Arts and Crafts, Gether and Stephens subsequently became part of the New South Wales organising committee, while Eirene Mort joined the Applied Art sub-committee.⁵¹ Contributions designed by Mort and Gether attracted much attention when displayed, and involved many Sydney women in their creation. Gether designed a dining suite, which was executed by 62 pupils and members of the Society of Arts and Crafts, while Mort entered a wide range of exhibits, united only by their persistent Australian subject matter. A widely noted and celebrated exhibit was the 380cm square

⁵⁰ Information from Starr, Eirene Mort, n.p.; and 'Australian Decorative Art. The Aspirations of Six Little Maids', *Bookfellow*, 3 Jan. 1907, p.12.

⁵¹ Australian Exhibition of Women's Work. 'Prize Lists, Etc'. Single page flier, Melbourne, 1907.

‘richly heraldic’⁵² ‘Waratah Carpet’, designed by Mort and embroidered by ‘an army of local women’.⁵³ Representatives of the Society of Arts and Crafts in Melbourne for the exhibition presented the carpet to Lady Northcote prior to the opening of the Exhibition in Melbourne. Members also won a selection of first and second prizes for their specimens of metal and leather repousse, book-bindings, and stencilled work, while Eirene Mort won first prize for her book plates.

Thus as a result of the involvement of professional artists as representatives of the Society in the Exhibition of Women’s Work, and the success of the exhibits entered by its members, the Society suddenly became the subject of great interest. During the first six months of 1908, nominations for associate membership boomed. In fact, the executive was forced to call an extraordinary meeting in January 1908, to amend their constitution to allow associate membership, as previously it had only permitted workers of a suitable standard to join the Society. Many of those who applied for membership after the Exhibition of Women’s Work hailed from the eastern suburbs. In the wake of the exhibition, the Society invited Mrs Muriel Munday, from Edgecliff, to join its ranks. The Lady Mayoress, Mrs Thomas Hughes of Rose Bay, also received an invitation. Among the nominations for membership received were: Miss Ruby Bullmore and Miss Campbell-Brown both of Darling Point; Miss Child of Elizabeth Bay; Miss Norton and Mrs James Ashton of Double Bay; Mr and Mrs MacCallum of Woollahra Point; Miss M. Little of Vacluse; and Miss Lennox Stewart of Woollahra. A number of nominations of women from Mosman, the birthplace of the Society, helped to further swell the ranks of new members.⁵⁴

⁵² Starr, Eirene Mort, p.71.

⁵³ See McPhee and Kerr, ‘Pen and Ink Work’, p.13 and Starr, Eirene Mort, p.71.

⁵⁴ See MOCM, 15 Dec. 1907, and 1908, SA&C Papers, ML MSS 3645, MLK 2078.

The rapid influx of interested non-practitioners appears to have caused some friction, with the result that founding member and first chairperson of the Society, Mrs Muriel Danvers Power resigned as President in August 1908. She was followed by Nora Kate Weston, custodian of the Society rooms, Miss Dorothy Wilson, the honorary secretary, and in September, Suzanne Gether.⁵⁵ Craft-workers filled the vacancies left on the executive, and a drive to secure the membership of other professional craft women appears to have taken place.

Membership changes continued to plague the executive committee during 1909. In May 1910, Mrs Frank Davenport (Ethel), of *Orme* Darling Point, became President of a committee that included Mrs Gilbert Lodge of Edgecliff, the Misses Helen Garran, Cleone Cracknell, and Allison, all from the eastern suburbs, and Mrs J. Spencer Brunton of *Elystan*, Bellevue Hill.⁵⁶ Aside from four professional workers with studios in the city or inner west, the remaining executive members lived at Mosman or near-by Neutral Bay. Only Mrs Langer Owen from Hunter's Hill broke the pattern. These organisers belonged to Lena Fairfax's world. Indeed, Davenport and Brunton habitually attended first night performances of the latest musical comedies from England, with Mr and Mrs Geoffrey, and Mr and Mrs James Oswald Fairfax. They were consistently present at garden parties and private dances hosted by any of the other women. By 1910, the Society of Arts and Crafts had thus attracted the elite of fashionable Sydney Society into its heart.

Davenport, Brunton and other members of the Society appeared to have held some loyalty to Suzanne Gether, perhaps through their close friendship with Lena Fairfax. In March 1911, the President proposed that the Society of Arts and Crafts take over Gether's studio on her departure from Sydney, with half the costs being covered through an

⁵⁵ See MOCM, 10 and 18 Aug. 1908, SA&C Papers, ML MSS 3645, MLK 2078.

⁵⁶ Annual Report, 1911, and MOCM for 1909-10, SA&C Papers, ML MSS 3645, MLK 2075, 2078.

anonymous personal donation of £100. Based on calculations of the total cost to the Society, the motion was rejected, and as a result, most of the eastern suburbs contingent resigned en masse. They carried out their plan to take over Gether's studio independently, and established 'The Sydney Club and Depot of Arts and Domestic Economy (D.A.D.E.)', 'for the purpose of continuing the work initiated by Miss Gether'. The Club's 'Objects, Notice and Rules', printed just after its formation, reveal similar intentions to those of the original Society but placed more emphasis on 'social intercourse' rather than its function as a depot for 'workers and members'. It also stressed the point that the Club was not purely for workers. 'Gentlewomen' could become members through introduction by two office bearers. Among the DADE's Office-bearers, were nine Vice-Presidents including the wife of the Rear Admiral, Lady King-Hall, Lady Carruthers, Lady Graham, Lady Hay, Mrs J. Macarthur Onslow, Mrs Wentworth and Rose Scott. Lady Cullen became an active and committed patron of the Club, and 'society girls' Dorothea Mackellar and Miss Helen Garrahan served on its committee.⁵⁷

The *Sydney Mail* followed these developments closely, and reported in October, 1911, that the DADE had changed its rather awkward designation to 'Australian Women Handicrafts', which was in turn informally transmuted into the 'Women's Handicraft Association' (WHA). Under the patronage of Lady Cullen and Lady Denman, the WHA staged the 'Women's Handicrafts Exhibition and Loan of Ancient Crafts' the following month. Presumably the 'ancient crafts' resembled the loan collections submitted for the Exhibition of Women's Work, and included family heirlooms mostly demonstrating earlier samples of needlework. Although reports on the exhibition boasted that members of the Society of Arts and Crafts had joined the Club and were participating in the exhibition, the craft workers numbered barely a third of the members listed in the catalogue. The

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The Sydney Club and Depot of Arts and Domestic Economy (DADE), 'Objects, Notice and Rules',

‘Sewing and art work’ section dominated the membership list, while under ‘Domestic Economy’ members admitted for their skills in making cakes, sweets, preserves, poultry dishes and natural polishes nearly rivalled in number those included for their talents in fine and applied art. Indeed while the club rules addressed the need for set standards for food items, and the question of payment for ‘fine laundry work, hand-made sewing, trousseaux, blouses and lingerie’, it remained silent about craftwork.⁵⁸ The editor of the women’s page of the *Sydney Mail*, apparently unsympathetic to the Society, reduced its coverage of the Society’s activities to brief announcements devoid of description or the usual list of influential personalities. Only in a report on the WHA exhibition in 1912, did the editor make the particular point that ‘specimens of needlework [were] not admitted to the Arts and Crafts Society, but [that] the Women’s handicrafts rightly embraced this most important branch’.⁵⁹ Despite its stated intention to continue the work carried on by Suzanne Gether the Club had evidently chosen a path defined more by traditional forms of women’s work and class status than one aimed at expanding the spectrum of approved practices in which women could aspire to and set professional standards.

That both old and new liberal values accompanied Sydney’s interest in the arts and crafts is demonstrated by the foundation in October 1907 of another institution linking women to the professional applied arts, the New South Wales branch of the Girls’ Realm Guild of Service and Good Fellowship. Originally founded in London by the Bishop of London with the Women’s Christian Temperance Union missionary, Jessie Ackermann, as its ‘World’s Organising President’, it was centred on ideas of service and fellowship. Its three central aims moved from the more egalitarian injunction to its girls ‘to help other girls’, to the assistance of ‘girls of gentle birth in poor circumstances’, to the aid of the

no date, in ‘Women’s Handicraft Association’, ML PAM FILE 745.06/W.

⁵⁸ ‘Women’s Handicraft Exhibition and Loan of Ancient Crafts’, Catalogue, St James’ Chambers, no date; and DADE, Rules. See *Sydney Mail*, various, 1911-12.

'sick and poor'.⁶⁰ A suitably prominent, wealthy and influential body including Miss Rawson, the daughter of the State Governor, the philanthropist Eadith Walker, Mary Fairfax, the writer Ethel Turner, a few teachers, the Bishop of Goulburn, Reverend W.G. Taylor, and other clergy represented the executive of the first New South Wales branch executive.

The first Sydney *Guild Gazette* chose to quote Ruskin, 'the weakest amongst us has a gift, however seemingly trivial, which is peculiar to him, and which, worthily used, will be a gift also to his race for ever'.⁶¹ Further issues spoke of 'supplying the means of self-help'.⁶² Self-help, efficiency, and service to humanity were all values that linked the Girls' Realm Guild to an older, optimistic, paternalistic middle-class liberalism. Yet in seeking out work for the less fortunate girl of gentle birth, the Guild firmly embraced new ideas spawned by and in conjunction with the women's movement. The *Gazette* referred frequently to the 'radical change which has come over ... as to what a woman, especially one of education and refinement, may do to provide means of existence or simply occupation for herself'. It noted the change in meaning of the word 'suitable'. To their grandmothers 'it meant, "compatible with the narrow pre-conceived ideas of what constituted gentility in women"'. To them 'a "suitable" employment mean[t] one compatible with the capabilities and tastes of the individual woman, provided only that it keeps her womanly'.⁶³ Suitability had, for the moment, changed its focus from class to gender.

⁵⁹ Sydney Mail, 4 Sept. 1912, p.21.

⁶⁰ Quoted in *Guild Gazette: the official organ of the Girls' Realm Guild of Service and Good Fellowship of New South Wales*, vol.1, no.1, 16 Oct. 1907, front page. See Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective 1880-1930*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) for numerous entries on Jessie Ackermann's WCTU activities.

⁶¹ *Guild Gazette*, vol.1, no.1, p.8.

⁶² *Guild Gazette*, vol.1, no.2, 16 Nov. 1907, p.15.

⁶³ "'What to do with our Girls" Exhibition', *Guild Gazette*, vol.1, no.10, 16 July 1908, p.149.

Inevitably the rapidly burgeoning number of Guild branches around Sydney embraced the arts and crafts as one of those occupations available to girls seeking employment. The Society of Arts and Crafts in fact participated in its exhibitions, which in fact were deliberately conducted as demonstrations. Many branch members also belonged to the Society of Arts and Crafts, as well as the Women's Handicrafts Association, and a Guild Depot established at the Women's Liberal Club to aid the regular sale of handcrafted items, including needlework, wood work, basket work, metal work, cut flowers, scones, cakes and jams.⁶⁴

Yet another organisation with an interest in the artistic work of women emerged in 1910. Centred round a handful of women painters, whose reputations suggest the inconsistency of gender-based hierarchies in the fine arts, the Society of Women Painters attracted much social and public attention. A group of 'Five Lady Artists', as they named their first exhibition, held a show in 1905. Including Ethel Stephens, Alice Norton, Emily Meston, and Aline and Edith Cusack, it featured a range of subject matter and artistic genres that were traditionally associated with female artists. Later shows such as "The Women Painters' Exhibition of Flowers and Flower Paintings" held in 1909, also included work by Gladys Owen.⁶⁵ These artists, and Florence Rodway, another founding member of the Society, had attracted the support of both the public and the art establishment alike prior to the Society's formation in 1910. As members of the Society of Artists, Stephens, Rodway and Muskett compared well to their male counterparts. Gladys Owen and Alice Norton exhibiting alone and together during 1910, and after their return from their joint

⁶⁴ 'The Guild Depot', *Guild Gazette*, vol.2, no.1, 17 Oct. 1908, pp.6-7.

⁶⁵ See Angela Philp, 'From Wallflowers to tall poppies? The Sydney Society of Women Painters, 1910-1934' in Maryanne Dever (ed.), *Wallflowers and Witches: Women and Culture in Australia 1910-1945*, (Brisbane: Queensland University Press, 1994), p.3; and various contemporary articles including 'Ladies' Picture Show', in *Daily Telegraph*, 15 April 1905; and 'Women Painters' Exhibition of Flowers and Flower Gardens' in *Art and Architecture*, vol.6, no.4, July-Aug. 1909, p.119.

travels through Europe, attracted positive reviews.⁶⁶ Like many of the members of the Society of Arts and Crafts, the founding members of the Society of Women Painters emerged from families of relative wealth, whose male heads generally occupied positions of public leadership and authority. The female patronage the Society attracted similarly hailed from the wealthiest and most socially prominent ranks of Sydney Society. The first SWP exhibition was opened by the wife of the State Governor, Lady Chelmsford, in her role as President of the new Society. Among those who visited the first exhibition were Lady Simpson, Mrs Langer Owen, Mrs Kelso King, Mrs James Ashton, Mrs Thomas Hughes, Mrs and Miss Garran, and Mrs Philip Street.⁶⁷

Neither the Society's executive, nor their patrons held challenging or discriminating positions on membership and exhibition selection. Subsequent annual exhibitions were criticised for the leniency of the hanging committee, and the damaging effect of a large number of very amateur paintings on the overall impression of the show. While one writer waxed lyrical over Florence Rodway's portraits, and praised work by Ethel Stephens, Alice Norton and Gladys Owen, he categorised most as unworthy of exhibition.⁶⁸ Some professional female artists, like Stephens, continued their association with the Society. Others, such as Thea Proctor, were only briefly connected with it, or, like Grace Crowley and Margaret Preston in the interwar years, avoided association with 'women-only societies' altogether.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ See references above concerning Ethel Stephens. Newspapers, journals and magazines of the day took an interest in the work of Muskett, Rodway, Norton and Owen. They are also listed in an assortment of art histories, particularly William Moore, *Story of Australian Art*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1934), and Ambrus, *Ladies' Picture Show*. See also Kerr *Heritage*, and Suzanne Edgar, Dorothy Green, 'Alice Jane Muskett', *ADB*, vol. 10, pp.652-3; Sue Backhouse, 'Florence Aline Rodway' *ADB*, vol. 11, p.436; Cedric Flower, 'Moore, John Drummond Macpherson', *ADB*, vol 10, pp.566-7 for Gladys Owen, Moore's wife; and Australian Red Cross Society, *Gladys Owen Moore, OBE*, retrospective catalogue, Red Cross House, 3-8 May 1976.

⁶⁷ *Sydney Mail*, 27 July 1910, p.46.

⁶⁸ *Sydney Mail*, 13 Aug. 1913, p.25.

⁶⁹ Philp, 'Society of Women Painters', pp.4-5.

Sir James and Miss Mary Fairfax also supported the Society. In 1913 the former opened their Annual Exhibition, and the latter hosted an afternoon tea at the show. Mary Fairfax also appeared on the list of Associate members of the Women's Handicraft Association from the end of 1911. More importantly, she regularly attended Society of Arts and Craft activities held during the period. Her patronage was timely, but it exemplifies another aspect of female cultural patronage of the period. It is for this reason that Mary Fairfax's endeavours warrant closer examination.

Mary Fairfax, the Society of Arts and Crafts, and the art establishment

Like her mother, Lady Fairfax, Miss Mary Elizabeth Fairfax, had offered prizes for needlework at the Exhibition of Women's Work. She contributed £3 3s for the 'best Set of Hand- embroidered Handkerchiefs', and the same amount for the 'best Hand-made Embroidered Handkerchief'. Again following in her mother's footsteps, Mary Fairfax actively supported the YWCA. In 1912, she captained a team of women participating in a YWCA campaign to raise a total of £20 000 for building purposes. Giving a higher profile to the campaign, the *Sydney Mail* included her portrait, and those of other team leaders, such as Mrs Hugh Dixson, in its women's page.⁷⁰ Barely a year earlier, the same paper had included her picture in an article on the key figures involved in the Girls' Realm Guild of Service and Goodfellowship. Mary Fairfax had acted as patron from 1909, if not earlier, and served as a Vice-President of the Guild at least until the early 1920s. She did not take on as active a role as Cara Edgeworth David, or Ethel Curlewis (Turner), yet she publicly demonstrated her commitment by attending the opening ceremonies of its exhibitions, and

⁷⁰ *Sydney Mail*, 15 May 1912, p.22.

its fund-raising concerts.⁷¹ Her support demonstrates an interest in and commitment to the welfare of other women, and support of the idea of feminine financial independence.

Although Mary Fairfax contributed prizes for embroidery in the 1907 Exhibition of Women's Work, evidence exists suggesting that her artistic interests reflected the broader cultural concerns of her father, and that she conceded the suitability and capability of women earning their own living as professional artists or craft-workers. Travel notes written during a tour of Europe in 1882 confirm that she possessed a particular interest in the arts and crafts, as much inspired by her father's careful study of European trends as her mother's consistent appreciation of needlework. She wrote:

drove to the private collection of Poldi Perzoli [at Milan] left by him to the town. The rooms are fitted with beautiful wood carving the bed chairs etc all matching, there are quaint specimens of glass (Venetian) and china amongst four cups and saucers of Capo di-Monte, the figures are a little in relief & very curious. A little kind of ante-room to the bedroom, has windows of very good coloured glass representing scenes from Dante's works. There is a very good collection of pictures Some of Luini's being particularly good, & a good specimen of Botticelli. The cabinets vases and knick knacks are all rare & fine.⁷²

When Mary Fairfax became involved in the Society of Arts and Crafts, in May 1908, she further demonstrated her wider artistic interests and her support of a more adventurous approach to craftwork by women. Relatively quiet as an associate member, she only assumed a more prominent role when a sense of crisis pervaded the Society in late 1911, most likely as a result of the emergence of the WHA and the SWP. Society membership had dropped. Its influential patronage had dissipated. Energetic established artists such as Suzanne Gether, Ethel Stephens and Eirene Mort had all departed for Europe; Gether permanently, the others on extended tours. The public attention and social

⁷¹ 'The Girls' Realm Guild. Some of the Workers', *Sydney Mail*, 23 Aug. 1911, p.29; and 'What to do with our Girls' Exhibition, Sydney, Catalogues, 1909, 1911, 1913; 'Women's Work in Wartime', Sydney, catalogue, 1916; 'Household Management Exhibition and Early Summer Flower Show', Sydney, 1921, Girls' Realm Guild Papers, ML MSS 3125, box 1.

⁷² Mary E. Fairfax, Diary, 1882, in Fairfax Family Papers, ML MSS 459/2, it.7

prestige attached to the Society through the Exhibition of Women's Work in 1907 seemed to have evaporated. The resultant void in leadership only disappeared when the Society's original leaders, Ethel Stephens, Eirene Mort, Elizabeth Soderberg, and Muriel Danvers Power returned to the executive. Excepting Power, the renewed leadership of these workers marked the return of the professional face of the Society. Its decisions reflected their seriousness based partly on intellectual imperatives and partly on economic necessity. The Society consciously re-evaluated its practices, and began to hold monthly sales of work rather than a regular annual exhibition in order to increase the number of works sold. Demonstrations of craftwork, such as those staged at the popular 'What to do with our Girls' Exhibitions held by the Girls' Realm Guild replaced the static display of wares.

The Society of Arts and Crafts had always maintained a constitution that encouraged serious engagement in the crafts. Only working members had been permitted to join the Society during its first two years, and samples of each nominee's work was strictly scrutinised in order to ensure that amateurs were not admitted. The selection committee was firm, and some hopeful members were rejected. Even Louisa Hughes, the former Lady Mayoress, though she was invited to join in 1907, was nominated provisionally on the basis of her work in February 1909.⁷³ Further, the early executive had been wary of publicising its activities until it had established a high standard of work. Nor had the Society ever sought to limit its membership to women. In fact, during its leadership crisis of 1910-11, the executive requested Professor B.J. Waterhouse to serve on the committee, and invited established male artists, architects, commercial artists and a teacher from the Technical College to join the Society. Strangely, Richard Baker was not

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MOCM, 15 Feb. 1909, SA&C Papers, ML MSS 3645, MLK 2078.

included in the list. A small number of men joined the Society for short periods and a male college student also participated in one of the 1911 shows.⁷⁴

This pursuit of high standards had already been recognised by established artists and journals. *Art and Architecture: The Journal of the Institute of the Architects of New South Wales*, for example, focused increasingly on craftsmen and women in Sydney. Between 1906 and 1909, it included articles by or about the interior decorator, Miss M.E. Moss; the needleworker, Mrs Ernest Favenc; the designer, Eirene Mort; the book-binder Dorothy Wilson; the repousse metal worker Florence Talbot Westbrook, and wood carver Suzanne Gether. In 1909 *Art and Architecture*'s Editor proclaimed:

More and more, every year the architect extends his jurisdiction. His work is not finished when the four walls receive the roof. With him works now, as in earlier times, the craftsman who was more or less of an artist, and the artist who was more or less of a craftsman. ... In this good work they are ably seconded by the Society of Arts and Crafts, a body of workers, strangely enough mostly composed of women, and their skill shows some necessity for the expunging of the word 'craftsman' from our vocabulary, with a view to the substitution of "craftswoman" instead.⁷⁵

This is an interesting development. When the men of the establishment began to look for advances in the arts and crafts in Sydney, despite the classes taught at the Technical College by Lucien Henry, the work of Richard Baker as the Technical Museum curator and the established businesses of the potter John Shorter, the decorators Arthur Gilkes and Harry J. Weston, and new generations of architectural students (such as W. Hardy Wilson, the 'clever architectural student now in London'⁷⁶) they looked to professional craftswomen for fresh contributions to the national culture. Considering barely a decade had passed since Sydney women had begun to tackle the various tasks involved in the

⁷⁴ See various MOCM SA&C Papers, ML MSS 3645, MLK 2078, including 18 Sept. 1911.

⁷⁵ 'Art and Architecture', *Art and Architecture*, vol. VI, no. 6, Nov.-Dec, 1909, p.181.

⁷⁶ John Barlow, 'Society of Artists' Exhibition', *Art and Architecture*, vol. V, no.5, Sept.-Oct. 1908, p.175.

applied arts, such recognition is a tribute both to the effectiveness of the patronage they received and the confidence of women in their own abilities as professional artisans.

The resurgence of professionalism in the Society of 1911 contrasted markedly with the traditionalism of the Handicrafts Association, and the more traditional artistic directions of the Society of Women Painters. Perhaps it was not coincidental therefore, that the patronage attracted from 1912 onwards seemed primarily concerned with this serious artistic practice, rather than feminine pastimes or hobbies. The male-dominated art establishment had already begun to notice the quality of the work being produced by members of the Society of Arts and Crafts, and appreciated its intentions. This interest, like the Society itself, was a response to the arts and crafts movement already established in Britain, and which lovers of culture, particularly the journal *Art and Architecture*, and teachers at the Technical College hoped to see emerge in Australia.

It was at this stage, that Mary Fairfax emerged as clear leader and patron of the Society of Arts and Crafts. Mary Fairfax was different to many of the patrons that dominated the Society in the years following the Exhibition of Women's Work. As seen, she had a genuine interest in and knowledge of various aspects of the applied arts. She had also demonstrated her commitment to the idea of women working to earn their own living. Her father had shown his interest in 1910 by accepting, along with fellow trustees of the NAGNSW, Mr Lister Lister, and Mr Du Faur, to judge the Society's Annual Exhibition. To the delight of the Society members, the trustees purchased numerous specimens for the Art Gallery, to a total of nearly £100. The following year, Mary Fairfax became a Vice-President of the Society. She became President in 1912 and held the position until 1919. Also in 1912 Mary Fairfax contributed one years' subscription to the London *Studio*, for the Society of Arts and Crafts Library. She, her mother, and Rose Scott also contributed loan exhibits to the 1912 Annual Exhibition.

The Annual Report for the year April 1912 – April 1913, paid special tribute to Fairfax's 'interest and leadership'.⁷⁷ That interest was consistent and sustained, linked intricately with her father's growing respect for the Society's work. In 1913, Mary Fairfax renewed her subscription to *The Salon* on the Society's behalf and paid unexpected costs arising from the Annual Exhibition. In May she passed on an offer of a prize for metal work made by her father, and in July, Sir James Fairfax and her sister-in-law Lena Fairfax, were both accepted as associate members. When the committee expressed concern about falling membership numbers and declining interest, Mary Fairfax approached influential Society figures. Although the minutes do not say it directly, it is also likely that Fairfax was responsible for organising the offer of four prizes at the Annual Exhibition in August 1914. Each prize was worth £2 2s. Sir James Fairfax offered one for metal design, the architect and trustee, Mr John Sulman (later Sir) offered his prize for painted or embossed tiles for a fireplace, Lady (Alice) Cooper offered one for woodcarving and Mary Fairfax for embroidery. Although Britain declared war on Germany just days before the Exhibition, it did not hamper the success of the event. At the opening, Fairfax as President, commented on the Society's 'efforts to spread a love for what was beautiful and artistic in [their] midst'.⁷⁸ A few days later, at an afternoon tea hosted by Mary Fairfax and Lady Alice Cooper, numerous women from the eastern suburbs including Lady Fairfax, Lena Fairfax, Louisa Hughes showed their continued support.⁷⁹ All acclaimed that it was in fact the Society's best exhibition yet, and the trustees purchased a wide selection of works. This support continued at a more moderate level throughout the war. By contrast, the trustees were irritated by SWP requests for patronage, and refused to visit their exhibitions altogether during the same period.

⁷⁷ Annual Report, 1913, SA&C Papers, ML MSS 3645, MLK 2075; and MOCM for 1913, 2078.

⁷⁸ *SMH*, 7 Aug. 1914, p.6.

⁷⁹ *SMH*, 12 Aug. 1914, p.7.

What emerges from this brief overview of Mary Fairfax's involvement in the Society of Arts and Crafts, is its close link with her father's increased interest in the work of its members. One can almost imagine Mary Fairfax as her father's able helper, tending to his needs and interests just as Patricia Jalland's dutiful British daughters did two decades or so earlier.⁸⁰ Likewise, Florence Sulman, the daughter of the architect Sir John Sulman who was also a trustee of the Art Gallery, became a member of the executive of the Society in 1910. Sulman sustained her interest for decades and published a two volume work *Popular guide to the wild flowers of New South Wales* with illustrations by Eirene Mort in 1914.⁸¹ Heather Johnson was the first to identify the family connection in her Masters thesis on art and patronage in Sydney.⁸² However, she did not identify the full range of social forces demonstrated by their patronage. Both women remained single throughout their life. Both endorsed female financial independence, and artistic practice as a means to attain that independence. Though they displayed a personal commitment to artistic causes already endorsed by their fathers, their own activism and their encouragement of women practitioners reveals an independence of their own. Their fathers may have emulated the cultural custodians of Victorian England, but the daughters confidently lay hold on the reigns themselves.

In the end, despite the increased freedom to move into the public realm that resulted from earlier struggles for female emancipation, and the class privileges enjoyed by the majority of female patrons of the arts and crafts movement they did not contribute solely to the Society's preservation. Ultimately, the art establishment was still a masculine province and in line with the aesthetic movement of the late nineteenth century new

⁸⁰ Patricia Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), part

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⁸¹ Margaret Henry, 'Florence Sulman', *ADB*, vol. 12, p.136.

⁸² Heather Johnson, *Art Patronage in Sydney, 1890-1940*, MA (Hons) Thesis, University of Sydney, 1988, p.117.

professional standards applied. Effective patronage, in the first decade of the twentieth century meant acceptance among practitioners, not lay arbiters of taste. Women could thus only acquire recognition by measuring up to professional standards, and making certain that the establishment noticed. The Society was founded primarily as an agency for serious craft workers, not specifically for women, or for Sydney Society. Its key members were dedicated, talented and dynamic leaders. Through the strict professionalism of artists such as Suzanne Gether, Ethel Stephens, and Eirene Mort, and the informed guidance and familial ties of Mary Fairfax and Florence Sulman, these two requisites were fulfilled.

In this case study of female patronage of the arts and crafts movements in Sydney in the first decade of the twentieth century, a pattern may be discerned. Women in Sydney certainly assumed more active roles as cultural agents. These patrons came from wealthy or influential families with strong imperial ties. Most had been exposed directly to European culture. Their biases reflected a combination of mid-Victorian and fin-de-siecle class and cultural values, the differing stances often a sign of generational shift. Their new cultural activism may be seen as a manifestation of new womanhood, although the patrons did not always directly and actively propound emancipationist views. Between them the actions of the Fairfax women demonstrated the merging of old and new feminist values. While Lady Fairfax and women of her ilk supported the practice of the most conventional crafts, middle-aged and younger members of the social elite, such as Mary, Mabel and Lena Fairfax, despite differences of approach, embraced more whole-heartedly and comprehensively the extension of both female artistic practices and the idea of feminine financial independence.

Under war conditions the concerns of the artistic establishment, as with Society leaders, inevitably changed. Those images created during the previous two decades

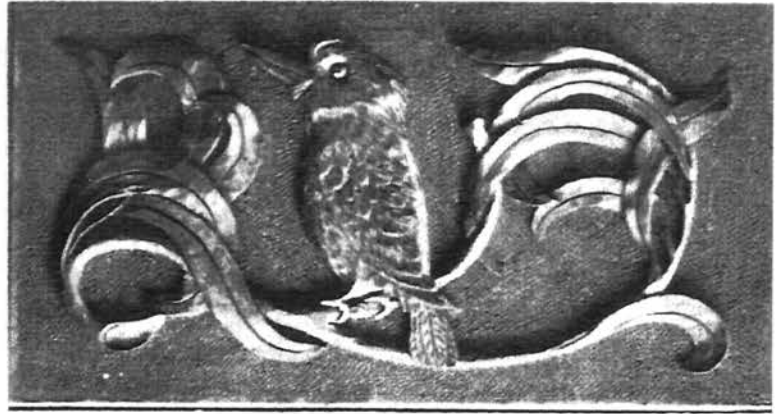
expressive of a particularly masculine Australian identity became acceptable to the establishment in the more conservative guise of loyalty to empire and rejection of European modernity. Culture needed to have some justification or war-related purpose. The knitting of socks for the soldiers, or selling of small goods to raise funds for the war effort, in short, the channelling of time and skill into the war effort, appears to have sapped some of the vitality out of the arts and crafts movement. It did not, however, end the female exploration, intellectually and technically, of new artistic directions. While Thea Proctor and Margaret Preston had studied in London at the same time as Eirene Mort the former adopting a crisp Edwardian style that found a new and receptive audience in the post war Flapper, the latter later using an alphabet of native Australian images in a cubist manner; while Grace Cossington Smith portrayed disturbed impressions of Sydney at war and on strike in a fresh post-impressionist manner that found few supporters for many years, women of Sydney's upper circles bent their cultural urges on patriotic causes. Cultural causes may have become secondary in importance, but as we shall see the women of Sydney still acted as cultural agents in a semi-public capacity during the First World War.



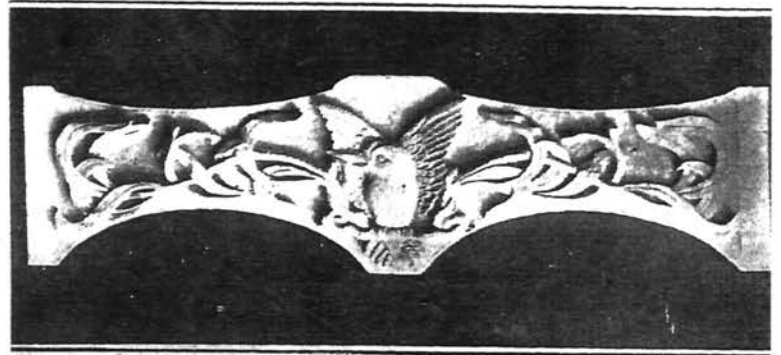
MISS GETHER.

Top left: Suzanne Gether, *Art and Architecture*, March-April 1908, p.50.

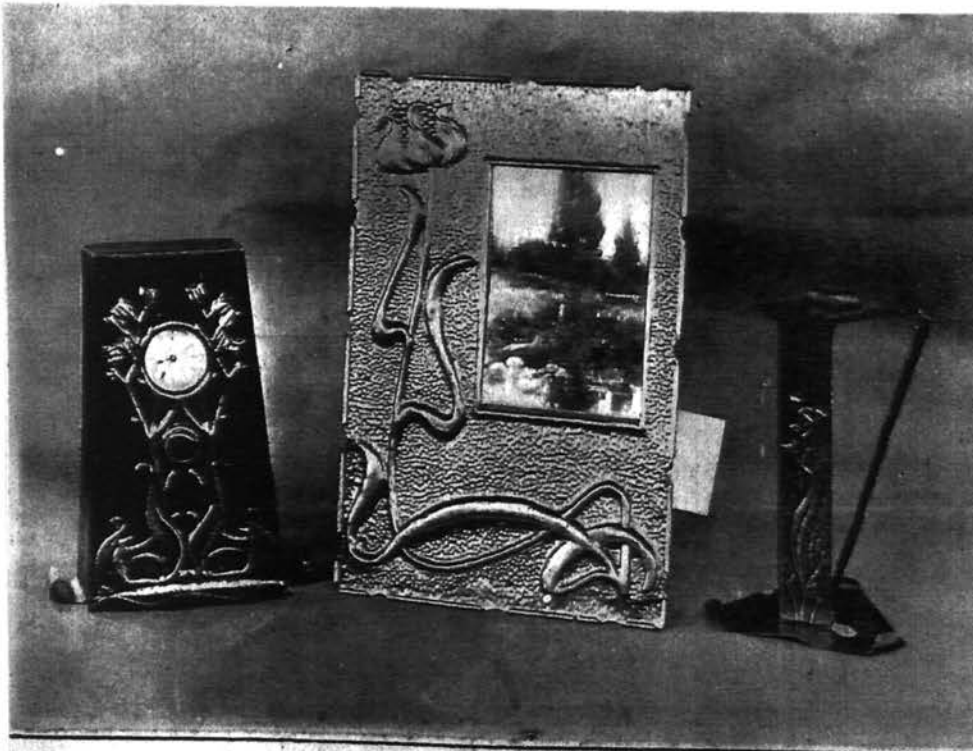
Right and below: work by Sydney craftworkers exhibited in the New South Wales Exhibition of Women's Work, *Sydney Mail*, 11 Sept. 1907, pp. 684, 687.



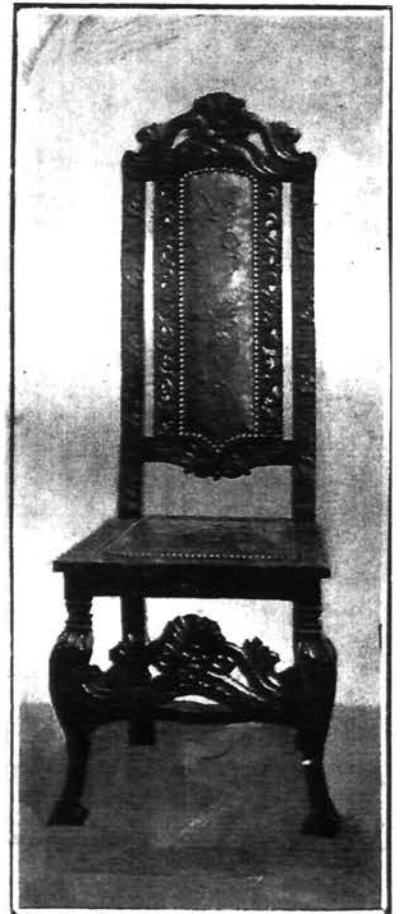
PANELS IN WOOD-CARVING.
Miss Beatrice Pearson.



CARVED MANTEL DECORATION.
Miss Beatrice Pearson.



CLOCKCASE, FRAME, PAINTING, AND CANDLESTICK.
Repousse metal clockcase (pitch method) and candlestick, by Miss Mildred Creed; Copper-beaten Frame, Miss Makinson; and Landscape, Miss Alice Norton.



ONE OF SIX DINING-ROOM CHAIRS.
By pupils of Miss Gether.



Photo, by Talma Studios, 374 George-street.
MISS EIRENE MORT.
Miss Mort, whose work frequently appears in the "Sydney Mail," is represented in the display by some hundreds of designs.



Top left: Eirene Mort,
Sydney Mail, 11 Sept.
1907, p.682.

Top right: Eirene Mort
bookplates, Australian
Bookplate Club,
*Checklist of the
Bookplates of Eirene
Mort*, (Melbourne, 1943),
n.p.

Bottom right: 'The
Waratah Carpet', *Sydney
Mail*, 11 Sept. 1907,
p.682.



Miss Mort here supplies a drawing of the carpet to be used at the opening ceremony of the Women's Exhibition in Melbourne next month. It is a gift to the exhibition from the women of New South Wales, who throughout have shown a spirit of federal co-operation. The design is by Miss Mort. The areas are in heraldic colours. They will be readily picked out—New South Wales and Victoria (front section), South Australia and Western Australia (centre section), Queensland and Tasmania (top section), reading in each instance left to right. The scheme generally is of red waratahs on a blue ground. In the centre, below a coronet, is the monogram of Lady Northcote. The wool used in the carpet was grown, manufactured, and dyed in this State. The carpet is wonderfully rich, thick, and handsome. The original design underwent a revision, and the above is the only accurate picture so far published. The carpet is 12ft 6in square.



MISS FAIRFAX,
Vice-president.



Photo. by Talma, 374 George-street.
MISS ETHEL STEPHENS,
Society of Artists.



Photo. by Rembrandt.
MISS FLORENCE RODWAY,
Royal Art Society.

Top left: Mary Fairfax, 'The Girls' Realm Guild: Some of the workers', *Sydney Mail*, 23 Aug. 1911, p.29.

Top middle: Ethel Stephens, 'Australian Women: Some Exhibitors of the Present Art Season', *Sydney Mail*, 28 Aug. 1907, p.559.

Top right: Florence Rodway, *Sydney Mail*, 28 Aug. 1907, p.559.

Bottom right: photograph of painting of Lady Northcote by Violet Teague, reproduced in *Art and Architecture*, Sept.-Oct. 1908, plate.

Bottom left: sketch of Violet Teague, artist unnamed, *Art and Architecture*, Sept.-Oct. 1908, p.180.



LADY NORTHCOTE.

Violet Teague



MISS VIOLET TEAGUE.