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Introduction

Maria Alambritis, Susanna Avery-Quash, and Hilary Fraser

As we worked on this issue of *19* dedicated to women writers on the old masters, the National Gallery, London staged two superb exhibitions of Italian Renaissance painters whose work has not consistently been admired but who were the subject of new scholarly interest in late nineteenth-century Britain: ‘Mantegna and Bellini’ and ‘Lorenzo Lotto Portraits’. Andrea Mantegna (c. 1431–1506) in particular has been very much in the public eye recently. His monumental nine-part fresco cycle, *The Triumphs of Caesar*, usually housed within the royal collections at Hampton Court Palace, formed the magnificent centrepiece of the Royal Academy’s blockbuster show, ‘Charles I: King and Collector’ (27 January–15 April 2018). When the art historian Julia Cartwright wrote of Mantegna at the end of the nineteenth century that ‘his works have never been, perhaps they will never become, the enthusiastic object of general worship’, it was impossible to imagine the queues today at Burlington House and the National Gallery, and inconceivable that the painter would ever be so resoundingly celebrated.¹

If the success of these major exhibitions proves her predictions to be unduly pessimistic, it seems fair to acknowledge that this remarkable shift in Mantegna’s reputation in the Anglophone world is to some extent attributable to her own path-breaking research and that of other female contemporaries. Cartwright’s monograph *Mantegna and Francia* (1881) was the first book-length study of Mantegna in English, though Anna Jameson had published an illustrated article on the artist in the widely read *Penny Magazine* as early as 1843, placing his work, as she proudly declared, ‘at once before the eyes of fifty thousand readers’.² Mantegna’s *Triumphs* are given high praise in the *Guide to the Italian Pictures at Hampton Court*, published in 1894 by ‘Mary Logan’ (the pseudonym of Mary Costelloe, later to become Mary Berenson).³ Two further dedicated monographs on the painter appeared after the turn of the century: Maud Cruttwell’s *Andrea*

¹ Julia Cartwright, *Mantegna and Francia* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1881), p. 62. See the article by Maria Alambritis in this issue for a full account of Cartwright’s influential work on Mantegna.

² [Anna Jameson], ‘Andrea Mantegna’, *Penny Magazine*, 11 November 1843, pp. 436–38 (p. 436). See the article on Jameson by Susanna Avery-Quash in this issue.

³ See the articles by Ilaria Della Monica and Jonathan Nelson in this issue.

Mantegna (1901) and Nancy Bell's *Mantegna* (1911).⁴ In her article for this issue, Maria Alambritis discusses why women were drawn to write about this hitherto neglected master.

Cartwright did not devote a book to Giovanni Bellini (c. 1435–1516), but the painter features alongside Mantegna in her important two-volume study of their female patron, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua 1474–1539: A Study of the Renaissance* (1903).⁵ Cartwright also published two pioneering articles (in *Portfolio* in 1889 and the *Art Journal* in 1895) on Lorenzo Lotto (c. 1480–1556/57), who even now has received scant scholarly attention in the English-speaking world. An established expert, she advised Bernard Berenson on his own 1895 publication on Lotto.⁶ Also in 1895, Mary Logan wrote a review essay about recent work on Lotto for the *Studio*, thereby consolidating the painter's newly restored reputation. Although it is rarely acknowledged in modern critical accounts of Mantegna, Bellini, and Lotto, all three painters may be said to have owed the change in their critical fortunes, leading to their popular acclaim today, in part to the women who first brought their work to wide public attention over a century ago.

This issue of *19* celebrates the foundational interventions of women such as Jameson, Cartwright, Cruttwell, and Mary Berenson in the history, collection, display, and reception of the old masters. Some of the articles collected here had their first outing either at a conference we co-organized at the National Gallery, London on 10 November 2017 or in an earlier, associated event which took place at Chawton House Library, Hampshire on 25 February 2017.⁷ It seems fitting for the gallery and Birkbeck, both founded in the nineteenth century with a mission to widen access to education and the highest forms of culture, to host a programme of research into the Victorian women who worked so indefatigably to take art to the people. It is fitting too for the outcome of this phase of the project to be published

⁴ See the articles by Francesco Ventrella and Tiffany Johnston in this issue.

⁵ A dedicated contemporaneous monograph was published by Roger Fry: *Giovanni Bellini* (London: Unicorn Press, 1899).

⁶ Bernhard Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto: An Essay in Constructive Art Criticism* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1895). For a discussion of Cartwright's contribution, see Meaghan Clarke, 'The Art Press at the Fin de Siècle: Women, Collecting, and Connoisseurship', *Visual Resources*, 31 (2015), 15–30 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.2015.1004776>> (pp. 20–21). Clarke cites *A Bright Remembrance: The Diaries of Julia Cartwright, 1851–1924*, ed. by Angela Emanuel (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), pp. 188–92.

⁷ For the conference at the National Gallery, see <<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/whats-on/calendar/known-as-much-of-art-as-the-cat-19th-century-women-writers-on-the-old-masters>>. For the earlier conference at Chawton House Library, 'Writing Art: Women Writers as Art Critics in the Long Eighteenth Century', see <<https://chawtonhouse.org/whats-on/conference-writing-art-women-writers-as-art-critics-in-the-long-eighteenth-century/>> [both accessed 21 March 2019].

in Birkbeck's pioneering open access journal *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* on the Open Library of Humanities platform.

There are good reasons why our issue is bursting at its virtual seams. A great deal has happened in the decades since Claire Richter Sherman and Adele M. Holcomb opened up the field with their edited collection *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts, 1820–1979* (1981), and it is time for a new reckoning of women's contribution to the last 200 years of art scholarship. It is no accident that the rediscovery of female scholars has coincided with revived interest in work by women artists. Thanks to the efforts of second-wave feminist art historians, the artists themselves, dubbed by Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker 'Old Mistresses' in their book of that name in 1981, are now finally being given their due.⁸ One of the pieces in the newly launched *19* Live feature of this issue, which aims to highlight and debate relevant events and news stories beyond the academy, celebrates the National Gallery's recent acquisition of the *Self-Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria* by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1653).⁹ This prized work by the accomplished Renaissance painter (the subject of a major solo exhibition at the Musée Maillol in Paris in 2012 and a forthcoming UK retrospective at the National Gallery in 2020)¹⁰ joins the gallery's growing collection of paintings by female artists, which extends from Catharina van Hemessen, Judith Leyster, Marie Blancour, and Rachel Ruysch, through Rosalba Carriera and Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Le Brun, to Rosa Bonheur and Berthe Morisot. Elsewhere, Tate recently launched a search for Angelica Kauffman's lost masterpiece *Religion Attended by the Virtues*, and around the world work by female artists is slowly being recovered and made accessible to the public. In Britain alone, major retrospectives at Tate Britain, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Barbican demonstrate the work being done by public galleries to increase female artists' representation and visibility;¹¹ while in the commercial art world, female artists have

⁸ Eve Kahn's forthcoming publication *Forever Seeing New Beauties: The Forgotten Impressionist Mary Rogers Williams* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press) is one example of the ongoing work of scholars to recover the work of still-obscure women artists. See Eve Kahn, 'Rediscovering Mary Rogers Williams' <http://evekahn.com/img/RediscoveringMaryRogersWilliams_EveKahn.pdf> [accessed 21 March 2019].

⁹ See 'Artemisia Gentileschi' <<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/artemisia-gentileschi>> [accessed 21 March 2019].

¹⁰ See 'Rare Self Portrait by Artemisia Gentileschi Now on Display' <<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/rare-self-portrait-by-artemisia-gentileschi-now-on-display>> [accessed 21 March 2019].

¹¹ Tate Britain's 'Sixty Years' will see a temporary re-hang of its free galleries to showcase the development of British art of the last sixty years with only works by female artists, featuring Bridget Riley, Rachel Whiteread, Monster Chetwynd, Mona Hatoum, and Sarah Lucas. Curated by Sofia Karamani (assistant curator of Contemporary British Art, Tate) it will open on 22 April 2019 and is set to be on display for at least a year. See 'Tate Britain to Celebrate Women Artists from

witnessed a resurgence at auction, such as at Sotheby's sale of significant early modern paintings, 'The Female Triumphant', and Liss Llewellyn Fine Art's current exhibition and sale.¹² Last year marked the sad death of Jane Fortune (1942–2018), who set up the non-profit organization Advancing Women Artists (AWA) to support the restoration and exhibition of works of art by women such as the Florentine nun Plautilla Nelli (1524–1588).¹³ Her legacy lives on through AWA's continuing project to recover the estimated 2,000-plus works of art by women that for centuries have lain mouldering and unseen in museum storage in Florence.¹⁴

1960 to the Present' <<https://www.tate.org.uk/press/press-releases/tate-britain-celebrate-women-artists-1960-present>>. The National Portrait Gallery will display 'Pre-Raphaelite Sisters' (17 October 2019–26 January 2020) on the women of Pre-Raphaelite art. See 'Pre-Raphaelite Sisters' <<https://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/exhibitions/2019/pre-raphaelite-sisters/>>. 'Lee Krasner: Living Colour' at the Barbican, London (30 May–1 September 2019) will celebrate the life and work of abstract expressionist pioneer Lee Krasner (1908–1984), whose artistic significance has often been obscured by her marriage to Jackson Pollock. See 'Lee Krasner: Living Colour' <<https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2019/event/lee-krasner-living-colour>> [all accessed 21 March 2019]. Moreover, the exhibition 'Christina Rossetti: Vision & Verse' at the Watts Gallery (13 November 2018–17 March 2019) and the accompanying two-day symposium 'Christina Rossetti and the Illustrated Poetry Book' at the Watts Gallery and Birkbeck (17–18 December 2018) demonstrate that this interest spreads beyond the national museums.

¹² 'The Female Triumphant' was a group of works by female artists auctioned at Sotheby's as a special consignment of the Master Paintings Evening Sale in New York on 30 January 2019, where Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Le Brun's 1788 painting *Portrait of Muhammad Dervish Khan, Full-Length, Holding His Sword in a Landscape* sold for \$7.18 million, making a new record for a pre-modern female artist at auction. However, the use of the phrase 'female Old Master' in the auction press material demonstrates the ongoing inadequacy of entrenched art historical terminology to accommodate the idea of a female artist in the pre-modern era: see 'Once Overlooked, Female Old Masters Take Center Stage', 25 January 2019 <<https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/once-overlooked-female-old-masters-take-center-stage>>. Curated by Sacha Llewellyn, 'Fifty Works by Fifty British Women Artists 1900–1950' at the Ambulatory, Mercers' Hall, London (3 December 2018–23 March 2019) and the Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery, University of Leeds (9 April–27 July 2019) <https://www.lissllewellyn.com/llfa__s_326__.htm>, is displayed in conjunction with the Liss Llewellyn ex-catalogue sale, One Hundred Years of Works by British Women Artists, 1880–1980 <https://www.lissllewellyn.com/llfa__s_346__.htm> [all accessed 21 March 2019].

¹³ See her obituary in the *New York Times*: Katharine Q. Seelye, 'Jane Fortune, Champion of Florence's Female Artists, Dies at 76', 2 October 2018 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/obituaries/jane-fortune-dead.html>>. See also, Advancing Women Artists <<http://advancingwomenartists.org/>> [both accessed 21 March 2019].

¹⁴ A significant outcome of Fortune's work will be realized this autumn with the launch of 'A Space of Their Own', a major illustrated online database cataloguing over six hundred female artists working in the US and Europe between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, the result of a collaboration between Indiana University Bloomington and the AWA.

Establishing the case for the value of women's *writing* on art has taken somewhat longer, and for some time the work of rehabilitation was pursued predominantly by literary scholars rather than art historians. The art writing of George Eliot, Vernon Lee, and Michael Field, like that of John Ruskin and Walter Pater, was until recently of more interest to English departments than to galleries and art history departments. But now art historians too are examining the contributions not only of these more literary writers but also of women who identified themselves professionally as art historians, who made significant scholarly contributions to the historical and technical understanding of the old masters, and influenced their collection and display.¹⁵ The comprehensive collective bibliography prepared by Maria Alambritis at the end of this issue takes stock of where we have arrived and demonstrates just how substantial and multifaceted the field has become.

We have been fortunate to secure some of the leading scholars in the field as well as a new generation of researchers for this landmark issue which, we feel, marks a step change in scholarship on female art historians by restoring them to their rightful place in the mainstream historiography of art. A number of them spoke at a research forum on 'Women and the Culture of Connoisseurship' organized by Meaghan Clarke and Francesco Ventrella at the University of Sussex in July 2015; we are delighted that our publication expands on work presented there and showcases the work of other scholars.¹⁶ The issue is certainly productively interdisciplinary, benefiting from the different perspectives that art historians, literary scholars, and museum professionals bring to this diverse material. It spans the long nineteenth century, taking us from the early women travel writers working at the end of the eighteenth century to those like Vernon Lee who continued to publish well into the twentieth century.¹⁷ Our issue brings together little-known authors, such as Lucy Olcott, and well-established writers, such as Maria Callcott, Mary Merrifield, Anna Jameson, and Lady

¹⁵ National Galleries Scotland will explore the role of women as collectors of art themselves in this year's annual conference, 'Women Collectors in Britain from the 18th century to the Present Day', to be held on Saturday, 28 September 2019 at the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh. This year's Christie's Education symposium focuses on women as dealers — 'Women Art Dealers 1940-1990', New York (17–18 May 2019) — while last year's Christie's Education conference explored a broad remit of women in the arts with 'Celebrating Female Agency in the Arts', New York (26–27 June 2018).

¹⁶ See 'Women and the Culture of Connoisseurship' <<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/scv/symposia/wcc>> [accessed 21 March 2019]. The proceedings, co-edited by Clarke and Ventrella, were published as 'Women's Expertise and the Culture of Connoisseurship', *Visual Resources*, 33.1–2 (2017).

¹⁷ See the articles in this issue by Isabelle Baudino, Meaghan Clarke, and Hilary Fraser.

Eastlake.¹⁸ Diane Apostolos-Cappadona has edited a helpful compilation of short biographies of the women discussed which, for ease of reference, appears as a separate section. It includes nineteenth-century art historians whose methods were empirical and whose objectives were to achieve a greater understanding of the technical skills of old master painters, alongside women who wrote more lyrically about the imaginative aspects of their work, or were more interested in analysing its historical and political dimensions. Its focus is historical, correcting the gender imbalance that has distorted many previous accounts of art history in the nineteenth century, yet our collection of articles also speaks to our present moment, to issues that are live.¹⁹ The cosmopolitan open-mindedness that characterizes the border-crossing work of so many of these women who wrote about old master painters in the nineteenth century seems newly relevant in a world where, as we write, the barriers are going up again between Britain and Continental Europe, just as they are finally coming down — in the art world at least — between the sexes.²⁰

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¹⁸ See the articles in this issue by Imogen Tedbury, Caroline Palmer, Zahira Véliz Bomford, Susanna Avery-Quash, Patricia Rubin, and Julie Sheldon.

¹⁹ See Lene Østermark-Johansen’s article in this issue on Moroni’s *Tailor* and the female gaze, then and now.

²⁰ See Hilary Fraser’s article in this issue which focuses on the issue of cosmopolitanism.