Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux: An Analytical Comparison of Two New Women and Issues Surrounding Femininity, Modernity, and Nineteenth-Century Feminism

A thesis presented to

the faculty of

the College of Fine Arts of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

Hayley D.K. McGuirk

April 2017

© 2017 Hayley D.K. McGuirk. All Rights Reserved.
This thesis titled
Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux: An Analytical Comparison of Two New Women and
Issues Surrounding Femininity, Modernity, and Nineteenth-Century Feminism

by
HAYLEY D.K. MCGUIRK

has been approved for
the School of Art + Design
and the College of Fine Arts by

Jody Lamb
Associate Professor of Fine Arts

Elizabeth Sayrs
Interim Dean, College of Fine Arts
ABSTRACT

MCGUIRK, HAYLEY D.K., M.A., April 2017, Art History

Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux: An Analytical Comparison of Two New Women and
Issues Surrounding Femininity, Modernity, and Nineteenth-Century Feminism

Director of Thesis: Jody Lamb

Forging reputations as the greatest women artists of their generation, Mary
Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux embodied the autonomous, ambitious, and complex
characteristics that came to represent the New Woman at the turn of the nineteenth
century. Their comparable levels of success as well as their conflicting ideologies
concerning the role of feminine expression in art resulted in a personal and professional
rivalry. Shifting the debate away from which of these women was the superior artist,
scholars have begun to dispute the social and symbolic implications of their work in an
effort to determine which artist proved to be the exemplary feminist.

Utilizing inferences drawn from autobiographical and primary sources, secondary
sources, and iconographic and semiotic analysis, this study explores the divergent impact
of Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux’s work as visual manifestations of the New Woman,
their diverse but equally significant contributions to the equal rights movement and the
professionalization of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century woman artist.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Biographies of Cassatt, Beaux, and The New Woman</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Woman</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Cassatt</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia Beaux</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Artwork Analysis</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Motherhood</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Cassatt: Mother and Child (1889)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia Beaux: Les derniers jours d’enfance (1883-1885)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Modern Women</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman Mural (1893)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia Beaux: Sita and Sarita (1893-1894)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Cassatt: Carriage Ride (1881)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplative Women</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Suffrage, Tea, and the Art Market</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassatt’s Suffrage Exhibition</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaux: Suffrage and the Professional Woman</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassatt and Beaux: Validating the New Woman</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassatt and Beaux: Mentors and Advisors</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mary Cassatt, <em>Emmie and Her Child</em>, oil on canvas, 1889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cecilia Beaux, <em>Les derniers jours d' enfance</em>, oil on canvas, 1883-1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Frances Benjamin Johnston, *Self-Portrait (as &quot;New Woman&quot;), material unknown, 1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mary Cassatt, <em>The Mandolin Player</em>, oil on canvas, 1868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mary Cassatt, <em>The Cup of Tea</em>, oil on canvas, 1879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mary Cassatt, <em>Modern Woman Mural</em>, 1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mary MacMonnies, <em>Primitive Woman Mural</em>, 1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Cecilia Beaux, <em>Shell Studies</em>, graphite and wash on wove paper, 1875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Cecilia Beaux, <em>Plaque</em>, porcelain, 1880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cecilia Beaux, <em>Portrait of Cecil Kent Drinker</em>, oil on canvas, 1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Cecilia Beaux, <em>Twilight Confidences</em>, oil on canvas, 1888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Cecilia Beaux, <em>After the Meeting</em>, oil on canvas, 1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Cecilia Beaux, <em>Self Portrait</em>, oil on canvas, 1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Cecilia Beaux, <em>The Dancing Lesson (Dorothea and Francesca)</em>, oil on canvas, 1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Gari Melchers, <em>Mother and Child</em>, pastel, date unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mary Cassatt, <em>Auguste Reading to Her Daughter</em>, oil on canvas, 1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Mary Cassatt, <em>Portrait of Alexander J. Cassatt and His Son Robert Kelso Cassatt</em>, oil on canvas, 1884-1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Mary Cassatt, Center panel of the <em>Modern Woman Mural</em>, 1893 (detail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mary Cassatt, Left and Right panels of the <em>Modern Woman Mural</em>, 1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Cecilia Beaux, <em>Sita and Sarita</em>, oil on canvas, 1893-1894</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 21. Eduard Manet, *Olympia*, oil on canvas, 1863. .............................................. 127

Figure 22. James McNeil Whistler, *Symphony in White No.1*, oil on canvas, 1862...... 128

Figure 23. Mary Cassatt, *Woman and Child Driving*, oil on canvas, 1881. ................. 129

Figure 24. Cecilia Beaux, *The Dreamer*, oil on canvas, 1894........................................ 130

Figure 25. Mary Cassatt, *Portrait of a Lady (Reading 'Le Figaro')*, oil on canvas, 1878. ................................................................................................................... 131

Figure 26. Photograph of the Suffrage Loan Exhibition at Knoedler Gallery, 1915..... 132

Figure 27. Installation view of the Suffrage Loan Exhibition, detail of Cassatt’s wall. Knoedler and Co. Galleries, New York................................................................. 133

Figure 28. Cecilia Beaux, *Sarah Elizabeth Doyle*, oil on canvas. ................................. 134

Figure 29. Cecilia Beaux, *Portrait of Eliza S. Turner*, oil on canvas, 1897.................. 135

Figure 30. Mary Cassatt, *Portrait of Louisine Havemeyer and Her Daughter*, oil on canvas, 1895......................................................................................................... 136

Figure 31. Cecilia Beaux, *M. Adelaide Nutting*, oil on canvas, 1906....................... 137

Figure 32. Cecilia Beaux, *William Henry Howell*, oil on canvas, 1910..................... 138

Figure 33. Cecilia Beaux, *Portrait of Marion Reilly*, oil on canvas, 1918.................... 139

Figure 34. Cecilia Beaux, *Caroline B. Hazard*, oil on canvas, 1908......................... 140

Figure 35. Edgar Degas, *Portrait of Mary Cassatt*, oil on canvas, c. 1884.............. 141
INTRODUCTION

French Impressionist Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) and American portraitist Cecilia Beaux (1855-1942) formulated prominent careers during “the greatest period of female social progress in history.” As such, they became integral members of a movement that would radically redefine socially circumscribed views of female ability, categorical gender spheres, and the prospect of female professionalism. As the New Woman’s movement began to permeate across Western Europe and the United States throughout the late nineteenth century, a shift from Victorian to Modern culture facilitated women’s claim to the public and professional sphere. Cassatt and Beaux would propel and embody this era of cultural and ideological progress as they pressed for critical recognition, achieved autonomous lifestyles, and lobbied for political, social, and economic equality. The breadth of their domestic and international success would, in the process, challenge the pejorative and dilettantish stereotypes that had characterized the work of ‘women artists’ well into the twentieth century.

Incorporating the emerging ideals of modern womanhood into the diverse nuances of their work, Cassatt and Beaux shared an unequivocally progressive ideological framework. However, their pitted rivalry as the ‘the greatest’ women painters of their era would characterize a discord that remains entrenched in the writings of modern-day scholarship as biographers continue to compare and disavow the feminist

---

2 The era of the ‘New’ or ‘Modern Woman’ began to emerge in Western culture by the end of the nineteenth century as notions of female autonomy, intelligence, sexual liberation and economic independence began to circulate; conflicting intensely with the traditional values of Victorian society. Setting the foundation for twentieth century feminism, ‘New Women’ flouted convention and undermined the ideals of ‘true womanhood’ with their most progressive principles advocating radical individualism and economic independence. Kirsten Swinth Painting Professionals: Women Artists & the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930 (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 169.
implications of the other artist’s work. I will argue that the differences that resonated within the complexities of Cassatt and Beaux’s theoretical perspectives and subsequently their art demonstrated the poly-lithic ideologies and multifaceted identities inherited by Modern Women at the turn of the century. Exploring the parameters and implications of this discussion, the foundation of this thesis intends to provide a critical and analytical comparison of Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux’s role in the context, development, and resonance of the Modern Woman’s movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

As an integral facet of a much larger cultural movement, women endeavoring to be makers and purveyors, no longer mere subjects, of the visual arts began to seek specialized education and enter art academies in unprecedented numbers during the last decades of the nineteenth century.³ Resonating questions concerning the extent of female capabilities and the significance of women’s contributions in the public sphere began to mitigate as consequence of the growing presence of venerated female artists, including Cassatt and Beaux, who exerted their skills in the professional echelon. While working collectively to develop and procure precedential avenues of cultural identity and professional opportunities for proceeding generations of female artists, an enmity for one another would come to define the personal and professional parameters of their relationship.

To the expatriate, Cecilia Beaux represented “the slick accommodating approach to art that Cassatt had always disdained” adamantly believing that the portraitist was one

³ Chadwick, 175-178.
of many academically trained artists who had achieved fame without deserving it.\textsuperscript{4}

Equally acidulous of her colleague, Beaux chose to ardentilly ignore the internationally acclaimed Impressionist, refusing to acknowledge her colleague’s art or her reputation as a vanguard in the field for professional female artists. Although Cassatt began to prolifically exhibit her work in America after 1895, modern scholars surmise that Beaux had never perceived a threat to “her primacy to come from someone older” and, furthermore, held little respect for Impressionism.\textsuperscript{5} As such, existing evidence suggests that Cassatt and Beaux saw themselves first and foremost as professional rivals as opposed to feminist comrades during this integral transitional period aimed at elevating women’s professional, economic, and political influence.

Recognizing their unusual status as contemporary American women with comparable levels of success, the foundation of Cassatt and Beaux’s acrimonious relationship was in part provoked by journalists and critics who publically debated which artist should be heralded as ‘the greatest woman painter’ of their era.\textsuperscript{6} Incited not only by professional competition and dissimilar stylistic penchants, however, the potency of their discord aptly indicated their conflicting ideological viewpoints concerning the nature of


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 156.

\textsuperscript{6} Contended within nineteenth century and modern scholarship, the title of the ‘greatest’ or ‘most distinguished’ woman painter was attributed to both Cassatt and Beaux throughout the course of their careers. In 1899, William Merritt Chase expressed in a public speech that “Miss Beaux is not only the greatest woman painter, but the best that has ever lived.” (“Art Jury Awards Miss Cecilia Beaux First Prize.” \textit{Philadelphia Public Ledger}, November 3, 1899, Cecilia Beaux Papers. Archives of American Art). In the forward of his exhibition catalog, director of the National Gallery, J. Carter Brown, averred in contrast that Mary Cassatt was “First, obviously, [a woman], in fact America’s greatest female artist.” (J. Carter Brown, \textit{Mary Cassatt 1844-1926} (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1970), 7. Prior, in 1909 Cassatt elevated to the status of the “most eminent of American woman painters” by Lula Merrick. (Lula Merrick, “The Art of Mary Cassatt” from the \textit{Delineator}, August 1909). Sylvia Yount affirms in her monograph that Beaux was fundamentally eclipsed in art historical interest by “her fellow [PAFA] alumna, against whom she was frequently pitted in the contest for ‘most distinguished woman artist.’” (Sylvia Yount, \textit{Cecilia Beaux: American Portrait Painter} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 11).
their subjects, the role an artist should play in the production of art, and the intrinsic value of femininity and female self-expression.

Riddled with depreciatory implications well into the turn of the twentieth century, ‘feminine art’ carried with it notions of amateurism, inferiority, and moral refinement. Furthermore, “women artists,” the innate producers of feminine art, faced similar criticism and confining stereotypes by conservative and international art critics well into the modern era. Refuting this contemporary classification, both Cassatt and Beaux were among many female artists who utilized their compounding influence to eradicate the socially instilled devaluation of ‘women in art.’ The foundation of an artistic and ideological divergence can be examined, however, in their opposing theories concerning the rightful place of gender identity and feminine expression in the production of artwork intended to reflect a new era of womanhood in Western society.

An example of this theoretical divergence can be seen in an impassioned speech delivered by Cecilia Beaux near the apex of her career to the students of Barnard College in 1915. The portraitist expressed that she had “very little to say on the subject of Women in Art or the point of view of women in art…[as] I very firmly believe there is and should be no sex in art.”7 To clarify the significance of this critical assertion, it was discussed by contemporary art historian Whitney Chadwick within her book *Women Art and Society* (2007) that many women artists working in the modern era sought to effectually eliminate any characteristics that would render their work discernably different from that of their male colleagues. By competing for public commissions and producing work that

---

was fundamentally conservative in style, Chadwick explains, female artists working in America during the second half of the century were inclined to produce works that were aesthetically “indistinguishable” from that of their male contemporaries. They opted to integrate themselves into the male system of production as opposed to formulating a new market for feminine invention. No longer allowing this basis from which their art could be judged differently from that of men’s, the subject of their works, however, began to focus on representing women’s capabilities, strong values, and distinguished positions in the public sphere. Expounding this notion further, Beaux elaborated that, ideally, if one were to look upon a modern work of art it “would be difficult to find the mark of sex upon [it] or to define indeed what it would be if discovered.”¹⁸ In Beaux’s view, the mark of femininity, of a ‘woman artist,’ has been and should be functionally eradicated from the canvas thematically, aesthetically and permanently.

Contrasting the foundation of this artistic and ideological mentality, after undertaking a monumental mural titled *Modern Woman* for the Women’s Building at The Chicago Centennial Exposition of 1893, Mary Cassatt exemplified her breadth of technique, creative motivations, and feminist philosophy. Although indisputably progressive from an early age, art historian Judith Barter asserts that Cassatt aligned herself with less than radical points of view.⁹ Cassatt opted to incorporate contemporary Victorian ideals of gender identity and accentuate the intrinsic value of feminine and maternal virtue within the iconographic and stylistic attributes of her work. When questioned whether or not the monumental mural was meant to visually epitomize the

---

¹⁸ Ibid.
true distinction of the Modern Woman from that of man, Cassatt both elucidated and defended her work’s seemingly contradictory intent of personifying the ideal side of the \textit{Modern Woman} while creating a work that was innately and unapologetically feminine. Men, she asserted, “are painted in all their vigor on the walls of the other buildings [of the exposition]; to us the sweetness of childhood, the charm of womanhood; if I’ve not conveyed some sense of that charm…if I have not been absolutely feminine, then I have failed.”\textsuperscript{10} Thus, to Cassatt, femininity was not only the natural expression of a woman artist but an integral part of what defines the emerging characteristic of the New Woman as she saw it at the turn of the century.

In recent years scholars have begun to explore the role of female artists in the transition from Victorian to modern culture. Critical debate has consequently emerged impugning the antithetical implications of both Cassatt and Beaux’s works as reflections of the New Woman’s Movement. Examining the conservative notions of the ‘ideal’ domestic woman that appear entrenched within Cassatt’s intimate portrayals of motherhood, as well as Beaux’s ostensibly idealized depictions of female sitters, analytical arguments have begun to develop that would functionally undermine the two artists’ work as visual manifestations and ideological catalysts of the Progressive Era.\textsuperscript{11}

Demonstrated within her monograph \textit{Cecilia Beaux: American Figure Painter}, Nina Auerbach utilizes an archetypal image of a \textit{Mother and Child} (1889) (see fig. 1) by Cassatt to illustrate the Impressionist’s overt testament to domesticity that both defined


\textsuperscript{11} The Progressive Era (1890s-1920s) is marked by wide-spread social activism and political reform movements across the United States.
and perpetuated confining ideals of Victorian femininity. Marked by her stylistic choice to “ooze” her figures into a figural mass, Auerbach argues Cassatt’s “poignant hymn to inseparability reinforces a clinging stereotype about women: whether we are painters or not, we are supposed to be creatures of permeable egos, of fluid boundaries; we do not stand apart or exist primarily in ourselves.”\textsuperscript{12} To the contrary she argues that Cecilia Beaux’s mother and child portrait “never succumbed to stereotypes of femininity” (see fig. 2). By aesthetically separating her figures, the mother and child are allowed to exist as self-sufficient individuals, occupying distinguishably different worlds and are enriched with independent identities. Furthermore, theoretical assertions contend that Cassatt’s work effectually outlasted Beaux’s decidedly ‘un-feminine’ style in contemporary and modern interest primarily because her quintessential images of domesticity aligned more closely with popular conservative notions of nineteenth-century gender dynamics; visually encompassing the “tender world that should be women’s”\textsuperscript{13}

Offering a contrary judgment in a recent essay titled “The Greatest Woman Painter": Cecilia Beaux, Mary Cassatt, and Issues of Female Fame,” Nancy Mowll Mathews, a foremost scholar in Cassatt literature, indicates that Beaux’s idealized portraits of female sitters actively perpetuated confining and objectifying notions of the nineteenth-century feminine ideal. Through the creation of more decorative, softer and consequentially more flattering depictions, she argues “Beaux showed the more feminine

\textsuperscript{12} Yount, 80.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 80.
side of the American woman, while Cassatt, a purist, made no such concessions to accepted standards of beauty.\textsuperscript{14}

As scholars continue to debate the ideological principles of these women and, consequentially the wavering levels of feminism\textsuperscript{15} imbued within their paintings, it becomes necessary to evaluate the progressive nature of their work within their personal, cultural, and contemporary contexts. For example, in her book \textit{Vision and Difference: Feminist Interventions in Art Histories}, social and feminist art historian Griselda Pollock elucidates that to be a producer of art during the late-nineteenth century was in some sense a fundamental “transgression of the definition of feminine…”\textsuperscript{16} and required the artist to defy contemporarily established and socially enforced parameters of respectable Victorian propriety.\textsuperscript{17} By exercising notions of autonomy, attaining economic independence and working and achieving influence in the public sphere, Cassatt and Beaux were intrinsically members, conflicting or not, of a collective and bourgeoning feminist movement. Within her book \textit{Painting Professionals: Women Artists & the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930}, Kirsten Swinth articulates, moreover, that women who successfully sustained professional careers collectively and effectually attenuated the ‘dilettantish’ stereotypes of late nineteenth-century women artists irrespective of the ‘feminine’ implications that were infused in their works’ stylistic or thematic elements.

\textsuperscript{14} Nancy Mowll Mathews, “The Greatest Woman Painter: Cecilia Beaux, Mary Cassatt, and Issues of Female Fame” \textit{The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography}, vol cxxiv, no. 3 (July 2000), pg. 11.
\textsuperscript{15} Although not emerging until the twentieth century, the term “feminism” will be used within a late nineteenth-century context in correspondence with the connections made by modern art historians as both waves of activism effectively advocated social, political, and economic advancement for women albeit occurring within two distinctly separate cultural milieus.
\textsuperscript{17} Swinth, 126.
While few works at the turn of the century overtly personified images of ‘New Women’ such as that found in the photographic work of Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864-1952) (see fig 3), an effort will be made to decipher the underlying principles embedded within Cassatt and Beaux’s most prevalent paintings. Critical and iconographic interpretations will thus be applied as necessary in order to ascertain supplementary and evidentiary perspective into their works’ ‘intrinsic meanings or content.’ Furthermore, an investigation into their works’ theoretical foundations will elucidate the complexities of their cultural influences and the extent to which their personal ideologies, i.e. their personal ‘brands of feminism,’ impacted the artistic and thematic motivations behind their art.

Albeit both were born to middle-and upper-class Philadelphian families only a decade apart and procured comparable levels of domestic and international recognition throughout their careers, Cassatt and Beaux have occupied remarkably different roles in art historical discourse. Cassatt’s preeminent success as a first generation French Impressionist and her proclivity for defying academic standards has been the topic of apt discussion dispensed through nearly a century of critical and interdisciplinary scholarship. In comparison, the life and work of Cecilia Beaux has only recently re-emerged as a topic of academic discussion after having been neglected in post-modernist scholarship for decades due to her distinctly conservative and academic style. The

---

18 Erwin Panofsky’s iconic methodology that was brought together under a series of essays titled Meaning in the Visual Arts (1939) in which he argued that the methodical interpretation of a painting’s pure forms, motifs, images, stories, and allegories will lead the interpreter to the work’s ‘underlying principles,’ and, subsequently, its intrinsic meaning or content.’ This process, in return, can elucidate, through its ‘symbolic values,’ the true meaning of the work of art while consequentially revealing the inner, most private truths of the artist and the parameters of its cultural implications.
discrepancies between these two artists, however, far exceed the considerations of disproportionate recognition in the art historical cannon. As Nancy Mowll Mathews attests, an attempt to compare Cassatt and Beaux proves an extraordinarily difficult task; the fact that they were both strong, progressive women does not provide much in the way of a thoughtful comparison. Moreover, “their different loci of activity, different theoretical viewpoints, and different approaches to the work itself mitigate the similarities of gender and nationality.”

Contrary to recent scholarly assertions and despite their discernable geographic, stylistic, and age disconnect, I contend in my thesis that Cassatt and Beaux shared a disparate yet equally important presence in the collective development of early feminism. Support for my thesis is based on an analysis of autobiographical and primary sources, secondary sources, and iconographic and semiotic studies. Two chapters of my thesis will explore their diverse cultural influences, the divergent impact of their work as visual manifestations of the New Woman, and their contending philosophies regarding the role of femininity in the modern era. The final chapter will more specifically address the personal and professional significance of their careers, institutional, and political influence during an intricate period of transition from women’s domestic refinement to public and professional presence in late nineteenth-century art and society.

---

CHAPTER 1: BIOGRAPHIES OF CASSATT, BEAUX, AND THE NEW WOMAN

The last decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a fundamental shift from the milieu of Victorian to modern culture. A drastic socio-political reform movement developed, resonating implications that would impact not only the art world but would more firmly establish women’s presence in the spheres of visual and public influence. Heralding the arrival of the early Progressive Era, the drastic influx of female art students in academic institutions reflected a much larger call for social and ideological progress as activist organizations began lobbying for social, political, educational and economic equality for women on both sides of the Atlantic. The emerging ideals that came to define the New Woman’s movement had consequently garnered a visual presence within the symbolic and iconographical nuances of both men and women’s artistic productions at the turn of the century. Establishing careers within an era of cultural transition, female artists such as Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux were forced to contend with the dilettante stereotypes that characterized much of their art, and were, furthermore, confronted with the culturally constructed line that delineated feminine expression from female professionalism.

In order to fully understand the drastic and radical implications of women’s growing presence in the professional and academic echelons of late nineteenth-century art and culture, it is necessary to acknowledge the variety of obstacles that encumbered women’s access to professional art training, markets, and the opportunities to achieve critical recognition equal to that of men.\(^{20}\) The conservative ideological framework that

\(^{20}\) According to U.S. census figures, the number of women who joined the echelon of professional artists rose from comprising ten percent to fifty percent of student enrollment and employment between 1870 and
had accompanied a flourishing Western bourgeoisie society, industrialization, and rapid urbanization during the early nineteenth century had facilitated a tangible gender dichotomy that demarcated a sharp distinctions between the masculine (public) and feminine (private) spheres. The era of Queen Victoria’s reign (1837-1901) further inculcated notions of feminine virtue; propounding confining ideals of modest, pure, and refined womanhood that were grounded in domestic responsibility, child rearing, and feminine morality. While gradually attaining positions within artistic communities by mid-century, prominent and reputable institutions such as the École in Paris had instituted more restrictive rules for female artists attempting to enroll in academic courses; reflecting, as historian Michelle Facos surmises, the desperate efforts by men to retain presiding control over the public and professional sphere.  

By seeking art training, women were not only challenging codes of feminine propriety and sexual conduct but were claiming the right to inhabit, interpret and represent the world around them, a concept that ardently transgressed their socially designated place within the domestic sphere. Living within confining and preconceived notions of middle and upper class femininity, women who endeavored to pursue art past its accepted facility as a feminine leisure activity were required to breach the boundaries

1890. By 1848, schools of design began to offer women formal instruction and employment in the decorative and industrial arts. By the 1860s, women began to enter traditional art academies and attain professional training in painting and drawing. As of 1890, approximately 11,000 women artists, sculptors, and teachers were practicing their trade on a professional level. Kristen Swinth, however, hedges that the progressive and encouraging growth in numbers “show neither the specific and cultural battles women fought nor how the growing numbers of women artists changed the structure and dynamics of the profession.” (Swinth, Painting Professionals, 3-4)

21 Michelle Facos, An Introduction to Nineteenth Century Art (London: Routledge, 2011), 279. Facos elaborates that “despite liberalization in some areas, both the École and Britain’s Royal Academy (RA) enforced stricter rules against women after 1848. This reflected desperate efforts by men to assert control where they could through the separation of spheres.” (279)
of proper Victorian womanhood. This radical endeavor, as articulated by Kirsten Swinth, would have rendered them open to detrimental criticism, public scrutiny and indignation. Although considered to be morally and spiritually superior to men, women were, furthermore, confined by a social ideology that prohibited individual competition and public visibility; assets that are invariably required in order to succeed as an independent artist. They were fundamentally deprived, moreover, of executing attributes of competition, aggression, and self-reliance all of which had been apportioned to the male spheres of character and influence.\textsuperscript{22}

Thus, throughout the pre-modern era, flower and china paintings, embroidery, and watercolors were deemed the most suitable avenues of artistic achievement available to women as they could successfully execute the decidedly ‘feminine’ works without risk of ‘unsexing themselves’ or breaching the values of feminine morality. A concept pervading well into the second half of the century, critiques that emerged from the period are full of charges forged against early artists such as Elizabeth Thomson (1846-1933) and Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899), who were scolded by contemporary critics for not “painting like women.”\textsuperscript{23} Delineating an inherent distinction between masculine and feminine art, it was expressed by critics for the \textit{Englishwoman’s Review} in 1857 that “it may be that in the more heroic and epic works of art the hand of man is best fitted to excel; nevertheless there remain gentle scenes of home interest, and domestic care, delineations of refined feeling and subtle touches of tender emotion, with which the woman artist is eminently entitled to deal.”

\textsuperscript{22} Chadwick, \textit{Women, Art and Society}, 177.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 176-177.
After mounting agitation by women seeking to expand the parameters of artistic opportunity, by the 1860s leading art academies such as The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art in Philadelphia and later the National Academy of Design in New York began instituting life classes designed specifically for female art students. Classrooms, however, were invariably segregated and access to the fully nude model was fervently denied. Forced to separate themselves in assembly and curriculum, and persistently confined to producing art deemed ‘feminine’ by aesthetic convention, women artists had thus individually and collectively acquired an artistic identity distinctively different from that of their male colleagues.  

Carrying the implications of this cultural and artistic discrepancy well into the last decade of the nineteenth century, critics had begun to call for the production of work with more individuality, ‘masculine strength,’ and virility; consequentially, only men, it was understood, harbored the technique and creative capacity required for this level of artistic production. Female artists, although well-established within academic circles and exhibition halls by this time, were continually expected to express the ‘essentially feminine;’ a nuance of art that was fundamentally different, biologically motivated, and something almost always lesser.  

The New Woman

Pervading in cultural ideology and manifested through visual production, the presiding notion of the feminine ideal, which was increasingly recognized as oppressive and unattainable by large numbers of women throughout the 1870s and 1880s, had begun

---

24 By the mid nineteenth century, the rise in popularity of large-scale history paintings was a subject matter that was reserved primarily for male artists while female artists working during the period were allotted scenes dealing with domesticity.

25 Swinth, Painting Professionals, 203-204.
to facilitate the development of reform-minded activist organizations throughout Western Europe and the United States. As Griselda Pollock notes, the same social system that promoted models of domestic Victorian womanhood, a notion that was unequivocally embraced by millions of women through the turn of the century, had simultaneously produced an era of cultural instability and the foundation of a feminist revolt.26

Establishing a platform of ideals that would ultimately culminate into the ‘Modern’ or New Woman’s Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, activists began to promote entirely different ideas concerning the parameters of women’s responsibilities, possibilities and ambitions outside of the domestic sphere. Emerging out of escalating nineteenth-century reform movements in Western Europe and America,27 the early feminist era formidably contested the anatomical, biblical, and physiological differences that kindled historical arguments rendering women the inferior sex. Exuding ideals of female independence, Modern Women actively contested the confining gender dynamics that had emerged through a patriarchal system and encouraged women to free themselves from the constraints of Victorian refinement while indefinitely expanding their influence and presence in public and professional institutions. Working within the matrix of this radical reform movement, women artists thus belonged to an integral era of modernity. Intrinsic members of a generation invested in flouting convention,

26 Pollock, Vision and Difference, 11.
27 Whitney Chadwick notes that the growing commitment to the emancipation of women was propelled by contemporary reformers such as John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor, Robert Owen, and the Chartists in England as well as the Transcendentalists and American Fourierites in the U.S. Likewise, movements such as Abolition, Temperance, and Suffrage profoundly influenced the lives of middle-and upper-class women aspiring to attain professional careers in the arts. (175)
undermining the ideals of feminine propriety, and re-affirming the individualism and self-expression that lies at the heart of professional achievement.

The Parisian Revolutions of 1848 had initiated the foundation of this cultural transition and had provided an essential reference point for the radical social and feminist movements that had emerged throughout the latter half of the century.\(^\text{28}\) By the 1860s, the city of Paris had grown dramatically, drawing citizens from all over France as well as foreign visitors and expatriates into the bourgeoning culture of flâneur and bourgeoisie society. Emperor Napoleon III had ascended the throne by 1853 and he soon hired the civic planner Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann to transform the medieval capital into what would come to be heralded as the ‘undisputed cultural capital of the world.’ Americans were one of the many nationalities who flocked to the designated center of the art world to participate in the grandiose culture and prestigious annual Salon exhibitions, acquire internationally recognized art instruction, and gain lucrative connections with wealthy collectors.

Although admission to the prestigious École des Beaux Arts in Paris was restricted to men until 1897, May Alcott Nieriker asserted that Paris was nevertheless “the Mecca of art students of both sexes” as private studios and ateliers offered additional and more accessible opportunities for prospective art students whether male or female.\(^\text{29}\) Consequently, beginning in the 1860s, modern estimates suggests that nearly one-third of the approximately one thousand Americans who flocked to Paris every year to receive art training were women. Upon their arrival, female art students had their choice of dozens


\(^\text{29}\) Mary Alcott Nieriker, *Studying Art Abroad and How to Do It Cheaply* (Boston, 1879), 43.
of private ateliers in Paris. The most prestigious and most successful of these studios were established by Rodolphe Julian who had cultivated nine progressively, co-educational studios that offered a curriculum for incoming artists pursuing diverse stylistic inclinations and representing all levels of aptitude until separate ateliers were founded exclusively for women in 1877.30

Although less prestigious than the internationally accredited institutions of Paris and Great Britain, art academies in the U.S. likewise responded to the growing presence of women artists in the late nineteenth century. At the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) alone, by 1886 female students comprised half of the school’s enrollment, began to dominate art classes, “routinely forced male juries to consider their work, and garnered critical praise as a fresh new force…challenging men persistently and visibly.”31 Consequential of emerging political, educational, and social liberation movements, the works produced by female artists during this era began to focus on representing women with strong values and physical and intellectual capabilities, reflecting the increasing sense of public confidence that women began to display by the 1870s and 1880s.32 In effect, their work had begun to manifest the ideologies of an emerging New Womanhood,

30 Julian was exceptional, at least during its first year of development, to provide integrated and thus truly equal education until separate women’s ateliers were opened in 1877 at 51 rue Vivienne, and in 1888 the female branch of Julian’s opened with three additional studios. They continued to offer female students instruction and criticism by revered and prominent Parisian artists such as Caroulus-Duran, William Sartain, and Charlez Lazar. Although required to pay twice as much for tuition as men for the same curriculum, one female student working in Julien’s studio noted that “there is no sex here; the students, men and women, are simply painters…This is one of the best ateliers in Paris to learn to paint in, and this is sufficient reason for our coming here.” Albert Rhodes, “Views Abroad: A Day with the French Painters,” Galaxy 16 (July1873): 13
31 Swinth, Painting Professionals, 105.
32 Chadwick, Women, Art, and Society, 216.
while their pursuit for higher education and professional endeavors became an intrinsic catalyst for the early Progressive Era.

Although critics claimed that by 1890 women were winning the “race” for art and out-pacing men in their achievements, women working in both Paris and the U.S. continually struggled to escape the devaluation that had accompanied their identities as ‘women artists’ and the demarcation of their work as essentially feminine.

Acknowledging the value of domestic experience and maternal responsibility, however, some artists sought to utilize their growing influence to redefine the socially pejorative term, imbuing feminine art with distinguishing implications of exceptionality and individuality. Others, to the contrary, sought to eradicate the presence of femininity entirely from their productions, aiming to produce art that was aesthetically and thematically indistinguishable from men’s. By eliminating discernably feminine qualities from their work, many reasoned that there would be, consequently, no basis from which a woman artist could be judged differently from that of a male colleague. This would result in a new era when “the term Women in Art will be as strange sounding a topic as the title ‘Men in Art’ would be now.”

Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux represented two women professionals who ran uniquely divergent but equally prominent roles in the collective effort to eradicate the devaluation of ‘women artists’ within the last decades of the nineteenth century. Although living and working in separate countries and attaining success in their respective domestic markets, Cassatt and Beaux both embraced an era of opportunity and

---

33 Swinth, *Painting Professionals*, 5.
would come to utilize their expanding influences to exemplify and propel the ideological shifts of cultural progress. As exemplars of Modern Women themselves, Cassatt and Beaux secured independent lifestyles, professional success, and economic autonomy while retaining different stylistic penchants and philosophical bents, Cassatt and Beaux chose fundamentally different methods when propagating contemporary issues surrounding female opportunity, responsibility, professional achievement, and political equality in both the U.S. and France. Partaking in equally progressive endeavors later in their careers, the differences found within their biographical narratives may provide valuable insight into their dissenting artistic theories and feminist perspectives.

Mary Cassatt

On May 22, 1844, Mary Cassatt was the fourth child and second daughter born to an upper-middle class family in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania. Moving frequently throughout her childhood and taking extended visits to Europe, the Cassatt’s settled in Chester County, PA in 1860 when Cassatt first enrolled in Antique Classes at the PAFA in Philadelphia. Women, at the time, were excluded from life-drawing classes but were able to attend anatomy lectures at the Pennsylvania Medical University for the first time that year. By October, Cassatt expanded upon her artistic penchants and began to study drawing with Christian Schussele and painting with Peter Rothermel. Throughout her time at the PAFA, Cassatt took considerable advantage of the opportunities allotted by

35 In 1848, Robert Cassatt retired from his position as Allegheny City mayor and moved the family to Hadwicke, a country family estate near Lancaster, followed by a re-location to the old Southward district of Philadelphia in 1849. In 1851, the Cassatt’s traveled to Europe to seek medical care for nine year old Robert Cassatt who suffered from a rare bone disease. Residing in Paris for over a year, the Cassatt’s moved to Heidelberg and then Darmstadt, Germany and returned to the United States in the last months of 1855.
the school and studied sketches and copied works of the Old Masters and contemporary painters. For a woman artist only interested in achieving amateur status, modern historian Andrew J. Walker writes, the “Academy’s pedagogical program was sufficient. Cassatt’s ambitions, however, were much greater; she wanted to be a professional, respected for her skill, and not confined by the perceived limitations of her gender.” She wanted, as she would later express, “to paint better than the Old Masters.” Showing remarkable talent and potential in her early training at the American academy, Cassatt’s early productions caused her elder brother Alexander to anticipate that “in three years, Mary will want to go to Rome” to pursue art education at the international level.

Considering the traditional responsibilities that were expected of someone from Cassatt’s upper-middle class background, curator and art historian Adelyn Dohme Breeskin documented Cassatt’s aspirations as something exceptional and relatively anomalous: “No respectable, refined lady could be a professional artist. Ladies were permitted to paint roses or pansies on china plates, even to make pencil sketches or watercolors in their enclosed gardens, but to study art seriously, learning anatomy from nude models and having a studio of their own—it was never done and therefore unthinkable.” Furthermore, with prospects of pursuing a professional and public career as an artist, Cassatt’s father, although ultimately financially supportive, expressed suitable concern for his daughter; once stating that “I would almost rather see you dead”

---

36 Andrew J. Walker, “Mary Cassatt’s Modern Education: The United States, France, Italy and Spain, 1860-1873” in Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, 21.
than transgress the perceived lapse of morality awaiting her in Europe. Illustrating the resonating Victorian ideology at the start of her career, the father of Mary Cassatt’s classmate and travel-companion, Eliza Halderman, expressed similar disapproval of his daughter’s less-than-traditional ambitions: “you will get married,” he told her, “and settle down into a good housekeeper like all married women & send off your paints to the garret.”

Rather than pursue the traditional and preferred path for women of her class, Cassatt endeavored for a professional career in the arts and acknowledged the necessary educational and cultural opportunities offered at the time by Parisian institutions. Leaving the comfort of her privileged upbringings, Cassatt traveled with Halderman to the ‘cultural capital of the world’ for an extended stay through the winter of 1865. Growing up in an affluent household, Cassatt had learned to speak French fluently; unlike many of the Americans flooding into the city, she quickly acclimated into Parisian culture. The two women attended Charles Chaplin’s art class for women where they worked from models and regularly partook in the common pastime of copying works at the Louvre. Expressing hesitation towards this public activity, Nancy Mowll Mathews surmised that Cassatt’s father knew “she was extremely impulsive and independent, and for her to be whispered about in the Louvre was not what he wanted for his beloved but troublesome daughter.” By November, Jean-Léon Gérôme had accepted Cassatt as a student; as one of Europe’s leading artists, this generated excitement back in the U.S. and warranted praise from administrators at the PAFA including American realist Thomas Eakins.

39 Mathews, Mary Cassatt: A Life, 36.
40 Samuel Halderman to Eliza Halderman, Mar. 2, 1863, in Mathews, Mary Cassatt: A Life, 58.
41 Mathews, Mary Cassatt: A Life, 36.
Although the first painting that she submitted to the Salon jury in 1867 was rejected, Cassatt remained in Paris and ultimately forged her position within the academic sphere when, only a year later, her *Mandolin Player* was accepted into this prestigious exhibition (see fig. 4).

Although enjoying inconsistent success with the Salon jury throughout the first part of her career, after four years of study in city’s finest institutions Cassatt duly considered herself a member of the artistic elite, stating to her Philadelphian friend “you must know we professionals despise amateurs.”\(^{42}\) Although she returned to the U.S. periodically to visit her family and traveled throughout northern France and Europe, Cassatt always remained immersed in the international modernity afforded by Parisian society. With emerging acclaim that gradually spread to the U.S., Cassatt sold a work to an American collector for the first time in 1872. In correspondence with Emily Sartain, whom Cassatt was traveling with at the time, Cassatt had once notably stated that “no woman artists ever sold her pictures except by favor in America-- that people bought them, not because they wanted them but only to patronize a woman. Perhaps now… her opinion [has been] modified.”\(^{43}\) While gaining considerable recognition in the U.S., Cassatt nevertheless preferred the opportunities afforded to her abroad; declaring “after all give me France---women do not have to fight for recognition here, if they do serious work.”\(^{44}\)

---


\(^{43}\) Emily Sartain to John Sartain, Oct. 17, in Mathews, *Mary Cassatt and Her Circle*, 112.

\(^{44}\) Mary Cassatt to Sarah Hallowell, quoted in Sarah Howell to Bertha Palmer, February 6 (1894), Chicago Historical Society.
By 1863 The Salon des Refusés opened in Paris, indicative of the growing protest over the Salon jury’s prominent institutional and aesthetic conservatism. Cassatt also began to voice her criticisms while continuing to exhibit her work at the annual Salon and a number of galleries throughout the city as the clearest path to artistic success was through the accolades afforded by Academic achievement. Cassatt’s dissatisfaction with academic aesthetics and monopolistic control of visual production would continue to grow. Settling in Paris permanently by 1874 and establishing the foundation of an unsatisfying but increasingly successful career through Salon and academic recognition, a critical turning point then occurred in the artist’s career. After two of her Salon entries were rejected by the 1877 jury, Edgar Degas, expressing sympathy for those of her works that were increasingly imbued with themes of societal modernity and an aesthetic sense of immediacy, invited Cassatt to exhibit with a small but emerging independent exhibition group of artists eventually identified as the Impressionists. Adding pressure at the prospect of his daughter deviating from a traditional avenue of success, Robert Cassatt insisted that his daughter begin to self-support her studio. According to her brother, “this makes Mame, very uneasy, as she must either make sale of the pictures she has on hand or else take to painting pot boilers as the artists’ say--- a thing that she never yet has done and cannot bare the idea of being obliged to do.”

Although a daring pursuit and in spite of her father’s ultimatum, in 1879 Cassatt debuted with the Impressionists by contributing twelve works to the group’s fourth exhibition. Among the sixteen artists who submitted 246 works to the show, three other

---

45 Cassatt’s paintings were accepted into the Salon during the years 1868, 1870, 1872, 1873, 1874, 1875, and 1876.
46 Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, Dec. 13, in Mathews, Cassatt and Her Circle, 143.
were women; including Berthe Morisot, Eva Gonzales, and Marie Bracquemond. Cassatt, however, was the only American. Despite a number of the disparaging critiques offered by the conservative art press, a number of Cassatt’s works were well received by a number of Parisian critics including Burty, Duranty, Houssaye, Huysmans, and Silvestre.\textsuperscript{47} Acknowledging the magnitude of his daughter’s success abroad, Robert Cassatt acceded that “in short, everybody says now that in the future it [doesn’t] matter what the papers say about her--- She is now known to the Art world as well as to the general public in such a way as not to be forgotten again so long as she continues to paint!”\textsuperscript{48} By the Impressionist’s 1881 exhibition, Cassatt had chosen to debut her domestic work \textit{The Cup of Tea} (see fig. 5) as well as other works depicting her increasingly favorite subjects of exploration: women and children. Displayed alongside Morisot’s \textit{Nursing} (1879) one journalist remarked that the “eternal Feminine is brilliantly represented by a French woman and an American woman: Mesdames Morisot and Cassatt. If only all the women who declare themselves the equals of men were able to paint like Mesdames Morisot and Cassatt they would accomplish more for their cause than all the debates…”\textsuperscript{49}

Traveling back to the U.S. in 1884 for extended stays to care for her elderly parents with failing health, Cassatt found little time to paint notwithstanding the six works that she submitted to the final Impressionist exhibition in 1886. She returned to Paris long enough to witness the Exposition Universelle of 1889, the largest world’s fair

\textsuperscript{47} Bolstering Cassatt’s critical recognition, she proceeded to sell a number of her works including \textit{Woman Reading} and \textit{Woman in a Loge} to art collector Antonin Proust.
\textsuperscript{48} Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, May 21 in Ibid., 144.
of the nineteenth century and would travel prolifically throughout Europe through much of the decade, returning, finally, to Paris in 1892. It was then that Elizabeth Gardner, a fellow expatriate artist, declined to paint a prestigious mural for the Women’s Building of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Cassatt, offered the prominent commission by Bertha Palmer, accepted the opportunity to paint a *Modern Woman* mural (see fig. 6) to complement Mary MacMonnies’s *Primitive Woman*. (see fig.7)

After contributing to the fair and gaining continuous recognition in her home country, Cassatt’s first large one–person exhibition in the U.S. was held in 1895 at Durand-Ruel’s New York gallery, opening to critical and commercial acclaim. During her student days, Cassatt had stated that she believed that the “goal of an artist was to exhibit and sell, to achieve fame and fortune.”50 However, by 1909 at the age of 65, Cassatt rejected the Muse de Luxembourg’s prestigious request for a portrait bust of herself to exhibit with all other celebrated painters in their set; declaring instead, that “what one would like to leave behind one is superior art and a hidden personality.”51 Retaining a considerable presence in the international art market and continuing to produce works throughout the last decades of her career, Cassatt passed away after years of ailing health in June of 1926 at the age of 83.52

During the last decades of her life, Cassatt had become heavily involved with circulating political issues of her day, the most prominent of which was the call for

---

51 Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, March 10.
women’s suffrage in the United States. Although she was not tempted to join any of the activist groups emerging in France, Cassatt expressed her willingness to support the growing movement in America financially and most distinctively, through her art.\textsuperscript{53} Believing that excluding women from the vote was unconscionable, Cassatt stated that “what we ought to fight for is equality,” elaborating to Theodate Pope that “it would lead to more happiness for both [men and women].” Like many feminists of her time, Cassatt believed that the approaching World War [I] was the inevitable result of excluding women from political and national decision-making processes.\textsuperscript{54} While she did not involve herself in political matters until later in her life, “there is no doubt that Cassatt was profoundly feminist from an early age,” Nancy Mowll Mathews asserts, “she held women in as high esteem as she held men, if not higher in some ways. She believed in a woman’s right to education and advancement in the world outside of home. She was fully aware of and did not hesitate to raise her voice against the vast injustices suffered by women in modern life.”\textsuperscript{55}

Over the past decades, social and feminist art historians have explored both the social and stylistic implications of Cassatt’s paintings, analyzing the ideological significance of her intimate, domestic portraits of motherhood in relation to her progressive depictions of autonomous women occupying the public sphere. Cassatt’s signature theme of mothers with their children poses potentially problematic as modern historians attempt to place Cassatt’s ostensible testaments to domestic womanhood in the

\textsuperscript{53} Cassatt’s role in the U.S. suffrage movement and Louisine Havemeyer’s exhibition will be discussed in depth in chapter three of this thesis. 
\textsuperscript{54} Mathews, \textit{Mary Cassatt: A Life}, 308-309.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 307.
context of the early Progressive Era. An argument that is propounded by historians such as Sidsel Maria Søndergaard asserts that the educational and autonomous ideologies embraced by “la femme nouvelle, stood in glaring contrast to the contemporary conception of motherhood’s gentle and benign women, as we typically find it represented in the works of Renoir and Cassatt.”

However, through closer cultural examination, the Victorian principles of domestic motherhood that some scholars interpret in Cassatt’s works may in actuality reflect contemporary ideologies of a popular branch of Parisian Feminism. During the second half of the nineteenth century, French feminists propagated issues of equal education as well as openly opposing the employment of wet nurses, encouraging “women to become more involved in the care of their children.” They wished to see not an abandonment of family life but a change in the status of women in the home. For women to have a truly meaningful impact on family life, French feminists argued, they needed increased access to education and professional opportunities. Possibly motivated by the circulating philosophies of her day, Cassatt seemingly embraced other forms of New Woman ideology as well, as, in middle-upper class Western society, “maternity was the only acceptable, public expression of female sexuality.” Through her heavy involvement in contemporary feminist issues, it is viable to speculate, as I will more thoroughly in Chapter 2, that the intentions behind Cassatt’s most perceptibly conservative works are in fact infused with notions of cultural modernity.

56 Søndergaard, Women in Impressionism, 83.
57 Barter, Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, 64.
58 Ibid., 71.
Moreover, it is worth noting that although she did unequivocally believe in the value of feminine expression through art, Cassatt did not accede to the perceived inferiority of female responsibility. In a letter to Louisine Havemeyer, Cassatt exemplified her seeming distaste of biologically and socially circumscribed gender spheres: “It seems,” she stated, “that Mr. S[tilman] says,…that women and men have different spheres and each must stay in their own. I would like him to define these spheres,”\(^{59}\) as they are not biologically fixed nor are they naturally defined. Femininity, it seems, in Cassatt’s belief was not a biologic element of justifiable subordination, but, instead, a value of feminine individuality and exceptionalism. Choosing the radical aesthetic of Impressionism during a period steeped in the pursuits of Academic perfection, Cassatt’s unorthodox stylistic avenue epitomized the depth of her progressive ideological framework. “Given her background and circumstances,” Nancy Mowll Mathews has argued, “extreme conservatism would have made more sense.”\(^{60}\) Cassatt’s financial independence and exceptional early training with Gérôme would have enabled her to achieve prestige and fortune if she should have pursued a ‘traditional’ course of professional achievement in the Academic sphere. However, it was only after Cassatt complemented her progressive lifestyle with that of a radical aesthetic movement, that she finally, in her words, “began to live.”\(^{61}\)

Cecilia Beaux

Studying the fundamentals of naturalistic painting from an early age and developing a proclivity for academic realism more conducive to conservative American

\(^{59}\) Cassatt to Havemeyer, Jan. 11, in Mathews, *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 309.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., 108.
art patronage, Cecilia Beaux took a different artistic and professional avenue after receiving her training in Paris. Born in Philadelphia to Jean Adolphe Beaux (1810-1884) and Cecilia Kent Beaux, née Leavitt (1822-1855) in May of 1855, Beaux’s mother passed away from complications twelve days following her birth. Returning to his native home in France shortly after, Beaux’s father left Cecilia and her sister with their grandmother, Cecilia Kent Levitt, and their two aunts, Emily and Eliza. Jean Adolphe, although making periodic returns to the U.S. to visit his daughters, remained only a peripheral figure in the artist’s life leaving Beaux to grow up in a predominantly matriarchal environment. Beaux was thus raised, as art historian Sylvia Yount notes, “by a circle of women relatives who instilled in her a sense of independence and self-reliance…” from an early age.\textsuperscript{62}

By 1858 the family resided in the city center of Philadelphia where Cecilia and her sister Etta received home schooling from their aunts befitting their social class, a curriculum designed to furnish the girls with the “expertise to manage a household, the accomplishments to attract a suitable husband, and the skills to find the appropriate work should circumstances dictate they find employment.”\textsuperscript{63} Beaux’s relatives also discovered her artistic talent and, obtaining a set of lithographs by the English artist James Duffield Harding (1797-1863), Cecilia began her first lessons in copy work at thirteen years old. By 1868 the Leavitt’s encouraged Beaux’s interests and began taking her to exhibitions at the PAFA and other local art galleries including William C. Gibson’s private collection where Beaux discovered the works of major contemporary French painters including

\textsuperscript{62} Sylvia Yount, \textit{Cecilia Beaux American Figure Painter}, 19.

Jules Breton, Gustave Courbet, Thomas Couture, Alexander Cabanel, and Jean-Leon Gérôme.

Deciding that her artistic penchant and ability warranted further cultivation, Beaux began to partake in formal lessons at her cousin’s private Independence Square studio. There she expanded on her training in copy work, lithographs and antique sculpture. By 1872 Cecilia enrolled in the school of Francis Adolf Van Der Wielen where she continued to copy and enlarge lithographs and began to draw from antique casts and geometrical solids. Although she had still not begun to study painting, Beaux would later credit her experience at Van Der Wielen’s studio along with her early experience conducting anatomical studies from bone samples (teaching her to see the structure and natural framework beneath a sitter’s skin) with enabling her to achieve a level of realism rarely attained by those in her profession (see fig. 8). Beaux’s schooling at this point, contemporary art historian Alice Carter notes, was still considered to be within the boundaries of a respectable course of study for a female during the period.\(^64\) According to Beaux, she, unlike Cassatt, had no early inclination to become a professional artist; “I was by no means set against marriage and had no glimmering vision of another sort of future I might have.”\(^65\)

Nevertheless, by 1874, Beaux replaced her drawing instructor at Miss Weltha L. Sanford’s school and began giving private lessons before taking her first steps as a professional artist. Commissioned by Sinclair and Sons, Beaux produced a series of fossil drawings to illustrate a multi-volume report titled *The Vertebrates of the Cretaceous*

\(^64\) Carter, *Cecilia Beaux*, 44.
\(^65\) Ibid., 62.
Formations of the West (1875) by paleontologist E.D. Cope. Two years later, Beaux continued to cultivate her artistic penchants and officially enrolled as a student at the PAFA, taking classes in costume and portraiture and by 1877, had transferred into the antique classes offered by Christian Schussele (1824-1879).

Although gradually developing ambitions for professional artistic recognition, Beaux was confronted with the “rock bottom reality” of her family’s financial strains and, unlike Cassatt, acknowledged from the onset of her career her need to become financially independent. In an effort to contribute to the household expenses, Beaux sold portrait paintings of children on porcelain (see fig. 9). A popular art form for the period that was predominantly favored by women artists and amateurs, Beaux later recalled this lucrative but demeaning period of her career in her autobiography, “remembering it with gloom and recording it with shame.” This early commercial work lacked the professional significance and creative depth she had begun hoping to achieve, which Sylvia Yount surmises, likely derived from her desire to distance herself from the dilettante and stereotypically female art forms.

Submitting a crayon drawing for the first time at the PAFA fiftieth annual exhibition, Beaux began to emerge as an independent artist and rented her first studio in Philadelphia while she attended life drawing and painting classes critiqued by William Sartain (1843-1924). In 1883 Beaux began her first major easel painting, Les derniers jours d’enfance, in which she, like Cassatt, relied on her sister and nephew as figural

68 Yount, Cecilia Beaux, 22.
models (see fig. 2). By 1885 Beaux made her professional debut in New York at the American Art Association Exhibition where the double portrait received favorable reviews and was displayed again at the PAFA fifty-fifth exhibition where it won the Mary Smith Prize for best painting by “a woman resident of Philadelphia.”

Urged by an artist friend then residing in Paris, Beaux hesitantly acceded to submit the portrait for jury consideration at the French Salon. The American artist’s first large-scale painting was warmly received and warranted not only admittance into the prestigious gallery but was awarded a prominent placement on the center wall.

Encouraged by her painting’s international success, Beaux decided to pursue her education in Europe, traveling to Paris in 1888 for an extended stay abroad. Upon arrival, she enrolled at the Académie Julien on the rue de Faubourg where she drew from live models and received encouraging and promising praise from visiting critics such as William-Adolph Bouguereau and Tony-Robert Fleury. Cultivating a wide breadth of skills and exposure afforded by professional art training, Beaux would spend the following year studying and sketching works at the Louvre, immersing herself in the American colony in Paris, traveling throughout Europe and trying her hand at the popular plein-air painting favored by experimental artists. Receiving constant admonitions from home, however, Beaux (like Cassatt) was warned by her family to

---

69 Ibid., 177.
70 Comprising the largest contingent of foreign visitors during the nineteenth century, the American Colony formulated as a professional and social network for American painters, sculptors, writers, businessmen, and diplomats who were living abroad temporarily or indefinitely in the Parisian capital and its surrounding cites.
preserve her feminine morality. “Remember,” her aunt wrote to her, “you are first of all a Christian, then a woman, and last of all an artist.”

From 1885 to 1888 Beaux produced forty-one known portrait likenesses. According to Alice Carter, this astonishing output may indicate her perpetual fear of being classed with other female painters who were not serious artists. “Cecilia, who by 1885 had enjoyed some positive public notice and was filled with personal ambition, had no desire to be categorized with dilettantes.” Beaux had come to believe that she could become a “professionally successful artist only if she freed herself from association with women’s art and other women artists.”

Compiling a substantial portfolio with portraits of wealthy American and European patrons, family, and friends, Beaux returned to Philadelphia by the fall of 1889, having now confirmed her identity as a skilled portraitist. Like many of her male contemporaries, Beaux was able to blur the line between portraiture and the “higher status genre of figure painting, which was characterized by compositional complexity and narrative or thematic ideas,” enabling her to compete in this larger artistic arena from the outset of her career. Now excelling in an academic style conducive to the conservative American art market, Beaux quickly propelled her career into the national spotlight. Like Cassatt, she would participate in the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, contributing

---

72 Carter, Cecilia Beaux, 69.
74 Beaux, unlike Cassatt, was fundamentally disappointed in Paris. Although benefiting from the training she received at Julien and the recognition she attained from her acceptances into the Salon, Beaux found the world renowned and modern experience rather anticlimactic. “In Paris she was not an equal but a supplicant—one of the many young women on the outer fringe of the Paris art world” (Carter 81). The World of Art in Paris, the artists remarked, “was in no ways open to me, and in fact was too far out of sight to even be longed for.” (Carter 85)
75 Yount, Cecilia Beaux, 13.
just two works, *Les derniers jours d’enfance* and *Cecil Kent Drinker* (see fig. 10), to the Fine Arts exhibition and another, *Twilight Confidences* (see fig. 11), to the Women’s Building. By exhibiting paintings in both buildings, Beaux conscientiously “presented herself as the equal of her male peers while asserting ‘kindship’ with an international gathering of women artists—despite her ambivalence about being so defined.”

In November of 1887 Beaux’s first major exhibition opened at the St. Botolph Club in Boston. She would, subsequently, receive an unprecedented appointment for a woman at the PAFA in 1895 where she would teach courses on portraiture; a position she held for twenty years. Indicative of her momentous success in the U.S., in 1897 Beaux became the only woman elected to the jury of the Second Annual Exhibition at the Carnegie Institute and again to the American Jury for the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Having achieved exhibition success and critical recognition in both Paris and America’s most prestigious galleries, Beaux extended her influence to Britain, where she would debut her *Portrait of a Lady* (location unknown) at London’s Royal Academy at the turn of the century. Further extending her presence within the academic sphere, Beaux delivered the first of many lectures at Simons College, Boston, in 1907 and would begin to present her first formal lectures at the PAFA a year later.

After decades of mounting critical acclaim, Beaux continued to maintain a prominent position amongst various domestic and international art juries, including an appointment to the Carnegie Institute’s eighteenth annual exhibition where she concurrently exhibited one of her most modern works, *After the Meeting* (1917) (see fig. 12). This critically acclaimed portrait depicted Dorothea Gilder after a suffrage gathering.

---

76 Ibid., 52.
Solidifying both her international reputation and national significance, Beaux was elected by the United States National Art Committee to create portraits depicting a series of international WWI war heroes including Desire-Joseph Mercier of Belgium, British admiral Sir David Beatty, and French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau. Women artists, even tenured ones like Beaux were still more commonly expected to paint feminine subjects, and it was exceedingly rare for a female painter to be hired to portray prominent men. However, by this point in her career, Alice Carter surmises, posing for Cecilia Beaux had become “a mark of prestige.”

By 1923, The League of Women Voters had named Beaux one of “America’s Twelve Greatest Living Women;” the only painter included amongst social and reform activists such as Jane Addams, Ida Tarbell, and Helen Keller. Unlike Cassatt, in 1924 Beaux submitted a self-portrait upon the Uffizi Gallery’s request (see fig. 13) and was awarded a gold medal in 1933 by the women’s fraternal organization of Chi Omega honoring American women who have made significant cultural contributions on the international stage. After her death in 1942 after a year of declining health, art critic Royal Cortissoz (1869-1948) commented that Beaux’s artistic proclivity “went to the bedrock of human nature…She was destined to be great.”

---

77 Carter, *Cecilia Beaux*, 163.
78 Beaux was the first American woman invited by the Uffizi Gallery to submit a portrait that would be displayed within their prestigious Medici Collection. (Yount, 43).
79 Yount, *Cecilia Beaux*, 185.
Although inherently progressive in her professional and public achievements, conventional proprieties remained immensely important to Beaux throughout the course of her life; once expressing shock when she saw a grown woman ride a horse astride for the first time. However, Sylvia Yount maintains that Beaux was by all accounts “a supremely self-confident and hardworking New Woman…who found it necessary to choose between a career and marriage.” Beaux is described in historical discourse as a domineering individual who sought the center of attention. She was a well-read intellectual who was emotionally needy but cultivated an aloof independence. She was a modish dresser, entirely sensitive to changing fashions but one who nevertheless subverted other traditional feminine codes. Beaux, “in all her complexity and contradiction, was a thoroughly modern woman.”

Unlike her French colleague, Cassatt, Beaux was immensely proud of the autonomy that led to her professional and independent success, remarking in her autobiography that “I had no allies; I was no one’s pupil, or protégée…I shrank from the committal [to a master].” Ironically, it was her desire to remain independent from larger artistic communities and her refusal to identify with particular stylistic labels, such as Impressionism, that contributed to her disappearance from the art historical cannon. Nevertheless, the rare and autonomous success that she had achieved during her lifetime led one contemporary critic, Homer Saint-Gaudens, to remark that Beaux was “the one

---

81 Carter, *Cecilia Beaux*, 160.
82 Yount, *Cecilia Beaux*, 12.
83 Ibid., 19.
85 Scholars suggest that Beaux’s disappearance resulted, in part, from her inability to be categorized into a particular artistic style or period as well as the overall decline in popularity of academic portraiture during the early twentieth century.
woman in a thousand who has no man standing between herself and her productions.”

Moreover, in her article, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists,” Linda Nochlin discusses a number of the characteristics that were needed to be a successful woman artist in the nineteenth century, which include assets such as having familial connections or professional associations with male artists. In this case, Beaux “represents the exception,” having achieved unprecedented acclaim by exuding the “necessary seeds of rebellion and unconventionality that, to some degree, she did possess.”

Not quite as politically active as Cassatt would become later in her career, Beaux instead “expressed ideals of female kinship in visual terms, making statements through art” rather than donning political labels or aligning herself with particular activist organizations. Through her Modern portraits of business women, college administrators, and social activists including American suffragists, Beaux effectively honored and immortalized the role of professional women who had attained positions and influence outside of the domestic sphere; choosing to personify New Women through visual validation of their public significance. Some scholars would assert that Beaux’s indirect relation to the American women’s rights movement can be better understood if attributed to the context of her Philadelphia upbringings, as she would have been innately familiar with progressive associations and women’s clubs as well as the outgrowths of the Women’s Pavilion at the 1876 Centennial exhibition.

---

87 Yount, *Cecilia Beaux*, 49.
88 Ibid., 38.
89 Ibid., 37-38, 54.
Beaux expressed entirely different sentiments than Cassatt concerning the need to preserve and recognize the value of the ‘essentially feminine’ in artistic production, she had asserted in her address to Barnard College that “there does not seem to be any intricate or intrinsic peculiar quality in woman as such that promises her a special form of superiority in art production… if there were so it would indeed be her prerogative and duty to preserve as a woman into the arena of art.” As she saw it this intricate or intrinsic female quality did not exist. Although aiming to execute her work in a distinctively unfeminine style, Beaux’s paintings were nevertheless frequently critiqued through the gendered lens that she was hoping to avoid. Sarah Burns, in her article analyzing the facets of nineteenth-century gender politics, attests that the binary use of language used when critiquing Beaux’s portraits in relation to those of her contemporary, John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), was consciously employed by critics in an effort to maintain ‘natural’ gender distinctions. Employing descriptive language such as quiet, sensitive, and full of feeling as opposed to brilliant, vigorous, or penetrating, Beaux’s portraits were consistently discussed in feminized terms that accentuated their charm, tenderness and emotionalism; further tethering Beaux to her ‘subordinate sex.’ This notion is exemplified by one nineteenth-century writer who, when commenting on her work *The Dancing Lesson* (see fig. 14), noted that “only an artist who was in perfect sympathy with the ambitions of girlhood could have painted it.” Others stated that Beaux herself “as a painter of women’s portraits…has [a] masculine breadth of

---

90 Beaux, ‘Address to Barnard College’, AAA.
technique,” that is, nonetheless, “allied to a point of view uniquely and exclusively feminine.”\textsuperscript{93}

As modern art historians continue to expand our the knowledge of the lives of nineteenth century women artists, Nina Auerbach asserts that “in the arts, as in other fields, there is generally room for only one great woman per generation, and by the mid-twentieth century” Beaux had been supplanted by her Philadelphian colleague Mary Cassatt as the most distinguished female painter of the period. Even now, “women artists are favored for being seemingly womanly,” and Cecilia Beaux did not exude the level of femininity expected of her. “Her subjects, even the children, are incurably self-contained.”\textsuperscript{94}

The variations found within the lives and careers of these two Modern Women artists can begin to elucidate the divergences that are found within their styles, their ideologies regarding gender, and the cultural and economic motivations behind their artwork. Critically, within her book \textit{Women, Art, and Society}, Whitney Chadwick asserted that while the personification of the New Woman had begun to emerge in literary outlets during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the proponents of Modern Womanhood had fundamentally failed to resonate in the period’s visual culture.\textsuperscript{95} While asserting that these two artists embraced their own distinct versions of feminist ideology and worked within the confines of disparate circumstances, a detailed analysis of the symbolic and iconographic elements imbedded within both Cassatt’s and

\textsuperscript{93} Charles Chaffin, “Some American Portrait Painters” 42-22.
\textsuperscript{94} Nina Auerbach, “The Queen Stands Alone,” in \textit{Cecilia Beaux: American Figure Painter}, 79.
\textsuperscript{95} Chadwick asserts that by 1893, the new female heroine had emerged in popular literature and had permeated in literary imagination throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century, though her “presence is barely recorded in painting” (251).
Beaux’s most prominent works, I will argue to the contrary, reflect the complex and multifaceted identities that defined New Women at the turn of the century.

As modern scholars continue to impugn the progressive intentions behind Cassatt and Beaux’s work in relation to each other’s, the underlying effort to name one the superior echoes the century-old debate of who would take the title of “greatest woman artist;” a designation which has, more recently, becomes contingent on their identity as a feminist. However, as I hope to convey in the following chapters, the domestic ideals of Modern Motherhood that resonated within Cassatt’s feminine paintings, and the underlying promotion of female professionalism found within Beaux’s idealized portraits of women educators and activists, effectively encompassed the multitude of emerging principles concerned with the social, political, and economic liberation of women in Western society. Whether choosing to embrace gender difference and the ‘essentially feminine’ as assets of women’s cultural significance or, conversely, working to erase the relegating connotations completely from their identity, Cassatt and Beaux utilized their diverse skills, philosophies, and circumstances to promote the progressive ideals that were embraced by New Women throughout the modern era.
CHAPTER 2: ARTWORK ANALYSIS

When making an analytical inquiry into the various feminist ideologies embedded within the work of Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux, it is important to consider that the New Woman’s Movement contained a variety of progressive ideals ranging from female professionalism and increased public presence to sexual and intellectual liberation. These emerging ideals were variably embraced by both middle- and upper-class women within the U.S. and Europe throughout the late nineteenth century and had provided a cultural platform for the social and political reform organizations of which both Cassatt and Beaux became active participants. In order to gain insight into the intrinsic content of their work through iconographic analysis, it is also necessary to examine their diverse philosophies as products of their separate individual, cultural, and artistic influences.

According to art historian Erwin Panofsky, whose methodology was brought together under a series of essays titled Meaning in the Visual Arts (1939), a viewer can invariably discover the underlying principles of a painting through thorough interpretation of its forms, motifs, and images. If used effectively, the decoding of a painting’s iconography can lead the interpreter to the intrinsic meaning or content of the work itself. Innately embedded within the painting resonate clues (‘symbolic values’) that can elucidate the private feelings and veritable intentions of the artist who created it. Implementing the principle directives of this traditional methodology, which has fueled the very foundation of art historical discourse for decades, an iconographic analysis of

[96 Art historian Erwin Panofsky has demonstrated his methodology in an essay titled “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the study of Renaissance Art” (1939). In this essay he argues that the methodical interpretation of a painting’s pure forms, motifs, images, stories, and allegories will lead the interpreter to the work’s ‘“underlying principles.”’ This process, in return, can elucidate the true meaning of the work of art while subsequently revealing the inner, most private truths of the artist.]
Cassatt and Beaux’s most prominent works reveal a number of diverse but, more importantly, equally progressive implications.

**Depictions of Motherhood**

Child portraits and images of domestic motherhood were topics that were predominantly favored by, and reserved for, female artists working as both professionals and dilettantes until the turn of the modern era. One critic, demonstrating the existing nineteenth-century cultural milieu, praised Cecilia Beaux’s work, *Les derniers jours d’enfants*, by expressing that “Miss Beaux understands painting children, and why should not women make a specialty of painting children? They certainly ought to understand the little ways and the working of their little brains better than men.”

The production of ‘women’s art’ and domestic scenes were further relegated by their inherent ‘femininity;’ a quality that was deemed contradictory and often subordinate to art associated with ‘masculine’ principles.

While sharing a common goal aimed at attenuating the pejorative connotations of women artists, Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux took very different approaches when depicting traditionally feminine scenes, a notion that can be exemplified in their diverse representations of motherhood. While many have argued that Cassatt’s oeuvre appear “more womanly” than those of her academic rivals’, the progressive ideology of Cassatt herself, I will argue, implicates the reformist nature of her paintings that are seen as steeped in idealized Victorian domesticity. Emboldening her work after garnering a

---

98 As discussed by Griselda Pollock in *Vision and Difference*, “Femininity is not the natural conditions of female persons. It is a historically variable ideological construction of meaning for a sign W*O*M*A*N which is produced by and for another social group which derives its identity and imagined superiority my managing the spectre of this fantastic Other.” (Pollock, 71)
reputation for her early commercial depictions of ‘china children,’ Beaux, unlike Cassatt, aimed to distance herself from the characterization of ‘feminine art’. Choosing, in other words, not to re-define ‘femininity’ with new and emboldened connotations, Beaux’s overall goal in her depiction of motherhood was to eliminate the regulatory term entirely from any association with her work.

*Mary Cassatt: Mother and Child (1889)*

In what is often recognized as Mary Cassatt’s most signature theme, portraits of mothers with their children, or more distinctly, images of motherhood, became a central topic for the Impressionist throughout the second-half of her career. Due to circumstances elaborated upon by many feminist art historians, for Cassatt, like all other female artists working during the period, the subjects and environments depicted within her work were directly related to the social boundaries imposed upon both her sex and her class. Images of modern domestic interiors and those who inhabited them were among the few subjects available to Cassatt, who was otherwise limited in her access to nineteenth-century Parisian public life. Domestic themes were furthermore both increasingly familiar and accessible to the artist who was tasked with taking care of her ailing parents between the years of 1883 and 1895.

---

99 Although Cassatt painted a few pictures of children during her first years in Paris, the subjects did not begin to emerge consistently in her art until the summer of 1880 when her brother Aleck and his family came to visit her at her studio and at her summer villa.

100 By January of 1884, Katherine Cassatt’s deteriorating health had begun to require much of her daughter’s attention. As the only remaining daughter in the family following Lydia’s death in 1882, Mary, who was tasked with finding a new apartment, traveling, and caring for her elderly parents, had found little time to paint; stating in a letter to her brother, Alexander Cassatt, “I have not touched a brush since we went home, have not been out of Mother’s room except for a walk…” (April 27, 1884). This change in the artist’s environment would result, according to Judith Barter, in the overall tone of her work becoming more meditative and internalized (Barter, 56). Cassatt’s father, Robert Cassatt, would eventually pass away on December 9, 1891 followed by her mother in October of 1895.
For decades beginning in the 1960s, feminist scholars have struggled to place Cassatt’s feminine portrayals of ideal motherhood into the context of her progressive and politically active career. Suggested by Fredrick Sweet in his 1962 biographical account, Cassatt’s frequent depictions of mothers could have simply resulted from the fact that “the painting of men was not her forte,” and that it is an amusing paradox that “a woman so forceful and so dynamic could produce paintings so sensitive, so feminine, and so deeply felt.”

Maintaining a ‘womanly’ aesthetic while always carefully refraining from overt sentimentality, he explains further, Cassatt was able to reveal the beauty of the relationship between Mother and child without resorting to superficial prettiness, which, after all, “has nothing to do with the matter.” While mapping the reconstructed spaces of femininity within her work *Vision and Difference*, Griselda Pollock declares that regardless of her intent (progressive, conservative, or otherwise), Cassatt’s distinct depictions of domestic interiors have provided scholars with unprecedented insight into the elements and rituals that had constructed and signified the nineteenth-century definition of the ‘feminine.’

Suggesting an anti-feminist bent to her domestic scenes, some modern scholars contend that Cassatt’s images of motherhood convey overt themes of feminine subservience. As argued by Beaux scholar Nina Auerbach, in contrast to the figural independence displayed within Cecilia Beaux’s acclaimed double portrait, *Les derniers jours d’enfance*, Mary Cassatt’s mother and child pairs visually ‘ooze’ together in an encompassing embrace that implies a distinct sense of inseparability between the female

---

101 Sweet, 214.
102 Ibid., 121.
and the infant. Cassatt’s paintings’ overt testament to feminine sentiment, she argues further, creates a compositional aesthetic where “flesh matters more than faces;”\textsuperscript{103} the thematic emphasis of maternity outstripping any reference to the woman’s identity as an individual. A number of critics have linked Cassatt’s resounding interest in painting children as not only a professional penchant but a sort of maternal compensation because she may have, conscientiously or not, regretted not having any children of her own.\textsuperscript{104} Although assertions such as these aim to impugn the progressive nature of Cassatt’s maternal representations, the iconographic nuances found resonating within her images of Modern Motherhood, I will argue to the contrary, align with the philosophical tenants of a nineteenth-century Parisian revolution.

Emerging during the late 1820s in Paris, Saint-Simonian feminists had begun to argue for the recognition of distinctively different but equally important functions based on the natural qualities of one’s sex.\textsuperscript{105} Unlike the definition of womanhood developed by Romantic patriarchalists and adopted by Victorian idealist, who stressed women’s innate “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity,” Saint-Simonian feminists sought to justify women’s full participation in all public functions.\textsuperscript{106} By mid-century, these proponents of a bourgeoning feminist movement had evolved to encompass another facet of what was understood to be women’s most unique and natural identity: motherhood. Essentially, “the image of the woman as mother became the linchpin of the feminist

\textsuperscript{103} Auerbach, \textit{Cecilia Beaux: American Figure Painter}, 81.
\textsuperscript{104} Bullard, 15.
\textsuperscript{105} The followers of Claude Henri, comte de Saint-Simonian, under the leadership of Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin, were the first among the French Socialists groups to propagandize the emancipation of women and increasing focused on women’s issues by 1831. (Claire Goldberg Moses, \textit{French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century} (State University of New York Press: Albany, 1984) 42.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 46.
rationale for sexual equality.” By 1848, feminists had transformed the concept of maternity as something that no longer justified their confinement to the private sphere; it would, instead, justify their participation in the public sphere.\(^{107}\) The new responsibilities of motherhood required that women be attentive mothers, well-educated and allowed to represent the state in civil acts, and to vote.\(^ {108}\) Although these developing notions of gender equality would not manifest into an organized reform movement until the last decades of the century, the French Feminists, which compromised the most advanced and the most experienced of all Western feminist movements, had begun to circulate and entrench their ideals within French society during the period in which Cassatt was living and working in Paris.\(^ {109}\)

Asserting that “a woman’s vocation in life is to bear children,”\(^ {110}\) Cassatt implemented the tenants of Saint-Simonian feminism into her depictions of women who were simply, as she believed, carrying out life’s responsibilities.\(^ {111}\) As noted by Debra Mancoff, “for an era that romanticized motherhood and children, Cassatt’s paintings display remarkable honesty;”\(^ {112}\) void of any unnecessary prettiness or cloying.

\(^{107}\) Moses, 130.

\(^{108}\) Ibid., 133.

\(^{109}\) The development of feminism evolved slowly in France during the nineteenth century as the legacy of the French Revolution resulted in a fear of revolutionary violence, prompting government sanctions and periodic repression of those who espoused new ideas. This political repression significantly hindered the growth of the feminist movement until the last decades of the century. (Moses, 38.) While Saint-Simonians believed that a women’s character was intrinsically different from that of men this belief did not conflict with their goal that women have the “means to live independently” and argue that women’s inherent pacifist and maternal nature necessitated their participation in the public sphere, including the rights and duties of citizenship and access to jobs and professions on equal terms with men. (Moses, 231) In essence, the Cult of Motherhood had actually derived feminist purposes.


\(^{111}\) No evidence exists however that Cassatt directly identified with or recognized the efforts of Saint-Simonian Feminists.

\(^{112}\) Mancoff, 80.
sentimentality. Conferring onto the feminine a greater degree of realism, Cassatt subtly represented the structure of the world of women, the artifice and the process through which the child was made the feminine woman, and allowing women to be perceived beneath the superficial accessories of feminine roles and pre-prescribed pursuits.  

One concept recognized by early twentieth century critics such as André Mellério who wrote in 1910 was that “what Miss Cassatt has sought in women is less their delicate grace, that fragile flower of fleeting sensuality, than the austere, yet ennobling aspect of motherhood…” Contrasted with the poetic maternal depictions rendered by popular male artists, such as Gari Melchers (see fig 15.), Cassatt’s approach to the portrayal of maternity was informed by contemporary perceptions of childhood and the current debates in France over the social and political role of women. Reflecting nineteenth-century French feminist ideals that emphasized the differences between sexes while affirming the validity of their equality, a movement that “championed maternity as the locus of female power,” Cassatt had depicted the value of motherhood as a defining characteristic of the newly educated, publicly active, and politically involved Modern Woman.

Contrary to recent assertions, Cassatt certainly believed that women were innately different from the children that they raised, and should, due to progress of their sex, continue to separate themselves from their shared identity with children. Noting in a letter

---

115 Barter, 74.
to Louisine Havemeyer on January 11, 1913, Cassatt expounded that enfranchisement will be given “freely when women want it, the trouble is that so many don’t want it for themselves and never think of others… women have been spoiled, treated and indulged like children, they must wake up to their duties” as accountable citizens.\textsuperscript{117} Precluding her career as an ardent suffrage advocate, Cassatt’s depictions of Modern Motherhood, although conveyed through demure and refined settings, inevitably retain an element of their creator who, throughout her life, projected an emboldened personality. Although regarded as a painter of children with tender sincerity, art critic Lula Merrick noted in 1909 that if “an artist’s characteristics may be known by his work” one might gain the impression that Miss Cassatt was a tender, gentle, feminine little woman. The contrary, however, is true. “In appearance she is tall and rather large of frame, her manner is decided, she knows what she is about at all times.”\textsuperscript{118}

Therefore, the ‘essentially feminine’ aesthetic continually associated with Cassatt’s work, was neither intended as a direct testament to Victorian propriety nor the notion of domestic maternity. Exemplified through visual cues, Cassatt’s unique treatment of female hands, for example, particularly seen in her collection of maternal scenes, can be interpreted as pictorial elements that figurally and figuratively separate women from their children.\textsuperscript{119} As seen in the example of Mother and Child (fig. 1), the mature, sturdy hands of the mother coupled with her upright posture juxtaposes the

\textsuperscript{117} Mathews, \textit{Selected Letters}, 309.  
\textsuperscript{118} Lula Merrick, “The Art Of Mary Cassatt,” The Delineator (August 1909). (Mathews, 293)  
\textsuperscript{119} Félix Fénéon who noted that: “and always, these large, beautiful, masculine hands that Cassatt likes to give her women, have decorative functions, especially when set against the bodies of naked children they disturb the lines, then blend them to create unexpected arabesques.” Félix Fénéon, “Cassatt, Pissarro,” \textit{Chat Noir} (April. 11), 1728.
flimsy, less confident, clinging hands of the flaccid infant. Beginning the late 1890s, Cassatt would begin to move her female sitters outside and experiment with *plein-air* paintings. This artistic transition, Judith Barter argues, exemplifies Cassatt’s desire to “literally open the windows and move [women] out-of-doors;” away from their domesticated existence. Through her garden pictures (fig. 16), Cassatt bonded her female subjects physically and symbolically with nature. And, at the foundation of this bridge that led “to the expansion of woman’s universe and potential, was the theme of motherhood.”

Cassatt, Nancy Mowll Mathews asserts, surely found the irony in depicting scenes of motherhood as she had no husband and no children of her own. Consciously breaking the rules of nineteenth-century naturalism, however, Cassatt chose to artistically devote herself to a theme outside of her own experience and, as consequence, faced criticism from writers who often critiqued the state of her personal life. A “less courageous artist and woman,” Mathews asserts, “might have backed off from a course that put her own womanhood on trial.” While it is possible that Cassatt never had a direct purpose for creating so many artistic depictions of mothers with their children, “she knew that in her hands, motherhood was understood and ennobled as it had seldom been before.”

---

120 Barter, 66.
121 Ibid., 68.
122 While believing in the essential role of parenting by both the mother and father, within her *Portrait of Alexander J. Cassatt and His Son Robert Kelso Cassatt* (1884-85) (fig. 17) Cassatt depicted a scene of physical closeness between father and son. The stiffness of pose found in this depiction of fatherhood, however, precludes the sense of tender protection that saturates Cassatt’s images of motherhood (Barter, 76). According a distinct aesthetic of formality to the male models, Cassatt, Judith Barter argues, reserved the more naturalist approach for the reflecting the relationship for mother and children.
123 Mathews, *Mary Cassatt: A Life*, 182-185. Critics and writers who would review her art often pointed out Cassatt’s child-less state and would speculate on her motivations for indulging in themes of maternity.
124 Ibid., 186.
Alluding to the possible progressive ideals behind her domestic works, in 1911 Mary Cassatt wrote in a letter to Theodate Pope stating that “almost all my pictures with women and children have the mother holding them, would you could hear them talk, their philosophy would astonish you.”

*Cecilia Beaux: Les derniers jours d’enfants (1883-1885)*

While Cassatt had embraced the ‘essentially feminine’ to manifest the emerging ideals of Modern Motherhood in nineteenth-century France, her American contemporary took an overtly different approach when depicting images traditionally reserved for the female artist. Believing that feminine themes such as images of motherhood should be void of any qualities that would further relegate the work of a woman artist, Cecilia Beaux aimed to produce her most daring painting in a way that she believed would guarantee its best chance for professional success: ‘sexless.’

While completing her art training in Philadelphia at the age of 28, Beaux began one of the most monumental and artistically complex undertakings of her career, a double-portrait featuring her older sibling Etta and her firstborn nephew, Henry, in a fitting tribute to her sister’s “traditional and maternal” life.126 Contrasting Cassatt’s embrace of gender difference, from the onset of her career, Cecilia Beaux recognized that in order to gain any kind of professional success in the conservative American art market, it would require her to disassociate her work from the characterization of women’s art and the aesthetic principles visually connected with ‘the feminine.’ Confirming the validity of Beaux’s professional concern, in her article “The ‘Earnest, Untiring Worker’

---

126 Tappert, *Cecilia Beaux and the Art of Portraiture*, 12.
and the Painter of the Brush: Gender Politics in the Criticism of Cecilia Beaux and John Singer Sargent,” author Sarah Burns explores the variances in critical reception and descriptive language used to critique the work of Cecilia Beaux and leading contemporary American portraitist John Singer Sargent. Her findings attest that critics “before and after the turn of the century…almost invariably contrasted the two painters’ work as the essentially feminine versus the essentially masculine nature and, with almost no exception, declared Sargent the superior.”

Incorporating her distinct philosophy into the production of her work, after completing *Les derniers jours d’enfants* (translated as ‘The Last Days of Infancy,’) Beaux exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy exhibition, the American Art Association Prize Fund Exhibition in New York, and the 1887 spring Salon in Paris. One art critic, Eugene Neuhaus, noted upon seeing the painting that when looking at Beaux’s portrait of a mother and child “the special qualities of delicacy and fragile charm one usually looks for in the work of women’s artist is not [there]. She is decidedly masculine, vigorous, and as bold in her brushwork as she is daring in her design and color.” While embodying Aesthetic Movement principles in its bold design and limited color pallet, the “sensitive handling” used to create the portrait, contemporary art historian Jeanette Toohey

---

127 Late nineteenth-century movements toward the remasculinization of art and culture, Burns argues, were complemented by maneuvers to control and limit femininity to ‘traditional’ domestic and subordinate roles. The binary use of descriptive language, such ‘emotional’ vs. ‘insightful,’ ‘delicate’ vs. ‘bold’ were an unstated attempt to maintain ‘natural’ gender distinctions and the relegation of women’s professional artwork. (Sarah, Burns, “The ‘Earnest, Untiring Worker’ and the Magician of the Brush: Gender Politics in the Criticisms of Cecilia Beaux and John Singer Sargent” Oxford Art Journal 15, 1 (1992): 36-38.)

128 *Les derniersjours d’enfants* is typical of Beaux’s non-commissioned portraits in which it displays an informal quality in figural pose and experiment in decorative influences. (Tappert, *Cecilia Beaux: A Career as a Portraitist*, 402.)

contends, successfully illustrated “the depth and tenderness of the maternal bond…without over sentimentality.”

Believing that ‘feminine expression’ was neither an intrinsic part of a woman’s artistic process nor an inherent element of domestic scenes, Beaux held that the stereotypical image of maternity could be produced without drawing attention to the sex of the creator. Implementing the principles of this ideology that were grounded in the notions of gender equality and equal capability, Beaux produced her maternal portrait devoid of the feminine qualities that one would have expected from a nineteenth-century woman artist. Creating a distinct separation between the mother and the child both symbolically and aesthetically, the white garment of three-year old Harry Drinker stands in stark, visual contrast with the black satin dress of his mother while the two figures are positioned leaning in slightly different directions. The limp posture of the child is counterbalanced by the stiff, vertical pose of his mother. Within her autobiography, Beaux pointed out that in the center of the composition the boy’s fingers can even be seen “showing a little dark upon the back of the mother’s white hand;” re-enforcing the figural division that lies at the foundation of the work.

Towards the end of her career Beaux expressed that the ‘highest point of interest’ in this particular portrait lies in the group of four hands resting in the center which creates a symbolic testament to the transition from childhood to adulthood. While Mary Cassatt asserted that women’s ‘vocation’ in life was to bear children, linking the roles of women and their children indefinitely, Beaux created a scene that alludes to both the

---

130 Tooehey, 357.
131 Beaux, Background With Figures, 93.
132 Ibid., 93.
ephemeral nature of childhood as well as the fleeting responsibility of childcare in a woman’s life. In contrast to the ‘flaccid’ depiction of maternity seen in Cassatt’s work, Nina Aurbach asserts, motherhood in Beaux’s portrait is “commanding but solitary; it neither gives nor receives intimacy and tenderness…it commemorates a self-sufficiency that may trouble stereotypes…” This bold image of motherhood, according to modern scholars, can be interpreted in a number of different ways; between a portrait immortalizing the last days of Harry Drinker’s childhood, a symbolic testament to the last days of the artist’s professional infancy (as the success of this work initiated Beaux’s rise to international fame), or possibly, a tacit elusion to the last days of Etta’s ‘infancy’ as she can begin her transitions from the confines of domestic motherhood and embrace her new role as an active, public citizen.

In what is believed to have significantly contributed to her disappearance from modern scholarship, Beaux’s ‘sternly unfeminine style’ was categorically surpassed by Cassatt’s distinctly ‘womanly’ aesthetic in the art-historical canon. Beauty, some art historians argue, was less important to Beaux than to Cassatt, or even John Singer Sargent and the Impressionists. By successfully ridding the implications of femininity from her work, William Merritt Chase expressed in a public speech that “Cecilia Beaux has done away entirely with sex in art,” and was consequently able to become “not only the greatest living woman painter, but the best painter who ever lived.”

---

133 Aurbach, 81.
134 Ibid., 79.
135 Bones and facial measurements that were a significant aspect of Beaux’s artistic process were components of phrenology, a Victorian pseudoscience popular with “artists and intellectuals like Beaux, whose aim was to reveal character, not prettiness.” (Aurbach, 83)
Depictions of Modern Women

Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman Mural (1893)

By the time of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in the U.S., Whitney Chadwick argues, American women had evolved a new sense of identity and purpose.\(^{137}\) While goals of equality and the strategies to secure it still divided many feminists, representatives from all groups came together to organize a Woman’s Building that aimed to celebrate female cultural achievements. Under the direction of Mrs. Bertha Palmer,\(^ {138}\) achievements in the Fine Arts were to be displayed in the ‘Hall of Honor’ where two large murals would depict the allegories of “Primitive Woman” (still in the state of servitude), painted by Mary Fairchild MacMonnies, and the other, “Modern Woman” (free to pursue knowledge, art, and fame) commissioned to Mary Cassatt.\(^ {139}\) Believing that Cassatt’s radical Impressionism and progressive lifestyle in Paris would be best suited to depict the emerging state of Modern Womanhood, Cassatt was thrilled to have received the committee’s solicitation, not only for the professional exposure in her home country but because it was both an artistic challenge and, as a woman and “something of a feminist,” she was proud to have been asked to participate.\(^ {140}\)

Acceding to undertake the most important mural a woman would paint in that century, Cassatt cautiously reverted to the traditional art forms of mural work that she had carefully and artistically distanced herself from throughout her career. She was also

\(^{137}\) Chadwick, 247.

\(^{138}\) Palmer did not advocate equal rights for women but her belief in women’s potential was characteristic of main-stream American middle-class feminism at the time (Chadwick, 248).

\(^{139}\) MacMonnies, who studied under the classicizing muralist Puvis de Chavannes, was equipped to evoke an image of the ‘ancient world’ while Cassatt’s radical new style stressed the close study of modern life. (Mathews, Selected Letters, 208).

\(^{140}\) Sweet, 136.
admittedly intimidated by the overall scale of the piece which would ultimately reach 14 x 58 feet with a deadline for completion under a year away. However, believing that women should be depicted as “someone and not something,” as expressed in a letter to Louise Havemeyer, Cassatt noted that “the bare idea of [the mural] put [Edgar] Degas in a rage, and he did not spare any criticism he could think of, [but] I got my spirits up and said I would not give up the idea for anything.” Just as Modern Woman would triumph over Primitive Woman, Nancy Mowll Mathews asserts, Cassatt believed that modern art would triumph over the traditional style she knew MacMonnies would utilize. Interpretation of the two subjects were left up to the artists themselves, Cassatt sought a complex manifestation of the Modern Woman, visually and symbolically casting off the chains of servitude since primitive times and has now emerged as an important force in modern civilization. She did not fail, however, to imbue her allegorical women with what modern scholars recognize as particularly feminine virtues: tenderness, sympathy, and intuition.

Dividing the canvas into three zones each unified only through a similar grassy background and communal horizon line, the central image features young women out of doors, plucking the fruits from the trees of knowledge and science (see fig. 18). Utilizing early Italian and Renaissance examples and the influence of Florentine and Tuscan murals, particularly the work of Sandro Botticelli, Cassatt chose to avoid specifics “to

141 Cassatt on Mrs. Palmer, see Sweet, 136.
143 Mathews, Mary Cassatt: A Life, 206. Mathews suggests that Cassatt probably began planning the mural in May of 1892 while she was still in Paris before moving back to Bachivillers where she intended to execute the work and then ship it off to Chicago in February. (205-206.)
144 Barter, 96.
preserve a sense of the lyrical and universal.” The passage of fruit from woman to child aimed to denote the transmission of inherited knowledge from one generation to another. Cassatt intentionally presented the mother/child relationship, Judith Barter suggests, as a crucial social model “that gives women, as the primary providers of childcare and education, an important moral role, different than that of men.”

Emphasizing the Modern Woman’s role as creator, nurturer, teacher, and muse, Cassatt’s mural effectively reflected generally apolitical yet progressive views of womanhood prevalent to her class and time. The two end panels connected tangentially to the central theme. On the left, Cassatt portrayed young girls pursuing a nude, allegorical figure of fame. The addition of geese snapping at their heels, she explained, “[represents] both the undignified posture such as pursuit forces the girls into and the annoying squawks of ever-present critics trying to impede women in their advances.” On the right, three women are shown in dignified poses, representing Music, Dance, and an observant artist. (see fig. 19)

Reflecting the new identities being embraced by New Women, Cassatt inclusively juxtaposed and conjoined images of education, women out-of-doors, female education, contemporary fashion, childcare, and maternity. As one art historian points out, the artist’s mural reflected her commitment to see in all of women’s everyday activities humanity’s highest aspirations. Cassatt’s project, in effect, reflected contemporary feminist emphasis on a woman’s right to determine her own pursuits in life while

---

145 Ibid., 91.
146 Ibid., 94.
147 Ibid., 96
148 Mathews, Mary Cassatt: A Life, 209.
independently and collectively questioning the history, theology, and culture of patriarchy.\textsuperscript{149} Connecting Cassatt’s iconography with popular nineteenth-century feminist challenges set forth within \textit{The Woman’s Bible} (1895) complied by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Griselda Pollock argues that Cassatt also questioned myths about Woman and contemporary biblical understandings of the Garden of Eden by intentionally inverting its themes of female subjugation through depicting \textit{Modern Woman}’s “guilt-free claims to education and intellectuality.”\textsuperscript{150}

Unlike Beaux, Cassatt ardently believed that the ‘essentially feminine’ was both an intrinsic part of female experience and artistic expression. In a letter to Bertha Palmer in October of 1892 Cassatt affirmed of her work that: “I have tried to express the modern woman in the fashions of our day…the sweetness of childhood, the charm of womanhood, if I have not conveyed some sense of that charm, in one word if I have not been absolutely feminine, then I have failed.” While the notions of ‘feminine expression’ and ‘women’s art’ retained depreciatory connotations at the time of the Columbia Exposition, with her monumental and highly publicized mural, Cassatt consciously aimed to re-define traditional notions of femininity and embed the term with the ideological values of a modern feminist movement.

Although a successful testament to the ideology of the artist, Cassatt’s mural had ultimately failed in the minds of critics. Its radical style did not match MacMonnies more academically influenced design, the colors were bright and out of place, and it was deemed pictorial rather than decorative. Critics described it as having “imprudent greens

\textsuperscript{149} Pollock, \textit{Mary Cassatt: Painter of Modern Women}, 43.  
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 42.
and brutal blues… [that] seem to indicate an aggressive personality with which compromise and cooperation would be impossible. Indeed, Miss Cassatt has the reputation for being strong and daring; she works with men in Paris on their own ground.”

Held not to the standards of artistic merit, modern art historian Kristin Swinth argues, but rather to the standards of Victorian womanhood, Cassatt’s work had no choice but to fail miserably. Although she represented variations of the feminine ideal in her portrayal of fashionably dressed women, sympathetic mothers, and laborers, Cassatt nevertheless emboldened her *Modern Woman* with imprudence, brutality, aggressiveness, and uncooperativeness.152

Some modern scholars have asserted that through her choice to imbed her work with womanly charm and femininity Cassatt systematically aligned her work with less progressive points of view.153 However, addressing a contentious issue resonating from divergent feminist ideologies during the period, Cassatt effectively represented the brand of New Women who wanted more chances to be recognized for what they could bring to the world as women.154 The three panels of her mural, art historian Sally Webster avers, depict the three ages of woman: the child, the young woman, and the mature adult shown not in their domestic roles as girls, mothers, and wives but as aspiring scientists, intellectuals, and artists. These aspirations traditionally reserved for men, “Cassatt claimed for herself, and in Chicago for all womankind.”

151 Swinth, 126.
152 Ibid., 126.
153 Barter, 95.
155 Webster, 112.
156 For more on Cassatt’s Modern Woman mural see *Sally Webster, Eve’s Daughter/Modern Woman: A Mural by Mary Cassatt* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).
Cecilia Beaux: Sita and Sarita (1893-1894)

After submitting her works to both the American Fine Arts Department and the Woman’s Building at the 1893 Columbia Exposition to prevent demarcating herself to a particular classification, Cecilia Beaux soon began work on a peculiar portrait with a meaning that still remains a topic of discussion among twenty-first century scholars. Markedly divergent in their depictions of the nineteenth-century New Woman, the visual productions of Cassatt and Beaux collectively represented the diverse ideals of the social reform movement that began to bourgeon in both the U.S. and France. One of the most controversial issues emerging during the period purported notions of female sexual independence. While never overtly referenced in Cassatt’s oeuvre of paintings the foundation of this new wave of social ideology, I will argue, is visually manifested in the iconographic elements of Cecilia Beaux’s enigmatic 1893 portrait.

First exhibited in the 1894 annual Pennsylvania Academy exhibition under the name The Black Cat, Beaux’s mysterious painting soon acquired a more evocative title; Sita and Sarita (meaning “Sarah” and “little one”). Painted in a barn studio in Essex Fells, New Jersey, the portrait features the artist’s cousin, Sarah Allibone Levitte, seated and gowned in a white dress. (see fig 20.) Her “claw-like” left-hand reaches up to gently caress a black cat that is perched attentively on her shoulder while her dark hair blends into the black fur of the “little Mephistopheles;” making their figural division nearly indistinguishable to the observer. While the New Woman’s movement had begun to establish itself in the U.S. during the onset of Beaux’s career, female artists working

---

157 Beaux exhibited Les derniers jours d’enfance and Cecil Kent Drinker in the Fine Arts Department and Twilight Confidences in the Woman’s Building.
158 Yount, 33.
within the public sphere remained conscientiously bound by the conduct of Victorian 
womanhood and would have been reproved for any indirect testaments to the radical new 
social movement. Thus, during its initial reception over a century ago reviewers chose 
to studiously ignore any hint of sensuality emanating from the canvas as it would have 
been unfitting to link sensual themes, opaque or not, to the hand of a woman artist. 
However, with recent biographical insights into the artist’s life, evidence would suggest 
that at the time of the portrait’s production Beaux was struggling with issues surrounding 
femininity, intelligence, and sexuality in an era of female liberation in American society. 

Following Panofsky’s systematic approach to discovering the ‘underlying 
meaning’ of Beaux’s portrait, analytical inquiry would point, first and foremost to the 
 inclusion of the black kitten placed precariously upon the sitter’s left shoulder. Whether 
portrayed independently or accompanying a human figure, the visual representation of 
felines within the visual arts can be traced back to the early Egyptian period of the eighth 
century. Transforming in cultural imagery and semiotic significance, however, the 
iconographic implications of the archetypal feline has evolved throughout the course of 
the Greek, Middle Ages, Baroque, and Enlightenment eras. By the turn of the eighteenth 
century, ‘the cat’ had acquired a distinct set of symbolic attributes that would pervade 
well into the modern era; namely; sensuality, malice and seduction. Art historian 
Stefano Zuffi indicates, moreover, that with the burgeoning popularization of Rococo 
art, which had ushered in pervasive themes of refined eroticism, public interest in the 
sensuousness of feline movement and feminine risqué culminated in the association of 

---

159 Chadwick, 217.
‘the kitten’ with contemporary ideas of *femme fatale*;\(^{161}\) further imbuing the painting with provocative implications.

Having prompted exploration into the possible influences of Beaux’s work within her monograph, Sylvia Yount asserts that “the implicit sexuality of the image” in the presence of the feline and the suggestive placement of Sarita’s right hand inevitably recalls Edward Manet’s work, *Olympia* (see fig. 21).\(^{162}\) She notes, additionally, that the tonal variants of white-on-white expanses of the figures and furniture, coupled with the darker recesses of the backgrounds further elucidate a categorical relationship between the two works of art.\(^{163}\) First exhibited at the 1865 Paris Salon, Manet’s work elicited vehement criticism for its overt provocation of the immoral in nineteenth-century Parisian society (i.e. rampant prostitution) by presenting the flagrant image of an adversarial nude courtesan. *Olympia* is now understood by modern scholars, however, to have been Manet’s representation of a New Woman at her most threatening; a proprietor of her own business, self-assured, self-sufficient, and free from male control.\(^{164}\) Through his inclusion of a black cat (a distinguishable symbol of prostitution during the era), as opposed to a small dog (a symbol of fidelity) featured within Titian’s influence,\(^{165}\) Manet

---

\(^{161}\) The *femme fatale* became a personified character found within popular literature and visual culture during the early twentieth century as an ideological manifestation of conservative rebuttals to the progressive Modern Woman’s movement. The emerging presence of *femme fatale* exemplified male discomfit of destabilized gender roles, female sexual independence, and the dangers of liberated women in the public sphere.

\(^{162}\) Unable to procure a buyer, Manet had kept *Olympia* in his studio from the time of its controversial appearance at the Salon until his death in 1883. Yount asserts that Beaux would have likely encountered the infamous work while at the Exposition Universelle in 1889, shortly before her departure back to the United States.

\(^{163}\) Yount, 33.

\(^{164}\) Facos, *An Introduction to Nineteenth Century Art*, 287.

\(^{165}\) Titian’s Renaissance masterpiece *Venus of Urbino* (1538) features a reclining, female goddess on a bed accompanied by a small dog, a symbol of fidelity during the period. *Olympia* at first appears to pay homage to the Renaissance work in its composition and subject matter; however, Manet’s painting is described as
scandalously alludes to radical themes of sexual impropriety and female promiscuity. Functioning as a pivotal symbolic element within the notoriously provocative painting, the black cat had consequently become ideologically emblematic of not only the arrival of modern art, but the cultural implications of a modern era.  

Created nearly thirty years after *Olympia*, a critical distinction between Beaux’s portrait and Manet’s work should be observed, however, in the comparable placement of the black kitten in relation to the primary figure. Images of animals during the Victorian era frequently symbolized the vices and virtues of women, exhorting females to rise above their ‘animal natures’ to achieve a pure and ideal state of domesticated womanhood. While perched tangentially at the foot of the bed in Manet’s composition, the cat is found visually integrated into the very form of Beaux’s sitter. Instead of acting as an allegorical allusion on the periphery of the composition, *Sita* immediately confronts the viewer with direct eye contact and a dominating compositional presence that rivals that of the sitter herself. With the exhibition of *Olympia*, Manet had scandalized critics by displaying a nude woman in an atmosphere of impropriety, surrounded by symbols of sexual autonomy (i.e. a black cat) and themes of tacit liberation. Within Cecilia Beaux’s portrait, a contemporary personification of the New Woman can, likewise, be interpreted; constructed from the same, symbolically charged element incorporated into her design. Noting a pivotal deviation, however, in *Sita and Sarita*, the Modern Woman not only

---

the very antithesis of Titian’s reclining nude (Stokstad, 978). Inverting the color pallet (cool instead of warm), replacing the Greek goddess with a Parisian prostitute, and swapping ‘Fido’ for an ominous black cat; Manet effectively subverted any thematic connection between *Olympia* and the Renaissance influence.  
166 Zuffi, 253. At the time of *Sita and Sarita*’s initial exhibition it appears that no immediate allusions were made between Manet’s *Olympia* and Beaux’s ‘mysterious’ portrait by either American or French art critics.  
167 Chadwick, 192.
reaches up to embrace her newly-acquired autonomy but it, in return, has become integrated into the very essence of her identity.

The investigative significance of Beaux’s artistic influences can continue as additional stylistic and symbolic values found within *Sita and Sarita* have been attributed to the work of her compatriot James McNeil Whistler. Whistler’s eminent work *Symphony in White, No. 1, White Girl* painted in 1862 (see fig. 22). features a distinguishably similar white dress that garments Beaux’s seated cousin as well as a comparable textile background and animal presence.\(^{168}\) Scholars and critics have recorded the underlying paradoxes in Whistler’s work as the Aesthetic Movement painting portrays the artist’s mistress, Joanna Heffernan, as a “household virgin, dressed in white, symbol of purity, and holding a lily…the dress has become a costume, a mask concealing rather than revealing the subject’s character.”\(^ {169}\) Rejected by both the Paris Salon and the Royal Academy, Whistler’s *White Girl* was criticized for its experimental emphasis on abstract form and for what scholars have attributed to be the visual representation of “a loss of innocence.”\(^ {170}\) Although translating her influence into a more conventional style characteristic of traditional American portraiture, Beaux was contrarily lauded by critics for her “true painter’s attention to white.”\(^ {171}\) Any connection, other than aesthetic, failed to register in the minds of critics or, if it did, it was promptly ignored.

\(^{168}\) Yount, 32-33. To clarify, Yount is only suggesting a stylistic similarity between *Sita and Sarita* and *Symphony in White*. Beaux would have probably seen Whistler’s work in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s 1881 exhibition.

\(^{169}\) Facos, 284.


Similarly, recent analytical arguments have impugned Beaux’s portrait as a visual manifestation and ideological catalyst of the Progressive Era. Exemplified in a recent essay, "The Greatest Woman Painter’: Cecilia Beaux, Mary Cassatt, and Issues of Female Fame,” Nancy Mowll Mathews contends that Beaux’s idealized depictions of female sitters, such as that found within *Sita and Sarita*, critically perpetuated confining and objectifying notions of femininity during the period. However, brief iconographic evaluation of the painting as presented here suggests that the work contains principles that are inexorably progressive in nature; present, even if decisively unheeded by nineteenth century or contemporary observers. While the discourse of art history continues to re-examine the sociological and political implications of her portraits as visual manifestations of the New Woman’s movement, the ideology found at the foundation of Beaux most evocative painting places it at the forefront of a cultural shift scholars regard as “the greatest period of female social progress in history.”

*Mary Cassatt: Carriage Ride (1881)*

While equally significant in her reflections of societal shifts occurring in late nineteenth-century France, modern scholars surmise that Cassatt’s portrayals of female figures are consciously void of any objectification and cliché; if women are not shown fulfilling their responsibilities as mothers, they are reading, conversing, sewing, lost in thought, or out-of-doors. By promoting her version of Modern Motherhood, Cassatt actively blurred the barrier between domestic maternity and newly accessible public spaces. Through her 1881 work *Carriage Ride*, sometimes referred to as *Woman and...*  

---

172 Chadwick, 177.  
173 Barter, 81.
Child Driving, or simply, Driving, Cassatt bridged the private sphere with the public by placing a modern woman out of doors, in control of her own direction, without neglecting her maternal responsibilities. (see fig. 23)

While scholars such as Whitney Chadwick suggest that The Carriage Ride is less a universalized depiction of maternity “than a response to the specific ways that social class is reproduced through the family,” the strategic placement of the figures in a compressed viewing field, the artistic delineation of masculine and feminine spaces, and Cassatt’s Symbolist penchants suggest that the artistic intentions within this painting have significant cultural implications. Reflecting her recently acquired interest in Japanese prints and Impressionist aesthetic, Cassatt severely cropped the asymmetrical composition and achieved the intimacy of a snapshot that suggests spontaneity in an unrestricted environment. This composition, Impressionist art historian Norma Broude argues, vividly conveys the sensation of literal movement “while it underscores through the forward moving into time and space the demeanor of the middle-class woman, who is the active subject of the painting.”174

Griselda Pollock argues that the unusual spatial structures and figural perspectives adopted by the Impressionists allowed painters such as Cassatt and Berthe Morisot to physically re-map the spaces of femininity by enabling new possibilities of representation that helped them, as women, renegotiate the limitations placed upon the female identity. As exemplified in this painting, through the compression of the spatial system there is little extraneous space to distract the viewer from the inter-subjective encounter or to reduce the figures to ‘objectified staffage;’ the woman depicted, in effect, functions as a

174 Broude, 156.
subject of her own looking within a highly controlled environment in which the viewer has no choice but to participate.\footnote{Pollock, Vision and Difference, 87.}

Accompanied by a little girl, symbolic of the next female generation, the woman sits assertively but not without consternation in the driver’s seat. The palpable trepidation on the face of the Modern Woman may indicate that her position metaphorically departs from or carries with it a veiled challenge to normal social order; reflected in the presence but passive and faceless male figure who sits behind her.\footnote{Barter, 81} Unlike her prominent work At the Opera (1879), which underscored the thematic inclusion of the male gaze, the averted eyes of the man in the carriage, similarly, voids the work of a male voyeur and female objectification. By placing the female figures against a rich backdrop of green foliage, Cassatt moreover imbues the work with further intention. While Cassatt’s portraits became increasingly Symbolist in content and form during the last decades of the century, depictions with women in association with natural environments, modern studies suggest, began to represent powerful, independent forces of creativity and nature.\footnote{Ibid.}

**Contemplative Women**

Personifying the intellectual advancements of women during the early feminist movement, both Cassatt and Beaux produced works that reflected the promotion of New Women’s access to education and the ideals associated with female’s intellectual
autonomy.\(^{178}\) In her work the *The Dreamer (1894)*, Cecilia Beaux portrayed her friend, Caroline Kilby Smith, as a “thoughtful and wholesome young woman, so lost in contemplative reverie that she seems unapproachable.”(see fig. 24)\(^{179}\) Shown in the 1894 spring exhibition at the National Academy of Design, the portrait made a distinctively modern contribution to the theme of contemplative women lost in thought which had begun to appear in visual vocabularies during the 1880s.\(^{180}\) Linked to the French *tête d’expression*, a staple of academic curriculum since the seventeenth century, Beaux’s unusual portrait differs from conventional images of reverie by depicting a woman alert in her thoughts and alive in the moment.\(^{181}\) The picture can barely contain her energy; the condensed space pushes the figure to the forefront of the canvas in an almost confrontational manner. Described by nineteenth-century critics as a having a “strange…deep, troubling fixity,” the idealized woman’s expression is far from complacent, and is, instead, direct with a gaze that inhibits a viewer’s opportunity for a voyeuristic experience.

Shortly after her parents joined her in Paris in the late 1870s, Cassatt painted a portrait of her mother reading a popular French newspaper, *Le Figaro* (fig. 25). Titled *Portrait of a Lady Reading Le Figaro*, the image depicts Mrs. Katherine Cassatt engaged in her daily activity of reading through a compositionally intimate yet un-idealized portrayal. Growing up in an affluent household surrounded by women who were avid readers, Debra Mancoff argues, impelled Cassatt to use the image of a woman engrossed

\(^{178}\) Equal access to education became a significant platform for nineteenth century feminist movements in both the U.S. and France.
\(^{179}\) Tappert, *Cecilia Beaux the Art of Portraiture*, 35.
\(^{180}\) Yount 28.
\(^{181}\) Ibid., 28.
in a newspaper to endorse reading as a worthwhile female pursuit.\textsuperscript{182} Offering a glimpse at everyday life as opposed to providing an image of a woman through a calculated gaze, the resulting intimacy of the constructed space implies the presence of the artist- a daughter painting an image of her mother as a figure of intelligence and intellectuality.\textsuperscript{183} Contrasting the productions of her male contemporaries such as Manet, who portrayed seated women reading in outdoor cafès visually on display to male and public passerby, Cassatt placed her figures comfortably, whether outside in the garden or in their home, in an atmosphere of intense, interpersonal concentration.\textsuperscript{184}

Within \textit{Portrait of a Lady Reading Le Figaro}, Cassatt was able to artistically and ideologically condense contradictory images of femininity, maternity, and intellectuality represented by a middle-aged, educated woman occupied with her mind. She is fashionable but not young or available (suggested through the inclusion of a gold ring on her finger.)\textsuperscript{185} Experimenting with light, line and dimensionality, E. John Bullard notes, Cassatt created a solidly modeled figure with a visual weight that gives the impression of a strong and intelligent personality.\textsuperscript{186} Even through the woman sits in a domestic space, she is connected to the contemporary world through her intellectual engagement. Putting a feminist twist on the traditional image of a domesticated woman reading a novel, Cassatt frequently depicted her female sitters with a newspaper, indicating their interests in the political and contemporary world of which they were quickly becoming apart.

\textsuperscript{182} Mancoff, 32.
\textsuperscript{183} Pollock, \textit{Mary Cassatt: Painter of Modern Women} 72.
\textsuperscript{184} Barter, 63.
\textsuperscript{185} Pollock, \textit{Mary Cassatt: Painter of Modern Women}, 135.
\textsuperscript{186} Bullard, 40.
Conclusion

While reflecting the image of the Modern Woman and embracing equally significant but diffident forms of nineteenth-century feminist ideology, the foundation of Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux’s artistic divergence and personal conflict can be found resonating within twenty-first century feminist debate. Within her book *Feminist Thought* (2009), Rosemarie Tong discusses the ideologies surrounding the notion of femininity as it applies in the modern era. Some modern activists argue that femininity in and of itself is not inherently subordinate to masculinity but rather subject to the “low value patriarchy assigns to feminine qualities, such as gentleness, modesty, empathy nurturance… [and] sensitivity.” Thus, an organized movement should work towards re-defining the notion of femininity and imbuing it with emboldened connotations. This is a position embraced by Mary Cassatt and a number of other women artists during the nineteenth century who believed in the value of feminine expression. Others, according to Tong, claim that femininity is itself the problem because it was culturally constructed by men for patriarchal purposes and thus, in order to be fully liberated women must reject preconceived notions of ‘the feminine’ in its entirety, a theory that unmistakably aligns with the century-old views of Cecilia Beaux and many of her American contemporaries who dedicated themselves to creating a world where there is ‘no sex in art.’

Although contrasting in their visual expressions of motherhood and their ideas of the role of femininity in the lives of New Woman, Cassatt and Beaux’s artistic productions reflected and impelled the same trans-Atlantic reform movement that aimed

---

188 Ibid., 4.
to achieve female social, political, and economic equality. As revealed through an iconographic analysis of their most prominent portraits, Cassatt and Beaux personified and validated the diverse and emerging proponents of the New Woman either through their testaments to Modern Motherhood, the emphasis on female independence in the public sphere, or the radical notions of women’s intellectual and sexual autonomy. Their artistic contributions to the early feminist movement, to be elaborated upon in the next chapter, can only be exceeded by their contributions to the most pressing political issues facing the turn of the twentieth century (namely, the movement for American women’s suffrage) their presence in the transatlantic art market, and the influence they spread to the next generation of female artists.
CHAPTER 3: SUFFRAGE, TEA, AND THE ART MARKET

While the 1848 Seneca Falls convention in New York had marked an official commencement to the American Women’s Suffrage Movement, the issue of female enfranchisement had become a central topic amongst late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New Women who were seeking to secure social, political, and economic autonomy. Although Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux were living and working in different countries during the early decades of the modern era, they had both acknowledged the growing and emboldening socio-political movements that had begun to organize in Boston, New York, Washington D.C. and their hometown of Philadelphia. Characteristically divergent in their personal approach towards the burning subjects facing New Women, I will argue that Cassatt and Beaux made equally substantial contributions to the progressive movement through diverse but critical avenues of influence.

Believing that women with their natural humanitarian concerns would vote to improve the world’s situations, Cassatt along with her life-long friend and suffragist Louisine Havemeyer,189 joined the U.S. movement as active organizers, activists, and financial contributors. While never overtly aligning herself with particular political organizations, Cecilia Beaux chose to express her ideas of “female kinship in visual terms,” according to Sylvia Yount, by “making her statement through art rather than

189 Louisine Haveyemeyer was an active member of the Women’s Political Union which was led by Harriet Stanton Blatch, daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, as well as The National Women’s Party. Havemeyer helped organize the WPU’s annual marches down Fifth Avenue for women’s suffrage that had become a national focal point for the movement and had periodically traveled through the state to establish new chapters of the organization. (Mathews, Mary Cassatt: A Life, 303.)
wearing political labels.” Her ‘visual’ participation in the movement manifested, instead, in the production of a series of art works immortalizing the image of suffragists and female professionals through ennobled portraits that reveal both the sitter’s and the artist’s progressive nature.

Cassatt’s Suffrage Exhibition

Prior to the turn of the century, Mary Cassatt’s particular brand of feminism had been primarily individualist in nature. That is, she felt that women should have the opportunity to work and the recognition they deserved but she did not feel the need to participate in any of the social organizations spawned by the women’s movement in either France or the U.S. However, by the 1910’s, the longstanding battle for votes that women had been waging in America for over sixty years seemed close to victory and the more conservative, focused character of the movement under the organization of Carrie Chapman Catt had compelled “such independent women such as Mary Cassatt and Louise Havemeyer [to join] the ranks.” Therefore, by 1915 Cassatt had finally agreed to identify her name with the cause of women’s suffrage and assumed an active role in the organization and execution of the Suffrage Loan Exhibition of Old Masters and Works by Edward Degas and Mary Cassatt held at the Knoedler Gallery in New York, from April 6-24 of 1915. The proceeds from admission of which were to directly benefit the Women’s Suffrage Campaign Fund.

190 Yount, 38.
191 Mathews, Selected Letters, 271.
192 Ibid., 271-272.
193 Cassatt had sent her works from France to the U.S. for the exhibition through her art dealer, Durand Ruel. Sometime between November 25 and December 29, 1914 Havemeyer relocated the exhibition from the Durand-Ruel Gallery in New York to the M. Knoedler Gallery, presumably when she expanded the show to include old master paintings. Rebecca A Rabinow, “The Suffrage Exhibition of 1915,” in Alice
Bridging the relation between art and activism, the exhibition organized and developed first and foremost by Louisine Havemeyer, was comprised of privately owned works\textsuperscript{195} by Degas and Cassatt as well as paintings by Old Masters and exhibited in an unusual format that has seldom been duplicated before or since (see fig. 26).\textsuperscript{196} Although hung in a “conservative way,” the gallery featured each artist’s work showcased within their own designated areas, perfectly expressing Cassatt’s philosophy “that the old and the new should always be intelligently juxtaposed.”\textsuperscript{197} While neither Havemeyer nor Cassatt recognized it to be an exhibition of true equals, they both believed that Cassatt came out creditably in comparison with Degas and the Old Masters\textsuperscript{198} and would do justice to the promotion of the advancement of women.\textsuperscript{199}

Surviving photographs from the Suffrage Benefit Exhibition suggest that many of Cassatt’s later paintings of young children and their mothers were dispersed throughout the collection of eighteen total works featured within her portion of the gallery (see fig. 27). Aligning with her personal belief that motherhood would hold a prominent place in

\textsuperscript{194} Louisine Havemeyer considered the fundraising possibility of raffling off pictures for the cause. However, Cassatt objected to the idea on the principle that it would “…lower Art” and declared that she would rather give $5000 than auction off one of her pictures. Ultimately, it was decided that the proceeds from an admission fee set at one dollar per guest would be forwarded to the Suffrage Fund. Ibid., 91.

\textsuperscript{195} The exhibit comprised works from Havemeyer’s personal collection and works on loan from the Whittemores, Sarah Sears, Joseph Widner, Henry Frick, and Durand-Ruel.

\textsuperscript{196} Mathews, \textit{Mary Cassatt: A life}, 306.

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 306.

\textsuperscript{198} There were eighteen works by Old Masters included in the exhibit. Five works were by Rembrandt as well as rare pieces from Vermeer, Terborch, Rubens, Bronzino, Peter de Hooch, Holbein, Coello, among others.

\textsuperscript{199} Cassatt, as a bonus, was notably amused and enthusiastic about the “poetic justice” of Degas’s art being shown to raise money for a feminist cause. Remembering that sexist remarks had always been a “staple of his biting wit” and knowing that, with his old-world conservatism, he would have been as “thoroughly antisuffrage as he was anti-Dreyfus.” (Mathews, \textit{Mary Cassatt: A Life}, 303-304.) There is little record to indicate that Degas (1834-1917) was aware of the U.S. exhibition as, in 1915, he was facing declining health and died two years later in Paris.
the new and politically active lives of modern women, Cassatt consciously included these paintings not to be interpreted as scenes of ideal Victorian domesticity but rather as a testament to the coalescing roles of women as educators, mothers, professionals, and public citizens. These maternal works along with her archetypal images of bourgeoisie women, furthermore, contrasted Degas’s array of pastels and paintings that featured working-class women posing in his “grimy Paris studio as if dancing, ironing, selling hats, washing themselves in brothels.”

The particular mode of installation according to Griselda Pollock not only juxtaposed two different artistic personalities of the two Indépendents but presented the possibility of a “historical space in which ‘Degas’ does not negate ‘Cassatt,’ in which these two worlds of bourgeoisie modernity- the sexualized spaces of masculinity and the intimate spaces of femininity- could, as it seems… coexist and converse.”

While increasing her political activism through her involvement with Havemeyer’s exhibition, Cassatt firmly believed that the exclusion of women from the vote was unconscionable on the grounds of equality but was amplified once the income tax was instituted and brought issues pertaining to ‘taxation without representation’ to the forefront of her thinking. The outbreak of WWI in 1914 added an additional motivation to her ideology as she, like many feminists, believed war was the result of excluding women from the decision-making process.

Aligning with Cassatt’s long held personal and artistic philosophy, which promoted the individualist nature of women and emphasized the intrinsic value of femininity and maternal nature, by the turn of the

---

200 Pollock, Mary Cassatt: Painter of Modern Women, 212.
201 Ibid., 211-212.
202 Mathews, Mary Cassatt: A life, 308-309.
twentieth century women’s rights advocates in the U.S. had begun to emphasize the value of *difference* between men and women in their campaign policies. In a “thorough reversal of classic women’s rights premises,” twentieth-century feminists began arguing that women should be able to vote not because they are the same as men but because the values associated with maternal instincts and feminine character would benefit the country’s future.\(^{203}\)

Given Cassatt’s evidently strong feelings about women’s suffrage later in her life, it became a personal trial for her when her sister in law, Jennie (wife of Gardner Cassatt) and her two nieces became involved in the anti-suffrage movement. Attributing their ‘misguided opinions’ to Philadelphian society, which as she puts “encouraged women to stay within a very restricted sphere and to make their contributions to the world behind the scenes,” Cassatt felt a particular affront when her suffrage exhibition, while otherwise a critical and financial success,\(^{204}\) was boycotted by her own relatives.\(^{205}\) In response to her family’s adverse politics, Cassatt began selling or donating all of the remaining important artworks in her possession that she had been saving for her heirs. Her niece, Ellen Mary, her namesake and favorite, for example, was to have gotten *The Boating Party*. Taking Ellen Mary’s lack of respect for the advancement of women to


\(^{204}\) Affirming the show to be a critical and financial success, according to the *World*, the private preview of the exhibition on April 6\(^{th}\) raised more than $1,100 “to start the Women’s Suffrage Campaign,” and at the end of April, Knoelder’s had presented Havemeyer with a check and receipts that totaled in the amount of $2, 283.01. “Suffrage Art Show Nets $1,100 in a Day, Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer Opens Display With Talk on Miss Cassatt and Degas,” *World*, April 7, 1915: p 7.

After the exhibition closed, Cassatt had written to Havemeyer: “My dear I am so very glad about the exhibition…you deserve all the credit…The time has finally come to show that women can do something.” (Mary Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, April 29, 1915, Havemeyer correspondence. In Rabinow, 92)

heart, however, Cassatt immediately turned the painting over to her art dealer. Consequently, the prized painting is now owned by the National Gallery of Art. Similarly, her major and prized Degas pastel of a bather as well as two other Degas works that were in her possession would have gone to Jennie’s children; she sold them instead to Louisine Havemeyer. This late re-distribution of Cassatt’s works contributed to her paintings revolving presence in domestic and international art markets; solidifying her popularity in the minds of collectors, dealers, and art galleries and can partially explain her prominent placement (in relation to Beaux’s) in art historical discourse.

Beaux: Suffrage and the Professional Woman

While never explicitly aligning herself as Cassatt did with the prominent political movement and omitting any references to it in her autobiography, Cecilia Beaux undoubtedly believed in the cause of American women’s suffrage and actively manifested her support for the movement through her artwork. Decidedly less vocal than Cassatt when it came to involving herself in political activism, it is possible that Beaux, working within the confines of the conservative American art world, was less willing to express controversial views that would have lost her important private commissions and her carefully cultivated place as one of the most well-respected and sought after American artists. As noted in Tara Leigh Tappert’s essay on “Aimée Ernesta and Eliza Cecilia: Two Sisters, Two Choices,” Beaux’s ultimate success as an artist hinged on her

---

206 Ibid., 309-310.
ability to balance a “steely determination for professional recognition and financial
reward while projecting the public persona of a gracious unthreatening lady.”

Nevertheless, in 1914 Beaux created a painting bold in style and subject. The
progressive work *After the Meeting* (see fig. 12) shows close-friend and confidant
Dorothea Gilder after a suffrage meeting, clad in contemporary fashion and engaged in
conversation. The portrait, according to an untitled clipping from the *Washington Star*
(May 1914) recognized it as “a new vein” for Beaux, and “may well be understood to
refer indirectly at least to the feminist movement of the day.” While another
contemporary article identified the work as “an adventure on the part of the
artist…painted…when interest in the feminist movement was rife. It is, as it were, this
distinguished artist’s essay on the subject, and pictures the type of restless woman who
was chief advocate of the cause if not the chief exponent.”

Once comparing suffragism to a post-modernist lecture by Caffin that she
drudgingly attended in 1913, Beaux was openly critical of suffrage promoters who she
thought based their claims on “wrongheaded-ness…contradictions and misconstrued
history;” expressing in her diary entry from January 21 that most suffragists inadvertently

---

208 Dorothea Gilder was the eldest daughter of Helena de Kay and Richard Gilder, a prominent family regarded as arbiters of American taste and whom Beaux befriended in the 1890s and though which she established a number of social and professional connections. At the time of *After the Meeting’s* creation, thirty-two year old Dorothea was an active member of local social and women’s political organizations.
209 *Art and Progress* 6 (November 1914), Cecilia Beaux Vertical Files, Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery Library, Smithsonian Institution Washington, D.C.
“injure the cause whenever they speak.” Yet, according to Sylvia Yount, there is no question that Beaux held respect for progressive young women “who were engaged in the issues of their day.” At this later period in her career, Beaux had enough fame and fortune to paint only subjects of her choosing and as a result she notably produced a number of portraits featuring accomplished, mature women in society whom she held in high regard. Two of these portraits depict some of the most prominent suffragists of the day: Sarah Elizabeth Doyle (1830-1922) and Eliza Sproat Turner (1826-1903).

In her portrait of Sarah Elizabeth Doyle (see fig. 28), Beaux depicted the New England educator and suffragist with what Tara Tappert describes as a “strong, womanly personality,” and whose affection for the sitter is evident in the artist’s sensitive yet distinguished portrayal of a woman who helped to spread feminist propaganda among her pupils. Similarly in her rendering of Philadelphian Eliza Sproat Turner, Beaux chose to depict the suffrage leader in a dignified pose, seated in contemplation and reverie (see fig. 29). Although tending to portray only prominent and high-class people in society, Beaux was not what one would call a “society painter.” In contrast to recent assertions by some

---

212 Archives of American Art, Cecilia Beaux Papers, Diary entry from Tuesday, January 21, 1913. Box 2, Folder 23.
213 Yount, 38.
214 Sylvia Yount, “This Difficult and Perplexing Art Form’ Portraiture and Women Artist” in High Society: American Portraits of the Gilded Age (Hamburg: n.p, 2008), 36. To clarify, Yount explains that Beaux, from the start of her career, “unlike many women artists, depicted as many esteemed male sitters as engaging children and accomplished women…” (36).
215 Sarah Elizabeth Doyle (1830-1922) was an American educator and educational reformer, significant for her role in founding the Rhode Island School of Design and establishing women's education at Brown University. The portrait was commissioned by a committee of graduates from Rhode Island’s Providence High School who wanted to immortalize the eminent educator who had been their principle.
216 Eliza Sproat Turner (1826-1903) was an American writer, women's club founder and leader, abolitionist, and suffragette. She was a leader of the Women's Congress and spearheaded the publication of the New Century for Women newspaper for the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876. Within the following years she helped found the New Century Club women's club and in 1882 was an integral figure in the establishment of the New Century Guild of Working Women.
217 Tappert, Cecilia Beaux: The Art of Portraiture, 78.
Cassatt scholars who argue that Beaux’s paintings are more ‘decorous’ and idealized than Cassatt’s, who had made no concessions to accepted standards of feminine beauty, Beaux was, Edward J. Sozanski declares, a “true realist, not a flatterer.” The most striking aspect of her portraiture, he writes, is the dignity and authority she captured in her female subjects and, while Beaux did paint handsome people, they were people she knew well, admired and respected.  

While preferring to only paint family members and close friends throughout her career, Cassatt’s oeuvre of portraits rarely feature any of the many prominent American women with whom she worked with during her decades as an activist. A rendering of Louisine Havemeyer produced at the beginning of Havemeyer’s political career, however, arguably reveals Cassatt’s distinct ideological stance concerning the ennobling characteristics of Modern Motherhood. In contrast with Beaux’s more formal, dignified, and arguably masculine depictions of New Women, Cassatt chose to portray Havemeyer not in her role as a spirited suffragist or an emboldened political figure, but as a mother holding her child (see fig 30).

Cassatt and Beaux: Validating the New Woman

As significant public figures in the early women’s rights movement, Cassatt and Beaux were equally influential in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social effort aimed at eradicating the woman artist, both seeking to promote a new generation of female professionalism. Using their art and recognition to propel the ideals emphasized by the reform movement, Cassatt and Beaux exerted a progressive influence through their

---

219 In comparison to Beaux, Cassatt rarely accepted private commissions for paintings and, further, did not often seek out public figures to immortalize in portraiture.
varied participation in public lectures, jury appointments, teaching positions, organized clubs, informal meetings with young female artists, and through a strong presence in domestic and international art trade.

In 1899 when Camille Mauclair had cast his retrospective critique on the Salon exhibitions of the 1890s he noted the changes in the way women were being visually represented. He observed that “a new concept of women’s portraits has begun to emerge; her decorative and non-conscious aspects [are on the verge of fading]. A new woman is being elaborated, a pensive and active being to which a new form of painting will have to correspond.” In her recent book on *The Body in Time: Figures of Femininity in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (2008), Tamar Garb similarly surmises that while portraits of women have historically functioned as “repositories of fantasy, whether that of their authors or their viewers,” the socio-cultural transitions occurring during the era of the Modern Woman had ushered in new aesthetic principles that were more appropriate for the depiction of female subjects. These new portraits of “bold protagonists representing women’s autonomy and agency could not…comfortably conform to the traditional topoi of seductive and sensual femininity” that had traditionally been reserved women’s portraiture.

---


221 Tamar Garb, *The Body in Time: Figures of Femininity in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, (Washington: University of Washington, 2008), 5. Prior to the socio-cultural transformations during the last decades of the nineteenth century, portraits of men were seen as a “psychological document through which the motivations and actions of the sitter were conveyed…a portrait of a woman was less a portrayal of an individual than a screen for the projected sensibilities and passions of the spectator…The last thing that it was required to do was confront the spectator with a powerful, autonomous subject who encountered him as an equal, or even a superior.” (46)
In the process of immortalizing prominent figures of the suffrage movement, I will argue, this concept of ‘New Woman portraiture’ was manifested in the dignified portrayals of female professionals, college administrators and social activists produced by Cecilia Beaux during the turn of the century. Beaux’s personal convictions regarding the sacred nature of an “unmarried professional woman’s vocational commitment,” as Tara Tappert contends in her monograph, is evident in her somber portrayals of women with the inclusion of their professional regalia and finely modeled heads through which Beaux sought to convey their intelligence.

Also seen in such examples as the portraits of Sarah Elizabeth Doyle and M. Adelaide Nutting (1906) (see fig. 31), Beaux boldly conveyed visual elements of sobriety, seriousness of purpose, high-minded endeavor, character, psychological depth, individuality, and professional prowess; all of which were conventional qualities traditionally reserved for portraits of men. Contributing to the reconceptualization of the female portrait, as a basis of comparison, Beaux’s formal depiction of William Henry

---

222 Beaux’s graphite on paper drawing of social activist and muckraker Ida Tarbell (1920) is inscribed: “To my friend Ida Tarbell- Cecilia Beaux,” suggesting that the portrait was intended as a gift. In a correspondence written on June 8, 1939, Tarbell expressed her fondness for Beaux, conveying to the artist: “I think you are the most Gallant lady I know.” (Beaux Papers, AAA microfilm 427, frame 961.)


224 When Nurse Mary Adeline Nutting (1858-1948) posed for her portrait during the summer of 1906, Cecilia Beaux “found a kindred spirit, another woman who regarded her work as a sacred calling.” Nutting was an American educator, administrator, and author in the field of nursing, was regarded as the world’s first ‘Professor of Nursing,’ and helped found the American Society of superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses of the United States and Canada. In a somber, monochromatic study that accentuates Nutting’s “nun-like uniform, Beaux visually captured the life of a committed professional woman and balanced the red-leather notebook that Nutting carried when she made her hospital rounds.” Critical response of the painting during its exhibition in Boston described it as representing “a useful and estimable personage, strong will and very capable.” (Tapert, *Cecilia Beaux and the Art of Portraiture*, 92.)

Howell (1910)\(^\text{226}\) (see fig. 32) shows a remarkable resemblance in physiognomy, gaze, and apparel to her equally formal portrayals of female educators, such as that of Marion Reilly (1918)\(^\text{227}\) (see fig. 33) and Caroline B. Hazard (1908) (see fig. 34).

Through these progressive depictions, it is argued that Beaux showed that she was a “gifted portraitist, if a conventional one…if she lacked Sargent’s flair and Eakins’ uncompromising naturalism, she produced many sensitive, humanistic images, especially of women, [and in these],” John Sozansk argues, “… she even surpassed Cassatt.”\(^\text{228}\) Thus, Beaux was able to simultaneously validate and immortalize the image of early twentieth-century female professionalism, the characteristics that make up the Modern Woman, and, as consequence, impel the beginning of a new chapter in female portraiture.

In addition, participating not only as artists in the manifestation and ideation of modern female portraiture, the appearance of the thoughtful, active, and purposeful New Woman can be exemplified in artist portraits such as Degas’s *Portrait of Mary Cassatt* (see fig. 35). In this work, the female protagonist is shown with her arms resting in her lap, dressed in black outdoor clothing, her fingers fidgeting with playing cards, and a pensive, serious expression adorning her face. Cassatt, as argued in this particular portrait, “embodies modernity in the forward orientation of her body as well as her sensible costume and restless hand movement.”\(^\text{229}\) Her figure, consequently, is not

---

\(^{226}\) Dr. William Henry Howell (1860-1945) was a professor of physiology, dean of the Johns Hopkins Medical School, and was a noted authority on the physiology and pathology of the blood. (Tappert, *Cecilia Beaux and the Art of Portraiture*, 102.)

\(^{227}\) Marion Reilly (1879-1926) was the dean of Bryn Mawr College from 1907-1916 when she was appointed to the Board of Directors. Considered “an unflinching feminist in the best sense” during her tenure as dean, Reilly had been responsible for making Bryn Mawr the college known for “the highest standards of scholarship for women.” (Tappert, *Cecilia Beaux and the Art of Portraiture*, 128)


\(^{229}\) Garb, 58-59.
oriented toward the viewer but is positioned at an angle, effectively occluding her body and prohibiting access, while her downcast eyes and serious expression suggest contemplation and sobriety rather than absentminded reverie. Visualized as a dark silhouette against a painterly backdrop void of passerby or interior recognition, she “cuts a solitary but replete figure: respectable, contained, and completely autonomous.”

Cassatt and Beaux: Mentors and Advisors

Expanding their professional reach beyond their own artistic success, Cassatt and Beaux became influential figures in the public sphere through their diverse and comparative involvement in various domestic and international organizations. Acquiring, for example, an unprecedented appointment as the first female faculty member at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1895, Beaux began teaching Head Classes (the drawing and painting of heads) and a portraiture class, a position that she would hold for twenty years. Moreover, throughout her career Beaux maintained a prominent presence in numerous art juries throughout the U.S. and Europe. Acquiring a position as one of the first women to serve on the PAFA’s exhibition and Jury Selection and Hanging Committee, Beaux was the only woman selected to the jury for the Second Annual Carnegie Institute in 1897, sat on the American jury for the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, and was elected to serve on the international Jury of Awards for the Louisiana Purchase exposition in St. Louis in 1904. Beaux’s prolific participation on exhibition juries critically helped to ascertain the authority and establish the precedent of a woman’s ability to critique the productions of her male colleagues.²³¹

²³⁰ Ibid.
²³¹ Swinth, 68-69.
Although encouraged by Bertha Palmer in 1892 to serve as a juror on the New York Art Committee as it “…is a great point gained by women to have their names prominently mentioned on art juries…and will help your sex who are generally entirely unrecognized in art matters,” Cassatt, in contrast to Beaux, had an ardent and particular aversion to the art jury service. While aiming to propel the presence of female artists within the profession, Cassatt had an oppositional opinion concerning the usefulness of both American and French jury systems. Elucidating her principles in a letter to John W. Beatty in September of 1905, Cassatt explained that “…I have never served because I could never reconcile it to my conscious to be the means of shutting the door in the face of a fellow painter… in art what we want is the certainty that the one spark of original genius shall not be extinguished…” As a young female art student who inevitably faced prejudice by a male-dominant art system and as an Indépendant artist working in Paris who received criticism and rejection from both the official Salon and conservative art critics, Cassatt, it seems, put very little stock in the opinions and service of the surviving institution. “Ours is an enslaved profession,” she continued, “fancy a writer not being able to have an article published unless passed by a jury of authors, not to say rivals-.”

Although absent from art juries domestic and abroad, Mary Cassatt exerted considerable influence through her judgement in the U.S. art market and through her prominent role as an advisor to American collectors. Deemed “undoubtedly the most

---

232 The letter correspondence from Mrs. Bertha Potter Palmer is dated from Chicago on December 15, 1892 to “My dear Miss Cassatt.” Mathews, Selected Letters, 242.
234 A number of contemporary American artists living and working permanently in France during the nineteenth century offered their advice to American collectors and museums, kept on eye on the art market, formed their own collections destined for the U.S., served as intermediaries, and offered judicious
important art advisor of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the scope of Cassatt’s influence was significant; stretching from Paris to New York, Boston, and Chicago. A “true humanitarian in that she wanted the general public to have the best in art,” Cassatt spent the late half of her career more interested in raising the quality of art in United States than promoting herself there, and advocated for the acquisition of both Old Master and modern art to private collectors anticipating the works’ ultimate placement in American public galleries. While a prominent name in France and a born member of the Philadelphian elite, through Cassatt’s ample social connections wealthy and prominent people from across the United States “could relax their reservations and feel that they were talking to ‘one of their own’ when Cassatt extolled the previously unsuspected beauties of Impressionist painting.” While subsequently providing a signal service to her French artist friends, Cassatt, raised in a business milieu, was able to ‘think like a businessman’ and, furthermore, “explain her artistic enthusiasm succinctly in a manner businessmen could understand.”

Suzanne Lindsay noted in an exhibition catalogue from the Philadelphian Museum of Art in 1985 that “Cassatt’s effect on Philadelphian patronage was… crucial in the history of American collections, particularly of French Impressionism” of which, initiated by his sister’s recommendations, Alexander Cassatt became one of the earliest collectors in the country. While impelling American interest in French Impressionism,

\[235\] Adler 214
\[236\] Sweet, xvi, 211.
\[237\] Adler, 214.
\[238\] Ibid., 214.
Cassatt is also credited by modern scholars as the figure that ‘rediscovered’ El Greco; had a significant impact on bringing Italian, Dutch, and Flemish art to the U.S.; and was notably in advance of her time in being among the earliest admirers of Japanese prints and of painters of the baroque period. Working closely with a number of female collectors, Cassatt became a judiciary voice for, most notably, Sarah Choate Sears in Boston, Theodate Pope in Connecticut, and Bertha Palmer in Chicago. Perhaps one of her greatest achievements as an art advisor, however, was through her 50-year-long relationship with Louisine and Henry O. Havemeyer and her role in shaping nearly one-third of their 500 painting private collection. Declared the ‘godmother’ of the expansive Havemeyer collection, Cassatt acted as a guide for Louisine beginning in 1877 when she advised her to purchase a Degas monotype with gouache and pastel, and concluded her service to her friend decades later when she helped determine which paintings would be allocated to the Metropolitan Museum of art upon Havemeyer’s death; a bestowal that would become “one of the most important benefactions in American Museum History.”

While the growth of the American museum during the last decades of the nineteenth century placed art, its acquisition and display, firmly on the public agenda it became a matter of civic pride for wealthy Americans to fund and donate to such institutions. American museums were, and continue to be, according to Americans in Paris 1860-1900 (2006), “private Philanthropies administered by trustees who also offer financial support,” and in the American Philanthropic tradition of acquiring and then

240 Sweet, viii.
241 Adler, 216.
giving away, “this they did primarily by the gift or bequest of their collections.”

Cassatt, anticipating this notion from the onset of her role as an art intermediary, expressed to a Philadelphia newspaper in 1911 that: “All the pictures privately bought by rich Americans will eventually find their way into public collections and enrich the nation and the national taste.” And, to a remarkable extent, modern art historians conclude, “Cassatt proved right.”

While less vocal in the international art market, Cecilia Beaux instead chose to exert her influence though a number of domestic organizations that encouraged and supported the ambitions of young female art students. Although criticized in modern scholarship for pulling up the ladder behind her, as she believed that her path to professional success required her to distance herself from other women artists, there are many accounts that Beaux became a mentor to many aspiring female art students, such as Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones (1885-1968), Edith Emerson (1888-1965) and Violet Oakley (1874-1961) who credited Beaux as her first mentor and even kept a photograph of Beaux on the wall of her studio.

Proving a popular and inspiring teacher during her time as a professor at the PAFA, Beaux received an anonymous letter from one of her students, thanking her for “all her vigor and vitality…fresh air and…sense of humor. It must be wonderful to live with a mind like that—I often think that yours is like an arrow, only you don’t wound

242 Ibid., 220.
243 Mary Cassatt in Philadelphia Public Ledger, 7 May 1911, quoted in Lindsay 1985, p. 12.
244 Adler, 220.
245 Tappert, Cecilia Beaux: Career as a Portraitist, 391.
people with it which is all the nicer.”

Often utilizing her academic platform to lecture and give speeches, Beaux gave numerous addresses to college students and graduating classes on the possibilities of succeeding in the art world and exalted the personal philosophy required to become a professional female artist. Although believing that women had less abundant ‘physical energy’ than men, Beaux expressed to the female graduates at Barnard College in 1915 that:

I very earnestly believe…that there is and should be neither advantage nor disadvantage in being either man or a woman. There are no obstacles in [women’s] way…All doors are open to Women sculptors, painters, illustrators, in fact to all the Halls of Art. …Far from deploring this it seems to me a state of things to be highly rejoiced over. The greatest of all opportunities is that of being judged by results…and history, even if written by men, will not withhold her due from women’s achievements.

Similarly, in a speech given to a chapter of Chi Omega in 1933, Beaux lauded the “outstanding purpose” of the organization, which was to “exalt and promote the World’s Workers as women.” Addressing the female students as a devotee in the field of plastic arts, Beaux expressed that: “I am glad to believe that women’s opportunities in this field is greater than ever before…and I believe that her results depend ---only, upon her powers, gifts, and devotion.”

Thus, Beaux projected a firmly held notion that individual nature and discipline, not sex, determined the success of the professional art student.

As established members of the artistic community by the latter half of their careers, both Cecilia Beaux and Mary Cassatt supported and participated in the organization of women’s art clubs throughout the United States which began to increase.

---

246 “One of Your Class” to Beaux, February 26, [1895?], Beaux Papers, PAFA Archives.
249 Cecilia Beaux, “Address to Chi Omega 1933,” AAA Beaux Papers, Box 2, folder 36: 3.
in quality and popularity throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century. Aiming to facilitate unbiased juried exhibitions, provide professional exposure, lucrative connections, and function as centers of support for female artists, organizations such as the Plastic Club in Philadelphia and the Woman’s Art Club founded in January of 1889 garnered support by both Cassatt and Beaux who enhanced the societies’ credibility through association and periodic exhibition in their galleries.²⁵⁰

Cassatt, who also adopted the role of a devoted mentor, offered support for young American art students studying abroad in Paris. Characteristically encouraging from the beginning of her days as a student in Philadelphia, Cassatt prominently wrote to her friend and PAFA classmate Eliza Haldeman in 1864: “Now Please don’t let your ambition sleep. But finish your portrait of Alice so that I may bring it to town with me and have it framed with mine sent to the Exhibition with mine hung side by side with mine be praised, criticized with mine and finally that some enthusiastic admirer of art and beauty may offer us a thousand dollars apiece for them. ‘Picture it- think of it!’”²⁵¹ However, while always offering console and ample advice (although, often critical) to female art students, Cassatt was untouched “by the sterile traditions of academic painting, she in turn did not wish to impose her own personal viewpoint on anyone else, and [thus] she accepted no pupils and had no direct followers.”²⁵²

Once settled in France and established in her profession, Cassatt instead frequently conducted ‘teas’ with young students who, like her, traveled to Europe to find

²⁵⁰ Swinth, 119. Neither Cassatt nor Beaux, however, became official members of the club as they were reluctant of the possibility of being identified with a “separate-sex initiative that could be construed as an amateur women’s art club.”
²⁵¹ Mary Cassatt to Eliza Haldeman, March 18, 1864, in Mathews, *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 34.
²⁵² Sweet, 215.
the best art education and connections in the world. In a letter to an aspiring American artist and sculptor Eugenie Heller (1868-?), Cassatt expressed after meeting with her that:

After I left you yesterday, it seems to me I might have given you the impression of want of interest and want of appreciation in your work—I can only say that I did not mean to do so, I saw that you had studied and improved, I merely wish to give you if possible another direction, much more sever things have been said to me and I am thankful for it now. My sister in law, Miss Hallowell and I are going this week to [the Musée] of St Quentin…won’t you go with us?...I should like you to meet Miss Hallowell as she may be useful to you and you may be to her.  

Anna Louise Thorne (1866-1965) penned in 1960 her experience upon meeting her idol, Mary Cassatt at her home in Beauvais. Even though, as Thorne expressed in her writing, she had “never once tried to paint like [the Impressionist] it seemed that women rebels in the field of art were very rare. And we were both rebels, she growing old and I still young.” Donned in her Sunday best, with a sketch book under one arm and a bouquet of violets in hand, Thorne traversed her way through the unfamiliar French countryside before finding the “glorious sort of chateau” that harbored the “celebrated lady painter.” After gathering the courage to knock for the impromptu visit, Thorne was escorted by Cassatt’s maid to the parlor where she was hedged that “Miss Cassatt would love to see you,” but that she was not well as she had suffered a severe fall the week prior and was confined to her chair. After entering the parlor, the American student saw Cassatt sitting in the corner, “almost as one on a throne.”  Proceeding to meet the aspiring artist, Cassatt requested to see her sketchbook and, after turning the pages, responded: “Pretty

253 Letter from Mary Cassatt to Eugenie Heller Advice to an Art Student (February 1, 1896), in Mathews, Cassatt: A Retrospect, 231.
254 Anna Louise Thorne (from Toledo, Ohio) was an American painter, etcher, and lecturer whose work “Boats at Harbor” was exhibited at the 1926 Paris Salon and won several awards. It is suggested that she likely visited Cassatt at Beauvais sometime around 1913.
255 Cassatt had notably greeted Thorne by stating: “So, you’re an American? I don’t like Americans. I’ve been in France too long. But sit down. You’ve come a long way to see me and we’ll talk.” Anna Louise Thorne, “My Afternoon with Mary Cassatt,” May 1960, in Mathews, Mary Cassatt: A Retrospect, 315-317.
good, but not good enough. It takes almost a hundred years. Look at me. I’m old now and I hardly know what art is all about.” Proceeding to show Thorne her collection of Japanese prints, Cassatt instructed to her before leaving: “that’s what you must get into your work, that flowing line. You must learn from those true artists long ago.” 256

While Cassatt’s influence in local affairs was considerable, various artists would join her small, informal gatherings at her Beaufresne Château and discuss pressing issues facing art, culture, and government. Exceptionally interested in politics, Cassatt frequently held sessions, particularly when local elections were coming up, and used them as a platform to discuss policy decisions, legislation, and political candidates. Regarded affectionately in her community as “lady of the manor,” Cassatt, according to Fredrick Sweet, was very “much respected in the community” while her “reputation as an artist was fully appreciated by her country neighbors, and they realized that the same determination and purposefulness that she applies to her art was also applied to her household and …to directing the political tenure of her domain.” 257

While choosing discernibly different but equally significant avenues of influence throughout the course of their careers, Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux unequivocally contributed to the advancement of the equal rights movement in the U.S, the validation of New Women, and the professionalization of women artists. However, the contentions over these two artists by modern scholars remains a fitting topic of discourse as resentment and animosity towards each other over artistic and personal principles were a defining characteristic of Cassatt and Beaux’s own relationship. “How did you like Miss

256 Ibid.
257 Sweet, 114.
Beaux?” Cassatt had written to Louisine Havemeyer in 1902, “I hope you did not make my Beaux mistake and talk Art [to her].” Separated by national identity and contending feminist philosophies, Cassatt had even confessed to having “furious antagonism” toward “that woman” when Beaux had risen to international prominence in the 1890s, and had even reportedly “cut her dead” on the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art during a chance meeting. Beaux, conversely, virtually ignored her French contemporary, omitting any reference to her in her autobiography and regarded her, it seems, with little esteem. Upon Cassatt’s death in 1926, memorial exhibitions began to display Cassatt’s work in Philadelphia, Boston, New York and Chicago, generating great American interest and garnering positive reviews. “Beaux must have noted the excitement over Cassatt’s work with dismay,” Alice Carter writes; evidently finding Cassatt, even in her death, a professional rival before a feminist comrade.

Illustrating that the ideologies and experiences of the nineteenth-century New Woman was far from monolithic, Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux represented two facets of one of the largest socio-political reform movements in Western history. While facing unwavering levels of competition throughout their careers and establishing a rivalry that is remembered well into the twenty-first century, Cassatt and Beaux proved equally significant in their espousal and contributions to early-modern feminism. Influenced by the disparate circumstances of their career paths, the cultural divide of their geographic locations, and their diverse ideological stances concerning the preservation of feminine expression in art, Cassatt and Beaux were among the first generation of New Women artists who sought to eradicate themselves from the relegating implications of their sex and achieve a higher level of professionalism than was expected of women artists. Although contradictory in their philosophies regarding the best methods to achieve equality, Cassatt and Beaux, epitomizing the array of nineteenth-century feminist organizations, shared a common goal: the intellectual, economic, social, and political liberation of women in the modern era.

Through her masterful combination of academic principles, a masculine breadth of technique, and the ability to convey the bedrock of human nature through anatomical form, Cecilia Beaux was regarded as the one “Philadelphian woman [who] has emancipated her sex… She has not only made a record… [but] has shown the potentialities of her kind.”259 Through her effort to eliminate the ‘essentially feminine’ from her work, Beaux effectively propelled not only her own career but a new generation

259 Yount, 47.
of female artists who would no longer be restricted by the dilettante stereotypes assigned to their sex. Prompted by her personal credo: “success is sexless,” Beaux utilized her prominent influence to promote an era when the term ‘women in art’ would be just as strange sounding as the term ‘men in art,’ and that a successful artist would be judged not on their ability to excel at the artistic potentials allocated to their sex but on the quality of their work alone.

Through her ennobled portraits of leading U.S. female educators, social activists, and suffragists, Beaux not only validated their identities as notable public figures but immortalized them as exemplars of New Women; recognizing their individual and collective significance during a time of cultural and social transition. By presenting Modern Women with airs of sobriety and intelligence, Beaux was able to influence a new and emboldening direction in women’s portraiture. Depicting female subjects as individuals infused with a sense of independence and personal ambition, the images no longer presented women as mere feminine objects or harbingers of male desire.

Although regarded as ‘idealized’ in modern scholarship and while recent assertions suggest that Beaux had a particular penchant for only painting ‘handsome people’ in society, Beaux explained in her autobiography that “the portrait of a very great man [or woman] should be as far as possible a true story. The artist is important in that his language and style should attract and convince readers.” What should be shown, above all, is the subject “summed up to, their scale in relation to lesser [individuals], the signs of a foremost member of the species.” 260 In this regard, Beaux painted her subjects as she saw them, aiming throughout her career to visually capture their ‘Spirit’ as well as their

260 Beaux, Background with Figures, 303.
material form. While painting various men and women in society whom she admired, respected, and held in high-regard, it is easy to see how her portraits depict the most ideal version of their physical form.

Becoming a revered member of various international and domestic art juries, a prominent faculty member at the PAFA, and a mentor for a number of aspiring female art students, Cecilia Beaux achieved a nationally revered, financially independent, and publicly active career. Although unassociated with any particular political organization and hindered by her necessity to maintain a conservative public persona, Beaux nevertheless became one of the many American feminists who enacted change on a monumental scale. Through her conscious rejection of ideal Victorian womanhood and her adoption of New Woman autonomy, Beaux used her artistic productions to document, validate, and propel a new era of female liberation. While always careful to refrain from the sentimental and the characteristically ‘feminine’ in her art, Beaux exemplified a prominent branch of late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century feminist ideology that strove to achieve female equality through the resolution and demonstration of their equal capabilities in relation to that of men.

Representing a different approach to the women’s liberation movement and choosing not to distance herself from ‘the feminine’ like her American colleague, Mary Cassatt instead brought the term with her into the modern age, redefining its stylistic and social implications to align with nineteenth-century French feminist ideals. As Nancy Mowll Mathews attests, Cassatt had always “considered her art an expression of respect for women;” whether she was painting women of substance and intelligence: women in
the midst of contemplation, at the theatre, driving a carriage, and present in both the private and public sphere, as she did earlier in her career. In the second half of her career, she marked a celebration of motherhood, depicting women as responsible, dignified adults carrying out one of life’s responsibilities.\textsuperscript{261} Visually manifesting the notion of Modern Motherhood in her images of women and their children, Cassatt, contrary to recent assertions, sought to embolden women as they transitioned from the confines of a purely domestic existence and adopted their new found identity as active participants in the public sphere.

Embracing the feminine as the natural expression of women, and therefore of the female artist, Cassatt imbued her paintings with ‘womanly’ aesthetic that some have misinterpreted as a testament to Victorian propriety. Believing that women should achieve economic independence, a higher level of education, and participate in the politics and policy-making of their day, Cassatt certainly embraced and projected the progressive proponents of a circulating ideology. While choosing to imbed her most monumental work, the \textit{Modern Woman} mural, with notions of feminine virtue, maternity, and fashion as well as enlightenment, female liberation, and professional ambition, Cassatt illustrated the multi-faceted roles that she believed would be adopted by New Women. Coalescing themes of the domestic and the public, maternity and occupation, ‘tenderness’ and ‘imprudence,’ within \textit{Modern Woman} Cassatt reflected not only her own feminist beliefs but the movement’s universal emphasis on a woman’s right to determine her own pursuits in life while independently and collectively questioning the cultural implication of a patriarchal system.

\textsuperscript{261} Mathews, \textit{Mary Cassatt: A Life}, 308.
Becoming a revered member of France’s artistic elite, a respected voice in the international art market, and a constructive mentor to a number of aspiring female art students, Cassatt, like Beaux, was an integral member of the same Progressive Era movement aimed at elevating the status women in society. A dedicated member of the American suffrage movement, Cassatt utilized an artistic platform to promote the ideals of female enfranchisement and the value of women’s contributions in the political sphere. Donating an array of works to be exhibited in the *Suffrage Loan Exhibition*, including her highly contentious scenes of domesticity, Cassatt illustrated her own understanding of what women’s role would be in the Modern Era: while it remains her “vocation in life” to bear children, women must also “wake up” to their duties as active, autonomous, and responsible citizens. Believing that women would be the ones who needed to fight for their children’s as well as their own self-interests, Cassatt asserted that in order for women to enact change at a higher level, first and foremost, “what we ought to fight for is equality.”

As an unwavering enmity for each other continued to grow throughout the course of their long careers, Cassatt and Beaux constantly found themselves vying for the title of ‘the greatest woman artist’ of their generation as journalists, critics, and art dealers continually juxtaposed their comparable levels of success. The discordant relationship between the two artists not only resulted from professional competition, however, but also indicated their conflicting views concerning the nature of their subjects, the role an artist should play in the production of art, the style through which one should emulate her environment, the value of femininity in artistic expression, and the most effective way to

---

separate the woman artist from the dilettante. While it seems that analytical debate in modern scholarship has moved the question away from who was the superior artist and toward the question of who proved to be the better feminist, it is important to consider, as I purpose in this thesis, the individual contributions each woman made to the early feminist movement. Although Mary Cassatt and Cecilia Beaux differed in their personal philosophies, their national identity, and their cultural circumstances, they illustrated through both their art and their lives, the diverse and complex identities embraced by New Women at the turn of the century.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


*Art and Progress 6* (November 1914), Cecilia Beaux Vertical Files, Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery Library, Smithsonian Institution Washington, D.C.


Cecilia Beaux Papers. Archives of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA), Philadelphia.


Nieriker, Mary Alcott. *Studying Art Abroad and How to Do It Cheaply*. Boston, 1879.


Figure 1. Mary Cassatt, *Emmie and Her Child*, oil on canvas, 1889.
Figure 2. Cecilia Beaux, *Les derniers jours d'enfance*, oil on canvas, 1883-1885.
Figure 3. Frances Benjamin Johnston, *Self-Portrait (as "New Woman")*, material unknown, 1896.
Figure 4. Mary Cassatt, *The Mandolin Player*, oil on canvas, 1868.
Figure 5. Mary Cassatt, *The Cup of Tea*, oil on canvas, 1879.
Figure 6. Mary Cassatt, *Modern Woman Mural* for the north tympanum of the Hall of Honor, Woman’s Building, World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.

Figure 7. Mary MacMonnies, *Primitive Woman Mural* for the north tympanum of the Hall of Honor, Woman’s Building, World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.
Figure 8. Cecilia Beaux, *Shell Studies*, graphite and wash on off-white wove paper, 1875.

Figure 9. Cecilia Beaux, *Plaque*, porcelain, 1880.
Figure 10. Cecilia Beaux, Portrait of Cecil Kent Drinker, oil on canvas, 1891.
Figure 11. Cecilia Beaux, *Twilight Confidences*, oil on canvas, 1888.
Figure 12. Cecilia Beaux, *After the Meeting*, oil on canvas, 1914.
Figure 13. Cecilia Beaux, *Self Portrait*, oil on canvas, 1925.
Figure 14. Cecilia Beaux, The Dancing Lesson (Dorothea and Francesca), oil on canvas, 1898.
Figure 15. Gari Melchers, *Mother and Child*, pastel, date unknown.
Figure 16. Mary Cassatt, *Auguste Reading to Her Daughter*, oil on canvas, 1910.
Figure 17. Mary Cassatt, *Portrait of Alexander J. Cassatt and His Son Robert Kelso Cassatt*, oil on canvas, 1884-1885.
Figure 18. Mary Cassatt, Center panel of the *Modern Woman Mural* for the north tympanum of the Hall of Honor, Woman’s Building, World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893 (detail).
Figure 19. Mary Cassatt, *Modern Woman Mural* for the north tympanum of the Hall of Honor, Woman’s Building, World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893. Top: Left panel showing *Young Girls Pursuing Fame*. Bottom: Right panel showing *Arts, Music, Dancing*. 
Figure 20. Cecilia Beaux, *Sita and Sarita*, oil on canvas, 1893-1894.
Figure 21. Eduard Manet, *Olympia*, oil on canvas, 1863.
Figure 22. James McNeil Whistler, *Symphony in White No.1*, oil on canvas, 1862.
Figure 23. Mary Cassatt, *Woman and Child Driving*, oil on canvas, 1881.
Figure 24. Cecilia Beaux, *The Dreamer*, oil on canvas, 1894.
Figure 25. Mary Cassatt, *Portrait of a Lady (Reading 'Le Figaro')*, oil on canvas, 1878.
Figure 26. Photograph of the Suffrage Loan Exhibition at Knoedler Gallery, 1915. Mary Cassatt’s are on the left of the doorway and the works by Edgar Degas to the right. Photograph courtesy of the Knoedler Gallery, New York.
Figure 27. Installation view of the Suffrage Loan Exhibition, detail of Cassatt’s wall. Knoedler and Co. Galleries, New York.
Figure 28. Cecilia Beaux, *Sarah Elizabeth Doyle*, oil on canvas.
Figure 29. Cecilia Beaux, *Portrait of Eliza S. Turner*, oil on canvas, 1897.
Figure 30. Mary Cassatt, *Portrait of Louisine Havemeyer and Her Daughter*, oil on canvas, 1895.
Figure 31. Cecilia Beaux, *M. Adelaide Nutting*, oil on canvas, 1906.
Figure 32. Cecilia Beaux, *William Henry Howell*, oil on canvas, 1910.
Figure 33. Cecilia Beaux, *Portrait of Marion Reilly*, oil on canvas, 1918.
Figure 34. Cecilia Beaux, *Caroline B. Hazard*, oil on canvas, 1908.
Figure 35. Edgar Degas, *Portrait of Mary Cassatt*, oil on canvas, c. 1884.