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**The Female Art of War: To what extent did
the female artists of the First World War con-
tribute to a change in the position of women in
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THE FEMALE ART OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

1914-1918



To what extent did the female artists of the First World War contribute to a change in the position of women in society?

Dissertation submitted for the Degree of B.A. Honors in History of Art

2015

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Abstract

“Maybe you don’t even associate the First World War with women, but think that the war was just a male affair?”¹ Gender was a defining feature of British citizens’ experience of the First World War. For most, war art evokes masculine images of aggression and devastated landscapes, as depicted by Official War Artists including Paul Nash (1889-1946), Eric Kennington (1888-1960) and William Orpen (1878-1931). Little is known about the female artists of the First World War. In 2011, Kathleen Palmer, curator of the Imperial War Museum’s exhibition, *Women War Artists*, drew attention to prevailing stereotypes by stating, “it is often misunderstood what the role of the war artist is [...] a lot of people think it is frontline sketching.”² The dominant view of a war artist therefore is an eyewitness, invariably male, working at the front line, capturing the sheer cruelty of the conflict. In this context the role of women as war artists has been obscured. Indeed, war art comprises more than scenes on the front line, it is about “artists’ creative responses to all areas of life, experienced by all areas of society during the conflict.”³ In this study I hope to show that female artists were equally as drawn to the subject of war as their male contemporaries and served an important role as “eyewitnesses, participants, commentators and officially commissioned recorders of war,” both on the front and on the home front, commemorating women’s war work.⁴

¹ G. Thomas, *Life on all Fronts: Women in the First World War* (Cambridge University Press 1989), 5.

² ‘Women at War: The female British artists who were written out of history’, *The Independent*, 11 April 2011.

³ K. Palmer, *Women War Artists* (Tate Publishing, Imperial War Museum 2011), 1.

⁴ Palmer, *Women War Artists*, 5.

Introduction

On 19 July 2014, the *Truth and Memory: British Art of the First World War* exhibition opened at the Imperial War Museum in London, to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the war itself. In the context of this significant exhibition, which spanned several galleries, one room contained four works by female artists. These were juxtaposed with two male artists' works depicting similar subjects. This limited representation shows that even one hundred years later, the neglect of women artists in the First World War is still patently obvious. In this dissertation, I wish to draw attention to a number of women artists, in particular Anna Airy (1882-1964), Norah Neilson-Gray (1882-27), and Olive Mudie-Cooke (1890-1925), who have been overlooked both within art historical discourse, as well as within the wider historical framework of the female suffrage movement.

The Women's Movement of the 1970s provoked feminist debate among artists, critics and historians, including Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker, who exposed how women had historically been denied artistic opportunities, or suffered sexist evaluations of their art.⁵ It not only sought to promote female artists and reassess them alongside their male colleagues, but also challenged the prevailing structures in which art was produced and displayed. This resulted in a "greater acknowledgement of female artists' achievements more generally, allowing them a higher profile through increased representation in public collections, exhibitions and in the art market."⁶ While some work has been done on rehabilitating female artists of the First World War, as in the work of Catherine Speck (2014), Kathleen Palmer (2011) and Katy Deepwell (2008), a review of the literature on war art shows that women artists remain under represented.⁷

In this dissertation I will attempt to build on the efforts of recent exhibitions and within feminist scholarly debate, to reintegrate and examine the role and function of

⁵ M. Hatt, C. Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods* (Manchester University Press 2006), 146.

⁶ Palmer, *Women War Artists*, 8.

⁷ C. Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield: Women Artists of the Two World Wars* (Reakiton Books Ltd 2014); Palmer, *Women War Artists*; K. Deepwell, 'Women War Artists of World War One', in Brown (ed.), *Women's Contributions to Visual Culture, 1918-1939* (Ashgate (2008)).

women's war art of the First World War. Building upon the general thesis in Deepwell's *Women War Artists of World War One*, which examines women's war art in relation to the politics surrounding women's suffrage, I will use Airy, Mudie-Cooke and Neilson-Gray as case studies to assess how female artists' work can be directly linked to the struggle for greater emancipation for women, and to the female suffrage effort.⁸ In addition I will draw upon a feminist and historicist approach to consider how the war enhanced the status of women in society and to what extent women's war work was used by suffragist movements as propaganda for their cause.

During the early twentieth century, dominant patriarchal forces defined women's social position and, as a result, women's art was historically confined to the spheres to which women had access.⁹ I will thus examine the complex situation surrounding the commissioning of artists, including Airy, as Official War Artists, and the various committees that emerged in 1917, in conjunction with the establishment of the Imperial War Museum in London. I will explore how male- and female-dominated committees differed in reflecting and shaping contemporary perceptions of women during the First World War. In particular, Airy's *Women Working in a Gas Retort House, South Metropolitan Gas Company, London, 1918*, and Neilson-Grey's *The Scottish Women's Hospital: In the Cloister of the Abbaye at Royaumont. Dr. Frances Ivens inspecting a French patient, 1919*, will be interpreted as suffragette propaganda, and will be linked to the first wave of what developed into the feminist movement.

Whilst Deepwell's study focuses on the politics of commissioning and exhibiting women's war art, she does not consider the spaces to which women had access. I hope to expand on her study through close technical analyses of specific works in two subject areas, first, the home front, and second, the front itself, specifically, the space just behind the front line. To do this, I will draw on feminist scholarship to explore how female artists of the First World War conformed to, and transgressed, the boundaries historically set for women, and for female artists more specifically. Within these categories, I will draw comparisons with male artists' work, to contrast the aims and objectives of male and female artists. The male point of view will, I hope, give a poignant sense of what women, including Airy, Neilson-Grey and Mudie-Cooke,

⁸ Deepwell, 'Women War Artists' 11.

⁹ A. Foster, *Tate Women Artists* (Tate Publishing 2004), 8.

were doing differently, and how they were perceived as artists not only by their contemporaries, but also in more recent art historical scholarship.

Chapter 1: The Position of Women in Society Leading up to 1914

As Pollock has claimed, “art is inevitably shaped by the society that produces it.”¹⁰ Prior to the First World War, Women lacked the fundamental democratic right to vote. They had few rights at home or at work, and many jobs and professions, including that of artist, were open only to men. For women to seek work as artists in the early twentieth-century was to challenge western beliefs about the nature and status of art, as well as of women, since it was believed that a “woman’s place was in the home.”¹¹ However, immediately before the war, Britain witnessed a surge of militant suffrage activity.¹² The first and largest organization responsible was the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), headed by Millicent Fawcett from 1897. The second was the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903. Unified by the common goal of the vote, the NUWSS campaigned peacefully whilst the WSPU took a more militant approach to pursuing this goal. In addition to the vote, women wanted recognition and acceptance that they could, and should, play a greater role in public life.

On 4 August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany, and the women’s suffrage movement radically changed.¹³ Prime Minister Herbert Asquith proclaimed, “every man and every woman should do his or her share.”¹⁴ Thus the war dramatically altered the course of suffrage politics and women’s wartime services have since been acknowledged as a basis for female political rights in Britain. Women seized the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities within the public sphere of the workplace. Nicole Dombrowski highlights that “patriotism” was crucial in shaping many women’s reactions to the war.¹⁵ Like men, women wanted to serve their country, feeling a clear duty to give every support to the national cause. The NUWSS

¹⁰ G. Pollock, ‘Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians’, *Women’s Art Journal*, 4:1 (1983), 42.

¹¹ G. Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (Routledge 1989), 82.

¹² L. Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign* (University of Chicago Press 1988), 6.

¹³ Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, 229.

¹⁴ Imperial War Museum, ‘A Closer Look at the Women’s Work Collection,’ <http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/a-closer-look-at-the-womens-work-collection>, [accessed March 2015].

¹⁵ N. A. Dombrowski, *Women and War in the Twentieth Century: Enlisted with or without Consent* (New York 2004), 8.

halted their campaigns, allowing members to assist in the war effort and show themselves “worthy of citizenship.”¹⁶

As the war progressed and society transformed, the conflict arguably marked women’s definitive entry into the public sphere as a result of two events. First the new Coalition Government established in May 1915, set up a separate Ministry of Munitions advocating employing women in munitions factories.¹⁷ On 17 July 1915 thirty thousand women marched in the “Rights to Serve” procession, financed by the Ministry of Munitions and headed by the reformist Prime Minister, David Lloyd George.¹⁸ The march was an admission of the government’s recognition that women’s industrial labour was not only useful, but essential, and “without women victory will tarry.”¹⁹ Women were thus afforded the opportunity to step outside their domestic roles and showed a certain willingness to serve the state in fulfilling these new roles.

In May 2016 the Universal Conscription Bill began the second growth in women’s employment, since “all men between the age of fifteen and forty-one had to join the army.”²⁰ As a result, women had to take over essential roles in the workplace which provided the critical impulse towards the full-scale employment of women in various professions. The war therefore served the interests of suffragists in unexpected ways, not least by suddenly and irreversibly advancing the economic and social power of female employees. These events, however, suggest that the changes affecting women were solely dependent upon the changes affecting their male counterparts.

Margaret Higonnet describes this pattern of gender roles during the war as a “double helix.”²¹ Within this binary she argues how when the female strand moves, the male strand moves in tandem to maintain its position of superiority. As women assumed previously male dominated roles, men moved forward into the “higher status and role of combatant.”²² Thus despite women taking on new opportunities outside the home, gender relations did not change, since both genders essentially evolved with women

¹⁶ Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, 229.

¹⁷ Marwick, *Women at War*, 12.

¹⁸ Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, 232.

¹⁹ A. Marwick, *Women at War 1914-18* (Harper Collins 1977), 54.

²⁰ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 15.

²¹ L. Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex 1907-1948* (Routledge 2006), 4.

²² Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 4.

always remaining one step behind. However, despite this, it was recognized that the suffragists had thrown their resources into the national cause and deserved recognition for their efforts. It is into this context that Airy and Mudie-Cooke's work must be located.

Chapter 2: The Commissioning of Women's War Art

As Karl Marx wrote,

“Women make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.”²³

In *Why Have There Been No Great Female Artists* (1971) Nochlin proposes that women have not failed because of their talent, but because of “institutional” prejudices and practical obstacles hindering their development.²⁴ Historically, restrictions have been placed on women artists by the institutions in which artists were trained and through which their art was promoted. These usually made women's lower status clear, by encouraging them to concentrate on lesser genres. This was still the case at the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition, social class played a fundamental role because only those of the upper and middle class who could afford private tuition as well as to support themselves through alternative incomes were able to practice and train as artists.²⁵

This is true of the First World War female artists. Official war art schemes did not support women, and female artists had to proactively seek commissions and sell their work. In addition to this, numerous female artists donated their work, as in the case of Mudie-Cooke. The British government established the first Official War Artists scheme in 1916. Instigated for propaganda purposes, it soon developed more artistic aims in recording and venerating Britain's war effort. However, despite the contribution of over 1.6 million British women to the national war effort, and the British War Memorials Committee's promise of an all-inclusive national memorial of “fighting subjects and home subjects,” female work was diminished by the scheme.²⁶ Of the “fifty-one artists commissioned, only three, Airy, Flora Lion and Dorothy

²³ Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, 8.

²⁴ L. Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (Thames and Hudson 1989), 176.

²⁵ Foster, *Tate Women Artists*, 10.

²⁶ ‘Truth and Memory: British Art of the First World War’, Exhibition Text, *Imperial War Museum, London*, 2015.

Cooke, were women.”²⁷ For these three female artists, the experience was degrading since the committee did not purchase any of their work. In addition, the terms for women artists including canvas sizes, titles of work and deadlines, were particularly regimented compared to the freedom afforded to their male contemporaries. This highlights the obvious difference in contemporary social attitudes to women.

In Britain, the principal commissioner of female artists was the Women’s Work Sub-Committee (WWS), established immediately after the war, in 1918, at the Imperial War Museum.²⁸ The WWS aimed to ensure that women’s contributions during the war would be recorded and commemorated in line with suffragette politics focused on gaining female equality and the vote. It was formed of eight upper class suffragettes. Agnes Conway, daughter of the Imperial War Museum’s honorary director, Sir Martin Conway, ran the committee, and Lady Pricilla Norman, also Honorary Treasurer of the Liberal Women’s Suffrage Union and a member of the Women’s Liberal Foundation, acted as Chair. In terms of artistic expertise, established bodies such as the Royal Academy informed the committee’s taste and they did not commission modernist or avant-garde artists. Instead, the WWS sought a relatively conservative style of art that would appeal to the majority, perhaps because commissioning female artists to celebrate the female war effort was radical in itself. The WWS was potentially aware of the importance of cultivating establishment acceptance of female war artists’ work as it formed a key part of their drive to advance women’s suffrage.

Due to the WWS’s strong suffrage links they had a clear agenda in the types and purpose of works they commissioned. The Sub-Committee’s first meeting was held on 26 April 1917 and the first report highlights its objective to show “women in various operations in which they had either been solely engaged, or had substituted men.”²⁹ In substituting men, women had responded to Fawcett’s rallying call at the start of the war to “show ourselves worthy of citizenship” by entering new areas of social and economic activity.³⁰ As a result they had earned the right to be represented

²⁷ ‘Truth and Memory’, Exhibition Text.

²⁸ M. Wilkinson, ‘Patriotism and Duty: The Women’s Work Collection at the Imperial War Museum’, *Imperial War Museum Review*, 6 (1991), 32.

²⁹ Imperial War Museum, ‘Women’s Work Collection.’

³⁰ Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, 229.

in any institution set up to record the war and, according to Deepwell, “it was the task of the WWS to build upon the praise of women’s work and secure what had in fact become a limited enfranchisement to women.”³¹ They thus enlisted a number of female and male artists to showcase women’s war work in new fields of employment. However, unlike “officially commissioned male artists who were afforded access to the war zone, only serving women were able to gain physical access to the front.”³² The WWS therefore employed artists from among the female nurses and Voluntary Aid Detachment workers (VADs) to depict the work, which they themselves had participated in. This conformed to the widely held view that “art should be based on personal experience [...] created from actual impressions.”³³ Conway wrote, “We are most anxious to get in touch with artists who have at the same time done war work, as we feel that is only such as they who can infuse into their art the right spirit.”³⁴

Despite the progress of the WWS’s commissions, women remained under-represented. First World War Collection contains roughly “150 works by 49 women artists compared to the 4,500 works by several hundred male artists.”³⁵ In addition, over half the works by female artists, as with Mudie-Cooke, were donations rather than commissions. This shows the extent to which women’s work suffered sexist evaluations compared to male artists who were officially commissioned and salaried. Non-payment undermined the idea of professional female artists by adopting a model which promoted amateur painting, and made women artists’ war work accessible only to the independently funded, and thus excluded certain working classes of women from participating in recording the war effort.

Airy was rare among female artists in having been commissioned by the male dominated IWM Art Committee to produce four works of munitions factories, two of which will be addressed below.³⁶ Despite being a well-respected female artist of her generation, Airy was subject to strict terms on her contract of employment, which

³¹ Deepwell, ‘Women War Artists’ 12.

³² Deepwell, ‘Women War Artists’ 20.

³³ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 17.

³⁴ Imperial War Museum, Agnes Conway to Nellie Isaac, 30/ 2, B/4, Part 1, Women’s Work File, 6 February 1919.

³⁵ Deepwell, ‘Women War Artists’ 11.

³⁶ A. Casey (ed.), *Anna Airy 1882-1964: The Story of her Life and Work*, Exhibition Catalogue, Ipswich: Ipswich Art Society (2014), 15.

included the committee's "right to refuse work without payment."³⁷ One such work showed munitions girls leaving for work, produced at the request of the committee in 1919. The work was rejected and for Airy, the embarrassment was so great that she destroyed it, commenting that it would "shortly be found in pieces in the dustbin" thus showing the destructive impact of officially sanctioned patriarchal condemnation.³⁸ The strict terms enforced by the WWS and the Official War Art scheme suggests they recognized the importance of art as a means of communicating to the public the significant role women had played in the war effort, as the enfranchisement of women, even as artists, can be viewed as a contribution to the war effort.

Dedicated to supporting the vote, the first and only complete exhibition of the Women's Work Collection was held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery from October 8 to November 20, 1918, at the culmination of the conflict. The exhibition coincided with the events preceding the December 1918 election, the first in which women voted and stood for election, and claimed that the war extended the "frontiers of women's emancipation and successfully completed the struggle begun by the suffragettes."³⁹ The exhibition presented a historical documentation of the various fields of employment hitherto reserved for men that women had fulfilled, a celebration of the contribution of women to the war effort, which had proved their courage and value to society. However, despite the exhibition's positive reception, women's work was not to take a central position in subsequent displays of war art, suggesting that despite receiving the vote, women did not necessarily achieve equality within society, and they continued to be neglected from the canon of art.

In 1919 the first major exhibition of war art was held at the Imperial War Museum, *The Nation's War Paintings and Other Records at the Burlington House*. Of the "173 artists exhibited, only 9 were women."⁴⁰ In addition, many of the works by female artists were donations rather than commissions. Again this draws attention to the social obstacles faced by female war artists. Not only were fewer of them officially

³⁷ North, Imperial War Museum, Review, 'Witness: Highlights of First World War Art' (2006).

³⁸ Imperial War Museum Archives, 27/2, Anna Airy to Mr Yockney, First World War Artists, 12 June 1919.

³⁹ Kozak, M., 'Women at War: A Celebration', History Workshop, 4, Oxford University Press (1977), 239.

⁴⁰ Deepwell, 'Women War Artists' 26.

commissioned but they also had fewer opportunities to display their work. Clearly these conditions of production and promotion circumscribed what they were able to achieve.

More recently, from 7 February to 19 April 2009 the Imperial War Museum held an exhibition, *Women War Artists*. The exhibition explored the “remarkable experiences and achievements of female war artists from the First World War to the present day.”⁴¹ It was organized into three categories, War Zone, Working Together and Costs of War, and highlighted the range of artists’ responses to the war. According to Elizabeth de Cacqueray, the display was “the first major exhibition of its kind for over fifty years in the UK.”⁴² This confirms that many female artists, particularly First World War artists, had been forgotten. Their artwork, like all aspects of life, returned to the background once the conflict was over. Furthermore the fact that the exhibition was devoted solely to the work of “Women War Artists” suggests that they are still not acknowledged as canonical “war artists,” alongside their established male counterparts. That their work is still regarded as inferior to male colleagues’ work is reiterated in a review *The Telegraph*, which states that, “Not even a handful of the images in this exhibition live up to those harrowingly dark, broken landscapes of the war artists we know.”⁴³ What this review does not however acknowledge are the constraints on women artists of the time, which did not hamper their male colleagues.

Regardless of this, Airy, Neilson-Gray and Mudie-Cooke succeeded in making war art through personal persistence and determination. Undoubtedly their class background and training would have also impacted their success. They each found time to create art while working for the war effort at the front and at home. Both Neilson-Gray’s *The Scottish Women’s Hospital*, 1920, and Airy’s *Shop for Machining 15-inch Shells: Singer Manufacturing Company, Clydebank, Glasgow*, 1918, are featured in the 2014 exhibition *Truth and Memory: British Art of the First World War*. They are considered alongside male artists such as Randolph Schwabe and John Lavery, both of whom were deemed unfit for military service during the First World War and were therefore invited to commemorate home front initiatives. The

⁴¹ ‘Women War Artists’, *Imperial War Museum London Press Release*, 2009.

⁴² E. Cacqueray, ‘Painting the Second World War in Great Britain: A Selection of Women’s Views’, *LISA E-Journal*, 10:1 (2012), 151-167.

⁴³ ‘Women War Artists, Imperial War Museum Review’, *The Telegraph*, 8 April. 2011.

juxtaposition of works by male and female artists highlights Nochlin idea that there is no such thing as a “subtle essence of femininity.”⁴⁴ The quality of women’s war art was equal to that of their male contemporaries, and any perceived difference is therefore down to social obstacles, which have hindered their development and recognition. This exhibition shows that even today, women’s war art is still being singled out, indeed, the room in which their work is displayed is titled “Forgotten Fronts,” suggesting that the works they produced had, since the war, fallen into oblivion.⁴⁵ In the following chapters: the home front and the front I hope to draw attention to the “forgotten” works of Airy, Neilson-Gray and Mudie-Cooke.

⁴⁴ Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power*, 148.

⁴⁵ London, Imperial War Museum, ‘Truth and Memory’, Exhibition, 2015.

Chapter 3: Women on the Home Front

The WWS sought to obtain a complete record of women's war work, by documenting women's work at home and abroad, in closer proximity to the battlefield. Speck categorizes the roles of men and women during the four-year conflict. Men are linked to "front line" violence, and women to the "home front."⁴⁶ In this framework, men fight to protect vulnerable women who in turn support men's efforts. Speck states that, "the location and contribution of women on the home front is on a lesser scale" and hence why it is not often acknowledged when thinking of war art.⁴⁷ However, the view that the home front was a place of idleness and waiting is untrue, since war was experienced both at home and away. Indeed, it infused everyday existence.

The war provided a framework in which, for the first time, women participated across all levels of society on the home front. In December 1914 Fawcett wrote, "Our men have been heroes in the field. When they come back let them find that women have been doing the work at home no less vital for the welfare of the nation."⁴⁸ Women played a vital role in supporting the war effort, becoming involved in all areas of society, "women have arisen in their millions [...] to take up the burden of work temporarily laid down by men who have gone forth to fight."⁴⁹ Whilst women entered areas including the Land Army and the Auxiliary Corps, previously open only to men, here I will focus on the munitions industry, since munitions work was most "nearly connected with war on its offensive side."⁵⁰

In recognition of the crucial role British women played in munitions production, Airy was commissioned to create an artistic record of the impact of the First World War on the British Munitions Industry, and the huge production effort required to wage war. Airy would have seemed a suitable artist to translate women's munitions work into visual terms. One of the few female artists to be trained at the Slade School of Fine Art by, and alongside, male war artists including Henry Tonks and William Orpen,

⁴⁶ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 8.

⁴⁷ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 8.

⁴⁸ D. Rubenstein, *A Different World for Women, The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (Ohio State University 1991), 215.

⁴⁹ G. Stone, *Representative Workers: Women War Workers* (London, George G. Harrap & Company 1917), 12.

⁵⁰ Stone, *Representative Workers*, 14.

Airy was “widely recognized as one of the leading women artists of the day”, frequently exhibiting at the Royal Academy.⁵¹ Commenting on her time at the Slade, she claimed “we were an enterprising lot, constantly on the look-out for fresh material to study.” Indeed Airy was known for her unconventional East end subjects. This perhaps prepared her for the challenging conditions under which she would work during the war. The style in which she worked was not radically new or “modern,” but adhered to the traditional and academic art favored in Britain during this period. As mentioned, this may have appealed to the WWS who perhaps chose more conservative female artists to counter the bold statement of commissioning a woman war artist. In 1918, the WWS commissioned Airy to portray women munitions workers at the London’s South Metropolitan Gas Company, with a view to capitalizing on the national mood to back the cause of votes for women. Airy and the WWS sought to pay homage to female munitions factory workers and *Women Working in a Gas Retort*, 1918 (Fig. 1), was intended as a clear statement of female equality and the triumph of female labour.

Manufacturing gas in retorts, the work was heavy and dirty. It was considered the most dangerous type of work open to women. To many female workers it represented the “grandest chance” to prove themselves in a male dominated world.⁵² In conveying these challenging conditions, *Women Working in a Gas Retort: South Metropolitan Company, London*, 1918 depicts female workers dwarfed by the cumbersome machinery, and engulfed by the intense heat produced by this form of gas production. According to Andrew Casey, the intense heat required Airy to work quickly to capture the “colors of the red hot metal and to deal with oil paints, which dried rapidly under these conditions”, suggesting this work was painted on the spot.⁵³ The female figures’ bodies are shown at extreme angles, conveying the exertion of physical strength. In the foreground, women pull on ropes, and the figure in the top right pushes a heavily laden cart. Airy expresses the danger of working in a Gas Retort by focusing on the intense flames and fire, which dominate the left half of the image. This can perhaps be viewed as an acknowledgement of the women’s bravery as they did not hesitate to participate in such a dangerous environment. Painting from direct

⁵¹ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 231.

⁵² Stone, *Representative Workers*, 44.

⁵³ Casey, *Anna Airy*, 23.

observation, Airy was herself participating in this hazardous situation, recalling the moment at which the “floor got black hot” and she “burned a pair of shoes right off” her feet.⁵⁴ This act of courage suggests that Airy herself went above and beyond the call of duty in order to empower fellow women. Although women did not engage in actual warfare at the front, the work in which they were involved could be equally dangerous, and required a different type of strength and bravery. By commissioning such images, the WWS paid respect to women whose “heroism and even martyrdom” potentially outshone that of men.⁵⁵

In June 1918 Airy was commissioned by the male dominated IWM Munitions Committee to create four paintings representing typical scenes in four munitions factories. Airy visited major factories throughout Britain, including the Singer Manufacturing Company factory, which opened in 1867, and was the first overseas factory of the successful American sewing machine company. During the First World War, the factory switched production to armaments. *The Verdun Shop: 15-inch Shells: Singer Manufacturing Company*, 1918 (Fig. 2) reveals these changes, as well as the ways in which women’s roles had altered. From using domestic machines in the home, women were now employed in factories. They were essentially providing the “hands, which armed the men” and thus supporting the war effort in a significant manner.⁵⁶

Airy depicts an interior view of the munitions factory and, as in *Women Working in a Gas Retort*, she focuses on the factory, the machinery and the weapons. The workers themselves appear diminished by the scale of the workshop and machinery and, as in the previous work, their size and identical uniforms betray little sense of femininity. However in contrast to the dynamic and dangerous conditions of *Women Working in a Gas Retort*, Airy appears to have depicted a much more static, passive scene. The workers are not as physically engaged in, or challenged by, their work. The factory had recently experienced a strike, since women commanded considerably lower wages on the basis that they were unsuited to such environments. Airy alludes to such

⁵⁴ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 39.

⁵⁵ Kozak, ‘Women at War’ 240.

⁵⁶ S. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (Pearson Education, 2002), 29.

sexist discrimination by way of the disorganized production lines and idle workers. The differences between this work and *Women Working in a Gas Retort* may have been a result of the commission from the WWS and the male-dominated IWM Munitions Committee. WWS commissioned image shows the committee's clear political agenda in overtly celebrating the physical strength and ability of the female munitions worker in order to back the suffragist cause, and to produce propaganda in favour of female employment.

Male artists were also invited to paint the munitions factories. Yet they did not appear to be as complementary of female munitions work as Airy. In depicting images of the home front they felt disparaged, believing that their "war" paintings could stand in comparison with scenes of the front line. This idea is expressed by Lavery who, in 1917 was commissioned as an official artist. However, following a car accident he remained in England and spent the war focused mainly on home front subjects. In depicting these subjects, he felt that,

"Instead of the grim harshness and horror of the scenes, I had given charming color versions, as if painting a Bank Holiday on Hampstead Heath [...] I felt nothing of the stark reality, losing sight of my fellow men being blown to pieces in submarines or slowly choking to death in mud. I saw only new beauties in colour and design as seen from above."⁵⁷

This suggests that male artists disparaged industry and work on the home front while female artists saw this type of work as an opportunity to prove themselves. Returning to Higonnet's "double helix," they perhaps felt that in depicting the home front they were not maintaining their position of superiority.⁵⁸ This is particularly apparent when comparing Airy's work with Edward Skinner's *For King and Country*, 1918 produced for the IWM Munitions Committee (Fig. 3).

Where Airy focuses on the factory and machinery, Skinner by contrast focuses on the representation of the women. Women's newfound adoption of traditionally male roles was not a straightforward transition. It was liberating for women but unsettling for

⁵⁷ Angela Wight, 'John Lavery: An Intrepid War Artist', *The Burlington Magazine* (2014), 579.

⁵⁸ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 4.

men in overthrowing the established social order, and many male munitions workers felt threatened. Industrial forms of labour were not considered “appropriate” occupations for women and even though their work was regarded as perfectly efficient they were underpaid when compared with men. In suppressing these anxieties, Skinner exoticises the female workers, depicting them as beautiful objects of the male gaze. In the foreground, a woman playfully offers a shell case to the viewer “as if she were a muse presenting a gift.”⁵⁹ In contrast to the independent, liberated and almost genderless workers pictured in Airy’s works, here the women are depicted at their stations and ordered in rows along the length of the room recalling traditional patriarchal society in which women’s lives were restricted and bound to order.

In contrast to the dangerous and laborious conditions of Airy’s munitions workers, the work they perform appears simplified. The machines seem basic and the women stand on wooden platforms, which is in itself patronizing as it emphasizes their diminutive stature and potential weakness. Skinner devotes particular attention to the women’s dress. Women saw wearing uniform as a patriotic statement for the war effort, however this opinion was widely criticized.⁶⁰ It was believed that it devalued the work of soldiers since women had not experienced the bitter realities of front line conflict.⁶¹ Traditional gender roles in society were being inverted and uniform’s symbolic purpose was threatened. In order to counter these anxieties, Skinner depicts the women in mustard-colored gowns with matching caps emphasizing female fashion as opposed to practicality or patriotism.

Close visual analysis of these works suggests that women’s war art, as with all aspects of the female war effort, was intended as propaganda for women’s emancipation. In commissioning images of female triumph such as Airy’s, the WWS took control of women’s self-presentation, supporting the view that the war provided an opportunity for crossing job barriers, “an advancement in the long haul to women’s emancipation.”⁶² The agenda of Airy’s work for the WWS becomes even more

⁵⁹ Deepwell, ‘Women War Artists’ 28.

⁶⁰ D. Condell and J. Liddiard., *Working for Victory? Images of Women in the First World War, 1914-18* (Routledge & Kegan Paul 1987), 115.

⁶¹ Condell, Liddiard, *Working for Victory?*, 116.

⁶² Kozak, ‘Women at War’ 239.

apparent when it is compared to the works commissioned by the Ministry of Information and in particular Skinner's degrading view of female workers. Furthermore, the large size of Airy's works contrast to Skinner's, further suggesting the propaganda aspect of women's war art by evoking the scale of history painting. However, despite Airy's success in being one of the first women war artists, employed by the newly founded IWM in 1918, she has since suffered neglect, supporting Nochlin's view that it was "institutionally impossible for women to achieve excellence or success on the same footing as men, no matter what their talent, or genius."⁶³

⁶³ L. Nochlin, *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness* (New York, Basic Books 1971), 37.

Chapter 4: Women on the Front

Although women were now engaged in all areas of work on the home front, when war artists were required, few posts were granted to women. Typically male artists were sent to document the war, capturing the conflict near the front, “though they were not actually engaged in warfare.”⁶⁴ It was believed that war artists needed first hand experience of life and conditions at the front, and thus only men could paint wartime landscapes. This was hardly surprising given the prevailing contemporary social attitudes. It was deemed unsuitable for women to witness scenes of such destruction. However, this male only view of war at the front “obscures a range of other spaces just behind the front lines where nurses and VADs operated during the conflict.”⁶⁵ Indeed, these women witnessed first hand the immediacy of causalities, which came “surging into the casualty clearing station hospitals.”⁶⁶ Thus, by expanding the realm of what represents the war torn landscape, and by examining the territory just behind the front, Speck argues that we can gain an insight into the view of the war as experienced by female nurses and VADs.⁶⁷

Serving as a wartime nurses offered women a way of “directly help the military and, by extension, the nation.”⁶⁸ Some medical women saw service in the war zone as “a patriotic duty, and a chance to prove themselves in a man’s world.”⁶⁹ It was believed that it did not pose a “direct challenge to conventional gender roles” since it drew on their “allegedly natural capacities for caring and nurturing.”⁷⁰ Keen to support women’s emancipation the WWS commissioned Neilson-Gray to paint an image of the Scottish Women’s Hospital in France. Prior to the war, Neilson-Gray had embarked on a successful artistic career as one of the Glasgow Girls, a group that actively encouraged and promoted the arts as a profession for women. Indeed, many students and staff of the Glasgow School of Arts were enthusiastically involved in women’s suffrage. Neilson-Gray had been exhibiting her work since 1910, and had

⁶⁴ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 16.

⁶⁵ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 59.

⁶⁶ K. Aide, *Corsets to Camouflage: Women and War* (Hodder & Stoughton Ltd 2003), 89.

⁶⁷ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 60.

⁶⁸ Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, 37.

⁶⁹ L. Leneman, ‘Medical Women at War, 1914-18’, *Medical History*, Cambridge Journal, 38:2, (1994), 160.

⁷⁰ Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, 37.

her own studio where she painted portraits. However, with the onset of the war, she volunteered as a nurse with the Scottish Women's Hospital, and was sent to France where she found time to sketch between shifts. Whilst it is unclear whether or not any of these sketches exist, in a letter of May 31, 1920 to the WWS, Neilson-Gray stressed that in "every case the thing painted has been seen at the hospital" she had been a witness to the many events at the hospital throughout the conflict.⁷¹ She would therefore have seemed an obvious choice to the WWS who desired an image of the Scottish Women's Hospital, as an artist's comment on the new occupations of women, which Neilson-Gray herself worked in. Furthermore, like Airy, she was working in a style of art that was not radically new but adhered to more conservative academic conventions.

The Scottish Women's hospital housed in a former Cistercian abbey, was of particular importance to the WWS since it was one of the only wartime hospitals managed "completely by women."⁷² It had been set up by Dr. Elsie Inglis, and represented to the WWS an important instance of the relationship between "suffrage activities and women's war work, which they wished to celebrate."⁷³ Neilson-Gray's first image, *Hopital Auxiliaire* 1918 (Fig. 4) was rejected by the WWS since it did not meet the Sub-Committee's requirements. In a letter to Neilson-Gray, Conway explained that although "we like this picture from an artistic point of view, it does not give sufficient prominence to women, if it is to be shown as a record of women's work."⁷⁴ In the initial work a more crowded composition meant that the nurses were obscured by the prominent depictions of a group of soldiers. Instead the WWS wanted a romanticized image that focused on the respectable profession of nursing, and particularly the hospital's female Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Ivens. Conway had been detailed in her requirements for the painting, "the important point about this picture ought to be the work and the interest should therefore centre around the figures and beds in the cloister."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Deepwell, 'Women War Artists' 22.

⁷² Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, 38.

⁷³ Deepwell, 'Women War Artists' 21.

⁷⁴ Imperial War Museum Archive, E/ 50, Agnes Conway to Miss N. Neilson Gray, Women's Work Subcommittee file, 4 March 1920.

⁷⁵ Imperial War Museum Archive, E/50, Agnes Conway to Miss N. Neilson Gray, Women's Work Subcommittee file, July 1919.

Neilson-Gray's *The Scottish Women's Hospital: In the Cloister of the Abbaye at Royaumont. Dr. Frances Ivens inspecting a French patient*, 1919, (Fig. 5) is a compelling image of female care, set in the open cloisters of the French abbey. Royaumont had been developed into an "efficient and modern" hospital that conformed to new scientific ideas on health and hygiene.⁷⁶ Adhering to the WWS's stipulations, the image focuses on two female nurses dressed in crisp white and blue loosely fitted gowns, poised at the bedside of a wounded soldier, while the central figure of Dr. Ivens engages with the viewer by looking directly out of the picture frame. Medicine was one of the most prestigious professions and having a woman doctor celebrated in an artwork for her war work was a novelty and an expression of admiration. In addition to the soldiers waiting to return to their units, nurses are re-arranging beds from which the men have recently left. This implies the success of care and treatment at the hospital, essentially displaying the positive results of the women's labor. The obvious transformation from Neilson-Gray's *Hopital Auxiliaire* highlights the fundamental differences between the more "formal arrangement" demanded to fulfill the WWS's commission and requirements in contrast to what Neilson-Gray initially painted, based on her own experiences of the hospital.⁷⁷ However, the clear divide, separating the nurses and Dr. Ivens from the group of uniformed soldiers standing to the right is perhaps a subtle comment on Neilson-Gray's experiences within the hospital, suggesting that despite women taking on such prestigious roles they were not wholly accepted or integrated within the military environment of nursing.

Indeed, much of the work of nurses and particularly in connection with the war was met with a degree of hostility. Female nurses were often perceived as a threat to the patriarchal status quo unless they conformed to an accepted template of the nurse as maternal and nun-like. However, Grayzel notes that working in such close proximity, intimate contact with injured soldiers was, to some degree, inevitable.⁷⁸ In *The Forbidden Zone*, 1929, Mary Borden explores the inversion of traditional gender positions in wartime field nursing and outlines contemporary views of the power that

⁷⁶ Deepwell, 'Women War Artists' 22.

⁷⁷ Deepwell, 'Women War Artists' 23.

⁷⁸ Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, 40.

nurses gained through the blood shed of men.⁷⁹ Furthermore it has been suggested that they used their “locus of care to tyrannize, humiliate and control sick men.”⁸⁰

These cultural anxieties emerge in the painting of George Coates, *Arrival at First Australian Wounded at Gallipoli at Wandsworth Hospital, London, 1921* (Fig. 6) commissioned by the Australian War Records Section. Coates had been working as a hospital orderly in London, and had therefore observed the matron’s orders. In this image, he infuses his own unease about the power of nurses exercising “undue power and control over men in their weakened state.”⁸¹ In contrast to the open setting of Neilson-Gray’s image, Coates depicts a dark interior scene. The confined domestic space perhaps alludes to the stereotypes regarding the spaces which women historically had access. The tender and caring nurses depicted in the *Scottish Women’s Hospital* have been replaced by two matronly figures, whose presence exudes elements of power and authority. The man becomes a passive figure over whom the woman has power. In contrast to the light and practical dress of Neilson-Gray’s nurses, they wear dark nun-like gowns. In the background of the *Wounded at Gallipoli* the uniformed soldiers carry a stretcher, signaling the arrival of a wounded soldier. These figures can be starkly contrasted with the group of uniformed soldiers in the *Scottish Women’s Hospital*, who have been treated and are waiting to return to their units. Thus, in contrast to the life and vitality expressed in Neilson-Gray’s work, here Coates alludes to a depressing image of nursing during the war and the prevalent anxieties of women as nurses.

As VADs women found themselves in even closer proximity to the front line driving both ambulances and acting as field nurses. Established in 1909 the VAD system of field nursing services operated under the British Red Cross.⁸² They were voluntary organizations and thus the roles were limited to upper and middle class women and offered them the opportunity to travel beyond the domestic sphere into a world of “motorized masculinity” where they retrieved the “wounded and the dead from deadly

⁷⁹ M. Borden, ‘Conspiracy’, *The Forbidden Zone*, in S.P. Sheldon (ed.), *Her War Story: Twentieth Century Women Write about War* (Illinois 1999), 23.

⁸⁰ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 63.

⁸¹ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 63.

⁸² Marwick, *Women at War*, 83.

positions”⁸³ Mudie-Cooke’s social background, coupled with her keen interest in life, to travel and observe was such that with the onset of the war she and her sister Phyllis served as VADs. Prior to the war Mudie-Cooke had studied at St John’s Wood Art School and at Goldsmith’s College, and had worked in Venice for a short period. Following the war Mudie-Cooke returned to her hometown of Newlyn, in Cornwall, where she was commissioned by the WWS to make drawings of her time as a VAD. It is therefore likely that during her time in France Mudie-Cooke had been carefully observing and sketching the scenes she saw around her. The image, *Kemmel, From Hooge* (Fig. 7) is a brief sketch depicting a motor ambulance on a tree-lined road. Such sketches would have inevitably aided Mudie-Cooke’s works, which were created on her return. Working as a VAD driver Mudie-Cooke would have been concerned with the practical mapping of the landscape and according to Palmer, the job gave her the “personal experience that people associate with war artists.”⁸⁴ However, despite working in such close proximity to the battlefield and witnessing the reality of the conflict, Mudie-Cooke neglects to show the absolute horrors of the war. Her reluctance to represent the “unpleasant” was perhaps a part of the contract set by the WWS, which wanted to show only the positive aspects of female care.⁸⁵

In her watercolor, *In an Ambulance: VAD Lighting a Cigarette for a Patient*, 1918 (Fig. 8), Mudie-Cooke conveys the very human and poignant side of the war with a strong sense of actuality. This image presents the female reassurance and attempt to comfort in contrast to the open battlefield from which this man has come. The ambulances operated by women provided a “domestic retreat” and gave a sense of hope to wounded soldiers.⁸⁶ Mudie-Cooke displays a private glimpse into how the VAD seeks to minimize the patient’s pain by means of the distraction of a lighted cigarette. The soft flicker of light reflects back on the nurse, revealing her compassion and “total concentration in helping her patient.”⁸⁷ Working in watercolor enabled Mudie-Cooke to capture the simplicity and intimacy of the scene. Furthermore, despite being produced on her return, the looser brushwork perhaps

⁸³ S. Gilbert, ‘Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women and the Great War’ in Higonet, M. R. (ed.) *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (Yale University Press 1989), 214.

⁸⁴ ‘Witness: Women War Artists at IWM North’, *Culture 24*, 11 February 2009.

⁸⁵ Kozak, ‘Women at War’ 240.

⁸⁶ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 66.

⁸⁷ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 66.

alludes to the conditions under which she worked, sketching between shifts. This emphasizes the fact that many female war artists of the First World War were working women with essential and difficult roles to perform outside their art.

Despite Mudie-Cooke's compassionate image of field nursing, this view was not universally shared. In Eric Kennington's *Gassed and Wounded*, 1918 (Fig. 9), he depicts an interior scene of a Casualty Clearing Station near Peronne, showing only male medical personnel. Like Mudie-Cooke's sketch, the work was based on a series of drawings made in Tincourt Casualty Clearing Station and completed on Kennington's return to London. However, in contrast to the domestic retreat provided by the ambulance in Mudie-Cooke's image, here Kennington depicts the horrors of working just behind the front line. Instead of the lone soldier being comforted by the VAD worker, we are presented with a crowded scene of gassed and wounded soldiers lying side by side on stretchers. In the foreground, a soldier lies with his eyes covered and his mouth wide open in an expression of pain as he is carried by the prominently positioned male orderly. Like the work of Mudie-Cooke, the scene is lit by one source of light. However, this source of light does not soften the scene, but illuminates the disturbed faces of the blinded soldiers. These differing representations shed light on a male artist and a female artist's experiences during the conflict, and what was deemed suitable for women to depict. In working near to the front as a VAD, Mudie-Cooke had gained an insight into the reality of war. However due to the commonly held belief that "a woman, who at least theoretically remained unwounded, should not attempt to describe this hell or the masculine heroism it engendered" Mudie-Cooke does not detail the horrors of the war.⁸⁸ Kennington by contrast had served in the army from 1914-15 and, following an incident on the Western Front, was "invalidated" and spent four months in hospital.⁸⁹ This experience is likely to have influenced his more brutal portrayal of this region behind the front line.

From studying the works of Neilson-Gray and Mudie-Cooke it becomes clear that in spite of it being deemed unsuitable for women to work on the front line, they in fact

⁸⁸M. Higonnet, 'Not So Quiet in No Woman's Land' in M. Cooke, A. Woollacott (eds), *Gendering War Talk* (Princeton 1999), 206.

⁸⁹ Imperial War Museum, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/15123>, [accessed 20 March, 2015].

worked very close to the front in their capacity as nurses and VADs. In doing so, they witnessed the destruction and devastation of war at first hand and, like their male contemporaries, sketched their experiences. The new phenomenon of nursing within the war torn landscape supports the idea that, as a result of the war, spheres of female activity and access greatly enlarged, which is reflected in their art.⁹⁰ The work of both Neilson-Gray and Mudie-Cooke was based on personal experience in the profession with which they best identified. As in the triumphant representations of women on the Home Front, the WWS took control of women's self-presentation on the front, commemorating certain individuals such as Dr. Ivens for her achievement in succeeding as a female doctor in such a male dominated environment. Comparing the works produced by Neilson-Gray and Mudie-Cooke for the WSS, with those of Coates and Kennington, the overt political agenda of the WWS, which was to support women's emancipation becomes clear. Like the work of Airy, Neilson-Gray's *Scottish Women's Hospital* is depicted on a similarly large scale. This can be contrasted to Kennington's more modestly scaled canvas, highlighting the importance of women's war art as a means of communicating the significant roles of women during the war. Furthermore, in contrast to Neilson-Gray's celebratory view of women as nurses, Coates expresses the anxieties surrounding the idea of women working in such close proximity to men, and portrayals such as these diminished the place of nurses and VADs, by highlighting the "male resistance to a changing military culture."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Grayzel, *Women and First World War*, 117.

⁹¹ Speck, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 64.

Conclusion

In considering the female art of war, this dissertation has challenged the view that the “fashioning of national identities in wartime is an exclusively male preserve, and that male artists had the monopoly on depicting the war effort.”⁹² Rather, building upon Deepwell’s discussion it has shown that women used “war art” to fashion their own distinctly female identity and ultimately contribute to women’s right to vote.⁹³ This was granted in 1918, to all British women over the age of thirty, and has been directly linked to women’s roles in the war.⁹⁴ In assessing the role of the war in women’s enfranchisement, this dissertation has also drawn on the feminist approach of scholars, to argue that women’s art was historically confined to the spheres to which women had access, this is no less true of women’s art.⁹⁵ However, as a result of the war, it has shown that the spheres of female activity and access to previously male dominated roles were greatly enlarged.

The three artists on whom this dissertation has focused, Airy, Neilson-Gray and Mudie-Cook as well as the WWS, sought to capitalize on the national mood towards women by documenting women’s war work and, more specifically, the most prestigious or dangerous occupations in which they were involved. As eyewitnesses, women artists worked in a similar manner to their male counterparts, and gained the necessary personal experience of various scenes both at home and on the front which typically characterise stereotypes of the war artist. Close visual analysis of Airy, Neilson-Gray and Mudie-Cook’s works and assessments of the WWS statements, suggests that women’s war art was undertaken as a form of propaganda, in an effort to support the vote and increased female emancipation. This idea is conveyed by the grand scale of their works, which place women’s achievements on the heroic scale of history paintings and shares in this genre’s glorification and heroicization of those depicted, as well as in the carefully tailored subject matter. On the “home front” Airy’s works celebrate the accomplishments of women in the munitions industry, glorifying and heroicizing those involved. It demonstrated that despite being at home,

⁹² A. Whitley, ‘The Politics of Vision: Women War Artists’, *The RUSI Journal*, 156: 5 (2011), 102.

⁹³ Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, 135.

⁹⁴ Grayzel, S., *Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (UNC Press Books, 1999), 190.

⁹⁵ Foster, *Tate Women Artists*, 8.

the work in which they were involved required both bravery and physical strength but also proved they were capable of performing previously male dominated roles. At the “front,” women worked as nurses and VADs as close to the front line as was deemed appropriate. However, this space did not extend to the landscape, which was exclusively depicted by male artists. Neilson-Gray and Mudie-Cooke witnessed the devastation and immediacy of casualties believed to be for the eyes of men only, yet offer compassionate views of life on the home front and commemorate certain individuals such as Dr. Ivens for their tremendous war work. By comparing the work of female artists with those of men, which deal with similar subjects, this dissertation has underlined the differences in the perceptions of women artists depicting fellow women, from those of the male artists who either condescendingly depict women, as in the case of Skinner’s *For King and Country*, dehumanize them, as in Coates’ *First Australian wounded at Gallipoli arriving at Wandsworth Hospital*, London, or avoid showing them altogether as in Kennington’s *Gassed and Wounded*, as a means of upholding the patriarchal status quo. Such comparisons again highlight the propaganda aspect of female war art.

Despite the success and greater independence afforded to Airy, Neilson-Gray and Mudie-Cooke during the war, they have since been neglected from the artistic canon, suggesting that the impact of the war on female identities was not permanent. The war did not prove a change in the popular opinion of women. Just as women returned to their pre-war feminine roles, women war artists remained restricted by the traditional patriarchal society in terms of promoting and exhibiting their work, making their full participation in the art world almost impossible. Given this context of male prejudice, it is perhaps unsurprising that despite the tremendous war effort on the part of women, as well as the self-tailored representations of women during the First World War in support of the vote discussed above, “it was not until ten years later that suffrage was extended to women over the age of twenty-one.”⁹⁶ Even with this increased freedom, the restriction of women as war artists extended to the conflict of 1939-45. Again, in the Second World War, women artists were excluded from working in close proximity to the front, and no women received the prestigious post of an official war

⁹⁶ Foster, *Tate Women Artists*, 59.

artist.⁹⁷ It was not until 1982 when “Linda Kitson (1945) was commissioned by the IWM to document the Falklands Conflict, that a British female artist was sent overseas to accompany troops into battle.”⁹⁸ Furthermore, the commissioning of women’s war art during the Second World War remained biased. Both male and female artists came under the control of the War Artist’s Advisory Committee. However, inclusion did not mean an end to discrimination since “less than ten percent” of the work purchased by Kenneth’s committee was by women.⁹⁹

As the Women’s Movement and Second Wave Feminism grew in the 1970s and eighties, “attitudes to women have changed dramatically, and women artists now operate in a very different climate.”¹⁰⁰ The Women’s Movement built upon the achievements of women’s suffrage and strove for a society in which women achieved equal rights and access to the same opportunities as their male colleagues. A further study might assess the evolving role of women as war artists in connection with the wider context of women’s rights. From the beginning of the 1970s most Western armies began to admit women to “serve active duty.”¹⁰¹ This increased accessibility to war zones has popularized the role of contemporary women war artists, manifested most obviously in the reportage of conflicts in the Middle East by female journalists and reporters.

However, in this dissertation, I hope I have shown that despite not achieving populist acclaim, the work of the First World War female artists quietly contributed to improving the position of women in society, and accelerated the process towards general equality by commemorating the valuable contribution of women towards the war effort.

⁹⁷ Palmer, *Women War Artists*, 7.

⁹⁸ Palmer, *Women War Artists*, 7.

⁹⁹ Foster, *Tate Women Artists*, 59.

¹⁰⁰ Deepwell, ‘Women War Artists’ 81.

¹⁰¹ H. Carreiras, *Gender and the Military: Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies*, Routledge, (2006), 1.

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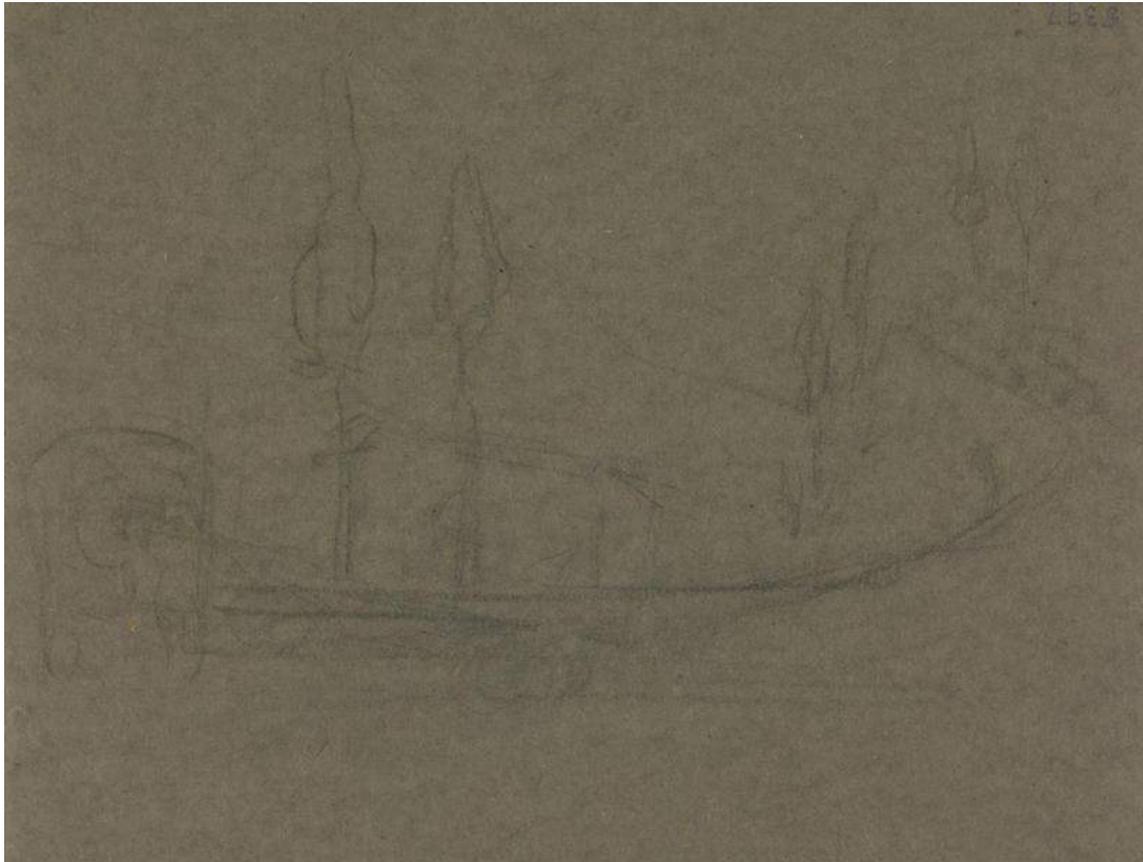


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