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THE "NEW WOMAN" IN FIN-DE-SIECLE ART:
FRANCES AND MARGARET MACDONALD

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ABSTRACT

Scottish artists Margaret and Frances Macdonald produced their most innovative art during the last decade of the nineteenth century. They received their training at the Glasgow School of Art and became known for their contribution to "the Glasgow Style," Scotland's answer to Continental Art nouveau and Symbolism. Although they inherited their visual vocabulary from the male-dominated language of the fin-de-siècle, they produced representations of women that differed from those made by their male colleagues. I suggest that these representations were informed by the female experience and that they must be understood as such if we, as historians, are to discuss their art. Like many other women artists from this period, the Macdonalds relied heavily upon so-called feminine imagery. This could be flower painting, "dainty" landscapes, pictures of children or pictures of "lovely" women. The Macdonalds strayed from conventional meaning, however, and made pictures of women that, while retaining the mystery of symbolism, presented the viewer with contextually accurate representations of women who were bound and restricted by a society that had not yet allowed women the vote. I suggest that these representations be considered in the light of recent theoretical developments in feminist literary criticism and feminist film theory

which give credence to women as producers of culture while remaining aware that culture is a patriarchal construction. My contention is that if we can comprehend the patriarchal construct of woman during the fin-de-siècle then we may be able to understand how the Macdonalds (and other women like them) strayed from this representation and made their own images (perhaps in their own likeness or at least in the likeness of their situation). Knowledge about how women's experience was integrated into the visual language may lead us to a greater understanding of that experience and its subsequent production as art and, in addition, may bring about a greater valuation of women's experience and its representation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One.....	19
Newbery's Early Career.....	21
Nineteenth Century Glasgow.....	26
The Glasgow School of Art and Haldane Academy, 1888-90.....	41
The 1890-91 Academic Year.....	48
The 1891-92 and 1892-93 Academic Years.....	65
The Final Year of Registration.....	73
Chapter Two: The Early Watercolours.....	76
The Final Year at the Glasgow School of Art.....	76
The Critics.....	83
The Early Watercolours.....	96
<u>Girl in the East Wind with Ravens Passing the Moon</u>	98
<u>Summer</u>	114
<u>The Fountain</u>	125
Chapter Three: The Studio Years.....	132
The Posters.....	137
<u>The Yellow Book</u>	146
The 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition.....	152
The Hope Street Studio Art.....	169
The Vienna Secession, 1900.....	177
Chapter Four: Frances Macdonald MacNair.....	184
The Liverpool Years.....	197
The Glasgow Years.....	210
Chapter Five: Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh.....	239
Margaret Macdonald's Watercolours, 1900-1913...	247
The Chelsea Years.....	278
The Last Watercolours.....	286
The Last Years in France.....	289
Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	295
Bibliography.....	319

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1: Frances Macdonald. Programme for a Glasgow School of Art Club "At Home," c.1893. Lithograph or line block. 13.1 x 15.6. Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 2: Frances Macdonald. A Pond, 1894. Pencil and watercolour on grey paper. 32.0 x 25.8. Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow.
- Figure 3: Frances Macdonald. Girl in the East Wind with Ravens Passing the Moon, 1893. Watercolour. 518 x 427. Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 4: Margaret Macdonald. Summer, 1894. Pencil, ink and watercolour. 51.7 x 18. Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 5: Frances and Margaret Macdonald. The Fountain, c.1894. Watercolour. 41.2 x 16.4. Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 6: William Holman Hunt. The Triumph of the Innocents, c.1885. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.
- Figure 7: Matthijs Maris. The Foundling, 1874. Burrell Collection, Glasgow.
- Figure 8: Charles Rennie Mackintosh, "Design for some finger plates," in The Bailie, 7 June 1893, p.9.
- Figure 9: Margaret Macdonald. Invitation card for a Glasgow School of Art "At Home", c.1893. Lithograph or line cut. 13.1 x 15.6. Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 10: C. F. A. Voysey. Design for a Wall-Paper Frieze, 1893. In The Studio, Vol.1, 1893.
- Figure 11: Giovanni Segantini. The Punishment of Luxury, 1891. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.
- Figure 12: Margaret Macdonald. "The Annunciation" from The Christmas Story, c.1895-6. Pencil, watercolour, gold and silver paint on vellum sheet. 32.4 x 23.0. Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 13: Frances Macdonald. The Sleeping Princess, c.1895. Pastel. 190 x 464. Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow.

- Figure 14: Frances Macdonald. Autumn, 1898. Pencil and watercolour on vellum. 454 x 147. Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow.
- Figure 15: Frances Macdonald. Spring, 1897. Watercolour on vellum. 442 x 131. Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow.
- Figure 16: Margaret Macdonald. Summer, 1897. Watercolour on vellum. 451 x 205. Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow.
- Figure 17: Margaret Macdonald. Winter, 1898. Pencil and watercolour on vellum. 472 x 196. Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow.
- Figure 18: Frances Macdonald, Margaret Macdonald, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Herbert MacNair. The Scottish Room at the Vienna Secession, 1900. As reproduced in Dekorative Kunst, Vol. VII, 1901.
- Figure 19: Frances Macdonald. The Legend of the Snowdrops, 1900. Gouache painting. 185.0 x 55.0. National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh.
- Figure 20: Frances Macdonald. The Frog Prince, c.1898. As reproduced in Dekorative Kunst, 1901.
- Figure 21: The MacNair room at the First International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art, Turin, 1902. As reproduced in Dekorative Kunst, Vol.X, 1902.
- Figure 22: Frances Macdonald. 'Tis a long path that wanders to desire, c.1912-15. Watercolour and pencil on vellum. 35.2 x 30.1. Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 23: Frances Macdonald. Man makes the beads of life but woman must thread them, c.1912-15. Watercolour. 34.3 x 29.2. Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 24: Frances Macdonald. Prudence and Desire. c.1912-1915. Watercolour. 34 x 29.4. Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.

- Figure 25: Frances Macdonald. Woman behind the Sun, c.1912-15. Watercolour. 34 x 29.4. Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 26: Margaret Macdonald. The Pool of Silence, 1913. Watercolour and ink. 75.8 x 63.5. Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 27: Margaret Macdonald. The Sleeper. Untraced work. Photograph from Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration, 1905.
- Figure 28: Margaret Macdonald. The Mysterious Garden, 1911. Watercolour and ink on vellum. 45.7 x 48.3. Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 29: Margaret Macdonald. The White Rose and the Red Rose, before 1909. Painted gesso set with string, glass beads and shell. 99.0 x 101.5. Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 30: Margaret Macdonald. The Mysterious Garden, c.1904-06. Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 31: Margaret Macdonald. La Mort Parfumée, exhibited 1921. Watercolour. 63.0 x 71.2. Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.
- Figure 32: Margaret Macdonald. The Legend of the Blackthorns, exhibited 1922. Watercolour. 40 x 34. Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.

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INTRODUCTION

The following pages begin with an end and speak of failure not success. This may be somewhat unusual for the history of art but not out of the ordinary, I suspect, for a discussion of the careers of women artists. Although my thesis considers the education and careers of two individual nineteenth century Scottish artists, Margaret and Frances Macdonald, what I have discovered about them is more typical than atypical of female art students and female artists in general during this era in the United Kingdom. Anthea Callen, in Angel in the Studio: Women Artists in the Arts and Crafts Movement (1979), presents an overview of the situation for nineteenth century English designers with a focus upon women trained and working in crafts. I intend to let specifics lead to generalizations and to go beyond "craft" into the world of the Symbolist movement. The decadent world of fin-de-siècle informed much of the Macdonalds' art and, because of this, the women entered the exotic realm of the Aesthete. Like many artists of the period, they designed bookplates, jewellery and embroidered hangings; they also painted and therefore cannot be slotted exclusively into "arts and crafts." In addition, they inhabited the grey, shifting zone of the 1890s: the arts and crafts movement was winding towards its end; modern art was preparing for birth and would, within fifteen years, spawn

Vanessa Bell and Gwen John, artists more in tune with the rational aesthetic of Roger Fry and more sympathetic to the clear formal analysis of line, colour and design. Margaret and Frances Macdonald moved beyond the role of the female helpmate so strongly associated with arts and crafts but were unable to make the leap into the modern world like their younger contemporaries at the Slade or in Bloomsbury. The Macdonalds studied design with a heavy emphasis placed upon originality. However, they were unable to sustain innovation or to wed uniqueness to perseverance. The inevitable question is, why?

Margaret Macdonald and her sister Frances entered the Glasgow School of Art in the fall of 1890. They received an outstanding education at the School, which is discussed in Chapter One. The Glasgow School of Art was one of the leading art schools in the United Kingdom, and Margaret and Frances were among its most promising students. Because Glasgow was part of what, since 1857, had been called the "South Kensington system,"¹ its students participated in the National Competition for Schools of Art and hence were judged by national not local standards. Students who succeeded at this level were among the best in Britain.

When their student days ended they and two of their

¹ See Stuart Macdonald, The History and Philosophy of Art Education (New York, 1970), for a discussion of the history of the art education system in Britain. For the origin of the designation "South Kensington system," see 226-7.

colleagues, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Herbert MacNair, joined together to become the Glasgow Four and as such they exhibited in London and on the continent. The Four received excellent reviews from German and Austrian critics and mixed reviews from British critics. However, by 1900, success seemed imminent. It was not achieved. A decade later one rarely heard of Margaret or Frances Macdonald although Margaret's name still appeared now and then in connection with that of her husband, the famous and influential architect, Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Both Frances and Herbert MacNair (Frances married Herbert in 1899) had faded from sight. Frances died in 1921; she was forty-eight years old. After this, Margaret produced an occasional watercolour, usually for family or for friends and, on rare occasions, designed fabric for printed textiles.² She died in January 1933.

Hence the development of promising careers proved to be a slow stuttering from initial success to obscurity. However, a very abrupt and almost official termination can be precisely dated. This official end came in 1933 with the Memorial Exhibition for Mackintosh who had died in 1928. If the two sisters' early glow dimmed slowly, this marked the extinguishing of reputations that might-have-been. Neither of the women would surface in the world of art again (with

² See Roger Billcliffe, Mackintosh Textile Designs (London, 1982), for reproductions of some of Macdonald's textile designs as well as for a discussion of her patrons.

the exception of occasional references made to them in discussions of the more famous Mackintosh) until 1983 when the Hunterian Art Gallery in Glasgow mounted an exhibition of Margaret Macdonald's art and included art made by Frances.³

The 1933 conclusion to the careers of Margaret and Frances Macdonald is methodically set down in letters that were exchanged between the Glasgow organizers of the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Memorial Exhibition and P. Morton Shand, a London critic who frequently contributed to The Architectural Review, and who wrote favourably about Mackintosh's architecture. He introduced himself to the exhibition organizers and announced to them that he would comment upon and publicize the exhibition. In one such letter dated March 1933, Shand told Glasgow that he had written of the exhibition to the "architectural papers."⁴ He also assured them that he had informed his colleagues on the Continent of the upcoming exhibition and that he had

³ Pamela Reekie Robertson's catalogue for that exhibition is the only critical work to date that addresses the female members of the Glasgow Four. See Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, 1864-1933, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow. The recent exhibition, 'Glasgow Girls:' Women in Art and Design, 1880-1920, Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow (23 August to 21 October 1990) includes a significant section on the Macdonalds. See also 'Glasgow Girls:' Women in Art and Design, 1880-1920 edited by Jude Burkhauser (Edinburgh, 1990).

⁴ Letter of P. Morton Shand to William Davidson, 31 March 1933. These letters are held by the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, Glasgow and I thank them for permission to use them.

urged them to comment. However, he made it clear that he disapproved of the role Margaret Macdonald had played in Mackintosh's work. He repeated his damning comments several times and he also made his feelings known in the press.⁵

In a private letter dated March 1933 he wrote:

It is for these reasons that I hope that the exhibition may not be so arranged or announced as to give the impression that Mrs. Mackintosh was in any sense considered her husband's equal, or 'alter ego.' Outside of circles of loyal friends in Glasgow and Chelsea her work is either unknown, or long since forgotten; and the future is scarcely likely to see her rather thin talent restored to a place of honour....Mrs. Mackintosh was scarcely even a Mrs. Browning to her Robert.⁶

In another letter to Macdonald, Smith & Co., a law firm which included Margaret's brother, Shand wrote that "his [Mackintosh's] wife was only a rather thin Aubrey Beardsley mannerism of the arty-crafty type which never could have had any permanent value."⁷ In a letter written in April, Shand expressed the hope that Mackintosh's work could be included in a major London exhibition that was, at that time, only in the planning stages. However, he made it clear that the

⁵ See for example, P. Morton Shand, "Scenario for a Human Drama: The Glasgow Interlude," in The Architectural Review, January 1935, 25.

⁶ Letter from P. Morton Shand to William Davidson, March 1933. Archives of the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow. Robertson also points out the damage done to Margaret "...through inevitable comparisons with Mackintosh," particularly by critics such as Morton Shand.

⁷ Letter from Shand to Macdonald, Smith & Co. dated 20 March 1933. Hunterian Art Gallery.

work should be "chiefly or wholly Mackintosh," rather than work done in collaboration with his wife.⁸ His public comments were as vitriolic as his private ones. For example, in his entry on Mackintosh in the Dictionary of National Biography, 1922-30, he wrote that, "His wife, though of a decidedly inferior artistic calibre, was his constant inspiration and collaborator in all his decorative work."⁹ In an article for The Architectural Review he charged Macdonald with the responsibility for Mackintosh's failures:

...Mackintosh's use of a plain surface was the reflection of a purely ornamental, and in no sense constructional principle. Only when he had to build, and so work in a single harness, does he seem to have seen beyond that narrower orbit of his own vision which was his wife's. It would appear to have been the florid coarseness of her wholly inferior decorative talent and a firm insistence on 'me too' that too often led him into an uxorious ornamental vulgarity.¹⁰

Macdonald's friends must be credited with challenging Shand's view. For example, William Davidson wrote to Randolph Schwabe, a Slade professor and close friend of the Mackintoshes as well as to Jeffrey Waddell, an architect,

⁸ Letter from P. Morton Shand, London to William Davidson, Glasgow, 16 April 1933 (Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow).

⁹ P. Morton Shand in the Dictionary of National Biography, 1922-30 (Oxford, 1937).

¹⁰ P. Morton Shand, 'Scenario for a Human Drama: the Glasgow Interlude,' in The Architectural Review, January 1935, 25.

asking them to make "a few enquiries judiciously....It is advisable we should know at once his [Shand's] status, etc."¹¹ Schwabe replied on two different occasions. The first letter confirmed Shand's reputation as a "writer on architectural subjects" who had been recently "concerned in some notorious divorce proceedings."¹² The second announced that Shand was "vouched for by the R.I.B.A. [Royal Institute of British Architects] as a free-lance journalist of some repute and one who has lectured for the institute."¹³ This did not squelch Davidson's concerns and, after Shand had asked him to comment on his article for The Architectural Review, Davidson confronted him:

By the way, your reference to Mrs. Mackintosh is, I think, a mistake, because she was a very great artist also, although quite different from her husband, & I feel in the same way that in time her greatness will be better known. Her work, admittedly, was of a very exceptional kind, and it doesn't appeal to the 'man in the street,' and even doesn't appeal to many artists, or, might I put it, so-called artists,....MMM undoubtedly was original and creative, very strongly so, also poetic; indeed almost to an excessive extent. For that reason I think it would have been better, even for your own sake, to have kept out the reference to her, & if it is not too late yet, it might be worth

¹¹ Letter to J. Jeffrey Waddell from William Davidson dated 5 April 1933. Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow.

¹² Letter from Randolph Schwabe to William Davidson dated 8 April 1933. Hunterian Art Gallery.

¹³ Letter from Randolph Schwabe to William Davidson dated 18 April 1933. Hunterian Art Gallery.

your while considering this.¹⁴

However, Shand published the article within weeks. His attitude toward Macdonald was accepted and entered the discourse on Mackintosh.¹⁵ This opinion has not since been challenged and, in many instances, is simply "written into" discussions of Mackintosh.¹⁶

As for Frances, Shand wanted her left out of the 1933 exhibition because her connection with Mackintosh was only through the Glasgow Four. Nevertheless, when the exhibition opened, a piece of metalwork of hers was included, the

¹⁴ Letter from William Davidson to P. Morton Shand dated 17 December 1934. Hunterian Art Gallery.

¹⁵ The Hunterian Art Gallery only recently received the Davidson correspondence. In the spring of 1990 it had not even been catalogued and I thank Pamela Robertson for allowing me access to this material. One must always question why Shand did this and his reasons do emerge from his correspondence. For example, in at least two instances Shand alludes to difficulties he had in being able to "get at" Mackintosh while Macdonald was around. (Letter to Macdonald, Smith & Co., 20 March 1933. Hunterian Art Gallery.) Shand also indicated that Macdonald's "fine loyalty to her husband made her resent any questioning of her husband's sole title to be considered the Father and Founder of Modernism as a sort of blasphemy," and that this attitude "made some difficulties about putting certain data and material at my disposal." (Ibid.) Curiously, one might also wonder about the effect of a "notorious divorce" upon Shand and his attitude toward women.

¹⁶ See for example, Thomas Howarth's, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement (London, 1952) and Robert Macleod's, Charles Rennie Mackintosh (Feltham, Middlesex, 1968). See also Roger Billcliffe's publications on Mackintosh's career including, Mackintosh Watercolours (London, 1978), Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs (2nd edition, 1980), Mackintosh Textile Designs (London, 1982).

Honesty Mirror c.1896.¹⁷ If Glasgow School of Art records are correct and the works of Margaret and Frances compared, Frances emerges as the more talented, innovative student. Frances showed much more promise than her older sister and, consequently, one would expect her early achievements to have materialized into even greater successes as she matured.

In this dissertation, Chapters One and Two look at the early years in the careers of the sisters and the work produced during those years. The first chapter considers the Glasgow School of Art and the Macdonald sisters' place in the School; the second discusses the art the women made during their final year as students. In addition to the art, I am concerned with the language of the critics, both supporters and detractors, and its possible impact on the artists. Peter Burke raised the issue of language and its importance in The Italian Renaissance, Culture and Society in Italy (1987) and then pursued this in The Social History of Language (edited with Roy Porter, 1987). Burke's interest in a social history of speech and a social history of communication complements a concern for the role of women in history. "In the last generation or so," he writes, "as

¹⁷ See the catalogue for the Memorial Exhibition, 1933, cat.116. The catalogue attributed this to Margaret Macdonald "in conjunction with her sister, Frances." However, when the mirror was reproduced in The Studio, Vol.XI, 1897, (p.87) it was attributed correctly to Frances Macdonald alone.

the rise of feminist and regionalist movements shows, dominated groups have become more sharply aware of the power of language as well as the involvement of language with other forms of power."¹⁸ The subjects of this study, being both female and regionalist, are out of the mainstream on two counts and the language of contemporary reviewers must be considered a major factor in any discussion of success and failure. Burke's suggestion that "language reflects the society (or culture) in which it is spoken," and that "language shapes the society in which it is spoken,"¹⁹ provides a model (rooted in social history) for analyzing the Macdonalds' milieu. However, one must also consider the poststructuralist injunction: language rather than reflecting reality actually constructs reality. As Chris Weedon proposes in Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (1987), "language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested."²⁰ Ultimately, in order to understand or discuss issues such as these, it is necessary to consider

¹⁸ Peter Burke, "Introduction," in Peter Burke and Roy Porter (editors), The Social History of Language (Cambridge, 1987), 1. For a thorough study of the impact of language upon women see Dale Spender, Man Made Language (London, 1980).

¹⁹ Burke, 4.

²⁰ Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (London, 1987), 21.

Michel Foucault's writing on power, particularly his The History of Sexuality (1976).²¹ Foucault's extensive analysis of power as a concept that goes far beyond traditionally defined structures allows one to examine concerns like the language of critics and stylistic hierarchies within the art world in a new way. In his essay "Truth and Power," Foucault wrote:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things. It induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.²²

Success and failure, and the power or lack of power associated with success or failure, become a measure or a definition of established, accepted and valued art. For these reasons the structures of the art world as well as the discourse within the structures will be a major consideration of this dissertation.

In addition, many feminists claim that rhetoric maintains hierarchies.²³ The Macdonalds challenge the

²¹ See Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: Volume I, An Introduction (New York, 1980; first published, Paris, 1976).

²² Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977 (New York, 1980), 119.

²³ See, for example, Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction (Bloomington, Indiana, 1987), Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics

hierarchy in several ways, as women, as regionalists and as designers, therefore the discourse about this challenge provides us, in the late twentieth century, with a framework in which to understand the situation for these artists in the late nineteenth century. This removes modern value judgments and allows meaning to emerge from the era itself. It is also possible to explore the art (and the discourse about art) from this period within a framework established by the "New French Feminists," particularly Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.²⁴ The silence of women as dealt with by the French theorists can be aptly applied to the silent or silenced art of Margaret and Frances Macdonald. The Macdonalds' art is a silent art in the sense that their pictures frequently depict passive, closed-off, mute women and, also that their paintings are watercolours, a feminine art form commanding little critical attention.

This same type of analysis continues in Chapter Three, an examination of the art produced when the two women shared a studio. The future, at this point, seemed bright indeed for Frances. Margaret emerges as competent but not as

(Oxford, 1983) and The Acoustic Mirror, The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Bloomington, Indiana, 1988), or Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (London, 1987).

²⁴ See for example, Hélène Cixous, "The laugh of the Medusa," in Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society (1976, Vol.1, No.4), 875-893, Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One (Ithaca, New York, 1985) or Julia Kristeva, "Sabat Mater," in The Female Body in Western Culture, edited by Susan Rubin (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).

creative or innovative. The chapter also weaves together the Glasgow Four's new successes in continental Europe with the marriages of the women to their colleagues, Mackintosh and MacNair. Mackintosh was the brilliant young architect soon to become the darling of Vienna; MacNair was the less brilliant, slightly unpredictable designer soon to fade from public view. This situation seems to indicate that a less talented woman married to a more talented man, collaborates with him and rides the crest of his fame, until a critic like P. Morton Shand appears on the scene. On the other hand, a very talented woman married to a less talented man, misses the crest along with him. The female artist, in this instance, is silenced by her husband's career.

Again, in Chapter Three, I shall consider the role of the discourse. This time, however, much of the discourse was supportive and proclaimed the successes of the Glasgow Four on the continent. The artists were admired as much, if not more, for their northern strength (here their regionalism became an asset) and purity than for their artistic innovations. They were seen as strong and clear, for example, where the Belgians were seen as weak and insipid.²⁵ The rhetoric in almost all instances is that of Blut und Boden; the many adjectives employed to describe

²⁵ See, for example, Georg Fuchs, "Mackintosh und die Schule von Glasgow in Turin," in Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration, September 1902 and H. Muthesius, "Die Glasgower Kunstbewegung: Charles R. Mackintosh und Margaret Macdonald-Mackintosh," in Dekorative Kunst, March 1902.

Scottish art are visceral, racial, nationalistic. The Scots were admired as much for their 'Scottishness' as for their art. This may offer some insight into why, by the second and third decades of this century, their art became obscure, tucked away and forgotten by historians or critics. The clarity, rationality and objectivity of modernism would be embarrassed by such excess.²⁶

Chapter Four examines the career of Frances Macdonald as she moved from international acclaim with her submissions to exhibitions in Vienna and Turin to motherhood and part-time teaching in Liverpool when her husband was on faculty there, then back to Glasgow and a short term teaching position at the Glasgow School of Art. By that time, her husband was a "mail messenger."²⁷ Although I have avoided biography as much as possible, I have made an exception to this in the chapter on Frances. Very little has been written about Frances (much less than about Margaret who is always included in Mackintosh texts) and because of the general lack of information about Frances's life as well as

²⁶ Modernism as a patriarchal construct has been discussed in detail (along with "alternative modernisms) by literary critic Shari Benstock in Women of the Left Bank, Paris, 1900-1940 (Austin, 1986). Griselda Pollock has addressed this issue with respect to women artists. See "Modernity and the spaces of femininity," in G. Pollock, Vision and Difference, Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (London, 1988).

²⁷ Herbert MacNair is listed as a mail messenger in the entry for Frances Macdonald in the General Register Office (Scotland), Register of Deaths.

her work, I have included more biographical detail in Chapter Four than in any other chapter.

Chapter Five looks at Margaret Macdonald's later career. Rather than focusing on the work she did in collaboration with her husband, the work usually considered her finest achievement, I shall look at the watercolour paintings that she exhibited in Europe and North America after her marriage. Finally, using Margaret and Frances Macdonald as prototypes, my conclusion considers the role of female artists in Britain during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. By examining the role of the individual, in this case the Macdonald sisters, I intend to consider the general experiences of women artists of their era. In this final chapter I shall also discuss the female experience as it is represented in the Macdonalds' art. This is a time when women artists had virtually no voice in the art world. If they were heard, it was in "deft and dainty" flower paintings,²⁸ in small landscapes, in "fairy imagining."²⁹ The medium was usually watercolour, as opposed to the more

²⁸ This phrase was used to describe watercolour paintings by Katherine Cameron, a colleague of the Macdonalds, when she had a solo exhibition at T. and R. Annan and Sons, Glasgow, 1920. See The Glasgow Herald, 13 March 1920, 13.

²⁹ This phrase was used to describe a painting by Jessie King, one of the Macdonalds' colleagues from Glasgow, in the review of the 34th annual exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours, The Glasgow Herald, 11 October 1913, 9.

"important" oil painting. For example, a critic writing about an exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours (1910), a society to which Margaret Macdonald belonged and with whom she exhibited, informed readers that, "...watercolour is not a medium for opulent composition or large decorative effect....It has had an influence in preserving the chastity and delicacy that naturally belongs to 'the maidenly medium'."³⁰ The Macdonalds inhabited the fringe world assigned to the female artist. Their pictures were watercolours; their work called "elusively exotic designs,"³¹ or "eerie and quaint,"³² or a "pleasant simplicity of fancy,"³³ or "gravely decorative."³⁴ The art was a silent art; the artists, in turn, were silenced.

In their writings, both H el ene Cixous and Luce Irigaray have addressed the issue of female silence as well as

³⁰ A review of an exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours in The Glasgow Herald, 1 October 1910, 10.

³¹ This phrase was used to describe a watercolour painting by Margaret Macdonald exhibited in the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours, The Glasgow Herald, 31 March 1911, 9.

³² This phrase was used to describe a painting by Frances Macdonald in the Sandon Exhibition, Liverpool in The Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 1 May 1908, 5.

³³ From a review of Frances Macdonald's art in The Times (London), 10 November 1911, 10.

³⁴ A review of Margaret Macdonald's art in The Glasgow Herald, 11 October 1913, 9.

women's language. In "Castration or Decapitation?" Cixous writes:

Women have no choice other than to be decapitated, and in any case the moral is that if they don't actually lose their heads by the sword, they only keep them on condition that they lose them--lose them, that is, to complete silence, turned into automatons.³⁵

Women, Cixous reminds us, are "outside the Symbolic, that is outside language."³⁶ In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous emphasizes the damage wrought against women, their text, their speech, by the unchallenged patriarchal structures of western society. I suggest that we might look at pictures made by women artists as women "speaking" their own experiences or even as speaking their own (female) language. Luce Irigaray writes that:

There may be a speaking-among-women that is still a speaking (as) man but that may also be the place where a speaking (as) woman may dare to express itself.³⁷

In expressing such attitudes, Irigaray is fully aware of the dangers of both segregation and establishing a "flip-of-the-coin" power structure and she addresses these concerns. However, she insists that women must acquire a place that is valued:

Speaking (as) woman is not speaking of woman. It is

³⁵ H el ene Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?", translated by Annette Kuhn in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society (Vol.7, No.1, 1981), 42-43.

³⁶ Ibid., 46.

³⁷ Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 135.

not a matter of producing a discourse of which woman would be the object, or the subject. That said, by speaking (as) woman, one may attempt to provide a place for the 'other' as feminine.³⁸

In addition to "speaking herself," woman must also visualize herself and we must understand those visualizations.

Therefore, my intent throughout the dissertation shall be to discuss the Macdonalds' art within its historical and social context as well as to consider their art as explicating the female experience. The question I shall constantly keep in mind is: can art made by women and/or feminine art, speak to us of the female experience?

³⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER ONE

In the fall of 1890, two young women registered in the Glasgow School of Art: Margaret Macdonald was almost twenty-six years old and her younger sister Frances had just turned seventeen. Margaret had attended Orme Girls' School (founded in 1876 as the first grammar school for girls in North Staffordshire) from 1877 when she was twelve years old until 1880 when she had just turned sixteen.¹ Orme's was extremely progressive and considered a pioneer in the field of female education.² The students learned both French and German and, in addition, they received instruction in art from the Headmaster of the Stoke-on-Trent School of Art. Margaret's instructor would have been J. P. Bacon who received a silver medal in 1884 "in recognition of the proofs given in the exhibition of the direct influence of [Bacon] on various local industries."³ By 1890 the Macdonald family had moved to

¹ I am grateful to Julia Powell for this information. Mrs. Powell taught at Orme's until recently and, because of a personal interest in Margaret Macdonald, she compiled some very pertinent biographical information which she was kind enough to share with me.

² In a letter to me from Julia Powell dated 5 May 1989.

³ The Artist, 1 December 1884, 389.

Glasgow, the family home of Margaret's father, John Macdonald.⁴ Without documentation we must assume that Margaret Macdonald, like other young women of her generation and class, lived at home from the time she left school until she entered the Glasgow School of Art, possibly at her younger sister's instigation.⁵

By 1890, the Glasgow School of Art was recognized as one of the leading schools of art and design in Britain and its principal, Francis Newbery, was admired for his progressive attitudes. The Macdonalds' entry into the School marked the beginning of careers that would take the sisters to London, Vienna and Turin during the height of European enthusiasm for the applied arts, for art that promulgated a union of fine art and craft.

Before discussing the work that the women produced as

⁴ Margaret and Frances's father, John Macdonald was an engineer and the son of a Glasgow solicitor also named John Macdonald. Their mother, Frances Hardeman (born 18 September 1838 at the Hayes in Stourbridge) was the daughter of Joseph Hardeman, a counting house clerk, and Harriet Moore Hardeman. They married in Warwickshire on 7 August 1862 and lived in or near the Potteries (that area of England around Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent noted for its pottery) until they moved to Glasgow. Information from Frances Hardeman's birth certificate and Frances and John Macdonald's marriage certificate. General Register Office, St. Catherine's, London. In Glasgow directories after 1890, John Macdonald was listed as a consulting engineer or as a consulting mining engineer. He worked, as did many Scottish engineers during the 1870s and 1880s for mining companies in the industrial part of England near the Welsh border. Information from the 1871 and 1881 Census.

⁵ Frances Macdonald's name cannot be found in the Orme school records.

mature artists, I should like to look at their training in the Glasgow School of Art: what they studied, with whom they studied, their roles within the School and the prizes they won, as well as the acclaim and criticisms they received. In order to do this, I shall examine the structure of the School and its place within Scottish society. This context can be best understood if it is woven together with a discussion of Francis Newbery, the School's Principal.

Francis Newbery's Early Career

Francis Newbery (1855-1946)⁶ was appointed to his position as Principal at the Glasgow School of Art after successful completion of a training programme at South Kensington. This programme would be comparable to an "internship" in art and design education. Newbery probably taught in art schools in London while finishing the more advanced stages of his formal training in South Kensington classes. We know that, in the fall of 1880, he won a first prize for a set of sketches done for the South Kensington

⁶ Francis Henry Newbery was born 15 May 1855 at Membury in Devonshire to William Newbery, an illiterate shoemaker, and Mary Elliott Newbery. Information from Newbery's birth certificate, General Register Office, St. Catherine's, London. See also, Isobel Spencer, "Francis Newbery and the Glasgow Style," in Apollo, October 1973 (286-293).

Vacation Sketching Club.⁷ The prize was awarded in "Section B," a section restricted to "...general students who have worked during the current year in the schools."⁸ Later, in 1884, he received a silver medal for a "chalk drawing of the figure from the nude."⁹ The medal was one of a number of prizes given to "Students of the Training Class at South Kensington."¹⁰ From this we may assume that Newbery studied and taught in London from at least 1880 until 1884.¹¹ A notice appeared in The Artist in August, 1885 announcing that, "the students of the training class, South Kensington, gave a farewell dinner to those masters in training who have lately got appointments, and to several national scholars who are leaving....Mr. F. H. Newbery [was appointed] to Glasgow School of Art."¹²

In the fall of 1885 he assumed his position at Glasgow

⁷ The results of the competition appeared in The Artist, 1 November 1880, 329. Spencer, in "Francis Newbery and the Glasgow Style," 286, wrote that Newbery attended the Bridport School of Art in Dorset and that he also taught there before he moved to London in 1875.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Academy and Art School News," in The Artist, 1 August 1884, 242.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Schools of Art: Their Origin, History, Work and Influence, prepared by John C. L. Sparkes for the International Health Exhibition, London 1884, indicates that Newbery was in the training class at South Kensington beginning in 1882; the report in The Artist places him there in 1880.

¹² The Artist, 1 August 1885, 243.

School of Art and Haldane Academy.¹³ Thomas Simmonds, Newbery's immediate predecessor, had already established the School as a major centre for art and design education in Britain. In 1884 in National Competitions, his students won three silver medals, two bronze medals and eight Queen's prizes.¹⁴ The Advanced Local Examinations were also highly successful that year. The combination of success at the National Competition and in Advanced Local Examinations was the measure of a School of Art and Design within the South Kensington system and Glasgow's performance in 1884 secured a lucrative government grant for the School: "As evidence of the successful results....the Government grant amounted to 782 [pounds], probably the largest in the kingdom."¹⁵ Simmonds was given full credit:

The report of the committee [of the Glasgow School of Art and Haldane Academy] stated that the very sanguine hopes expressed by them on the appointment of Mr. Simmonds as head master two years ago had been fully realized by the remarkable success of the school under that gentleman's direction.¹⁶

Having firmly established the direction of the School,

¹³ See the Annual Report of the Glasgow School of Art and Haldane Academy, December 1885, 11. See also, June Bedford and Ivor Davies, "Remembering Charles Rennie Mackintosh," a recorded interview with Mary Sturrock [Francis and Jessie Newbery's daughter] in Connoisseur, August 1973, 280-288.

¹⁴ Reported in The Artist, 1 April 1884, 106.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Simmonds accepted another appointment in Derby¹⁷ and left the now blooming Glasgow School under the direction of Francis Newbery.

By 1885 the School of Art in this Scottish industrial city had already been in existence for nearly a quarter of a century¹⁸ and was attached, as were all other schools of art and design in Britain at this time, to the South Kensington system. The system began in the early part of the nineteenth century as part of the National Department of Science and Art and, by 1852, a National Competition for the Schools of Art had been established.¹⁹ These schools

¹⁷ The Artist, 1 July 1884, 206 announced Simmond's appointment to a school in Dumbarton however, the Annual Report of the Glasgow School of Art for 1885 states that Simmonds resigned in order to return to his former post at Derby. See The Annual Report..., 11.

¹⁸ The date of the establishment of the School is open to question. Current research by George Rawson, Fine Art Librarian, Glasgow School of Art, is addressing this problem. In 1895 a former student of the Glasgow School of Art corrected Newbery when the principal commented on the first headmaster of the School. In a letter to the editor of the Glasgow Evening News, an "Old Designer" insisted that Henry McManus had been the first headmaster (and not Heath Wilson as Newbery had declared) and that the School opened its doors for the first time in 1842. The "Old Designer" wrote that he was a student on the first day of classes. Glasgow Evening News, 24 May 1895, 3.

¹⁹ The Competitions began under the direction of Henry Cole the General Superintendent of the Schools of Design in Great Britain from 1852-73. This period of time saw the most rapid increase of art institutions in British history. The Central Training School of Art (the "mother" institution) was renamed the National Art Training Schools in 1863 after the move to South Kensington and then in 1896 became the Royal College of Art. The National Competitions themselves lasted from 1852 until 1915 and proved to be the most enduring aspect of Henry Cole's system. See Stuart Macdonald, The History and

forwarded advanced students' work to London for inclusion in the annual National Competition and an institution's reputation rose or fell depending upon their students' success rate. Newbery, understanding the importance of industry to Glasgow and committed to establishing a strong relationship between art, society and technology, would have clearly seen the School's potential. Undoubtedly there was an opportunity to garner even more support for the development and expansion of a northern art school which would rival the established facilities in the south. However, Newbery always championed quality of education and of product. He would work with industry but always with the view that standards must rise, that artistic merit and aesthetic sensibilities would enhance the manufacturing world. In a paper presented to the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry (1889), Newbery, unequivocally told his audience that:

They [the Schools of Art and Design] are not commercial but artistic institutions, with ideas and aims which should be ever of the best, and whose efforts should be directed, not to supplying the demands of a public taste, but of endeavouring to educate that taste by an acceptance of the fact that good art and public taste are not usually synonymous terms; and in this really lies the true functions and place of a School of Art. Picture painting is for the few, but beauty in the common surroundings of our daily lives is, or should be, an absolute necessity to the many; and to educate the producer to send out, whether from loom, bench, lathe, or wheel, articles which shall possess an intrinsic value in the art they

contain, and the consumer to appreciate such beauty as lies therein, is to teach a gospel which shall have for all men a like salvation.²⁰

Newbery faced the tremendous task, in this northern industrial city, of making art and design acceptable to the industrialists while maintaining high standards within his own institution. He consistently did this, always stressing the importance of function but never by sacrificing individuality. In a lecture he gave on architecture in Glasgow in 1887 he had said that he "...wished to emphasize the all-powerful influence of man's rudimentary necessities upon style, rather than any artistic proclivities, style being but the handwriting or expression of a people's character."²¹ His ability to hold his ideals while moving forward with the times remained a great strength in his character, a strength that would be reflected in the Glasgow School of Art.

Nineteenth-Century Glasgow

Rapid industrialization of the north during the nineteenth century had plummeted the two major Scottish cities into the mainstream of the British economy. By 1880

²⁰ Francis Newbery, "The Place of Art Schools in the Economy of Applied Art," reprinted in the Transactions of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry, the Edinburgh Meeting, 1889 (London, 1890), 450.

²¹ As quoted in The Artist, 1 November 1887, 362.

Edinburgh was the third richest city in Britain (surpassed only by London and Manchester); Glasgow was the fifth, behind Liverpool.²² With the new wealth came a desire for a culture that would also rival the south. 1850 saw the foundation of the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh and by 1861 Glasgow had responded with the establishment of its own exhibiting organization, the Institute of the Fine Arts. In addition, when Archibald McLellan, a Town Councillor and Magistrate, died in 1854 he left his art collection to Glasgow.²³ His collection formed the nucleus of the Corporation Galleries of Art which, later in the century, became Glasgow's Kelvingrove Museum and Corporation Galleries of Art (although the city expected their building in Kelvingrove Park to be "ready for occupation"²⁴ by 1896, the building did not open to the

²² T. C. Smout, A Century of the Scottish People, 1830-1950. London, 1986, 110. T. C. Smout, one of the leading historians of Scottish social history, has compiled the most extensive data dealing with the relationship between industry and society in Scotland to date.

²³ Corporation Galleries of Art, Glasgow: Catalogue of Pictures and Sculpture, 1898, "Preface," 5.

²⁴ Kelvingrove Museum and Corporation Galleries of Art, Glasgow. Report for the Year 1895, 4. Archives of the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh. Earlier, in recognition of Glasgow's art/industry relationship, a Quiz commentator wrote, "We are on the eve of an important development in civic life, and the Palace of Art at Kelvingrove, when it is realized, will be at once an expression of, and a powerful aid to, what Councillor Crawford calls 'the great Socialistic and Communal march of our time.'" 23 January 1891, 207.

public until October 1902).²⁵ These incursions of culture into the industrial city had been difficult and some reasons for the struggle between art and the Scots were suggested by Thomas Rennie, a gallery assistant at the Corporation Galleries of Art, in an "Illustrated Lecture" he gave to the Glaswegian public in 1895:

Among the causes which have operated to delay and obstruct the progress of Art, and which, to a large extent, account for the lack of appreciation of it by the people of Scotland, three may be singled out as the most prominent--(1) the struggle for existence with an unkindly soil and a rigorous climate, (2) the adoption of an austere religion, and (3), and most recent, the extraordinary development of mechanical industrial activity.²⁶

Rennie went on to give credit to Francis Newbery for the efforts he had made toward changing this situation by educating "local opinion."²⁷ The Committee of the Corporation Galleries of Art had been so impressed with an illustrated lecture given for them by Newbery in April 1891 that "it at once became obvious that a series of similar

²⁵ A Glasgow Herald Yearbook, 1914, 3.

²⁶ Thomas Rennie, Assistant, Corporation Galleries of Art, "Illustrated Lecture in Art Galleries and Museums," (139-140) in Report for the Year 1895, Kelvingrove Museum and Corporation Galleries of Art, Glasgow.

²⁷ Ibid.

lectures on Art subjects could not fail to be beneficial."²⁸ This experiment had been "almost too successful" in that it was attended by "all sorts of men and women, and, most gratifying of all, by large numbers of the working class."²⁹ Five years after this first lecture by Newbery, the Corporation Galleries had learned "that there exists in the community a sincere and widespread desire to learn something of Art."³⁰ In 1895 Newbery continued his tradition of giving public lectures, this time called "The Promise of the Present," and Patrick Geddes, a biology professor and Celtic revivalist from the University of Edinburgh (a person soon to become a close friend of the members of the Glasgow Four), spoke on "Every Man his own Art Critic."³¹

In addition to the ongoing education of the Glaswegian public by Newbery and the Corporation Galleries, the press was eager to inform its public that Scottish artists from both Edinburgh and Glasgow were exhibiting in international exhibitions, particularly in Germany, and were being written

²⁸ Ibid., 143. The lecture given by Newbery in the Spring of 1891 was called "The Language of Pictures." This lecture was "so well attended and highly appreciated that the Committee decided to offer a lecture series." Report for the Year 1891, Kelvingrove Museum and Corporation Galleries of Art, Glasgow, 5. In the fall of that year Newbery presented a second lecture, "Technical Processes in Art." (Ibid.)

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 6.

about, in glowing terms, by art critics on the continent.³² Quiz (1891) reported that the Glasgow artists exhibiting works in "the late Munich exhibition" received exceptional honours from the Bavarian government and the Exhibition Council: "...we have heard a great deal about German appreciation of Glasgow art."³³ The critic indicated that several long articles in Munich papers as well as in other Continental journals were, "...of too rhapsodical a character to be of any service."³⁴ In 1895, The Glasgow Evening News announced that the "Glasgow Boys" had "created great and wide-spread interest in Continental art centres."³⁵ This honeymoon between the Germans and the Scots continued unabated throughout the decade: the "...bond between Glasgow and Munich in Art is one which promises to remain unbroken."³⁶ Francis Newbery's students, particularly the Glasgow Four, would extend the "rhapsodical" relationship with the Germans into the early part of the twentieth century.

³² Roger Billcliffe provides the most thorough study to date on the Glasgow artists of this period who achieved fame on the continent. See his, The Glasgow Boys: The Glasgow School of Painting, 1875-1895 (London, 1985). The Bailie, a contemporary Glasgow weekly arts and culture magazine, is filled with comments about the successes of the young artists as are the local newspapers.

³³ Quiz, 9 January 1891, 185.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ The Glasgow Evening News, 22 March 1895, 2.

³⁶ Quiz, 2 August 1894, 130.

Newbery assumed his new position in a school of art located in an area where an arts and crafts approach to instruction could take root and flourish, where a marriage could occur between the fine arts and the more practical and technical aspects of design.³⁷ The Scots' interest in "useful art" and non-classical art training had been established in Edinburgh as early as the eighteenth century³⁸ and continued along with the rapid rise of industrialization. Newbery proved to be correct in his estimation of Glasgow's receptiveness to design and a relationship between design and industry. However, as his students produced ever more innovative work, the conservatism of the north along with Scotland's lack of interest in the genuinely new directions of the arts and crafts became clear. Some of his most promising students, including Frances and Margaret Macdonald, would suffer harsh criticism from the community even as they attempted to wed their innovations in fine art and design to utilitarian products. However, Newbery, faithful to his comments at the Edinburgh meeting of National Association for the Advancement of Art and Design, always defended his students.

³⁷ The good relationship between art and industry was established while Simmonds was still head of the Glasgow School of Art. An article, "Art School and Manufacturers" in The Artist, 1 November 1884, 358-60, mentioned the benefit trained people from the School had lent to Glasgow factories.

³⁸ Macdonald, The History and Philosophy of Art Education, (New York, 1970), 76-77.

The tendency in Scotland had been, and would remain, to look to the south, specifically to London for cultural direction and approval and even London, in the late nineteenth century, did not support much in the way of new and different directions in the arts.³⁹ Scotland was even more conservative. Plays had a successful run on the Glasgow stage only after they had opened in London.⁴⁰ Many successful 1890s Scottish artists imitated their contemporaries from the Royal Academy in London. Pictures by Edward Burne-Jones and J. W. Waterhouse or their London colleagues were always praised by Scottish reviewers. Even when Glasgow praised its own artists, it continued to look to London. For example, The Bailie (1893) reported that, "Glasgow is now an art centre of no mean importance," that the fame of its painters was world-wide,⁴¹ but that the artists continued to be criticized by London: "...members of the so-called 'Glasgow School' have been rather pooh-poohed

³⁹ For a most informative view of London during these years, particularly of the prevailing attitudes toward art and literature, see Richard Ellmann's brilliant biography, Oscar Wilde (London, 1987).

⁴⁰ Max Beerbohm and Ellen Terry were frequently written about in Quiz and The Bailie, Glasgow's literary, art and leisure magazines, as well as in the local newspapers. Popular London plays were reviewed in local papers as well as plays appearing on Glasgow stage.

⁴¹ The Bailie, 7 June 1893, 1.

of late by the London press."⁴² This was while a painting such as J.W. Waterhouse's, Lady of Shalott, was "...pronounced the finest figure-piece in the present exhibition at the Glasgow Institute,"⁴³ and Hove to for a Pilot by Henry Moore was "...pronounced by the public the finest canvas in the show [the Fine Art Exhibition], and some of the members of our local 'School' have been going about the city with long faces."⁴⁴ Glasgow lacked a well-educated and culturally aware middle class; a large population to support the arts was virtually non-existent. Its art-going public preferred art from London.

Scotland, in fact, hardly had a middle-class during the nineteenth century and, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it was an area of sharp contrasts. Nearly one million of the Scottish people, a large majority consisting of seventy percent of the entire population, were at the foot of the economic and social pyramid⁴⁵ and barely able to survive, let alone able to take a great interest in arts and culture. The two most financially secure groups in Scotland, the extremely wealthy and those solidly in the

⁴² The Bailie, 24 May 1893. References such as this one to a "Glasgow School" are not to the Glasgow School of Art but to a group of local impressionist painters including George Henry and Edward Hornel.

⁴³ The Bailie, 1 May, 1895, 11.

⁴⁴ Quiz, 16 May 1895, 15.

⁴⁵ T. C. Smout, A Century of the Scottish People, 1830-1950 (London, 1986), 110.

middle class, made up approximately ten percent of the population but received more than half of the national income.⁴⁶ The arts, then, would have been patronized only by the few able to afford the luxury (hence Rennie's excitement at attracting some working class people to the Galleries art lectures). However, the Glaswegian wealthy were well used to glossing over discrepancies and ugliness in their own society but were, it would later appear, unwilling to condone "ugliness" or even the unusual in art.

This discordant society, the few very wealthy and the many very poor, produced severe social problems manifested most obviously in alcohol abuse in Scotland. Prostitution was also a major concern during the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ Both problems were dealt with by sublimation. The attitudes toward drink and sex in Scotland became ones of denial and repudiation. Within the bourgeoisie, the attitude toward

⁴⁶ Of these 10%, only about 5000 made up the wealthiest class. This class accounted for 1/4 of the national income. The vast majority of Scots during the mid-nineteenth century, approximately 70% of the population, earned 30 to 50 pounds per year. See Smout, 110.

⁴⁷ See T. C. Smout, "Aspects of Sexual Behaviour in Nineteenth Century Scotland," in Social Class in Scotland: Past and Present edited by A. Allan MacLaren (Edinburgh, n.d.). For a contemporary source see, William Tait, Magdalenism, an inquiry into the extent, causes and consequences of prostitution in Edinburgh (London, 1842). Recent studies on this subject include Linda Nead's Myths of Sexuality, Representations of Women in Victorian Britain (London, 1988), and Linda Mahood's The Magdalenes, Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century (London, 1990).

sexuality, in true Victorian fashion, was one of ignorance.⁴⁸ This was particularly true among the female population providing, in some cases, rebellious and intelligent young woman of the 1890s with an obvious and readily available focus for attacks against their own upbringing. These women were sarcastically labelled "New Women" and were frequently ridiculed in the press.⁴⁹

An example of a "New Woman" may be found in the writer Catherine Carswell, whose work offers many insights into Scotland's social problems. Carswell, born in Glasgow in 1879,⁵⁰ was the daughter of an agent who negotiated the

⁴⁸ See Smout, "Aspects of Sexual Behaviour..." particularly, 56 and Uncharted Lives: Extracts from Scottish Women's Experience, 1850-1982 (Glasgow, 1983). This subject is also touched upon by Catherine Carswell in her autobiography, Lying Awake (London, 1950) as well as in her novel, Open the Door! (London, 1920).

⁴⁹ For example, virtually every issue of Quiz during the 1890s contained a cartoon or short comment (often a joke) about the "new woman." Quiz, 13 September 1894, offered its readers suggestions on how to become a "new woman" which included "deal with sex questions," "denounce man," and "make it clear that you are not unacquainted with the mysteries of the punch bowl." On the more positive side, both Quiz and The Bailie often printed interesting news about women. Quiz, 16 August 1894, was glad to see "ladies becoming qualified to obtain the degree to qualify them to practise as doctors." (145) Nine women from Scotland (four of them from Glasgow) had passed the Cambridge University Higher Level Examinations.

⁵⁰ Carswell was six years younger than Frances Macdonald and fifteen years younger than Margaret Macdonald but it is possible that Margaret, if not Frances, was acquainted with her. Carswell and Margaret Macdonald had friends in common, the Raleighs. Walter Alexander Raleigh (1861-1922) was Chair of English Language and Literature at Glasgow University (from 1900 until 1904 when he took a position at Oxford) and when Margaret and Mackintosh decided to stay in England in 1914 and let their Glasgow flat, it was to a friend of the Raleighs.

shipping and sales of textiles between Glasgow and the West Indies and probably at some time even owned his own ship.⁵¹ She was a product of the financially solid middle-class. In her late teens she attended classes in English literature at Glasgow University and, in this respect as well as in her class origins, resembles some of the young art students at Newbery's Glasgow School of Art. In her autobiography, Lying Awake (1950), she wrote that "her greatest friend" went "straight from school to the Glasgow School of Art then to Paris."⁵² Carswell's friend probably found the atmosphere at the School of Art more receptive to her as a serious student than she would have the University. Marion Gilchrist, the University's earliest woman graduate, took a medical degree in 1894 after her Master of Arts degree from Queen Margaret College had been

See a letter from Margaret Macdonald to Anna Geddes dated 14 January 1915 ("I went back to Glasgow & let the house for a year to Miss Penelope Ker--a friend of the Raleigh's [sic] who will take great care of it.") National Library of Scotland. Desmond Chapman-Huston comments on the friendship between the Raleighs and the Mackintosh's in The Lamp of Memory (London, 1949), 124.

⁵¹ Information about Carswell is drawn from her autobiography published posthumously in 1950 with an introduction by her son, John Carswell. See Catherine Carswell, Lying Awake: An Unfinished Autobiography and Other Posthumous Papers (London, 1950).

⁵² Carswell, 112.

revoked as illegal by Glasgow University.⁵³ The Glasgow Evening News (in November 1894) announced that for the "first time in the history of the University the women students of Queen Margaret are to be admitted to the Moral Philosophy Class," but, continued the News, the "fair damsels" were to sit in the front benches so male students were expected to develop "short sight and defective hearing."⁵⁴ As late as 1951, when Glasgow University celebrated its fifth centenary, The Glasgow Herald recognized the patriarchal nature of the institution:

Scotland, still a patriarchal country, has lagged behind England in recognizing and encouraging the educated woman, especially if she belongs to the academic and scholarly rather than practical type. The 'learned' woman has been jeered at in literature from Elizabethan days onward.⁵⁵

Carswell sat in on classes at the University but then chose to study music for two years at Frankfurt. When she

⁵³ "Women in the University," in The Glasgow Herald--Glasgow University Fifth Centenary, 6 January 1951, 8. A number of the Macdonalds' colleagues from the Glasgow School of Art including Jessie Keppie, Agnes Raeburn and Janet Aitken left money to the Glasgow University Queen Margaret Settlement Association in their wills. The wills are on file with the Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.

⁵⁴ Glasgow Evening News, 10 November 1894, 2. An Association for the Higher Education of Women formed in Glasgow in 1877 and, in 1883, was incorporated as Queen Margaret College. Marion Gilchrist was its earliest woman graduate. See James Coutts, A History of the University of Glasgow from its Foundation in 1451 to 1909 (Glasgow, 1909), 458-459.

⁵⁵ The Glasgow Herald--Glasgow University Fifth Centenary, 6 January 1951, 8.

returned to Glasgow she turned to lecturing on art and then to journalism.⁵⁶ She became a drama and literary critic for The Glasgow Herald, and like some of her contemporaries in visual arts, came under attack for her progressive attitudes: she praised a novel by D. H. Lawrence (The White Peacock, 1911) thereby alienating her Glasgow readers. In 1915 she was fired for writing a favourable review of Lawrence's The Rainbow.⁵⁷ As late as 1922, long after Carswell had moved to the less restrictive environment of London, she was still criticized by The Glasgow Herald:

Glasgow women who like to feel proud of their native talent will be glad to hear that Mrs. Catherine Carswell's second novel [The Camomile, 1922] is almost as clever as her first, and much less disagreeable. Most of us pride ourselves on being free from prudery and able to look unpleasant facts squarely in the face when any good purpose is to be served, but I don't think that any of us want to feel that the heroine of her first book [Open the Door!, 1920] stood forth to the world as in any way representative of her sex. Gilbert Cannan, D. H. Lawrence, and one or two other male writers have dealt with this entirely abnormal type of humanity as if it were the rule rather than the exception in life, but to find a woman writing like this of a woman, especially when the setting and characterisations are otherwise as essentially true to life as in Open the Door!, gives one a nasty shock.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See the introduction to Carswell's autobiography, Lying Awake, xii.

⁵⁷ See the introduction to Carswell's novel, Open the Door! (1920)

⁵⁸ The Glasgow Herald, 26 April 1922, 8. Carswell's "true to life" protagonist in Open the Door! studied art in Glasgow.

Criticism directed toward Carswell for her portrayal of the female in her novel, is very similar to that aimed at the Macdonald sisters for their distortion of the female figure. The Herald's comments about Carswell and her novels captured the attitude toward women in Glasgow from the 1890s right through to the 1920s. Carswell's own observations of and responses to her early experiences in Glasgow offer keen insights into the life of a young, educated female of the 1890s; in turn, public response to her gives insight into how an intelligent, productive woman would have been perceived in the Scottish industrial city. Undoubtedly, the experiences of Newbery's students would be similar to Carswell's, particularly students such as the Macdonald sisters who would also be disapproved of by the Glasgow public.

Carswell saw the "real" Glasgow at an early age. Her father was an abstainer and a do-gooder who actively tried to help the down-and-out on Glasgow's streets. As a youth, she accompanied her father on his Saturday excursions through the Glasgow streets in an attempt to "rescue" some of the revellers. Carswell wrote:

...in the teeming Saturday night crowd, where all the men and women, even children at the breast, were openly drunk, drunkenness assumed an epic quality. It was an orgy, an abandon, a bacchanal, a celebration, a wild defiance. Shawled women fought, screaming and tearing each other's hair, while the men stood round roaring them on with laughter. Other men and women reeled along in song or reclined oblivious in gutters. At that

date--round about 1890--whiskey, gin, even brandy, could be bought by the lowest wage earner, and cheaper, more potent liquids were to be had for a few more pence. No alternative pleasures were offered except for hard thrift. The spectacle was shocking. But it had a sordid splendour, a whole-hearted, ruinous contempt which, for the moment, excluded other considerations in a least one beholder. Hence, my father's morality play miscarried.⁵⁹

Carswell also gives us an intimate look at the confusion which confronted a young woman reaching toward maturity with little or no knowledge of sexuality to guide her or enlighten her.

My complete ignorance of what are called the facts of life, so far as human beings were concerned, my familiarity with the processes of wild and farmyard animals, and with the structure of small boys, and my dreams of romantic love ran separate and parallel.⁶⁰

She also tells her readers that although she and her companions were often "rude and rough," her sister, who attended an exclusive Edinburgh boarding school was much more worldly than her own friends:

But there must have been far more vice both flagrant and insidious, in my sister's expensive and 'select' Edinburgh boarding school, by her accounts, than in the maze of somewhat low thoroughfares and the very dark closes round Renfrew Street.⁶¹

Her comments make us aware of the external reality, what was expected of young women during the late nineteenth century,

⁵⁹ Carswell, Lying Awake..., 18-19.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 63.

⁶¹ Carswell, 62.

as well as of the internal reality, that is the more private thoughts of these women. The discrepancies would haunt Carswell as well as her contemporaries, the Macdonald sisters. In Carswell's words, "The woman because she is a woman, must as an artist suppress what the man as artist or as man is entitled to reveal."⁶²

Carswell also described the "conspiratorial delight" she experienced when she "...stood alone among the jeering, sniggering crowd at the first exhibition in Scotland of the French impressionists,"⁶³ an exhibition that opened in Glasgow in the fall of 1892, approximately six years after the last impressionist exhibition in Paris. What had become commonplace in Paris was too "new" to be accepted in Glasgow.

This was Newbery's terrain and, despite the conservatism and the lack of understanding of or appreciation for "modern art", he set out to organize a school that could hold its own in Great Britain, to shape and direct students who would compete favourably with those from the south, and to unite art and craft.

The Glasgow School of Art and Haldane Academy.

1888-1890

In the 1888-89 academic year, with an enrolment of just over five hundred students, the School hired William Kellock

⁶² Ibid., 116.

⁶³ Ibid., 112.

Brown as a new "instructor in Modelling."⁶⁴ Like Newbery, Kellock Brown had been a "Student of the Training Class at South Kensington."⁶⁵ In 1886 he was awarded a bronze medal for a "modelled design for a panel."⁶⁶ The appointment indicates Newbery's continued interest in the arts and crafts as well as his commitment to providing students with quality instruction in a technical area.

Kellock Brown had been a member of the Century Guild of Artists, an organization which formed around A. H. Mackmurdo in London in 1882 and, along with George Esling, he was considered their chief metalworker.⁶⁷ It is quite likely that the aims, ideals and directions of the Century Guild and those of Kellock Brown were one and the same. After all, he was closely associated with the founder, and as one

⁶⁴ See The Annual Report of the Glasgow School of Art and Haldane Academy for the 1888-89 year presented to the Annual Meeting, 28 January 1890, 3-5. This report and all other Annual Reports cited are held in the archives of the Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, and have been quoted with their permission.

⁶⁵ The Artist, 1 September 1886, 283.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ I am grateful to George Rawson, Fine Arts Librarian, Glasgow School of Art, for pointing out to me Kellock Brown's connection with the Century Guild. Kellock Brown, the son of a metalworker, was born in Glasgow in 1856 (See Tate Gallery, Modern British Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture, vol. 1). He was supposed to have studied at the Glasgow School of Art but this seems doubtful as his name does not appear on the records (letter from George Rawson to me, 16 September 1988). See also, The Catalogue for the Exhibition A. H. Mackmurdo and The Century Guild Collection, William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow (c.1967).

of the Guild's most skilled metalworkers, executed work for Mackmurdo. The interests of members of the Century Guild were clearly stated in their magazine, The Hobby Horse, launched in April of 1884.⁶⁸

The Hobby Horse characteristically included articles on late medieval or early Renaissance painting and contemporary painting in the Pre-Raphaelite style, as well as on the Century Guild attitudes toward art and life. For example, an issue in 1886 commented on some of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paintings, reproduced late medieval paintings by Cimabue and Giotto, and published an article about Margaritone of Arezzo (1216-1293), again with illustrations of the art.⁶⁹

There were articles about artists written by other artists. For example in April 1886, William Rossetti (the painter's brother) contributed an article on Ford Madox Brown. Mackmurdo often wrote about medieval artists and, in this same issue, he discussed Duccio's Madonna and Child and Taddeo Gaddi's Baptism of Christ, with Birth and Death of St. John the Baptist.⁷⁰

The interest in the Pre-Raphaelites and late medieval

⁶⁸ The Hobby Horse was the first journal of its kind, that is one associated with an arts nouveaux movement, to appear in Europe. See Robert Schmutzler, Art Nouveau (New York, 1978), 13.

⁶⁹ See The Hobby Horse, October 1886, No.4.

⁷⁰ The Hobby Horse, No.2, April 1886, 116-120.

art was complemented during the late 1880s by an interest in a "Celtic Resurrection."

This is the hour of the Celts in politics....We are on the eve, not of a Celtic Renaissance, but of a Celtic Resurrection....Perhaps the hour of the Celts is coming in Art, too; it may be the function of their immortal youth, their eternal freshness, to electrify our too serious Germanic old age.⁷¹

This attitude repeats itself in other issues, in fact the very words "Celtic Resurrection" recur frequently in reviews of Celtic literature.⁷² The particular rhetoric common to the articles of the Century Guild publication must be considered as a vital part of the art of this era. The language mirrors the visual representations; it is an extension of the visual world and an essential ingredient in the formation of the visual language.

This very obvious focus of the Century Guild upon the late medieval, the Celtic and the Pre-Raphaelite would surface in the art produced by Guild members, reflecting influences from any or all of these sources. For example, Mackmurdo's wallpaper and textile designs of the 1880s incorporate his floral details derived from Gothic and Romanesque sources.⁷³ During his travels in Italy and Switzerland, he had made a whole series of drawings of these

⁷¹ Ibid., 115.

⁷² See, for example, a review of Lady Wilde's Ancient Legends of Ireland in The Hobby Horse, No.6, 1887, 67-74.

⁷³ Stephen Tschudi Madsen, Sources of Art Nouveau (New York, 1975), 154.

medieval details from architecture along with naturalistic studies of plants, flowers, buds and stalks.⁷⁴ Kellock Brown is noted for his original designs in metal work but he is also known to have executed Mackmurdo's designs. In the Arts and Crafts Exhibition of 1888, Kellock Brown exhibited a copper sconce that he designed and executed as well as two sets of copper panels that he had executed but which Mackmurdo had designed.⁷⁵ There can be little doubt about his interests nor about how or in what direction he would have guided his students at the Glasgow School of Art.

In addition to an interest in these specific areas of art, The Hobby Horse also published the philosophical concerns of its members or affiliates. An 1886 issue contained an essay "On Art and Nature," written by one of the Guild's leading members as well as one of its most prolific writers, Selwyn Image. His comments characterize Guild attitudes:

Fine art is not imitation, but invention: it is not reflection, but creation: it is not the counterfeit of Nature, but another world of imaginative creation out of the raw material of Nature supplying it with symbols.⁷⁶

The Guild was also very clear about the role design

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ See the catalogue for the first exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society, The New Gallery, 1888, items 129, 131 and 279. (These catalogues are held by the Archive of Art and Design, a section of the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.)

⁷⁶ The Hobby Horse, No.1, January 1886, 18.

played in art. In 1887, Image wrote:

It [Design] is the inventive arrangement of abstract lines and masses in such a relation to one another that they form an harmonious whole; a whole, that is, towards which each part contributes, and is in such a combination with every other part that the result is a unity of effect, which completely satisfies us.⁷⁷

Image, in this same article, supported the "new Schools of Design," but insisted that "...the true gift of Design is incommunicable. It is in man as an instinct..."⁷⁸

In Glasgow, Newbery expressed ideas very similar to those professed by the Century Guild⁷⁹ and he hired the Guild's chief metalworker as an instructor. William Kellock Brown took up his new position at the School in Glasgow in 1888 and produced and exhibited his work in Scotland even

⁷⁷ Selwyn Image, "On Design," in The Hobby Horse, No.7, July 1887, 118.

⁷⁸ Image, The Hobby Horse, No.7, July 1887, 120.

⁷⁹ In a speech Newbery gave in 1913, he said that "...instinct should be encouraged." (as quoted in The Glasgow Herald, 22 December 1913, 12. Newbery would also defend his innovative design students against attacks from a conservative public. For example, when Edinburgh painter Alexander Roche, criticized the Glasgow School of Art Club exhibition of 1894, Newbery said that he "...rather encouraged what [had been] so vigorously condemned..." and that he "...would not rest until design was raised to the same level as picture painting." He goes on to say that it is a gross mistake "...to imagine that less intellect was required for designing than for picture painting." (quoted in the North British Daily Mail, 9 November 1894, 2)

after he retired.⁸⁰ During the first year of his appointment, fifty-five of the works done by students from the School of Art that had been forwarded to South Kensington were retained for the National Competition; twenty-seven of these were selected for public exhibition at the South Kensington Museum.⁸¹ A young Glasgow student, Jessie Keppie, even won a silver medal for her design for a "Persian carpet."⁸² From this time onward, the Glasgow School of Art was one of the leading schools of art and design in the United Kingdom and the students were formidable competitors for national prizes.⁸³ For example, in the 1891-92 academic year, Glasgow students took 23 prizes, one of which, this time, was a gold.⁸⁴ Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a young architecture student, won the

⁸⁰ For example, see The Glasgow Herald, 2 February 1894, 7, for mention of Kellock Brown's sculpture exhibited with the 33rd exhibition of the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts. Kellock Brown is listed as participating in most of the Institute's shows in the 1890s. In addition to this, he would, on occasion "open" his studio at 138 Wellington Street. The Bailie, 12 May 1897, 11, writes that a "collection of works in hammered copper and brass" were placed on view in his studio.

⁸¹ The Annual Report..., for the 1888-89 academic year, 5.

⁸² Ibid., 14.

⁸³ There were a total of nine principal schools of art in the United Kingdom with students competing for National Prizes. These included South Kensington, Birmingham and Manchester, in other words the major schools in the country at this time. The first list of the schools and an actual breakdown of prizes can be found in The Annual Report for the 1896-97 academic year, 6.

⁸⁴ The Annual Report (1891-92 session), 12.

gold medal for a design for a Chapter House; Frances Macdonald won a bronze medal for a design for a Majolica Plate.⁸⁵ By the 1896-97 academic year, Glasgow won more prizes than any other competitor: fifty-seven out of a total of 221 prizes awarded to nine schools. That is, as one of nine schools, Glasgow took just over one quarter of the prizes.⁸⁶ It seemed that Newbery had succeeded.

It would also seem likely that the Century Guild exerted an important influence on the work of Glasgow's students. It is likely that copies of The Hobby Horse arrived in Glasgow with Kellock Brown, and it is also probable that he would have expected his students to create a "new art," one that represented a unification of the medieval and the modern (the Pre-Raphaelite) along with a dash of "Celtic resurrection" or, more specifically, an art like that of Century Guild.⁸⁷ All this would have to be accomplished in an aesthetically pleasing fashion: design must "...form an harmonious whole" and the result must

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ The Annual Report, 1896-97 academic year, 6.

⁸⁷ Interestingly enough, this connection between the Century Guild and the Glasgow artists is often made but usually lacks any substantive rationale. That is, it lacks the connection or link provided by William Kellock Brown. For example, Schmutzler remarks that, "This idea of Mackmurdo's then reappears in the works of Mackintosh..." (39), without making any suggestion as to why it reappeared. As for the Celtic revival, it was underway in Scotland by the 1880s so Kellock Brown would have entered familiar territory.

create a "unity of effect."⁸⁸ Without pausing, at this point, to look at art done by individual students at the Glasgow School of Art, I shall continue to examine the development of the careers of Margaret and Frances Macdonald and the directions of the School during the early 1890s.

The 1890-91 Academic Year

The 1890-91 academic year was Margaret and Frances Macdonald's first year of art training. Frances and Margaret registered together as day students and began their classes in September of 1890.⁸⁹ Registration in the "day student" category placed the two women into a programme more oriented toward fine arts or toward the training of artists than toward the training of artisans or workers.⁹⁰ Artisans or apprentices were slotted into early morning or evening classes thereby allowing them time to attend to

⁸⁸ Selwyn Image, The Hobby Horse, July 1887, 118.

⁸⁹ The Glasgow School of Art Record Book for the years 1881-1892 lists Frances Mcdonald [sic] as 'registration 707' and Margaret Mcdonald [sic] as 'registration 708'; admitted September 1890.

⁹⁰ Liz Bird, "Threading the Beads: Women in Art in Glasgow, 1870-1920" in Uncharted Lives: Extracts from Scottish Women's Experiences, 1850-1982 (Glasgow, 1983), 100-102. Bird is specifically concerned with female students and the reasons for their attendance at the art schools. For a more complete account of art education for women in England during this period see, Anthea Callen, Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement (London, 1979). For a discussion and an analysis of the art education system in general and the attitude toward various classes and their attendance at art schools see Stuart Macdonald, The History and Philosophy..., 143-155.

their work.⁹¹ The fees for these classes were somewhat lower than those for the day classes and the day classes tended to attract young middle-class women who could pay the higher fees and who wished to either broaden their education or prepare themselves for a career in art, often for a career teaching art in schools.⁹² The two men who would become their associates were students at this time: Charles Rennie Mackintosh had been admitted at age seventeen in September 1884; James Herbert MacNair, at age twenty-one, in 1889.⁹³ Both men were architects' apprentices, and therefore they would have been registered in the early morning or evening classes.⁹⁴ The Macdonalds, along with Mackintosh and MacNair, would become the first graduates of

⁹¹ For example, by the mid-nineteenth century a typical timetable at most of the Schools would show artisans' classes from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. "Gentleman's" or "Amateurs" classes (meaning those interested in fine arts) and "Special Ladies" would be held between the hours of 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. (Macdonald, 143). At first the male and female students would be separated but as early as 1848 in Glasgow the classes were co-educational. Bird, "Threading the Beads...", 101.

⁹² Bird, 101-2.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ See Howarth, 4-7, for a discussion of Mackintosh's and MacNair's apprenticeships and studies. Thomas Howarth's Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement (London, 1952), remains the definitive work on Mackintosh although much has been published on the architect since then. Roger Billcliffe has also written a number of important studies on Mackintosh that are vital to an understanding of his work such as Mackintosh Watercolours (London, 1978) and Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs (London, 1980).

Newbery's School to attain international reputations.

In the 1890-91 academic year the enrolment of the School increased by about twenty to approximately 520 students; the number of prizes won in National Competition also increased. Mackintosh, for example, won two silver medals, one for a "design for a Public Hall" and the second for the "design for a Science and Art Museum."⁹⁵

Neither Margaret nor Frances Macdonald took prizes in the National Competition that year, but Frances did take an award in the Local Competitions for the design of a Majolica Plate.⁹⁶ Margaret took a first in the Advanced Local Examinations for Anatomy.⁹⁷ Although nine students passed the Advanced Local Examinations in Anatomy, only two of those students took firsts. This excellence in anatomy during the first year of study was probably as a result of Margaret's earlier training in art classes when she attended Orme Girls' School near Stoke-on-Trent.⁹⁸ Margaret was

⁹⁵ Mackintosh was listed as an apprentice architect. He was registered at the School in 1885-86, 1886-87, 1887-88 then not again until 1889-90, 1890-91 and 1891-92. Information from the Glasgow School of Art Record Book, 1881-1892. His prizes are listed in the "Prize List," Annual Report, 1892 for the 1890-91 session, 12.

⁹⁶ Annual Report 1890-91, 22-23.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁸ As mentioned previously, Margaret Macdonald's formal education at Orme's ended when she was sixteen and we have no definite information about her from that time until she entered the Glasgow School of Art when she was twenty-five. However, in a 1933 request to Macdonald from Who's Who (London), the biographical information under the heading

twenty-five years old when she enrolled in the School and her earlier training stood her in good stead during her first year but this would be the only time that her school record would surpass that of her sister. From then on it is Frances's name that appears most frequently on pass lists as well as on prize lists, indicating that Frances excelled in her studies.

However, the first year found both the young women taking seconds in design ornament, a course probably taught by either William Kellock Brown or by A. Aston Nicholas. It was during this term that Kellock Brown introduced the metalwork course at the School⁹⁹ but, although eventually both young women would be skilled in the use of that medium, there is no indication that they studied metalwork in their first year. The School records indicate that, much like students today at the Glasgow School of Art, first year students studied design and drawing; practical applications

"education," included both "Germany" and "Glasgow School of Art." (This form is held by the Hunterian Art Gallery) As this was not corrected, Macdonald may have attended a school in Germany during these years. This would account for her apparent fluency with the language.

⁹⁹ Minutes for the Governors' Meeting for 3 November 1890 report that: "The syllabus for class lectures was submitted with the addition of a note intimating the establishment of a class for hammered metal on Mondays and Wednesdays from 2 to 4 pm under Mr. Kellock Brown; Fees £3-3/- for 20 lessons." Information from George Rawson in a letter dated 16 September 1988. All information from Governors' Minutes has been given to me by George Rawson either in letters or photocopied materials. These materials have not been catalogued and are virtually inaccessible except to the librarians at the Glasgow School of Art.

would have come in the more senior years after successful completion of the first year.

In the 1890-91 academic year, both took seconds in freehand drawing; Frances took a second in "plant drawing in outline." In addition to this, Margaret took a second in "model drawing." It was most likely during this year that the two women became acquainted with fellow student Jessie Keppie.¹⁰⁰ Keppie was the sister of a Glasgow architect and was engaged to Mackintosh who apprenticed with the Keppie firm. All three of these women actively participated in School "At Homes," in exhibitions and in School publications.

The School of Art Club, based upon a tradition established by South Kensington, was already in existence by 1890 and was responsible for an Annual Exhibition which coincided with a Vacation Prize Scheme.¹⁰¹ Based upon an established tradition at South Kensington, the club encouraged students to continue working on projects during their summer break. Upon returning to classes in the fall, they would conduct an "At Home" for their friends, in

¹⁰⁰ Jessie Keppie took a first in design ornament; Frances and Margaret Macdonald took seconds. Only 10 students secured passes in this category and we may assume some contact between them. Annual Report, 1890-91, 16.

¹⁰¹ Annual Report, 1890-91, 6. Newbery won prizes in just such as scheme when he was a student at South Kensington. See The Artist, 1 November 1880, 329.

conjunction with a two day exhibition of their work.¹⁰² The Board of the School supported this event, recognizing "...in these social meetings of students a reflection of the hearty and earnest nature of the work pursued in all the classes, and a manifestation of the spirit which pervades the School."¹⁰³ The Board, by this time, had decided to do away with the phrase "and Haldane Academy" in favour of the "simple but expressive title, 'the Glasgow School of Art'," and insisted that under these "altered and improved conditions," the School would long continue "...as a boon to the city even greater in the future than it has been in the past."¹⁰⁴ The relationship between the city and the School had been established and was enhanced by the public displays of students works. The "At Homes" were commented upon by the Glasgow press, not always with favour, as were both the national and local competitions.

The local press wrote enthusiastically about the outcome of the competitions for the 1890-91 academic year when these results were announced in August 1891. The Glasgow Herald also published an explanation of the huge art education system to which the Glasgow School of Art was attached. This system included all Schools of Art and art classes which fell under the control of the Department of

¹⁰² Annual Report 1890-91 Session, 6.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 6-7.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 7.

Science and Art in the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁵ A large National Competition, under the auspices of this Department, was held each year at South Kensington. The submissions of students forwarded from the various schools were marked by specially appointed Royal Academicians and experts in various areas.¹⁰⁶ For example, in 1883 when Newbery was a student at South Kensington, E. J. Poynter examined drawings, while William Morris and Walter Crane examined design.¹⁰⁷ These men, and others just as well known in their areas, continued to examine the students at the national level until the end of the century. This complex system enabled authorities of the Department to chart the progress of art education throughout the United Kingdom as well as to "...test the efficiency and standard of any individual school."¹⁰⁸ The evaluation of the "efficiency and standard" of a specific school was arrived at by a calculation of the number of awards made in National competition in combination with the percentage of passes made in the Advanced Local Examinations. Any given school stood or fell by the result.¹⁰⁹ In 1891, when these

¹⁰⁵ The Glasgow Herald, 24 August 1891, 8.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ "National Competition of Schools of Art" in The Artist, 1 December 1883, 369-372.

¹⁰⁸ The Glasgow Herald, 24 August 1891, 8.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

criteria were applied to Glasgow, the test showed that Glasgow ranked "for the fourth successive year with Birmingham and Manchester as the three most successful schools of art in the country."¹¹⁰

Glasgow took one gold and five silver for a total of six (almost thirty percent of the medals awarded throughout the country) in 1891.¹¹¹ Winning prizes and completing passes in one of the top schools in the country meant that one was a top student, not just in Glasgow, but in the United Kingdom. Prize winning was also an occasion for festivities. In Glasgow the official congratulations of the students took place in conjunction with the annual meetings that were held early in the new year, usually January or February. There would be an accompanying exhibition of students' works, the second to be held during each academic year. Whereas the first exhibition was held in the fall under the auspices of the students' Art Club and included summer works, the winter exhibition was under the control of the School and included National and Local Competition

¹¹⁰ Ibid. By 1884 there were over 200 schools or classes in other institutions in Great Britain attached to the South Kensington System. By 1887 there were 525 art classes in the system with a total of 31,491 students. That year 15,855 students sent 256,422 "works for examination." 164 prizes were awarded. The Artist, 1 September 1887, 285. See Barbara Morris, Inspiration for Design, The Influence of the Victoria and Albert Museum (London, 1986), 9-11, for a brief overview of the origins of the System.

¹¹¹ The Glasgow Herald, 24 August 1891, 8.

prize-winning pieces.¹¹² The Report would be read and after the speeches, prizes would be awarded to the students who had excelled during the previous academic year. Each of these events was marked by an address to the students. This address was usually presented by a prominent Scottish artist and for the celebrations of 1892, Sir George Reid, the new President of the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh, was chosen to give the keynote speech.¹¹³

Reid's address is remarkable for three reasons: first, as an academic artist, he criticized Glasgow's more contemporary "impressionists." Publicly attacking these artists from the "West of Scotland" who had developed independently from the Edinburgh Academy drew down a volley of response in local papers, and began debate that raged for over eight weeks.¹¹⁴ Second, Reid praised the idea of art for art's sake and the right of artists to be true to their instincts except, it would appear, when those instincts differed from the Academy. Third, Reid recognized the artist only as "he" and set down a peculiar and rigid set of rules to be followed by the male artist in order to achieve success. All three of these premises affected art students

¹¹² See, for example, "Glasgow School of Art and Haldane Academy" in The Glasgow Herald, 29 January 1890, 7.

¹¹³ Most of the text of the speech was printed in The Glasgow Herald, 23 February 1892, 4.

¹¹⁴ George Henry, one of the leading painters of the "Glasgow School", finally responded in print in The Glasgow Herald, 11 March 1892, 10.

at the School but only two were seen as having any great significance at the time.

As for the first of Reid's points, the students resented the dominant role assumed by the European-style impressionists in the Glasgow art world. One such student commented:

These artists kept Sir George Reid exclusively in their hands during his visit and naturally expected him to draw attention to the beauties of their work. Imagine, therefore, their dismay when he--a talented impressionist himself in the true sense of the word--did not fall down immediately and worship them and their false gods, but on the contrary smote them hip and thigh.¹¹⁵

Reid had attacked the more progressive Glasgow painters (those often called the "Glasgow Boys") by unfavourably comparing them to the more traditional Academy-trained painters. The students apparently failed to comprehend that the traditional and conservative views of the Academy would hardly favour their own experimental work. They saw only that an "outsider" from Edinburgh, a respected Scottish artist, praised them and railed against the "impressionists."

Reid's second set of offending remarks about art for art's sake outraged some members of the community but, once again, appealed to the students from the School. Reid announced that before taking art as a profession one must have a true, genuine capacity for it and not give art only

¹¹⁵ Letter to the editor signed by "Student" in The Glasgow Herald, 27 February 1892, 3.

half-hearted service; that the artist was no longer a Bohemian but had a respected place in society; that artists could now practice art for art's sake rather than be hungry for capital. With this introduction of the concept "art for art's sake," he indicated that he had no intention of being disrespectful to the industrial spirit "...especially in such a great and enterprising city as Glasgow," but that the "...money-making spirit, the commercial, the industrial spirit was....entirely opposed to the artistic spirit."¹¹⁶ He could see examples of "industrial artists" who catered to the market, in fact, he said, the Academies "...are filled with such artists."¹¹⁷ It was at this point, having alienated most of his audience by maligning the marriage between art and industry so desired in Glasgow, that he went on to berate the type of impressionism that was currently being practised by some of Glasgow's most respected artists without, of course, mentioning them by name.¹¹⁸

Within Scotland, even Sir George Reid, when referring to "art for art's sake," did not consider the aesthetes¹¹⁹ or

¹¹⁶ The Glasgow Herald, 23 February 1892, 4.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ George Henry and Edward Hornel would have been foremost among this group of artists.

¹¹⁹ Aestheticism as brought to the British public by Oscar Wilde in the 1880s and early 1890s was barely, if ever, accepted in London. The mere idea of such a concept in Scotland would have met with even greater disdain among a public conditioned to a work ethic and unaccustomed to art as "a search after the signs of the beautiful." (Oscar Wilde, as

decadents part of his discussion, but rather he meant the production of art for its own sake and not for the payment which one received for the product; that is, he was much more in the tradition of Ruskin than of Whistler, Wilde or Pater. Reid went on to say that some great artists are "moralists and preachers;" some neither of these. Most important was to be true to one's own instincts and feelings and to one's own way of seeing. This part of his speech was, then, totally in keeping with Newbery's philosophy. In fact, despite the furore this raised in many Glasgow circles, the concept of following one's own "instincts and feelings" as well as being true to a personal way of seeing undoubtedly found fruitful ground in which to sprout and grow in the minds of many of the young students at this meeting among whom would have been the two Macdonald sisters.

The third controversial point raised by Reid might be controversial in retrospect only, except that previous comments which had ignored or denigrated the female art student had already elicited a heated retort from Glasgow. In 1884, Sir James Watson, during his address at the Annual Meeting of the Glasgow School of Art commented on a speech that had been delivered at the Edinburgh School of Art, and made it clear to his audience that Glasgow was different:

The remarks I have made apply equally to the

quoted by Richard Ellmann, Oscar Wilde, 151.)

Ladies attending this School. I utterly discard the extraordinary views expressed by Sir Fettes Douglas in his address....as to work and capacities of women. Sir William declares she has no talent for drawing; speaks of her relative failure in art, and asks "Why is woman's work like man's work only weaker and poorer?" Among her characteristics used to be beauty, grace, purity, smartness, a fine vividness of mind and a quick perception. Most of these qualities are required, and can be expressed in art, yet where are they to be found in her work? I answer, You will find them in the Glasgow School of Art!¹²⁰

Watson ended his comments about Douglas's speech by insisting that women in the Fine Arts, "if they apply themselves, will take a distinguished place....and that they act from much higher motives than those attributed to them by that gentleman."¹²¹ Reid, on the other hand, directed his comments exclusively to the males in his audience warning them that in order to be a great artist, in order to make progress, one must always experience dissatisfaction and discontent.¹²² They were also told that "celibacy and a monkish state" was essential to their success:

If the old monkish vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience could be observed for, say the first 15 or 20 years of the artist's professional life, it might prove of infinite benefit to the artist himself and to the cause of art as well.¹²³

Reid, in his remarks about the celibacy of the artist,

¹²⁰ Annual Report of the Glasgow School of Art and Haldane Academy, 1884, 11.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² The Glasgow Herald, 23 February 1892, 4.

¹²³ Ibid.

obviously the male artist, had no regard whatever for the many female students at the School. His remarks were blatantly directed toward the male artist. So although this issue is one that can perhaps only be appreciated years later, and with a more sophisticated awareness of the difficulties faced by women artists, it is one that must be pointed out. It also makes extraordinarily clear to the late twentieth century reader that women at some of the British art schools were not taken very seriously. In the first part of the nineteenth century, it was considered unseemly to educate working class women except to enable them to work as domestics. As late as 1861 art education was still considered pointless for the working-class female.¹²⁴ However, demand for art training from "better-class females" increased substantially enough that education for these women had to be taken more seriously.¹²⁵ When "better-class females", like Margaret and Frances Macdonald, entered the Schools of Art it was generally assumed that acquiring such skills was merely an addendum to wifedom.¹²⁶ Reid's comments reflect this Victorian attitude and show that there was a "lack of place" for female students aspiring to become artists. Men were

¹²⁴ Stuart Macdonald, The History and Philosophy..., 146-8.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Bird's article, "Threading the Beads...", deals, in part, with this particular issue.

artists; women were helpmates in the later stages of a man's career.

It is evident that Sir George had no thought for the development of the female artist. The effect of such statements rings clear when we see that his audience did not resent his exclusion of women but only his suggestions as to how male artists should live. One irate Glaswegian took Reid to task for his attitudes toward celibacy and declared that, quite to the contrary, a woman can "help" the artist:

A woman, truly in sympathy with him [the artist] and with his life's work, might be an immense help to him throughout all the worries, trials and discontent of which his life consists consequent on the failure to attain to his ideal, for which he (if he have the true art instinct) is always striving. It is a matter of history that women have done these things.¹²⁷

In retrospect, and in a analysis of the careers of female students, these are moot points; in the general discussion of the time, however, they played no great role. Of much greater concern were the battle lines that were drawn between those in support of "art for art's sake" as understood in Glasgow and those opposed. Of the three major points of Reid's speech, that concerning "art for art's sake" was most relevant for that time as well as for the School and its newly emerging philosophy.

One Glaswegian wrote that, "One may accept the President's history, but take serious exception to his

¹²⁷ The Glasgow Herald, 27 February 1892, 3.

philosophy. Many a false sermon has been preached upon 'Art for Art's sake'.¹²⁸ An unnamed "student," probably from the Glasgow School of Art, wrote that Reid's advice on being true to one's own instincts and feelings and to one's own way of seeing, "...should be written in letters of gold and hung in the Art Club."¹²⁹ No wiser words, continued the writer, were ever addressed to student or artist.

The controversy raged, finally provoking a response from George Henry, one of the leading artists of the Glasgow school of impressionist painters, in which he defended the "artists of the West," that is, of western Scotland.¹³⁰ Nevertheless the lines appeared drawn between the established artists who were painters in the European style, and the students of the Glasgow School of Art and their supporters who were drawing their inspiration from the Arts and Crafts movement, from British Aestheticism¹³¹ as well

¹²⁸ The Glasgow Herald, 23 February 1892, 4.

¹²⁹ The Glasgow Herald, 27 February 1892, 3. The "Glasgow Boys" would have frequented the Art Club.

¹³⁰ The Glasgow Herald, 11 March 1892, 10.

¹³¹ Many London Academicians exhibited "...at the stronghold of Aestheticism, the Grosvenor Gallery." The catalogue for the exhibition The Last Romantics, The Romantic Tradition in British Art, at the Barbican Art Gallery (London, 1989), 12. As an Edinburgh Academician, Reid would have seen nothing out of the ordinary about supporting art for art's sake.

as from the art of the continental Symbolists.¹³² A comment signed, "There is but one Art," expressed the opinion that the Glasgow School of Art under the direction of Newbery encouraged the arts of design and "...with what gratifying success may be judged from the high standard shown by the exhibited works of the students."¹³³ Another writer railed against the "vagueness" of the fin-de-siècle author, musician and painter.¹³⁴ Another went so far as to not only support Reid in his attack upon the Glasgow impressionists but to criticize all art "with no meaning" such as the paintings by Whistler and [Marie] Bashkirtseff that had been recently purchased by a museum in Paris; he then went on to praise Sir Joshua Reynolds.¹³⁵

The arguments surrounding this conflict are confusing. Some supported Reid in his attack of "impressionism" and opposed him in his stand on "art for art's sake." Some opposed him, in general, because he represented Edinburgh rather than Glasgow. Some supported his ideas on the "individual artistic search" and ignored his comments on the established Glasgow artists. None concerned themselves with

¹³² See Macleod, 31-33 for a brief analysis of the influence of fin-de-siècle art on the Scottish school. See Howarth, 223-233, for comments upon the influence of Beardsley and the Pre-Raphaelites on Mackintosh and his associates and Madsen, 230-235, for an overview of some of the connections.

¹³³ The Glasgow Herald, 27 February 1892, 3.

¹³⁴ The Glasgow Herald, 10 March 1892, 3.

¹³⁵ The Glasgow Herald, 4 March 1892, 11.

his attitude toward women artists. Nevertheless, the three issues raised in Reid's speech throw light upon the relationship between Glasgow and art. The issues characterize attitudes toward innovative art in Glasgow, particularly art that displayed fin-de-siècle characteristics, attitudes toward many of the students of art from the School and the role of women in art at this time in Glasgow. These various attitudes surfaced later in responses to students' work and would finally coalesce in responses toward the Glasgow Four in their native city.

The 1891-92 and 1892-93 Academic Years

Art made by students during the 1890-91 academic year did not result in any adverse comments from the community. The only real controversy about the Glasgow School of Art during that year centred upon Sir George Reid's talk. Enrolment had increased just slightly and, once again, students from Glasgow competed successfully in the National Competition. As a result of its growing reputation, which had in turn resulted in increased funding, the School was able to expand. This increase in funding "...enabled the Governors to carry out a long cherished desire for the development of Technical Education in Art in its highest

branches."¹³⁶ Newbery was able to direct the School even more toward the Arts and Crafts by expanding his programmes in those areas.¹³⁷ This was done after a deputation from the Governors of the School had visited the Schools of Art in Manchester and Birmingham and had consulted with the authorities at South Kensington. As a result of these visits, steps were taken "...to give instruction in glass staining, pottery, repoussé and metal work, wood carving and bookbinding."¹³⁸ Instruction in these subjects was to be undertaken by artist craftsmen and it was anticipated that this, in conjunction with the work in textile fabrics already in effect at the School, would "... give a complete cycle of Technical artistic education applicable to the Industrial Arts of the City of Glasgow."¹³⁹ This was by no means a sudden shift toward design and technical instruction but represented the fruition of Newbery's plans.

The annual report of the School of Art for the 1888-89 academic year clearly established the School's direction.

¹³⁶ Annual Report, Session 1891-92, presented at the Annual Meeting in February 1893, 7.

¹³⁷ The governors gave Newbery their full support in moving toward a more technical programme: "The governors would give Mr. Newbery cordial support in the new departure in connection with the school." James Fleming, one of the governors, in his address to the 1893 Annual Meeting, remarked that "...in the near future art, as applied to various crafts, would take a very much higher place than hitherto." As reported in The Glasgow Herald, 3 February 1893, 11.

¹³⁸ Annual Report, 1891-92, 7.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

A manufacturing city to be anything in these days must have a school of art. Design, and rapidly improving design, permeated every branch of manufacture...Glasgow was peculiar in its variety of manufactures, and hence a difficulty arose in adapting the school to so many branches...[The School's] duty was so to train a student in true principles of form, colour, and taste that he was fitted, on leaving school, to turn his attention technically to the execution of any class of work to which his future life might be devoted.¹⁴⁰

Newbery's own philosophical commitment emerged in his comments during the 1893 Annual Meeting: "In the heyday of art the artist was the craftsman and the craftsman was the artist."¹⁴¹ He stated clearly, "that he desired a distinctive school of art for Glasgow."¹⁴² According to Newbery, the School,

...had taken five gold medals, and there was only one subject in which they might take a medal, and that was modelling. But if in order to gain gold medals they required to please the London school, he did not care if he did not win gold medals; he would rather win the golden opinions of Glasgow. What was wanted in Glasgow was an improvement in art industries, so that there might be no need to apply to foreign labour and production.¹⁴³

Modelling, the one subject in which the School did not take a medal, was of course the subject most traditionally associated with the Academy and its emphasis upon drawing rather than design. Design with its link to new movements

¹⁴⁰ The Glasgow Herald, 29 January 1890, 7.

¹⁴¹ As quoted in The Glasgow Herald, 3 February 1893, 11.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

like Arts and Crafts could be considered "unimportant" by traditional Academicians. Newbery wanted the Glasgow School of Art to be unique, to focus upon innovative design and to establish a working relationship between art and craft.

As a result, students attending the School in the early 1890s, were able to include even more design courses in their programme than in the past and, in addition, they were able to learn technical skills such as metalworking and fabric work. In Frances and Margaret Macdonald's second year of study (1891-92), their progress, particularly Frances's, indicates that the women took full advantage of the expanded programme and excelled in much of the work. Frances was one of two women from Glasgow who took prizes at the National Competition for 1891-92. She took a bronze medal for another design she did for a Majolica plate.¹⁴⁴ As a foretaste of more vitriolic criticism to come in the future, a critic reported that: "Frances MacDonald [sic], of Glasgow, wins a bronze medal with a design for a Majolica plate, which would have won a higher award but for the poor execution and very disagreeable colour used."¹⁴⁵

Her fellow student and future colleague Mackintosh won the first gold medal to be obtained in Scotland for

¹⁴⁴ Annual Report, 1891-92, 1893, 13. 23 medals were awarded to the School that year.

¹⁴⁵ North British Daily Mail, 10 August 1892, 4.

architecture.¹⁴⁶ Winning medals such as these was not only prestigious but, on a more practical level, guaranteed admission to the Central Art Training School at South Kensington.¹⁴⁷ Neither Frances nor Mackintosh were to take advantage of such training in London. Herbert MacNair won a National Book Prize for a "Village Library." Thus, three out of the four students who would eventually become known as the "Glasgow Four" won prizes at the National level during that school year. Because the number of prize-winning students (twenty-three) was small when compared with the total population of the School (approximately 525), one may assume that these particular students were at least slightly acquainted with each other at that time.¹⁴⁸

In addition to winning prizes at the National level, these four students also competed successfully at the Local level. Frances Macdonald took a third prize in Local competition with another design for a Majolica plate;

¹⁴⁶ The Glasgow Herald, 3 February 1893, 11.

¹⁴⁷ Stuart Macdonald, 192-3.

¹⁴⁸ Howarth (Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement), was fortunate enough to interview MacNair in 1944. According to MacNair, he and Mackintosh "did not meet the girls for some time" and that they were "...not aware of the Macdonalds' presence until Newbery drew attention to the similarity of their work at a criticism." Howarth, 25. Newbery confirmed this but was unable to remember the date. The critique could have taken place any time after 1890-91 because Margaret Macdonald was enrolled in advanced courses, courses with senior students, during her first year.

Mackintosh and MacNair both took firsts in architecture.¹⁴⁹ In the Advanced Local Examinations, another of South Kensington's ways of assessing how well students were doing in Art and Design schools, Margaret Macdonald completed "drawing from the life" with a second; Margaret and Frances both took seconds in "composition from a Given Figure Subject."¹⁵⁰ From this we may assume that the women had access to the nude model as well as to plaster casts. The Glasgow School of Art responded to a student request for the nude model as early as 1870.¹⁵¹ The Governors agreed provided there were enough students to cover the expense, suggesting that the class was not a regular part of the curriculum at this time. By 1877 there was "a largish class painting from the living nude model," as well as an evening class painting in oil from the nude male model.¹⁵² It is unclear whether any of the students

¹⁴⁹ Annual Report, 1891-92, 22.

¹⁵⁰ Annual Report, 1891-92, 15. Female students were drawing from the nude at South Kensington; as Glasgow was part of this system, the Macdonalds undoubtedly had access to the live model. In March 1883, when female students at the Royal Academy wanted to draw from the nude they used South Kensington to support their claims: "Students at South Kensington and the Slade, without any distinction of sex, draw and paint from the nude..." The Artist, 1 March 1883, 66-67.

¹⁵¹ Information from the Governors' Minutes for the Meeting, 8 December 1870. Information from the Governors' Meeting was obtained with the assistance of George Rawson, Fine Art Librarian, Glasgow School of Art.

¹⁵² Information from Glasgow School of Art Governors' Minutes, 21 January 1878.

in these classes were female but, by 1881 at least, female students at the Glasgow School of Art were working from the nude model.¹⁵³ Female students in the South Kensington system in London were drawing the nude by 1885 and the last holdout, the Royal Academy, allowed its "ladies studying art" to draw the nude in 1890.¹⁵⁴ Drawing from the nude, at this time, usually meant the partially draped male nude and there is no reason to believe that Glasgow was different. Both Frances and Margaret at some point during their studies must have drawn from the nude; their paintings and drawings clearly suggest this.

The next academic year, 1892-93, saw an increase in faculty as well as continued success in student performances at the National and Local levels. Because Frances Macdonald's second year of study had been outstanding she

¹⁵³ Glasgow School of Art "Table of classes" for 1881 shows seven female students attending an evening life class.

¹⁵⁴ In Britain controversy over the use of a nude model in Schools of Art raged throughout the nineteenth century. As late as 1860 a motion put down in the House of Commons suggested that "...Government grants should be withdrawn from any Schools of Art where the living female model was engaged." Macdonald, 175. In 1885 at South Kensington exhibition three studies of nude women were selected for prizes. All of these were done by women. This did draw criticism that the women, "...trained at the public expense" were assisting "...in the degradation of their sex." The Artist, 2 November 1885, 334. In 1890, The Artist announced that: "Ladies studying art will hear with pleasure that the Council of the Royal Academy has at last decided to permit them to study from the living model. The concession was limited, it is true, to figures not wholly devoid of drapery, but this, at least, is a step towards placing its pupils on a equality with those at South Kensington." The Artist, 1 March 1890, 81.

was awarded a "free studentship" or tuition scholarship for her third year.¹⁵⁵ With her scholarship she continued to excel, taking even more awards during the 1892-93 academic year. Mackintosh and Frances Macdonald took the only two firsts awarded in "Design-Honours Stage;" Frances took firsts in "Model Drawing-Advanced Stage," in "Drawing in Light and Shade" and in "Painting in Monochrome." She took seconds in "Drawing from the Antique," and "Principles of Ornament-Advanced Stage." In addition, she took a first prize in the Local Competition for a Tapestry Hanging described in the Annual Report as "...bold and clever in conception."¹⁵⁶ Margaret Macdonald did not win any prizes nor does her name appear on any lists for passes either at the first or second class level so, although she did receive a mention for a "Design for a Window," commended for "...its decorative treatment," she was outshone, during this third year of study, by her younger and apparently more talented sister. Frances would continue her successes during her final year at the Glasgow School of Art but she and her sister, as well as the two men with whom they became associated, would have their first taste of what it was like to have public criticism directed against their work.

¹⁵⁵ Annual Report, 1892-93, 15. Out of the over 500 students registered at the Glasgow School of Art in the 1892-93 year only 20 were awarded "free studentships."

¹⁵⁶ The Annual Report, 1892-93, 1894, 18.

The final year of registration, 1893-94

During their final year at art school, the two women registered themselves as "designers" rather than as "students" as they had in their first three years.¹⁵⁷ They began, it seems, at this time to see themselves as practising artists, as designers, as having careers or at least as being ready to launch them. They had worked during the summer break to prepare pieces for the School of Art Club exhibition which was to be open for five days during the month of November in the Fine Arts Institute.¹⁵⁸ As usual an "At Home" or "Conversazione" was held in conjunction with the exhibit. A change, however, took place in what was to be included in the show. The summer projects had previously been shown as a "summer sketching exhibition" but this year, for the first time, Arts and Crafts are mentioned as being part of the annual event. Work done by the students from the School was also entering the community at the practical level: "In Lithographic Work some Art Posters, designed by students of the School, have been accepted and used."¹⁵⁹ Posters, along with the new Arts and Crafts projects, would provoke interest, queries and outright hostility within the community when the November

¹⁵⁷ Glasgow School of Art Record Book 1892-1903. Interestingly enough, in her passport (1929) Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh called herself a "painter."

¹⁵⁸ Annual Report 1893-94, 7.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

exhibition opened its doors.

This last student "At Home" for Margaret and Frances Macdonald provided them with their first taste of animosity directed toward their art but also saw the production of their first mature work. The art from this year, as well as their activities in the School during the final year of their studies, must be examined at length.

CHAPTER TWO
THE EARLY WATERCOLOURS

The Final Year at the Glasgow School of Art

Although Frances and Margaret won prizes (Frances more than Margaret) and must have exhibited in student shows during their first three years at the Glasgow School of Art, none of their early student work is extant. The earliest dated piece done by either sister is from 1893, the year before they, along with Mackintosh and MacNair, entered the stage of public notoriety. 1893 was also the year that their status, at least among the students at the Glasgow School of Art, clearly emerged along with an indication of whom they associated with and how their talent and their work was viewed by their contemporaries.

Their status at the School becomes apparent in The Magazine, a "book" which was put together by a group of students who studied there. The first Magazine dates to 1893 and was probably made just prior to the annual exhibition of the students' summer projects. It, as well as the other "magazines" to follow, was a one-of-a-kind effort containing original drawings, stories, poetry and commentaries, done by a select group of students. The Magazine was edited by Lucy Raeburn (1869-1952). Mackintosh was a regular contributor, as were Jessie Keppie (1868-1951), Lucy's sister, Agnes Raeburn (1872-1955), Katherine

Cameron (1874-1965), Janet Aitken (1873-1941) and the Macdonalds.

All of these young women's names appear frequently in the lists of the Annual Reports: they won prizes, passed advanced local examinations and took "honourary mentions" in local competitions. For example, as early as 1889, Jessie Keppie won a silver medal for a design for a "Persian carpet" in National Competition and took the "Highest Grade Prize" in ornamental design at the Local level.¹ During the 1890-91 academic year Margaret Macdonald took a first in anatomy; Janet Aitken and Agnes Raeburn, seconds.² This same year Jessie Keppie obtained a first in Design Ornament; Frances and Margaret, seconds.³ In the 1892-93 academic year, Katherine Cameron and Frances Macdonald took firsts in Advanced Model Drawing; Agnes Raeburn took a second.⁴ Three of the women, Janet Aitken, Katherine Cameron and Frances Macdonald all took firsts in "Drawing in Light and Shade."⁵

Mackintosh, as one of The Magazine's contributors,

¹ Annual Report, 1891 for the Academic Year 1889-90, 14-15.

² Annual Report, 1892 for the 1890-91 Academic Year, 16.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Annual Report, 1894 for the 1892-93 Academic Year, 18.

⁵ Ibid.

probably knew the other students involved with its production. He was an outstanding student and, in addition to this, he was engaged to a member of the clique, Jessie Keppie.⁶ His name also appears on the same awards lists as those of the women. For example, he and Frances Macdonald were awarded firsts in "Design at the Honours Stage" in the Local Examinations for the 1892-93 session.⁷ The year before both Mackintosh and Frances had won medals in National Competition.⁸ Considering that the student population at the Glasgow School of Art in 1893 was just over five hundred, it would seem that the students involved in putting together The Magazine were a small, select group and, indeed, the very format they chose for their production speaks of exclusivity and uniqueness.

The Magazine suggests a scrapbook or a collection of works put together by a number of students who knew each other well and who also were aware of one another's talents. There is nothing to indicate that the book was intended for

⁶ The date of Mackintosh's first meeting with the Macdonalds is unknown and has given rise to much speculation. Most (Howarth, Billcliffe, Macleod, Robertson) favour a later date, one that coincides with the Student Exhibition in the Fall of 1894. However, given the performance of these students at the School, their ranking in the top five to ten percent, I tend to favour an earlier date. (See Chapter One.)

⁷ Annual Report, 1894 for the 1892-93 Academic Year, 16.

⁸ Annual Report, 1893 for the 1891-92 Academic Year, 12-13.

any sort of mass production. It was hand constructed, one of a kind and obviously intended only for circulation among a small group. It is, in many ways, an "illuminated manuscript," a collection of stories with drawings or "illuminations" that complement, rather than describe, the writings.

The stories, in this first and in subsequent issues, are sentimental fairy tales with predictably happy endings. For example, Agnes Raeburn wrote a short story about "Princess Froth and Prince Spray" that ends: "Away! Away over the bright sea, to strange and distant beautiful lands; there to spend a most enchanting honeymoon."⁹ Certainly, a Freudian interpretation of much of the writing in this book could provide innumerable psychological insights into the young woman of the 1890s. Idealized love equated with happiness is also the theme of "A Fairytale," written by Jessie Keppie for the same issue. Her story ends with, "And soon they were married and live happy in one another's love till there [sic] days were numbered."¹⁰ The prose is childish and flowery; the Macdonald sisters' illustrations are not.

Frances and Margaret Macdonald, in their contributions to this book, adhered most closely to a medieval atmosphere

⁹ The Magazine, 1893. The Magazine is held by the Glasgow School of Art in the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Library. Quoting from this work is courtesy of the GSA.

¹⁰ Ibid.

both in their choice of subject matter and in the manner in which their drawings were executed. Frances contributed a fine line drawing with an emphasis upon design to the first issue. The same emaciated Gothic figures that appear on her Glasgow School of Art Club Programme of November 1893 (Fig.1), turn up in this work of approximately the same date.¹¹ Here as well is the apple, a recurring symbol in her work, which sometimes becomes part of the anatomy but at other times is held by a figure. Even though Frances was still a student at this time, the design is unique. Her skill was recognized by her fellow students.

Lucy Raeburn, in her comment in The Magazine (1893) on the students' works just prior to the exhibition of 25 November 1893, directed most of her attention to the "sisters Macdonald" while she reserved the remaining space for the other members of her group, Agnes Raeburn, Katherine Cameron, Jessie Keppie and Janet Aitken. Lucy Raeburn used the same flowery language found in the stories but, at the same time, she attempted to play art critic:

¹¹ Interest in medieval art could easily have come to the Glasgow School of Art with Kellock Brown, that is, if Newbery with his interest in Ruskin and Morris had not already introduced it but, as if to reinforce this, in 1894 a series of lectures on medieval architecture were sponsored by the School. Alexander McGibbon, an architect, delivered his series of lectures in the fall. His subjects included Romanesque art during the 11th century and the first half of the 12th century; Norman work in England was discussed in detail. See The Glasgow Herald, 9 November 1894, 6. In a follow-up lecture, McGibbon focused on the Gothic. See The Glasgow Herald 12 November 1894, 5.

To begin with, the brilliant sisters Macdonald have some work which ravished my artistic "Soule", by its originality of idea, tho' perhaps in execution something is to be desired. The younger's colour schemes made me ask myself tenderly, "Is it possible your eye for harmony is out of tune?" I never could abide crude blues, they always make me think of the wash tub.¹²

She went on from there to chide her fellow students for their "much woe-stricken" work but her tone is that of a friend making clever remarks about original and unusual works. She was not attacking their work¹³ and wished Frances and Margaret well: "So go on and prosper my young friends, I expect to hear of you in wider circles soon."¹⁴ She ended her discussion with a quote from Tennyson and her own "apology:" "I hope these remarks will be taken for what they are worth."¹⁵ There are two points to be made here. First, the comments made about the sisters by their colleague were intended to be witty, not cutting. Second, and more important, is the choice of a quote from Tennyson for the closing. Henry Irving's production of Tennyson's Becket opened in London on 6 February 1893 and, although the play did not open in Glasgow until November 1894, it was

¹² The Magazine, 22.

¹³ Pamela Robertson views this as criticism. See Robertson's "Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh: A Biography" in the catalogue for the exhibition Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, 1864-1933.

¹⁴ The Magazine, 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

reviewed in Glasgow at the time of the London opening.¹⁶ The Glasgow critic wrote at length about Rosamund's plight and pronounced the play as, "essentially gloomy, a stream of pathos running through even the brightest of love scenes."¹⁷ It is precisely this sort of fashionable melancholy that informs the drawings and watercolours paintings produced by Frances Macdonald during this period, including those presented in The Magazine.

The final essay in the 1893 issue of The Magazine, by J. W. Aitken, was appropriately titled, "Some Words on Originality." Students were advised to be original but not at the expense of studying the past; to be original but to build on tradition: "It is not ideas that this world lacks, it is the power to make them felt. As much depends on the execution, the translation of thought into action, as upon the thought itself."¹⁸ This, more than any other statement in The Magazine could have served as a warning for Frances and Margaret who did have a rare originality but who, as the decade progressed, had difficulty sustaining it.

That year, however, even the critic for The Bailie was

¹⁶ The Glasgow Herald, 7 February 1893, 9. This is another indication of Glasgow's cultural tie to London. The play was performed in Glasgow by the Lyceum Company at the Theatre-Royal and, as in London, starred Ellen Terry.

¹⁷ The Glasgow Herald, 7 February 1893, 9. A lengthy synopsis of the play was printed again when Irving's production opened in Glasgow in November. The Glasgow Herald, 6 November 1894, 7.

¹⁸ The Magazine, October 1893, 29.

impressed with the students' work:

The exhibition in the Institute Galleries of the work of the students connected with the School of Art Club, has been a great success and has attracted the attention and commendation of all art critics in Glasgow. The exhibit shows that among the students, as well as among the professional artists of Glasgow, art is alive and progressive. We have no stagnation here.¹⁹

The pleasant commentary about this exhibition did not carry over to the next and the status of the Macdonalds in the larger community was very different from their status at the School.

The Critics

In 1893 The Bailie deemed the Student Art Club Exhibition a success, attracting "...the attention and commendation of all art critics in Glasgow."²⁰ Precisely one year later these same critics would not be so kind. Although the critics liked some of the students' works, for example, the "remarkably fine etchings" by Susan Crawford;²¹ others were chastised, including Margaret and Frances Macdonald.

Strictly speaking, by the fall of 1894, the women were no longer students. The academic year ended in June; the

¹⁹ The Bailie, 29 November 1893, 12.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Quiz, 15 November 1894, 13.

Student Art Club Exhibitions were routinely held in the fall. However, with this as well as with The Magazine,²² the Macdonalds retained their ties with the School and it is quite likely that the Exhibition in the fall contained works done over the previous year, in this case works from the Macdonalds' final year of study. This holds true for the winter exhibition of 1895 but this is understandable because student commendations and prizes for the 1893-94 academic year would have been awarded at the Annual Meeting in February 1895. This second exhibition also drew criticisms from the press.

The earlier exhibition, the one in the fall of 1894, drew a particularly vitriolic response directed right at the Macdonalds.²³ A detractor wrote in the Quiz:

As for the "ghoul-like" designs of the Misses Macdonald, they were simply hideous, and the less said about them the better. Distinctly the authorities should not halt till such offences are brought within the scope of the Further Powers.²⁴

²² The November 1894 issue of The Magazine had drawings by Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald. An even later issue, Spring 1896, had drawings by both the Macdonalds and by Mackintosh.

²³ Elizabeth Bird discussed public reaction to this particular exhibit in "Ghouls and Gas Pipes: Public Reaction to Early Work of 'The Four'," in Scottish Art Review, Vol.14 (1975), 13-16 and 28.

²⁴ Quiz, 15 November 1894, 13. "Further Powers" is a reference to a bill of this time that give extra powers to the constabulary allowing to remove drunks and unruly children from the Glasgow streets. Bird, "Ghouls and Gas Pipes...", 13.

This unusual request to put art under the control of the "Further Powers" act granted to Glasgow police was not unique to Scotland at this time but was found in London as well. Upon the publication of Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), the St. James Gazette called it a "matter for the police."²⁵ Another comment directed at the Macdonalds did not go quite this far: the diatribe continued but it discreetly refrained from "naming names." This article quoted extensively from a speech delivered by one of the judges of the Glasgow School of Art Club exhibition, Scottish painter Alexander Roche (1861-1921). Roche agreed that the designs were "dreadfully clever" and, that the greatest ability of the students lay with design but, "as regarding some of the extraordinary things," he questioned where such things were leading: "It seemed to him to be leading to the graveyard."²⁶ He thought that some of the designs "exhibited a very unhappy spirit, which should not go much further" and, although he wanted to say "nice things," he found that after he had examined "some of

²⁵ Ellman, 303.

²⁶ As quoted in the North British Daily Mail, 9 November 1894, 5. Only a few days earlier, 1 November 1894, Roche was present at the annual dinner of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water-Colours, a society that had been in existence for seventeen years and one that was seen as providing a "stimulating and encouraging influence on younger artists" with its emphasis upon "pure Scottish" themes and atmosphere. This was hardly the man to favour the strange and unusual art of the Macdonalds. See The Glasgow Herald, 2 November 1894, 7.

these productions he had had a dreadful nightmare and one of his fellow judges was now ill."²⁷ In conclusion he announced that, given the opportunity, "he would press upon future judges the desirability of putting down that ghoullike sort of thing."²⁸ The Bailie commended Roche for his remarks which it considered "very much to the point," particularly because they were made by an artist who was "in keen sympathy with every truly artistic movement."²⁹

The columnist continued:

As to the weird designs, to the making of which went impossible forms, lurid colour and symbolism, that requires many foot-notes of explanation, the less said, perhaps, the better.³⁰

These "weird designs" were seen as having been influenced by Blake and Beardsley, who suggested the critic, were "not always safe guides for the young to follow--and especially for those who have not yet learned the principles of severe drawing and the charm that lies in simplicity and directness."³¹

The criticism levelled at the drawing skills may be deserved, especially if one assumes that it is the Macdonald sisters' watercolour drawings under attack; the criticism

²⁷ North British Daily Mail, 9 November 1894, 5.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The Bailie, 14 November 1894, 11.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

directed toward the weirdness, symbolism, lurid colour and the inspiration from Blake and Beardsley is narrow and parochial. This is particularly true if one considers the widespread morbid or lugubrious character found in the art and literature of the time.³² The first issue of The Studio (April 1893) had included a well illustrated article on Beardsley; the fifth issue (August 1893) reproduced Jan Toorop's The Three Brides. Howarth wrote that "Beardsley came into his own just as the style of The Four was beginning to emerge, and his influence on them is clearly apparent."³³ Glaswegians were consistent in their dislike of artists like Beardsley and their perceived followers from the Glasgow School of Art.

The Principal Francis Newbery responded to the Roche's attack against his students. He admitted that he had "rather encouraged what Mr. Roche had so vigorously condemned."³⁴ Newbery contended that a major criticism directed toward the Schools of Art was that they turned out too many picture painters rather than competent artist craftspeople. In true Century Guild form, he said that the students "must divert their abilities to design" and that he

³² For example, consider the poems of Algernon Swinburne or even of Christina Rossetti.

³³ Thomas Howarth, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement (London, 1977), 226.

³⁴ As quoted in the North British Daily Mail, 9 November 1894, 5.

would not rest "until design was raised to the same level as picture painting."³⁵ He insisted that it was a gross mistake to "imagine that less intellect was required for designing than for picture painting."³⁶ With that, he continued an emphatic defense of his students: "As to the style of design condemned by Mr. Roche, it might lead to the graveyard, but he [Newbery] believed it would lead somewhere else, in the first place."³⁷

Newbery also described the nature of the student art club as semi-independent from the School although he "...could not [have] said [that] five years ago."³⁸ The art club, said Newbery,

For nine months of the year....[the Glasgow School of Art] existed as an institution in which they [the students] did not talk of art if they could help it, but just drew and painted, and drew and painted, in the faith that individuality in art would be developed.

³⁵ Ibid. Newbery echoes the concerns of Selwyn Image: "You must not imagine, however, that Design does not enter into, and is not of the greatest importance in, the more complex and higher forms of art as well; in sculpture, for example, and in picture painting. In these, also it is of the greatest importance: so that no one can be a fine sculptor or a fine picture painter, who is not a fine designer." Selwyn Image's essay "Of design, and of the Study of Nature," in Plain Handicrafts, edited by A. H. Mackmurdo (London, 1892), 2.

³⁶ North British Daily Mail, 9 November 1894, 2.

³⁷ Ibid. Elizabeth Bird attempts to piece together some of the exhibition, specifically to sort out what work appeared that could be attributed to the Glasgow Four. See Bird, "Ghouls and Gas Pipes...", 13-14.

³⁸ Ibid.

During the remaining months of the year they went to nature. The result of the system was on the walls before them, including some things that might be regarded as eccentricities. All that they wanted was to see what the students were like, and they were very well pleased if they were not all alike, but each different from his neighbour.³⁹

There were some who agreed with Newbery. "A retired builder" wrote a letter to the editor of the Glasgow Evening News giving his support to the students, particularly those students who produced some of the more offensive work:

As in my own trade construction is very necessary. I was glad to see in the figure drawing the smart way in which the outer coverings are done away with and the framework laid clear in full detail. As I hear this is a further advance of the Glasgow School...⁴⁰

The critic for the Glasgow Evening News expressed some disapproval but on the whole thought that the work was "quite remarkable:"

The Glasgow School of Art Club have, this year, as last, 'gone and done it,' especially those members who have been inspired by the greenery-yellowey-Aubrey Beardsley schemes of colour and design. The work, however, generally speaking, is quite remarkable and it is safe to say nothing of a similar quality or character has been done or attempted by other schools here or in England.⁴¹

In all the furore, however, it was the Macdonald sisters who were singled out for criticism as "two of the chief perpetrators":

³⁹ North British Daily Mail, 9 November 1894, 2.

⁴⁰ Glasgow Evening News, 19 November 1894, 3.

⁴¹ Glasgow Evening News, 9 November 1894, 2.

No one who has seen the nightmare work in the middle room of the Glasgow School of Art Club's Exhibition can fail to be impressed by its cleverness, its imagination and its drawing and colouring. But, at the same time, to the untutored, and even to the tutored mind it suggests a gruesome practical joke. It is, however, nothing of the kind, for though it is hard for the average person to believe it, the artists have both design and theory in the painting. Two of the chief perpetrators are sisters (the Misses Frances and Katherine [sic] Macdonald), and it would be hard to find two art students more thoroughly in earnest. They have vivid imaginations, and (art apart) are remarkably clever girls, who not only hold, but can explain, their theories--though not, I admit, to my understanding. Certainly they are original enough, though it is difficult to comprehend why two young ladies, with nothing of gloom in their own atmosphere, should spend their time in designing ghastly caricatures of nature. Still, even these may be preferable from the individualistic point of view to the painting of eternal plagues.⁴²

Because there is no catalogue available from the exhibition it is impossible to connect the criticisms with specific works; however, it is quite likely that some or all the extant work by the Macdonalds dated 1893-1894 appeared.⁴³ Comments such as "sadly scant of fleshly padding," or, "Of the hags who sought your pillow spectral, hideous and lean,"⁴⁴ obviously describe paintings of emaciated and elongated figures like the threatening, androgynous ones in

⁴² Glasgow Evening News, 10 November 1894, 1-2.

⁴³ See Bird, "Ghouls and Gas Pipes..."

⁴⁴ Glasgow Evening News, 13 November 1894, 4. Elizabeth Bird quotes from the poem in "Ghouls and Gas Pipes....," 13-14.

Frances Macdonald's Pond (1894) (Fig.2).⁴⁵

Sought after or not, the Macdonalds came out of this with a certain notoriety as well as with a press-attached label: New Women. The Glasgow Evening News's caption for its comments about the exhibition was "The New Woman in Art."⁴⁶ It continued with this explanation: "Many of the pictures exhibited by ladies ...are fearfully, wonderfully, and weirdly 'new.' Their impressions of the female form, particularly, are startling."⁴⁷ The paper then printed a lengthy and nasty poem about the art and the artists that began and ended by establishing an unflattering relationship between new art and the New Woman:

Would you witness a conception
Of the woman really New
Without the least deception
From the artist's point of view
See the Art School exhibition
.....
If you asked for explanations
Talk vaguely of design
Or adopt a few evasions
About temperament and line
But if nothing save confession
Of your real intent will do
Say the hags are your impression
Of the Women who are New.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Macdonald's pencil and watercolour drawing, A Pond, was included in The Magazine but we can assume that it, or ones like it done at the same time, appeared in the 1894 exhibition.

⁴⁶ Glasgow Evening News, 13 November 1894, 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The author of this doggerel decided that the female images in the art looked as if they were the offspring of Caliban and a female gorilla who had "dissipated" her youth over The Yellow Book: "For if Caliban was mated/with a female gorilla/who her youth had dissipated/O'er the Book yclept the Yellow."⁴⁹ The last verse of this diatribe characterizes the author's conception of how one must make a picture in order to experience "success" in this decadent art world:

Let them waltz across your path
 In a weird macabre dance
 Or perform some fiendish caper
 With the Beardsley leering glance.
 Let their slim limbs sprawl erratic
 And eschew all kinds of dress;
 If the whole thing's idiotic
 Then your picture's a success!⁵⁰

The "chief perpetrators," as we have already seen, were the Macdonald sisters, described as "hags" as well as, "New Women." Quiz was less cruel, even though the barbs were directed at "the Misses Macdonalds" personally.⁵¹ This report was also more sophisticated and subtle. The word "ghoulish," at this time in at least some Scottish reporting, was attached as an adjective to anti-establishment activities. Hence a group of dissenting

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Quiz, 15 November 1894, 13.

parsons was called "A Ghoulisn Gathering."⁵² The critic, in this case, viewed the art as a statement against authority or the establishment and called for the "Further Powers" (the police) to put it down. Quiz, while actually using the Macdonalds' names, did not conduct a personal vendetta against the artists as women but placed them within a larger political context.

There is no evidence to suggest that the Macdonalds considered themselves "anti-establishment," but then neither is there evidence to suggest that they saw themselves as New Women. According to Ellen Jordan, the New Woman, who emerged in Britain in the 1880s, existed because of the pioneering efforts of 1860s feminists and it was the earlier feminists who "endowed the New Woman with her hostility to men, her questioning of marriage, her determination to escape from the restrictions of home life, and her belief that education could make a woman capable of leading a financially self-sufficient, single, yet fulfilling life."⁵³ By 1889, the derision found in the poem about the Macdonalds became the kind of attack favoured in the press. Jordan suggests:

It was in 1889...that the series of attacks on the new generation of feminists, using ridicule as a weapon rather than moral outrage, began. Women were now sneered at for aping the customs and

⁵² The Bailie, 25 April 1894, 9.

⁵³ Ellen Jordan, "The Christening of the New Woman: May 1894," in The Victorian Newsletter, Spring 1983, 19.

habits, and even rivalling the physical strength of men.⁵⁴

Judging from the Glasgow press, the public saw the Macdonalds as New Women and as subversive. This attitude carried on into 1895, surfacing again when the student exhibition to accompany the annual meeting of the Glasgow School of Art opened in February. James Guthrie, R.S.A., gave the address to the students and, according to Quiz, he "bristled with valuable guidance to those about to follow the career of Art as a means of livelihood."⁵⁵ Quiz went on to report that:

In his criticism of the endeavours of the Glasgow School of Art--some of them exceedingly wild endeavours, he parenthetically remarked--Mr. Guthrie, whilst commending in warm terms the originality displayed by the students in all their work did not spare their ludicrous striving after that supreme simplicity which comes only after long years of weary, hard, and laborious study. He seemed to insinuate that these students, or at least many of them, fancied that simplicity of technique was an easy thing to acquire...⁵⁶

However, the reporter for the North British Daily Mail saw Guthrie's comments as ones that encouraged the students' explorations. According to the Daily Mail, Guthrie

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ James Guthrie as quoted by Quiz, 28 February 1895, 164.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

"expressed satisfaction with what the school was doing."⁵⁷ He felt that whatever else the school did it should always show signs of "intelligence, life and activity."⁵⁸ There were too many pretentious institutions, he continued, that "dragged out a very posthumous existence" and only on rare occasions showed a "comatose consciousness."⁵⁹ The Glasgow School of Art was not like this but, according to Guthrie, was full of "vitality and activity."⁶⁰

Quiz, on the other hand, wrote that after commending the students on the originality of their work, Guthrie offered a warning to "the young men and women who study art and Posters, under Mr. F. H. Newbery:" those artists who fail to understand the complexities of "splendid simplicity," might, in fact, tumble "into the ditches of oblivion."⁶¹ It was obvious from the report in Quiz that some Glaswegians continued to view the more progressive students with suspicion. The Macdonalds obviously fell into this category and Quiz, as well as other Glasgow journals and papers, would continue to view them with

⁵⁷ Guthrie as quoted in the North British Daily Mail, 23 February 1895, 2. The Glasgow Herald, 23 February 1895, 8, printed a similar account.

⁵⁸ North British Daily Mail, 23 February 1895, 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ As quoted in the Glasgow Evening News, 23 February 1895, 5. The Evening News report did not mention Guthrie's "warnings" either.

⁶¹ Quiz, 28 February 1895, 165.

derision. The reason for this must lie in their art. Therefore, I would like to examine three pieces of art made by the women between 1893 and 1895. All of these pieces were completed while they were still students or immediately after they completed the four year programme at the School of Art. The pictures throw light upon their view of the world in late 19th century Glasgow, their sources of inspiration, as well as the path or direction they followed as they attempted to establish themselves as artists. An understanding of their milieu may give us a more comprehensive picture of the Macdonalds, of their successes and their failures, as well as indicating why the early pictures were so vehemently attacked.

The Early Watercolours

The first, a watercolour painting by Frances Macdonald, Girl in the East Wind with Ravens Passing the Moon (sometimes called Ill Omen) (Fig.3), is dated 1893 in the lower right hand corner immediately beneath her signature. The second, a watercolour drawing done as a design for a stained glass window by Margaret Macdonald, Summer (Fig.4), is undated but appeared in the April 1894 issue of The Magazine. The third, The Fountain (Fig.5) is undated and unsigned and has been attributed to both the sisters. However, it is usually considered to be closer to

Frances's style than to Margaret's.⁶² The date ascribed to this work is c.1893-5.⁶³ The style, the colour and the content speak for the earlier date, that is, 1893-94, rather than a later date. In addition to this, a letter to the editor commenting on the "graveyard" art of the 1894 student exhibition accurately describes The Fountain without actually naming the piece.⁶⁴ All three of the pictures, then, were completed before 1895, and they all rely upon a similar colour scheme of secondary colours and muted, often muddy tones, usually lilacs, greens and blues,⁶⁵ as well as the elongated figure that became a trademark of much of their work. In addition, all three watercolour drawings depict the female or a relationship between female and male.

⁶² To date no one has openly stated that Frances painted The Fountain although most accounts quite readily admit that it is probably, if not completely her own, then at least hers in inspiration. Robertson in the exhibition catalogue for Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh (1983), 15, writes that, "This design c.1893-95 with its eery symbolism is perhaps closer to the work of Frances Macdonald, and is related to her large watercolour Crucifixion and Ascension, 1893-94." Roger Billcliffe agrees. See Billcliffe, Mackintosh Watercolours, 46.

⁶³ Robertson, 15.

⁶⁴ See the letter to the editor signed "A Reader," in the Glasgow Evening News, 17 November 1894, 3.

⁶⁵ Secondary colours and low tones were associated with Oscar Wilde and his aestheticism of the 1880s. Wilde was "aesthetic to the last degree, passionately fond of secondary colours, low tones, Morris papers." From a letter written by George Macmillan as quoted by Ellmann, 68.

Girl in the East Wind with Ravens Passing the Moon

This enigmatic watercolour was produced by Frances Macdonald when she was 19 or 20 years old.⁶⁶ It is, as Billcliffe notes, "A drawing which sums up the aims and achievements of the Spook School,"⁶⁷ but, in fact the "spook school" had not yet been labelled as such. That nickname did not emerge until 1894 when it was applied to all of the members of the group that came to be known as the Glasgow Four: Frances Macdonald, Margaret Macdonald, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Herbert MacNair. Billcliffe ascribed to this painting elements of the "...twilight world of Celtic, or more simply, northern legend."⁶⁸ The Celtic world appeared in the work of other Glasgow artists during this time and Frances Macdonald certainly saw this work. For example, George Henry and Edward Hornel painted The Druids Bringing in the Mistletoe in 1890. It was exhibited at "the stronghold of Aestheticism, the Grosvenor Gallery"(London),⁶⁹ the same year and was later purchased by the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum (Kelvingrove). The Druids was not well received in London: The Artist found it

⁶⁶ Frances Macdonald turned twenty on 24 August 1893 and this work could have been done during the summer break, probably no later than this.

⁶⁷ Billcliffe (1978), 46.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ The catalogue for the exhibition, The Last Romantics..., 12.

"far too lavish and unrestrained to be in really good taste" as well as "perilously near vulgarity."⁷⁰ However, in Scotland it represented only one manifestation of a Celtic revival taking place during the 1890s. Grant Allen, in The Fortnightly Review (1891), "claimed that the Celt dominated in all fields of artistic activity--he speaks of 'the return wave of Celtic influence over Teutonic or Teutonized England'."⁷¹ Howarth suggested that Scottish intellectual Patrick Geddes, "and his followers in the 1890s, [merged] the Ossianic mysticism of the Celt and the sensual morbidity of the aesthetic movement."⁷² Certainly Geddes was passionately nationalistic, as his article for the first issue of his own publication, The Evergreen shows. Written to commemorate the death of another Scottish nationalist, Geddes unabashedly evoked the Celts:

For here were inter pulsating all the wildness with all the majesty of Celtic sorrow, the eerie song of northern winds and the roar of western tides. The sigh and wail of women, the pride and lament of chiefs, gathered of old into bardic monologue and chorus, were all in this weirdest, wildest, most elemental music. So again pealed forth the

⁷⁰ The Artist, 1 July 1890, 209.

⁷¹ As quoted by Howarth, 230. Howarth, in this instance, refers to a London journal that the Macdonalds may or may not have seen. They were much more likely, because of Kellock Brown, to have read The Hobby Horse. See Madsen, Sources of Art Nouveau, 207-221, for a very complete discussion of the influence of Celtic manuscripts and Saxon ornament on artists of the late nineteenth century.

⁷² Howarth, 230. Geddes, along with William Sharp, founded an illustrated quarterly journal, Evergreen, which Howarth writes was "a kind of Scottish Yellow Book."

chant of Ossian over an unreturning hero amid the undying moan of Merlin for a passing world.⁷³

In addition, the Glasgow Celtic Society actively promoted the language "which every true Highlander loves to speak," and attempted to preserve the language and literature as well as the music, poetry, and even the sports of Celtic Scotland.⁷⁴ Within the Glasgow School of Art itself, the ideas of the Century Guild with their proclivity for the Celts undoubtedly entered the vocabulary of the students via Frances's teacher William Kellock Brown, if not through Newbery himself. As we have seen, the Century Guild's publication The Hobby Horse supported what one of their frequent contributors, Arthur Galton, called the "Celtic Resurrection."⁷⁵ In addition, a Celtic revival of sorts was taking place in Scotland and could hardly have been ignored by a young student at an art school.

The Pre-Raphaelites, and then later Edward Burne-Jones, produced many paintings based on the haunting northern legends and myths. Their works are often

⁷³ Patrick Geddes in The Evergreen, Spring 1895, 131.

⁷⁴ Quiz, 7 March 1890, 7. Professor Blackie of the University of Glasgow was an important and influential member of the Society. The Scottish Society of Literature and Art, interestingly enough an early promoter of women's rights in Scotland, was also active in Glasgow. For example, see Quiz, 6 September 1894.

⁷⁵ See for example, The Hobby Horse, April 1887, 67-74, as mentioned in Chapter One.

considered to have influenced the Macdonalds.⁷⁶ The sisters certainly had access to such paintings and to information about the Pre-Raphaelites. For example, Holman Hunt's "remarkable painting" The Triumph of the Innocents (Fig.6) was exhibited in Glasgow in March 1886 and commanded "wonder and admiration" from the Glasgow audience.⁷⁷ This same painting was purchased by the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool in 1891⁷⁸ thus giving the Macdonald sisters, with a close relative living in Liverpool, the opportunity to see it.⁷⁹ Burne-Jones's, The Bath of Venus, exhibited with the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours in Glasgow in November 1894, was praised for its "essential purity as well as poetry of the figure, its beauty of line

⁷⁶ See, for example, Howarth, 226-8; Madsen, 293-298 or Billcliffe, Mackintosh Watercolours, 11.

⁷⁷ Quiz, 5 March 1886, 253. The painting was exhibited at White's Gallery on West George Street.

⁷⁸ The painting is on display in the Walker Art Gallery with the acquisition date listed.

⁷⁹ Joseph Tilley Hardeman, the Macdonalds' cousin on their mother's side, accepted a position at Greenbank School, Liverpool upon completion of his education at Trinity College, Oxford. A limited amount of information about Hardeman can be found in Greenbank School Liverpool (University Press of Liverpool, 1939). Hardeman remained close to the sisters and was, upon Margaret's death, responsible for dealing with her effects and arranging for her funeral in London. (From private correspondence in the archives at the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.) When Frances taught in Liverpool, after she moved back to Glasgow, she lived at Hardeman's house. (See the Sandon Bulletin, March 1912.)

and contour."⁸⁰ Certainly this painting, with its Venus "clothed with chastity,"⁸¹ contrasts sharply enough with the Macdonalds' "pale green...hags,"⁸² to throw some question upon Pre-Raphaelite inspirations upon the young women.

Rossetti's Mnemosyne was exhibited at the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts in February, 1893 and was mentioned in the press: the painting had superb colour, wrote the critic, but Rossetti painted from "too ample a model."⁸³ The Macdonalds, however much they took from the Pre-Raphaelites,⁸⁴ would never be accused of "too ample a model," and there are instances of critics denying a close link between the sisters and the English Pre-Raphaelitism. For example, a German critic for Dekorative Kunst (1898) most effectively dismissed this source of influence when he

⁸⁰ The Glasgow Herald, 1 November 1894, 5.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See the poem published by the Glasgow Evening News, 13 November 1894, 4.

⁸³ The Glasgow Herald, 3 February 1893, 9.

⁸⁴ There is a firm case for the availability of Pre-Raphaelite imagery. In addition to the paintings on view in Glasgow, Rossetti's books were often reviewed at length in the Glasgow press, see, for example, a review of The Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in The Glasgow Herald, 3 February 1891, 4. Once again, it would not have even been necessary to read the book in order to grasp a feel for its mood. This same review covered (and again at great length) J. Marshall Mather's, John Ruskin: His Life and Teaching and a translation of Ibsen's Hedda Gabler: A Drama in Four Acts.

wrote that a new and fresh stream flowed from the Macdonalds and that this was not at all in the manner of the Pre-Raphaelites but rather that it was the Glasgow artists that poured "new blood into London arteries."⁸⁵

Interestingly enough, here and in other articles by German critics, an indische Motive is mentioned.⁸⁶ Early in the 1890s, the noted scholar of Indian thought and philosophy, Max Müller, was a frequent lecturer at the University of Glasgow and his lectures were paraphrased in the local newspapers. For example, the Glasgow Herald (1891) reported that the seventh lecture given by Professor Müller dealt with "the discovery of the soul," and that he traced the growth of the words "soul" and "spirit."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ "Von ihnen [Mackintosh, the Macdonalds and G. Walton] geht eine frische Strömung aus, die gar nichts mit dem Praeraphaelitismus gemein hat und den erschlafften Adern der Londoner neues Blut geben könnte." Dekorative Kunst, vol.1, no.1, 1898, 50.

⁸⁶ "...man findet in ihren originellen Ornamenten deutliche Erinnerungen an indische Motive." Dekorative Kunst, Vol.I, No.1, 1898, 50. This is mentioned again in Dekorative Kunst, Vol.III, No.2, 1899, 48. "Man wird eine Menge orientalischer Elemente in ihnen [the Macdonalds] finden, die aber abseits von der Heerstrasse liegen, die der Eklektizismus unserer jungen Kunst gezogen ist." As mentioned earlier, the Macdonalds were probably familiar with Toorop and he was influenced by Indonesian art so, if one were to consider only visual sources of inspiration for their work, this would provide a link. However, there are other events taking place in Glasgow that allow one to forge a link between the Macdonalds and the East such as the lecture series at the University.

⁸⁷ The Glasgow Herald, 4 February 1891, 9. Quiz also commended Professor Müller's lectures; see, for example, 13 March 1891, 6. In addition, all these lectures were announced in the February issues of Quiz.

Three days later another lengthy column appeared in which Müller's "soul" lectures were again discussed.⁸⁸ Early in 1892, Müller gave another series of lectures at the University of Glasgow focussing on the Upanishads. Professor Müller, in at least one of the four lectures, discussed the difference between the mythological and the philosophical and, in addition, elaborated on the theory of the "migration of souls."⁸⁹

Whether Frances Macdonald or her sister Margaret attended any of these lectures remains unknown. However, Müller aroused a great deal of attention in the local press. The Glasgow Herald reported on his lectures at length; one could know virtually all that was said simply by reading the paper. The Bailie also carried somewhat briefer and more superficial reports but, nevertheless, nearly any literate Glaswegian would have been aware of Müller and his interests.⁹⁰ Probably, the German critics observed quite legitimate connections. Certainly, the ideas of "soul," "spirit," "migration of souls," could have interested young

⁸⁸ The Glasgow Herald, 7 February 1891, 9.

⁸⁹ The Glasgow Herald, 23 January 1892, 4.

⁹⁰ Somewhat later the ideas and concepts of Theosophy attracted some attention in the Glasgow press. See, for example, Quiz, 2 November 1893. The Glasgow Evening News also printed long discussions about Theosophy in October 1893. The point is that Glaswegians had great opportunities to be quite well versed in Eastern thought just by reading popular press. In addition, as shall be mentioned later, Patrick Geddes and theosophist Annie Besant were close friends.

students in Glasgow and, indeed, these descriptive terms along with "mystery" could be applied to Girl in the East Wind.

The combination of greens, blues and mauves conveys a pervasive sense of mystery. The elongation of the young woman suggests distance, aloofness and loneliness. Her verticality is emphasized by the three barren slender trees immediately behind her and one somewhat heavier but also barren tree slightly in front of her. Her long arms stretch down to below her hips and her hands just barely cross over one another. The woman's eyes are closed. Her head is tilted down in a meditative pose that further removes her from the viewer. Her space cannot be entered. The woman is silent and she has closed herself off sexually. Her large, powerful looking hands, are emphatically folded over her pubic area which is front on toward the viewer. This contrasts to the over-large feet which are in strict profile and correspond to the profile of the face. The pose of the figure is reminiscent of the conventions of ancient Egyptian art and the critic Gleeson White made this connection, in reference to Macdonald's later work, in his Studio article of 1897. White wrote that the Scots:

who appear to be most strongly influenced by Egypt, affect to be surprised at the bare suggestion of such influence, and disclaim any intentional reference to 'allegories on the banks of the Nile'; nor in their studios do you see any casts, photographs or other

reproductions of Egyptian art.⁹¹

The artists' disclaimer may or may not be accepted;⁹² certainly, the pose itself speaks of Egypt as does the emphasis upon strong verticals and horizontals. The long, pale hair, also shown from the side, streaks out from the woman's head in a horizontal that, along with the flight of the five crows or ravens, balances the strong verticals. The full pale yellow moon hovering behind the woman's torso offsets the harshness of the rigid grid composition.

Who is this mysterious figure standing alone in the moonlight? Interestingly enough, the solitary and independent nature of the young woman in combination with her Egyptian pose relates to an article in the popular press in Glasgow (1891):

Advocates of women's rights will derive a strong argument from the discovery recently made at Thebes,

⁹¹ White, "Some Glasgow Designers..." in The Studio, 1897, 88.

⁹² In 1893, the year this picture was painted, Egypt was a popular topic in the British press. The Illustrated London News, 28 January 1893, had an "Egyptian" cover; one of its articles was on "The Political Crisis in Egypt;" and a drawing, In the Seraglio, by N. Sichel was reproduced (108). The same publication on 4 February 1893 published "Scenes from Eastern Life," and an ad for Lipton's Teas even used an Egyptian woman as its theme. Perhaps all this influenced Frances Macdonald's so-called Egyptian-looking art. The question of "authorial intentionality" forms an ongoing debate in film and literary criticism and it has been suggested that "texts can in some sense generate meanings on their own, or at least meanings that go beyond the author's intentions." (Annette Kuhn, Women's Pictures, Feminism and Criticism, London, 1982, 9.) This can be extended to include visual arts.

where a remarkable 'find' of mummies has been made. Among these are the remains of priestesses who exercised a great influence some 900 years before the founding of Rome.⁹³

In addition, a connection between the Glasgow Four and the Belgian symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck, is often made⁹⁴ and, although the playwright is generally linked with Margaret Macdonald's art, in this instance similarities to his work certainly can be found in Frances's picture. The Girl in the East Wind could represent either Maleine, from Maeterlinck's La Princesse Maleine (1889), or Melisande, from Pelleas et Melisande (1893).⁹⁵ The princess, Maleine, wears a green dress and is often associated with wind and with a fountain;⁹⁶ she waits for her lover in the garden every evening and pursues him in the moonlight;⁹⁷ she is, as is much of Maeterlinck's literary description,

⁹³ Quiz, 13 March 1891, 5.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Howarth, 145; Billcliffe, Mackintosh Watercolours, 47; or Peter Vergo, Vienna 1900, 47.

⁹⁵ La Princesse Meleine was first published serially in La Societe nouvelle in 1889. It was translated into English by Gerard Harry in 1890. Maeterlinck was very taken with the English Pre-Raphaelites (and with England, in general) and saw his first play performed on the London stage in May, 1891. The play, L'Intruse was not well received. W. D. Halls, Maurice Maeterlinck, A Study of His Life and Thought (Oxford, 1960), 26-51.

⁹⁶ Maurice Maeterlinck, Princess Meleine, in The Plays of Maurice Maeterlinck (New York, 1972; first published by Stone & Kimball, 1894), 71-79.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 71-73.

"pale and greenish;"⁹⁸ crows are ominously present in the drama;⁹⁹ and eventually, although Maleine was poisoned, Maeterlinck, tells us that it was "...the wind that killed her."¹⁰⁰ Melisande is a similar pale heroine who says, in the play, Pelleas et Melisande: "My hair is longer than my arms."¹⁰¹ Frances's Girl in the East Wind seems made for Maeterlinck; its sub-title, Ill Omen, are words found in Princess Maleine.¹⁰² In addition, another Maeterlinck play, L'Intruse, when it was performed in London in 1895, was called "a creepy and crepuscular drama" peopled by "ghostly ladies with long hair and eyes that never close."¹⁰³ The Glasgow critic of the play considered it a "tragedy in a grim twilight" that made one see "forests and caverns."¹⁰⁴

Maeterlinck, however, is only one possible source of Frances's imagery. The decadent tone of the fin-de-siècle was often discussed in Glasgow papers. For example, in November 1893, a short essay appeared in the Glasgow Herald called "Fin-de-Siècle November." The author described the

⁹⁸ Ibid. See for example, 93.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 203.

¹⁰¹ Maeterlinck, Pelleas et Melisande, 38.

¹⁰² Maeterlinck, Princess Meleine, 71.

¹⁰³ Glasgow Evening News, 3 April 1895, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

personified month as moody, gloomy and melancholy.¹⁰⁵

This same issue of the Herald published a column by their Paris correspondent on fin-de-siècle dance in Paris referring to the French paper, Figaro.¹⁰⁶ The Scottish correspondent in Paris wrote that:

In these fin-de-siècle days a great many things are to be seen in Paris, and doubtless in other large cities, that would shock and disgust the great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers of the present generation, could they by any possibility be spectators of them. What are perhaps not inaccurately called "immoral" exhibitions increase and multiply here after nightfall...¹⁰⁷

The author went on to report on the death of one of the dancers as she performed le grand écart and then mentioned an article in Figaro which criticized the conditions under which the dancers worked. One could live and work in Glasgow and be quite aware of Paris and the fin-de-siècle, as Frances and Margaret Macdonald obviously were.

In addition, adjectives used to describe the sisters' work, for example, "weird", "grim", "ghoulish," are all terms used to describe a wide assortment of art or events that appear frequently in the Glasgow press. For example a review of Murray Gilchrist's The Stone Dragon and Other Tragic Romances (1894) described the stories as "weird and grim," as well as "bizarre" and totally in keeping with the

¹⁰⁵ The Glasgow Herald, 25 November 1893, 7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

"descriptions of Theophile Gautier."¹⁰⁸ Similarly, as we have seen, an event with obvious political overtones, such as a gathering of "dissenting parsons," could be discussed using the same terms: "There must have been a ghoulis disestablishment gathering at Lockerbie....Ten hoodie-craws eager to pick out the eyes, and fatten upon the flesh, of the establishment, [are] sharpening their beaks and claws against the attack!"¹⁰⁹

This particular tone of fin-de-siècle melancholy and fascination with death appeared in The Magazine at this time. The April 1894 issue, again edited by Lucy Raeburn, included a short essay by Jane Keppie, "Ophelia," in which the mad woman is described as noble, true and wronged.

Ophelia, wrote Keppie:

has sometimes been represented as weak and childish, too gentle and obedient to act for herself, but such is not my idea of her character. Her circumstances are such as to try the strongest....Ophelia seems separated from other women....she claims our tears and pity for the overthrow of a noble mind and true and loving heart.¹¹⁰

Keppie promoted the idea of Ophelia as a strong heroine but, perhaps because of Victorian constraints similar to those voiced by Catherine Carswell in her autobiography, Lying Awake, she failed to free her heroine from pathos. She was

¹⁰⁸ The Glasgow Herald, 3 February 1894, 4.

¹⁰⁹ The Bailie, 25 April 1894, 9.

¹¹⁰ The Magazine, April 1894, 15-17.

unable to create a strong, independent Ophelia but instead showed her protagonist to be acted upon rather than acting herself: "Poor Ophelia! Never had a maiden such a strange wooer. She knows him to be noble and good, yet his treatment of her is inexplicable....Ophelia finds her noblest feelings crushed, her purest hopes blasted, her trust betrayed."¹¹¹

The poignant and romantic theme of a woman suffering and dying from unrequited love was a common one in the 1890s. J. W. Waterhouse's painting The Lady of Shalott (1888) was a "hit" in Britain and, as such, appeared in the 1893 Royal Academy Exhibition.¹¹² His The Naiad and The Hamadryad were both exhibited at the thirty-third annual exhibition of Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts in January 1894. Neither of these representations of these water or wood nymphs depicted a strong, vigorous woman. The popular heroine, in the early 1890s, was not the independent heroine. Quite the contrary, the public expected to see

¹¹¹ Ibid. See Bram Dijkstra, Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture (Oxford, 1986), for a discussion of the fin-de-siècle fascination with the image of woman as dead or dying, 25-63. Dijkstra cites Ophelia as "...the later nineteenth-century's all-time favourite example of the love-crazed self-sacrificial woman who most perfectly demonstrated her devotion to her man by descending into madness, who surrounded herself with flowers to show her equivalence to them, and who in the end committed herself to a watery grave, thereby fulfilling the nineteenth-century male's fondest fantasies of feminine dependency." Dijkstra, 42.

¹¹² The Glasgow Herald, 2 February 1894, 9.

weak, limpid, pale women in paintings and in real life. Hence paintings of waning women or of quiet, gentle female children were favoured. Matthijs Maris (1839-1917), a popular Dutch artist who lived and painted in Glasgow during the 1880s and 1890s, exhibited The Enchanted Castle in the 1895 winter show at the Institute. According to a review in one local newspaper, the painting "expressed much of the sympathy....for the child-life and simple joys" and was commended for being "beautiful exceedingly in its tender veiling, and [was] full of romantic suggestion."¹¹³ Two years earlier, Maris's The Foundling (1874) (Fig.7) was exhibited at the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts.¹¹⁴ This painting of a helpless pre-pubescent girl also drew critical praise:

[The] tiny girl....has strayed all by herself into a wood. She has decked her hair with wild blossom, and her little limbs beginning to tire, she has lain down with the large faith of childhood. There is no fear in the light brown eyes; her wakeful repose is that of innocence and unconscious trust. How delicate, too, is the colour scheme, how pure and tender the blue of the child's dress.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ The Glasgow Herald, 2 February 1895, 7.

¹¹⁴ The Glasgow Herald, 3 February 1893, 9. The Foundling, judging by the 1893 description, is the painting called Butterflies held by the Burrell Collection, Glasgow. I am grateful to Vivienne Hamilton, Curator of Prints and Drawings, Burrell Collection, Glasgow for pointing out a possible connection between the later fairytale-like works by the Macdonalds and Maris as well as for showing me the Maris's in the Burrell Collection and for her valued comments and insights.

¹¹⁵ The Glasgow Herald, 3 February 1893, 9.

Alexander Roche's In Springtime depicting "a girl gathering early flowers in the fields," as well as Edward Hornel's Children at Play, both with themes of innocent childhood (that is female childhood) appeared in this 1893 exhibit.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, when Degas's The Ballet was exhibited (with Maris's The Enchanted Castle in 1895) the critic described the picture as "vulgar in feeling" and said that it should never have been hung next to a Scottish landscape.¹¹⁷ The Glasgow audience wanted to see and read about an innocent, romantic child-like world. Neither Keppie's struggle to create an independent Ophelia nor Frances Macdonald's eerie Girl in the East Wind fits this concept of innocent female childhood. Hence Keppie's Ophelia, aided by the writer's waffling, stymied her own development; Keppie wanted a proud Ophelia but lost her by the end of the essay.

This same struggle shows itself in Frances Macdonald's paintings: she attempted to create a strong heroine. However, the tall solitary woman in Ill Omen, retreating from her own sexuality, closed off from the world, is unique in Frances's work. She would make other images of women, some unpleasant, some repulsive, but few demonstrate the strength in solitude found in The Girl in the East Wind.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ The Glasgow Herald, 2 February 1894, 9.

Summer

Margaret Macdonald never produced such a strong image of a woman alone. Most of her females are silent like The Girl in the East Wind, and they appear to retreat into their silence rather than to exalt in it. She also made pictures that show a male and female together including Summer (Fig.4), an undated pencil, ink and watercolour drawing completed about 1893. Billcliffe considers the work, "one of the earliest of the so-called Spook School drawings by Margaret."¹¹⁸ Another recent comment describes the male figure in Summer as "a reptilian man identified with the sun," and the female as "an immensely elongated, pale girl who perhaps symbolizes the organic life of the earth."¹¹⁹ Robertson, in the catalogue for the exhibition Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, notes that Summer is, "probably a design for a stained glass window," and suggests that it may be the work that won Margaret a prize in a local competition: Design for a Window of Mosaic Glass.¹²⁰ In fact, Margaret won two mentions for designs for a window, throwing the exact date of this work into question. First, she received a mention (not a prize) for "a design for a

¹¹⁸ Billcliffe (1978), 46.

¹¹⁹ William Hardie, Scottish Painting, 1837-1939 (London, 1976), 84. One wonders why, when both figures seem to be about the same age, that Hardie names one a "man" and the other a "girl."

¹²⁰ Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, 16.

window [commended for]....its decorative treatment," during the 1892-93 academic year.¹²¹ This would place the design in the latter half of the academic year, prior to June 1893 or the end of that academic year.

The following year she received a prize for "Stained Glass (Design for a Window of Mosaic Glass)"¹²² and because her drawing is mosaic-like, the temptation is to identify it with the design for the second window, dating from the fall of 1893 or the spring of 1894. There is no definite way of knowing in which of the two competitions, indeed if either, that this drawing appeared. However, as Margaret's elongated central female figure is almost identical to a small drawing done by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Design for some finger plates (see Fig.8), for the new Glasgow Art Club, which is precisely dated to 7 June 1893,¹²³ a connection between these two artists is evident. Who produced what first remains a puzzle.

Margaret's tall female figure is Mackintosh's figure reversed and placed in the centre of the composition. She

¹²¹ Annual Report, 6 February 1894, for the 1892-93 Session, 19.

¹²² Annual Report, 22 February 1895, for the 1893-94 Session, 23.

¹²³ Mackintosh's drawing appeared in The Bailie, 7 June 1893, 9, as part of the Keppie firm's designs for the new Glasgow Art Club. The drawing is reproduced in Billcliffe, Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs (New York, 1979), 29.

binds the hair, positions the arms down rather than up, introduces a male figure and simplifies the line, making her representation more sinuously elegant than his.

Mackintosh's three tubers, or possibly apples, at the base of the tendrils are transformed into smooth, embryonic shapes in Margaret's design; Mackintosh's five spheres become one in Margaret's. If Mackintosh's design came late he cluttered up Margaret's spare clean lines; if Margaret's came late, she modified, simplified and strengthened Mackintosh's curves. Either way, one certainly saw the other.¹²⁴

Margaret's work is similar to Frances's both in design and content. The elongation and the palette as well as the emphasis upon strong horizontals and verticals all resemble Frances's Ill Omen. The relationship between the male and female, however, eliminates the pervasive pathos of Frances's drawing. One can also see a greater emphasis upon design in Summer, a feature that would remain constant in Margaret's work. Another similarity between the two women, however, does appear here and that is the androgyny of the two figures.¹²⁵ Both figures in Summer are elongated,

¹²⁴ This is further evidence for, if not an exchange of ideas between the artists, an awareness of each other's art. By June 1893 there are similarities to be found between Mackintosh and Macdonald, that is, over a year before the date generally ascribed to this mutual influence.

¹²⁵ Androgyny is in keeping with fin-de-siècle decadence, for example, J.-K. Huysmans' A Rebours and Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray favour androgyny, albeit on the part of

emaciated, and have strong, heavy facial features. If the man were standing rather than kneeling, he would be no taller than the woman. The male and female figures are distinguishable only because the female has breasts and the treatment of her hair is different.

The mood of Margaret's composition is softened in comparison to her sister's Ill Omen, by the introduction of the s-curve which undulates through the centre of the drawing. It is in this same way that Margaret's drawing differs from Mackintosh's finger plates designs. Her line is always graceful and elegant, never cluttered. Her male figure, emaciated and elongated, is curled into a position that allows him to fit very comfortably into the moon. The woman, whose form stretches up through nearly the entire vertical space, is superimposed on the moon, drawn into it by the long arms of the man who supports her somewhat as she balances on her toes. Her position does not seem precarious as she appears more as an expert dancer sharing the support of a partner, rather than a neophyte about to fall over.

The mood established by Margaret's Summer is one of harmony between the sexes; the mood established in Frances's Ill Omen is one of isolation. This contrast is even more apparent in two small lithographs both done for the November 25th, 1893, Glasgow School of Art Club exhibition and "At Home." Margaret's is an invitation card for the "At Home"

males not females.

(Fig.9); Frances's is the cover for the programme (see Fig.1). Taken together, these prints not only reiterate the differences between Summer and Ill Omen but in them one is also able to see the characteristics which distinguish Frances's work from Margaret's: Frances's is harsh; Margaret's more gentle.

Both prints take inspiration from C. F. A. Voysey's "Design for a Wall-Paper Frieze" which was reproduced in the first volume of The Studio (1893) (Fig.10).¹²⁶ Margaret's work bears the closest resemblance to Voysey because her figures face toward the tree as do his, but both the sisters move more toward a simplified linear patterning. In addition, both use a curvilinear shape (again like Voysey); both depict two women aligned parallel to each other on the picture plane (Voysey's figures are male); and both use a circular shape to surround and define the rectangular space used for the text. Here the similarities end. Frances's two women sit on the ground back to back separated only by the slender trunk of a tree. The women are bound on either side of the tree by a band of cloth that holds them against the trunk. Their long hair round them almost meeting, in each case, the tip of a crescent shape, somewhat moon-like, somewhat harp-like. They are seated on another crescent shape which repeats the "harp" and which has a "tragic" theatre mask fastened to each end.

¹²⁶ The Studio, Vol.1, 1893, 231.

Each of these women reaches for a tendril that grows down from the tree ending as an apple. This apple-tree-Eve theme would be repeated time and again by Frances, eventually constituting some of her most powerful imagery. The "caught" woman or, in this case women, also recurs in her later work. In other words, even in this little programme cover, Frances introduces pathos and struggle into her work. Once again, this is similar to the plight of Ophelia as innocently described by Keppie in The Magazine. Neither Ophelia nor Frances's women are able to forge their own destiny; both are trapped in the machinations of others. Frances's women are bound to the tree and caught in the tendrils. Her representation is neither subtle nor romantic and suggests that she perceived the condition in which end-of-the-century British women found themselves. Frances's female figures, however, make an individual rather than a collective statement; they speak of personal restrictions and confinements rather than those constructed by the society in which she lived.

Nevertheless, Frances eliminated the pathos of unrequited love hovering in the background and makes a simple and straight-forward statement: the women are going nowhere. In total opposition to this powerful comment, Frances would later create images of submissive princesses and passive Ophelias. Her pictures of women would always be inconsistent (she resisted closures) one time passive,

another time aggressive, but always depicting some aspect of woman's reality.

On the other hand, Margaret's art, including the 1893 invitation, would always make a different point. In her invitation, while using a composition almost identical to her sister's (and to Voysey's), she constructs an entirely different representation. Her "tree" in the centre is a tall, straight woman with eyes closed and a gentle, oval face turning just slightly down in a meditative attitude. She undoubtedly is also meant to resemble a tree but a much more benign one than her sister's. The two kneeling women inhabit exactly the same place as Frances's but they face one another and reach out toward the woman/tree who, in turn, puts out her hands in a protective or blessing gesture.

The two prints differ in both style and content: the style just slightly; the content quite obviously. Margaret's work, like Summer, shows a sophisticated use of a sinuous s-curve. Her curving lines flow gently making no sudden turns or unexpected twists. The line is lyrical and smooth with sharp verticals and horizontals always tempered with a softer curve. She uses the same technique in Summer. Her female figure is not stick straight as her sister's Girl in the East Wind but displays just a slight curve in the outward thrust of the pelvic area. Margaret's female figure is sexually open; Frances's is closed. Margaret's tree-

woman wears a rigidly angular, ankle length skirt but this is balanced by the gently sloping shoulders and serene expression on her face. There are no unexpected shifts in the flowing quality of the line.

Frances's line can turn, sharply, at any moment. The tendrils at the top of her gnarled tree turn back upon themselves just before they leave the print, creating a sharp, angular shift in the rhythm. A leaf near each of the apples at the top of the print also turns at a quick angle. She uses curvilinear lines but most often avoids the sweeping, lyrical s-curve. Her lines move faster, are more gestural and provide a staccato rhythm. In Ill Omen, for example, one finds little respite from the harshness of the verticals and horizontals. Frances's viewers can seldom relax.

Similarly, the content in Frances's art tends to put the viewer on edge; she does not express angst but does make one slightly uncomfortable. Her drawing A Pond (November) (1894) (see Fig.2)¹²⁷ carries her grotesqueries to their furthest limits; she would never again be this extreme in her distortion of the human figure. This watercolour caricatures a type of Victorian woman, particularly woman as represented in Pre-Raphaelite art. There are two androgynous figures in the drawing who meet chin to pointed chin. This trend toward incorporating an androgynous figure

¹²⁷ This appeared in The Magazine, November 1894.

into a drawing or design possibly reflected the influence of Newbery, who preferred "less anatomy in the figures."¹²⁸

The Century Guild's Selwyn Image also called for less emphasis upon recognizable form: "in [the artist's] search for an harmonious or complete whole....both flower and figure are alike...they are simply the objects, that is to say, which give or suggest fine lines and masses."¹²⁹

However, Frances's emphasis upon "fine lines and masses" went further than Image, perhaps, would have liked. The features of the figures are harsh and shrill; their elbows, wrists and fingers are sharp and pointed. The rhythm of her line is again staccato. When she repeats a curve, as she does in the balloon-like faces at the top of the drawing, she destroys any possible gentleness with the round, staring eyes and hard, crescent-shaped mouth. These figures are sardonic mockeries of the languid, sensuous Pre-Raphaelite women. They inform the viewer of the artist's understanding

¹²⁸ The androgynous character of some of Macdonald's early drawings was probably supported by her teachers at the GSA. For example, an article signed "F. Elliot" in The Scottish Art Review, Vol.1, No.6, 1888, expresses a desire for "less anatomy in the figures" in order to create a better design. George Rawson, in his work in progress on Newbery, draws the undoubtedly correct conclusion that "F. Elliot" is, in fact, Francis Newbery.

¹²⁹ Selwyn Image, "Of design, and of the Study of Nature," in Plain Handicrafts (edited by A. H. Mackmurdo, London, 1892), 2.

of these English artists while poking fun at them.¹³⁰ Rossetti's Mnemosyne hung in the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts in the winter of 1893;¹³¹ Burne-Jones became an honorary member of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours in 1894;¹³² Waterhouse, Millais and Holman Hunt, in addition to Rossetti, were constantly praised by the Glasgow press. By the 1890s the Pre-Raphaelite woman, most aptly represented by the models Jane Burden Morris and Elizabeth Siddal, was a recognizable type. Stephen Madsen described Morris and Siddal as:

...two women who helped to inspire the Pre-Raphaelite female face, with its greenish-blue eyes, full of melancholy, and half-closed heavy lids, and the sensual, slightly protruding upper lip, with its peculiar curve. It is an expressive female face, framed in a profusion of copper-coloured locks; the head is tilted back slightly, and has an air of resigned suffering, while the curvature of the long swanlike neck is continued in the draperies of her garments.¹³³

Frances Macdonald's figures are naked. This suggests a move away from Victorian puritanism and, at the same time, eliminates the subliminal seductiveness traditionally evoked by the form-hugging drapery of Pre-Raphaelitism. Their

¹³⁰ William Hardie in Scottish Painting, 1837-1939 (London, 1976), 84, described this print as "two emaciated and pallid figures beneath waters of a pond lapped gently weed-like growths with heads like tadpoles."

¹³¹ The Glasgow Herald, 3 February 1893, 9.

¹³² The Bailie, 30 May 1894, 10.

¹³³ Madsen, 236.

long, swanlike necks become extensions of narrow bodies no wider than the necks. Their heads are not "tilted back slightly" to indicate female submissiveness but, led by sharply protruding chins, jut pugnaciously forward to signify challenge. The "profusion of locks," characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite images, becomes a negative space around the figures, balloons out, then trails down into pond stagnation. Frances's "pond" women (the Pre-Raphaelites favoured images of Elaine or Orphelia floating downstream)¹³⁴ have heavy eyelids and protruding upper lips. However, unlike the Pre-Raphaelite representation of woman which is laden with dreams of voyeuristic seduction, Frances's women are repellent. They are also active (subject) rather than passive (object). The figures have long eyelashes, long thick hair and full lips. The genital area, in three-quarter profile, seems female; the chests are flat. These figures are Frances's most androgynous. Hence the picture, in its direct opposition to the alluring Pre-Raphaelite woman, is radically opposed to prevailing standards of female sexuality. The nudity combined with sexlessness, emphatically destroys the evocation of the Pre-Raphaelite beauty, the Victorian maiden or the fin-de-siècle femme fatale.

In a drawing to accompany or parody this, Margaret

¹³⁴ See Dijkstra, 38-42, for a discussion of the 'dying among the water lilies' theme.

differs again from her sister. Her The Fifth of November, 1894¹³⁵ is tearful, sad and somewhat gloomy but she softens her skeletal figures with a very slight curve, again a modification of an s-curve. Her figures are clearly female, not androgynous; their full breasts contrast with the long, narrow torsos. Their long hair, mingled with or perhaps turning into their tears, falls toward a face similar to the face of the tree-woman of the invitation card but, this time, her eyes are open with the pupils upturned. She seems full of despair. She is still closely affiliated with nature, this time a hill or small mountain rather than a tree. The difference between these two drawings by the sisters is the difference between a shrill scream and a quiet sob. This is a consistent and enduring difference: Frances's pictures are more painful.

Another difference that can be seen is the different attitude toward sexuality. Margaret's figures are obviously female; Frances's are devoid of sexuality. This particular feature will remain one that distinguishes Frances from Margaret and although it is most evident at this early stage, it will recur in collaborative works and, in such instances, we can see the hand and mind of Frances.

The Fountain

This watercolour drawing, dated to c.1893-95 (Fig.5),

¹³⁵ This also appeared in the November 1894 issue of The Magazine.

is the first work that has been considered a joint work although it is most often seen as Frances's inspiration.¹³⁶ It includes another depiction of these unalluring female figures. The woman on the left is a greenish-white, emaciated creature whose reed-like arms end in thin angular "flippers" rather than hands. Her features, like those of the Girl in the East Wind, are large; her hair is straight, thin and balding. The crescent shape near the bottom of the drawing is repeated from Frances's "Programme" but its upward curve is much sharper. The theatre masks are gone and two vultures sit at its base. The crescent shape, although moon-like, could be the birds' long, narrow, featherless wings. They meet, beak to beak, in the same sort of symmetry one finds in Frances's The Pond. Their sharp angularity and threatening posture also suggest Frances's hand. However, the roundness and lack of any sudden angularities in the two female figures who form the apex of the fountain seems to speak of Margaret's style of drawing.

Margaret also used anthropomorphic elements in another drawing, The Story of a River, 1894. In River, the two

¹³⁶ Both Billcliffe (1978) and Robertson (1983) consider this a joint work. They also suggest, and I tend to agree, that it represents more of Frances's inspiration than Margaret's. Billcliffe writes that "the figures do bear some resemblance to those in Frances's large watercolour, Crucifixion and Ascension." (46) Robertson concurs: "This design c.1893-5 with its eery symbolism is perhaps closer to the work of Frances Macdonald." (16).

trees in the foreground turn into women; the mountain in the background is a crouching figure with knees drawn up to the chest like Frances's women in her "Programme". The mood here, as well as in November 5th and The Fountain, might owe much to the Italian symbolist, Giovanni Segantini. Segantini's, The Punishment of Luxury, 1891 (Fig.11) was purchased by the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool in 1893¹³⁷ and might have been seen by the Macdonalds on trips to Liverpool. It is obvious from pictures like The Story of A River, November 5th, and The Fountain, that the Macdonald's had a clear conception of Symbolism and what it meant.

Again, as with Ill Omen, the female figure dominating Fountain could be a protagonist derived from Maeterlinck. She is emaciated and greenish-white. Her reed-like long arms end in thin, sharp "flippers" and repeat the harsh edges of the vultures. We can recognize Frances's hand in the sharp turns and staccato rhythms. Here we also see the fountain linked with the female, a frequent symbol in Maeterlinck's work: Hjalmar makes his vigil for Maleine by the fountain;¹³⁸ Pelleas and Melisande meet at a fountain;¹³⁹ Golaud kills Pelleas at the fountain.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ The acquisition date is noted next to the painting in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

¹³⁸ Princess Maleine, 71.

¹³⁹ Pelleas and Melisande, 91.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 113.

Frances's female, her head framed by a full moon, turns her face upward toward an appendage which stretches down from the side of the tree/fountain. It is about to place its end in the woman's open mouth: it could be an apple of death; it could be a stream of life. However, with the dark, ominous presence of the vultures it speaks more of Eve's fall or of Maleine's poisoning than of life or joy. There is also a pervasive sexuality in this work that may or may not have been intended. If we recall Catherine Carswell's reminiscences of her youth, we must surely admit that the "fountain" could have been a deliberate reference to sexual content. In addition, if we assume that the Macdonalds were "New Women" then we may also assume that they were aware of the suggestive quality of the image. Quiz, in 1894, told its readers, "How to be a 'New Woman';" one characteristic was to "denounce man," another to "deal with questions of sex."¹⁴¹ Whether deliberate or not, the sexual implications exist.

The one male figure in the right mid-ground seems an after-thought, tacked on rather than integrated. He plays no role in the drama. The drawing is poor, the anatomy is incorrect and the pose is awkward. The attempt to render a muscular figure, rather than to abstract figural elements for elongated design, fails.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 113.

¹⁴¹ Quiz, 13 September 1894, 181.

The Fountain was exhibited along with other student works. Although no catalogues exist for the Glasgow School of Art exhibitions, newspaper reviews and hostile letters to the editor provide evidence that these, or other pictures like them by the Macdonalds, were put on display in the Fine Art Institute, Glasgow's leading gallery space. One irate viewer in 1894 clearly identifies The Fountain by his vivid description of the picture:

Imagine human beings drawn on the gas-pipe system-arms, legs, and bodies all of the same skinny pattern, with large lips and immense hands. The background of one of these masterpieces consisted of various parts of anatomy subjects, floating about in an objectless manner in a sea of green mud....Looking at these pictures one would think the artists had run short of all colour except a sickly green with which to finish their job....Painting figures with no clothes on has always excited opposition from a large portion of the public, but these ambitious enthusiasts in their search after truth paint their figures without even their flesh on.¹⁴²

This rather muddy watercolour drawing, so reviled by the Glasgow audience, was a joint effort between the two women. It is probably one of their earliest joint works, pre-dating the metalwork that would be co-operatively produced in their studio at 124 Hope Street and appearing during that period of time which spawned their most inventive, creative and original images.

¹⁴² Glasgow Evening News, 17 November 1894, 3.

Prior to the studio years or just at the beginning of these years the sisters produced their most unusual as well as their most dramatic pictures. Margaret's November 5th and Story of a River along with Frances's Pond and Ill Omen, works that quite likely appeared in the November student exhibition, shocked a Glasgow audience used to the "enchanted" children of Matthew Maris, the "too-ample" Pre-Raphaelite women and the girls "gathering early flowers in the fields" of Alexander Roche. To such an audience, the long, skeletal women were "greenish hags," associated emphatically with the dreaded "New Women." The Macdonalds gloomy pictures, however, were in keeping with the state of the world at this time, even as reported in the Glasgow papers. 1894 was filled with apprehension, violence and tension: the Brazilian war had dire consequences for the Glasgow ship-building industry;¹⁴³ Scottish miners were verging on violent in their demands for higher wages and better working conditions;¹⁴⁴ the anarchist, August Vaillant, executed on the morning of 5 February, was brought to the scaffold shouting "Vive l'anarchie! Death to society and the bourgeoisie!" His lengthy statement calling

¹⁴³ The Glasgow Herald, 2 February 1894, 9. British ships were being detained at Rio de Janeiro. This affected the Clyde Shipowner's Association representing the owners of many of these impounded vessels and the Herald published many of the letters that were passing between the Foreign Office and the Secretary of the Shipowner's Association.

¹⁴⁴ Over 26,000 miners supported their spokesmen. The Glasgow Herald, 2 February 1894, 10.

for the revenge of the proletariat and the "crushing" of bourgeois society was well publicized;¹⁴⁵ later in the year anarchists attempted to bomb a residence in London; and there were major stories about the war in the East between China and Japan. Altogether this was neither a calm nor a peaceful time in the political or economic sphere nor, with the growing evidence of unrest among women and the emergence of the New Woman, was there quiet in the social sphere. The Macdonalds' art seems much more indicative of the unrest of the era than the innocent art of Maris, Roche or other Glasgow artists but it was the Macdonalds who drew vitriolic attack.

¹⁴⁵ The Glasgow Herald, 6 February 1894, 4. Vailliant had exploded a bomb in the French Chamber of Deputies, 9 December 1893, wounding several people but killing none.

The attempted assassination of Reginald Brett in London drew much attention in the press. See The Glasgow Herald, 6 November 1894, 7. This virtually coincided with the Student exhibition.

See, for example, The Glasgow Herald, 7 November 1894, 7, which again coincided with the Exhibition.

CHAPTER THREE
THE STUDIO YEARS

Francis Newbery, the progressive head-master of the Glasgow School of Art, consistently supported, indeed encouraged, his students' forays into the new, the daring and the exciting. Poster art was among the most innovative art forms in Glasgow by 1895. In an article titled "Glasgow School of Art, A Flourishing Institution" (Glasgow Evening News, May 1895), Newbery publicly announced his support for his students when the reporter questioned him about their posters:

The possibilities of the poster are great. Our early efforts (with which the public must be fairly familiar by this time) met with a shower of adverse criticism. We expected that, and were not cast down. The voice of the people is not always the voice of Art, and if the people are not educated in Art matters surely no compromise should be made by turning out stuff to suit their taste. Rather let them see what can be done--what has been done in France--and in turn their standard of artistic taste will rise.¹

Newbery had supported his most original students and he continued to support them when they completed their training.² In addition, Newbery openly advocated the

¹ Glasgow Evening News, 22 May 1895, 2. Just three weeks earlier Newbery had written an entire article on posters for the Evening News, 30 April 1895, 2-3.

² See Jessie Newbery, "Foreward: A Memory of Mackintosh" in the Catalogue for the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Memorial Exhibition (1933). Jessie Newbery writes about the enduring relationship between the Glasgow Four and the Newberys.

education of female students. At a time when this was by no means common, when "artist" was defined in virtually all reviews, articles and comments as male, Newbery consistently included women artists in his definition. "A young man or young woman," said Newbery, "comes to me and says he or she wants to be an artist. Well, I don't listen to that. I put them on to make an outline drawing of a cast selected by themselves in the Antique Room and from that drawing I see what the student can do..."³ However, Newbery refused to sanction the "dilettante young lady."⁴ This type of artist, insisted Newbery, had "...been weeded out. She got no encouragement and is now, so far as the School is concerned, non-existent."⁵

It was within this atmosphere of seriousness and hard work that Frances and Margaret Macdonald earned their diplomas. Soon after they completed their training they set up a studio at 128 Hope Street⁶ to display their art as

³ Glasgow Evening News, 22 May 1895, 2. The success of Newbery's female students was born out as early as 1889 when three out of the four silver medals won by Glasgow were won by women. Jessie Keppie, a colleague of the Macdonalds, won a silver for the design of a Persian carpet. See The Artist, 15 September 1889, 264.

⁴ Glasgow Evening News, 22 May 1895, 2.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ In the Catalogue for the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts. Works of Modern Artists, 1894, Margaret Macdonald's address is given as 9 Windsor Terrace, that is the same address listed in the GSA records. However, by 1896, for the Arts and Crafts Exhibition the sisters' address is 128 Hope Street.

independent artist/designers. The art they made during these years, 1894 to 1899, is among their most original. Much has been written about influences upon the women, all of it inconclusive. A source of inspiration would be cited but then qualified, usually with a statement that insisted upon the uniqueness of the sisters' art. Gleeson White, The Studio's editor, commented on this as early as 1897:

With a delightfully innocent air these two sisters disclaim any attempt to set precedent at defiance, and decline to acknowledge that Egyptian decoration has interested them specifically....One would almost think that Mr. Aubrey Beardsley had satisfied their craving for the unexpected, and that in future they debar any fresh experiments in design....and the work of all Glasgow school of designers is singularly free from vulgarity of idea, redundancy of ornament, and misapplication of material....Today, when almost everything in decoration can be traced to an established style, it is so unusual to find some original endeavour, that one tries to hark back to some precedent.⁷

White, close to the Arts and Crafts movement, aware of the latest developments and trends taking place in that world, and well able to see and establish "derivatives," was unable to categorize the Macdonalds nor could he trace their sources. His statements set the tone for subsequent research. For example, Howarth (Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement, 1952) writing about Frances's Ill Omen, tells us that her "style is well developed" and that, "technically the painting is more accomplished than, for

⁷ Gleeson White, "Some Glasgow Designers...", in The Studio, (Vol.XI, 1897), 90-92.

example, Mackintosh's conversazione Programme of 1894."⁸

He continues, later, to stress Frances and Margaret

Macdonald's individuality:

It seems indisputable that the Macdonald sisters themselves had an important part to play in the evolution of the Glasgow Style, and that they cannot by any means be dismissed out of hand as mere plagiarists--an opinion that is further strengthened by a closer examination of their early work.⁹

Certainly their contemporaries saw the sisters as unique, sometimes as eccentric. In his first discussion of the Macdonalds in 1896, Gleeson White felt that they "show so much novelty and so much real sense of fine decoration in their works that a tendency to eccentricity may be easily pardoned."¹⁰ He failed to identify their "sources:"

"The spooky school" is a nickname not wholly unmerited. Can it be that the bogiest of bogie books by Hokusai has influenced their [the Macdonalds] weird travesties of humanity? Or have the shades whence came the ghostly long-drawn figures, with pained faces and sadness passing words, afforded them special inspiration?...In each [of the sisters' work], lines which impress you as symbolic, and part of some strange system of magic or ritual, are the chief features, but these new combinations of lines generally reveal themselves as crowned by faces of weird import....it is hard at first sight to disentangle the lines which belong by right to the figure, from those others which (since Mr. Beardsley set the fashion) only 'exist beautifully;' with no

⁸ Howarth, 24-5.

⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰ Gleeson White, "The Arts and Crafts," in The Studio, Vol.IX, 1896, 202.

common place explanation of their object.¹¹

White then suggested that, "No doubt in Glasgow there is a Rosetta stone, which makes clear the tangled meaning of these designs; but it would be hazardous for the average person to suggest their interpretation."¹² He was also convinced that art by the Macdonalds owed "absolutely nothing to the past."¹³ Frances and Margaret Macdonald were unique; their art was different.

The roots of this originality lie in their training at the Glasgow School of Art as the School operated under Frances Newbery, and it is to him that one must look to find reasons for their uniqueness as well as to the art of the Continent and of England (particularly as it became available in journals like The Hobby Horse and The Studio). Newbery provided a fertile ground from which originality could grow. In a address he gave at the 1913 annual meeting of the Board of Governors of the School, his ongoing quest for experiment is obvious:

Mr. Newbery went on to refer to the enormous potentialities of the cinematograph. He strongly advocated its introduction into the schools and he almost ventured to predict that instead of a teacher standing in front of a silent class and instructing it there would be silence everywhere, and the instruction would be conveyed by the pictures as they passed across the screen. Objections were urged by magistrates, town

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 204.

¹³ Ibid.

councillors and others against children attending picture displays on the grounds that the pictures might arouse sensations that were undesirable.¹⁴

Newbery moved from cinematography to a discussion of a Greek system of open-air education: "The outdoor school provided the ideal environment for the study of nature."¹⁵ Then he moved on to colour photography: If coloured photography came into general use it would prove an enormously serious competitor with painting. After all, much in the art of painting today was repetition; how far had we advanced in portraiture and landscape?"¹⁶ This man-of-the-future taught Frances and Margaret Macdonald and, in their maturity, became their friend; little wonder that their art was unique.

The Posters

One of their early ventures as independent artists working out of their own studio was their contribution to an exhibition of posters at the Société des Beaux Arts in Glasgow (January 1895).¹⁷ In addition they sent a poster

¹⁴ The Glasgow Herald, 22 December 1913, 12.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Glasgow Evening News, 11 January 1895, 2. The Glasgow Evening News also refers to a "weird picture drawn by the Misses Macdonalds for Mr. Joseph Wright," in the exhibition at the Art Institute in February 1895. The sisters designed a poster for Wright's umbrella company so they may have had works in both poster exhibitions. Glasgow

to a London exhibition (1896), paintings to the Autumn Exhibition held annually in Liverpool and they contributed to Glasgow's own Institute of Fine Arts as well as the Glasgow Arts and Crafts Exhibition, 1895. They also sent watercolour drawings to London's notorious Yellow Book. None of these could be deemed critical successes but, as Newbery had already pointed out, "no compromise should be made by turning out stuff to suit their [the people's] taste."¹⁸ Acclaim did come. When the young women exhibited in the Arts and Crafts Exhibition in London in 1896, the lone but powerful voice of Gleeson White intervened on their behalf. However, before looking at the success they achieved through White, the not-quite-so-successful attempts to influence public taste must be examined. Newbery had insisted: "Rather let them [the people] see what can be done....and in time their standard of artistic taste will rise."¹⁹ Such attitudes fostered individuality and, perhaps, gave students the necessary

Evening News, 9 February 1895, 2.

¹⁸ Glasgow Evening News, 22 May 1895, 2.

¹⁹ Ibid. It is interesting to note that the article immediately following this profile of the Glasgow School of Art and its originality was "The latest London scandal: Street fighting between Lord Queensbury and his son [Alfred Douglas]." Certainly the late student work and even the early work during the studio years done by the Macdonalds was seen as being closely related to the "decadents." Without written documentation, however, it is virtually impossible to determine whether or not the Wilde trial had any effect upon the sisters or caused them to modify their more extreme moves in the direction of "decadence."

self-confidence to weather the storm of criticism.

Poster art was encouraged by the Glasgow School of Art. This was not part of the South Kensington curriculum: "South Kensington, of course, has nothing to do with them [posters],"²⁰ insisted Newbery. The Glasgow School of Art felt perfectly comfortable with adding to or subtracting from the so-called rules and regulations of South Kensington. Newbery felt that strict adherence to rules was only necessary in "weak" schools: "Weakness at the top has necessitated refuge being taken behind what some people are pleased to call the South Kensington system. We find that Kensington is very reasonable."²¹ Glasgow, as one of the leading British art schools, apparently determined its own direction. One such direction was in the new art of posters. Even though Glasgow viewers distrusted the poster-as-art, the most original students produced posters and, eventually, Glasgow critics accepted this.

One critic, while not totally fond of posters, recognized their potential and also realized that Glasgow was at least ten years behind London in acceptance of the new art form:²²

²⁰ Glasgow Evening News, 22 May 1895, 2.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Glasgow Evening News, 24 January 1895, 2. The critic also noted that London was at least ten years behind Paris--putting Glasgow twenty years behind the Continent in poster art.

Perhaps the ideal condition of affairs would be one in which wall posters were absolutely unknown, and where that colour which they undoubtedly lend to our drab streets was provided by less vulgar and adventitious means. But the poster is with us, and will likely be with us for many a day to come, so that our only immediate concern is to make it as little of a nuisance and an eyesore as possible.²³

Posters by Beardsley as well as by foreign artists such as Henri Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) and Eugène Grasset (1841-1917)²⁴ appeared in an 1895 exhibition at La Société des Beaux Arts, Alexander Reid's gallery in Glasgow. The Glasgow Evening News reported that, in addition to the "best foreign designers," Reid had included "the work of Beardsley."²⁵ Of the British artists represented, the "Misses Macdonald" were singled out for praise as:

the only 'new' poster designers who have yet arisen in Glasgow....whose rather weird adaptation of the human form to decorative purposes at the recent exhibition of the School of Art will be remembered.²⁶

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ An article on Eugène Grasset, a major poster artist within the French Art nouveau movement, appeared in The Studio in 1894. See "Eugène Grasset and Decorative Art in France," The Studio, Vol.IV, 37-47. The Macdonalds, as we know that they had access to The Studio, would have been familiar with his art prior to the Glasgow exhibition. They most certainly were not influenced by his naturalistic representations.

²⁵ Glasgow Evening News, 24 January 1895, 2.

²⁶ Ibid. Shortly after this review, on 17 February 1895, Frances and Margaret's father, John Macdonald, died in Glasgow. The notice of death and distribution of the estate are filed with the Scottish Record Office in Edinburgh. Work made by the sisters after February 1895 may have been

Co-inciding with the exhibition at the Beaux Arts in St. Vincent Street, was an exhibition at the Art Institute in which Newbery took an "active interest."²⁷ The Glasgow Evening News assumed that because Newbery was involved, "it goes without saying that the exhibits [would be] original and unique," and because of this would receive "much attention from visitors."²⁸ This favourable review followed very closely upon the acerbic comments opposing the women's pictures when they were exhibited in the Glasgow School of Art Club exhibition in November 1894. The respite was brief. When they exhibited a poster (produced jointly with MacNair) in London the following year they were severely criticized. The School of Art poster appeared in the second exhibition of A Collection of Posters held at the Royal Aquarium in London. In the introduction to the catalogue the use of silhouette in the poster came under attack and with this, the Glasgow group:

So infectious has the new doctrine of the silhouette proved that it is almost open to the question, if it has not already reached towards the point of decadence. Certainly there is a tendency in some of these later posters to incoherency and a sacrifice of everything to freedom of line, particularly in the case of certain extreme examples coming from America and from Glasgow, in all of which the influence of Mr. Beardsley's work (without any of his judgment) is

influenced by their father's death.

²⁷ Glasgow Evening News, 18 January 1895, 2.

²⁸ Ibid.

more or less present.²⁹

Gleeson White, in an article in The Studio the following year (1897), came to the Glasgow artists' defense:

Some others [posters]....have been shown in London, and provoked much diverse opinion. But it must never be forgotten that the purpose of a poster is to attract notice, and the mildest eccentricity would not be out of place provided it aroused curiosity and so riveted the attention of passers-by.³⁰

White reproduced the Nomad Art Club poster by Frances and Margaret Macdonald in this issue of The Studio.³¹ The face in a circle in the centre of the poster is very like the face of "Mary" in Margaret Macdonald's beaten aluminum panel The Annunciation which had been reproduced in The Studio in 1896.³² The same face appears on a page, "The Annunciation," from the illuminated manuscript, The Christmas Story (1895-96) (Fig.12). The stylized plant forms are angular and geometric in keeping with much of the sisters' work from this period. Such simplification and stylization did not meet with much success and, although White liked the poster, he understood public response to

²⁹ A Collection of Posters: The Illustrated Catalogue of the Second Exhibition, 1896, Royal Aquarium (London), 6. The exhibition opened after 20 March 1896. The poster by the Macdonalds and MacNair was item 262. Mackintosh exhibited a poster, "Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts," dated 1895, item 138.

³⁰ Gleeson White, "Some Glasgow Designers," in The Studio, Vol.XI, 1897, 98.

³¹ White, "Some Glasgow Designers..." 98.

³² White, "The Arts and Crafts..." 203.

such work:

The small poster of the Nomad Art Club needs no explanatory paragraph. It is calculated to exasperate those who dislike the work of these clever sisters to a degree perhaps unapproached by any other work pictured herewith.³³

The major offense, in almost every instance, can be traced to the "semi-grotesque conventionalising of the human figure" for which there was no precedent.³⁴ The Nomad Art Club is relatively gentle in its approach to the human figure compared with the Drooko poster (1895) made for the Scottish manufacturer Joseph Wright, owner of Royal Drooko Umbrellas. In a review written after the opening of the exhibition at the Art Institute, the Evening News announced that, "the weird picture drawn by the Misses Macdonald for Mr. Joseph Wright....is the first commission for a picture received by these lady artists."³⁵ Although the Evening

³³ White, "Some Glasgow Designers..." 92.

³⁴ White, "Some Glasgow Designers...", 98, offers this as an explanation for the vitriolic attacks against Mackintosh's posters but the explanation applies to the Macdonalds as well.

³⁵ Ibid. Public response was somewhat less favourable. One Glaswegian, in a letter to the editor of the Glasgow Evening News, wrote that: "I with many others no doubt, have been looking out for the Fine-Art Institute Poster. If it is meant as an imitation of Aubrey Beardsley, it is a libel on that artist." Glasgow Evening News, 30 January 1895, 3. This comment was probably directed at the "Fine Art Institute Poster" by the Macdonalds and MacNair. This poster is usually dated c.1896 (see 'Glasgow Girls': Women in Art and Design, 90 or the catalogue for the exhibition Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, cat.11) but should be dated 1895. Another letter insisted that "this poster is a libel on good taste." Glasgow Evening News, 1 February 1895, 3. See also, Glasgow Evening News, 18 January 1895, 2, when the

News called it "of the advanced Impressionist school,"³⁶ its rigorous simple figure puts it very much into the Beardsley tradition. The poster, reproduced in Dekorative Kunst (1899), is startling in its severity. The woman in the centre of the long, narrow print is the most Beardsley-like of the sisters' pictures of woman. She is full-breasted but narrow and elongated; her chin and nose are long and pointed; her arms, hands and fingers are narrow and sharp. Her tall shape is repeated in the linear, plant-like forms on either side of her. The Dekorative Kunst critic praised the work, writing that the Macdonalds distinguished themselves in metalwork as well as in pure decorative design.³⁷ He went on to suggest that there was just a hint of lyrical symbolism but that it was not so strong as to contradict the ornamental character of the work.³⁸ This author, like Gleeson White, suggested some possible

reporter announced that the Institute Exhibition was to be advertised by two "specially designed posters, which have been done by students of the Glasgow School of Art."

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Dekorative Kunst (Vol.III, No.2), 1899, 48. "Wir beschäftigen uns hier nur mit den fünf hervorragendsten Künstlern der Gruppe, den beiden Fräulein Macdonald, die sich namentlich in Metallarbeiten und reinen Dekorationen--Affichen, Büchern--hervorthun, Chas. R. Mackintosh, der im Mobiliar hervorragend ist und von dem wir ausserdem reizende Stoffdekortinen abbilden." The Drooko poster is reproduced on page 74.

³⁸ Ibid. "Wo man ihm, zumal bei den Macdonald's begegnet, begnügt er sich mit Andeutungen, die sich wenigstens nicht aufdrängen und sich nicht dem angestrebten ornamentalen charakter widersetzen."

sources of inspiration through the remainder of his review, but concluded that no matter to whom they looked, the artists always retained total control of their own work.³⁹ However, if Dekorative Kunst found value and aesthetic interest in the Macdonalds' posters when London and Glasgow had not, the Glasgow audience did appreciate their arts and crafts work.

In April 1895, "the first Arts and Crafts Exhibition on a large scale," opened in Glasgow.⁴⁰ The Exhibition which was meant to "raise funds for the purpose of clearing the debt upon the Soldiers' Home at Maryhill," had been organized "under the convenership" of Newbery.⁴¹ Newbery had invited "most of the leading designers in the country" and many of them, including William Morris and Walter Crane, sent work to Glasgow. The Macdonalds, perhaps in anticipation of their contribution to the London Arts and Crafts exhibition in 1896, displayed their work and were recognized for their "notable" designs⁴² even though at

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ The Glasgow Herald, 8 April 1895, 13.

⁴¹ Ibid. Mackintosh was singled out in this review for "seven designs for wallpaper," which, although they were considered as "distinctly unconventional in treatment," were also seen as containing "but little suggestion of that eccentricity which marks much of Mr. McIntosh's [sic] work."

⁴² Ibid. Jessie Newbery's work was praised, too: conspicuous among Glasgow needlework is a quilt executed to a design by Mrs. Newbery, who also contributes other specimens in the same department, besides examples of work in silver and bookbinding."

least one critic thought they were men: "The furniture designs are also excellent, the work of Messrs McNair and McIntosh and the Messrs Macdonald being of course the most remarkable."⁴³ The furniture was seen "as clever as it is characteristic"⁴⁴ and indeed, characteristic and clever were frequently used to describe the work of the four artists.

The Yellow Book

Soon after these mixed receptions, the work of the young Scottish artists appeared in The Yellow Book. This publication was regarded as one that preferred the "new" in both art and literature. In 1894, a writer for The Artist proclaimed that:

If a sub-title had to be devised for the 'Yellow Book,' it might be described as 'the organ of the experimentalists.' Most of the contributors to its page --whether artists or writers--seem to be trying to produce new effects by new methods; and it has been officially announced they all have, and will exhibit, from time to time, 'the courage of their modernity.'⁴⁵

Considering the Macdonalds' background, The Yellow Book was the perfect venue for their work. Certainly, in keeping with the criticism the Macdonalds often received from the Glasgow press, association with The Yellow Book would have

⁴³ Glasgow Evening News, 6 April 1895, 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ The Artist, May 1894, 171.

been viewed as confirmation of the "rightness" of such criticism. In 1895, Quiz, pronounced that, "the Decadents, the Neurotists, the Yellow-Bookists, the Ibsenites....and all the rest of the morbid and effeminate crew have been voted impossible."⁴⁶

In July 1896 The Yellow Book reproduced four of the Macdonalds' watercolour drawings: Girl in the East Wind with Ravens Passing the Moon (Ill Omen) and The Sleeping Princess by Frances Macdonald; A Dream and Mother and Child by Margaret Macdonald. They were not the first Scots to publish pictures in The Yellow Book. In January 1896, Francis Newbery's Under the Moon appeared on the pages of the controversial publication. In addition to Newbery, the work of D. Y. Cameron, D. Gauld, E. Hornel, G. Henry, A. Kellock Brown and Alexander Roche, all prominent artists in Glasgow, was seen in the same issue. When the Macdonalds' paintings were reproduced in July of this same year, work by their colleague from the Glasgow School of Art, Katherine Cameron, appeared as well as reproductions of the work of her brother, D. Y. Cameron.⁴⁷ This publication of the sisters' paintings should not be seen out of context; the impression one is often given is that, suddenly, the Glasgow

⁴⁶ This statement was in the Prologue to Volume XXIX of Quiz, 9 May 1895 (no page number).

⁴⁷ Katherine Cameron's, Babies and Brambles was reproduced; two works by her brother D. Y. Cameron, Dieppe Castle and The Butterflies, are listed.

Four were taken up by the London decadents.⁴⁸ This is simply not true; their way was adequately paved, again, probably by Newbery.

Because Scots appeared in the London journal does not mean that it was accepted in Glasgow circles; quite the contrary, it was usually criticized or made fun of (as in Quiz) and had been since its inception. The Weekly Citizen (Glasgow) 1894, thought that Beardsley should learn a "greater sense of beauty:"

In the last number of the Yellow Book are some of Mr. Aubrey Beardsley's extraordinary drawings, signed with his name. The critics, more or less, while praising the 'massing' of black and white and the technicalities generally, have been very much 'down' on these same drawings....One critic, in a fatherly way, implores young Aubrey to sit humbly at the feet of Gamaliel Foschter, and learn artistic reserve and a greater sense of beauty.⁴⁹

London critics, while not completely convinced of The Yellow Book's quality, were more tolerant than their Glasgow counterparts. For example, a writer in The Artist, 1894 suggested that "if nothing else" it was "...an extract of the modernity craze, and as such cannot fail to attract

⁴⁸ This is the impression one receives when reading Howarth. He also claims that the sisters were influenced by Beardsley, particularly by drawings like The Peacock Skirt, 1894. This idea cannot be dismissed out-of-hand but one must also note that the two women had established their own style by exactly this same time, 1894. In addition, the Glasgow painters (the Glasgow School, engaged mysticism and symbolism in their pictures as early as 1890. See Kenneth McConkey, British Impressionism (New York, 1989), 95-101.

⁴⁹ Weekly Citizen (Glasgow), 17 November 1894, 7.

attention."⁵⁰ The Yellow Book was also seen as Decadent and as being associated with the "New Woman."⁵¹ It has never been pointed out that by the time the Macdonalds' art appeared in The Yellow Book, Beardsley was no longer associated with the journal. Beardsley designed and edited the first four volumes of the Yellow Book; the Macdonalds' work appeared in volume ten. Their association was with a more conservative Yellow Book and the images that appeared there confirm this.

Margaret Macdonald's A Dream and Mother and Child are not controversial images. Mother and Child, in particular, is a gentle, soft representation of a nineteenth-century woman holding a baby. The composition is based upon the circle. In many ways, this little drawing predicts Margaret's later work in gesso panels. A Dream is slightly more angular but hardly enough to be offensive.⁵²

Frances's Ill Omen was undoubtedly considered unusual, possibly even offensive. The young woman in the picture is awkward, large, thin and plain. Paintings of women, done

⁵⁰ The Artist, August 1894, 275.

⁵¹ For a discussion of this see Bridget Elliott, "New and not so 'New Women' on the London Stage: Aubrey Beardsley's Yellow Book Images of Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Réjane," in Victorian Studies, Vol.31, No.1, Autumn 1987, 33-57.

⁵² The Catalogue for the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts, 33rd Exhibition. Works of Modern Artists, 1894 lists a painting by Margaret Mempis Macdonald, Dreams (item 418); this may be the same as the picture reproduced in the 1896 Yellow Book.

during this period, were expected to be "beautiful." Even when the female subject was "evil" she was still pretty. For example, Segantini's The Punishment of Child Murder (which appeared with Macdonald's Ill Omen in a Liverpool exhibition in 1896), was considered "attractive."⁵³ Khnopff's Witch of Endor, in the same exhibition, was hardly an image of gentleness or kindness; nevertheless, it evoked "...a grand type of mysterious evil beauty."⁵⁴ Macdonald's picture is out of the ordinary in that the woman is not beautiful or desirable by the standards of the time. Girl in the East Wind is not a femme fatale, an accepted "outlaw" image of woman, but is effectively shut off from the viewer.

The fourth piece of art by the sisters to be reproduced was Frances's The Sleeping Princess (Fig 13). This image of a recumbent female⁵⁵ was more in keeping with the expectations of the period, however, it was unusual in the fact that the silvered metal frame was designed and executed by Frances. The sisters' skills in metalwork was praised by

⁵³ The Liverpool Courier, 29 August 1896, 5.

⁵⁴ The Artist, 1 April 1893, 115.

⁵⁵ Dijkstra dwells at length on this type of image and, in fact, uses Frances Macdonald's Sleeping Princess as one of his examples: a "...fairy tale of the sleeping beauty....seen as symbolic of woman in her virginal state of sleep--her state of suspended animation and, as it were, death-in-life. See Bram Dijkstra, Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture (Oxford, 1986), 61.

White:

Perhaps the most striking fact that confronts one at first is to find that some comparatively large and heavy pieces of wrought metal were not only designed, but worked entirely by the two sisters. Indeed, with the exception of certain assistance in joinery, all the objects here illustrated are their sole handiwork.⁵⁶

The Sleeping Beauty (and its frame), however, did not appear with the other pieces that had been reproduced in The Yellow Book in 1896, in an exhibition in Liverpool just a month later.

The Autumn Exhibition was an established, traditional event in Liverpool. The 1896 exhibition was the twenty-sixth such exhibition to be held at Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery: "1,161 pictures in oil and watercolour, and 76 works of sculpture and pottery"⁵⁷ were accepted; over 1600 pictures were rejected.⁵⁸ Margaret and Frances Macdonald each had a picture accepted; Herbert MacNair had two pictures accepted.⁵⁹ The Yellow Book association did not go unnoticed:

⁵⁶ White, "Some Glasgow Designers..." 90.

⁵⁷ The Liverpool Courier, 29 August 1896, 5.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Walker Art Gallery. 26th Autumn Exhibition of Modern Pictures, Catalogue for the Exhibition, 1896. The works accepted were Margaret Macdonald's A Mother (cat. 978); Frances Macdonald's Ill Omen (cat. 998); J. Herbert MacNair's Ysighlu (item 993) and The Dew (cat. 1002).

The Whistler-room in itself will furnish matter for careful subsequent comment. For the present, it must suffice to draw attention to....some Yellow Book madnnesses, very much after Blake, by three decadent artists.⁶⁰

It would seem that whether or not Beardsley was responsible for their inclusion in The Yellow Book, the Glasgow artists were labelled by association with him as "decadents."

This label would stay with them until the end of the century but never so relentlessly as it did prior to 1898. The term "weird" used so frequently in reviews of the sisters' 1890s' work, would continue to describe Frances's pictures but it would drop from the critics' vocabulary in descriptions of Margaret's work. 1898 seems to be the decisive turning point. Before looking at the changes in attitudes toward their work in 1898, the 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition must be discussed in detail.

The 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition

The Governors' minutes for 17 April 1895 state that the Glasgow School of Art submitted work by invitation to an exhibition in Liège:

The Headmaster intimated that an official request had been received by the School from the City of Liège, Belgium asking that an exhibit of students' work be sent to an exhibition of arts and crafts to be opened in that City in May next. Three cases containing examples of work in all the Departments of the School's work had been

⁶⁰ Ibid.

forwarded.⁶¹

Later, in the Minutes for the May meeting of the School Committee, Newbery announced that the work was highly regarded, then he quoted from a letter dated 16 May 1895 that he had received from Liège:

Our Exhibition has been open for about a fortnight and the exhibit you sent us has been very much admired by everybody....Our Schools of Art are far indeed from being so advanced as yours, and what has above all astonished us in your work is the great liberty left to the pupils to follow their own individuality such is so different from the ideas current in our School of Art that it is difficult for us to comprehend this freedom although we admire it very much....Many of us should like to have some of your posters which are very beautiful...⁶²

The favourable reception of the School by Liège was also mentioned in the Annual Report for that year:

The School received an invitation in March last [1895] to send an exhibit to an Arts and Crafts Exhibition organized by the city of Liège, and some very favourable press comments were made upon the work, which consisted of examples in architecture, modelling, and design, some of the designs being drawn and carried out in the material.⁶³

There are no Glasgow press reviews of this work; there is no catalogue. However, Howarth in Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement wrote that this represented "the

⁶¹ From the Governors' Minutes for the meeting of the School Committee, 17 April 1895. Courtesy of the Glasgow School of Art.

⁶² Governors' Minutes for the month of May, 1895. Courtesy of the Glasgow School of Art.

⁶³ Glasgow School of Art Annual Report, 25 February 1896, 7.

first link between Glasgow designers and the continent."⁶⁴

Just one year later students and former students from the Glasgow School of Art exhibited work in a much more important (and well reviewed exhibition), the Fifth Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts held in London in 1896. Certainly this show and the subsequent articles by Gleeson White, made the Glasgow Four known beyond the borders of Scotland.⁶⁵ As with their entry into The Yellow Book, their way was paved by their instructors from the Glasgow School of Art.

The first exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society had been held at the New Gallery in London in 1888. In his preface to the catalogue, Walter Crane promoted the joining of artist and craftsman: "The true root and basis of all

⁶⁴ Howarth, 37.

⁶⁵ After the death of Margaret Macdonald and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, their close friend Desmond Chapman-Huston in correspondence to William Davidson (one of the Glasgow organizers of the Mackintosh Memorial Exhibition, 1933) insisted that "both Toshie and Margaret had a great aversion to that magazine [The Studio], as they both thought that the editorial policy was sensational, and inclined to overemphasise the more sensational aspects of the work of the artist, rather than present the artist to the reader complete and in the round." Letter from Chapman-Huston to Davidson, 23 May 1933 (Hunterian Art Gallery archives). Davidson replied to Chapman-Huston reminding him that Macdonald and Mackintosh gave "a lot of their work to be published by the Studio." Letter from Davidson to Chapman-Huston, 25 May 1933. This information from Chapman-Huston adds a new and interesting dimension to The Studio material.

Art lies in the handicrafts."⁶⁶ The London critic for The Artist, observed that "...Bohemia was more freely represented than Belgravia,"⁶⁷ and that "Mr. William Morris, who was the originator of the exhibition, walked about the rooms clad in an unconventional suit of blue serge."⁶⁸ However, having indulged briefly in setting the tone for the innovative and daring exhibition, the critic clearly announced the intent of the organizer: "One of his [William Morris's] principal ideas in getting up the show was to benefit the designers and by bringing their names before the public to enable them to escape from the thralldom of the manufacturers."⁶⁹ When unknown by the public, continued the critic, manufacturers could take advantage of designers but once their names are made known to the public then they "occupy a very different position and can command a very different price."⁷⁰ This concern remained a focal point of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition. The important relationship between art and industry was a social concern as well as an artistic one as it had been since the founding of the organization. Mabel Cox (1896)

⁶⁶ Walter Crane, "Introduction," Arts and Crafts Exhibition society: Catalogue of the First Exhibition. The New Gallery, 1888.

⁶⁷ The Artist, 1 November 1888, 339.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

offered a cogent statement about these aims and directions:

That the necessity for a society to protest against the separation of art and industry, and the consequent prevalence of improper design, should ever have arisen is almost incredible....The question is social, even before artistic....Carlyle decided that the greater part of mankind are fools; can it be that the majority is also without artistic perception? The full measure of artistic perception and the creative faculty, we know, is only for the few. But are not understanding and appreciation for the many? Or, as one is tempted to think when looking at things as they are, is it a fact that most of us are aliens from art and her influences, that we are incapable of natural beauty? We may be thankful that the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society takes a brighter view, that they believe the people will awaken from their nightmare of ugliness, and claim a heritage of beauty; and they are already stretching helping hands to those who are, one by one, arising.⁷¹

Little wonder that Francis Newbery, with his own highly developed support for aesthetic quality, manufacturing and crafts, actively supported the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society and encouraged his friends and students to participate in their exhibitions.

Among the participants of the first exhibition were the true believers in this concept, including the Century Guild of Artists and William Kellock Brown.⁷² The 1888 exhibition coincided with Kellock Brown's new appointment as

⁷¹ Mabel Cox, "The Arts and Crafts Exhibition," in The Artist (October 1896), 9 and 12.

⁷² Item 129 under "Century Guild of Artists" was a "Copper Panel for a Sconce" designed and executed by Kellock Brown; item 279, "Balcony, Panels," designed by A. Mackmurdo and executed by Kellock Brown; item 131, "Copper Sconce," designed and executed by Kellock Brown.

an instructor at the Glasgow School of Art. The following year (1889) Kellock Brown was listed as a member of the Society but he did not exhibit, nor did any other Glasgow artists.⁷³ This second exhibition, however, contained many gesso pieces and as gesso panels were to become popular with some Glasgow students, particularly by the mid-1890s with Margaret Macdonald, the interest in gesso could well be traced back to the 1889 exhibition. A critic reported that, "gesso work is largely represented in the exhibition and is probably destined to become enormously popular."⁷⁴

The following year, when the Arts and Crafts Society held its third exhibition, Kellock Brown, in addition to holding a membership, exhibited his work.⁷⁵ Francis Newbery did not exhibit and was not listed as a member but his name appeared on the list of "guarantors."⁷⁶ With this, Glasgow made its first really significant entry onto the exhibition floors of the Arts and Crafts Society. The

⁷³ Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society: Catalogue of the Second Exhibition, The New Gallery, 1889.

⁷⁴ The Artist, 1 November 1889, 322.

⁷⁵ Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society: Catalogue of the Third Exhibition, The New Gallery, 1890. Kellock Brown exhibited two sconces in repoussé copper (cat. 280); a plaque in hammered copper (cat. 300); and a door of hammered copper on an oak frame executed by Kellock Brown and R. Ferris (cat. 495). In addition to the Glasgow School of Art, the private sector in Glasgow was represented by George Walton and Company with a plaque executed by Hannah Walton (cat. 505) and wallpaper by Robert Graham (cat. 636).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

1890 Arts and Crafts exhibition was "in many ways an improvement on the two preceding ones."⁷⁷ The critic for

The Artist wrote:

There is evidence about it [the Arts and Crafts exhibition] that the principles which originally guided the formation of the society are becoming more thoroughly understood and appreciated by the various classes of workers and consumers. People are beginning to find out that there is something more than mere faddism in the alliance between the 'Arts' and 'Crafts.'⁷⁸

The aims of the society, always eloquently stated in the introductions to its catalogues, were quite similar to Newbery's aims for Glasgow: a happy marriage between art and craft and, more specifically in Glasgow, between art and industry. In 1893, Jessie Newbery⁷⁹ represented the School in the exhibition; John Guthrie more than adequately represented the Glasgow community of artists outside of the School.⁸⁰ The 1890 exhibition had been the last annual

⁷⁷ The Artist, 1 November 1890, 327.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Francis Newbery's marriage to Jessie Rowat, a student from the Glasgow School of Art, was announced in the same issue of The Artist in which the review of the second Arts and Crafts exhibition appeared: "We have to congratulate Mr. Newbery, of the Glasgow School of Art, on his marriage. Mr. Newbery was very well-known at South Kensington before his translation to a sphere of usefulness in the far North." 1 November 1889, 339.

⁸⁰ Cat. 110e, "Chalice and Paten" in silver repoussé was designed by Jessie Newbery, executed by Kellock Brown; cat. 268, "Alms-Plate," designed by Jessie Newbery, executed by Kellock Brown; cat. 245f, "Altar Frontal," designed by Newbery, executed by Miss Dunlop. (Miss Dunlop is always referred to in this way with no initial to distinguish her

exhibition and, from this time on, the exhibitions were scheduled for every third year. The fifth exhibition, in 1896, saw the largest Glasgow contingent ever and their work was seen as "new and individual":

In Glasgow the newest and most individual manner is undoubtedly that which is seen in the work of the Misses Macdonald, Mrs. F. E. Newbery, Mr. Charles Mackintosh, Mr. J. Herbert McNair, and Mr. Talwin Morris.⁸¹

Not everyone favoured the work. Some, such as the critic for The Artist, considered it eccentric: "Mr. Charles Rennie Mackintosh exhibits a hall settle which would have been very nice if it were not for its decorations. It has two cushions let into the wood back; this is simply a straining after eccentricity, for if the wooden seat is sufficiently comfortable a wooden back would be also."⁸² However, Gleeson White reminded the readers of The Studio that, "Eccentricity is often enough, we fear, the first title given to efforts, which, later on, are accepted as proofs of serious advance."⁸³ Although White's support for the Glasgow artists must be considered most significant (The Studio had become an important and influential

or make identification possible.) Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society: Catalogue of the Fourth Exhibition, The New Gallery, 1893.

⁸¹ Gleeson White, "Some Glasgow Designers and their Work, Part I," in The Studio, Vol. XI, 1897, 87.

⁸² The Artist, October 1896, 39.

⁸³ White, "Some Glasgow Designers...", 88.

journal), their detractor's lent them lasting notoriety.

The Magazine of Art stated that:

There are still examples of that form of originality that rather hinder than help the movement in the favour of the public, and rather hinder than help the public itself in its understanding of what fine applied art is, and of the depth of the enjoyment found in it. The trail of Mr. Aubrey Beardsley--who may be termed the Hyde to Sir Edward Burne-Jones's Jekyll--is still over some able designers, for cleverness, even foul genius always attracts disciples, even when sound excellence fails to do so. Then there is what is colloquially termed the 'Spooky School,' whose 'spookiness' reveals itself alike in form, design and colour. But the great fact remains that a distinct school of decorative design is evolving itself out of the chaos which attended its birth...⁸⁴

However, the source of such criticism must be put into its context. Journals such as The Magazine of Art were committed to writing about traditional, conservative art, especially the art of the Royal Academy, and rarely ventured into the realms of the "new" or the arts and crafts. One should not be surprised to find such comments about experimentation on its pages. Therefore, although this review is often cited as representative of London criticism levied against Glasgow, in its own context it is of relatively little importance.⁸⁵ Given The Magazine of

⁸⁴ "The Art Movement: The Arts and Crafts Exhibition, I," in The Magazine of Art (London), Vol. XX (November 1896 to April 1897), 34-35. White's article would make it clear that the "Spooky School" was the Scots. See The Studio (1896), 202.

⁸⁵ See, for example, the introduction to the catalogue for the exhibition Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, 1864-1933 (no pages numbers).

Art's quite conservative approach, it gave fair coverage to the Exhibition and pointed out that, "in selecting illustrations from this exhibition" they did not always seek out "the most charming, the most captivating," but instead they presented the work "of the better-known men."⁸⁶

Research on the Glasgow Four, most of it about Mackintosh, has dwelt upon the negative criticism that Mackintosh's work invoked. The origin for some of this might be White's statement in his Studio article of 1896: "Probably nothing in the gallery has provoked more decided censure than these various exhibits [by the Glasgow Four]; and that fact alone should cause a thoughtful observer of art to pause before he joins the opponents."⁸⁷ White may have been referring to verbal criticism he heard from the general public as they toured the galleries, because little of the "decided censure" filtered into print. The critic for The Times of London commented that:

another attractive part of the exhibition is the metalwork, in copper, bronze, silver, brass, iron, steel and pewter, which is to be seen in all the rooms....It will be understood that we can only indicate the chief features of this remarkably varied exhibition, leaving the criticism of each detail to the visitor.⁸⁸

The Macdonald sisters contributed metalwork to the exhibit,

⁸⁶ "The Art Movement, The Arts and Crafts Exhibition, I," in The Magazine of Art, 35.

⁸⁷ White, "The Arts and Crafts," 204.

⁸⁸ The Times (London), 5 October 1896, 14.

(a beaten silver clock, a brass and iron muffin stand, and two beaten aluminum panels)⁸⁹ therefore their art must have been considered as an "attractive part of the exhibition," even if their names did not appear. The Times, in fact, found the entire exhibition noteworthy: "Better work or done with more artistic care, it would be impossible to find."⁹⁰ Nevertheless, it is the "negative reception approach" that is most frequently cited in the literature. For example, Howarth (Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement) writes:

The unheralded appearance of the work of The Four evoked a storm of protest from public and critics alike. Everyone was shocked by their grotesque conventionalization of the human figure and strange linear patterns; everyone, it would seem, except Gleeson White, editor of The Studio.⁹¹

Then, later, he wrote that the work of the Glasgow Four "evoked such condemnation" at the 1896 exhibition "that they were refused admission to subsequent exhibitions."⁹²

Robertson, in her catalogue for the exhibition, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh (1985) agrees with Howarth: "their work there [at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition] was on the whole

⁸⁹ See Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society: Catalogue of the Fifth Exhibition, The New Gallery, 1896, (Cat.285, 475, 508 and 511).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Howarth, 38. No source is given for this information.

⁹² Ibid., 255.

dismissed, primarily because of its apparent lack of historical basis."⁹³ Macleod (Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 1968) writes that:

The anger and chagrin of these earnest folk [the exhibition organizers] can be understood when they saw what had been invited to their table....The benign influence of Burne-Jones could not be seen through the malignant presence of Beardsley--and not just Beardsley, for the distortions accorded the human figure in the Glasgow designers' work were beyond Beardsley, and could not conceivably be reconciled with a due respect for Nature. They were not invited to exhibit again.⁹⁴

All work for these exhibitions was juried, therefore the exhibition organizers could hardly have been outraged when they saw the Scots' work (and they did exhibit again in the next Arts and Crafts exhibition in 1899).⁹⁵ The scathing

⁹³ Robertson, 3. No source for this information is given. Later, she wrote that their work "provoked hostility and ridicule from many observers but she cites only The Magazine of Art review.

⁹⁴ Macleod, 44. Once again, no source for the criticism is given.

⁹⁵ Entries to the exhibition were juried; they were not invited, or if invited, they still would have had to submit to the jury. According to the "Regulations for Exhibitors" established at the time of the first exhibition: "Work intended for exhibition, whether by members of the Society or other persons, must be submitted at the Gallery to the Selection Committee of the Society for their acceptance....Work not accepted must be removed." Glasgow work, like everyone else's, was subject to the Selection Committee.

Hermann Muthesius, The English House (London, 1979; originally published 1904), is probably responsible for the misinformation about the 1899 exhibition. He wrote that in 1899 the pieces by the "Glasgow group" were refused by the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (51). The Scots, including Mackintosh, are listed in the exhibition catalogue for 1899.

comments in The Magazine of Art, from whence much of the later criticism seems to evolve, revealed The Magazine's own conservatism more than anything else when it attacked the Arts and Crafts Exhibition in general and the "spooky school" in particular:

There is much in it, no doubt, that is the outcome of mere juvenile enthusiasm of the passion for the originality-at-any-price which is willing deliberately to sacrifice all claim to beauty and revel in absolute ugliness, if novelty can by that means be obtained. In defence of such misdirected effort there is not much to be said, except this-- that the habit of independent thought, of strenuous striving to leave the rut of convention, in whatever branch of the art manufactures, sows a precious seed in the mind that conceives it. Ugliness, whether of subject, form, or colour, so soon as its novelty wears off, ceases to please and a return to the acknowledged canons of beauty, accompanied by the newly-won individuality, achieves a victory in the fruits of which we all must share.⁹⁶

Although the Macdonalds were not mentioned by name, some of the same criticisms had already been applied to their work by Glasgow critics and could apply to much of the art exhibited in 1896. The critic went on to refer to English architects and their interiors in which, "even in the badness of decoration [could be] detected an originality."⁹⁷ Later on in the article, however, the critic derided what he called the "Spooky School" and, this time, he undoubtedly meant the Scots. Interestingly enough, the "Spooky School" was not as severely chastised as those

⁹⁶ "The Art Movement....," 33.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 33.

on the "trail of Aubrey Beardsley."⁹⁸ I would suggest that the comments about the "Spooky School" are not as vicious as they were straight-forward and, in addition, it is not clear that "the Spooks" were seen as being on the "trail of Mr. Aubrey Beardsley." Rather, the Scots seemed to be more tied in with the evolving of "a distinct school of decorative design."

Another important review of the exhibition was published in The Art Journal but no Scots were mentioned; in fact, few artists at all were mentioned by name. Instead the exhibition as a whole was commended:

The Arts and Crafts Exhibition attracts because it does what picture galleries do not do. Its justification is not merely that, amidst the thousand and one shows at the amateur figures as artist, it is the only one where you see the artist as amateur-- experimenting, that is to say, in branches of Art in which he is not expert, but in which he is sure to do some interesting thing."⁹⁹

The few derogatory lines about Mackintosh's hall settle and brass panel in The Artist¹⁰⁰ pale in significance when

⁹⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁹⁹ Lewis F. Day, "The Fifth Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts," The Art Journal, November 1896, 332.

¹⁰⁰ "Mr. Mackintosh also exhibits a brass panel, entitled Vanity. The title is appropriate enough, as it is impossible to discern what the design is supposed to represent, or any possible use to which the panel could be put. It is not necessary that a design should resemble any plant or creature, or, in fact, any form on earth; but it must embody some idea and take some form upon itself; an aggregation of meaningless lines does not constitute a design, however well those lines may be drawn. Unless a designer has a distinct thought to express, he must keep to

looked at within a larger picture. Much more important than a couple of brief mentions specifically about Mackintosh in articles about the Arts and Crafts Exhibition is the attitude of critics to the Exhibition in general. In context, the Glasgow Four fared well. As a general rule, the arts and crafts were slow to be accepted as "art" and often work singled out for praise was the more traditional. For example, "the most interesting feature" of the 1896 exhibition, according to The Daily Telegraph, was "the special group of paintings, cartoons, studies, and drawings by the late Ford Madox Brown."¹⁰¹ Walter Crane was praised for his "great series of pen drawings for Spenser's Faerie Queene,"¹⁰² in other words, for his art not his for craft. Burne-Jones was roundly criticized for the "sickly attenuated grace" of his drawings for the Kelmscott Press's publication of Chaucer: "decorative as they undoubtedly are in their own strange way, [they are] as far as anything could be from the freshness and unforced naïveté of the

strictly geometric patterns." Cox, in The Artist, 39. Cox's article on the Exhibition is important for an understanding of the philosophy behind arts and crafts and one cannot but wonder if her concern for lack of representation of the working classes ("The Society must be disappointed at receiving so little work from workmen, that is, from the working classes." 16) had anything to do with her condemnation of Mackintosh's non-functional panel which she may have considered elitist.

¹⁰¹ The Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1896, 2.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

first great English poet."¹⁰³

There were hundreds of exhibits, many of them by well-known, established artists. These artists were the ones who attracted attention in the press. Gleeson White, committed as he was to new directions, focused upon the new and innovative rather than the established. Hence, he searched out the Glasgow artists. His articles on them in The Studio put the designers on the cutting edge of the new arts and crafts movement in Britain and, because The Studio was read abroad, made them known on the continent.

White acknowledged Frances and Margaret Macdonald's "novelty" in his review of the 1896 Exhibition:

The Misses Macdonald show so much novelty and so much real sense of fine decoration in their works that a tendency to eccentricity may be easily pardoned. But this same tendency constitutes a very real danger; and those who are most eager in defending the posters and various subjects from their hand, should be also quite candid in owning that 'the spooky school' is a nickname not wholly unmerited.¹⁰⁴

He also reproduced Frances Macdonald's The Star of Bethlehem, a panel in beaten aluminum and Margaret's companion piece Annunciation, as well as the beaten silver clock mentioned by Cox in The Artist. It was the clock and a muffin stand that prompted White to write that the uniqueness of their art showed "...evidence of a very

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Gleeson White, "The Arts and Crafts," in The Studio, Vol.IX, 1896, 202.

definite and not unsuccessful attempt to create a style of decoration which owes absolutely nothing to the past."¹⁰⁵

This clock is, in all likelihood, the one praised by The Artist in the same review that chided Mackintosh:

There is a very good wall-clock with a square face of beaten silver, with brass weights and chains, and a large flat pendulum with cherubs' faces beaten upon it. This is a very good form of clock, both for practical and artistic reasons. The work on this one is good, and the result is very satisfactory.¹⁰⁶

Later in 1904, the German architect Hermann Muthesius would write that the Macdonalds' "principle is not simply to produce the design but to execute everything themselves, thus giving their efforts the only valid hallmark of the genuine work of art."¹⁰⁷ White, in his review of the exhibition for The Studio, focused on the two women. His later two-part article, written after the Exhibition, focused upon "The Four" as well as Jessie Newbery and Talwin Morris. Once again, he reproduced for his readers, a number of new pieces by the two sisters: the Honesty mirror, The Sleeping Princess and beaten brass candlesticks all by Frances Macdonald; The Nomad Art Club poster, a pair of sconces in beaten brass, a copper sconce, a brass and ivory clock and a clock in beaten tin and ebonized wood were made

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ The Artist, October 1896, 38.

¹⁰⁷ Hermann Muthesius, The English House (London, 1979; originally published, 1904), 51.

by Frances and Margaret together. The metalwork was designed and executed by the women.

These images illustrated in The Studio are representative of the art produced by the sisters when they worked together in their Hope Street studio and, as such, can be considered examples of their mature work. Frances dominates these as she dominated the student work and it is to her that we should look for evidence of this mature style.

The Hope Street Studio Art, 1896-1899

In order to discuss, in a representative way, the art made by the two women during this phase of their careers, I have chosen to focus upon paintings in metal frames designed and executed by the artists themselves. These works represent both art and craft.

Frances Macdonald's The Sleeping Princess, c.1895 (see Fig.13), was reproduced in The Studio in 1897. The woman in the predominately pink painting is more accessible in a conventional way than the woman in Ill Omen. Even though she is asleep, or perhaps because she is asleep, the viewer is able to approach her or even possess her. The words inscribed on the metal frame, "Love if thy tresses be so dark how dark those hidden eyes may be," might represent Frances's interpretation of Tennyson's poem The Sleeping Beauty. Tennyson's "sleeping beauty" has "jet-black hair"

and each arm "glows forth" from the long-time-growing-hair.¹⁰⁸ Certainly Tennyson was a popular figure among Frances's contemporaries.¹⁰⁹ The image of the passive woman asleep, which is inoffensive and very different from the more notorious earlier work, has led recent critics to apply their label "fairy-tale" painting to this work.¹¹⁰ However, the spider's web, best seen in each of the upper corners of the beaten metal frame, weaves around the entire picture totally enclosing the dark-haired female. Like the woman in Ill Omen, this woman is also alone but one wonders if the solitude here is self-imposed (as it seems to be in Ill Omen) or imposed upon her by someone else. If she is the fairy-tale "sleeping beauty," her isolation is not of her own choice and she must be made active by another, a male. This theme and as well the suggestion of activity only in conjunction with a male was more acceptable to the late nineteenth-century viewer than was Frances's earlier work. First, it represents the object (woman) who only becomes active in response to the male gaze or the male Other.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Tennyson's poem, The Sleeping Beauty has "jet-black hair" and each arm "glows forth" from the long-time-growing hair.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example The Magazine (Glasgow School of Art) 1894-95.

¹¹⁰ Billcliffe, Mackintosh Watercolours (London, 1978), 46; Dijkstra, 61.

¹¹¹ The full implication for the gaze upon such work will be explored later as will the concept of the male Other. For discussions of these concepts see, for example,

Second, there was a fascination with what Foucault has called the "pornography of the morbid," during the late nineteenth century,¹¹² and Macdonald's sleeping woman suggests such possibilities. The figure still reflects Frances's use of elongation and, with the length of the arms, still distorts the female form but somewhat less offensively than did her earlier work. This subtle but significant change is evident in two paintings done as part of a series on the theme of the four seasons: Spring and Autumn are by Frances; Summer and Winter, by Margaret. A beaten metal frame surrounds each of the pencil and watercolour drawings. Although the pictures are part of a series, the sisters' different styles emerge clearly and Margaret's women still remain more tranquil and less pensive than those of her sister.

In Frances Macdonald's Autumn (1898) (Fig.14),¹¹³ the

E. Ann Kaplan, Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera (New York, 1983), particularly 21-49; Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (Oxford, 1983); or Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Constance Penley (ed.), Feminism and Film Theory (London, 1988). Mulvey's article first appeared in Screen, Autumn 1975.

¹¹² See Michel Foucault, A History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction (New York, 1980, 1st published 1976), 54.

¹¹³ The source of inspiration for both Spring and Autumn is undoubtedly an illustration done by Carloz Schwabe for Émile Zola's Le Rêve (Paris, 1892). See plate nine opposite page 64. Howarth wrote that Jessie Newbery was familiar with the book. Howarth, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement, 229; see also Jessie Newbery's "Forward" to the catalogue for the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Memorial Exhibition, 1. No one, including Newbery, is able to say precisely how or when the Macdonalds saw these

central female figure although elongated, is fuller, rounder and her hips are broader, more suitable for child-bearing. The figure to the side, however, is thinner, less open and is shown connected with red apples, presumably the apples of Eve and the Garden. Both figures are still and silent. This new suggestion of available sexuality in Macdonald's work is placed in a sea of floating brown skulls. In her companion piece Spring (1897) (Fig.15), she locates a fertile woman in the centre. A baby, suggesting spring or new life, lies in front of the woman at her feet. This joyful image is disturbed by the inclusion of a second woman hovering behind the first; her head and shoulders are just visible and her fingers stretch upwards from the first woman's hair. Her fingers are long, thin and claw-like. The young woman in the centre, who looks very like the woman who appears in Autumn, has wide open eyes flowing with tears. Hence, while not as disturbing as Macdonald's earlier pictures such as Ill Omen or A Pond, we still see representations of loneliness, melancholy and despair rather than desire.

The images, though sad, are more accessible in this

pictures but one only needs look at the Schwabe drawings to realize that his figure and Frances Macdonald's are almost identical. I should point out that none of the other illustrations for the book show the same similarity and even in this one instance, Frances distorts the figure more than Schwabe.

later work and critics were quick to see the difference. When Spring was exhibited with the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers in London (1899), Macdonald received a favourable review:

Among the drawings and prints [there were] a number by the Misses Macdonald, C. K. [sic] Mackintosh and Herbert MacNair, which quartette, if I mistake not, were responsible for such extraordinary poster work on the Glasgow boardings. The pictures of each of them represent a vast improvement on anything I have previously seen of theirs. The desire to startle for startling's sake has passed away, and they now produce honest, mature work of which The Rose Garden (Margaret Macdonald) and Spring (Frances Macdonald) may be taken as types.¹¹⁴

Although it was Margaret's Rose Garden that the critic singled out for the review, she also exhibited her companion piece to Frances's Spring in this important London exhibition.¹¹⁵ Margaret Macdonald's Summer (1897) (Fig.16) represents fecundity and, because of this, is closer in spirit to her own Rose Garden, than to her sister's Spring. The elegantly dressed female in Rose Garden turns lovingly toward her male partner while the

¹¹⁴ Glasgow Evening News, 22 May 1899, 5. Frances Macdonald had exhibited Spring at the Autumn Exhibition of Modern Pictures, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool in 1898. See the catalogue for the exhibition, cat.82.

¹¹⁵ See, The International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers. Catalogue of International Art, Knightsbridge, London, May to July, 1899. Frances Macdonald exhibited Spring (cat.211) and Lover's Land (cat.213); Margaret Macdonald exhibited Summer (cat.209) and The Rose Garden (cat.215). The other two members of the Glasgow Four also exhibited, Charles Rennie Mackintosh The Black Thorn (cat.216); Herbert MacNair Hope and Love (cat.210) and The Lovers (cat.212).

full-breasted "Summer" wearing a full, flowing skirt filled with blooming flowers, is surrounded by a nimbus made up of chubby babies. Both of these representations speak of love, partnership and offspring. The fourth in this series depicting the seasons, Winter (1898) (Fig.17), continues the theme of the fecund woman, this time as snowflakes drift gently over her hands and young babies array the top of the picture. However, more significant than the themes of the pictures is their inclusion in a major London exhibition, and a secessionist exhibition at that.

This very British secession organization, the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers, had held its first council meeting in December 1897 and opened its first exhibition in 1898. In "the chronic revolt against the Academy," the new Society was seen as "an insurrection in force," one that might even be using its first exhibition as a celebration of the "jubilee of '48-- that year of revolution."¹¹⁶ The critic for the London Times continued his discussion of the rebellious organizers:

At all events, in far-away Knightsbridge they have set up their headquarters, have summoned their cosmopolitan forces, and have appealed to the world to judge between them and their oppressors. Not at the New Gallery, which is new only in name, not at the Grafton, which is for the moment wedded to the colonies, but at the Skating-club--a building as yet innocent of all association with art--has Mr. Whistler's 'International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers' fixed its

¹¹⁶ The Times (London), 16 May 1898, 12.

momentary abode.¹¹⁷

A large contingent of Scottish artists, all painters, had been invited to exhibit in the "jubilee of '48:" David Gauld, D. Y. Cameron, A. Roche, M. Maris, F. Newbery, G. Henry and E. Hornel.¹¹⁸ In addition, during the 1899 exhibition, Francis Newbery was on the "list of Guarantors" and James Guthrie and George Henry were executive members.¹¹⁹ The rules of the I.S.S.P.G. gave its Council the right to "exclude from an Exhibition any work or works, whether invited or not, which they may consider upon any grounds undesirable."¹²⁰ They also stated that, "no member may belong to the Royal Academy."¹²¹ The Macdonalds, by exhibiting with this Society confirmed their position outside of the mainstream. They had already established somewhat of a name for themselves by exhibiting with the Arts and Crafts Exhibition which was a marginal organization in that it favoured the crafts as well as the arts. The I.S.S.P.G. showed traditional art, easel

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ From the Minutes of the Council Meeting, International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers, 16 February 1898. The Minutes are held in the Archives of the Tate Gallery.

¹¹⁹ Minutes of the Council Meeting, March 1899, Archives of the Tate Gallery. See also the catalogue for the second exhibition of the I.S.S.P.G.

¹²⁰ The Rules of the Council of the I.S.S.P.G. in the Archives of the Tate Gallery.

¹²¹ Ibid.

painting, drawings, prints and sculpture, but its existence challenged the established art world. One critic began his review of the 1899 exhibition: "The Academy? Never mind the Academy..."¹²² In addition, the I.S.S.P.G. validated the decorator's role in the art world and encouraged the inclusion of arts and crafts in its second exhibition: "What the directors of the Exhibition purpose this year is that sculptors and decorators shall show that it is possible to exhibit the arts and the crafts in a gallery with painting and sculpture."¹²³ This probably attracted the Macdonalds to the second exhibition. Their watercolour paintings with metal frames fell into the categories of both art and craft.

The Macdonald sisters exhibited on a regular basis with either secessionist organizations or with independent organizations that announced their objections to the status quo. Frances Macdonald was more committed to this than Margaret. Margaret, more conservative in both her art and her actions, became an active member and exhibitor with the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours and, after the Turin Exhibition of 1902, she contributed more frequently to its exhibitions than to any others. For example, in 1898, the year they first contributed to the London based I.S.S.P.G., Margaret exhibited The Rose Garden and Les Giroflées with the Royal Scottish Society of

¹²² Glasgow Evening News, 22 May 1899, 4.

¹²³ Architectural Review, May 1899, 311-12.

Painters in Water Colours; she was also a member of that organization. Frances was not a member but she did exhibit one painting, The Frog Prince;¹²⁴ she did not exhibit with them again. In 1897 both the sisters contributed to the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts Exhibition of Modern Artists; after that, only Margaret exhibited with this Society.¹²⁵ However, between 1898 and 1902 both women participated in major secession exhibitions in Britain and on the continent.

The Vienna Secession, 1900¹²⁶

Much of the claim to fame of the Glasgow Four, as well as that of Talwin Morris and George Walton among others, emanates from their successes in exhibitions on the Continent, beginning with the much lauded Vienna Secession

¹²⁴ See the catalogue for the exhibition, Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours, 1898 (Edinburgh).

¹²⁵ See the Catalogues for the Exhibitions of the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts, 1897 to 1912.

¹²⁶ For a thorough and precise analysis of the participation of "The Four" in this exhibition see, Roger Billcliffe and Peter Vergo, "Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Austrian Art Revival," in Burlington Magazine (November 1977), 739-744. Billcliffe and Vergo attempt to identify the work of each member, a difficult task because "...the catalogue of the eighth Secession exhibition is not only inadequate; it is also, on occasion, inaccurate." (740) The value of their article lies with identification and provenance.

of 1900.¹²⁷ Dekorative Kunst (1901), in its review of the 1900 Secession, proclaimed "the Scottish Room" a success: "most relevant for us [was] 'the Scottish Room' and the sculptures by Minne....because they both took the majority of the visitors to the exhibition by surprise and elicited several superficial jokes from them."¹²⁸ The critic also commented on the feeling that the Scottish artists evoked in the viewer:

Their stringent, nearly rigid lineation leads us into a remote, almost ghostly world which, once we have accommodated ourselves to the alien aspects of it, is imbued with enough poetical, magical and spiritually expressive qualities to make a highly artistic impression on us.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ In addition to Billcliffe and Vergo, see Peter Vergo, Vienna 1900 (Edinburgh, 1983) for a comprehensive discussion of the Exhibition. See also, Howarth, 151-54. This connection between Scotland and the continent was not new. Glasgow painters were well-known in Germany. For example, in 1894, Quiz commented that the "bond between Glasgow and Munich in Art is one which promises to remain unbroken." Quiz, 2 August 1894, 130.

¹²⁸ "Die VIII. Ausstellung der Wiener Secession" in Dekorative Kunst (Vol.VII, No.5, 1901), 176. "Es kommen aber für uns hier hauptsächlich das 'schottische Zimmer' und die Skulpturen Minne's (ebenfalls aus Maison Moderne) in Betracht, die beide das Gros der Ausstellungsbesucher verblüffen, und ihm so machen oberflächlichen Witz entlocken."

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 181. "Ihre strenge, beinahe starre Linienführung führt uns in eine fern abliegende, fast geisterhaft anmutende Welt, die, wenn wir erst das Fremdartige der dortigen Umgebung überwunden haben, genug des Märchenhaften, Peotischen und seelisch Ausdrucksvollen hat, um eine hohe künstlerlerische Wirkung auf uns auszuüben."

The Artist's correspondent from Vienna pointed out that the exhibition was devoted to decorative art.

In Vienna, more even than in other countries, public interest has turned from pictorial to industrial art. People whose interest in art had never induced them to spend a few pounds for a water-colour drawing are eager to acquire a chair by Hoffmann, or a lamp by Gurschner. To beautify the objects of daily use has therefore been the endeavour of the Secession, and therein lies the success of the 'new art.'¹³⁰

He commented on "a Scotch interior by Mr. and Mrs. Mackintosh, who have been assisted by Mr. and Mrs. McNair."¹³¹ "The whole room," he continued, "denotes an attempt at originality which reaches the very limits of possibility."¹³²

Howarth (1952) wrote about the "natural place" the Scottish work filled in the Vienna Secession as well as about the lavish reception accorded Mackintosh and Macdonald when they arrived in Vienna:

And so Vienna welcomed the Scottish artists. It is said that students met them at the station on their arrival and drew them through the city in a flower-decked carriage.¹³³

Robert Macleod (1968) wrote that:

Charles and Margaret went to Vienna, and both they and their work were enthusiastically acclaimed, apparently by critics and public alike, and the triumph was

¹³⁰ W. Fred, "Vienna" in The Artist, March 1901, 87.

¹³¹ Ibid., 92.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Howarth, 154.

followed by contributions to exhibitions in a number of European centres over the following years.¹³⁴

Most existing scholarship fails to comment upon the reception of "northern Scot-ness" which seemed, to the German critics, to be as important as their art. For example, in Dekorative Kunst (1898) the critic commended the Scots for "pouring new blood into London arteries."¹³⁵ We are told that "...a fresh stream flows from them," and that, although they draw their inspiration from many places, the source of this inspiration is from "...a source other than Burne-Jones and company."¹³⁶ Much of this prose has not been translated or if it has, the Blut und Bloden rhetoric has been Anglicized. For example, a critic in Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration (1902) wrote that Mackintosh and the Macdonald sisters were:

...already contributing to a strong and vigorous life of their race with a powerful will and domineering hands....because their exists in Scotland a culture and a way of life coinciding with a rhythm of the race.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Macleod, 93.

¹³⁵ Dekorative Kunst, 1898, 50. "...und erschlafften Adern der Londoner neues Blut geben könnte."

¹³⁶ Ibid. "Von ihnen geht eine frische Strömung aus..." and "...andere Quelle als die Burne Jones und Genossen." Der Quell is a poetic term that refers to a spring or fountain as well as to a source or authority.

¹³⁷ Georg Fuchs, "Mackintosh und die Schule von Glasgow in Turin," Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration, Vol.XII, September 1902, 582. "...von welchen wir bei Gelegenheit der Turiner Ausstellung melden konnten, dass sie mit machtvollen Willen und herrischen Händen einer starken, frohen

Although in the late twentieth century all this emphasis upon race is somewhat distasteful, it does not diverge significantly from the Scots' own attitudes. For example, The Bailie (1893) insisted that "Celts have a monopoly of genius," and that the Celtic race has "more fire and fervour than the Saxon."¹³⁸ Arthur Galton, in his articles in The Hobby Horse (The Century Guild), was relentless in his "promotion" of the Celt and Scotland's own Patrick Geddes devoted his journal The Evergreen, to praise for Scotland and the Celts. Geddes' language, in particular, complemented the visceral Germanic prose: "For here were inter pulsating all the wildness with all the majesty of Celtic sorrow....the pride and lament of chiefs....this weirdest, wildest, most elemental music..."¹³⁹ Patrick Geddes and his wife were close friends with Macdonald and Mackintosh, therefore the "Celtic Resurrection" was more than an abstract concept or a feeling-in-the-air. The passionate recognition awarded "The Four" in Vienna and the

Lebensführung ihrer Rasse vorarbeiten....zahe Kultur und Regelung des Lebens nach einem Rhythmus, der dem Blute der Rasse entsprang."

¹³⁸ The Bailie, 15 February 1893, 11. On the other hand, Londoners were somewhat uncomfortable with "fervour" whether it was verbal or visual. For example, The Artist condemned Henry and Hornel's Celtic picture The Druids, calling it "semi-decorative." It was "too lavish and unrestrained to be in really good taste, and the picture in consequence goes perilously near vulgarity." The Artist, 1 July 1890, 209.

¹³⁹ Patrick Geddes, "The Scots Renaissance," in The Evergreen, Spring 1895, 131.

enthusiastic articles that appeared in the German press must have felt more like home than home did to the Glasgow artists.

Most of the Scottish work in this exhibition and in other exhibitions on the Continent was done by Margaret Macdonald and Mackintosh. By the fall of 1900 each of the women had married: Frances married MacNair in the summer of 1899; Margaret and Mackintosh married in 1900. Frances had given birth to their only child in August 1900 and this undoubtedly limited any active participation by the MacNairs.

Virtually no art made after 1899 by either of the Macdonalds originated in their studio. After this, if they collaborated at all with anyone else it was with their respective husbands. However, their clock, the same one reproduced in The Studio in 1897, was put into the Scottish Room in Vienna (see fig.18). Gleeson White, in an otherwise favourable analysis of the Macdonalds' art, had criticized this clock:

It is in this especially that one feels the absence of white woodwork above the face of the clock, and doubts arise whether a circular form is quite happy as the crown of a structure quadrangular in plan, especially when it seems like a silhouette on an object otherwise modelled in the round. The subject of this dial is 'the hours blowing dandelion seeds'.¹⁴⁰

The clock was mentioned in the Dekorative Kunst review but

¹⁴⁰ Gleeson White, "Some Glasgow Designers...", 91.

not singled out for specific comment. The critic merely stated that the metalwork done by the Macdonalds and Mackintosh had an "inner truth," and that the "decorative element is not denigrated here but used in a spiritual manner."¹⁴¹

The Vienna exhibition, including only one piece of art made by the sisters together and representing the debut of the Mackintoshes as a vital force in decorative art on the Continent ended the collaboration between the two women and began a new phase in their careers: that of individual artists working with their husbands or alone. The next major exhibition, the Turin Exhibition of 1902, reflected the new alliances.

¹⁴¹ Dekorative Kunst, 1901, 181. Das dekorative Element is hier nicht verpönt, sondern in verinnerlichender Weise verwendet.

CHAPTER FOUR
FRANCES MACDONALD MACNAIR

During the years that Margaret and Frances Macdonald worked out of their Hope Street Studio, the Glasgow School of Art continued on its successful course as a leading school of art and design in Britain. In the 1896-97 academic year, the School won a total of fifty-seven prizes in the National Competition; three of these were gold medals and eight were silver, making Glasgow the leading School within the system.¹ The School held its annual exhibition of students' works in November 1897 and the attending public was treated to a speech by Newbery:

The School of Art Club [had existed] for about 12 years, and it had grown from year to year, so that next year he was sure the committee would have to engage the whole suite of rooms of the Institute Galleries for their exhibitions. Speaking of the exhibition of the Glasgow Art Club, he said that it would look very respectable, even if it were not given entirely over to the work of professional artists. There was still a vague superstition in the minds of some people that there was a day when the student ended and the artist began. From his 30 years experience he had never come across that day, but he had discovered that if a pupil was properly dealt with the artist commenced from the beginning of his work.²

The Glasgow Herald commented upon Newbery's speech and then quoted the spokesperson for the judges of the competition. Glasgow readers were told that the judges had a difficult

¹ Glasgow School of Art, Annual Report for the 1896-97 Session (published 31 January 1898), 6.

² The Glasgow Herald, 27 November 1897, 4.

task because, "a lot of the studies were really interesting," even though some of them looked at "the ugly side, which was rather to be regretted."³ Most significant, however, was the absence of so many of the "eccentricities" that had appeared in earlier student exhibitions:

The figure class altogether was good. There was less of the eccentric this year than he had seen in former times, but he thought that was not much to be deplored. Originality was distinct from eccentricity, and no such thing as originality was possible until they had seen and learned a great deal.⁴

The Glasgow Four, now practising artists on their way to success, were still remembered as having been unusual students and the "eccentricity" in the figure class undoubtedly referred to their contributions to earlier School of Art Club exhibitions.

The following year fourteen former students accepted prestigious appointments at various institutions in the country.⁵ One of these was Herbert MacNair. He was hired to teach design and decoration in the School of Architecture and Applied Art at University College in Liverpool.⁶ This seemed the perfect situation for MacNair. He was dissatisfied with the amount of time left to him to pursue

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Annual Report for the 1897-98 Session, 7.

⁶ Ibid.

his own experiments in design while working as an architectural draftsman in Glasgow.⁷ Although he received some money from his family, as a "second son" he would have been expected to supplement his income as well as to establish himself in a career.⁸ Therefore, while the school in Liverpool had neither the reputation nor the facilities of Glasgow, it certainly offered him a more sympathetic and creative environment than did an architecture firm.

In 1898 MacNair became one of three instructors in the new Department of Applied Art. The Department had taken in its first students in the spring of 1895 and still four years later was holding classes in makeshift wooden sheds (hence its nickname, the "Art Sheds").⁹ MacNair soon

⁷ MacNair worked for the same Glasgow firm as Mackintosh but Honeyman and Keppie do not appear to have offered him the same opportunities as they did Mackintosh. See Billcliffe, "J. H. MacNair in Glasgow and Liverpool, " in Annual Report and Bulletin, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (Vol.1., 1970-71), 48-67.

⁸ James Stanser McNair, Herbert's grandfather, died in 1887 leaving George Best McNair, Herbert's father an extremely wealthy man. However, George McNair does not appear to have added to the family estate but, quite the contrary, used it up. In any event, George Stanser McNair, Herbert's older brother would have stood to inherit. Information from Wills, Inventories, Trust Dispositions and Settlements and Codicils drawn up by members of the McNair family and held by the Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh. Herbert started using MacNair in the first decade of the century but continued to be McNair in all legal documents.

⁹ See The Art Sheds, 1894-1905, An Exhibition to Celebrate the Centenary of the University of Liverpool, 1981, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1-6.

became a popular figure and a respected instructor at the Sheds.¹⁰ At the end of his first year of teaching, he returned to Glasgow and married his colleague, Frances Macdonald.¹¹ Her family approved of the marriage which, at the outset, promised to provide Frances with a socially prestigious position and a comfortable life. George Best McNair, Herbert's father, had inherited a substantial estate from his father, Herbert's grandfather James Stanser McNair; Frances Dorothy Dixon, Herbert's mother, was the daughter of a minister from near Tunbridge Wells.¹² The family background was remarkably similar to that of the Macdonalds except that the McNairs were considerably wealthier.¹³ A

¹⁰ Roger Billcliffe, "J. H. MacNair in Glasgow and Liverpool," in the Annual Report and Bulletin, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (Vol.I., 1970-1), 53.

¹¹ A wedding invitation, apparently designed by MacNair, is held in the archives of the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool. It is Billcliffe in "J. H. MacNair...", 53, who suggests that MacNair, "seems to have designed the wedding stationery." The wedding, which took place on 14 June 1899, was announced in The Glasgow Herald on 16 June 1899.

¹² Information about Frances Dorothy Dixon McNair in a "Deed of Assumption," Index of Deeds, 3658, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.

¹³ George Best McNair inherited the income from a number of rental properties including agricultural farms near Shettleston, small houses "situated in McNair Street and Daudy Row" and Greenfield Mansion, Shettleston. In 1887 the estate was worth well over £46,000. Scottish Record Office SC.36/48/100 and SC.36/48/118. In the last half of the nineteenth century an unskilled Scottish labourer (a class that made up 30% of the total population) earned just over £20 per year; a lower skilled labourer (this class making up 40% of the population) earned just under £30 per year; an upper class earner (from the class making up 0.33%

year after the marriage, 18 June 1900, Frances gave birth to their only child, Sylvan.¹⁴

The MacNair marriage ended the successful five year collaboration between the Macdonald sisters. Once Frances moved to Liverpool she worked either alone or with her husband. The first important art made in the new partnership was for the Vienna Secessionist Exhibition, 1900. However, as mentioned in Chapter Three, their contribution was less significant than that of the other half of the Glasgow Four, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh and her husband, Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The Mackintoshes dominated this exhibition. They also appeared in person and received the accolades.¹⁵ The Mackintoshes travelled to Vienna in the fall of 1900 to oversee the decoration of the space allotted to the Glasgow artists by the Secession. The MacNairs had a young baby; Herbert MacNair had teaching responsibilities. These factors probably prevented their full participation and, in any event, they would have had complete faith in the ability of the other two to look after their interests.

of the population) earned an average of almost £4000 per year. As late as 1911, a government official or civil servant earned an average salary of £350 per year. Thomas Smout, A Century of the Scottish People, 1830-1950 (London, 1986), 110-11. Obviously, the McNairs were well into the upper classes.

¹⁴ Sylvan's date of birth is noted, in MacNair's writing, on the back of a photograph of Frances held by the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

¹⁵ Thomas Howarth, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement (London: Routledge, 1977), 150-152.

The inclusion of the Scots in this new Austrian exhibiting organization and the glowing reviews they received for their work secured their place in history. The organization itself was founded only a year earlier when progressive artists tired of the Künstlergenossenschaft (the Artists' Union) and its restrictive policies. They considered the Artists' Union's "narrow-minded policy" restrictive and inhibiting to "...the free development of the imagination."¹⁶ In addition, the young rebels wanted to include more foreign artists in the Viennese exhibition:

...even the works of the most celebrated foreign painters scarcely found a worthy place in the annual exhibitions organized under its [the Artists' Union] exhibitions. In a word, Vienna appeared doomed to everlasting conservatism.¹⁷

A reconciliation between the old school and the new could not be effected and the "secessionists" rapidly established their own organization, Vereinigung bildender Künstler Oesterreichs (the Association of Austrian Artists), as well as a publication to promote their ideas, Ver Sacrum.¹⁸ This journal attended "...to the propagation of the views of the 'younger' artistic generation."¹⁹ The founders of the journal had searched "the records of antiquity," and found

¹⁶ W. Fred, "The Latest from Vienna," in The Artist (London), May 1898, 51.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 52.

the following romantic custom:

When a great danger threatened the country, the Romans vowed to dedicate to the service of the gods all living things born in the coming spring, as a propitiatory sacrifice--Ver Sacrum (the Consecrated Spring). When those born in the spring thus consecrated to the gods grew to manhood, they left their homes, themselves a holy troop, to found by their own efforts a new community (with special aspiration) in a foreign land.²⁰

The Glasgow Four would soon be featured in Ver Sacrum. The experiments of the Vienna group as well as the significance of the "strange title borne by the journal"²¹ undoubtedly appealed to the innovative Glaswegians.

The way was paved for them to exhibit by a contingent of British artists invited to the 1898 exhibition of the "secessionists." These included Frank Brangwyn, George Sauter and William Strang.²² At this time, the move in the direction of decorative art had already been noted and had met with "very great success."²³ The Glasgow artists contributed to the decorative art section. Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh built a room at this exhibition that would lead them on to greater

²⁰ Ibid., 53. This explanation which had been published in the first issue of Ver Sacrum was written by Dr. Max Burkhardt (the former director of the Vienna Burg Theatre) in his introductory article for the new journal. It was reprinted in The Artist, May 1898.

²¹ Ibid.

²² W. Fred, "The 'Secession'," in The Artist (London), August 1898, 217-223.

²³ Ibid., 217.

successes. Inhibited by their Liverpool commitments, the MacNairs contributed a somewhat smaller portion and their success in Europe never achieved the magnitude of that attained by the Mackintoshes.

The art-going public in Austria and Germany had already been introduced to the work of The Four by major German-language journals. The Macdonald sisters had often been singled out for special attention by the German press. Frances Macdonald, in particular, was admired for her metalwork and for her lyrical symbolism, a symbolism that was not too obtrusive and did not contradict the ornamental character of her work.²⁴ However, her metalwork included only the clock that she and her sister made in 1896 and a pair of brass candlesticks.²⁵ Her major piece was a large decorative panel, the Legend of the Snowdrops (1900) (Fig.19).

²⁴ Dekorative Kunst, Vol.III, No.2, 1899, 48. "Wir beschäftigen uns hier nur mit den fünf hervorragendsten Künstlern der Gruppe, den beiden Fräulein Macdonald, die sich namentlich in Metallarbeiten und reinen Dekorationen--Affichlen, Büchern--hervorthun, Chas. R. Mackintosh, der im Mobiliar hervorragend ist und von dem wir ausserdem reizende Stoffdekorationen abbilden...Wo man ihm, zumal bei den Macdonald's begegnet, begnügt er sich mit Andeutungen, die sich wenigstens nicht aufdrängen und sich nicht dem angestrebten ornamentalen Charakter widersetzen."

²⁵ The catalogue of the exhibition attributed one silver panel of the "Day" and "Night" panels to Frances but, in fact, Margaret made them both. See Billcliffe and Vergo, 740.

The Legend of the Snowdrops²⁶ is dated 1900 and is signed in the lower right hand corner underneath the poem indicating that Frances probably composed the lines herself. The female figures in Snowdrops resemble the ones she painted earlier in Spring (1897). Although they are elongated, nude and pensive they lack the strength of her Girl in the East Wind. She included apples in the composition thereby establishing a connection between the Biblical Eve and her representation.

As if the apples were not symbol enough, the poem was added to insure an understanding.

When ice flakes fell in showers
 upon that world of death
 Some pitying ones-distilled
 by angels-breath fell loving flowers
 And snow drops thus were born
 to comfort Eve who sorrowful
 the land of life did leave.

The apple suggests the fall of woman; the snowdrop comfort for the banished. In English flower lore, the snowdrop was called the "Fair Maid of February" and could be a "death-

²⁶ The Legend of the Snowdrops was reproduced in "Die VIII. Ausstellung der Wiener Secession," Dekorative Kunst (Vol.VII, No.5, 1901), 188. The Germans recognized a "Christian mood" in the exhibit undoubtedly in part because of this large panel. "Es liegt christliche Stimmung in diesem Interieur." (181) See also Billcliffe, "J. H. MacNair...", 58. The two panels, Snowdrops and MacNair's accompanying piece, The Legend of the Birds, are held by the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh and I would like to thank Elizabeth Wright from the National Museums for her assistance in letting me see the pictures.

token."²⁷ Tennyson also used the snowdrop as a metaphor for the loss of the innocence when Guinevere and Lancelot consummated their love.²⁸ Macdonald's personal experience had expanded, by this time, to include childbirth. The painting must have been done either while she was pregnant or immediately after Sylvan MacNair's birth and may indicate her more intimate understanding of the Biblical punishment given to woman: "I will multiply your pains in childbearing, you shall give birth to your children in pain."²⁹

A second watercolour included in the Vienna exhibition was The Frog Prince (c.1898) (Fig.20).³⁰ Macdonald had exhibited this fairy-tale picture in 1898 with the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours and in design and content it bears close resemblance to her sister's The Rose Garden which was in the same exhibition.³¹ The richly

²⁷ Hilderic Friend, Flowers and Flower Lore (London: W. Swan Sonnenschein, 1884), 580.

²⁸ See Tennyson's "The Last Tournament." "Our one white day of Innocence hath past,/Tho' somewhat draggled at the Skirt. So be it./The snowdrop only, flowering thro' the year,/Would make the world as bland as Wintertide./Come--let us gladden their sad eyes, our Queen's/And Lancelot's, at this night's solemnity/With all the kindlier colours of the field." Tennyson, Poems and Plays (Oxford, 1973), 415.

²⁹ Genesis 3:16 from The Jerusalem Bible (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966).

³⁰ This is also reproduced in the 1901 Dekorative Kunst article. (170)

³¹ See the catalogue for the exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours, 1898 (Edinburgh).

richly clad female figure is looking over her shoulder at an anthropomorphic frog whose face resembles an Egyptian mummy mask. Done not long before her own wedding, it could well represent her own finding of a "prince." However, Macdonald retains one disturbing element characteristic of her earlier work: the woman's hands are thin and claw-like.

Few documents remain to chart the course of Frances's marriage. MacNair burned most of her pictures and her papers in his possession.³² Therefore, her Liverpool pictures and her later work from Glasgow must be relied upon to inform us of her experience over the next few years. She was a wife and she certainly felt the responsibilities and loyalty demanded of a married woman by society at that time. Marriage to MacNair, as shall be seen later, was difficult. Her own attitudes to this cannot be ascertained. However, with the facts that can be pieced together, I shall divide the last twenty years of Frances's life into two phases. The first, between 1899 and 1905, was outwardly calm, full and busy. Augustus John, painting in Liverpool at the time, remembered the MacNairs as a couple who, "...always worked, as I imagine they played, in perfect harmony."³³ Then, in 1905, the Applied Art Section of the School was closed as the School of Architecture forged ahead under the direction

³² Jude Burkhauser, "Frances Macdonald (1873-1921)" in 'Glasgow Girls': Women in Art and Design, 1880-1920 (Edinburgh, 1990), 127.

³³ Augustus John, Autobiography (London, 1975), 350.

of Charles Reilly. The second phase of Frances's career began with the closure of the Department of Applied Art.

The Education Committee of the Corporation of Liverpool decided that the city's Corporation Art School could replace the University Department of Applied Art. The university part of the old School of Architecture and Applied Art became, exclusively, a Department of Architecture.³⁴ Municipally controlled art education, such as that at the Corporation Art School, was considered conservative and restrictive. Rather than transferring from the relatively free and experimental approach of the Sheds to this more controlled environment, MacNair chose to join forces with those who set up a new School of Art at 9 Sandon Terrace.

This School became known as the Sandon Studios and, although it functioned effectively for the purposes of the students, the instructors received no fixed income. The "two masters," MacNair and Gerald Chowne, volunteered their services and the students "subscribed what they could collect among themselves."³⁵ Should any profits be made, a bonus was to be given to the instructors "in recognition

³⁴ The Art Sheds, 1894-1905, 1 and Bisson, 21. See also, Thomas Kelly, For the Advancement of Learning: the University of Liverpool, 1881-1981 (Liverpool, 1981).

³⁵ Quoted from a letter to R. E. Foster, Esq., Income Tax Commissioner from Hamel Lister dated 28 June 1908. The letter is held (uncatalogued) in the archives at the Liverpool City Records Office and was meant to shed light on the financial situation of the Sandon Studios.

of their kindness."³⁶ In 1906, because the number of students increased, the Studios did show a small profit and each of the masters received twenty-five pounds.³⁷

However, in 1907 they ran at a loss and the "masters were not paid at all."³⁸

Frances had been teaching some classes at the University and continued to teach some at Sandon. Augustus John wrote that, the "MacNairs taught what was known as design at our art school on Brownlow Hill [the University], where I was supposed to teach drawing."³⁹ Her income, however, would have been slight and, even though MacNair borrowed against his inheritance,⁴⁰ their financial condition would have been difficult. This begins the second phase of Frances's career which continued in Glasgow, when,

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ John, 350.

⁴⁰ In a Codicil attached to his father's will and dated 15 May 1909, George Best McNair names Herbert as responsible to the estate for his borrowings: "in respect of my having made advances to my son James Herbert McNair during his lifetime, whatever advances he has so had are to be accounted for..." Register of Deeds, Vol.3873, f35, Scottish Record Office. We can assume that the borrowing had been going on for some time as it is also in this Codical that McNair declares that his "said son Herbert is not to have any share in the residue" of his estate.

in the summer of 1908, the MacNairs moved back to Scotland.⁴¹ She lived and worked in Glasgow until her death in 1921.

The Liverpool Years

To understand Frances's life after her marriage to MacNair, I shall look at her work and activities in Liverpool, then in Glasgow. Her public life in Liverpool included designing sets and costumes for plays performed by University students. She also entertained a wide spectrum of friends including intellectuals like Gilbert Davies, Professor of Greek at the University, Herbert Strong, Professor of Latin, E. K. Muspratt, a chemist, who later became President of the University Council,⁴² and the artist, Augustus John. Much of her own art from this socially active period, at least before the Turin exhibition of 1902, was done in collaboration with Herbert. This was to Herbert's advantage. For example, Billcliffe has suggested that the quality of MacNair's designs and drawings improved after his marriage to Frances:

The roundels [on a smoker's cabinet] and the jewellery

⁴¹ A Programme and Menu from the Liverpool University Club's Farewell Dinner for Frances and Herbert MacNair dated Monday, 29 June 1908, is held in the archives of the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.

⁴² Apparently Muspratt would visit the MacNairs when he would not visit anyone else. R. F. Bisson, The Sandon Studios Society and the Arts (Liverpool: Parry Books, 1965), 20.

may well have been made by MacNair, but the quality of the design and the drawings is higher than that of known works by him, and so it is probable that the original designs are by Frances Macdonald.⁴³

Billcliffe noted that the writing room done for the Turin Exhibition, "emerged as one of their [Frances and Herbert's] most successful designs."⁴⁴ He also wrote that: "None of the pieces [of furniture] is particularly well made, with the exception of his latest known pieces--those made for the Turin Exhibition in 1902."⁴⁵ The Studio, in its comments on "The Scottish Section" at Turin considered the "joint work of J. Herbert McNair and Frances McNair" as "partaking of the same character as the work of the Mackintoshes" while, at the same time, creating "new interests" and arousing "fresh attention."⁴⁶ However, having generously, and quite likely correctly, given credit jointly to both artists, The Studio claimed a differentiation based upon sex:

A settle with glazed and curtained sides invites to rest, and the luxury is enhanced by a cushion embroidered with a charming treatment of little birds in nests. The dainty craft of these fittings proclaim the woman's hand, while the sturdy structure of the chair itself attests to the work of a man.⁴⁷

⁴³ Billcliffe, "J. H. MacNair...", 51.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁶ "The International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art at Turin--the Scottish Section," in The Studio (Vol.26), July 1902, 96.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 96-7.

A pair of silver repoussé panels, on the other hand, were attributed to both: "Man and wife are equally responsible for their production."⁴⁸ The MacNairs were then given credit for demonstrating "how the same motif in the hands of differing artists, becomes like a new thing," and for showing "in what manner the necessities and beauties of life can be brought together in one harmonious whole."⁴⁹ The "beauty" was found in the harmony between a "baby's crawling rug" and a "silver figure panel"⁵⁰ both of which were probably designed by Frances. We might conclude that Herbert's work was improved because of his collaboration with Frances.

Frances executed her own metalwork; her craftsmanship was superior to MacNair's and her designs were more accomplished.⁵¹ Frances probably had the greater hand in the Turin room (see Fig.21) and she was more than likely the major designer of their own home at 54 Oxford Street,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Billcliffe compares two early drawings by Macdonald and MacNair: Ill Omen and MacNair's The Lovers (1893). He writes that, "Both have the long sinuous figures and the images of malevolent birds, but MacNair's composition seems slightly over-complicated, with Frances's eerie positioning of her single figure makes her drawing all the more potent." Billcliffe, "J. H. MacNair...", 51. A look at any of their art side by side provides ample proof of these suggestions.

Liverpool.⁵² This home, wrote Billcliffe, is "the most important work he [MacNair] ever completed. It received several pages in the special edition of The Studio."⁵³ R. F. Bisson, in his personal recollections of the Sandon Studios Society, stated that 54 Oxford Street was decorated by both Herbert and Frances "in their distinctive way."⁵⁴

After the publication of 54 Oxford Street in The Studio, little of MacNair's work "is to be found in any journal, with the exception of the articles on the Turin Exhibition."⁵⁵ Billcliffe writes that the metal inserts in the cabinet, originally in the dining room at Oxford Street, "are novel, in that they are the first evidence of a possible collaboration in furniture design between MacNair and Frances Macdonald."⁵⁶ The furniture at Oxford Street bears great resemblance to the Writing Room designed for Turin and, in fact, the pieces in the Exhibition probably came from their Liverpool flat.⁵⁷ These two major

⁵² The house has been demolished but photographs remain of the interior. See Modern British Domestic Architecture, The Studio, Special Number, Summer 1901.

⁵³ Billcliffe, 57.

⁵⁴ R. F. Bisson, The Sandon Studios Society and the Arts. This is the only historical account of the Sandon Studios and this volume was published, in Liverpool, under the auspices of the Society.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Billcliffe, 51.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 58.

collaborative works, both dating from early in their marriage, undoubtedly reflect Frances's influence. Frances was, after all, the more successful of the two when they were students at the Glasgow School of Art. She also consistently received more coverage than MacNair in articles written by foreign critics, as well in the two important articles published in The Studio by Gleeson White.

These early years of marriage and collaboration must have been relatively happy ones for the MacNairs. Herbert was well liked by the students at the Sheds.⁵⁸ In addition to his University work, his activities as a member of the Liverpool Academy of the Arts made him known to the wider art community.⁵⁹ Frances shared this life as can be seen in their work on some theatre productions. A student and friend of the MacNairs, Mary "Bee" Dale (née Phillips) provides a rare account of life with the MacNairs during these years. She and her sister made a trip with Frances, Herbert and their son to Loch Lomond where they "sailed and swam for 3 weeks."⁶⁰ She wrote that Herbert took her in

⁵⁸ See Billcliffe, 53. The Sphinx (Vol.IX, No.5) February 1902, commented upon the popularity of a lecture given by MacNair, 172.

⁵⁹ See the catalogues for the Liverpool Academy of the Arts. Liverpool Record Office. In 1906 MacNair was a member of the selection committee and he exhibited regularly with the Academy until 1907. By 1909 he was no longer a member.

⁶⁰ Quoted from a letter written by Mary Dale to T. Stevens, Curator, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. The letter, not dated by its author, is stamped "received" by the Walker, 22 October 1976. Quoted by the courtesy of the

"his famous old wicker trailer,"⁶¹ attached to his bicycle, in which Frances and Sylvan travelled, to visit the "McDonalds [sic] at Dunglass Castle, on the Clyde."⁶²

Dale also noted that she would "never forget his [MacNair's] kindness..and help."⁶³ Mary Dale did not continue her training as an artist but her sister, also a close friend of the MacNairs, went on to study at the Slade.⁶⁴ Dale took embroidery classes with Frances but she does not tell us in what year, although we know that Frances taught at the University and at Sandon.⁶⁵

MacNair was a popular lecturer as well as an art teacher. One of his public lectures was reviewed in the University undergraduates magazine, The Sphinx, in 1902. The "Art Shed Correspondent" wrote that "all enjoyed Mr. McNair's lecture," and that they "had hardly realized before then how much poetry he could put into his exposition of artistic principle."⁶⁶ In addition, the "correspondent" noted that "some surprise was shown at the quality of

Walker Art Gallery.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. See also, Bisson, 9.

⁶⁵ Letter from Mary Dale to Timothy Stevens, dated 11 August 1971. Walker Art Gallery archives.

⁶⁶ The Sphinx, Vol.IX, No.5, February 1902, 172. The Sphinx is held in the University of Liverpool archives.

lecture coming from an artist."⁶⁷ His students were also commended for their "cleverly-executed illustrations in pen and ink, theatre posters and stencil friezes."⁶⁸

In 1903 the MacNairs and the Davies (Gilbert Davies, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, was the first occupant of the Chair of Greek Studies at Liverpool) helped Liverpool University students with their theatre productions. In May 1903, the students performed "Gorgo and Praxinoe" based upon a poem from the Idylls of Theocritus. Professor Davies directed the play; the MacNairs produced a "pageant of scenery and dresses" that had probably not been equalled in the history of the University.⁶⁹

Later on, when the Greek play was once again performed (this time along with Tempest), The Sphinx critic wrote that, "it would be quite impossible to try to find adequate words to describe the artistic beauty of the dresses worn by those taking part in the Greek play and Tempest."⁷⁰ These costumes were designed by the MacNairs with Davies and his wife and were such that "nothing could exceed the perfect

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ The Studio commented on an exhibition of students' work held at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool. "The decorative design class under Mr. Herbert McNair [sic]," was given special mention. See The Studio, August 1900, 195.

⁶⁹ The Sphinx, Vol.X, No.6, March 1903, 97.

⁷⁰ The Sphinx, Vol.X, No.7, May 1903, 124.

taste."⁷¹ A few days before the performance, a reporter for a local paper wrote that the "School of Fine Arts at University College has in hand the whole of the scenery, decorations, and the dresses, so that a pageant of exceptional beauty and distinction will be forthcoming."⁷²

During this period of activity at the University of Liverpool, Frances continued to contribute to major exhibitions and to be featured in art journals such as Dekorative Kunst and Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration. In 1901, Ver Sacrum carried a large photographic essay on the work of The Glasgow Four. It reproduced two of Frances's illustrations for William Morris's poem, The Defence of Guinevere: "Alas! Alas! I know not what to do," and "Ozana, Shall I pray for thee? Her cheek is pressed to thine."

The First International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art was held in Turin, April to December, 1902. The MacNairs' contribution in Turin was much more significant than it had been in Vienna two years earlier and rates as one of their finest achievements. In addition to the furniture already mentioned, Frances sent a number of paintings, including the Legend of the Snowdrop.⁷³ Other than the article which appeared in The Studio, the Glasgow

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² The Liverpool Daily Post, 2 May 1903, 2.

⁷³ The Glasgow School of Art holds a complete listing of all the items that were sent to Turin by Glasgow artists. This included the MacNairs.

contingent to Turin did not attract much attention in the British press. In Germany, however, the group continued receiving positive coverage. Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration, in conjunction with Turin, published an important article on Mackintosh and the Glasgow School in September 1902, in which the author commented on the use of the figure as design.⁷⁴

The human figure, suggested the German critic, seems to be only a pretext for indulging in a kind of sweet line play. To accomplish this the figure is elongated and bent in an unrealistic fashion, then stylized in the same way in which the English artist stylizes plants. It is forced into decoratively contorted positions to achieve a particular linear design representing the logical or final extreme of decorative art. The origins of this, according to the critic, were to be found in Blake, Rossetti, and Toorop.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ "Mackintosh und die Schule von Glasgow in Turin," in Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration, Vol. XII, no. 1, September 1902, 574-591.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 580. Die menschliche Figur scheint nur ein Vorwand zu sein, um sich bei ihrer Darstellung in süßem Liniengewoge zu ergötzen, sie wird nach Bedarf in die Länge gezogen oder in's Unmögliche verändert, jedenfalls ist sie lediglich dekorativ. Sie ist in derselben Weise stilisiert, wie die englische Kunst in ihrem Flachmuster die Pflanze stilisiert: sie ist in geziert-verbogene Stellungen gezwängt, um eine bestimmte Linienführung zu erreichen. Wir haben hier die letzte Konsequenz der dekorativen Linie vor uns deren Ur-Anfänge in England zu suchen sind. Blake schwelgte schon vor hundert Jahren in ihr und Rossetti suggerierte sie der ganzen Welt. Von Rossetti und den Praeraffaeliten führt der Weg in gerader Linie sowohl zu Toorop als den Glasgower Künstlern.

Other than these general comments undoubtedly elicited by some of Frances's work, it is Margaret upon whom the critic lavished most of his attention.

The MacNairs received some critical acclaim for this exhibition but it was mostly from European critics. Locally they did not exhibit very much in the early years of the century. Both seemed to be focused on their own home and their world in Liverpool. While doing some of their own art and designing sets and costumes for the University students, the MacNairs maintained their flat with theatrical flare. Augustus John recalled a dinner he and his wife Ida attended at the MacNairs:

We dined with two artistic people called MacNair, who between them have produced one baby and a multitude of spooks--their drawing room is very creepy and the dinner table was illuminated with two rows of nightlights in a lantern of the 'MacNair' pattern. The 'MacNair' door-knocker is most popular with the children of the neighbourhood who by its means keep themselves in constant touch with the most advanced Art movement. However the MacNairs have a homely way of conversing which immediately sets people at their ease.⁷⁶

John obviously recognized the work that had been labelled "spook" by earlier critics but the year was 1901 and John and other young artists in Britain, including his sister Gwen, who visited him in Liverpool that year, were moving in new directions. The Arts and Crafts movement had reached its apex and successful artists and designers were venturing

⁷⁶ Letter from Augustus John to Willhelm Rothenstein as quoted in Bisson, 13.

onto new ground, away from the Arts and Crafts, Art nouveau and Symbolism. The MacNairs, and others like them, were rapidly falling out of fashion.

John, in his autobiography, described what must have been a truly painful experience for the MacNairs when they asked him to comment on their work:

I responded frigidly to the curly door knockers and the rectangular tin troughs fitted with night-lights, etc., of the one, as to the quaintly pretty embroideries of the other, in which bulbous gnomes or fairies figured largely in surroundings of a totally unidentified order. To me they might have been dreams of a babe, signifying nothing, or at least nothing I knew about. When pressed by McNair [sic] for a personal appraisal of his industry, I with much reluctance complying, the honest fellow, forgetting that he had volunteered a similar estimate of my own efforts, broke down, saying he would just like to swim and swim right out to sea til he drowned. Without going to these lengths he did leave Liverpool eventually to return to his native land, where, I was told, forswearing Art, he became a first-class postman.⁷⁷

This truthful, though unflattering description of the MacNairs' art, was delivered by John just after the University had disbanded the Applied Art Section of the School of Architecture and Applied Art. Students and faculty were to be shunted over to the former rival of the Applied Art Department, the Corporation School of Art. MacNair left the University and became an instructor at Sandon Studios. A pamphlet announced the opening of the Sandon Terrace Studios:

⁷⁷ John, 350-1.

The Students of the University Art School (lately amalgamated with the Municipal School of Art) who do not wish to live under South Kensington regulations, have organized studios on the Paris system in Liverpool.⁷⁸

The Studios opened on 23 October 1905 and the event was considered an important direction for British art training. The Manchester Guardian recognized the "break with South Kensington,"⁷⁹ which constituted a secession from the traditional art school. The Guardian described it as a new "development of intellectual life:"

The opening in Liverpool by Mr. Gerard Chowne and Mr. Herbert McNair of a Studio School of Art free to develop on its own lines and unrestricted by official regulations is a matter of more than local interest. The development of intellectual life in the great provincial towns, which has made many of them organized centres of education, is by general consent one of the most significant events of the time....[At Sandon] the work of the students is inspired rather than controlled by the services of the masters, and all recognise themselves as fellow students within the walls of a school where the spirit of the drill shed has wholly given place to the well-considered co-ordination of a common endeavour.⁸⁰

The aspirations for Sandon were high and its aims lofty. The resident artists fully intended "to carry on the old and free tradition of a painter's and craftsman's workshop....to enable partially trained students to practise the higher branches of their art without the expense of a

⁷⁸ Pamphlet held by the Liverpool Record Office.

⁷⁹ The Manchester Guardian, 15 December 1905, 9.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

private studio."⁸¹ In a practical vein, MacNair and his students received a commission for twenty-four panels for the children's ward in the Mill Road Infirmary which, according to The Guardian, were based on a story from Andrew Lang's Red Fairy Book:

The panels vary in size, but most of them are about 7ft. by 3ft. and will be carried out in gesso by the students themselves. The subjects which have been chosen, episodes from "Graziosas and Persenet" in Andrew Lang's Red Fairy Book, give abundant place for the infinite variety of Mr. McNair's pupils. Each panel is alive with a personal life of its own, but arrangements have been made to harmonise the whole and to preserve those types which are ultimately chosen as being the most suitable to the scheme.⁸²

The most telling comment in the reviews about the first students' exhibition at Sandon had to do with the financial arrangements of the Studio: "The difficulties of maintaining an unendowed school of this character are well known, but they will be surmounted by the indestructible power of earnestness and conviction."⁸³ "Earnestness and conviction" were not enough to sustain the MacNairs and within two and a half years (in June 1908) they returned to Glasgow.

⁸¹ Quotes are from a Prospectus issued on the founding of the Sandon Terrace Studios, 9 Sandon Terrace, Duke Street held by Liverpool City Records.

⁸² The Manchester Guardian, 15 December 1905, 9.

⁸³ Ibid.

The Glasgow Years

Frances's wealthy uncle, Glasgow solicitor David Dalrymple Macdonald, had died in January 1908 leaving one fifth of his estate to his niece.⁸⁴ Her share in the estate amounted to over one thousand pounds but although she had the right to demand advances she was to receive the "annual income thereof" not the full amount.⁸⁵ In addition to receiving this modest income, the MacNairs soon moved into Frances's uncle's flat at 50 Gibson Street in Hillhead. This flat had been one of David Macdonald's residences and it is likely that, given the MacNairs' uneasy financial position, the Macdonald family encouraged them to live in what was now family property.⁸⁶ However, while this little security coming to the MacNairs from Frances's family could have stabilized them financially, Herbert's unemployment in combination with his family's financial

⁸⁴ Will of David Dalrymple Macdonald written 22 March 1902 (recorded 1908) left the major part of his estate to Frances and Margaret and their brothers, Charles and Archibald. The estate was to be divided into five equal shares, Archibald receiving two fifths rather than one fifth, "with the view of assisting him to start in business." Scottish Record Office SC.36/51/146.

⁸⁵ A Trust Disposition and Settlement drawn up by her uncle made these special arrangements for her alone among his nieces and nephews: Frances was to receive the income, upon her death this would revert to the youngest of her children (when that child reached 25 years of age) or failing the "lives of children or their issue" to James Herbert McNair, failing him to Margaret. Scottish Record Office, Register of Deeds, Vol.3717, f.326.

⁸⁶ David Dalrymple Macdonald's will listed three residences.

downfall, made their situation precarious. By mid-1909, the once rich and prosperous McNair family had lost most of the estate of Herbert's grandfather. Even before this, in May 1909, Herbert's father had added a codicil to his will that effectively disinherited Herbert. George Best McNair declared that "in respect of my having made advances to my son James Herbert McNair during my lifetime," these advances were to be "accounted for as the portion falling to him and in lieu of his share of my means and estate."⁸⁷ In November 1909 George McNair signed a Trust Deed which effectively made over the estate to the Bank of Scotland. McNair declared that his affairs had "become embarrassed" and that he was "unable to pay the several debts due," therefore the Bank of Scotland was to "take immediate possession of the whole of said estates to sell the same by public or private sale, in whole or in lots."⁸⁸ The McNair fortune was completely decimated possibly by poor investments in Glasgow's precarious shipping industry. Herbert's older brother, George Stanser McNair, was a Glasgow shipping agent and during the first decade of the

⁸⁷ As early as November 1907 George McNair had announced that his estate was to be divided among his four daughters, Frances Eleanor, Emily Edith, Mary Christian and Caroline Gertrude. Scottish Record Office, Trust Disposition and Settlement and Codicil, Index of Deeds, 3658/f32.

⁸⁸ George Best McNair, Trust Deed, Register of Deeds, Vol.3830, 116-123 (f.117), Scottish Record Office.

twentieth century this could be a risky adventure.⁸⁹ This danger had been recognized by McNair's father as early as 1907 when he attached a Codicil to his will protecting his other children from the follies of their older brother: "Considering that I have advanced certain sums to my son, George Stanser McNair," these advances were to remain as debts to the estate and his other children were to incur "no personal liability for George Stanser McNair's debts."⁹⁰ The fortune amassed by Herbert's grandfather which in 1888 was in excess of forty-six thousand pounds, or what would be close to a million pounds today, was lost within twenty years and Herbert, probably for the first time in his life, was faced with having to actually live on his own earned income.⁹¹ As mentioned above, his position at Sandon while prestigious in the art community was anything but lucrative. The move back to Glasgow must have been

⁸⁹ Billcliffe, "J. H. MacNair...", 64-66, suggests that MacNair's private income from his father had disappeared with the collapse of a family shipping business. The will of Anne Meek McNair (possibly Herbert's aunt) made George Stanser McNair her executor. In this document he is listed as a "shipowner and shipbroker, 28 St. Enoch Square, Glasgow." Scottish Record Office, SC70/4/395, 1905. The deeds and testaments signed by Herbert's father indicate that, even without that collapse, Herbert had borrowed more than his share of the estate and would not have inherited anyway.

⁹⁰ Register of Deeds, Vol.3873/f.24. Scottish Record Office.

⁹¹ The McNair estate was still under the control of the Royal Bank of Scotland in 1957. See writ number 10522 in Assumptions and Resignations, Register of Deeds, 8474/24 October 1957.

accompanied by hopes and expectations for better opportunities. However, within a short time the optimistic change was shadowed by Herbert's failure to obtain a position at the Glasgow School of Art.

MacNair had teaching experience from the University of Liverpool but the Applied Art Department there never rivalled Glasgow's exalted place in the British art world. When a teaching position opened at Glasgow upon the resignation of Adolphe Giralton,⁹² Herbert's name was put forward (by someone on the Board or by Herbert himself) for the "Design Professorship." However, he was not awarded the position. Instead, the professorship was first offered to C. F. A. Voysey and when he turned it down, it was offered to W. E. F. Britten who accepted.⁹³ Glasgow apparently felt that MacNair lacked the experience to fill Giralton's position. It is also possible that Herbert, failing to obtain the more exalted position, refused any position at all. This would seem the most likely because within a few

⁹² Giralton had taught at the School for five years but, because of the demands of his own work, left the teaching position. Annual Report, 1907-08, 11.

⁹³ Minutes of the School Committee, 8 May 1908. The minutes of the School are not catalogued and I am grateful to George Rawson, Fine Art Librarian, Glasgow School of Art, for photocopying relevant parts of them for me. Britten was exhibiting in London between 1884 and 1886--exactly the same time that Newbery and Kellock Brown were there. It is possible that one or both of the Glasgow artists knew him. In April 1884, The Artist commented on three paintings in oil that Britten had nearly completed for exhibition; in February 1886 they mentioned his "frieze for Mr. Stewart Hodgson's house."

months, Frances accepted a position as Instructor for Metalwork and Enamel.⁹⁴ However, neither Herbert's disappointments nor the changes in their lives and careers, affected their exhibiting schedules and 1908 was a productive year for the artists.

Their first major exhibition was at Sandon itself. In May of 1908, Frances hung four paintings in the Sandon Society of Artists' Exhibition of Modern Art held in the Old Bluecoat School in Liverpool.⁹⁵ The press referred to her paintings and the ones by Herbert as "fantastic compositions,"⁹⁶ or as "symbolic studies [which] they treat so successfully."⁹⁷ The Liverpool Courier commented specifically about the women artists in the exhibition. After noting that "Mrs. MacNair wore black with pink in her hat," The Courier noted that the "women artists" made "a brave show, and Mrs. MacNair's panels are quite lovely studies of form and colour."⁹⁸ Like the London-based

⁹⁴ Minutes of the School Committee, 5 November 1908. Frances replaced Jessie King, another graduate of the School, who had exhibited in Europe with the Glasgow artists.

⁹⁵ Waves kissing the faces of the Rocks, A Panel, A Blue Rose and Sleep are listed in the catalogue for the Exhibition (held in the Liverpool City Record Office, Liverpool).

⁹⁶ The Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 1 May 1908, 5.

⁹⁷ The Liverpool Courier, 2 May 1908, 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers exhibition of 1898, this was seen as a "secession" exhibition, albeit a provincial and northern one. Frances's A Panel and Sleep were singled out as "quite beautiful inventions with a musical rhythm of line and colour."⁹⁹ In addition, her painting Waves Kissing the Faces of the Rocks was seen as having "charm," and as being "eerie and quaint."¹⁰⁰ These characteristics seem out of place in a so-called progressive exhibition. Most of the artists were "ardent disciples of the new English movement in artistic expression," and "imbued with the spirit of the eminently modern world."¹⁰¹ Augustus John was represented by twenty-two exhibits. His art, along with that of Gerard Chowne, MacNair's colleague at the Sandon Studios, was most extensively reviewed. The MacNairs were not in the forefront of the "modern art movement" extolled at this exhibition: they hung their paintings but their style was far from modern.

Nevertheless, for a period of time they were associated with the "new" style, or at least with the "new" artists. Almost immediately after the Sandon Exhibition, the MacNairs forwarded their paintings on to London for the first

⁹⁹ The Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 1 May 1908, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

exhibition of the Allied Artists' Association.¹⁰² Gerard Chowne was a founding member of the Association which professed to be a "new art society."¹⁰³ The primary objective of this new society was to permit artists "to submit their work freely to the judgment of the public."¹⁰⁴ Unlike the Academy it was an independent organization which accorded "the same treatment to all artists, irrespective of their positions and reputations."¹⁰⁵ The only rules were that contribution to the exhibition had to be received prior to a given date and a maximum of five works would be hung per person. The MacNairs each submitted five paintings.

The London Salon was virtually the end of the MacNairs' exhibiting career. In 1909 Frances submitted the three pieces allowed each member;¹⁰⁶ Herbert's name appeared with the list of exhibitors but none of his paintings are named in the catalogue. By the time of the third London Salon in 1910, the MacNairs had disappeared from the Association. They would have only one more major

¹⁰² See the catalogue for The London Salon of the Allied Artists' Association, July 1908, Royal Albert Hall.

¹⁰³ See the Forward to the catalogue for the Exhibition.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ The organization restricted its members to three pieces for its second exhibition for a total number of 1700 non-juried pieces. See, The Studio, August 1909, 221.

exhibition: at the Baillie Gallery in London in 1911.

It would appear, given the titles of the works, that Frances exhibited the same paintings (with only a few variations) between 1900 to 1911. The Birth of the Rose¹⁰⁷ from the 1908 Salon Exhibition would have been typical. The woman in the predominantly pink watercolour lies stretched out with a large rose on her abdomen. The centre of the flower contains a young blond child. The female is not a young, sleeping princess but a care-worn adult. Her eyes are closed and her head is turned away from the child. Her exposed breasts are matured by child-bearing. Far removed from her lone "girl in the east wind" and from her repulsive "pond women," this female exemplifies weariness and resignation.

This picture of resignation typifies Frances Macdonald's late paintings. Indeed the theme of resistant resignation is encoded into the titles of these paintings. For example, in 'Tis a long path that wanders to desire (c.1909-15) (Fig.22), Macdonald drew a young woman weighed down by her hair, hair that also becomes the "path". She looks suspicious or bewildered about the prospect of "desire." That this desire is related to man is indicated

¹⁰⁷ The painting described here appeared in The Last Romantics: The Romantic Tradition in British Art, Burne-Jones to Stanley Spencer, an exhibition at the Barbican Gallery (London), 1989, as The Sleeping Princess, c.1909-15. I think that this is the picture that appeared in the Salon exhibition of 1908 and should be titled, The Birth of the Rose, c.1908.

by the inclusion of two male figures in the background on the path: one faces toward the viewer with his arms outstretched as if waiting for the woman and the other has his back to the viewer. The young woman with the palms of her hands upturned by her shoulders, extends her thin, pointed fingers in a gesture that speaks of "not knowing:" not knowing how she should respond, not knowing in which direction she should move, not knowing what to do. This picture of a vulnerable nude female (the nude is not voluptuously sexual) is a rare example of an artist's attempt to address the issue of female desire and consequently raises questions about female desire, how it is expressed and what, precisely, it is.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, Man makes the beads of life but woman must thread them (c.1911-15) (Fig.23), is a clear and direct representation of woman's role and her inability to transcend this role. The picture shows a nude male, sex organ explicitly depicted, holding an egg-like circle containing a child. He offers this "gift" to a woman. She faces the viewer straight-on; her hair, recalling that of "girl in the east wind," streaks out in a strong horizontal away from her head. The woman covers her pubic area with a large circle containing a child. Her hands intrude into the

¹⁰⁸ For a discussion of desire as it relates to cinema (and many of the comments could be used in art historical research) see Linda Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema," in Screen, Vol.16, No.2, 1975, 6-18.

circle; her long, thin fingers wrap around the baby. Both the male and the female figures are elongated and emaciated. Like her earlier work, the predominant colours are blue, mauve and green. Also like some of her early work, this picture is unsettling, disturbing. The explicit reference here, according to Frances's title, is that pregnancy is caused by the male while the care and tending of the child falls onto the female. Once again Macdonald confronts female desire. She suggests that motherhood with its ensuing responsibilities, rather than being desired by women, is thrust upon woman. Certainly, as I shall make clear, the responsibilities for the MacNair household were fully Frances's by 1912.

The Glasgow years were particularly difficult and paintings like, The Birth of the Rose, 'Tis a long path that wanders to desire and Man makes the beads of life but woman must thread them undoubtedly disclose to us some of Frances's experience as a working woman and a mother. She had written to Francis Newbery in October 1908 asking for a position and he had replied that, although "Instructresses both for Bookbinding and for Pottery Painting," had already been hired there was an opening in metal work and enamels.¹⁰⁹ Newbery went on to write: "this is what I have been wishing for you because I know your strengths in

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Francis Newbery to Frances MacNair dated 21 October 1908, in F. H. Newbery correspondence at the Glasgow School of Art, 1908-09, 225.

both these Arts."¹¹⁰ In her capacity as an instructor, Frances was to undertake two visits to each of her classes weekly and, addition to this, she was to assist Ann Macbeth with Needlework classes on Saturday mornings.¹¹¹ The Needlework classes were part of the "Art 55 Classes" which had been developed by the Glasgow School of Art under the auspices of the Glasgow Provincial Committee to improve the qualifications of already practising art teachers.¹¹² During her weekly teaching at the School, Frances was responsible for the teaching of Design in Enamels and in Metalwork which included repoussé.¹¹³ The hierarchy of the School was such that the Design Instructors, in whatever area they taught, were immediately responsible to the Head of the Department. In Frances's case Professor Britten was the head of the Department of Decorative Arts. Therefore, had Herbert taken such a position he would have had to work under his competitor. On the other hand, the Design Instructor was one step above the Instructor, that is, the person who taught the technical skills involved. An exception to this, during the 1907-08 and the 1908-09 academic years, is found in the Art Needlework and

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² The Annual Report of the Glasgow School of Art, Session 1907-08, 11.

¹¹³ Annual Report, 1907-08, 4-5.

Embroidery section where both Ann Macbeth and Frances MacNair are listed as responsible for "Design and Instruction."¹¹⁴ In 1909 The Studio singled out some of Glasgow's female students for praise: "Not the least remarkable feature of the GSA is the measure of individuality it seems to develop in many of its students who pass through its classes. This is particularly so in the case of the women artists."¹¹⁵ Because prizes were awarded to students in enamelling and in silversmith,¹¹⁶ classes Frances taught, we must assume that some of these were her students. She quite likely still believed in students developing "the measure of individuality."

However, the School's emphasis had begun to change. During the 1890s, particularly when Frances was a student, the focus was upon an exploration of individual creativity. This was in keeping with Frances's work and obviously, as she wholeheartedly pursued this, with her personality but styles and fashions, ideas and directions changed with the new century. Symbolism, Art nouveau and English Aestheticism were definitely out of fashion. This is one of

¹¹⁴ Annual Report, 1907-08, 4-5. This remains the same in the Report for 1908-09,, 5.

¹¹⁵ The Studio, June 1909, 60.

¹¹⁶ The Studio, May 1909, reported on an exhibition of students' work in Glasgow: "some of the most distinguished former students are both members and contributors." (331) Prizes were awarded to Mary Hogg in "enamelling" and to Ina D. D. Campbell in "silversmith work." (332)

the reasons that the Sheds in Liverpool were closed; they had been too closely related to the English Arts and Crafts movement. Now, in Glasgow pragmatism and practicality reigned. A new wind was blowing and it blew upon Frances.

The Annual Report from 1909-10 indicates that Ann Macbeth received a promotion. She became "Chief Instructress" of Art Needlework and Embroidery.¹¹⁷ Then, the following year, she was made "Head of Section."¹¹⁸ The ideas behind Macbeth's teaching are similar to those which would be found later in the fabric courses at the Bauhaus. She insisted that work be done with the "simplest and least expensive materials" but that these "must be good of their kind" and that the student must "always take the type of fabric into consideration for the type of work."¹¹⁹

These same ideas were elaborated upon the following year when Macbeth announces that "the instruction in the Embroidery Section has undergone practically a total change as regards the approach to design."¹²⁰ The reference to design would indicate that this is a personal statement

¹¹⁷ Annual Report, 1909-10, 21.

¹¹⁸ Annual Report, 1909-10, 7.

¹¹⁹ Annual Report, 1909-10, 21. These concepts of Macbeth's were included in the "Notes upon Sessions Work."

¹²⁰ Annual Report, 1909-10, 20, in "Notes on the Needlework Section." These notes were signed "Ann Macbeth, Chief Instructress."

regarding Macbeth's move in a direction different from that of Frances. Frances retained her position as teacher in "Metalwork Repoussé" and added a new class in "Design in Enamels, Gold and Silversmith Work," but it was clear that her art not the type that the School wanted.

Frances's art is an art of personal symbol and expression. Macbeth wrote that "there has been a tendency for the students to work for their personal ends only" but that now, "with a new type of instruction" it would be "the needle, as the tool employed," that would fix and define the "nature of the design" and that the "too pictorial a rendering of floral and other forms" would be replaced by a more pragmatic art applicable to the teaching of school children.¹²¹ This reference to "floral and other forms" could relate to little other than Continental Art nouveau; the emphasis upon teaching of children places the art of training above the art of experimentation. Macbeth was committed to the teaching of teachers with an emphasis upon the function. She continued on in this direction with the School's support. In 1916 she responded to May Morris's determination to continue the traditions and ideals of her father William Morris:

We cannot put the clock back. We are of the twentieth century, and we cannot, as Miss May Morris advocates, put either the arts and crafts or any other industry of this country back into the seventeenth century. The machine has come to

¹²¹ Annual Report, 1909-10, 20.

stay. Let the buyers of the country consider the cost of the work produced by Messrs. Morris and Co. Can we afford it? No. That is only for the wealthiest. But this need not mean that the brain behind the machine be lacking in good taste or skill. Our people, given rational training in art, may be artistic as any nation under the sun, but the training must be altered.

The making of patterns--not of pictures--must be the art training in our children's schools of all grades....for art, if it is to be a national thing, must start in the national schools, and it must also be purely utilitarian in its application. Pictures we can most of us do without.¹²²

Despite the fact that William Morris had been an important influence on Newbery and the Glasgow School of Art in the nineteenth century, it was now the twentieth century and times had changed. A move toward a functional, practical art dictated by the needle and the fabric meant a move away from art for art's sake. This was not Frances's world. The "making of pictures," the individual artist and individual expression were all part of Frances's life and work. In September 1909 Newbery wrote a letter to Frances relieving her of the Saturday afternoon enamel and metal work classes because she felt physically incapable of "undertaking" them.¹²³ She continued to teach her weekday classes and, in October 1909, she was appointed "full instructress in association with Miss Macbeth to take charge

¹²² The Daily News and Leader (London), 17 October 1916, 4.

¹²³ Letter from F. H. Newbery to Frances MacNair dated 21 September 1909. Glasgow School of Art, Newbery correspondence 1909, 367.

of the Embroidery Class on Tuesday afternoon and Thursday morning."¹²⁴ That year, however, would be her last at the Glasgow School of Art as an instructor. Changes in the School's direction combined with George McNair's bankruptcy and her own poor health undoubtedly led to her decision. Her life became ever more difficult.

During these trying times in Glasgow, Frances retained her ties with Liverpool. She remained as an honorary member in the Sandon Society along with Charles Rennie Mackintosh.¹²⁵ MacNair was a member until 1912 at which time his membership was revoked by the Executive Committee of the Society. The Committee reported "with very great regret" that one of the "Honorary members has been causing annoyance to members of the club,"¹²⁶ and although MacNair wrote a letter apologizing for his behaviour, the Committee refused to change its decision.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Letter to Frances MacNair in the F. H. Newbery correspondence, 15 October 1909, 455.

¹²⁵ See the Sandon Bulletin published at various times during this period and held in the archives of the Liverpool City Record Office.

¹²⁶ Reports of the Executive Committee, July to October 1912, 4. Liverpool Record Office, ACC 4096.

¹²⁷ Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive, Sandon Studios Society, 16 October 1912. MacNair did respond to this "asking what authority the committee had to threaten to eject him," but "after some discussion a reply was drafted and sent immediately." Minutes, 23 October 1912. Liverpool Record Office.

In the spring of that year Frances had returned to Liverpool to teach an embroidery class. In addition to an advertisement placed in the Bulletin of the Sandon Studio Society that referred to her as the "Late Instructress of Embroidery at the Glasgow School of Art," there was also a short article about her and the classes.¹²⁸ Obviously, her former friends did everything they could to promote her classes and Frances even offered to instruct (for a fee) at any "Lady's Private House," if six students could assemble there.¹²⁹ The courses were to have begun in May but the same advertisement ran again in the June Bulletin.¹³⁰ Hamel Lister Calder, the secretary and treasurer for the Sandon Studios Society, exchanged a number of letters with friends trying to enlist their support for Frances's embroidery classes. The replies she received were not encouraging and many of them, while attesting to the difficulties Frances was experiencing do not elaborate upon them. For example, Elsa Hutchinson wrote to Hamel Calder that the "old fashioned and conventional" people in her area (Cheshire) "could not possibly understand Mrs. MacNair's work":

I have heard about poor Mrs. MacNair and should be so glad to help her but I am afraid it would be no good trying to get up a class in this neighbourhood as most

¹²⁸ Bulletin, No.1, March 1912, 2 and 5.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Bulletin, No.2, June 1912.

of the people are very old fashioned and conventional and could not possibly understand Mrs. MacNair's work.¹³¹

Another acquaintance of Calder's responded much the same way: "I am so sorry to hear of Mrs. MacNair's difficulties. She was a brave nice little woman. I wish I could help her but I'm not sure." The friend went on to comment that people in her area were "much more given up to golf than the arts."¹³² Hamel Calder sent out numbers of letters attempting to garner support and students for Frances's classes but the responses were all much the same: interest in her work but doubt that she would be able to "get a class together."¹³³

Bisson included a poignant account of the MacNairs that could date anywhere from 1909 to 1912:

These were hard times for the MacNairs. They were living in Glasgow but both of them frequently came down to the Sandon. Mrs. MacNair had relatives in Liverpool who managed Greenbank School, Sefton Park. Although he [MacNair] had no classes he wandered about the club all day. One of the characteristics of his dress, besides the unusual cut of his jackets, buttoned right up to the neck like a tunic, was his preference for tennis shoes. They were famous in Liverpool. Members [of Sandon] were distressed to notice one day when he came in from a shower of rain that the prints of

¹³¹ Letter from Elsa Hutchison, Bebington, Cheshire to Hamel Calder, undated. Liverpool Record Office. Sandon Studios archival material.

¹³² Letter from Eleanor Caroe to Hamel Calder, dated 24 February 1912. Liverpool Record Office.

¹³³ Letter from Margaret Weisse, New Brighton, Cheshire to Hamel Calder, dated 14 March 1912. Liverpool Record Office.

his wet toes were visible on the floor.¹³⁴

It is possible that when Frances went to teach in Liverpool in the spring of 1912, Herbert was not even living with her. A 1911 legal document aimed at collecting money for MacNair from his grandfather's estate (his grandfather had died intestate) shows MacNair at a London address.¹³⁵ About this same time MacNair travelled to Canada to start a new life but returned, eventually to Glasgow and to Frances. Billcliffe suggests that the Macdonalds "paid MacNair's fare over to Canada, but not Frances's, in the hope that he would find a job there and not return."¹³⁶ With the money he had from his grandfather he may, in fact, have financed his own trip to Canada or after travelling to Canada he may have settled in London for a time. Either way, Frances's life must have been unsettled.

Despite the hardships, Frances continued to exhibit. She had two drawings in the Sandon Studio "Exhibition of Modern Art including works by the Post-Impressionists," in the spring of 1911 and two more drawings in the 1912 spring

¹³⁴ Bisson, 79.

¹³⁵ Charles Macdonald, Frances's brother and a Glasgow solicitor, signed the ad non executata that provided MacNair with £2800 from his grandfather's estate. This must have been part of the estate that was excluded from the 1887 inventory. MacNair was living at 8, Aberdeen Road, Neasden, London. James Stanser McNair, ad non executata, 25 July 1911, Scottish Record Office, SC.36/48/23.

¹³⁶ See Billcliffe, "J. H. MacNair...", 66.

exhibition.¹³⁷ She and Herbert had an exhibition of watercolour paintings at the Baillie Gallery in London in November 1911 indicating that, at least in their work, they remained a unit.¹³⁸

The Glasgow Herald considered the London show "a markedly interesting feature of the series of exhibitions just arranged in the Baillie Gallery."¹³⁹ In the minds of the critics, both artists were still connected to the Glasgow School of Art:

These artists, closely associated with the Glasgow School of Art, and widely known in Scotland, have till now been represented but occasionally in London.¹⁴⁰

They were also seen as having a "certain similarity of aim."¹⁴¹ The London correspondent for The Glasgow Herald wrote:

Neither is concerned with the mere reproduction of

¹³⁷ Catalogues for these exhibitions are held by the Liverpool City Records Office. The 1912 Sandon exhibition coincided with Frances Macdonald's attempts to teach embroidery classes in Liverpool. She only exhibited two works, both listed under "drawings;" one had been lent by Charles Reilly, Professor of Architecture at the University (Blue Butterflies); the other, Rose, was listed for sale. Sandon Studios Society: Exhibition of Modern Art, Liberty Buildings, School Lane, Liverpool, 22 April to 18 May 1912.

¹³⁸ The catalogue for this exhibition is held by the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. Margaret Macdonald was to have exhibited with the MacNairs but "this section of the show was postponed." The Glasgow Herald 7 November 1911, 7.

¹³⁹ The Glasgow Herald, 7 November 1911, 7.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

visible objects. Each, on the contrary, desires to evoke images born in dream or moods of fantasy, and with utmost delicacy to breathe these forms as it were on to the decorative picture space.¹⁴²

Frances Macdonald MacNair's pictures were considered

"decorative":

Mrs. MacNair, by garlanding and flushing with colour her spare wistful figures or her chubby amorini and uniting them to the spirit of the bird, of flower, proves herself to be not alone a highly skilled painter but one who as though by intuition weaves delicate webs of enchantment. As typical examples there may be cited Butterflies White done in 1907; the quite recent Love's Land, Flora, and Bows, Beads and Birds.¹⁴³

The critic for the London Times criticized Macdonald for practising a "decorative kind of watercolour whichseems to be too arbitrary in its treatment of form and not sufficiently based on visual experience," but, in the same article, she was praised for her "pleasant simplicity of fancy."¹⁴⁴

Decorative art in 1911 was not the wave of the future. In 1913 and 1914, although Frances retained her membership in the Sandon Studio Society, she submitted no pictures to the exhibitions of those years. Evident of the changes that were taking place were Roger Fry's illustrated lecture "on the aims of post impressionist design" presented in

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ The Times (London), 10 November 1911, 10.

Liverpool in February 1913¹⁴⁵ and the inclusion of paintings by Gwen John and Vanessa Bell in the 1914 Sandon exhibition. Although the Sandon Studios Bulletin printed criticism directed against Roger Fry ("a lunacy, a joke, or an impertinence") and suggested that Vanessa Bell's Girlhood of Thisbe was not "worthy of a place in a national exhibition," the London artists represented the future.¹⁴⁶ Frances's symbolism could not compete with the new modernism. Just a few years older than these two modernists, Frances had not taken advantage of the doors that her medals and "free studentship" would have opened for her in the London art schools. Gwen John, on the other hand, took full advantage of what was available. She entered the Slade in 1895 just one year after Frances left the Glasgow School of Art. Vanessa Bell was studying at the Academy Schools by the turn of the century.¹⁴⁷

It would appear that the Baillie was the last independent exhibition for the MacNairs as a couple and that the 1912 Sandon exhibition was the last group exhibition to which Frances contributed. She produced four important

¹⁴⁵ The Bulletin, Sandon Studios Society, Spring 1913.

¹⁴⁶ The Bulletin, Sandon Studios Society, April 1914.

¹⁴⁷ See Angelica Garnett, Deceived with Kindness, A Bloomsbury Childhood (London, 1984) and Mary Ann Caws, Women of Bloomsbury, Virginia, Vanessa and Carrington (New York, 1990) for accounts of Vanessa Bell's life. See Mary Taubmann, Gwen John: The Artist and Her Works (Ithaca, N.Y., 1986), and Augustus John, Autobiography for information about Gwen John.

paintings, however, that did not appear in either of these shows. It would seem, therefore, that rather than being dated as they usually are, c.1909-1915, they should be dated to after 1912. Had she painted them prior to 1911, these paintings would probably have been exhibited either in Sandon Studios Exhibitions or in the Baillie exhibition of November 1911; painted after 1911, however, they probably would not have been exhibited and, as far as we know, these four paintings were never shown. Roger Billcliffe in Mackintosh Watercolours (1979) referred to these paintings as "mysterious."¹⁴⁸ He suggested that these images, and others like them from the late period, reflect "Frances's unpredictable existence," and that they have been given "philosophical titles."¹⁴⁹ I would suggest that these late paintings are an integral part of Macdonald's life work, speaking of the female experience from the perspective of a woman artist. The perceived obscurity of her images described by Billcliffe as mysterious has to do with her choice of content and subject, both of which are exclusively female and, therefore, difficult to understand within our established patriarchal modes of perception. These paintings were probably done between the time Frances's

¹⁴⁸ Roger Billcliffe, Mackintosh Watercolours (London, 1979), 47.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

mother died, in 1912,¹⁵⁰ and her own death nine years later.

Her mother's will with its restrictions and conditions upon Frances's inheritance tells us a great deal about Frances and how she was seen by her family. The will was a straight-forward document that divided up the estate among the brothers and sisters, the exception being the part that pertained to Frances. A portion of the estate was to be divided into two parts: "two equal shares" for Margaret and Frances.¹⁵¹ Margaret's share was given to her directly; Frances's was given with qualifications and under no circumstances was to become her husband's property. This document dramatically confirms the lack of trust and respect awarded to MacNair by his mother-in-law. Frances was given an annual income:

during all the days of her life exclusive of the jus mariti and right of administration of any husband she may have and payable to her on her own separate receipt and that as a strictly alimentary provision to her not assignable by her nor attachable for her debts or deeds.¹⁵²

If this income was "not sufficient for the maintenance of the said Frances Eliza Macnair [sic]" then the Trustees could "make such advances to her out of capital [they]....shall in their absolute discretion deem necessary

¹⁵⁰ Frances Hardeman Macdonald died 16 June 1912.

¹⁵¹ The will is filed in the Scottish Record Office in Edinburgh, reference SC65/36/10.

¹⁵² Ibid.

and expedient."¹⁵³ The restrictions went on from there:

Frances Eliza Macnair shall not have right to demand such advances out of capital as a matter of course and that the decision as to the time and extent to which such advances of capital shall be made shall rest with the Trustees alone: In the second place after the death of the said Frances Eliza Macnair the said Trustees are hereby directed to hold the Trust...[for] the children of the said Frances Eliza Macnair....¹⁵⁴

Should both Frances and her children die, her share of the estate was to revert to the other heirs. Under no circumstances was Herbert MacNair to have access to the Macdonald estate. This is in direct contrast to Margaret's inheritance which was free and clear: she could do with it what she wanted (that included leaving her share to Mackintosh should she die), she received it all at once and she administered it herself. Frances was considered too irresponsible to control her own financial affairs or, more likely, her husband was considered too irresponsible (similar restrictions but done without disinheriting Herbert had been applied to her share of her uncle's estate).

We can only speculate about the final years of Frances's life. She did not exhibit. She lived in Glasgow while Margaret had moved to Chelsea. The excitement and promise of the 1890s and the acceptance on the Continent in the early years of the new century had all faded away.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Frances's brother Charles persuaded those he could to purchase pictures and furniture made by the MacNairs. Among their best customers of these last years were Charles's wife's relatives but the sales were few and infrequent.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, her last paintings found a home even if not exhibited.

As already mentioned, two of these late works obviously refer to a relationship, and not always a happy one, between the sexes: Man makes the beads of life but woman must thread them and 'Tis a long path that wanders to desire. Another picture from this same group, Prudence and Desire (Fig.24) is virtually a pendant to 'Tis a long path because the woman appears to have made a decision. Two men (as in most of her work they are androgynous with shoulder length hair) turn toward the central female figure with looks of puzzlement upon their faces. Macdonald has painted another "Eve"; apples are present everywhere and most obviously in the woman's drawn-back hair which becomes an apple filled with smaller apples. This Eve, however, is not the meek, abashed Eve from The Legend of the Snowdrops but, instead, a proud, self-contained woman.¹⁵⁶ Although her eyes are closed,

¹⁵⁵ Information about these transactions and about Charles and his family was obtained in conversation with a relative of the family. Transcriptions of the conversation remain with me.

¹⁵⁶ Macdonald painted another watercolour titled Eve which has been dated c.1896 by Mario Amaya in Art Nouveau (New York, 1985), 51. However, the picture is clearly signed 'Frances MacNair' in the lower right hand corner and

her head is raised. Her abdomen is defiantly thrust forward and her hands are extended in a gesture that says, "stay away." If the woman in 'Tis a long path appeared confused, this woman has made up her mind: she will be alone.

Another painting from this series shows four women, one of them representing the proverb indicated by the title, Truth at the bottom of the well. This silent supine woman at the bottom of the well gestures for silence; her eyes are closed. The three women in the bricked in enclosure (the well) also gesture for silence. This painting is similar in theme to Margaret's 1913 The Pool of Silence and may indicate that the women were exchanging ideas about their work at the time. Frances's figures are all nude; Margaret's are shrouded.

The title of the last painting in this group is as unknown as its content is enigmatic. Sometimes the picture is called Woman Standing behind the Sun (Fig.25)¹⁵⁷ but the supine figure in the sun is

therefore must be dated after her marriage in 1899. In addition, the figures resemble the figures from the group of four watercolours dated 1912-1915. A solitary "Eve" fills the entire left part of the picture. She is almost as shrouded as Margaret's figures but, unlike Margaret's women she has feet and the Godiva-like hair found in Woman behind the sun. She covers her eyes with her hands. There is such a great similarity between this woman and many of Margaret's women that we may conclude that the resemblance is intentional. Three couples, all pointing to "Eve", inhabit the far right, about one third, of the picture.

¹⁵⁷ The owner of the painting insists that the title is unknown but that it might be Woman behind the sun.

androgynous. Another androgynous male figure stands to the side, present but not really part of the activity. One woman, with very long Godiva-like hair, stands with her head bowed. The female behind the supine figure quietly observes; the third young woman dances, enveloped in a diaphanous veil of flowers. Her hand and leg movements suggest an Indian dance. If the picture has Indian content, it could possibly be dated to early 1915. One of the Mackintoshes' closest friends, Patrick Geddes, was visiting India in 1915. While there he spent time with a former student and lifetime friend, Annie Besant (this connection will be further explored in chapter five). He wrote to the Mackintoshes from India and his excitement about the culture may have been passed on to Frances by Margaret. Certainly her picture does suggest an Indian source and may represent a dance of death. The male and female in the top left corner appear to mourn, possibly for the figure in the sun. If this is a memorial to the dead, it is indeed a strange memorial, one that suggests a tremendous vitality and life emanating from death. These "mysterious" paintings definitely speak of the female experience as well as the many roles that women play during their lives: wife, mother, mourner, sexual woman, celibate woman and celebrant. If, as I have suggested earlier, these late works speak to us of a resigned resistance, they also contain elements of a quiet but pervasive rebellion, at

least against the values of early twentieth-century Britain.

The pictures made during the last years of Frances's life when she was not exhibiting nor teaching give us our only information about her from this time. On 12 December 1921, Charles Macdonald reported his sister dead of a cerebral haemorrhage in her flat in Hillhead in Glasgow.¹⁵⁸ She was forty-eight years old.

¹⁵⁸ General Register Office (Scotland). Register of Deaths (644/12/1098).

CHAPTER FIVE
MARGARET MACDONALD MACKINTOSH

Margaret Macdonald is most often remembered as Charles Rennie Mackintosh's wife, and her art is most often discussed as an addendum to his more important works. Macdonald's designs, usually made into gesso panels, beaten metal panels or embroidered hangings, functioned as decorative postscripts to Mackintosh's architecture or interiors. Thus, in keeping with established art historical hierarchies, architecture retains its lofty position while design assumes a more subordinate role and, in keeping with society's patriarchal structure, the architect is usually perceived of as male, the designer female.¹ When Stephen Madsen discussed Margaret Macdonald's wall decoration for Haus eines Kunstfreundes (1901), he suggested that:

if the expression "feminine interior decoration" calls up any associations at all, then it must be this graceful linearism and range of delicate, carefully controlled hues.²

Thomas Howarth, in his definitive work on Mackintosh

¹ See William Eadie, Movements of Modernity: The Case of Glasgow's Art Nouveau (London, 1990), 209-10, for a discussion of the exclusion of women from architecture and the subsequent 'masculinization' of that art. Eadie writes that: "With the exclusion of women from the architectural profession, apparently fundamental attributes of architecture itself were equated with 'masculine' properties, and values rooted in gender stereotyping were projected onto architectural creations." Eadie, 209.

² Stephen Madsen, Sources of Art Nouveau (New York, 1980), 34-36.

(Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement)

suggested that Margaret Macdonald limited Mackintosh's vision, that she encouraged him "to dissipate his energies on work of comparative unimportance [design] when he might have consolidated his position in the architectural field."³ Howarth, when he described Haus eines Kunstfreundes praised "the broader all-embracing mind of the architect-designer" and criticized "the more circumscribed femininity of Margaret Macdonald with her predilection for small-scale pattern and mystical fairylike ornamentation."⁴ German art historian and critic, J. Meier-Graefe considered all the Glasgow designers "feminine." In 1904 he stated that "in Glasgow English art was no longer hermaphrodite but passed into the hands of women," thereby effectively dismissing an already marginal Scottish art while, at the same time, maintaining the masculinist hierarchy.⁵

Macdonald's watercolour paintings are rarely mentioned in the literature on Mackintosh. Even the introduction to

³ Thomas Howarth, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement (London, 1952), 145. Eadie, Movements of Modernity, provides a critique of Howarth's

⁴ Howarth, 167.

⁵ J. Meier-Graefe, Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst, I-III (Stuttgart, 1904-05, Vol.II, 620), as quoted in Madsen, p.292n11. Eadie discusses this comment by Meier-Graefe (210) and also poses the thesis that the Scottish artists were not as marginal as earlier research, particularly that done by Howarth and Macleod, would have us believe (Eadie, 50-85). It was the advent of modernism and its rigid exclusions that placed an enforced marginalism on later analyses of Scottish Art nouveau.

the catalogue for her only retrospective exhibition, in Glasgow (1983-1984) focused upon her collaborative work.⁶

We are told that Macdonald:

was at her most productive when working in collaboration with other artists. More than two thirds of her output was collaborative, though she worked with only three other artists, all personally close to her: her sister Frances, Frances's future husband MacNair, and Mackintosh;collaboration seems to have been essential for Margaret Macdonald's creativity.⁷

Macdonald's declining output was said to be, "directly related to Mackintosh's declining career as an interior designer [sic]."⁸ However, between 1894 when she graduated from the Glasgow School of Art and the early 1920s when she stopped painting, she produced a series of watercolour paintings. Virtually all of these have silent, still, inactive women as their theme.

In this chapter, although I shall touch on the work she did with Mackintosh, the emphasis will be upon Margaret Macdonald's watercolour paintings. She painted these at a time when women artists had virtually no voice in the art world. If they were heard, it was in the gentle murmurings of flower paintings, in small landscapes or in "fairy

⁶ See the catalogue for the exhibition Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, 1864-1933, Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow, 1984.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

imagining."⁹ Macdonald's medium, like many of her female colleagues, was watercolour rather than the more "important" oil painting.¹⁰ Most highly successful and respected water colour painters were those who made water colours in addition to oil paintings. This hierarchy was supported by the press. For example, The Glasgow Herald, in its review of an exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours (1910), a Society to which Macdonald belonged and with whom she exhibited, maintained that:

water colour is not a medium for opulent composition or large decorative effects....It has had an influence in preserving the chastity and delicacy that naturally belong to "the maidenly medium."¹¹

Like many of Macdonald's representations of women made during the later part of her career, watercolour was a silent art. In addition, Macdonald's art was, and still is, silent in that it is most often discussed only in

⁹ This phrase was used to describe a painting by Jessie King, one of Margaret Macdonald's colleagues in Glasgow in the review of the 34th annual exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours, The Glasgow Herald, 11 October 1913, 9.

¹⁰ Macdonald's male colleagues also made water colour paintings. However, even Mackintosh's water colours were not taken very seriously until 1979 when Roger Billcliffe's Mackintosh Watercolours appeared. P. Morton Shand, in his early and influential writings about Mackintosh, considered only his architecture. In a letter from Scottish architect J. Jeffrey Waddell to William Davidson about Shand's work, Waddell wrote that "Shand knows little about CRM as an 'artist'...seeing that nobody has seen the Water Colours but ourselves." Letter dated 5 April 1933, Hunterian Art Gallery.

¹¹ The Glasgow Herald, 1 October 1910, 10.

conjunction with her husband's art; she is thought of as a collaborator, not an initiator.

Many feminist theorists have discussed the silence of women.¹² For example, Hélène Cixous suggested that in addition to being unheard, women are "outside the Symbolic, that is outside language."¹³ Because she is outside, woman is excluded from a relationship with the cultural order and she is designated in terms of lack, ultimately lack of phallus in Freudian or Lacanian terms.¹⁴ Lack includes lack of desire as well as the inability to express female sexuality.¹⁵ Macdonald's paintings accurately portray both the silence of woman and the lack of desire. Her female figures are mute and often disembodied or, sometimes, flat and androgynous; they are incapable of

¹² I am particularly interested in Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa," translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol.1, No.4 (1976), 875-893 as well as her "Castration or Decapitation?" translated by Annette Kuhn in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol.7, No.1 (1981), 41-55, and in Luce Irigaray's This Sex Which Is Not One, translated by Catherine Porter (Cornell, 1985) and Speculum of the Other Woman, translated by Gillian G. Gill (Cornell, 1985).

¹³ Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?", 46.

¹⁴ Ibid., 46ff.

¹⁵ See both Cixous and Irigaray for an elaboration of the theories surrounding female desire. I am not ignoring the work of Julia Kristeva and certainly her writings on the repression of the Mother in western society are relevant for feminist art historians but I am focusing on Cixous and Irigaray because their work seems so appropriate for Margaret Macdonald's paintings.

expressing a clearly defined sexual desire. This characteristic becomes more pronounced in Macdonald's work after 1900 and is more evident in her independent watercolours than in her gesso panels which were often made to decorate Mackintosh's interiors. The appeal of the erotic nude or the submissively alluring, sexually available model has no place in Macdonald's work. Her use of line and geometric shape, her elongation of form, and her consistent reference to androgyny, make her work obscure and elusive.

For example, in her watercolour painting The Pool of Silence (1913) (Fig.25), a woman, whose face is reflected in the pool beneath the supine body of the female in the mid-ground, gestures for silence by holding one outstretched finger against her closed lips. Her eyes are shut; her face tilts slightly downward. Three female faces appear in this picture. One is a reflection of the other; the third creates the horizontal line that divides the reflected from the reflection. A contemporary critic wrote that this woman in the centre is "the dead figure of a beautiful woman."¹⁶ However, the faces all look alike and the sign for silence might indicate sleep rather than death. The woman is three and she has no voice. She is a reflection of herself and she is repeated, floating on the surface of the pool. The Glasgow Herald observed the "spell of quietude" cast by this

¹⁶ A review of the annual exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours, The Edinburgh Evening News, 10 October 1913, 6.

picture as well as its "wistful notes," and the "gravely decorative way" in which the image "fulfils its symbolic purpose."¹⁷ Certainly Macdonald was aware of the symbolist tendency to incorporate a haunting silence, or even the soundlessness of death, into visual representations of women. Artists from Edward Burne-Jones to Fernand Khnopff did this frequently and their pictures were exhibited widely in Britain.¹⁸ In fact, as Bram Dijkstra reminds us in Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture (1986), most representations of quiet women depicted passive and sexually subservient creatures for the edification of the viewer. However, few pictures combined silence with the muted, emaciated, cocoon-like figures like those painted by Margaret Macdonald.

While examining Macdonald's "wistful," grave pictures we must remember that her life after her marriage to Mackintosh was more settled and less stressful than was that

¹⁷ The Glasgow Herald, 11 October 1913, 9.

¹⁸ The Scottish artists were familiar with Khnopff and Toorop as Continental Symbolists but as Madsen points out, "it seems rather difficult to trace any direct influence on Great Britain from the Continent." Madsen, 255. In addition, Howarth quoted MacNair as saying that "the work of our little group was certainly not in the least inspired by any continental movements." Howarth, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement (London, 1952), 264-65. I think that we must accept that Margaret Macdonald did not draw heavily on the European Symbolists for her representations of death or silence.

of her sister.¹⁹ The Mackintoshes' first successful collaborative effort was the Vienna Secession Exhibition of 1900 and, unlike the MacNairs, they were able to travel together to Europe to oversee the installation of the exhibit as well as to meet foreign colleagues.²⁰ In all of this, as in the Turin Exhibition two years later, the Mackintoshes were a close unit. However, in Glasgow, as Mackintosh became an ever more prominent architect, Margaret became known more as his wife than as an independent artist. Outside of collaborative projects such as the Willow Tea Room (1903), for which Macdonald designed and executed a gesso panel, her major artistic activity revolved around the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours. Not only did she exhibit regularly with them (the reviews of exhibitions quoted above were of Society shows) but she actively participated in the Society as a member of the executive. She was elected as a "member of the council representing the West [of Scotland]," in 1907 and again in 1908 and 1909.²¹ 1913, the year prior to the Mackintoshes

¹⁹ The Macdonald-Mackintosh wedding which took place on 22 August 1900 in St. Augustine's Church in Dumbarton, was announced in The Glasgow Herald, 23 August 1900, 1.

²⁰ Howarth, 148-54; Macleod, 93-96. The most comprehensive comments on the Mackintoshes participation in the Vienna Secession are found in Roger Billcliffe and Peter Vergo, "Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Austrian Art Revival," The Burlington Magazine (Vol.CXIX, No.896, November 1977), 739-744.

²¹ See The Glasgow Herald, 7 February 1907, 9; 6 February 1908, 13; and 11 February 1909, 11.

move to the south, was the last time she served on the council.²² Her activity in the Society suggests that watercolour painting was an important part of her life and the pictures she produced after her marriage in 1900 are significant to any discussion of her career. For this reason, I have selected her watercolours, The Pool of Silence (1913) (see Fig.26), The Sleeper (c.1905) (Fig.27) and The Mysterious Garden (1911) (Fig.28) as vehicles with which to explore Margaret Macdonald's life and work after her studio years with Frances ended and before she and Mackintosh moved away from Glasgow. The second part of the chapter will look at her contributions to arts and crafts exhibitions as well as to international exhibitions in the second decade of the twentieth century, and end with her last watercolour paintings made early in the 1920s.

Margaret Macdonald's Watercolours, 1900-1913

In 1905, Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration reproduced Macdonald's lost picture, The Sleeper.²³ In 1911 she exhibited the same painting (or one similar with the same title) in a London exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours and, later in the year, at Liverpool's Autumn Exhibition of Modern Pictures at the

²² See the catalogues for the exhibitions of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours.

²³ See the catalogue for the exhibition Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, cat.xxxiii.

Walker Art Gallery.²⁴ Because her work appeared with "the newly formed Society of Women Artists--Vereinigung der bildenden Künstlerinnen Oesterreichs,"²⁵ at the Secession Gallery in Vienna early in 1911, it is quite possible that The Sleeper appeared there as well.

The content of the picture reproduced in Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration in 1905 (probably the same painting that Macdonald exhibited in 1911) differs remarkably from watercolours she completed just prior to and immediately after her marriage such as Winter (1898) (Fig.16), Summer (1897) (Fig.15) or The Rose Garden (1898).²⁶ Dekorative Kunst, which reproduced The Rose Garden in a 1901 issue devoted to the Vienna secession, announced it would not make

²⁴ See Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration, Vol.VI, 1905, 361 and the catalogues for the exhibitions, Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours (1911) (cat. 102) and Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition of Modern Pictures (1911) (cat. 1763). She also exhibited The Sleeper in Paris (April to October 1914). See the catalogue for Arts Decoratif de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande, cat.1579. The exhibition was held in the Pavillon de Marsan of the Palais du Louvre. The painting was listed for sale at £55; as this seems to be the last time that she exhibited The Sleeper it may have been sold to a Paris buyer. See The Times, 23 March 1914, 4, for a comment about the selection of the work for this exhibition which was to be "illustrative of modern British arts and crafts" and the "immense strides made" in Britain during the previous fifty years "owing to the guidance and inspiration of William Morris."

²⁵ The Studio, February 1911, 62.

²⁶ Macdonald was already a member of the R.S.S.P.W.C. in 1898. See the catalogue for the exhibition (1898). The Rose Garden was item 100. She also exhibited Les Giroflées (cat. 219) that year. The Rose Garden was reproduced in 'Die Ausstellung der Wiener Secession' in Dekorative Kunst, Vol.VII, 1901, 189.

specific critical evaluations of individual works but would provide readers with a large selection of good reproductions. However, its descriptive critique of the Scottish contingent repeatedly included adjectives like "spiritual manner", "inner truth" or "simplicity."²⁷ The Rose Garden, with its theme of the loving couple, had received a favourable review when exhibited with the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers in London (1899). It was considered "honest" and "mature."²⁸ Another picture from the same time, The Flowery Path (1901), also represents man and woman but, rather than gazing into each others eyes as they do in The Rose Garden, they begin, arm in arm, to tread upon the "flowery path."

The female figure, in both these paintings, is similar to the softly curved women who appear in Summer and in Winter. The significant difference between the two later pictures lies only with the addition of the male figure. However, by the time Macdonald painted The Sleeper, the male has disappeared and the female has become an elongated, shrouded oval shape without hands or feet. Although clearly identifiable as "woman" by the gentle facial features and the long hair, this figure is flat chested and devoid of any other specifically female characteristics. Unlike

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ From the review of the 1899 exhibition of the I.S.S.P.G. in the Glasgow Evening News, 22 May 1899.

Macdonald's personification of Summer, whose full breasts and narrow waist speak of fecundity and suggest availability, "sleeper" speaks of solitude.

Contemporary critics found The Sleeper "in its kind almost beyond criticism."²⁹ The Glasgow Herald fancifully described "the sleeper" as a "recumbent figure with....convolutions of filmy draperies about her head," an image that was "delicately wrought" and "delightfully starred with gossamer-like pattern."³⁰ The tear-drop, almost eye-like shape with which Macdonald defined The Sleeper appeared as early as 1900 in a pair of embroidered panels that she exhibited in the Vienna Secession exhibition; the same panels or similar ones were in the Turin exhibition of 1902 (see fig.28). In these panels, Macdonald took the mysterious Egyptian-like eye that she had put in the upper corners and turned it on its side to make the long, narrow figure in the centre. However, the repetition of the eye-shape as a female figure elicited bewildered comments from German critics:

But even those who regard these figural contortions as merely excessive still will not be able to deny the peculiar charms of these works. Their stringent, nearly rigid lineation leads us into a remote, almost ghostly world which, once we have accommodated ourselves to the alien aspects of it, is imbued with enough poetical, magical and

²⁹ In a review of the exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours (London), The Glasgow Herald, 31 March 1911, 9.

³⁰ Ibid.

spiritually expressive qualities to make a highly artistic impression on us.³¹

These panels, with their narrowly shaped armless and legless women with bent heads and closed eyes, are Macdonald's earliest images of a totally silent female. It is also her earliest representation of a woman who can neither desire nor be desired and, interestingly enough, contemporary critics received these passive creatures much more favourably than they had her more aggressive, collaborative work, The Fountain (c.1894) (Fig.5). When describing the later pictures, critics consistently use words like "mystery" or "ethereal." The "silent woman" was seen as "symbol" although it was not clear to many exactly what she was a symbol of.

For example, in 1911 The Times observed that Macdonald's painting, The Mysterious Garden, "is symbolic and decorative in a fashionable Celtic way....but one suspects that she [Macdonald] herself has not the key to her mysteries, and that her symbolism has no relation to dry

³¹ Aber auch wer in diesem Figurenverzerrern lediglich eine Ausschreitung sieht, wird sich im ubrigen dem eigentümlichen Reize dieser Arbeiten doch nicht verschliessen können. Ihre strenge, beinahe starre Linienführung fuhr uns in eine fern abliegende, fast geisterhaft anmutende Welt, die, wenn wir erst das Fremdartige der dortigen Umgebung überwunden haben, genug des Märchenhaften, Poetischen und seelisch Ausdrucksvollen hat, um eine hohe künstlerische Wirkung auf uns auszuüben. "Die VIII Ausstellung der Wiener Secession" in Dekorative Kunst, 1901, 181.

facts."³² When she exhibited The Three Perfumes and "The Silver Apples of the Moon"³³ in Edinburgh in 1912, The Scotsman called them "highly decorative arrangement[s] of figures in sparkling tones,"³⁴ while The Glasgow Herald saw her pictures as "decoratively exotic fantasies" that were "born as it were in another 'sphere'."³⁵ In 1913 The Edinburgh Evening News remarked that in Macdonald's painting The Pool of Silence, "the outstanding features of the symbolism are evident, but some of the detail wants

³² A review of the annual exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours (London) in The Times (London), 6 April 1911, 10.

³³ The title of this painting as it appears in the Catalogue of the R.S.S.P.W.C. has quotation marks around it indicating that Macdonald was quoting a source. The source was W. B. Yeats. The line can be found in the last verse of his poem "The Song of Wandering Aengus" from The Wind Among the Reeds (1899): "Though I am old with wandering/Through hollow lands and hilly lands,/I will find out where she has gone,/And kiss her lips and take her hands;/And walk among long dappled grass,/And pluck till time and times are done/The silver apples of the moon,/The golden apples of the sun." The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (London, 1969), 66-67. This indicates that by 1912 she had read Yeats and considered the mystical Celtic revivalist significant enough to quote; the painting is untraced. I suggest, however, that W. B. Yeats collection of poems The Rose (1893) might be very significant to the Glasgow Four and that this source of inspiration, as yet unexplored, requires investigation.

³⁴ The Scotsman (Edinburgh), 28 September 1912, 9. Macdonald exhibited The Mysterious Garden (1911) again in 1912. Members were usually allowed to have only three pictures in each exhibition. In 1912 they were allowed four each but Macdonald only submitted three.

³⁵ The Glasgow Herald, 28 September 1912, 9.

explaining."³⁶

The gesso panels she made in the first decade of the century attracted the same kind of attention. In 1909 when Macdonald exhibited three gesso panels, In Willow Wood (1903), Summer (1904) and The White Rose and the Red Rose (c.1909) (Fig.29),³⁷ in the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers special exhibition of "Fair Women," The Building News (London) told its readers that:

A good deal of attention, too, is claimed by three large exhibits in gesso...by Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh. They are studies of fine-line decoration, the female figure being introduced merely as something round with which to weave these decorated forms, interspersed with glass beads and lumps of mother-of-pearl.³⁸

The figure in The White Rose and the Red Rose, however, is not "something round" but is enveloped in the same tear-drop shaped shroud that enclosed "the sleeper" in her watercolour, as well as the women in her embroidered panels for the Vienna Secession. Summer (1904) is the metal-framed watercolour from 1897 (see Fig.15) re-done in gesso; In

³⁶ In a review of the annual exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours (Edinburgh), The Edinburgh Evening News, 10 October 1913, 6.

³⁷ See the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers, catalogue of the "Exhibition of Fair Women" held in the New Gallery, London, February and March 1909. Macdonald also exhibited the panel in the exhibition of Modern Art at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool (20 September 1909 to 8 January 1910). See the catalogue for the exhibition (cat.2253).

³⁸ From a review of the exhibition in The Building News, 26 February 1909, 4.

Willow Wood (1903) had been lent by Catherine Cranston from her Willow Tea Room in Glasgow.³⁹ The Building News chose to discuss these two panels, panels in which the female figure is more obviously female and implicitly "fair," and ignored the narrow, oblong figure in The White Rose and the Red Rose. Most of the attention given to this exhibition (it received extensive coverage in newspapers and journals all over Britain) focused upon an ideal beauty. Characteristically, The Daily Telegraph let its readers know that:

This is a subject of which the world apparently never tires; in 'Fair Women' not only the other sex, but also, and indeed principally, other fair women take an abiding interest. There is....a crescendo of interest in the ever fresh subject of the Eternal Feminine, which starts with the Creation of the world, and will never end until the world dies.⁴⁰

A correspondent for the women's magazine, The Ladies Field, observed that, "this is the most fascinating exhibition we have had in London for some years."⁴¹ The Glasgow Herald remarked that the I.S.S.P.G. "...has succeeded in organizing a truly remarkable exhibition from the aesthetic point of

³⁹ The Catalogue for the Exhibition of Fair Women, International Society of Sculptors Painters and Gravers, 1909, indicates that cat.105, In Willow Wood was lent by Mrs. Cranston Cochrane therefore it must have been the panel that had been made for the tearoom in 1903.

⁴⁰ From a review of "Fair Women" at The New Gallery in The Daily Telegraph, 22 February 1909, 12.

⁴¹ The Ladies Field, 13 March 1909, 54.

view."⁴² To the critics the "other sex" was inevitably beautiful, "gracious" and even "divine." Pictures were singled out for possessing the favoured characteristics. For example, Watts's pictures were said to "suggest the loftier, the more gracious phases of the Eternal Feminine, in which the divine side of womanhood emerges";⁴³ Francis Newbery's A Brown Study, "a three-quarter length of a pretty girl in furs and brown velvet," was considered to be "charming."⁴⁴ A portrait by the eighteenth century artist Joshua Reynolds had "entrancing beauty and grace,"⁴⁵ and pictures by Impressionists Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot were "delicate flowers of modernism tempered by femininity."⁴⁶ The Daily Mirror (London), however, found fault with the emphasis on the gracious and beautiful, and attacked the very foundation upon which the exhibition rested:

One is struck by the languid and easy grace....Repose of manner, a dreaminess of posture, even a sweet vacuity of far-away expression....Fair women, you understand here, are never supposed to do anything but look beautiful. But in real life, we are well aware that women were never so impatiently active as they are now. [The exhibition seems] to have strayed into a past time. These portraits, even when they are

⁴² The Glasgow Herald, 20 February 1909, 10.

⁴³ The Daily Telegraph, 22 February 1909, 12.

⁴⁴ Glasgow Evening Times, 24 February 1909, 6.

⁴⁵ The Observer (London), 21 February 1909, 11.

⁴⁶ The Daily Telegraph, 22 February 1909, 11.

superficially modern and 'smart' are, in their spirit nothing but anachronisms. They transport us to a time when the vapours were the mode, and quiescence upon afternoon sofas, with balls of worsted falling about somewhere, was the universal pattern of womanliness. We are in the age of suffragettes. It is woman's object and ambition nowadays to attain things and to live the active life....Women nowadays do as much active work as men. [The artists] ought to set about painting the typical modern woman rampant....passant, and regardant rather than recumbent....with nothing to do but dream. In short, we want portraits...of the women of today--of the woman who is going to have the vote tomorrow.⁴⁷

Certainly Margaret Macdonald's gesso panels would not be described as "rampant, passant, regardant" but neither would The White Rose and the Red Rose be described as "quiescence upon afternoon sofas." Neither of the two figures represented in the panel have arms or, if they do have arms, they are bound tightly against the body and hidden by their dresses. In fact, their bodies extend straight down from the narrowed heads converging, in the centre figure, to a point. The cocoon or eye-like casing effectively immobilizes the "white Rose" as she has neither legs nor feet. The "red Rose's" feet might be hidden beneath her confining garment which is also dramatically narrowed but which does become wider at the bottom. Macdonald's panel did not challenge the status quo (as the Daily Mirror thought it should); however, neither does it represent woman in a traditionally beautiful way. Macdonald makes woman into a purely decorative object, thereby

⁴⁷ Daily Mirror (London), 23 February 1909, 10.

effectively removing any pretence that she operates independently. Woman becomes only a "fine-line decoration" who has been denied physical movement.

Macdonald's watercolour painting, The Mysterious Garden (1911) (Fig.28) shares the reductive woman-as-decoration characteristic with "Roses," however the central figure in the picture is enclosed within a diaphanous flower-like dress. Her eyes are closed and her head, repeating the body's exaggerated Gothic sway, is tilted to the side. Eight female faces, the tops of their heads cropped, hover neatly in a row across the top. Like masks they cannot speak; the central figure sleeps in silence.

The Glasgow Herald suggested that the "row of mask faces emphasizes unduly the note of strangeness,"⁴⁸ and insisted that this "strangeness" was unnecessary, that it distracted the viewers attention "from the beautiful play of hyacinth-blues in the web of patterning beneath."⁴⁹ The critic thought that the formal qualities should be more important than the quiet mystery of the image. The drawing was considered "subtly inventive" while exhibiting "no wide imaginative range."⁵⁰ Unable to deal with the content, the critic saw The Mysterious Garden, as well as The

⁴⁸ A review of the exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours (London), The Glasgow Herald 31 March 1911, 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Sleeper, as having "intrinsic merits as elusively exotic designs and bewitching harmonies of colour."⁵¹

Macdonald's picture was first exhibited in March 1911 and may have been based on Maeterlinck's play, The Blue Bird, which was performed in Glasgow in the fall of 1910. The Glasgow Evening News called the play a "brilliant phantasy" and observed that it was "woven" of an "airy gossamer-like fabric."⁵² In The Blue Bird, Maeterlinck evoked the "most unexpected of gardens, unreal, infinite and ineffable, a dream-garden bathed in nocturnal light."⁵³ This garden, filled with bluebirds, may well have inspired Macdonald's watercolour, The Mysterious Garden. The Glasgow performance of the play may also explain why she changed the later picture from her earlier drawing, The Mysterious Garden (Fig.30) (Maeterlinck tended to include a "mysterious garden" in most of his plays).

The earlier drawing made around 1904-06 might be a sketch for Macdonald's untraced gesso panels which were based on Maeterlinck's play, Les Sept Princesses.⁵⁴ This

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² The Glasgow Evening News, 8 October 1910, 9.

⁵³ Maurice Maeterlinck, The Blue Bird, A Fairy Play in Six Acts (London, 1911), 114.

⁵⁴ See the catalogue for the exhibition Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh..., (xxxv). The watercolour relates to the series of gesso panels that were made to decorate a music room (see Peter Vergo, Vienna 1900, Edinburgh, 1984, 47). The panels were part of Mackintosh's design for Fritz Waerndorfer's music salon in Vienna. See also, T. Howarth,

play about a "princely lover who returns to find his beloved dead" is, as one critic put it, "no fairy tale."⁵⁵ The protagonist is death and the "Ideal may be attained only by penetrating Death itself."⁵⁶ The seven princesses in the play are white, pale, tall, weak and asleep: "how white they are all seven....how pale they are all seven....they sleep forever."⁵⁷ When the prince sees them, he says: "They are strange...Ah! ah! they are strange."⁵⁸ Macdonald's first watercolour and pencil drawing on this theme contains eight faces but arranges them somewhat differently from the mask faces in her later picture. This central figure is more severe, more geometric, than the standing figure in Macdonald's 1911 Mysterious Garden. The eighth figure in this drawing is male and probably represents Maeterlinck's prince who is about to claim his bride. Despite his thick legs, he is a feminine-looking man and he is rendered as immobile as is the silent women. A. S. Levetus, writing from Vienna for The Glasgow Herald, commented on Macdonald's two painted panels exhibited in the city in 1909:

She takes us into the symbolic regions of holy

Charles Rennie Mackintosh..., 155.

⁵⁵ W. D. Halls, Maurice Maeterlinck, A Study of His Life and Thought (Oxford, 1960), 31.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ M. Maeterlinck, The Seven Princesses (London, 1909), 13.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 14.

ideals, where the spirit of love hovers over all and crowns all. The Dead Princesses is a work of ethereal beauty, and at the same time an earnest work of art. Such art is indeed a revelation.⁵⁹

Desmond Chapman-Huston, a friend of Macdonald and Mackintosh, wrote in his autobiography about a painting he saw when he visited them in their Glasgow home. Although Chapman-Huston called the pictures Dreamers in the Moon, it is quite likely that he saw Macdonald working on her designs for The Seven Princesses. He wrote about his feelings when he looked at Macdonald's picture:

Over all the sound is a deep silence; a deep passionate silence. In the silence...[the viewer's] naked soul, shivering and ashamed, knows that it has been unfaithful to its vision of beauty; through humility it rises to renewed hope, and resolves in faith and courage ever to obey the dream.⁶⁰

Chapman-Huston's prose is remarkably Maeterlinck-like and captures the dreaminess of the prince's futile search for his bride who died while awaiting her lover. Macdonald's Seven Princesses (Mysterious Garden) (c.1904-06) and The Mysterious Garden (1911) share a sense of silence and stillness with many of her other works, like The Pool of Silence (discussed above).

In almost all of Macdonald's paintings, this silence relegates them to the realm of the symbolic. Her

⁵⁹ A. S. Levetus, "Glasgow Artists in Vienna: Kunstschau Exhibition," in The Glasgow Herald, 29 May 1909, 11.

⁶⁰ Desmond Mountjoy (Desmond Chapman-Huston), A Creel of Peat, Stray Papers (London, 1910), 13.

contemporaries in Glasgow, many of them women who had studied with her at the Glasgow School of Art in the 1890s, made pictures that remained more within the bounds of traditional acceptability for women artists. However, this meant that their works lingered in the background of the larger, male dominated art world. Like Macdonald's representations, these pictures were without a significant voice and were highly praised only if their content remained "delicate" and "delightful." Reviews supported the traditional notion of what women artists should produce and in so doing helped to construct a non-obtrusive ethos. For example, The Glasgow Herald's regular comments on the exhibitions of the Glasgow Society of Lady Artists consistently described the artists' pictures using acceptable feminine words.⁶¹ In 1907 The Herald informed its readers that, "one expects in a show by lady artists that flower pictures should bulk largely" because "the treasures of the garden make powerful appeal to most women."⁶² Two of Macdonald's colleagues were singled out for praise: Jessie Keppie for her "delightful" Wild Roses and Katherine Cameron for her "happy conception (golden bees buzzing around sweet blossom)," Wild Bees. In 1906 "the

⁶¹ This is not to suggest that "feminine" adjectives were never used for pictures made by male artists but that other more "masculine" or "bolder" adjectives were also used and these adjectives were rarely used for pictures and women.

⁶² The Glasgow Herald, 19 October 1907, 3.

outstanding characteristic" had been "daintiness, which, after all, is what one would expect to find in a ladies' picture show."⁶³ The Herald thought that the "influence of various masters" was obvious but that "such striving" and "earnest endeavour" was to be commended. However, by 1911 such "influences" were considered detrimental.

If one were inclined to be hypercritical it might be urged that the besetting sin of the lady artist is a too great susceptibility to influences, and the present exhibition is not lacking in pictures where the artist obviously strives to imitate the manner of certain distinguished workers.⁶⁴

Having reprimanded these imitators, The Herald praised the pictures of Jeka Kemp (1876-1966) to whom "that observation certainly does not apply." Kemp "clearly thinks things out for herself," and, in addition, her picture "is not ambitious." The critic for the Glasgow paper also liked Annie Laing's (1869-1946) Every Morn I Send Thee Violets in which "a woman gracious in form and figure" gazes into a mirror, "beside which is a heap of violets in artistic disorder." Laing's figure had "finely painted" shoulders and she treated the "filmy drapery" admirably but, when it came to her lighting, she made the "shadows on the face too deep and the contrast with the gleaming neck and shoulders too acute." The Herald thought her "more successful in her

⁶³ "Glasgow Lady Artists," in The Glasgow Herald, 13 October 1906, 3.

⁶⁴ A review of the annual exhibition of the Glasgow Society of Lady Artists, The Glasgow Herald, 4 March 1911, 9.

more modest contribution." Another of Macdonald's colleagues, Agnes Raeburn, was praised for her "delightful harmony." The message to women artists was clear: the "lady artist" should not strive to "imitate the manner of certain distinguished workers" and she should not be ambitious. Modesty was appreciated as well as harmony and "delightful" subject matter.

In 1909 The Glasgow Herald had been more sympathetic toward the Society and its artists. At that time The Herald remarked that "the ladies" displayed a "notable array of portraits and character studies."⁶⁵ It seems that such an "incursion into these alluring but difficult branches of art" was somewhat unusual for the women. Nevertheless, commented The Herald, it was "quite a success" and merited a "sincere compliment." However, the favoured subject matter was still traditional, "delicate" and "restrained." For example, The Herald thought that nothing "could excel the archness and grace" of Annie Laing's "study of a young girl" whose "demeanour" was apparently explained by the quotation which accompanied the title of the picture: "She gives a side-glance and looks down. Beware!'" Flower studies, which were "as usual a conspicuous feature" were "treated with delicacy and restraint."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Review of the annual exhibition of the Glasgow Society of Lady Artists, The Glasgow Herald, 16 October 1909, 11.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

However, if the subject matter for women artists was limited and the images restrained, the difficulties these women faced in the art world did not go entirely unnoticed. In its 1907 review that had commended flower painting, The Glasgow Herald, also supported the "aggressive womanhood" that organized "a society of lady artists" and understood that men dominated the art world: "The triumphs in the realm of art have been won chiefly by men; in the big exhibitions the works of lady painters are comparatively few."⁶⁷ The reason for this was not found in the "lack of artistic talent:"

The eloquent advocate of the rights of women might retort that the reason is to be found not in the lack of artistic talent, but in the handicapping of the sex in many directions. The complete emancipation of the fair sex is not yet, but the cry for it was never more clamant nor more confident than to-day.⁶⁸

This understanding of the problem did not change the way in which The Herald described the work for its readers. These modern comments were followed by a predictably trite discussion of feminine subject matter which included flower painting, small portraits and "the charming purity" of landscape.

Margaret Macdonald was not a member of the Glasgow Society of Lady Artists, even though many of her colleagues

⁶⁷ Review of the annual exhibition of the Glasgow Society of Lady Artists in The Glasgow Herald, 19 October 1907, 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

were. She chose to collaborate with her husband or to submit her paintings to male-dominated exhibiting organizations like the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours or the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers (London). Her choice of subject matter distinguished her from her female colleagues as did her choice of exhibitions. She did not paint flowers, landscapes and portraits. She painted female subjects but they were not examples of "archness and grace." Macdonald's women do not represent the ideal womanhood of her era, the coy and charming female who adored and adorned the male. Her women have no place in this world. They exist outside the discourse; they do not take part. In addition to being silent, they are inactive. The Sleeper, for instance, is shrouded; she has no limbs with which to move. Similarly, in The Pool of Silence, Macdonald's women hover quietly. In The Mysterious Garden (1911) the central figure cannot move because she is enveloped in a full, round flower-like casing. Only her neck and face emerge from the bloom; her hair becomes one with the petals. The female in Macdonald's paintings, then, is often silent in two ways: she cannot utilize her power of speech nor arouse physical desire.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ A recent article suggests that female sexuality is "conventionally coded" and often displayed (her nudity or semi-nudity) thereby making her available while male sexuality (the penis) is historically absent allowing "the male body an independence from sexual anatomical verification." Male sexuality "is doubly absent. It is present on the male body but remains unseen and therefore

In addition, the lack of physicality effectively distances the viewer. Because desire is suppressed the gaze itself is rendered silent.

The gaze, a term used by psychoanalytic theorists and by feminist literary and film critics,⁷⁰ to indicate the activity of control by a subject over an object, is absent from Macdonald's pictures. This activity (the gaze) implies that sexual gratification can be experienced by voyeuristically looking at a desirable object.⁷¹ In most instances in our culture the gaze is male and although the gaze can certainly be reversed and "owned" by women, theorists like E. Ann Kaplan (Women and Film) would argue that the gaze, because it implies dominance, remains patriarchal. The concept of the gaze, although explored most thoroughly in film theory, cannot be overlooked in discussions of late nineteenth and early twentieth century painting. John William Waterhouse alone provided the public with countless representations of beautiful sexually-available females and these are still discussed in innocuous

unavailable." Chris Straayer, "The She-man: Postmodern bi-sexed performance in film and video," in Screen (Vol.31, No.3) 1990, 262-63. The sexuality of the women in Macdonalds pictures is absent, not displayed: it, too, is "unseen therefore unavailable."

⁷⁰ See E. Ann Kaplan, Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera (New York, 1983) for a precise examination of the gaze as it applies to women and film.

⁷¹ See Linda Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema," Screen (vol.16, no.2), 117-22.

terms that refuse to disclose the underlying concept of woman as object. For example, in the catalogue for a recent exhibition of British art, The Last Romantics (1989), John Christian describes Waterhouse's Echo and Narcissus (1903) as based upon the theme of "unrequited love" which is "particularly well expressed here by a design which emphasizes the isolation of the figures and a marvellously atmospheric landscape."⁷² In the painting, although Echo's face is demurely turned away from the viewer, her body with one exposed breast is front on to the viewer; Narcissus is clothed. In the large international exhibition held in Glasgow in 1901, "the important group" of paintings included Lord Leighton's Bathers, Burne-Jones's Danae and G. F. Watts's Orpheus and Eurydice none of which differed significantly from Waterhouse's work.⁷³ How the gaze operated in a period when so many valued paintings constructed an image of available woman becomes a relevant question. Griselda Pollock addressed just such a question in her essays, "Woman as sign in Pre-Raphaelite literature: the representation of Elizabeth Siddall," and "Woman as sign: psychoanalytic readings."⁷⁴ Her observations could

⁷² John Christian (ed.) of the catalogue for The Last Romantics: The Romantic Tradition in British Art, Barbican Art Gallery, London (February to April 1989), 117.

⁷³ See the review of this exhibition in The Times (London), 25 May 1901, 14.

⁷⁴ Both these essays appear in Vision and Difference, Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (London,

aply apply to art produced in the 1890s and the 1910s.

For Macdonald's art, however, the question becomes not how the gaze operated but how it did not operate. In her work, the gaze becomes ineffectual. One cannot "own" Macdonald's silent women because one cannot desire such disembodied creatures. The closest one can come is to own it as decoration. Possibly because the decorative is so often associated with the feminine or for that matter, with women, the critics read her pictures as decorative designs. However, neither of her male colleagues, Mackintosh nor MacNair, produced such asexual images. The men's designs retained the roundness of Jugendstil with an addition of Celtic mystery. For example, even Mackintosh's The Wassail (1900), a drawing for the gesso panel for the Ingram Tea Rooms, Glasgow, which has some characteristics in common with Macdonald's work, depicts six figures who are undoubtedly female.⁷⁵ They share a modified eye-shape with Macdonald's females but, in Mackintosh's hand, the elongation swells out and creates a softer less androgynous look. Although one cannot see their arms (again like Macdonald's figures), they appear to be wrapped in cloaks, their arms tucked close to their bodies; they are not

1988).

⁷⁵ See Billcliffe's Mackintosh Watercolours for reproductions of many of Mackintosh's drawings and watercolours. None of his representations of women are as disembodied as are Macdonald's.

armless. Macdonald's panels and watercolours, with their strangely ambivalent inactive women, become more accessible to the contemporary critic as "line weavings of exceptional charm," or "delightfully starred" "gossamer-like" patterns, or as beautiful plays of hyacinth-blues in webs of patterning." When she made the female body into a wrapped, tear-drop shaped design with the emphasis upon the smooth, flowing line (The Pool of Silence and The Sleeper) or into a large, sphere-like bloom (The Mysterious Garden), she effectively destroys any voyeuristic desire present in the viewer. As mentioned above, this was not the common language found in representations of women during this period. Macdonald does not use the common language. When The Times implied that one must suspect "that she herself has not the key to her mysteries, and that her symbolism has no relation to dry facts,"⁷⁶ one may ask exactly what are the "dry facts" and how much are these facts rooted in the male gaze.

E. Ann Kaplan, in her analysis of the gaze and its effect upon representation of woman in film, asks:

Is it enough simply to 'give women the voice,' if women can only speak from a position already defined by patriarchy? If male discourse is monolithic and all-controlling, how can women ever insert another 'reality' into it? From what place would women come to know any other 'reality'?⁷⁷

⁷⁶ The Times (London), 6 April 1911, 10.

⁷⁷ Kaplan, Women and Film..., 200.

I suggest that Macdonald expressed another reality in her pictures and that the reality she portrayed accurately represented the status of women in society and the art world when she was painting.

Certainly, her own experience both as a designer and as the wife of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, an architect, is one of silence.⁷⁸ Although Margaret Macdonald's work has attracted more attention than Frances Macdonald's, it is precisely because she was the wife of the better-known man that she received more notice. During their years together, Mackintosh always gave the impression that he valued her work. In his personal letters, Mackintosh frequently expressed the high regard he placed upon his wife's contribution to his designs as well as the value he awarded to the relationship.⁷⁹ Their life together during the

⁷⁸ Mackintosh was also a designer of renown but he is written about as an architect. His incursions into design have often been criticized in the literature. Eadie, Movements of Modernity: The Case of Glasgow and Art Nouveau suggests that Mackintosh's "masculine" work, his architecture, is more highly valued than his "feminine" work, his designs: "When the quality of Mackintosh's work was being debated in the 1930s, it was the constructivist elements in his architectural practice which were singled out for commendation. Conversely, the 'artistic' or 'decorative' aspects were negativized, and in such a manner as to present the latter as having been unfortunate manifestations of the ('feminine') influence of Margaret Macdonald."

⁷⁹ The Hunterian Art Gallery holds a number of letters written by Mackintosh to Macdonald when she left their home in France to spend some time in London. See also the introduction to the catalogue for the exhibition, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, 1864-1933.

first decade of the century was productive and rewarding. This was the period of Mackintosh's greatest achievements, the most spectacular perhaps being the design for the new Glasgow School of Art. At the official opening of the new School in 1909, Mackintosh received the accolades of the city:

Sir John Stirling-Maxwell moved a vote of thanks to the architect, Mr. Mackintosh. He said he would deserve well of his generation were it only because he had made them think. He had shown that it was possible to have a good building without plastering it over with the traditional, expensive, and often ugly ornament....Mr. Mackintosh had the real faculty of being able to adapt a building for which it was really intended. The Glasgow School of Art was a conspicuous success of that kind.⁸⁰

However, despite Mackintosh's renown as an architect responsible for some of Glasgow's most exciting buildings, his love affair with Glasgow ended by 1914 and the couple moved to Walberswick in Suffolk. In 1978, Billcliffe wrote that the reasons for the Mackintoshes move away from Scotland were "complex:"

concerned mainly with Mackintosh's inability to work in an office with partners, to conform to a routine, and his failure to gain commissions for his own practice when he left Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh in 1913. Behind all this was a crisis of confidence--Mackintosh's confidence in himself, the confidence of clients and colleagues in him, and a more general crisis which was to affect the whole of the architectural profession in Glasgow, where never again would there be such vitality and quality in building design as had been seen during

⁸⁰ "The Glasgow School of Art, Opening Celebrations," in The Glasgow Herald, 16 December 1909, 5.

the fifty years before the outbreak of war in 1914.⁸¹

William Eadie, in Movements of Modernity: The Case of Glasgow and Art Nouveau (1990), suggested English trained architects or "London Scots" were awarded more commissions in the early decades of the Twentieth century than those architects more exclusively associated with Scotland or with continental Europe:

Against a background of introverted "nationalism" in Scotland...English Arts and Crafts, and English artists, designers, and architects, were lauded with praise and provided with commissions, while local practitioners were either given mediocre projects, or were ignored, slandered, and often portrayed as being inferior plagiarists of English ideas.⁸²

Margaret Macdonald, in a letter to her close friend Anna Geddes early in 1915, wrote that she and Mackintosh extended what was meant to be a July holiday with the Newberys into a relatively permanent stay. Macdonald told Geddes that the outbreak of the war combined with Mackintosh's need for rest compelled them to remain in the south:

We have been here since the middle of July--coming then just for our holiday and then the war broke out and I induced Toshie to just stop on and get the real rest-cure that he has so badly needed for quite two years. It struck me as the right thing to do--there will be nothing really doing till the war is over for one thing and for another it is too dangerous to go on--when a man is over-worked he must rest or something serious

⁸¹ Billcliffe, Mackintosh Watercolours, 15.

⁸² Eadie, 232.

will happen--so it was all arranged.⁸³

Macdonald's letter suggests that both she and Mackintosh welcomed the change. This move completely altered the direction of their work; Macdonald produced little independent work after this and Mackintosh concentrated on watercolour drawings, many of which are signed by both him and Macdonald. Macdonald implied as much in her letter to Geddes, while at the same time indicating that they still supported Patrick Geddes's utopian plans for urban development:

We are going to have a real wander Jahr--already Toshie is quite a different being and evidently [by] the end of the year will be quite fit again and by that time we hope the war will be over and then perhaps he can have a hand in rebuilding the beautiful cities which are lost to us.⁸⁴

The relationship between Anna and Patrick Geddes and the Mackintoshes is an important one and may provide some

⁸³ Letter to Anna Geddes from Margaret Macdonald, dated 14 January 1915 from Millside, Walberswick, Suffolk. MS/10582/16 (the Geddes material) in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. Newbery suffered a nervous breakdown while they were all at Walberswick. The breakdown happened near the beginning of October and the Newberys stayed on in the south for five weeks before returning to Glasgow. Jessie Newbery commented on her husband's health in a letter to Anna Geddes dated 19 November 1914: "I am sorry to tell you that my husband is in bed suffering from nervous breakdown--the result of years of overstrain--but the shock of the war 'knocked him out.' The doctors say six months rest and treatment will probably pull him round again and even permit me to hope that he may be fit for his place in the School. He is to go to a nursing home one of the next few days....For the last 7 weeks, 5 in Walberswick and two here I have hardly left him for more than an hour." MS10581/224-226, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

insight into the art produced prior to 1914 and certainly after that date. The Geddeses advocated social reform; they admired artists; they conceived of planned urban environments ordered upon the natural principles of biology; and they had personal connections with Annie Besant's then influential theosophical movement.⁸⁵ The impact of friendship upon the production of art cannot be ignored and, in this instance, Anna and Patrick Geddes were as important as Jessie and Francis Newbery to the Mackintoshes. The Geddeses must be written into any attempt to understand the Mackintoshes' art.

When Macdonald wrote to Anna Geddes in 1915, Patrick Geddes was in India. Macdonald wrote that they had received a card from him from Bombay and that Geddes was still "full of great visions for one future." While there Geddes spent time with the well-known theosophist Annie Besant. The Scottish biology professor shared his visions for a better world with Besant, who was a former student of his as well as a long time friend. As early as 1884 in a letter to Geddes, Besant commented upon their obviously similar feelings of protest against the "destruction of natural

⁸⁵ Geddes tutored Besant in natural science (in London, 1874-78) after she was refused admittance to University because she was female. See Philip Boardman, The World of Patrick Geddes, Biologist, Town-Planner, Re-Educator, Peace Warrior (London, 1978), 74. For information about Geddes see also, Helen E. Meller, Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner (London, 1990).

beauty now going on in England."⁸⁶ In India, they met again and this time Besant was able to show Geddes her "official home," the old temple city of Conjeveram which, according to Geddes, was "one of the seven holy cities of India, and the most unspoiled and undegenerated" that he had ever seen.⁸⁷ Besant, who called Geddes, "My dear Professor of Beauty,"⁸⁸ acknowledged that his lectures were "a joy" to her and that he was only the second Englishman she had met who saw "what India means to the world."⁸⁹

A knowledge of Theosophy and of India as well as the Geddeses' utopianism undoubtedly became part of the Mackintoshes' life. There is no evidence to suggest that they actually became Theosophists but considering their other interests (the Celtic revival, Maeterlinck, symbolism), we can assume that a philosophy that blended Eastern thought with Western would have attracted their

⁸⁶ Letter from Annie Besant to Patrick Geddes, dated 13 October 1884. MS/10545/f.115, Scottish National Library, Edinburgh.

⁸⁷ A letter from Patrick Geddes to Anna Geddes as quoted in Boardman, 263.

⁸⁸ This is how Besant addressed Geddes in a letter dated 14 February 1915. MS/10545/f26, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

⁸⁹ Letter from Besant to Geddes dated 29 January 1915. MS/10545/f19, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

attention.⁹⁰ Given the interest aroused in Glasgow by Max Müller's lectures during the 1890s, and the possibility that the Glasgow Four were exposed to ideas about Eastern thought and philosophy at that time, Geddes's personal relationship with one of Theosophy's most important figures would certainly have interested the Mackintoshes. Perhaps Theosophy, with its emphasis upon "the solidarity, or brotherhood, of all living things,"⁹¹ held great interest for the Mackintoshes, particularly during World War I, if not before. The Voices of the Wood, a collaborative project made for the 1916 Arts and Crafts Exhibition, with its themes of death, peace and joy, might well reflect some of these concerns.

The Voices of the Wood was one of the few new works that Macdonald made after leaving Glasgow and the first major project undertaken by either artist since their move away from that city in 1914. Macdonald submitted photographs of The Seven Princesses and In Willow Wood and a "design" for The May Queen⁹² to the Ghent International

⁹⁰ Theosophists saw a link between themselves and Maeterlinck. See J. D. Crawford, "Maeterlinck's Message" in Theosophy in Scotland, Vol.1, No.12, April 1912.

⁹¹ Annie Besant, "Theosophical Society," in Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (edited by James Hastings), Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, n.d., 300.

⁹² The May Queen, like Willow Wood, was painted gesso and consisted of two panels designed and constructed for Catherine Cranston. May Queen was for the Ingram Street Tea Rooms.

Exhibition in 1913⁹³ but these were all works that had been made earlier. The following year she sent The Mysterious Garden (1911), The Sleeper (1905) and Cinderella (1906) to the Arts Decoratifs de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande in Paris;⁹⁴ all of these pictures had already been exhibited in 1911 with the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours. Cinderella appeared again, in 1920, at the Exhibition of British Arts and Crafts in Detroit.⁹⁵ The Three Perfumes, exhibited first in 1912 (Edinburgh), appeared again in 1913 (Glasgow) and a third time in the 1918 exhibition of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers (London).⁹⁶ She also exhibited it with Cinderella in Detroit. One must conclude from this that she "recycled" pictures done prior to leaving Glasgow; little new work seems to have appeared after this. However, three pieces which were produced during the Chelsea

⁹³ See the Ghent International Exhibition 1913, Catalogue of the British Arts and Crafts Section (prepared under the auspices of the Board of Trade, Exhibition Branch), cat.408, 412 and 1294. The advisory committee for this exhibition was made up of F. H. Newbery and Selwyn Image among others.

⁹⁴ See the catalogue for the exhibition.

⁹⁵ See the catalogue for the Exhibition of British Arts and Crafts, 1920-21. Assembled by the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts. Detroit, Michigan, cat. 171. She also exhibited The Three Perfumes (1912), cat.170. This picture appeared with The Mysterious Garden in the 1912 annual exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours.

⁹⁶ See the catalogues for the exhibitions.

years are representative of her work between 1914 and 1923: The Voices of the Wood, made by the Mackintoshes together for the 1916 Arts and Crafts Exhibition (London), La Mort Parfumée⁹⁷ (exhibited 1921) (Fig.31), and The Legend of the Blackthorns (exhibited 1922) (Fig.32).

The Chelsea Years

The Voices of the Wood marked the re-appearance, after a hiatus of sixteen years, of work by the Mackintoshes in the London Arts and Crafts Exhibitions. This absence had been lamented by The Studio in 1912:

The display of decorative work at the [Arts and Crafts] exhibition held here last year....disappointed many. A Scottish exhibition of such work without examples of the art of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh and Mrs. Herbert MacNair--all leaders in the new movement, each still actively engaged in it--surely forfeited any claim to being truly representative.⁹⁸

Their participation in 1916, seemingly long overdue, attracted mixed attention. The Scotsman expressed some doubt about the work: "Voices of the Wood is the name Mr. and Mrs. Mackintosh have given to a picture of wonderful

⁹⁷ In a small notebook, Macdonald had written La Morte Parfumé [sic] beside the date 29 April 1903 (this notebook is held by the Hunterian Art Gallery) which would translate as "the scented or perfumed dead woman", la morte meaning "dead woman" rather than "death." The title she later chose, La Mort Parfumée would translate as "scented or perfumed death." The notation indicates that she thought about this theme for some time before she painted it.

⁹⁸ The Studio, September 1912, 319.

colour, but of doubtful meaning."⁹⁹ The Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, liked the piece and saw the Mackintoshes as being among the most important artists in the exhibition: "Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mackintosh are to the front."¹⁰⁰ The Glasgow Herald attributed the piece to Margaret alone probably assuming that decorative panels would have been made by her rather than her architect husband:

"In another part of the exhibition I caught sight of a characteristic painting, Voices of the Wood, by Miss Margaret Macdonald Macintosh [sic] of Glasgow [sic]."¹⁰¹ The Glasgow critic, careless in his attribution, ignored the fact that the Mackintoshes had not lived in Glasgow for three years. However, the same critic remedied this somewhat in a second review: "From Glasgow come a sequence of panels, The Dirge of the Dead Mother and other Voices of the Wood unmistakably by Mrs. Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh and Mr. Charles R. Mackintosh."¹⁰² Others saw the exhibit as "interesting" but "not yet finished,"¹⁰³ or produced by

⁹⁹ The Scotsman (Edinburgh), 10 October 1916, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, Vol. XXIV, November 1916, 12.

¹⁰¹ The Glasgow Herald, 7 October 1916, 9.

¹⁰² The Glasgow Herald, 3 November 1916, 8.

¹⁰³ Manchester Guardian, 11 October 1916, 9.

"artists who have laboured in distinction."¹⁰⁴

As The Voices of the Wood is an untraced work, we must rely upon these reviews to give us a picture of how the piece looked. The catalogue for the Arts and Crafts Exhibition listed the subtitles for the "Wall Decoration of Panel and Candlesticks: The Voices of the Woods."¹⁰⁵

The Song of the Lovers
 The Dirge of the Dead Mother
 The Lament of the Little Child
 The Song of Peace as she covers the Child with her
 Cloak of Comfort
 The Songs of Joy
 The Cries of the Lost Souls
 And the Great Silences¹⁰⁶

The British Architect undertook the most extensive description:

Under the stained glass is one of the ablest decorative exhibits in the gallery--that by Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh and Charles R. Mackintosh. It takes the form of a wall decoration of panel and candlesticks, and is entitled The Voices of the Wood. We suppose it is more or less inevitable that artists who can revel in beautiful detail like this are liable to overlook the broader and more important aspects of their designs. As a whole this is neither dignified nor impressive considering its size, and looks as though it were specially meant for

¹⁰⁴ The Builder (London), 20 October 1916, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Arts and Crafts Society, Catalogue for the Eleventh Exhibition, The Royal Academy, Burlington House, London, 1916 (cat.181).

¹⁰⁶ It is tempting to try to connect this missing panel with H. P. Blavatsky's The Voice of the Silence but without the work and without written documentation from either Macdonald or Mackintosh, this must remain speculation. Blavatsky was the first president of the Theosophical Society; Besant became president in 1907.

execution in needlework, to which its very liney effect would be suitable. It is odd enough, but full of interest from the sweet little Cupid below to the many lines of varying colour and the women's faces peeping out of the ornament. We cannot look at this without feeling sure that the artists are fortunate enough to read a great deal of fairyland into it, and that the public will unfortunately be unable to do the same.¹⁰⁷

Two forces worked against the critical acceptance of The Voices of the Wood. First, descriptions of the panel are similar to P. Morton Shand's analysis of Margaret Macdonald's detrimental influence upon Mackintosh's work. When The British Architect suggested that the work was "meant for execution in needlework" it relegated the work to the lesser art form usually done by women artists. The same critic denigrated it as "fairyland," stating that it was "neither dignified nor impressive." Shand's condemnation of Margaret Macdonald in 1935 echoes this earlier criticism and exonerates Mackintosh from all responsibility for "vulgarity:"

It would appear to have been the florid coarseness of her wholly inferior decorative talent and a firm insistence on 'me too' that too often led him into an uxorious ornamental vulgarity.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ The British Architect, November 1916, 8. Theosophists believed that "the hierarchy of beings is the third truth universally accepted," and that within this hierarchy the "nature-spirits, the gnomes, fairies, etc., who play so great a part in folk-lore," can be seen by children. (Annie Besant, "Theosophical Society," 301).

¹⁰⁸ P. Morton Shand, "Scenario for a Human Drama: The Glasgow Interlude," in The Architectural Review, January 1935, 25.

The second problem faced by the Mackintoshes arose from their "German connection." The couple were in Suffolk when World War I broke out and, as mentioned above, they decided to stay on into the winter. The area in which they lived was essentially a summer place; most "foreigners" left as fall approached. They were viewed by the locals as "outsiders" and, in addition, they received regular correspondence in German from the continent. Howarth wrote that:

The unaccountable presence of the two strangers, both speaking with a foreign accent--the pleasant vernacular of Central Scotland being a rarity in the marshlands of Suffolk--and wandering about the countryside at dusk, soon aroused suspicion, and brought them under observation as enemy agents....

On returning from a walk one evening the artists found a soldier guarding their lodgings: all their papers had been examined and some correspondence with the Viennese Secessionists discovered.¹⁰⁹

Mackintosh actually had to appear in court; references had to be obtained from Patrick Geddes in Edinburgh to support his innocence.¹¹⁰ Shortly after this, the Mackintoshes moved to the more anonymous city of London. However, their association with the Arts and Crafts Exhibition and their known relationship with German and Austrian artists may not

¹⁰⁹ Howarth, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement (London, 2nd edition, 1977), 196. Macdonald's German was probably quite good as a result of her education at Orme's and possibly because she spent some time studying in Germany. E. Seckler, "Mackintosh and Vienna," in Architectural Review (Vol.144, December 1968), 456, notes that a letter from the Mackintoshes in Scotland "is written in fairly correct German."

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

have helped their careers between 1914 and 1918.

The kind of art exhibited during the war years became an issue of nationalism. For example, the connections between the Arts and Crafts Society and the German art world actively entered public discourse when the Eleventh Arts and Crafts Exhibition opened in 1916. The Society's connections with Germany were recognized by the press. The Scotsman (Edinburgh) suggested that "native talent" suffered because manufacturers and merchants "promoted and developed German art:"

In the Arts and Crafts Exhibition....there are signs as well as hopes that all the talk of the last two years about counteracting German competition is not to end in more verbiage or to be translated into nothing more than fiscal expedients....The impression may become a belief that the British art worker of to-day has still something to teach to the foreigners who have been allowed and encouraged even to rob him of his due as much at home as elsewhere. It is a reflection on our manufacturers and merchants that while they refused recognition to native talent, their methods of business promoted and developed German art and craft, which derived much of their inspiration from study and imitation of British work.¹¹¹

The Scotsman went on to suggest that the Deutsche Werkbund, after sending a number of representatives to Britain "to study and report on craft revival here," proceeded to assimilate British "designs and methods," in their own teaching. Readers were told that "these students returned to their own country [Germany], where special courses of

¹¹¹ The Scotsman (Edinburgh), 10 October 1916, 3.

construction were organized, and the new knowledge widely spread."¹¹² The critics, in turn, were criticized for not letting the relationship between Germany and Britain in the arts and crafts rest. A letter to the editor of The Daily News and Leader (London) stated that:

the promoters themselves have not let the critics 'forget the Werkbund'....In their explanatory literature they hold up the Werkbund as a source for inspiration, if not a model for imitation.¹¹³

Beyond the controversy over the Werkbund and the relative superiority or inferiority of each country's art, there lay an overt call for "patriotic art." The subtitle for The Glasgow Herald's review of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition was "Pleasure, Profit, and Patriotism."¹¹⁴ The issue raised by the press was the opposition between the efficiency of machine-made art (perceived of as German) and "medieval" or individual art (British). W. H. Whall, a member of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, wrote that the Germans "organize" and "we muddle through."¹¹⁵ May Morris, William Morris's daughter, wrote in defense of "the men who founded the arts and crafts movement," those who, she suggested, had worked toward a "better understanding"

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ The Daily News and Leader (London), 12 October 1916, 4.

¹¹⁴ The Glasgow Herald, 3 November 1916, 8.

¹¹⁵ C. W. Whall in The Daily News and Leader, 16 October 1916, 4.

and had stressed both handicrafts and individuality.¹¹⁶ She announced that art, particularly in wartime, must be treasured as part of civilized life: "Should we deny the arts of life we should lose the pride of life--and lose our own souls."¹¹⁷ Ann Macbeth, Frances Macdonald's former colleague at the Glasgow School of Art, disagreed. She saw functional machine art as the art of the future and insisted that artists could not "put the clock back."¹¹⁸ She considered the more functional art of Germany oriented toward the future and individualistic art (what May Morris called "handicraft") as passé. The Daily News (London), unconcerned about either functionalism or individualism but interested in nationalism, supported art inspired by William Morris's "genius:"

Anyone who has seen the soulless productions of what the Germans refer to as 'art nouveau' at the Werkbund must be without artistic perception to compare them to the beautiful exhibits of William Morris and the group of artists inspired by his genius.¹¹⁹

The Mackintoshes were caught in a trap. It was known that they conducted personal relationships with German artists, indeed much of their fame in England accrued to them from

¹¹⁶ May Morris, "The Future of British Arts and Crafts," in The Daily Mirror, 11 October 1916, 5.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ann Macbeth, "Arts and Industries: The Mind Behind the Machine," in The Daily News and Leader, 17 October 1916, 4.

¹¹⁹ The Daily News, 11 October 1916, 4.

these relationships which were established largely as a result of their successes at German and Austrian exhibitions. This would not have served them well during the war. On the other hand, their art was decorative rather than "of the twentieth century;" even those who deplored emulation of the Werkbund were aware of its progressiveness. The British Architect's observation that The Voices in the Wood was "wall decoration and candlesticks," "liney," with a "sweet little Cupid," and "women's faces peeping out of ornament," suggests that, next to the avant-garde art of the day, it could not hold its own. The taste of the time meant that work like this was doomed to extinction.

The Last Watercolour Paintings

Neither could Margaret Macdonald's two watercolour paintings, La Mort Parfumée (1921) (fig.31) and The Legend of the Blackthorns (1922) (Fig.32), stand up against the rigours of modernism. These pictures do not differ significantly from the watercolours that she made in Glasgow prior to 1914. All the figures, in both pictures, are female. The focal point of La Mort Parfumée is a dark armless woman who has her eyes partially closed. Five linear figures stretch forward toward a dead woman who lays on a bier of flowers. Their long, thin arms and fingers complement their elongated androgyny. The face of the dead woman is similar to the mask-faces in The Mysterious Garden

(1911) and the face of the "silencer" in The Pool of Silence (1913). The Scotsman found La Mort Parfumée "affected and bizarre" and considered its symbolism "profound" and, at the same time, "definitely obscure."¹²⁰ The Glasgow Herald informed its readers that Macdonald showed "how effectively profound blacks can be used as a foil in a rich colour scheme," and that her "aim, very skilfully pursued, seems to be vary and imaginatively floreate the Egyptian mummy rite."¹²¹ Probably because of the death theme, it has been suggested that La Mort Parfumée might be a tribute to Frances Macdonald who died in 1921,¹²² but this is impossible: Margaret exhibited the painting with the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours in February 1921,¹²³ while Frances did not die until 12 December 1921.

However, it is entirely possible that The Legend of the Blackthorns was a commemoration. The painting was first exhibited in Glasgow in March 1922, less than three months

¹²⁰ The Scotsman (Edinburgh), 17 February 1921, 7.

¹²¹ The Glasgow Herald, 17 February 1921, 4.

¹²² See the Catalogue for the exhibition, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh... (cat.71).

¹²³ The private view of the 41st Annual Exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours was held in Edinburgh in the galleries of the Royal Scottish Academy on 17 February 1921. The Glasgow Herald, 17 February 1921, 4.

after Frances's death.¹²⁴ Macdonald made the two women in "blackthorns" more attenuated than any of her other representations. Pencil thin and kneeling on sharply pointed knees, they are shrouded in black cloaks which cover their bowed heads with pointed, tightly fitting hoods. Their eyes are closed. The women are surrounded by the small white blossoms of the blackthorn, also called sloe, a flower that blooms in winter in southern England. In Devonshire and Cornwall the blackthorn represented the grief one experienced over a loved one's death.¹²⁵ In Sussex, the flower was considered a "death-token."¹²⁶ Tennyson also linked the blackthorn with death and with the "May Queen." Macdonald had produced a pair of gesso panels called The May Queen. We can assume, given her knowledge of Tennyson, that the panels refer to Tennyson's poem of the same name, in which the dying "may queen" says: "I shall never see the blossom on the blackthorn, the leaf upon the tree."¹²⁷ Since this part of the poem is set in winter (before the New Year) and Frances Macdonald died in this

¹²⁴ This painting hung in the 42nd Annual Exhibition of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours which opened on 11 March 1922. See the Catalogue for the Exhibition.

¹²⁵ Hilderic Friend, Flower and Folklore (W. Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1884), 207.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 580.

¹²⁷ Tennyson's The May Queen, line 51 and 52 in Tennyson, Poems and Plays (Oxford, 1973).

same season, Blackthorn may well relate to her death. Its title even recalls Frances's picture, The Legend of the Snowdrops. Both the blackthorn and the snowdrop are winter flowers; both were associated by Tennyson with death. In the poem, the dying young woman laments: "There's not a flower on all the hills: the frost is on the pane:/I only wish to live to see the snowdrops come again."¹²⁸ In Sussex the snowdrop, like the blackthorn, is called a "death-token."¹²⁹ Not only does this picture recall Frances's death, but it is the last watercolour Margaret painted.¹³⁰

The last years in France

According to Howarth, the Chelsea years were difficult and became progressively more difficult as Mackintosh failed to obtain lucrative commissions.¹³¹ Macdonald's small independent income could hardly have supported them totally.¹³² In 1923 they sublet the Chelsea studios and moved to France, living first in the Pyrenees, then settling

¹²⁸ Ibid., lines 57 and 58.

¹²⁹ Friend, 580.

¹³⁰ See Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, (cat.73).

¹³¹ See Howarth, 193-219.

¹³² Like Frances, Margaret had received an income when David Dalrymple Macdonald, their uncle, died in 1908. Will of David Dalrymple Macdonald (22 March 1902) recorded 2 March 1902. Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh SC.36/51/146.

in Port Vendres on the Mediterranean.¹³³ Macdonald relinquished her membership in the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours in 1923; her name would not appear on their membership lists nor in their catalogues again. Friendships were maintained through correspondence but, with this last move, the Mackintoshes distanced themselves even more from Scotland and, if they met with friends or family, they seemed to have done so in England.¹³⁴ Letters written by Mackintosh to Macdonald in 1927 when she returned to England for a short stay for health reasons are affectionate and revealing.¹³⁵ Macdonald obviously handled all their finances; Mackintosh seemed relatively lost without her. He asked her to find copies of Wyndham Lewis's new periodical, The Enemy, indicating that they were both aware of the "new" movements in art.¹³⁶ He also told

¹³³ Howarth, 215.

¹³⁴ Slade professor Randolph Schwabe, a close friend of the Mackintoshes, wrote about a summer he and his family spent with Macdonald and her brother Archibald at Charing in Kent in 1931 in a letter to William Davidson, 12 March 1933 (Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow). This is merely one instance of her family joining her in the south after Mackintosh's death and she chose to live in London not Scotland when she returned permanently to Britain.

¹³⁵ The letters are held in the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, Scotland.

¹³⁶ It is a mistake to assume that because these artists did not make modern art, they were not interested in it and a greater mistake to think they did not understand the new movements. Their friend Newbery, who continued to paint in a very traditional style, had defended Futurism soon after it appeared in Britain. At a talk he gave in Greenock, Scotland he supported the right of the artist to

her about French women working unloading the ships who were earning only half the usual salary because they were considered as wives and not as independent workers. Mackintosh ended the comment with several exclamation marks and then added a note about equal pay for equal work indicating that this issue was one of interest to him and to Macdonald. The letters suggest that, aside from some financial constraints, their life in France was happy and comfortable. Mackintosh produced a number of watercolour paintings during the 1920s;¹³⁷ we do not know why Macdonald did not paint. Not long after Macdonald returned

"revolt against convention" and suggested that the public tended to accept that which they knew: "People had been educated unconsciously to accept a certain convention, and unless they were educated as well as the painter" they would not understand what the artist intended. "The futurist," said Newbery, "saw more than an iota of truth in the statement that it was a mania to endeavour to reproduce what nature does a thousand times better....The Futurist asked why not express the instinct of colour, and, if it were not possible in a picture to give the fourth dimension, that of time...What the futurist said was, 'Why can't I do that in painting?'" The Glasgow Herald, 23 March 1914.

¹³⁷ See Billcliffe, Mackintosh Watercolours. Some of these watercolours are initiated "CRM" and "MMM;" although collaboration seems obvious, this is usually ignored (for example, Billcliffe, 16). Randolph Schwabe owned at least eleven pictures. In a letter to William Davidson, 12 March 1933, Schwabe wrote that he did "what he could to sort out the drawings, paintings and designs, separating with certainty in all but a few cases the work of Toshie from Margaret's." (Hunterian Art Gallery Archives) Later, one of the Schwabe drawings (Gorse) was reproduced in Country Life (15 April 1939) as by C. R. Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh. Given the artists' history of collaboration and Schwabe's intimate knowledge of their work, the jointly signed watercolours are probably exactly that, joint work.

to France, Mackintosh fell ill and the couple returned to England. He died in London, 10 December 1928. Macdonald died 10 January 1933. Her cousin from Liverpool, Joseph Tilly Hardeman, visited her in the fall of 1932 and, suspecting that she was ill, suggested that she not live alone.¹³⁸ She refused to move away from the Chelsea studio that she and Mackintosh had shared but, in the end, she died in a nursing home. Hardeman looked after her effects and, with the housekeeper, burned letters he considered of no use.¹³⁹ He also put her obituary notice in The Times. Desmond-Chapman, in a letter to Macdonald's brother, voiced his dissatisfaction with the notice: "I do wish Mr. Hardeman had thought of putting Margaret Macdonald instead of Mrs. Charles Rennie Mackintosh in The Times. She was very proud--and rightly so--of Macdonald!"¹⁴⁰

On 3 May 1933, just months after her death, the McLellan Galleries in Glasgow opened its doors on the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Memorial Exhibition. Although Shand had done his best to exclude Macdonald from the

¹³⁸ Letter from J. T. Hardeman to Archibald Campbell Macdonald, held by the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.

¹³⁹ Letter from Hardeman to Archibald Macdonald, dated 9 January [sic] 1933.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from Major Desmond-Chapman to Archibald Macdonald dated 12 January 1932 [sic], held at the Hunterian Art Gallery. In the catalogues for the exhibitions of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours, Macdonald always listed herself as Margaret Macdonald with Mrs. C. R. Mackintosh in brackets.

exhibition, she played an important role in it. The Glasgow Herald reported:

The exhibition includes a good many examples of the art of his wife, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, who was also a talented artist, and whose work as a decorator, like that of her husband, reached a very high level.¹⁴¹

Further on, after discussing the commission for Catherine Cranston's "tea-room in Buchanan Street, and later tea-rooms in other parts of the city,"¹⁴² the critic observed that:

Mackintosh and his wife, whose maiden name was Margaret Macdonald, did the decorative panels between them, and the result proved that in Mrs. Mackintosh he had found, as he always did, and unflinching helper and a perfect collaborator.¹⁴³

Another column on the Memorial Exhibition appeared in The Glasgow Herald the following day. This time the speeches given at the opening were quoted at length. One speaker, J. Jeffrey Waddell, an architect, mentioned Margaret Macdonald: "In his work he was ably helped by his wife, Margaret Macdonald, whose work as a decorator exactly suited and harmonized with that of her husband."¹⁴⁴ If these reports gave Margaret Macdonald more credit than did P. Morton Shand, she still remained Mackintosh's "helper." Only the occasional voice of a friend rose to defend Macdonald and her art. Desmond Chapman-Huston wrote about Macdonald in

¹⁴¹ The Glasgow Herald, 3 May 1933, 15.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ The Glasgow Herald, 4 May 1933, 11.

his commemorative article for Charles Rennie Mackintosh:

Their union, an ideal one, had the happiest results for both art and architecture. Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, to give her the name by which she became famous, is an artist of high gifts and she had an undoubted influence on the development of her husband's style, an influence and inspiration which he was always proud to acknowledge, and which no student of his work can fail to observe.¹⁴⁵

However, his comments were lost while Shand's entered the discourse.¹⁴⁶ It was not until the Glasgow exhibition of 1983-84 that Macdonald was recognized as an artist in her own right.

¹⁴⁵ Desmond Chapman-Huston, "Charles Rennie Mackintosh," in Artwork (Vol.VI, No.21), 1930, 21.

¹⁴⁶ Although William Davidson voiced his concern to Shand about Shand's treatment of Margaret, his voice was lost. It was not until recently that Davidson's correspondence became available for research.

CONCLUSION

No representations in the written and visual media are gender-neutral. They either confirm or challenge the status-quo through ways they construct or fail to construct images of femininity and masculinity. (Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory, 1987, 101.)

Asked to imagine a picture of a woman from the late nineteenth century or the early twentieth century one almost always calls to mind an Ophelia like those so frequently painted by artists such as J. W. Waterhouse (he painted a number of different Ophelias beginning in 1889),¹ or a Lilith like that painted by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Lady Lilith, 1868). Ophelia represented the neurasthenic woman so common to the Victorian era;² Lilith, the sexual woman who inhabited the sphere outside of the patriarchal family.³ Rossetti, in addition to making pictures of woman who display what his colleague William Holman Hunt called "a

¹ Catalogue for the exhibition The Last Romantics, The Romantic Tradition in British Art, Barbican Art Gallery (London, 1989), 117.

² Elaine Showalter's The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980 (New York, 1985), provides an insightful comment about insanity among women in nineteenth-century Britain.

³ Lynda Nead discusses the Victorian concept of "respectable femininity" as well as the "adulteress" and the prostitute in Myths of Sexuality, Representations of Women in Victorian Britain (London, 1988). Virginia M. Allen, "'One Strangling Golden Hair': Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Lady Lilith," The Art Bulletin (Vol. LXVI, No. 2, June 1984, 290), writes that Rossetti's Lilith "illustrates the dark side of his dual iconography."

gross sensuality of a revolting kind,"⁴ painted a number of beautiful languid females who represent the ideal Victorian woman. In the late nineteenth century when George Savage and Edwin Goodall published Insanity and Allied Neuroses, they saw the connection between women suffering from neurasthenia and the women in Rossetti's paintings:

A woman, generally single, or in some way not in a condition for performing her reproductive function, having suffered from some real or imagined trouble, or having passed through a phase of hypochondriasis of sexual character, often being of a highly nervous stock, becomes the interesting invalid....In the end, the patient becomes bedridden, often refuses her food, or is capricious about taking it, taking strange things at odd times, or pretending to starve. Masturbation is not uncommon. The body wastes, and the face has a thin anxious look, not unlike that represented by Rossetti in many of his pictures of women. There is a hungry look about them which is striking.⁵

The literature and the visual arts of this period articulated polarized representations of woman as sickly, helpless and dependent or as femme fatale, threatening and sexual, and consequently established ways of seeing that continue to inform our understanding of the Victorian

⁴ In a letter by William Holman Hunt to Thomas Combe, 12 February 1860, as quoted by Griselda Pollock "Woman as sign: psychoanalytic readings," in Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (London, 1988), 130.

⁵ George Savage and Edwin Goodall, Insanity and Allied Neuroses (4th edition, London, 1907), 96-97. Quoted by Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady, Women Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980 (New York, 1985), 134.

woman.⁶ Recent research suggests that most nineteenth-century women artists contributed little to an enlightened vision of what women may have really been like but, instead, they often upheld and perpetuated a simplistic and stereotyped representation of their own femaleness and, in this respect, supported their own submissive role as object within the traditional structure of society.⁷ Chris Weedon wrote that:

We need to understand why women tolerate social relations which subordinate their interests to those of men and the mechanisms whereby women and men adopt particular discursive positions as representative of their interests.⁸

Margaret and Frances Macdonald departed from the dominant discourse and added unique and, in some instances startling, visual alternatives to the existing canon. In the Macdonalds' art, specifically in their representations

⁶ See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven, 1979), for a discussion of this polarization of women in literature.

⁷ Bram Dijkstra's Idols of Perversity includes female artists who contribute to the dominant discourse of 1890s society. He focuses upon the image of woman, not the artist as woman, in this period and thereby elaborates upon the already established discourse. Within literature, Patricia Stubbs, Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel, 1880-1920 (London, 1981), suggests that the "real" life of women was not represented in any novels by men or women during this period. See also, Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics (London, 1985), particularly for her work on Virginia Woolf and the early twentieth century.

⁸ Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (London, 1987), 12.

In women, we find a visual language that turns markedly away from the familiar 1890s' representation of women-created-by-man toward a more self-contained image that speaks to us of "woman alone" (as subject) rather than "in relation" to man (as object).

Frances Macdonald's art can be seen as comprising three stages. The first is a confrontational challenge of the status quo, as for example in Girl in the East Wind with Ravens Passing the Moon (1893) and A Pond (1894). The female figures in these early watercolours do not speak of submission or sexual availability nor do they suggest reproductive potential but, instead, they deny accessibility. In addition, by using uncomfortable, angular lines and "sickly" colours any sense of desire on the part of a viewer is forestalled.

However, Frances was unable consistently to maintain this challenge throughout her career. Even prior to her marriage in 1899, the forms of her female figures had softened while suggesting a sense of isolation. In this second phase, she sustained the confrontation but modified the aggression as, for example, in Autumn (1898) and Spring (1897). The women in these two pictures are somewhat accessible but, in Autumn, the more sexually available figure is located in a sea of floating brown skulls, and, in Spring, a fertile-looking female is shadowed by a second more frightening woman with long, thin claw-like fingers.

Hence, while not as perspicacious as her earlier pictures, these later pictures still depict loneliness, sorrow and despair rather than desire.

During the third stage a sense of resistant resignation typifies Frances Macdonald's paintings and, indeed, is encoded in the titles of these paintings. For example, in 'Tis a long path that wanders to desire (c.1912-15), Macdonald draws a young woman weighed down by her hair (hair that also becomes the "path") not looking very joyful about the prospect of "desire." That this desire is related to a man is indicated by the inclusion of male figures in the background on the path. Similarly, Man makes the beads of life but woman must thread them (c.1912-15), is a clear and direct representation of woman's role and her inability to transcend that role. All the images in Frances Macdonald's work are personal in nature. They have a basis in her own life history and speak eloquently of her subjective experience of the world. However, they are also unmistakable statements about her subject: women. She often shows us a woman or women alone. They are neither with men nor do they seek to attract men by offering themselves as innocent submissiveness or as irresistible voluptuousness. These pictures challenge the status quo in that they deny the sexual essentialism that became dominant

during the last half of the nineteenth century.⁹ On the other hand, she depicts the quiet sadness of woman within a resigned relationship to an "other." Frances Macdonald, like many other women artists during this period, operated within previously established constructs and traditionally accepted ways of representing women. For example, in 1895 a writer for the new popular Windsor Magazine told readers that: "Women owe most of their pleasure in life to men, and men like women to be pretty, or at any rate to look pretty; they are not particular which."¹⁰ Artists gave "woman" to viewers in ways that the viewer understood or desired. If the picture did not subscribe to the accepted dictates, the picture itself was not accepted. Based on the language of the critics, I would conclude that female artists were faced with two major constrictions: they were expected to paint in a certain way and to paint certain subject matter; if they painted women, the picture should reflect the viewer's idea of desirability in women. For example, when the painter Arthur Hughes wrote to his friend the Irish poet William Allingham about Rossetti's picture, Bocca bacciata (1859), he recognized its sexuality:

Rossetti has lately painted a most beautiful head, marigold background, such a superb thing, so awfully lovely. Boyce has bought it and will I expect kiss the

⁹ See the "Introduction" to Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (ed.), Feminism and Foucault, Reflections on Resistance (Boston, 1988), 12.

¹⁰ Windsor Magazine (Vol.I, 1895), 103.

dear thing's lips away before you come to see it.¹¹

Women painted by women artists had to conform to the idea of desirability but were often painted more "modestly" than those of their male colleagues. This was particularly true in Scotland where artistic production was tempered by a "widespread puritanical morality."¹²

If we consider women making pictures, we can determine from contemporary reviews exactly what was expected. Women artists were rewarded, praised by the critics and given more exhibitions, when they painted according to expectations. Katherine Cameron, a colleague of the Macdonalds, was commended for her "imaginary forms....fantastic composition[s], with bees and butterflies, babes and blossoms for themes."¹³ "With loving care," reported The

¹¹ As quoted by Griselda Pollock, "Woman as sign: psychoanalytic readings," in Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (London, 1988), 129.

¹² William Eadie, Movements of Modernity: The Case of Glasgow and Art Nouveau (London, 1990), 232. Eadie writes that: "In Glasgow, when the first exhibitions to include work by The Four were seized upon as providing evidence of a threat to public welfare, a widespread puritanical morality and fear of sensuality and spontaneity persisted in the city, and against this background the new artistic developments were interpreted as manifestations of Aesthetic movement opposition to the most revered aspects of the British character and way of life." Eadie links the puritanical directions evident in Glasgow with the increased economical dependence of that city's industry upon London and the perceived need to inhibit Scotto-Continental connections, particularly after the outbreak of the Boer War (1899). Eadie, 28-41.

¹³ The Artist (London), August 1896, 352.

Artist, "she follows the trembling petal of a flower, and one can almost hear the buzz of the bee as it swings around, or feel the soft flutter of the butterfly as it but touches the blossom."¹⁴ Reviews of the work of women artists from the 1890s, as well as from the first two decades of this century, establish how women were expected to paint and in addition, they indicate to us what women were expected to paint. For example, the critic for The Liverpool Courier, in his review of the 1897 Autumn Exhibition at the Walker commented:

Most of our lady artists are represented... Love among the Roses by Miss G. Laing, is a delicate and finely finished drawing of a picturesque village scene. Mrs. Hall Neale has a pretty child portrait....Miss Eva Hollyer's She gives a side glance and looks down takes us pleasantly back a century or soMrs. Gray Hill's decorative skill is displayed to advantage in several floral panels.¹⁵

The adjectives delicate, picturesque, pretty, pleasant and decorative, are frequently used, here and elsewhere, to describe visual art done by women.

As for how pictures of women were supposed to look we can turn to a description of a painting done by the Glasgow artist, George Henry. The painting was in the second exhibition of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers in London in 1899 (the Macdonald sisters also had work in this exhibition). The Glasgow

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The Liverpool Courier, 28 August 1897, 5.

Herald reported that:

one turns instinctively to an exquisite half-length portrait of a lady, The Pearl Necklet by George Henry. The pearl necklet winds round the bare neck of the brown-haired woman, over the broad lace and falls to her waist. It strikes the keynote of colour, for the picture is painted in soft pearly tones, in which grey-green predominates. Delicate touches of pale blue, of tender red, are half-hidden in the sheen of white and grey dress....the brown eyes are wonderfully lustrous, and there are soft grey shadows under the ringlets on the forehead.¹⁶

Obviously, woman whether painted by a male or female artist was meant to be soft, delicate and pretty. This is abundantly clear in the "special exhibitions of Fair Women" begun by the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers in 1908, considered by some to be the "most fascinating" exhibition in London "for some years."¹⁷

The same concern for beauty is evident in reviews of exhibitions of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours. In 1910 Sir Francis Powell, long-time president of that Society, exhibited "an exceedingly pleasing piece of portraiture, Day Dreams....a figure of gracious womanhood; the expression of her mood is happily conveyed, the texture of the gown is skilfully treated, and the whole forms a very pleasant picture."¹⁸

Frances Macdonald's pictures display a resistance to

¹⁶ The Glasgow Herald, 9 May 1899, 7.

¹⁷ The Ladies Field, 13 March 1909, 54.

¹⁸ The Glasgow Herald, 1 October 1910, 10.

this dominant discourse. She painted the figure, in itself an uncommon undertaking for women artists at that time, and then she painted it differently. At times her female figures are unattractive and unattractive women implied revolution or at least change. The Windsor Magazine told its readers that, "With good looks and a good temper a woman is all-powerful. She can get what she likes if she dresses well and does not 'nag'."¹⁹ However, if she is not attractive, society may be threatened: "I firmly believe," continued the Windsor Magazine, "that the lack of an eye for appearances has turned more women into revolutionists and social reformers than any other cause whatsoever."²⁰ I suggest that certain aspects of the methods used in psychoanalysis, if applied to a critical analysis of pictures, could provide insights and new interpretations of women's painting from this period. Meredith Anne Skura, in The Literary Use of Psychoanalytic Process (1981), suggests that the critic should use:

all the resources of the psychoanalytic process--with its attention to the different aspects of the text; its distrust of literal reference; its lack of tact and its openness to counterintuitive meanings; and its self-consciousness about the process of interpretation.²¹

Any explanation or discussion of Macdonald's pictures should

¹⁹ Windsor Magazine, 106.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Skura as quoted in E. Ann Kaplan, Psychoanalysis and Cinema (London, 1990), 6.

include a "distrust" of literal interpretation; should pay strict "attention to different aspects of the text" or, in the instance of visual representation, pay attention to different aspects of visual language; should always remain open to variations of meanings; and finally, should self-consciously remain aware of problems of interpretation. This is particularly important with respect to pictures like Macdonald's which defy broad categorizations.

Given recent explorations in feminist thought, particularly among French theorists such as Hélène Cixous, new meanings of Macdonald's art could be constructed. Cixous and other French theorists write about the female experience and its multiplicities. That is, woman's psychology and woman's body do not conform to the oppositions with which we are familiar: superior/inferior, passive/active, dominant/submissive. Cixous claims that, in addition to women being unable to function within these rational categories, the oppositions are always "against woman."²² In Technologies of Gender, Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction (1987), Teresa de Lauretis suggests that even as poststructuralist theorists attempt to eliminate the binary structure, the structure continues to inform their theorizations:

This duality of stability/subversion--like the other

²² See Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" translated by Annette Kuhn for Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society (Vol.7, No.1, 1981), 44-45.

familiar dichotomies of subject and object, self and other--is what contemporary critical thought (poststructuralism) challenges with notions such as heterogeneity, difference, deconstruction, contradiction. But it remains an enduring cognitive paradigm: even as postmodern writers would wish to do away with it, this binary structure in one way or another informs their very theorizations.²³

In order to avoid "this binary structure," De Lauretis suggested in a more recent article that feminism seeks to create "alternate ways of seeing, conceptualizing, and representing difference."²⁴ She insists that we must look at:

the female subject in all of its component aspects-- from the modes of its social and material subjection to the modes of its resistance and agency, from the emergent conditions of female symbolic subjecthood to the affective and unconscious processes that mark female historical subjectivities.²⁵

Often when analysing Macdonald's art we are thrown back upon oppositions: she created rebellious art, then she created fairy-tale art; she was castigated as "weirdly 'new'," then credited with "quite beautiful inventions;" she was too eerie, then too mysterious. Her art was inconsistent and it was personal, of woman by woman.

Art like this requires fresh views and new insights. Traditional patriarchal discourse, sometimes called

²³ Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender, Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction (Bloomington, 1987), 73.

²⁴ Teresa de Lauretis, "Guerilla in the midst: women's cinema in the 80s," Screen (Vol.31, No.1, Spring 1990), 15.

²⁵ Ibid.

"phallogocentric criticism,"²⁶ fails to illuminate multiplicities of meanings in female art. The relegation to the realm of the fairy-tale has effectively removed Macdonald's work from the mainstream and allotted her second, if not third, rate status in the established art historical hierarchy. If, however, we can remain open to the "different aspects of the text," rather than insisting upon closures which posit only one interpretation, Macdonald's art begins to make more sense.

Certainly Frances Macdonald's last paintings, paintings that were not exhibited, such as 'Tis a long path that wanders to desire (c.1912-1915) and Man makes the beads of life but women must thread them (c.1912-1915), reveal an insight into woman's psychology, woman's role and woman's place in society. If we consider Macdonald's commitment to exhibiting with non-mainstream organizations, such as Sandon and the London Salon, in combination with a analysis of her work that incorporates feminist theory, a fresh view of her art emerges. She can be seen as painting the female

²⁶ See, for example, Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London, 1988), 105. "Her [Cixous's] whole theoretical project can in one sense be summed up as the effort to undo this logocentric ideology: to proclaim woman as the source of life, power and energy and to hail the advent of a new, feminine language that ceaselessly subverts these patriarchal binary schemes where logocentrism colludes with phallogocentrism in an effort to oppress and silence women." See Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen for Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, vol.1, no.4, 1976, 875-893.

experience in its many forms. For example, The Girl in the East Wind is powerful, self-contained and independent; the princess in The Prince and the Sleeping Princess (c.1895) in a loving way relates to a male Other;²⁷ the young woman in 'Tis a long that wanders to desire, stands naked, exposed and indecisive, between two other figures, one male, the other ambiguously sexed. Her "pond women" in A Pond (1894) are shrill and aggressive; her mother, in Birth of the Rose (1908), is mature and weary. Macdonald's paintings posit many different women and suggest that women have many different voices. Within the a context of the location of women in society at the time Macdonald was painting, her pictures may be seen more clearly. Her women are sometimes closed off, sometimes available and sometimes ambivalent.

Ambivalence is a major characteristic of Macdonald's paintings and in order to understand her work and obtain a clear understanding of it we must abandon hierarchical art-historical thought and begin to rely upon less rigid structures. Static closures,²⁸ that is those closures produced when one relies upon binary oppositions, must be replaced by more flexible ways of organizing information

²⁷ Male figures appear infrequently in Macdonald's work and when they do, they are androgynous. Macdonald's depiction of feminine men conforms remarkably with Cixous's discussion of bisexuality in "The Laugh of the Medusa," 884-885.

²⁸ I am using Toril Moi's phrasing here. See Moi, 105.

that allow artist and viewer to move and change, to analyse images that are not fixed but change according to the modes of interpretation that are available at any given time.

Annette Kuhn suggests that:

'the feminine'...may be regarded as an attribute of textual organization only in the sense that it poses a challenge to dominant forms of relationship between texts and recipients. This challenging relationship is one in which in the act of reading, meanings are grasped as shifting and constantly in process, and the subject-reader is placed in an active relationship to those meanings. A feminine text would in this way constitute a subversion of and challenge to a 'mainstream' text.²⁹

It is here that Foucault's insistence upon open-endedness becomes most relevant as does his location of power within the discourse of a particular. In The History of Sexuality, he writes that, "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it."³⁰ It is in the language of the critics, even when that language reinforces the power of the hierarchy or perhaps because it is the language of the hierarchy, combined with an open reading of the text (in visual arts, the picture) that will give us a comprehensive understanding of that content of the picture.

Pierre Macherey suggests that all texts contain

²⁹ Annette Kuhn, Women's Pictures, Feminism and Cinema (London, 1990), 12.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction (New York, 1980), 101.

inconsistencies, contradictions and silences;³¹ certainly this can be extended from text to visual representations. We must be aware of these qualities if we are to write effectively about out-of-the-mainstream art. Macdonald's turning "away from the eerie world of the Spook School to paint fairy-tale scenes,"³² or her painting of "mysterious works given philosophical titles,"³³ are much better understood within the process of feminist theory. She painted woman and woman's experience and it is within the gender issue that her work must be discussed.

Margaret Macdonald's images, more consistent and less ambivalent than her sister's, conveyed a sense of silence. Macdonald portrayed a reality that accurately reflected the status of women in society and in the art world when she painted: she painted silent women at a time when women were silent. At least as early as 1900, when she made her embroidered hanging for Vienna, Margaret Macdonald represented mute, inactive, powerless women. Her subject matter is almost exclusively female and in this respect she is like her sister (The Mysterious Garden from around 1904 is the last picture in which she included the male figure),

³¹ Pierre Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production (London, 1978). See also Chris Weedon, 169, for her interpretation of Macherey as it applies to feminist literary theory.

³² Billcliffe, Mackintosh Watercolours (London, 1979), 46.

³³ Ibid.

but unlike her sister she disregarded the concept of a multi-faceted woman. She never wove between a "sleeping princess" and a weary "birth", or between isolation (Ill Omen) and choice (Prudence and Desire). Still, designating her work "mysterious" further silences the already silent and dismisses Macdonald's pictures as feminine and symbolic. They have been seen as meaningless or frivolous rather than insightful and enlightening facets of the female experience. I suggest that we might look at other pictures made by women artists at the same time as women "speaking" their own experiences³⁴ or even as speaking their own (female) language. As Luce Irigaray suggested women must speak (and be listened to) from a valued position.

Speaking (as) woman is not speaking of woman. It is not a matter of producing a discourse of which woman would be the object, or the subject. That said, by speaking (as) woman, one may attempt to provide a place for the 'other' as feminine.³⁵

If we examine painting by women, for example, the flower paintings done by Margaret Macdonald's colleague, Katherine Cameron, the "fairy imaginings" by Jessie King or the elusive women painted by Frances Macdonald, all come from a woman's reality; they are created by a feminine

³⁴ E. Ann Kaplan, Women and Film, looks at different theoretical positions taken by women directors one of which is "speaking our experiences and showing our everyday image..." 200.

³⁵ Ibid., 135.

visual "language."³⁶ None of these pictures answer to the voice of the established patriarchal discourse and when they are discussed it is with the same language the critics used for Margaret Macdonald. For example, when Jessie King's drawings and watercolours were exhibited in Glasgow in 1912, they were considered "mystical and elusive:"

There is a fine cleanliness about Miss King's drawings. Her designs are not always obvious, rather are they mystical and elusive like the prose of Maeterlinck, and in their pictorial way equally fascinating. Her extraordinary deft draftsmanship...is the expression of a mind full of the gossamer things of poetry, strange and beautiful, belonging to the realm of fancy, and not to the world of common things.³⁷

The question of whether women paint differently from men because they are women (hence their work is feminine and devalued), or whether they paint differently from men because they have not had access to the same training and experience (hence their work is not as good and devalued) has been, and still is, an ongoing debate.³⁸ The Times,

³⁶ A feminine visual language does not have to be a female language (made by a woman) any more than the gaze is exclusively controlled by men.

³⁷ The Glasgow Herald, 5 October 1912, 5.

³⁸ These arguments, among others, are laid out in Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," The Art Bulletin (Vol.LXIX, No.3, September 1987), 326-57. Griselda Pollock, "Review of Mary D. Garrard, Artemesia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero," The Art Bulletin (Vol.LXXII, No.3, September 1990), 499-505, provides a short commentary on this article and the value of the "theoretical diversity [that] characterizes contemporary feminist interventions in and on cultural analysis, and art history in particular." (p.499)

in its review of a Women's International Art Club exhibition in London in 1911, grappled with this problem:

Admitting that women can now paint as well as all except the greatest male artists, we are curious to discover whether they paint differently from men: whether they manage to express any distinctively feminine qualities in their art: and we are bound to say that in this exhibition there are not many pictures which seem to have any distinctively feminine qualities.³⁹

While the Times critic had noted that "one has to make no allowance for the sex of the artist," and that the work of the women on display at the Grafton Galleries was "just as high in accomplishment as the level of work at most exhibitions," she or he continued on in the review to discuss the work using virtually the same language as any other critic of the time used. Women, wrote the critic, "have always had a wonderful gift of imitation;" a picture was said to contain "no sentimental prettiness," however it expressed "a peculiarly feminine delight in the play and happiness of children;" and another women artist "painted three girls with feminine sympathy and subtlety."⁴⁰ As early as 1911 it was evident that when one discussed women's art within the established discourse, even when that discussion was enlightened, the women gained nothing and the way of writing about their art and the way of seeing their

³⁹ The Times (London), 4 March 1911, 11.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

art changed little.⁴¹ Frances Macdonald's art was inevitably seen as "a decorative kind of watercolour which....seems too arbitrary in its treatment of form and not sufficiently based on visual experience."⁴² Her pictures were "eerie and quaint;" her images were described as "born in dreams or moods of fantasy."⁴³ Katherine Cameron's watercolours and drawings were "dainty and highly finished."⁴⁴ Her "brilliant pure colour [was] mysteriously and successfully applied"⁴⁵ in her paintings of flowers and still life. Apparently the exhibition of the Glasgow Society of Lady Artists in 1911, "provided a study of the rejected."⁴⁶ Much of the art in this exhibition

⁴¹ That this has not changed lends credence to the continuing challenging of the dominant discourse by feminist art historians. See, Griselda Pollock and Rozika Parker, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology (London, 1981); Griselda Pollock, Vision and Difference; and Griselda Pollock's review of Mary Garrard's monograph mentioned above. Mandy Merck, "Difference and its Discontents," Screen (Vol.28, No.1, Winter 1987), 2-9, discusses sexual difference and its influence upon cultural analysis.

⁴² Review of an exhibition at The Baillie Gallery, London in The Times (London), 10 November 1911, 10.

⁴³ Review of an exhibition of the Sandon Society of Artists, Liverpool in The Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 1 May 1908, 5.

⁴⁴ Review of a solo exhibition (Glasgow) in The Glasgow Herald, 20 December 1922, 13.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See a review of the exhibition in The Glasgow Herald, 4 March 1911, 9.

had been "intended for more distinguished walls:"⁴⁷

With a daring that characterizes the modern women, the lady artists have provided a study of the rejected, which some artists of the other sex have clamoured for without the daring to offer an opportunity. It may be that some of the pictures here merited that irritating fate, but there are others whose exclusion it is hard to understand.⁴⁸

Agnes Raeburn exhibited her work with this organization and the critic thought that her landscape of Picardy "...reveal[ed] her customary fine sense of colour; the leafy avenue, with its blues, its quiet browns, and its tender greens, make a delightful harmony."⁴⁹ In an earlier exhibition her work was considered "very effective."⁵⁰ The large, "important" exhibitions such as those organized by the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers rarely included work by women. Artists such as Katherine Cameron, Agnes Raeburn, Janet Aitken, Jessie Keppie, and the Macdonalds exhibited occasionally with mainstream organizations. For example, Janet Aitken had a watercolour drawing in the Autumn Exhibition at the Walker in Liverpool in 1897 along with the Macdonalds. In 1899 Jessie Keppie was the only one of these women whose work appeared in Liverpool; in 1902 Agnes Raeburn had a painting

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ The Glasgow Herald, 19 October 1907, 3.

accepted; in 1909 only Margaret Macdonald exhibited; in 1911 work by both Margaret Macdonald and Katherine Cameron was included.⁵¹ Katherine Cameron even had a painting purchased by the Walker Art Gallery for the permanent collection in 1911 and, although she exhibited frequently after this in the Walker, none of the other women would appear.⁵² A similar situation could be found in the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours where Keppie, Cameron, Raeburn and Aitken all exhibited in 1896; the Macdonalds exhibited in 1898. After this the women appeared irregularly.

All these artists trained at the Glasgow School of Art during the 1890s when the School was directed by a progressive administrator who prided himself on the equal treatment of female and male students. All the women were extremely successful during their student years winning prizes at both the local and national level and they graduated to become exhibiting artists. However, along with Frances and Margaret Macdonald, they faded into obscurity and their art has not re-entered art historical structures in any significant way. The most reasonable explanation for their absence is the consistent co-opting of their feminine work (medium and content) into a feminine discourse and the

⁵¹ See the catalogues for the Annual Exhibitions, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (in the National Art Library, London).

⁵² Ibid.

marginalization of that discourse combined with their subsequent and/or corresponding disappearance from the archive.⁵³ When an artists' work failed to conform to the established criteria, as happened with the Macdonalds, then they could be equally well-dismissed as mysterious or elusive. However, a new look at painting by women using recent theoretical developments may provide us with fresh insights into feminine art as well as to the experience of the women who made this art. This is not to designate as unimportant the discussions of how gender and sexuality are produced in society but, rather, to suggest that visual productions by women artist themselves might be added to a discourse that establishes value for art made by women. The production of so-called feminine art, particularly feminine decorative art made largely by women artists, is an art that resists masculinist definitions and analysis.⁵⁴ It is also an art that must be addressed without fear of engendering essentialism; all the more so because it is in

⁵³ The archive complements the art historical hierarchy by its exclusions. Michel Foucault examined the power of the archive in The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language (New York, 1972). Griselda Pollock addresses the issue of archival selectivity and its impact upon feminist scholarship in "Woman as sign in Pre-Raphaelite literature: the representation of Elizabeth Siddall," Vision and Difference, 91-154.

⁵⁴ Although I am focusing upon the women artists a re-evaluation of feminine art would certainly benefit male artists who produced work in the genre. Herbert MacNair, for example, has effectively been dismissed for same reasons as Frances Macdonald.

this art that one encounters a patriarchally defined "femininity" which must be reclaimed and re-written by feminist art historians.⁵⁵ As Irigaray has suggested:

One must listen to her differently in order to hear an 'other meaning' which is constantly in the process of weaving itself, at the same time ceaselessly embracing words and yet casting them off to avoid becoming fixed, immobilized.⁵⁶

If we can "listen differently" to women artists perhaps we would learn more about their art.

⁵⁵ Julia Kristeva suggested that "femininity" has only been defined by the patriarchy and that we do not know what it means outside of that construct. Kristeva, "Woman can never be defined" (1980) in Isabelle de Courtivron and Elaine Marks (eds) New French Feminisms (New York, 1988), 137-141.

⁵⁶ From Irigaray's "This Sex Which Is Not One" as translated by Claudia Reeder in New French Feminisms, 103.

Figure 1: Frances Macdonald, The Glasgow School of Art Programme, 1893.

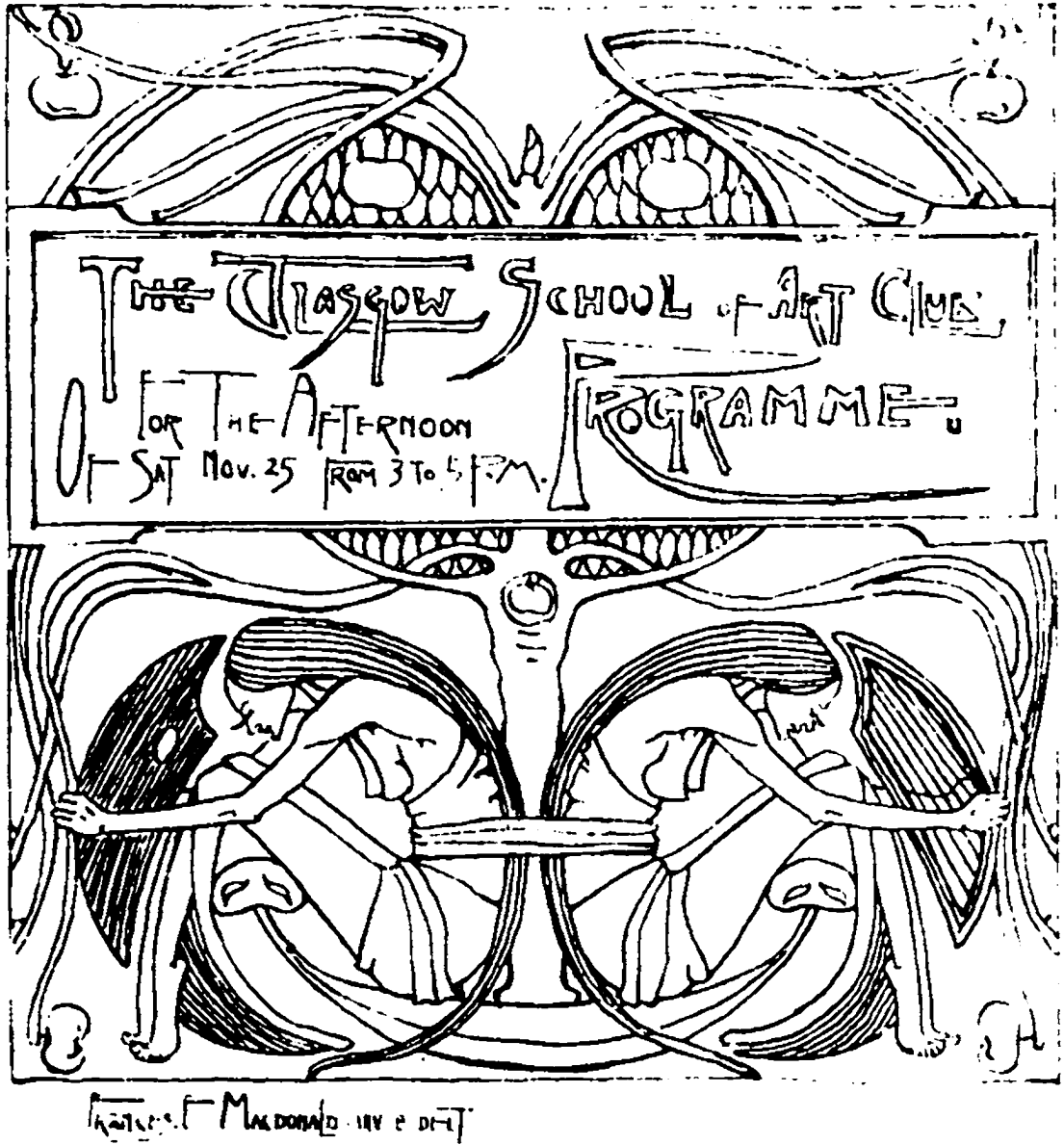
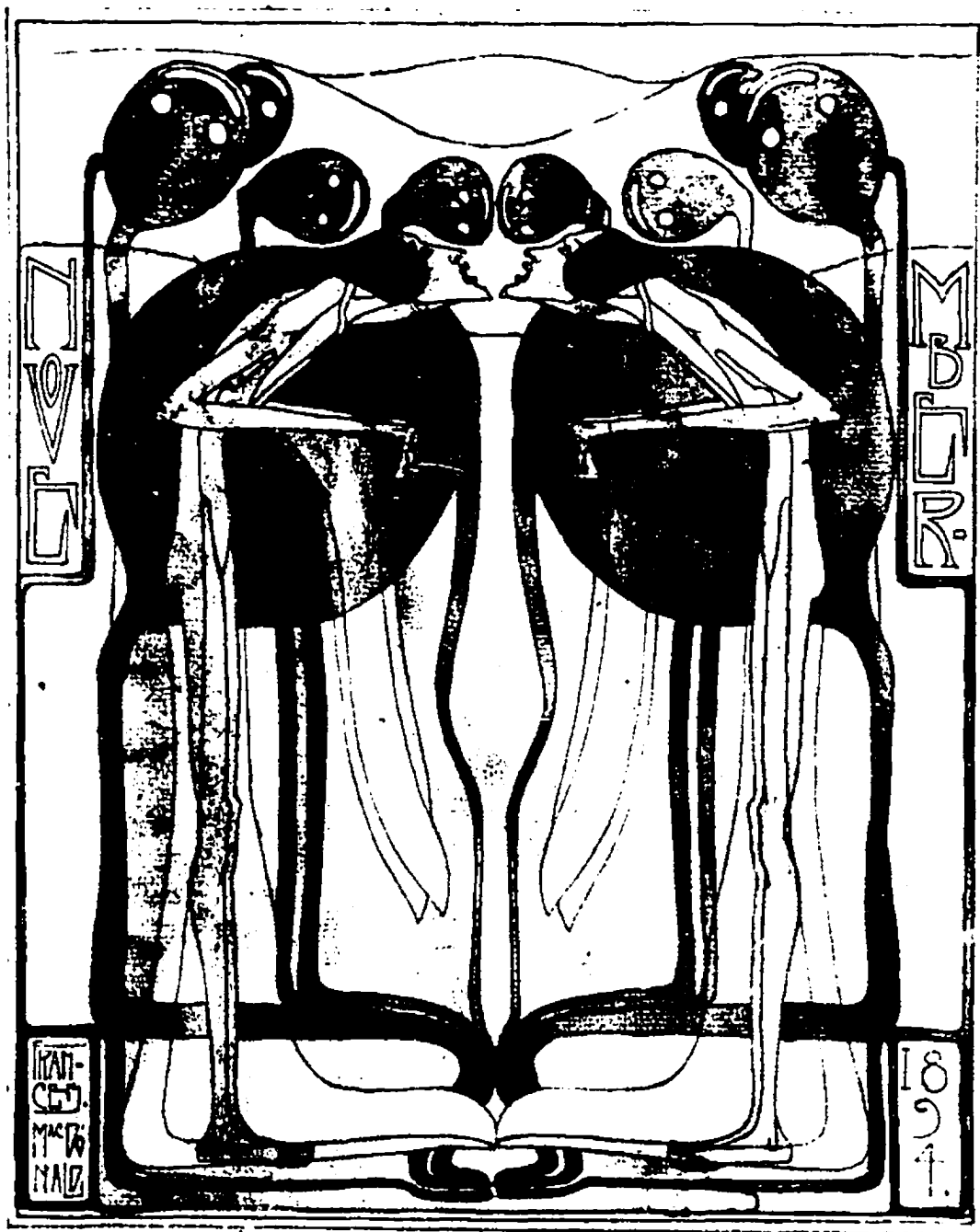


Figure 2: Frances Macdonald, A Pond, 1894.



A POND =

Figure 3: Frances Macdonald, Girl in the East Wind with Ravens Passing the Moon, 1893.

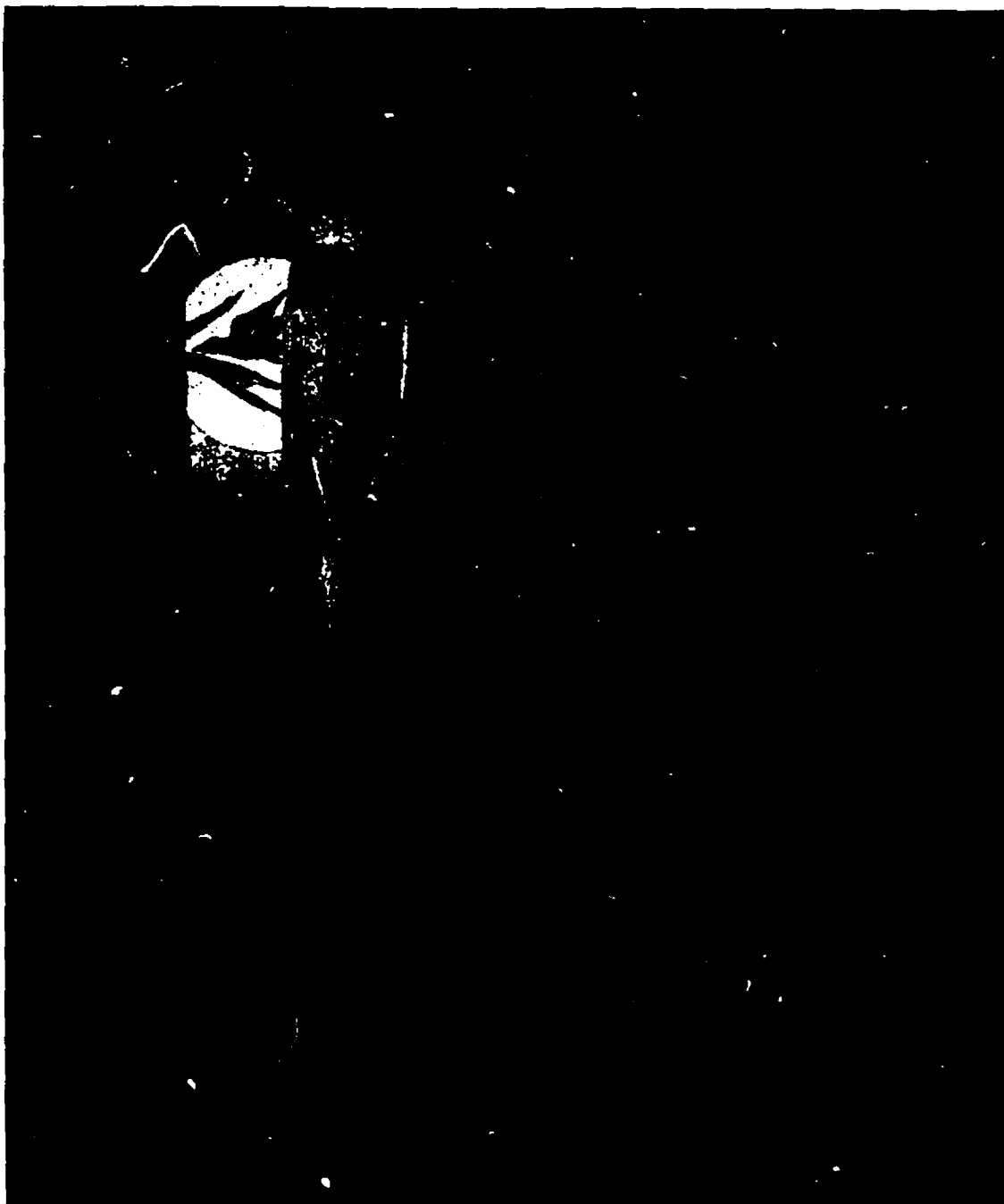


Figure 4: Margaret Macdonald, Summer, 1894.



Figure 5: Frances and Margaret Macdonald, The Fountain, c.1894.

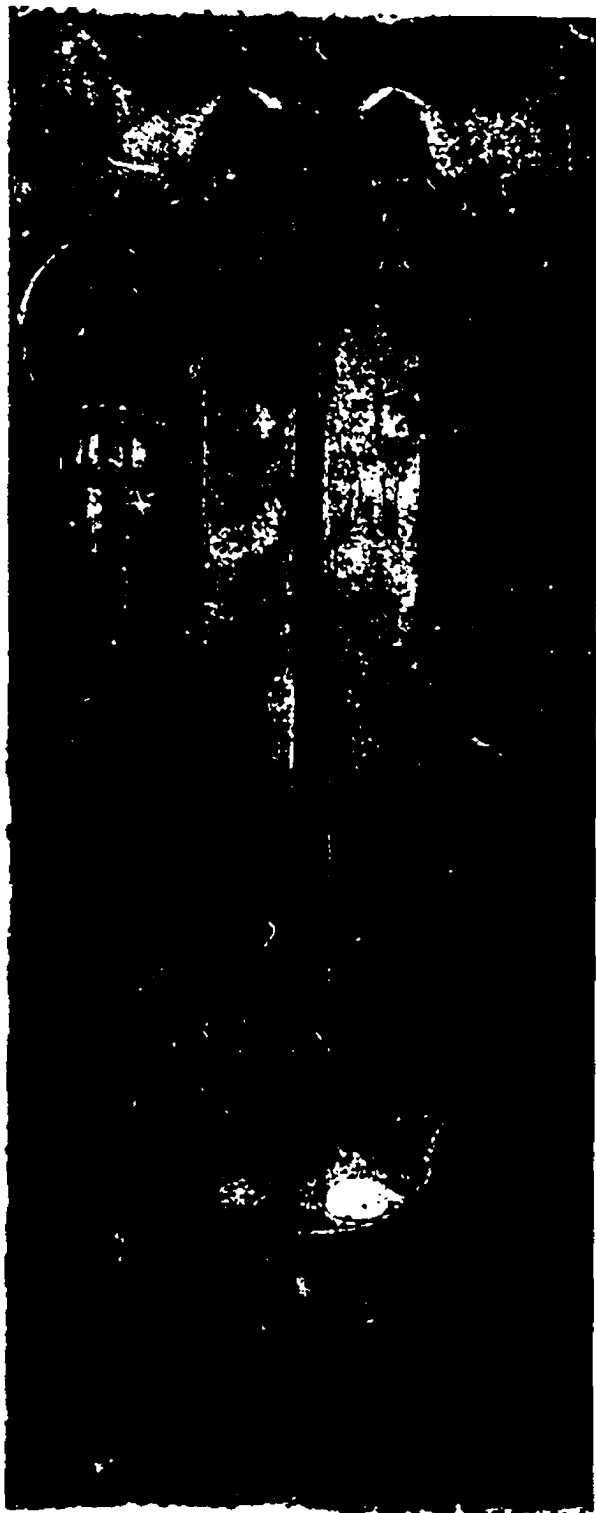


Figure 6: William Holman Hunt, The Triumph of the Innocents, c.1885.



Figure 7: Matthijs Maris. The Foundling, 1874.



Figure 8: Charles Rennie Mackintosh, The New Glasgow Art Club, 1893.

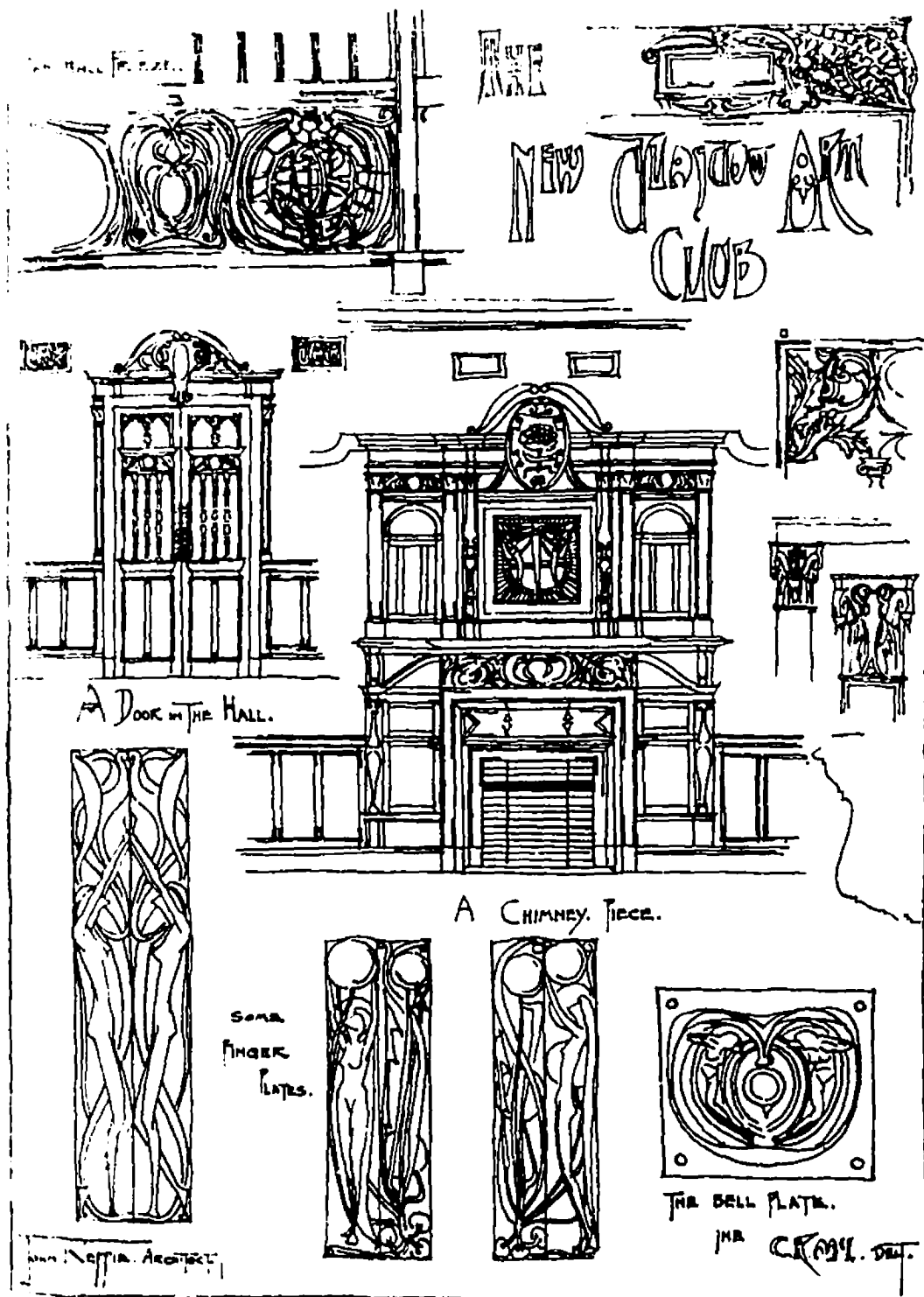


Figure 9: Margaret Macdonald, Glasgow School of Art "At Home."

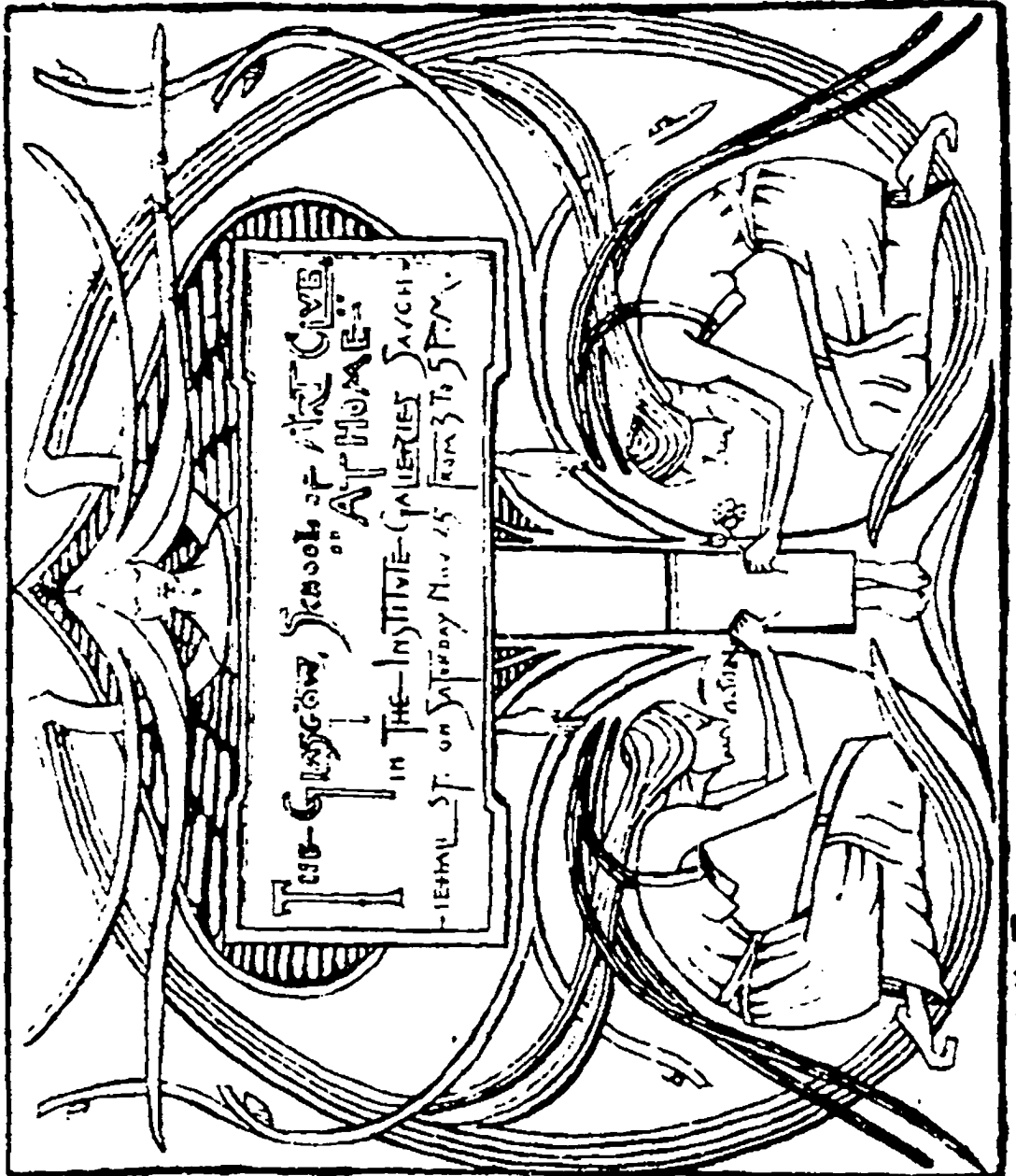


Figure 10: C. F. A. Voysey, Design for a Wall-Paper Frieze, 1893.



DESIGN FOR A WALL-PAPER FRIEZE BY C. F. A. VOYSEY. COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART.

Figure 11: Giovanni Segantini, The Punishment of Luxury, 1891.



Figure 12: Margaret Macdonald, "The Annunciation" from The Christmas Story, c.1895-96.

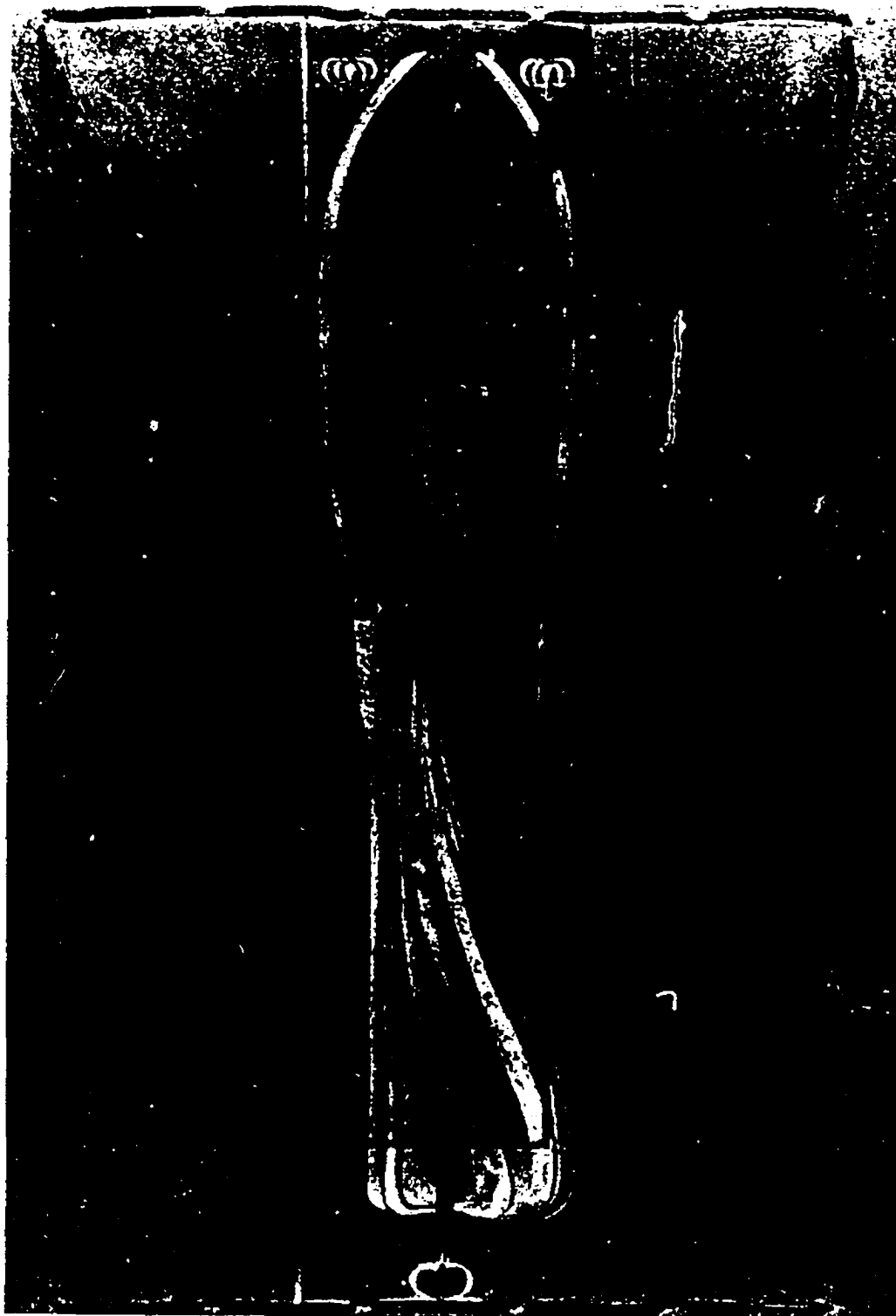


Figure 13: Frances Macdonald, The Sleeping Princess, c.1895.

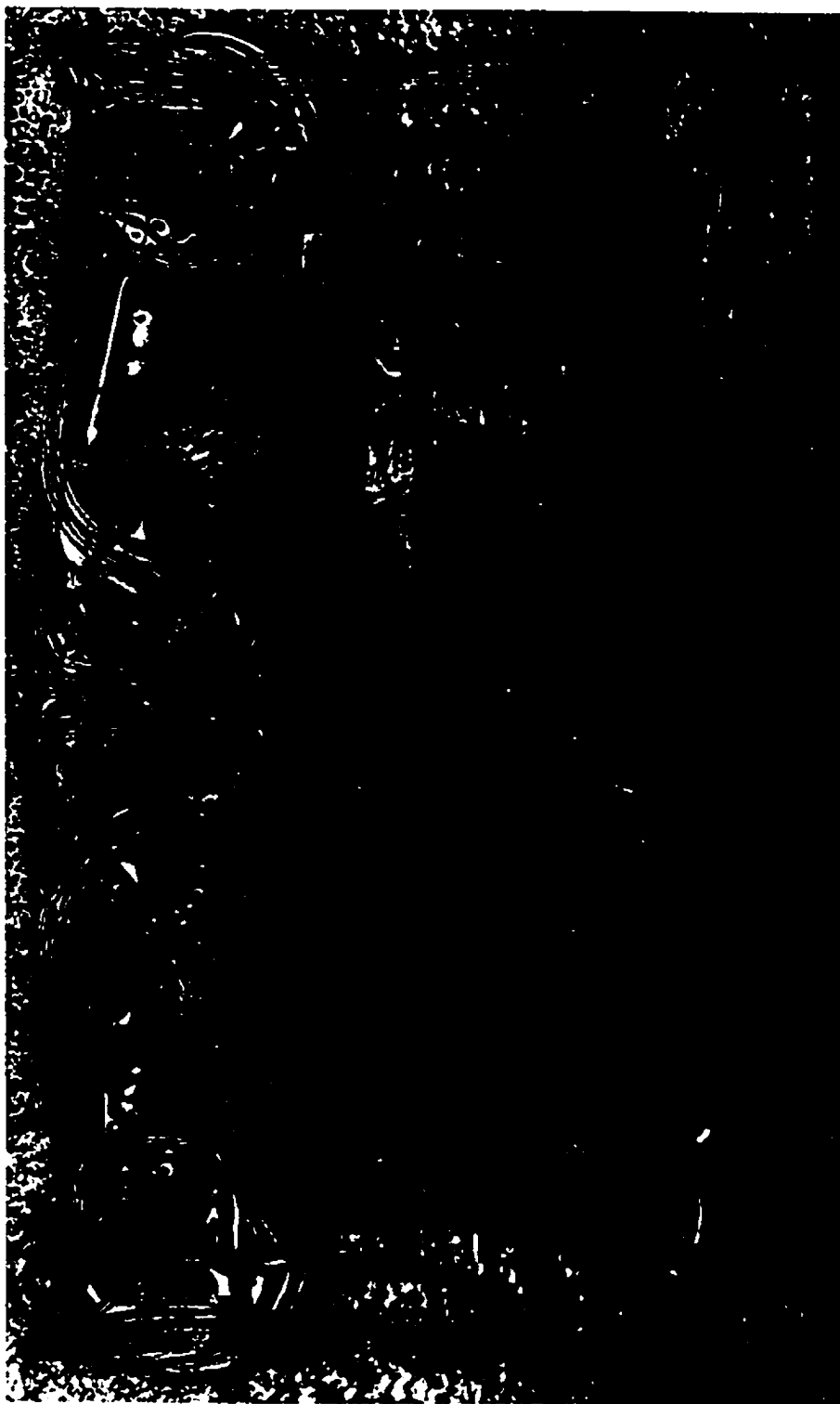


Figure 14: Frances Macdonald, Autumn, 1898.

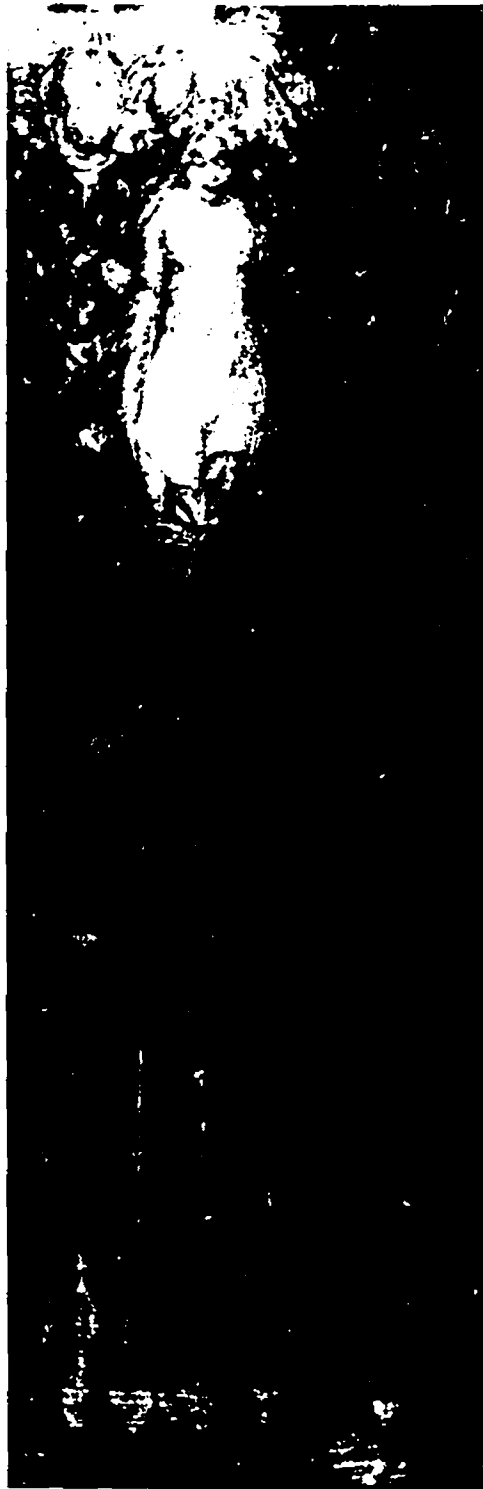


Figure 15: Frances Macdonald, Spring, 1897.



Figure 16: Margaret Macdonald, Summer, 1897.



Figure 17: Margaret Macdonald, Winter, 1898.

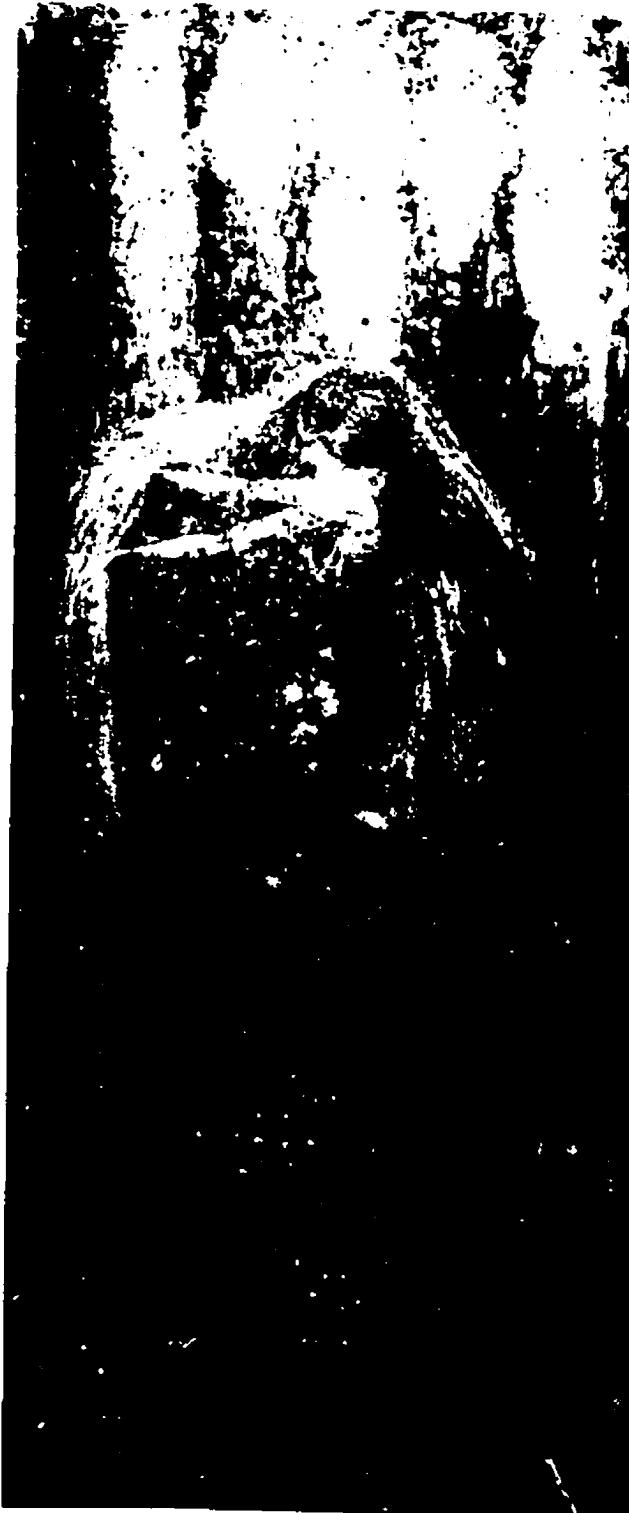


Figure 18: Frances Macdonald, Margaret Macdonald, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Herbert MacNair, The Scottish Room at the Vienna Secession, 1900.

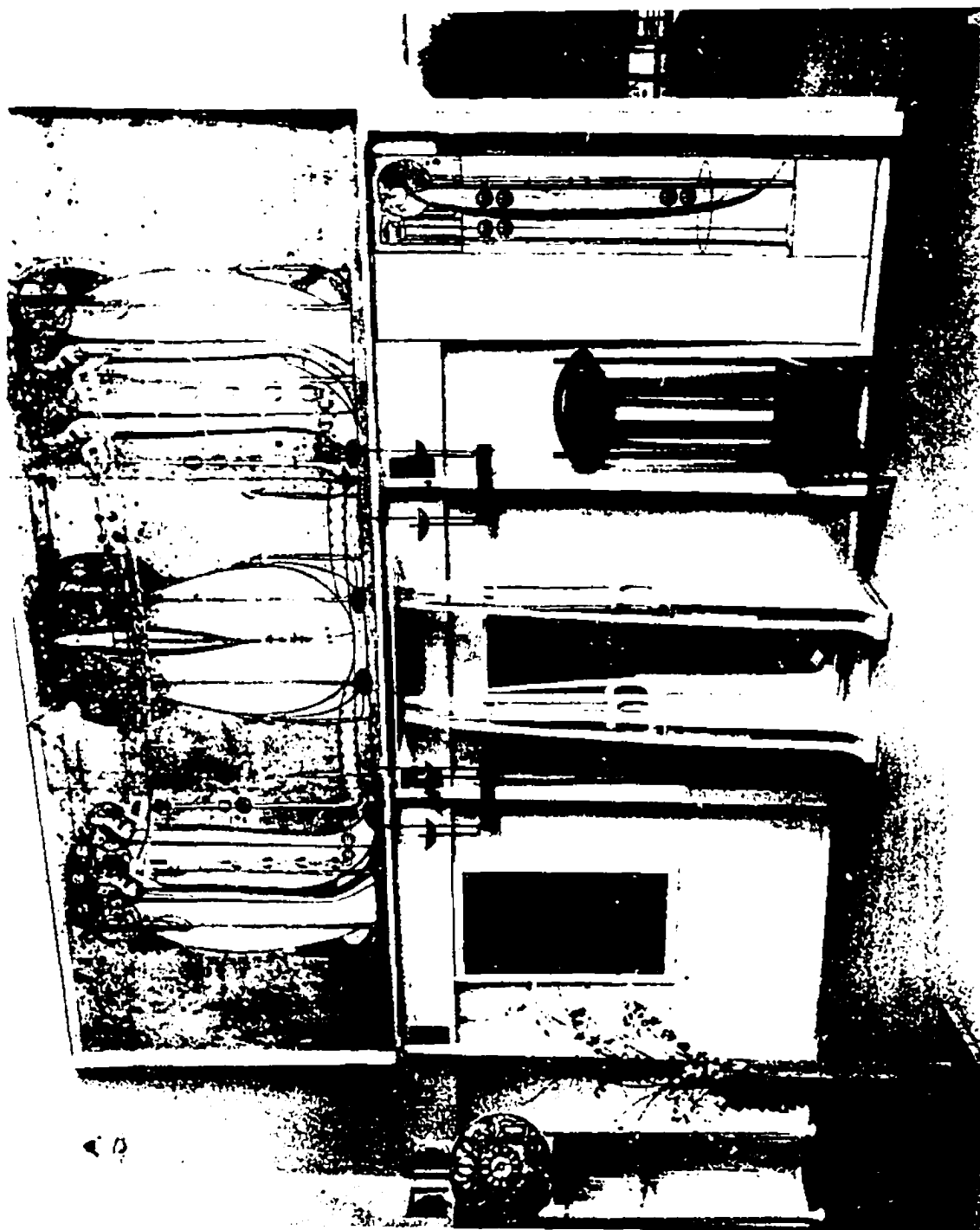


Figure 19: Frances Macdonald, The Legend of the Snowdrops, 1900.



Figure 20: Frances Macdonald, The Frog Prince, c.1898.



Figure 21: The MacNair Room at the First International Exhibition of Modern Art, Turin, 1902.

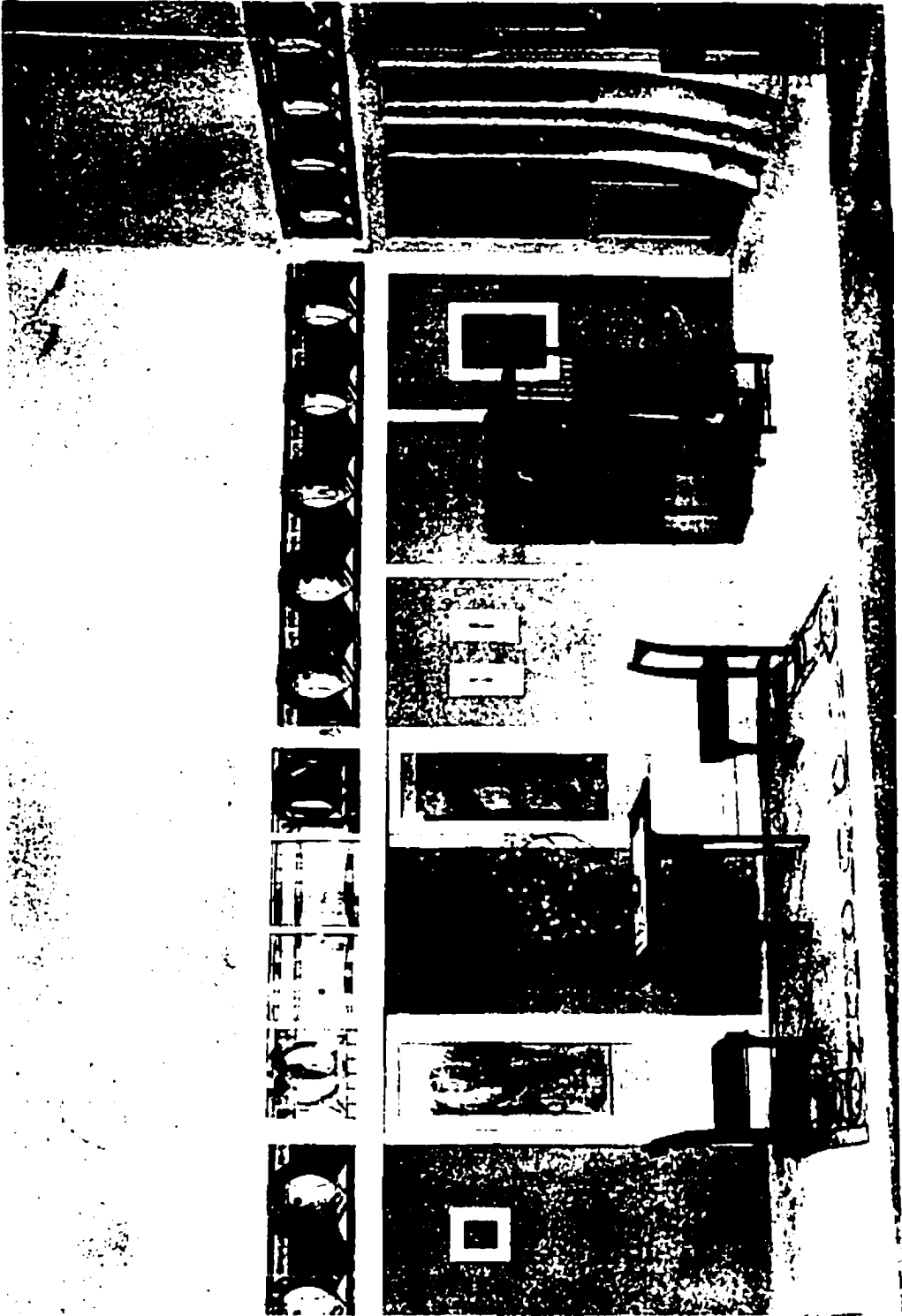


Figure 22: Frances Macdonald, 'Tis a long path that wanders to desire, c.1912-15.



Figure 23: Frances Macdonald, Man makes the beads of life
but woman must thread them, c.1912-15.



Figure 24: Frances Macdonald, Prudence and Desire, c.1912-15.

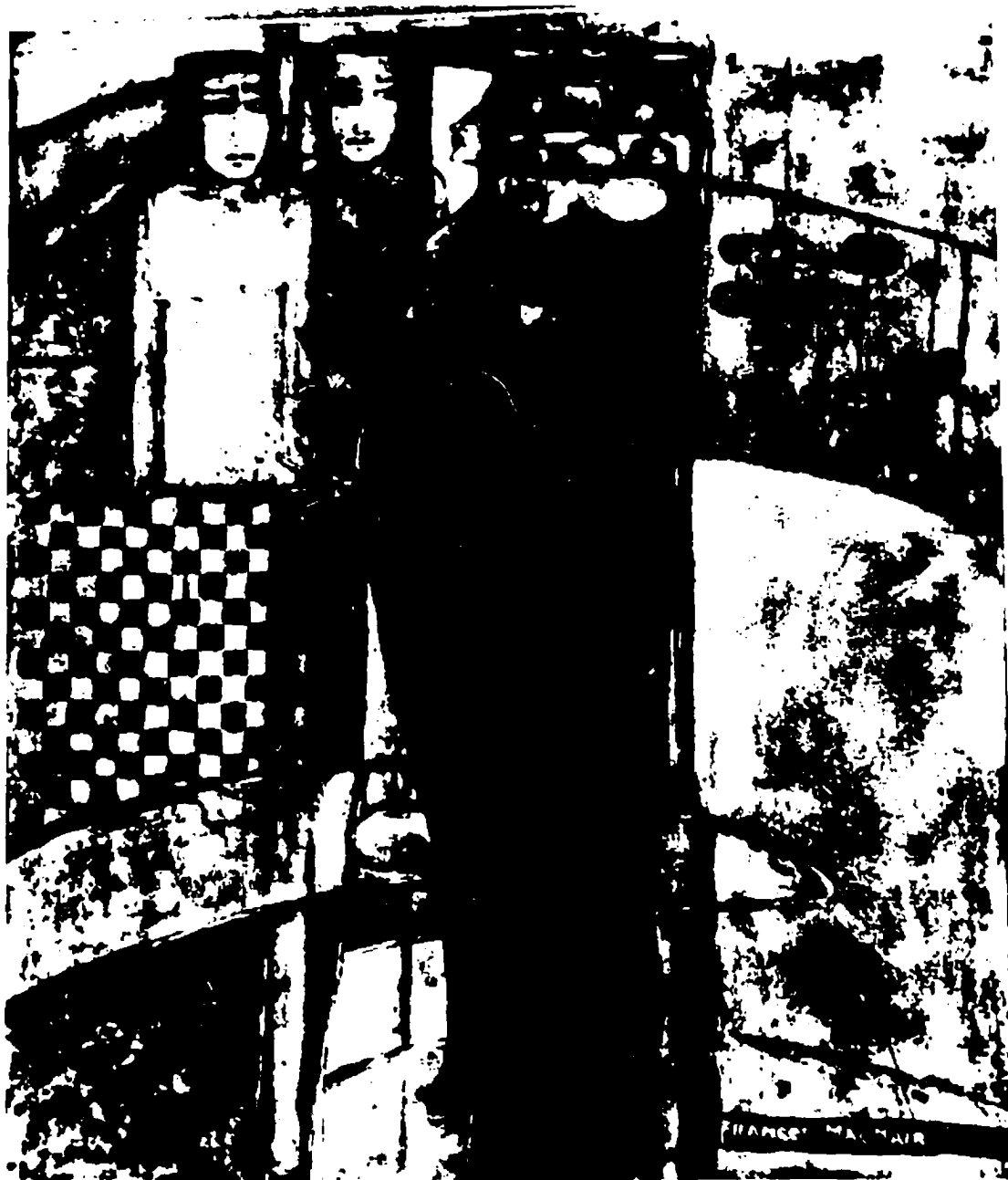


Figure 25: Frances Macdonald, Woman behind the sun, c.1912-15.



Figure 26: Margaret Macdonald, The Pool of Silence, 1913.



Figure 27: Margaret Macdonald, The Sleeper, c.1905.



DEKORATIVE MAJERET THE SLEEPERS.

MARGARET MAUDONALD MACKINTOSH - GLASGOW.

Figure 28: Margaret Macdonald, The Mysterious Garden, 1911.

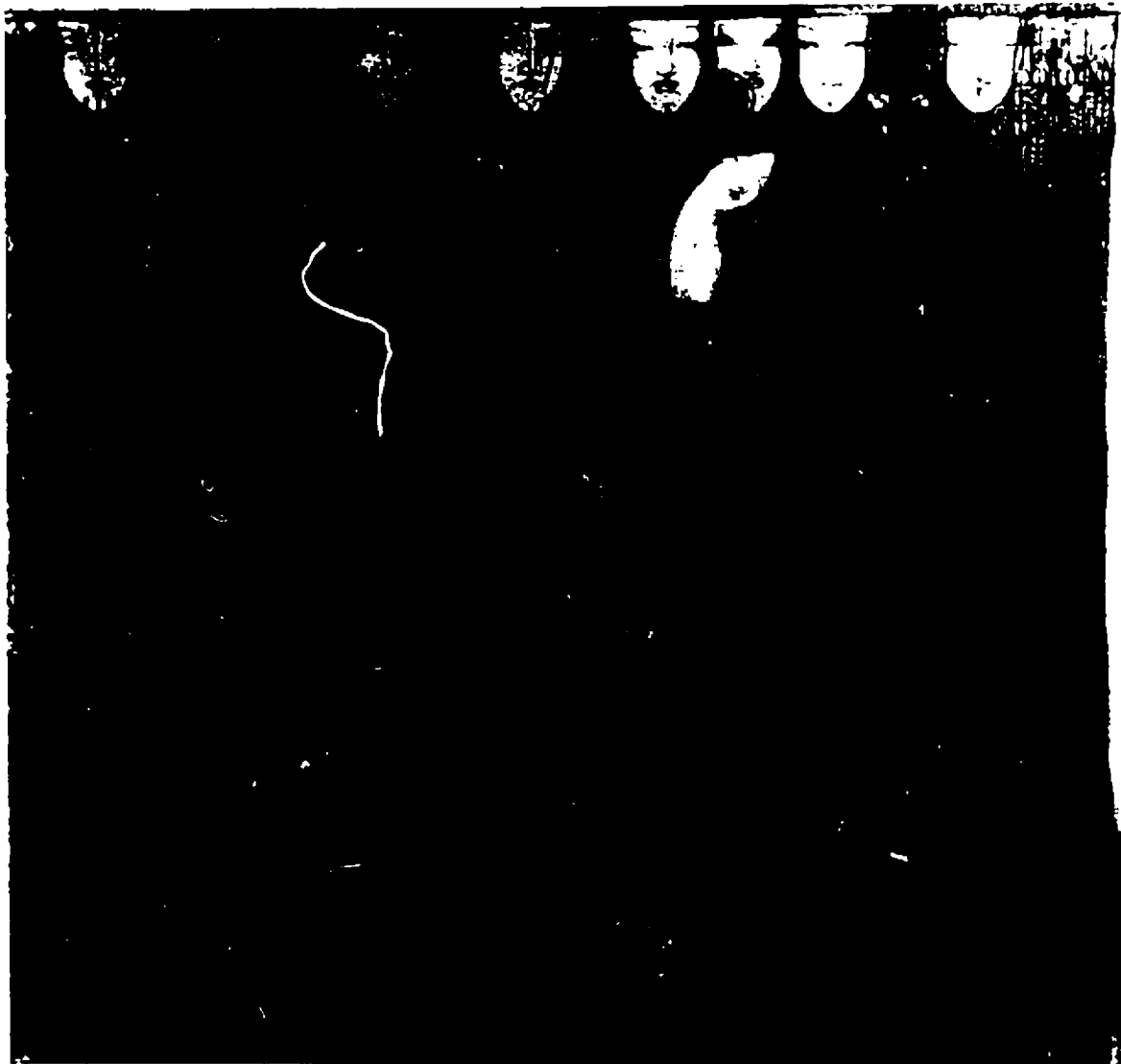


Figure 29: Margaret Macdonald, The White and the Red Rose, before 1909.



Figure 30: Margaret Macdonald, The Mysterious Garden,
c.1904-06.



Figure 31: Margaret Macdonald, La Mort Parfumée, exhibited 1921.

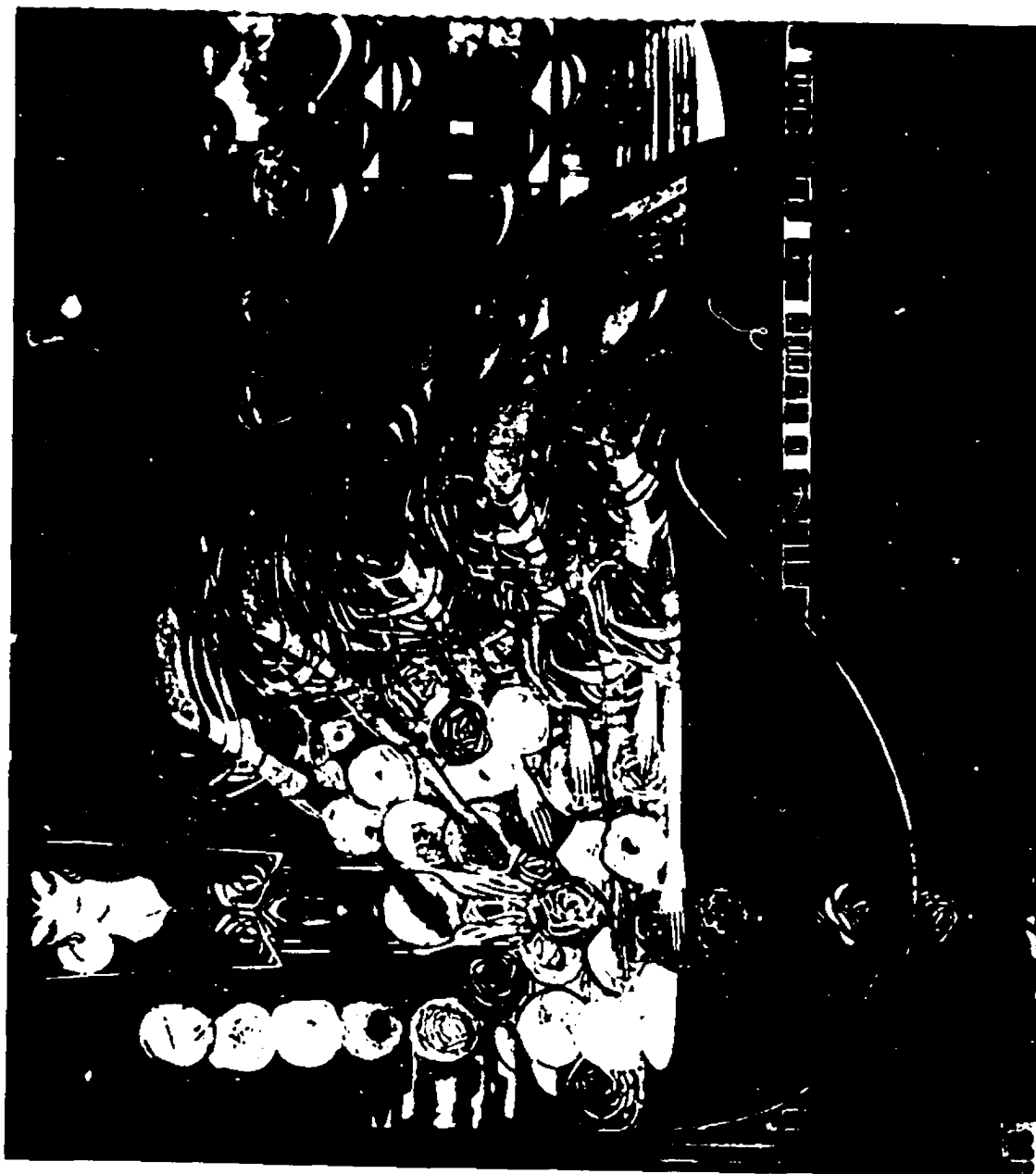


Figure 32: Margaret Macdonald, The Legend of the Blackthorns, exhibited 1922.



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