

Catherine W. Zipf. *Professional Pursuits: Women and the American Arts and Crafts Movement.* University of Tennessee Press, 2007. x + 229 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-57233-601-8.



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In the attempt to find new and interesting things to say about old topics, scholars can easily become caught in the monograph trap, writing works that build an argument on the excessively rare exception to a rule. That exceptions do exist does not automatically make them significant and often produces monographs that leave readers wondering what difference this new knowledge has made. Catherine W. Zipf's *Professional Pursuits: Women and the American Arts and Crafts Movement* clearly makes a significant contribution to historical scholarship and is also highly interesting. She does not attempt to claim originality for her topic or any great analytical depth for her study; rather, she reveals that women's participation in, and importance to, the American Arts and Crafts movement was more widespread, and more historically relevant, than previously thought.

Preceding scholarship on the Arts and Crafts movement has all but ignored women's involvement, despite the fact that in the United States

women sometimes worked more tenaciously than men to bring Arts and Crafts values, methods, and techniques to domestic art and architecture. In order to control philosophically the vast differences between the many types and styles of design that counted themselves as Arts and Crafts, many scholars have illogically defined the movement narrowly to the exclusion of the work of many women. Those scholarly works that have examined women in the movement have focused primarily on the question of how much good, or harm, the movement did to women attempting to work within it, and most have reached highly contradictory and confusing conclusions.

Zipf, an assistant professor of cultural and historic preservation at Salve Regina University, takes a different direction. Rather than asking what good the movement was for women, she focuses on how women worked within it. In searching for the role women played in this large movement, and in speculating on the importance Arts and Crafts women had for the inclusion of women

in the broader world of work, Zipf has produced an important and engaging book.

Women who sought to work in the domestic arts, from architecture to pottery and furniture design, in the second half of the nineteenth century found a unique opening in the Arts and Crafts movement. The Victorian conception of gender tied women to the home as both moral guides and producers of homemade goods; the Arts and Crafts movement emphasized both of these roles, focusing, as it did, on the ethical value of handmade instead of industrially produced goods. The movement linked women to the home on several levels, allowing them safe and socially appropriate paid work. As reform movements grew in response to the problems created by increasing industrialization and urbanization, women found that they could use the ideal of their old role as moral compass to justify taking paid work as social reformers.

The Arts and Crafts movement, then, with its combined emphasis on the home and social reform, gave women an entree into the professional world. Moreover, because of an emphasis on community, Arts and Crafts women found support (artistic and financial) within the movement that they could not find in the greater world, allowing them access to training and professional development as well as connections with potential clients.

Arts and Crafts women, then, learned that they could enter the professional workplace when paid work disguised itself as fulfilling the traditional social roles deemed appropriate for women. Zipf argues that women's professional work in the Arts and Crafts movement, which cloaked paid work in the cloth of socially acceptable roles, opened the way for artistic and other work outside the protection of a movement that emphasized areas considered traditionally female.

This study adds a new and valuable layer to our attempt to understand how women justified their movement into the professional working world without completely defying or overturning

the social structure--indeed, Arts and Crafts women used that structure to their advantage. This connection could be explored further, and Zipf leaves the door open for future scholarship in this direction. She focuses on how and why women moved into the Arts and Crafts movement and the role they took in the movement. Women were not only involved in the movement, she discovers, but were vital to its direction and commercial success.

If Zipf's writing is sometimes slightly less than inspired, it is always clear and to the point, making *Professional Pursuits* useful for general audiences and particularly for undergraduate classes in women's history, modern art history, the history of industrial America, or the Progressive Era. Zipf divides each chapter into two parts, first providing an overview of women in a particular area of the Arts and Crafts movement and then including a case study as illustration. Zipf considers women as architects, inventors, executives, editors, and, finally, contributors broadly within the Arts and Crafts movement. Each overview focuses both on its particular topic within the Arts and Crafts movement and on that topic more broadly, thus ably demonstrating the different opportunities for women to work within and outside the movement. One upshot of these overviews is that they provide a good basic synopsis of the period and of women's place in this unstable era. Undergraduates will find these overviews useful, although experts may find them repetitive.

A case study follows each overview, with particular attention paid to San Diego architect Hazel Wood Waterman; potter and inventor Mary Louise McLaughlin (Cincinnati); Candace Thurber Wheeler, executive of several New York Arts and Crafts businesses that focused on and supported women artists; Syracuse editors Adelaide Alsop Robineau (*Keramic Studio*) and Irene Sargent (*The Craftsman*). Anyone searching for supplemental readings for a course in regional history will find this work disappointing. Although the movement did have regional importance throughout the

country, for example in the Tulane University Decorative Art League, this is a national story, indeed even an international one, and Zipf presents it as such.

Well researched in the personal papers of Irene Sargent and Hazel Wood Waterman, as well as articles in contemporary art and design publications, this book avoids the common tendency to lack clarity when assigning agency. Zipf does not head too far down the shady path of implying agency without providing evidence of the consciousness of such action. In fact, she often does find explicit consciousness when women used their involvement in the Arts and Crafts movement to organize politically for women's rights and Progressive agendas.

Despite its strengths, Zipf's work sometimes feels limited in scope and short on in-depth analysis. A few other, more minor, troubles, such as a full paragraph explaining the number of hits various names of Arts and Crafts notables produces at Amazon.com, reveal the work to be a first book (based on the author's dissertation) and occasionally make the scholarship feel slightly unfinished. Fortunately, these moments are few and do not disrupt the overall quality of the scholarship. Zipf has discovered an important common component of both the Arts and Crafts and women's movements and has written about it convincingly to produce a work valuable for readers on every level, from experts to undergraduates. My hope is that women's historians will pick up on the direction in which this work points and begin to evaluate the influence women's work in the Arts and Crafts movement had on social structures and gender relationships within the broader culture.

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