

# eNEWSLETTER

Women's Arts Association / Cymdeithas Celfyddydau Menywod

## Women's Arts eNewsletter issue 5 published Sept 2013

### Three Women Printmakers

Phillippa Sibert  
Catherine Ade  
Carla Shepherd



*Phillippa Sibert*

Catherine Ade recently completed her MA in printmaking where she focused on refining her knowledge of lithography. She works on both plate and traditional stone to create figurative lithographic drawings printed in subtle colours. Her interest is in observing everyday life, specifically city life, and she uses the street scene as a way of depicting detachment and the anonymity of our everyday. Phillippa Sibert is a painter and printmaker who works from her studio in West Wales. Her mixed media prints are concerned with conveying her relationship with the natural world. She uses a variety of materials and methods to build up rich layers and textures with natural elements, while Carla Shepherd's small but stunning photo etchings utilize found images to explore notions of memory.



*Carla Shepherd*

*Exhibition at Butetown History and Arts Centre until 22nd September*



*Catherine Ade*

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# COMMENT

## The Women's Arts Association Office



From 1995 to 2004 Permanent Waves, as Women's Arts was then known, had an office, a meeting room and the Digital Arts Workshop in a warehouse on an old industrial estate in Ely, Cardiff. This was the entrance. The rent was very cheap!



In 2004 Women's Arts moved to Bute Street in Cardiff Bay to a smart office and workshop room.



In 2010 Women's Arts moved to 4 Dock Chambers in Bute St, in the same terrace as the previous premises. The office is now a shared room and appropriately housed within an art centre!

**THE WOMEN'S ARTS ASSOCIATION** was born out of the desire of a small group of women to increase the visibility of the art of women practitioners in Wales. This grew from feelings they had of frustration and exasperation at the lack of presence that women artists of all disciplines had in the arts in Wales at that time. It was apparent that few if any were receiving the promotion their male counterparts enjoyed. Grants, bursaries, publications, solo exhibitions, purchases and commissions were dominated by men. Virtually all of the teaching staff in art colleges were men and men also held most of the senior positions in universities. Women, it seemed, had been written out and little effort was being made anywhere to consider the value and creativeness of women.

A small group of women under the aegis of the then South Glamorgan County Council Women's Committee (the only one in Wales) met to devise a means to put women artists in the public light, to promote the creative talents of women in Wales. This Discussion Group (as it was then called) decided to have an annual Women's Arts festival and with no real funding, only the generosity of the Council, the group set to work to organise the first Women's Arts Festival. After its success of the first two years, it was combined with the celebrations for International Women's Day and over the subsequent years more and more women came to take part.

# WOMEN'S ARTS continued

Soon the need to support women at other times of the year became apparent so funding was acquired from Cardiff City Council and the Arts Council of Wales, a modest office was established and eventually support to employ some paid staff was found. By 1995 the organisation had become a charity and was developing projects from which many women benefitted.

Over the thirty years Women's Arts has continued to celebrate International women's Day with open and solo exhibitions of women's art, performances, lectures and talks, film and video shows and many, varied demonstrations of women's creativity.

The organisation has survived many attempts to damage its reputation. There was a vitriolic review of the first open exhibition by a male art writer/artist who, it turned out, had never seen the exhibition. One year sabotage of all the festival publicity material was fortunately discovered in time to be salvaged. Another year a well-known newspaper orchestrated the impersonation of a female artist by a male student who purported in the press to have made the only sale from the art exhibition. The publication of a small book of poetry upset a few councilors as a poem made reference to corrupt politicians, which apparently one Councillor identified with! Threats of legal action were reported in the press.

Women's Arts has employed many artists to run workshops, projects for women in isolation, classes with disadvantaged women, digital arts courses (it set up in 1997 what was arguably the first computer arts workshop in Wales using Apple computers). This concentrated on giving women the knowledge and confidence to promote their own art practices.

In 2010 by removing the revenue funding for Women's Arts, the Arts Council of Wales and Cardiff Council caused the loss of all project funding, the redundancy of all of the staff followed and the loss of the digital arts studio and the working office.

Next year is the thirtieth anniversary of the Women's Arts Association. We have weathered many potential disasters but are still here, working for creative women. Undoubtedly the Women's Arts Association has made a difference for many women both in Wales and beyond. The intention is to carry on with this objective for however long it is necessary.

**THE WALES ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN** is the sister organisation of Women's Arts. It is a women's rights campaigning group and it too was born in 1984 and had strong connections to the South Glamorgan County Council Women's Committee. The Wales Assembly of Women grew out of the earlier Wales Women's Rights Committee which lobbied for the Sex Discrimination Legislation and the setting up of the Equal Opportunities Commission. This paved the way to the amazing equal representation of women in the first National Assembly for Wales.

The Wales Assembly of Women is a Non Governmental Organisation accredited to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Representatives have attended every major U.N. world conference for women since Nairobi in 1985 - Beijing in 1995, Beijing plus Five in 2000, plus Ten in 2005, plus Fifteen in 2010 and every annual UN session of the Commission on the Status of Women to date.

<http://www.walesassemblyofwomen.co.uk>

Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics  
(CAWP)

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/cawp/latest.html>

Convention for the Elimination of all forms of  
Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>

European Women's Lobby

<http://www.womenlobby.org/>

Fawcett Society

<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/>

Women's Budget Group

<http://www.wbg.org.uk/>

Million Women Rise

<http://www.millionwomenrise.com/>

Equality and Human Rights Commission

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

Feminista

<http://ukfeminista.org.uk/>

# WHAT'S HAPPENING

## Ray Howard-Jones 1903-1996 A Retrospective



Tenby Museum and Art Gallery Sep 6th. – Oct.18th 2013 official opening of the Ray Howard-Jones exhibition on Sept 6th. at 6pm. School of Art, Aberystwyth University - Monday 17 February 2014 – Friday 28 March 2014 (Gallery 1 & 2); Hang begins Tuesday 11 February private view 7:30 on Friday 14 February.

The University of South Wales, Treforest Oriol Y Bont Gallery, April - May 2014 dates TBC. Arts Central Gallery, Town Hall, Barry, Vale of Glamorgan...Summer 2014 TBC.

## Lucy Tomlins & Becky Whitmore Bay Art, Bute St, Cardiff bay.

Lucy Tomlins combines the concept of readymade with advanced craftsmanship, resulting in beautifully crafted sculptures and crisp-sharp photographs of everyday consumer objects.

In Becky Whitmore's own practice she seeks out and remakes abandoned, forgotten and discrete objects. The things that fascinate her are often in a state of flux or suspension, understated or taken for granted in their previous lives.

Exhibition continues 17 September - 11 October 2013. Gallery open Tuesday - Saturday 12 - 5

## Mira Schendel 1919 - 1988

Mira Schendel is at Tate Modern, London SE1, 25 September to 19 January 2014

Mira is perhaps best known for her use of language and letters, often in an abstract aesthetic rather than a readable, meaning-making way.

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/mira-schendel>



# MEMBERS' PROFILES



## Sue Roberts

My work is about the concept of woman, what is felt, what is experienced, it is about emotions and the twists and turns of relationships and exchanges experienced in our daily lives.

I explore emotions, feelings, and sensations. My work deals with ideas of beauty. It seeks to magnetically draw in or repel the viewer through the encounter with surface or tactility. I am interested in notions of womanliness and where this leads.

I work in 3-D, using clay and plaster but also consolidate form in 2-D, drawing the surfaces I have experienced. I have been exploring through metals using both bronze and cast iron, drawing, photography, film, and installations. In 2007/8, and 2009/2010 and 2011/2014 I had an Arts Council Wales funding to produce new work. I have shown internationally, in NY, Melbourne Australia, Dublin, Venice and Vienna in group shows. Some of my work is held in private collections.

<http://www.suerobertsartist.co.uk/>

## Penny Hallas

I'm interested in the various strategies by which human beings appropriate and abandon aspects of identity, creating systems and patterns of thought, feeling and behaviour which are continually being broken into by other systems and patterns. 'Self' and 'other', object and subject are in an endless state of flow and interchange and always vulnerable to irruptions (sometimes blindly destructive) of desire and fantasy. The challenge for me is to find ways of depicting these kinds of process, retaining something of the energy and surprise inherent in them.

A constantly recurring motif is the human head, which could be seen as the representative sign for this complex process, simultaneously both object and subject, at once a barrier between the outside and the inside and a continually metamorphosing site of interaction between the two.

[www.pennyhallas.co.uk](http://www.pennyhallas.co.uk)  
[boxingthechimera.blogspot.co.uk](http://boxingthechimera.blogspot.co.uk)



# EXOTIC CROP

## Exotic Crop's Curator Melissa Hinkin 'In Conversation'

Exhibition 28 July - 26 August 2013

Goat Major Project Projects, 70a Llandaff Road, Cardiff

Featuring works by Rebecca Gould, Suzanne Mooney and Mary Vettise

The Goat Major Project is collaboration by artist and curator Richard Higlett and arts consultant Emma M Price to develop a space for curatorial experimentation, and over the eighteen months or so since it opened, the modest gallery space within the Prinhaus Workshops complex has offered an engaging series of exhibitions. Differing approaches to displaying and exhibiting artworks are extended and interrogated through open forum events and discussions the range of curatorial practices.

Melissa Hinkin is the latest curator to 'play' with the limited space, and for Exotic crop she has made it an obviously feminine one too, painting the walls a peachy colour – Apricot Crush apparently. This was one of the subjects she discussed on Thursday 22nd August during her curator 'In Conversation' session with Arts Journalist and Public Arts Consultant Emma Geliot at the GMP venue.



Curator Melissa Hinkin (right) with Emma Geliot

Hinkin, for the last two years a Curatorial Assistant at the arts organisation Artes Mundi, and previously an Exhibitions and Education Assistant at the Oriel Davies Gallery in Newtown, is the first female curator at GMP. She described painting the walls to make the compact space feel even smaller, emphasising intimacy and eschewing any sense of white cube, closing the gap between work and space as well as viewer.

In response to Geliot's questions about how the exhibition came together and the role of the artists in negotiating the space, Hinkin described how, having seen Mary Vettise's work during her time at Oriel Davies,

she was keen to present her film *Persephone* - its images, colours and texts - in dialogue with works by other female artists. Rebecca Gould's collaged fabric works she already knew, and was attracted by their saturated colours and allusions to consumerism, while she was aware of Suzanne Mooney's photographs initially only from exhibition imagery online. Following studio visits, the exhibition developed as Hinkin described 'more like a collaboration', the only difficulty being securing all of the work she wanted for the show. She spoke of the 'consensual dialogue' that produced the final look of the exhibition, with all of the artists involved in the installation, and described it all as having been quite straightforward. The challenge of accommodating works by three artists, especially ones with such different practices (and who didn't know each other beforehand) in such a small space could have given her significant problems. That she can talk about the process as straightforward though speaks volumes for her curatorial style, and of the artists' responses to her vision for the show. Hinkin listened to them when she wanted to paint 'a crazy floor' and they weren't keen on the idea, and with the benefit of hindsight acknowledged that changing too many things around the works might have made it look too much like her solo show. But then she has come to curating through an artistic route rather than from a theoretical one, and that practising background has given her a confidence with artists and a sound understanding of their imperatives. Hinkin firmly believes that 'having confidence, trust and open communication is key' in the artist - curator relationship.

To Geliot's final questions about her future as an Independent Curator, Hinkin spoke enthusiastically about building on the experience gained at GMP and approaching other venues with experimental curatorial ideas. She was also keen to rekindle her own art practice. In the Q & A that followed she reiterated that it is difficult to separate out one's own artistic ideas from curatorial practice since '...influences blur and bleed over and vice-versa. Working closely with artists gets the creativity flowing'

*Mary Vettise's sound piece forming the invitation to Exotic Crop can be heard through the GMP home page at <http://www.goatmajorprojects.com/page3.htm>.*

*Vettise's *Persephone* can be seen at <http://www.maryvettise.co.uk/>*

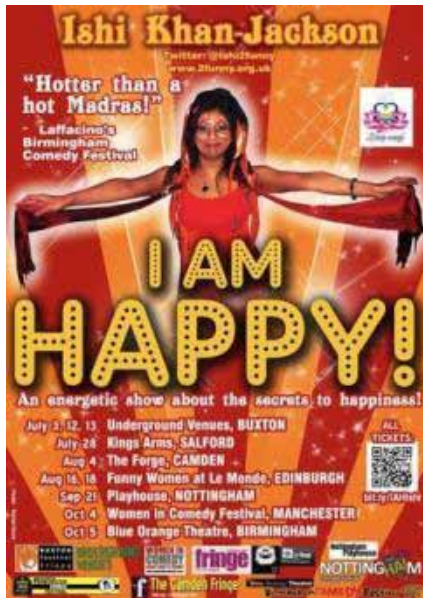
*Gould's *Zeitgeist One* and *Zeitgeist Two* at <http://www.rebeccagould.co.uk/>*

*Mooney's *Edge of Collapse* series at <http://suzannemooney.net/works/the-edge-of-collapse/>*

Jan Bennett

# Reviews

## I am Happy - comedy review by Madelaine Moor



I am happy! is billed as “An energetic show about the secrets to happiness” and it is certainly energetic! The stage is set up with a box (disguised as a giant boombox) containing her props, a mic stand and a giant banner emblazoned with a picture of Ishi and ‘I AM HAPPY!’ on it. Consequently, it feels like we are about to meet a motivational speaker rather than a stand-up; not at all in a negative way you understand, as indeed there is an element of happiness ‘therapy’ involved in seeing this show.

When Ms Khan-Jackson finally appears on stage it is in traditional Indian garb and she treats us to a dance to Jai Ho during which she plays peekaboo from behind a tree (or the niftily disguised mic stand with a small banner with the work ‘tree’ stuck on it) and drags an unwitting man up from the audience to be her ‘Leading Man’ (he is given a notice telling us this to hang around his neck). She also promises us the routine in 3D, which I found the most amusing, as she asked us to make 3D glasses by holding our hands round our eyes and then proceeded to run at us from the stage into the audience. Needless to say, it becomes very apparent from the beginning this show is going to be very silly indeed.

Ms Khan-Jackson certainly has an interesting story to tell: a British Muslim of Indian heritage, born in Kenya, raised in Zambia, schooled by Catholics and finally now living in the UK and performing as a stand-up comedian. We are introduced to her family, as she embodies her Lady Gaga loving Grandmother who likes nothing more than hanging out in the cafes and

shops at the new hospital in Birmingham; her father, a ‘Pakistani wannabe’ who threatens to send her there to be ‘fixed’ after he catches her dancing to the BBC World Service after lights-out and her mother, who reels off lists of ‘harams’ or taboos such as perfume, fornication, fluttering eyelashes and definitely no dancing.

The material itself is a bit of a mixed bag in terms of what lands with the audience and what doesn’t. Generally, the gag-based material is a little weaker than the character based storytelling. It is here that the stories really come alive, the characters drawing us into her confused cultural world as a teenager and her illustrating her journey to where she is today with some very funny anecdotes. Ms Khan-Jackson also clearly has the touch with an audience and her interaction with them is firm (indeed she managed to get the rather reserved audience on the night I saw the show singing a Zambian song and on their feet dancing) but so charming and full of positivity that it would be hard to say no to her!

Despite the odd cheesy gag, I am Happy is great fun and it is genuinely refreshing to see not only a female comic, but an Indian/Zambian/Muslim/British one! I absolutely came away smiling, which I guess is the point!

(c) Madelaine Moore

*Written, Performed and Produced by Ishi Khan-Jackson*  
<http://www.2funnyishi.co.uk/i-am-happy-tour.php>

### First Saudi comedienne takes to the stage at Edinburgh Fringe

Saudi Arabian playwright, actress and academic, Dr Maisah Sobaihi, is making history by being the first performer from the kingdom to showcase their work at Edinburgh’s famous Fringe Festival.

Her one woman play “Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia,” is inspired by elements of Sobaihi’s own life and other Saudi women she has met.

Dr Sobaihi performed the show in universities and private homes because the country does not have a significant theatre scene.

Although the show examines the challenges faced by Saudi women, she hopes it will educate foreigners about their culture and break down some barriers.

Watch a video clip at -

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/edinburgh-festival/10240548/First-Saudi-comedienne-takes-to-the-stage-at-Edinburgh-Fringe.html>

# REVIEWS

Haifaa al-Mansour



The first Saudi teen rebel girl's bike movie has its eyes on the prize.

Narratively, *Wadjda* is of a type rather than trailblazingly original: the earnest but gently comic tone as well as the content of Samira Makhmalbaf's films is particularly recalled, as is the emotional trajectory of the 'kids compete' documentary strain so beloved by festivals since the success of *Spellbound* (2002). Still, Haifaa al Mansour's debut merits recognition for its fresh-feeling take on the trope whereby the travails of a child protagonist mirror those of a wider society. It also has a place in the history books as the first feature film ever to have been shot entirely in Saudi Arabia – and by a female director at that.

That ten-year-old Wadjda (Waad Mohammed) is something of a rebel is established when we glimpse the jeans and baseball boots she wears underneath her abaya. She also listens to western pop music on the radio, hangs out with a boy, Abdullah, and has her own small business selling plaited friendship bracelets to her schoolmates.

When Abdullah crows about having a bicycle, Wadjda is inspired to step up her moneymaking activities in order to buy one for herself. As in De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), a bike symbolises freedom, with potency added here by the fact that the riding of one by a woman is widely frowned on.

The limitations and humiliations conferred by her sex confront Wadjda everywhere she turns, from the building-site worker who sexually harasses her to a family tree on the wall of her home that lists only males. Wadjda is astute enough to realise that she can bypass social or religious approval if she's financially independent – but, when she endeavours to sell her bracelets to a market trader, she quickly learns that she'll always be undercut by bulk product imported from China.

For Wadjda's mother – less entrepreneurial, more traditional, and as in love with and subservient to her elusive husband as her society could wish – the consequences of patriarchal dominance are yet more fraught and contradictory. She loses one job when her driver lets her down, in a country that doesn't allow women to drive themselves, and the possibility of another when she declines to associate with men unveiled. Her cherished marriage, meanwhile, is thrown off course by genetic happenstance: her failure to produce a male heir.

Wadjda, in the midst of all this, is a bit of a wish-fulfilment figure: a tomboy superheroine who gives pleasurable vent to the audience's frustration when she answers back to bullies and makes rakish little gestures of defiance. Here, the film rather seeks to have its cake and eat it too (though one could more kindly judge that it's just optimistic). For political reasons, it needs to show Wadjda as cowed and oppressed; yet for feelgood reasons it wants to show her as indefatigable.

Wadjda also has a bit of a tendency to deploy the very tactics of her enemies in resisting them – confronting her pious teacher with a rumoured sexual indiscretion to show her up; threatening her mother's unreliable driver with deportation via Abdullah's politically connected relatives. This too can be interpreted in two ways: as a flaw in the film's moral logic, or as an observation on how readily children learn from the examples that are set for them.

A final slight rub comes from the fact that the film rewards Wadjda's unconventionality with conventional satisfactions: winning her bicycle money by outdoing her classmates at Koran recitation, and receiving – with a coy simper – Abdullah's shy declaration that he'd like to marry her when they're older. The latter is an odd moment. On one level, it's just cute. But it's also saddening, in that it lodges the easy friendship between Abdullah and Wadjda within the system of ownership and capitulation that so annoys her. Worse, it risks coyly reassuring us that our difficult heroine is still marriageable, like a spunky Disney princess.

These are little flaws, however, in the fabric of a first-time feature that doesn't falter in achieving its main goal: to make clear certain realities of female life experience in Saudi Arabia while also proffering comfort in the form of the hope of a fairer future. Its most receptive audience might be among schoolchildren, although certain elements of Saudi custom that are rushed over in the film (such as the prohibition against women driving) would have to be explained.

*Hannah McGill, BFI, Film of the Week*



# REVIEWS

## Ellen Gallagher

That artistic inspiration does not diminish with the passing of generations is a much-needed tribute to human survival. The recent exhibition at Tate Modern of another outstanding and original talent in Ellen Gallagher, further exemplifies the abundance that deserves recognition but can miss out. Disproportionately female, we may think.



Her range of subject matter is largely but by no means exclusively based on black New York culture: her topics include numerous aspects of contemporary existence. Among these is the opportunity to ridicule that mainstay of capitalism - commercial advertising: "Look glamorous for him with howard real hair attachments" - except that these appear to be metallic chain constructions, with its metaphor springing readily to the viewer's mind.

Satirical reference to beauty products abound eg "Mercolised Cream Generates Gloriously fair skin," one of dozens included in her iconic series of facial cartoons. These again focus on hair, or rather on yellow wigs, each different and individually structured; likewise the women's faces, both black and white. Another series contains mask-heads of "men who go places", and "Supergroom proved best", a conventionally handsome male head, parodied and half obliterated by one of her yellow masks.

Her individual pieces cover a wide range of interests and variety of technique. A self-portrait, clothed, lying propped on one elbow on the psychiatrist's couch, watching Freud writing his notes, was included in her exhibition at the Freud Museum in 2005. The sardonic glint in her eyes is noticeable.

Other work draws on her wide interests and displays impressive versatility of technique and material. Depiction of natural history, wildlife and especially the translucence of water eg "Watery Ecstatic" 2001 and luminosity of its creatures, her interest in Egyptian and Jewish history, provide a satisfying contrast to her social comment and confirmation of her artistic status, should any be needed.

Working methods, we are told, often include flat surface, better to facilitate her use of materials such as plasticine and a variety of fragments eg rubber, paper, enamel or linen, as in "Bling, bling" 2011. Sometimes she uses a "cut and paste" technique as in her satirical advertisements: "Free 1st lesson in Nursing", "Earn 70 dollars weekly as Graduate Practical Nurse", surrounded by narrow viper-like shapes among a cluster of fashionable heads of women pressing for attention from the black nurses. Much of her work appears to present abstract surface texture, such as "Oh, Susanna" 1995, but looking more closely reveals dozens of pairs of attentive eyes. Colour is prolific and effective in both abstract and natural presentation: the unlikely subject "Greasy 2011" is both 777 colourful and contains subtle monochrome depictions of a human head.



At not yet 50 years of age, it is to be hoped that there is plenty of time for us to hear more of the achievement of Ellen Gallagher and her strong perception of life in the 21st Century.

Audrey Jones

# Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas: How we made The Shop

Extract - Read the full article at

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/aug/12/tracey-emin-sarah-lucas-shop>



*Sarah Lucas and Tracey Emin outside their shop on London's Brick Lane in 1993.  
Photograph: Carl Freedman*

## Tracey Emin

It was 1992, and Sarah Lucas and I were on the hunt for a studio. She'd been sharing one with her boyfriend, Gary Hume, but they'd split up. Although I had no money, Sarah had just sold some work to Charles Saatchi for £3,000. "I don't really want to be an artist," I told her, "but I would come to a studio to write, make tea and chat." She said: "You're on." We decided to look around the East End. Back then, nearly every shop on Brick Lane was boarded up – everywhere was, in fact. We looked at each other and said: "It'd be good to have a shop." We knew what each other meant – not a studio, but an actual shop. Once we had the idea, it took us just two days to find one. There's this great photo of us down Bethnal Green Road, drinking a weird East End drink, port and lemon perhaps, toasting our shop.

## Sarah Lucas

It was just an idea we had at an Indian restaurant on Brick Lane, but we were excited about it right away. We

both had an anti-art slant, and this was always more than just a shop: it was a social thing. I remember we wanted it to be in the Brick Lane area mainly because of its bagel shop! But both of us were marketgoers and had sold stuff there when we needed a few bob.

I'd given up on art two years before, but then I had my first solo show and people were clamouring to offer me exhibitions. I needed more time, though, and was giving that whole world a wide berth, or saying: "Well, I'm doing this, see it if you want." I'd stopped having a studio: I've never been very studio-ish, I'm still not.

We never knew who or what would come in the shop door. It was all quite surreal, especially the Saturday nights. There was always an opportunity for a chat, which Tracey and I both enjoy.

We would buy cheap things then customise them. Tracey's T-shirt with the slogan "She's kebab" was a bestseller, and the Damien Hirst ashtray was Tracey's idea, too. We also stuck pictures of ourselves on mugs. Not everything was collaborative, though. The best things I made alone were small, delicate mobiles with pictures of me hanging from them.

It had been round-the-clock for six months. Tracey and I were offered an art project in Geneva, which we said yes to. Eating ice cream out there the whole time, we felt like a couple of recuperating old grannies.



*The Last Night of the Shop 3.7.93 1993.  
Collection Tate, London*

# Edith Downing (1857 - 1931): Artist and Activist

My eye was caught recently by a life size bronze bust of a woman studying "The Old Hundreth" in a small music book. She holds her arms across her chest with one hand holding one cover to that the other creating a diagonal which breaks the horizontal emphasis of her arms and the vertical lines of the folds of her dress. What was striking was the deep sense of contemplation and absorption in the music the composition evokes. The label proclaimed it to be Music/Cerddoriaeth by Edith Downing (see illustration), a work produced in 1897 and named at the time Music Sent up to God.

The catalyst for this article was what the label went on to say: Edith Downing was born in Cardiff and was a suffragette who spent some time in prison on hunger strike. What intrigued me to find out more was the contrast between the classical, almost academic, style of her art with the intense radical political activity she was clearly involved in. How well had she combined the two?



*Edith Downing at work*

Edith Elizabeth Downing was born in Cardiff in 1857 and the 1881 census shows that when she was twenty-four she was living in Roath in Cardiff with her parents (her father was Belgian Consul and merchant), two older sisters and her younger brother.

According to a letter she wrote to the Museum in 1929 her interest in art and sculpture was encouraged when she was a schoolgirl at Cheltenham College. Then, sometime in the 1880s, she moved to London with her sister because by the 1891 census she was living in Chelsea and a student studying at the Female School of Art in South Kensington which was part of the National Art Training School (and which became the Royal College of Art in 1896). Female artists not only had to study in a separate building from the men but any models in the life classes had to be decorously draped on the grounds of propriety. Then, for a year from 1892, she studied at the Slade School of Fine Art. By the 1901 census she had moved to Tite Street in Chelsea, a centre of creative activity, where she was to remain until at least 1912. In that census she described herself as a sculptor who was living by her own means and working from home.

By 1892 she had begun to exhibit regularly at the Royal Academy and with the Society of Lady Artists (which became the Society of Women Artists in 1899). Her work was mainly in plaster although she completed a marble altarpiece with thirty-two alabaster figures for St Peter's Church, Wormbridge, Herefordshire. She continued to exhibit during the first decade of the twentieth century but during this period she also became involved with the campaign for women's electoral suffrage.

The first decade of the new century saw a re-ignition of the long campaign for women's suffrage. In 1903 Edith Downing joined the Central (later London) Society for Women's Suffrage. In 1906 this became a constituent member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) which was led by Millicent Fawcett. The NUWSS campaigned for the vote "on the same terms as it is, or may be granted to men" (basically universal suffrage) and they did this by holding public meetings, organising petitions and writing letters to politicians and newspapers.

Many became disenchanted with this constitutional approach which seemed not to be making progress in the face of government intransigence. So Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). It adopted a more restricted demand which was for votes for women meeting the complex set of property qualifications that applied to men at the time. It was a calculated judgement that such a proposal would find broader support than one for universal suffrage which would

# Edith Downing (1857 - 1931): Artist and Activist

make women the electoral majority. However, it was not the rather arcane policy differences that set the WSPU apart from the NUWSS, rather it was their tactics as they adopted an increasingly confrontational approach, attacking whichever party was in power. In October 1905 Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenny heckled Sir Edward Grey, who would shortly become Foreign Secretary in Campbell-Bannerman's Liberal Government. When they refused to stop they were arrested and fined and when they refused to pay they were sent to prison. The term "suffragette" was coined to distinguish those in the new movement from suffragists and although a feminised diminutive it was wholeheartedly embraced. They promised "deeds not words" and proceeded to fulfil that promise.

Edith Downing was also becoming disenchanted with the lack of progress being made by the NUWSS and in 1908 she joined the WPSU Chelsea branch together with her sister. In an article she wrote soon after for the weekly Newsletter of the WSPU, *Votes for Women*, she referred to "the futility of quiet work". At first she used her artistic ability to create works that could be sold to raise funds for the WSPU so in 1909 she produced ceramic statuettes of Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenny for sale at an exhibition organised by the WSPU. Her most important artistic work though was as a designer of the WPSU processions, which were becoming an increasingly important part of publicising the WPSU message. On 18th June 1910 the WPSU organised a huge march through London called "Prison to Citizenship". Together with Marion Wallace-Dunlop she designed a float "The Prisoners Tableau" The float celebrated the hunger strikers who had endured forced-feeding and "faced death without flinching". It was drawn by two white horses and featured a suffragette in prisoners garb surrounded by young women in white dress and green and purple caps looking on in admiration.

That summer had seen a suspension of militant activities whilst a new suffrage bill was introduced in Parliament. However, when the House of Commons refused to pass the new bill, the WPSU ended the truce and, on what became known as Black Friday (18th November 1910), its members demonstrated in Parliament Square and many were arrested, including Edith Downing. She was released without charge but five days later she was arrested for throwing a stone through a window of Somerset House and this time was sentenced to seven days imprisonment.

June 1911 saw perhaps the biggest and most spectacular of the WSPU's processions. This was the Women's Coronation Procession held a week before the coronation of George V and which was intended to enlist the support of the King in getting the Conciliation Bill of 1911 through Parliament. This Bill would have extended the franchise to wealthier property-owning women. The procession was led by two suffragettes on horseback with one in armour personifying Joan



*The 'Pageant of Empire' float for the Women's Coronation Procession 1911*

of Arc. In addition there was a band playing Ethel Smyth's new-completed "March of the Women" which became the suffragettes' anthem. Edith Downing was again involved with Marion Wallace-Dunlop in designing the float, "The Pageant of Empire", which was intended to represent the unity of the British Empire (illustration). On top of the float were two figures representing East and West and on the lowest tier women depicting the various colonies and dominions.

With the failure of the Conciliation Bill in parliament, the window-smashing campaign intensified and on 1st March 1912 Edith Downing was amongst those who marched through the West End smashing windows with stones and hammers. She was arrested for, rather appropriately, breaking the windows of a fine-art dealer in Regent Street. In her speech to the jury she spoke of police brutality and her regret that law-

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abiding women should be compelled to take part in such actions in breaking windows. While in Holloway Prison she took part in a mass hunger strike and was forced-fed before being released before completion of her sentence.

It is noticeable that after that event there are no records of her as a productive artist or as an activist. The reasons can only be speculated. Withdrawal from political activism might be due to the increasing militancy of the WSPU with greater and greater acts of violence and an increasingly autocratic and idiosyncratic leadership of the movement by Christabel Pankhurst. However, the absence of any further artistic activity suggests that maybe her health was permanently damaged by the brutal treatment that force-feeding entailed.

The story of her sculptures is taken up again in December 1928, by which time she is living in Peaslake, near Guildford. She writes to the National Museum offering nine of her sculptures and, moreover, she is prepared to have them cast in bronze. The Museum, after consulting Sir Gascombe John, warmly welcomes her generosity and, when they are finally received in 1930, reports that it was delighted to be able to display many of them in the main entrance. At present three of them are on public display, *Music Sent Up to God* in Gallery 15 and *Avarice* on the west stairs.

So Edith Downing's legacy is a set of fascinating sculptures and, of course, the success of the campaign to give women the vote. It took, though, a World War to shift political opinion and it was not until 1918, in The Representation of the People Act, that women over thirty were enfranchised. Finally, in



*Edith Downing*  
*Music Sent Up to God 1897*  
*Bronze, H 64 cm*

1928, another Act was passed which gave women the vote on the same terms as men. However, Edith Downing lived to see all that happen.

Sources on Edith Downing's life and work are few and far between and I have tried to restrict myself to facts that do seem verifiable.

The most important source is:

Elizabeth Crawford, *Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866-1928* (Routledge, 2001)

I also consulted [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk) and various Census returns available on-line.

I wish to thank Clare Smith for the opportunity to look at the correspondence between Edith Downing and the Museum.

Diane Davies 2013

This article was first appeared in the Friends of the National Museum Newsletter and Magazine  
Photograph of *Music Sent Up to God 1897* by permission of National Museum of Wales.

# ON LINE



## News Items from the WAA facebook page

<http://www.facebook.com/WomensArtsAssociation>

None facebook members can view Women's Arts facebook page too

The Real Work of Rosa Parks: Not Just Refusing to Move to the Back of the Bus, But Combating Sexual Violence

<http://rhrealitycheck.org/article/2013/08/23/the-real-work-of-rosa-parks-not-just-refusing-to-move-to-the-back-of-the-bus-but-combating-sexual-violence/>



Madge Gill Inside The Outside Artist Ethos - New London Exhibition

[http://www.artlyst.com/articles/madge-gill-inside-the-outside-artist-ethos-new-london-exhibition?\\_source=rss](http://www.artlyst.com/articles/madge-gill-inside-the-outside-artist-ethos-new-london-exhibition?_source=rss)

A Sweet Seven of Eleven: The Guardian First Book Award 2013 Longlist

Seven of the eleven listed are women, including the only poetry entry from Claire Trévien, for The Shipwrecked House. Trévien was this year's Readers' Choice: yet more vindication that the reading public want female literary talent to be recognised.

<http://forbookssake.net/2013/08/24/a-sweet-seven-of-eleven-the-guardian-first-book-award-2013-longlist/>

Saudi Arabia passes historic domestic abuse legislation

<http://www.trust.org/item/20130828043037-kacqu/?source=hptop>

Feminist wins Edinburgh comedy award with show poking fun at sexism

<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/aug/24/bridget-christie-wins-edinburgh-comedy-award?uni=Keyword%3Anews-grid+aux-1+Pixies%3APixies%3APosition1>

You've Never Heard Of Her, But She's Basically One Of The Most Important Women In Movie History

<http://www.upworthy.com/youve-never-heard-of-her-but-shes-basically-one-of-the-most-important-women-in-movie-history?c=upw1>

Of course all men don't hate women. But all men must know they benefit from sexism

<http://www.newstatesman.com/2013/08/laurie-penny/men-sexism>

From the archive, 22 August 1918: David Lloyd George on women and the war

The prime minister pays tribute to the 'tremendous part' women have played in Britain's war effort, both at home and abroad.

<http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2013/aug/22/women-first-world-war-lloyd-george>

Do critics paint women artists out the picture?

Bridget Riley, not David Hockney, is Britain's greatest living painter, but an ingrained prejudice against female greatness puts a glass ceiling on the pantheon as well as the boardroom

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjones-blog/2013/aug/21/women-artists-critics-glass-ceiling>

First Lady of the Last Night of the Proms

For the first time in 118 years, the conductor on the Royal Albert Hall podium will be a woman. It's a chance she is keen to take to promote equality.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/marin-alsop-first-lady-of-the-last-night-of-the-proms-8772719.html>

# REPORTS

First of all thank you to all our members for your support for, and participation in, our WAA events over the last year.

We have been concentrating on funding possibilities this year. Vicky Wilson and Dilys Jackson met with Sarah Carroll of Wales Council for Voluntary Action and later Sarah Carroll attended one of our Committee Meetings to advise us on possible funding strategies. This was very helpful and has generated contact with Katie Mallam of the 3rd Sector Council who visited our Meeting in early September.

Our 2013 'International Women's Day' events and open exhibitions were a great success.

Every year the Women's Arts Association celebrates International Women's Day with exhibitions, performances, talks and craft workshops. As in previous years the Welsh Government funded women's organisations with the help of WEN (Women's Equality Network) to hold celebratory events around Wales. Women's Arts 2013 celebrations took place at Art Central in Barry and at Butetown History and Arts Centre in Cardiff with open exhibitions and all day events in which many women took part. In Butetown History and Arts Centre. Glenn Jordan, Director of BHAC gave a talk about the history of the Centre. The Women's Arts Association is very happy to have their base in this centre and have collaborated with BHAC on projects and exhibitions for International Women's Day and will work together with BHAC in the future. Rakhsanda spoke in Dr Mwenya Chimba's place in the morning. She spoke about the work Black and Asian Women Stepping Out organisation does, working with the immigrant community on issues like domestic violence and forced marriage. There were several workshops to take part in. In the morning Mitra Saneei ran a workshop on Persian calligraphy and Di Setch ran one on ways that women artists could promote their work. Caroline Deacon and Cath Lewis both ran afternoon workshops. Caroline used plastic bottles and other recycling material to make forms and decorative objects and Cath's workshop involved making a small book using collage images and watercolour. All were very popular as were the talks and workshops at Art Central on the previous day. The Workshop was run by Vicky Wilson on Reflections, - those about oneself and those seen in the colourful reflective materials used.

Later there was a series of talks by Maggie Hampton of Disability Arts Wales who were our partners in the event and by two deaf artists, a ceramicist, Bev Bell-Hughes and a poet Donna Williams. AM Jane Hutt opened the exhibition in the afternoon. Of course there

were delicious refreshments at both events, from MIND in the Vale and from Kemi's Cafe.

Across Wales there is an increasing awareness of IWD and of the importance of noting the day to such an extent that celebrations now tend to take place throughout March and sometimes beyond. It is becoming impossible now to attend all the events one would like to experience. These range across a multitude of options from conferences to lectures, music, poetry readings, book launches and more. Most of these celebrations are organised by volunteers but more institutions are offering support which demonstrates how significant IWD is becoming.

Recently we had a Good Ideas special General Meeting which generated a lot of thought about future events.

Raffles of postcard-sized works perhaps displayed in cafe's such as Waterloo Gardens and Pettigrew Tearooms were mentioned as was a Silent Auction event possibly in March 2014. Tracy Kearns our Treasurer offered a 'Forever Living' event from which she would donate funds to WAA. A poetry event brings in a large number of participants and audience. It was suggested that a Writer in Residence during 2014 could produce a record,- Archive, Booklet,- about WAA and also run Twitter, the e-bulletin and re-organise the website.

There could be a series of recorded Interviews with perhaps 30 members from the start of the organisation to the present as a record of our 30th Anniversary, 2014. Art on the Railings was another suggestion for 2014 or for IWD. One of our members, Caroline Deacon, offered to organise a Paint the Bay Event in 2014 with a show in the Norwegian Church. Participants pay £10 to get their paper (or other medium) stamped and then through Friday and Saturday they depict the Bay handing in their work by 12 noon on Saturday for display. Prizes could be offered for different categories.

So there are plenty of opportunities for our members to participate in or contribute to. As always we need more members to join in the voluntary work that is being done constantly to create these activities and events.

Jane Taylor, printmaker, has just organised a printmakers exhibition in Butetown History and Arts Centre for the month of September to co-incide with our AGM.

Overall this has been a very successful year for WAA and I hope the next one will be even better.

*Jacqueline Alkema and Dilys Jackson (Co-Chairs)*

# Women's Arts Association

## Women's Arts Membership

Associate membership £10.00  
Ordinary membership is free.

To become an Associate Member post a membership form enclosing a cheque for £10.00 made out to Women's Arts Organisation or make a bank transfer (information below).

Download a membership form from [www.womensarts.co.uk](http://www.womensarts.co.uk) - membership page which you can print and post back or email to - [office@womensarts.co.uk](mailto:office@womensarts.co.uk). Please put MEMBERSHIP in the subject field of the email. Remember to tick the box if you wish to become an Associate Member. Enclose a cheque for £10 by post or indicate if you have made a bank transfer or have created a Standing Order

Women's Arts Association  
Sort Code: 08-90-03  
Account No: 50013461  
at  
Cooperative Bank PLC  
16-17 High Street  
Cardiff CF10 1AY

To become an ordinary member, email or post a membership form to Women's Arts Association, 4 Dock Chambers, Bute St, Cardiff Bay, CF10 5AG.

## INFORMATION

**Currently the events bulletin is unavailable.  
It is hoped to restore a regular monthly contact with members soon.**

The office is only staffed by volunteers on occasional Fridays and not necessarily all day. Emails and telephone messages are answered as soon as can be arranged.

### **[www.womensarts.co.uk](http://www.womensarts.co.uk)**

The website will carry fixed information. WAA events, members work, general information, the eNewsletter to download and archived old newsletters etc.

The eNewsletter will be available when there is enough content to make an interesting publication. This, in the main, will be dependent on members' contributions. We aim for at least twice a year but ideally we would like it to be quarterly.

**Send contributions to the Editorial team:**

Di - [di@womensarts.co.uk](mailto:di@womensarts.co.uk)

Jacqueline - [jacqueline@womensarts.co.uk](mailto:jacqueline@womensarts.co.uk).

### **[www.facebook.com/WomensArtsAssociation](http://www.facebook.com/WomensArtsAssociation)**

Women's Arts facebook page has more immediate information of interest to women. To date the page is not open for contributions direct, members will have to email pertinent material to the page administrators for posting. We have revived the group page where members can share their thoughts and ideas with each other, The Network of Women's Arts Association.

**None facebook members can view the page at the above address.**

Administrators: Di - [di@womensarts.co.uk](mailto:di@womensarts.co.uk); Isabelle - [Isabelle.a@ntlworld.com](mailto:Isabelle.a@ntlworld.com)

**Anyone who would like to volunteer for Women's Arts please contact the Chair.**

Jacqueline - [jacqueline@womensarts.co.uk](mailto:jacqueline@womensarts.co.uk).