

Postgraduate Workshop, 21 September 2015, 10-12h, Rogers Room, Woolley Building

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Current research project:

Gender, Art and Theosophy in Sydney: Louisa Haynes Le Freimann (1863-1956)

This project focuses on hitherto overlooked Australian woman artist Louisa Haynes Le Freimann (1863-1956) and her contribution to Theosophy and the arts in Australia. Trained at Birmingham Municipal School of Art and strongly influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement, Haynes Le Freimann emigrated to Australia in 1892 and joined the Theosophical Society in Sydney in 1897. The painter and her contribution to the arts, particularly in the context of the TS, have remained largely unacknowledged, except for some critical (and partly sensationalist) attention that her Impressionist *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide* (c. 1896, National Library of Australia) has received. Her paintings link her to a group of Australian women artists analysed in Jenny McFarlane's *Concerning the Spiritual* (2012). The works of Haynes Le Freimann, like those of theosophical artists Jane Price and Florence Fuller, belong to a subtly spiritual, feminine, and thus alternative, strand of modernism.

Recommended Reading

Plummer, Patricia. "The Hidden History of an Australian Painter: Louisa Haynes Le Freimann (1863-1956)." *Gender Down Under*, ed. Viktoria Herche. Special Issue. *Gender Forum* 53 (2015) [open access journal; now online at www.genderforum.org/issues/gender-down-under/].

McFarlane, Jenny. "Towards an Alternative Tradition of Visuality." *Concerning the Spiritual: The Influence of the Theosophical Society on Australian Artists, 1890-1934*. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly, 2012. 1-13.

Study Questions

In preparation for the workshop please consider the following questions concerning the chapter from McFarlane's *Concerning the Spiritual*:

1. Look up a definition of 'Modernism' and find out about the intertextual reference in the title of McFarlane's book.
2. Why is it important to consider the existence of "overlapping multiple Modernisms" (McFarlane 5) and why have they rarely been acknowledged?
3. What does the "critique of modernity" (7) imply that McFarlane (and others) have detected in connection with the works of Australian artists associated with the Theosophical Society, e.g. Mme Mouchette, Ethel Carrick and Roy de Maistre?
4. McFarlane suggests that she has "gathered the large intricately patterned fabric of our histories and picked out a repeating detail which [she has] connected with smocking threads" (7) – comment on her use of figurative language.
5. According to historian Jill Roe, author of *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia, 1879-1939* (1986), "Australian Theosophical women were the 'best educated women of all religious groupings'" in 1911 (qtd. in McFarlane 9)? Are you familiar with other social and religious organisations that attracted intellectual women, and how might that appeal be explained?