Call For Publication Grant Applications

Each year HBA awards a grant to offset publication costs for a book manuscript or peer-reviewed journal article in the field of British art or visual culture that has been accepted for publication. To be eligible for the $600 award, applicants must be current members of HBA. To apply, send a 500-word project description, publication information (correspondence from press or journal confirming commitment to publish and projected publication date), budget, and CV to Kimberly Rhodes, HBA Prize Committee Chair, krhodes@drew.edu by January 15, 2016.

Dear HBA Members,

With the passing of the baton from an outgoing to an incoming HBA President, I have had far more fun than I would have ever expected going through the HBA archives that Colette Crossman mailed to me a few weeks ago. The contents of these seventeen manila folders stretch back to 1992, when HBA was founded. I’m not sure what’s more striking to me: how much things have changed or how familiar this organization feels throughout its twenty-three-year history.

The second issue of the newsletter, dated October 1993, begins with a note from HBA’s first president Jody Lamb “regarding our name change.” During the 1992–93 academic year, “members voted overwhelmingly to call ourselves the ‘Society of Historians of British Art’ rather than the proposed alternative, ‘The British Art Club.’” Because of the length of the new name, however, members present at the annual College Art Association meeting in Seattle in February 1993 voted to condense the name to the less cumbersome Historians of British Art.

A single anecdote thus provides a glimpse into an organization finding its own way, a reminder that things could have gone differently, a reminder that an organization like ours is nothing without the good sense of its membership working out what kind of organization it aims to be. Other portions of the newsletter provide a sort of time-travel experience. A session on ‘The State of British Art Today’ asks “How is the way we research British art changing, for example regarding computer searches & new databases, recently available archives, etc.?" It’s intriguing just trying to recall what precisely a “computer search” entailed in 1993! And finally, the back page of the newsletter notes that work had begun on a New Dictionary of National Biography.

A PDF file of the October 1993 newsletter has been added to our newly refurbished website, an ideal destination for this artifact of a late twentieth-century print culture! Looking through past newsletters, it’s impossible not to be impressed with the dedication of people who invested countless hours in keeping HBA’s membership informed of key news relevant to the organization. Now, in the age of social media, our Treasurer and Membership Chair, Emily Talbot, brilliantly maintains our Facebook page and Kate Roach, graciously and with good cheer, produces this first-rate newsletter and the monthly e-blasts. Thanks to both of them. And thanks to all of you for being part of HBA.

Sincerely,

Craig Hanson
Associate Professor of Art History, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI craigashleyhanson@gmail.com

Call for Member News & Newsletter Contributions

Please send ideas for reviews or features, as well as items of member news, to the editor, Catherine (Kate) Roach, at croach2@vcu.edu
Dear HBA Members,

As the new Treasurer and Membership Chair of the Historians of British Art, I am writing to introduce myself and to ask you to continue your support of HBA by renewing your memberships for 2016 and beyond.

My relationship with HBA began in 2009 when I delivered a paper in the CAA session “Collecting and Displaying Art in London and the Empire, 1753-2010,” chaired by Anne Nellis and Morna O’Neill. From that point on, I enjoyed attending the annual HBA events hosted at CAA and throughout the academic year, finding this organization to be particularly congenial and supportive of its members and their work in the field. After beginning my Ph.D. at the University of Michigan I joined HBA’s board in 2011, with the goal of helping to boost our graduate student membership. Over the past few years I have learned more about HBA’s mission and future goals through my work on the HBA Communications Committee and in conversations with fellow board members. In my new role as Treasurer and Membership Chair, I hope to meet many more of you at various HBA events and through our web platforms.

As HBA memberships expire at the end of the calendar year, I also write to encourage you to renew your commitment to HBA in 2016. HBA dues directly support the scholarship of our members by funding the annual Publication Grant and graduate student Travel Award, as well as our panels at CAA. All members receive a monthly e-blast, with calls for papers, job listings, and other news, in addition to this biannual newsletter, with its book and exhibition reviews, news from our members, and updates regarding HBA events that are held throughout the year. As part of our initiative to grow membership, our revamped website (historiansofbritishart.org) is now fully accessible without a log-in requirement. The website maintains an archive of all our past newsletters in perpetuity, in addition to full descriptions of the papers that will be presented at CAA in February, and details regarding the HBA Book Prize, Publication Grant, and Travel Award. In the same spirit, our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/HistoriansBritishArt) is accessible to members and non-members alike, and we hope it will become a space for sharing news with fellow Historians of British Art in the United States and across the globe. If you have not done so already, please “like” us to receive HBA announcements in your feed.

HBA is run by a small but very committed group of volunteers who care deeply about the field of British art and support all those who contribute to it. We hope you will continue your affiliation with HBA by renewing your membership for the 2016 calendar year (please note we also offer a three-year renewal option for a discounted, one-time payment). Membership renewals can be processed online at: http://historiansofbritishart.org/membership/ or by sending a check to me directly at the address below.

If you have any questions about your membership status or about HBA in general please do not hesitate to contact me at emtalbot@umich.edu or treasurer.hba@gmail.com. Thank you for supporting HBA and I look forward to meeting you in Washington, D.C., or elsewhere this year!

Sincerely,

Emily Talbot
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**membership fees**

- Student $15
- Professional $25*
- Benefactor $50
- Institutional $100

* Professional members can renew their membership for three years at the reduced rate of $20 per year by making a one-time payment of $60.
Reforming Pre-Raphaelitism in the Late Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries: New Contexts, Paradigms, and Visions
HBA Session at the 104th Annual Conference of the College Art Association
Washington, D.C., Saturday, February 6, 2015, 12:30–2:00pm; Washington 4, Exhibition Level
Chaired by Susan P. Casteras, University of Washington

Since its formation in 1848, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the phenomenon of Pre-Raphaelitism have continued to evolve and reinvent themselves, and in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been revived in ways that transmit and transform its style, ideas, themes, and influence. This has occurred for numerous reasons, from admiration for selected Pre-Raphaelite tenets and artists (especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, William Morris, and others in their circle) to nostalgia for certain aspects of its imagery in a new, post-modern era of industrial/technological revolution. The heterogeneous responses have proven global, with some ties stronger and more self-consciously claimed, and others more tenuous and subtle.

These creative extensions and transformations of Pre-Raphaelitism have generated considerable fluidity in manifestations throughout various media, from the fine arts to film, fashion, literature, photography, book illustration, graphic novels, music performance, popular culture, Steampunk, and in the digital realm, innumerable special websites, blogs, and databases. There are new generations of advocates, including couturiers like Valentino, magazines such as Vogue and Vanity Fair, and reiterations of stunners in super models-cum-muses like Lily Cole. Some materializations of expression come from individuals, others from loosely allied groups who overtly admired Pre-Raphaelitism and were interested in re-adapting and remediating it to their own art, purposes, and era. The online presence is especially revivifying and powerful, e.g., as conveyed via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and Tumblr, all testimony to the modes in which Pre-Raphaelitism has not just survived, but thrived in the twenty-first century. The session aims to explore these fields and other extensions and reformations of Pre-Raphaelitism as well as the possible reasons for this renewal and even renaissance of focus.

Robyn Asleson, “Popular Music and Pre-Raphaelitism(s) in England, 1972–2012”
Madeleine Pearce, “Digital Curation and the Pre-Raphaelites”
Alison Syme, “Our English Ghosts: The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape in Drowning by Numbers”
Elisa Korb, “Animated Archetypes: Disney and the Pre-Raphaelites”

Historians of British Art Business Meeting
Friday, February 5, 2015, 7:30–9:00am; Washington 3, Exhibition Level

Also of interest to historians of British art:

London: Capital of the Nineteenth Century
Saturday, February 6, 2015, 9:30 AM–12:00 PM; Salon 3, Lobby Level
Chairs: Jason Rosenfeld, Marymount Manhattan College; Timothy J. Barringer, Yale University

Catherine Roach, “London: Exhibition Capital of the Nineteenth Century”
Laura Kalba, “Philistinism and the Financial Industry: Visual Culture of the City of London”
Alison R.W. Hokanson, “L’Esthétique Anglaise: The Belgian Avant-Garde and British Art”
The word “magisterial” is inevitable in a review of William L. Pressly’s most recent book. In thirteen closely argued chapters and two informative appendices, Pressly brings staggering erudition and imaginative insight to the interpretation of the six canvases he considers “the most important series of history paintings in Great Britain.” The paintings (which remain in situ in the Great Room of the Royal Society of Arts in London) are the work of James Barry (1741-1806), the idealistic and irascible Irish artist who spent the latter half of the 1760s in Italy absorbing the lessons of Renaissance art before settling in London, where he pursued a singular career as a history painter. This beautifully produced and, yes, magisterial book marks the culmination of some forty years of research and writing on Barry and his circle, and the author is forthright in asserting its important contribution to the field as “a major building block in the study of British art” that will “enrich our understanding of the role Christianity played in Enlightenment thought,” “bolster the place held by history painters in British art,” and “bring this neglected series [of murals] into the mainstream of discussions of British art of the Romantic period.”

The terms of Barry’s 1777 agreement with the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce allowed him unprecedented creative control over the program of murals he designed for the Great Room of the Society’s new building, and he took full advantage of this freedom to develop an idiosyncratic cycle of history paintings on the theme of human culture. It has long been Pressly’s contention that the murals’ ambitious though rather disjointed program of classical and modern subjects hides a second narrative extolling the virtues of the Roman Catholic Church, which Barry was at pains to conceal. The close guarding of this secret message would appear to be the only occasion on which the notoriously outspoken and intemperate artist ever kept his own counsel. Secrecy was necessary, Pressly asserts, not only because detection of Barry’s Roman Catholic subtext would have meant censorship, but also because the artist believed the arduous challenge of discovering the murals’ true meaning was essential to the transformative experience they offered. Pressly invites us to “reimagine” our experience of the murals as Barry intended it: as a philosophical and spiritual progress and an initiation into secret wisdom. Setting aside stylistic concerns, Pressly focuses exclusively on content in order to recover not only an understanding of the murals themselves, but also of Barry’s ambition to “alter the viewer’s fundamental perception of life’s meaning and purpose” and “reshape the viewer’s understanding of the world” through thoughtful immersion in the didactic and spiritual environment he created in the Great Room.
The simultaneous need for secrecy and desire for revelation placed Barry in a paradoxical situation and helps explain why he continued to revisit and fine-tune his message over many years. Having commenced work on the murals in 1777, he first exhibited them to the public in 1783, at the same time publishing a discursive text of over 200 pages in which he explained the surface narrative, which was itself arcane and complex. Barry continued to modify the murals prior to their second exhibition in 1784, and altered the compositions further in a group of seventeen prints based on them, published in 1792 with another exegetical text published the following year. Pressly marshals these visual and textual documents with admirable clarity, disentangling the complex interrelationship of Barry’s initial thoughts and later emendations, the overt and covert narratives, and the various media (painting, drawing engraving, and text) in which the artist articulated his ideas. The book is divided into three main sections, the first of which provides Pressly’s detailed reading of the surface narratives of the six murals, each with its own copiously illustrated chapter headed by relevant passages from Barry’s descriptive texts of 1783 and 1793. The second section of the book focuses on the murals’ Catholic subtext, and the third on Barry’s response to seismic contemporary events, principally the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland, but also the French Revolution. In addition, Pressly provides two appendices tracing Barry’s ongoing efforts to refine and amplify his hidden message while continuing to cloak it in a veil of secrecy.

The book presents an ocular feast for readers whose eyes have strained over relatively small, often black-and-white reproductions of Barry’s murals in previous publications. Each mural is reproduced in its entirety at least once, together with numerous details, many of them full-page bleeds. The excellent illustrations are essential to Pressly’s close reading, which often hinges on small or faintly rendered compositional elements. Occasionally the reader senses the seams of the argument straining against the pressure of over-interpretation, and the author has a disconcerting tendency to express speculation as fact. These cavils aside, Pressly has laid out a compelling analysis of the multivalence of the Society of Arts murals, as well as a vigorous argument in defense of close scholarly attention to individual artists such as Barry, whose unconventional ideas “do not necessarily correspond to the terms of our current discourse.”

Congratulations to the HBA 2016 Travel Grant Winner

Allison Young is the recipient of the 2016 HBA Travel Grant. She’ll be presenting her paper “The Image of the ‘Riot’ in Gavin Jantjes’ Political Prints” in the panel Afrotropes at CAA 2016.

As Allison notes in her application: My paper considers a series of screen-prints made by the South African artist Gavin Jantjes in the late 1970s and 1980s, while he was living in exile in London after almost a decade in Hamburg. Jantjes’s work was informed by his entry into a local artistic milieu, and reflects visually the influence of British Pop artists such as Joe Tilson and Richard Hamilton, while also sharing with these artists an interest in the media’s role in steering public discourse on social and political topics. My paper focuses on his use of British newspaper clippings documenting the 1976 Soweto Uprisings in South Africa, when militarized police opened fire during a student protest. I argue that meaning may also be read in light of similar events escalating concurrently in Britain, most notably in the aftermath of riots at the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival…[The paper] highlights the ways in which foreign-born and minority artists are central, not peripheral, to the history and evolution of British art in the twentieth century. Jantjes’s presence in the London art scene in the 1980s, as an artist, writer and curator, had an undeniable impact not only on the development of his own practice but also on the British organizations with which he was involved, including the Arts Council of Great Britain, where he was a key consultant in forging the Council’s policy on cultural diversity, and Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts).
The Delaware Art Museum is currently hosting a retrospective exhibition of the work of Marie Spartali Stillman that runs through January 31, 2016. The exhibition is co-curated by Margareta Frederick, Chief Curator and Annette Woolard-Provine Curator of the Museum’s Bancroft Collection of Pre-Raphaelite Art, and Jan Marsh, noted Pre-Raphaelite scholar, currently working on the Late Victorian Catalogue at the National Portrait Gallery, London. The exhibition will travel, in reduced format, to the Watts Gallery, Compton, Guildford, England (March 1–June 5, 2016).

Marie Spartali Stillman (1844–1927) was one of a small number of professional female artists working in the second half of the 19th century. She was an important presence in the Victorian art world of her time and closely affiliated with members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. The youngest daughter of Michael Spartali, a merchant and Greek consul-general in London, she grew up within the wealthy community of Greek expatriates, many of whom were strong supporters of the Pre-Raphaelites and their circle. She and her cousins Maria Zambaco and Aglaia Coronio were known collectively among friends as “the Three Graces.” She modeled for George Frederick Watts (1817–1904), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), and Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898) among others. Desiring an artistic career of her own, she trained with Ford Madox Brown, working side by side with his daughters Lucy and Catharine.

In 1869 she met the recently widowed American painter and journalist William James Stillman (1828–1901). The two were married in 1871. A significant part of her married life was spent in Italy where she was deeply influenced by Renaissance art. She exhibited her work in London at the Royal Academy, the Grosvenor and Dudley galleries, as well as in the United States in Boston and New York.
Spartali Stillman’s early training with Madox Brown provided her with a solid technical background, based in the academic tradition. Her earliest work, from the 1860s, took the form of single figures. By the end of the decade she was tackling more challenging multi-figure scenes such as *Sir Tristram and La belle Iseult* (1873, Private Collection). This painting, the subject of which was drawn from Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, was exhibited at the Royal Academy before traveling to America for inclusion in the 1876 Centennial Exhibition. With her move to Italy in 1878, the subjects of her work, such as *Fiammetta Singing* (1879, Private Collection) were more often drawn from the early Italian poets including Dante, Petrarch, and, as in this case, Boccaccio. Gradually her compositions became more complicated and the color harmonies more subtly muted. The use of atmospheric perspective in the landscape backgrounds suggests the influence of the Italian Renaissance tradition in which she was now immersed. Despite living abroad, she continued to send her work annually to exhibitions in London. She corresponded with both Madox Brown and Burne-Jones on matters of technique and received advice and suggestions from them regarding various paintings in progress. The 1890s was a particularly productive decade with significant pieces such as *The Enchanted Garden of Messer Ansaldo* (1889, Pre-Raphaelite, Inc.) and *How the Virgin Mary Came to Brother Conrad of Offida* (1892, Wightwick Manor, National Trust). In many ways Spartali Stillman’s work engages with and encompasses the tenants of Pre-Raphaelitism in subject matter and style with more fidelity than that of the actual Brotherhood members themselves.

Throughout her working life she sent work to America as well as Britain, although with slightly less regularity. She became quite adept at reading variations in taste between the two cultures. Through her husband’s American family and friends she developed relationships within American Aesthetic period circles, befriending artists, writers and critics including John La Farge, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Richard Watson Gilder, and Helena de Kay.

Landscapes also featured in her oeuvre, including views of Kelmscott Manor, the home of William Morris and his family, scenes of the Isle of Wight where her family vacationed each summer, and, of course, the Italian countryside. During the decade of the 1890s when she moved to Rome she befriended Giovanni Costa, the leader of a group of Italian and British landscape painters who have since come to be known as the Etruscans. Her landscapes took on many of the aspects of this group, and she exhibited with them in both Italy and London.

Spartali Stillman worked primarily in a mixture of watercolor and gouache, loaded with Chinese white and ox gall. The heavy mixture of opaque pigments and additives gives her work the overall quality of an oil painting. This crossing of media boundaries, while practiced by Edward Burne-Jones among others, could also be correlated with her own breaking of gender confines, as an upper-middle-class woman working as a professional artist during the Victorian period.

Spartali Stillman’s aversion to publicity has left her somewhat overlooked in the history of Victorian art. This exhibition, the first retrospective of her work, showcases paintings completed in the United Kingdom and in Italy, exploring the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism, Aestheticism, and Italian culture in the development of her mature style. Works from public and private collections in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, many of which have not been on public view since Spartali Stillman’s lifetime, are included in this exhibition. A scholarly catalogue accompanies the exhibition; the book includes three essays and object entries written by the curators.
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Cornelius Jabez Hughes, daguerreotyper (British, 1819-1884)
Portrait of a Yeoman, about 1853, Daguerreotype, hand-colored ¼ plate
Image: 9.1 x 5.6 cm (3 9/16 x 2 3/16 in.) Mat: 10.6 x 8.3 cm (4 3/16 x 3 ¼ in.)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles