

Gaze and Her

How do women exist in the museum?

Originating from Percy Grainger's desire to create a memorial to his mother Rose Grainger and built upon the joint efforts of his wife Ella Grainger, this autobiographical museum is inextricably linked to women. However, in this museum - as in many others - the significance of women can be obscure.

The first part of our exhibition, *From Others' Eyes*, shows some idealised moments defined by the gaze of others. Here, women are objects to be viewed, framed by stereotypical social roles. In the second part, *From Her Eyes*, we show a decisive turning point. When women transition from being watched to actively watching, they reclaim the dominance of the narrative. Women's courage of self-awakening thoroughly blooms in this part, where they step out of restricted spaces to observe and depict themselves, and the world, with their own subjective gaze.

Our exhibition, we suggest, is not only an exploration of gender, but also a universal journey about how individual lives break out from confinement and retrieve the right to self-definition. Here, seeing them is also seeing every soul that bravely awakens in life.

Curated by Ziyi Chen, Jiajun Ai, Vinda Lyu, Xin Zhang

Part 1: From Others' Eyes

Mortimer Luddington Menpes

Australia, United Kingdom (1855–1938)

Dorothy Menpes

not dated

three-colour reproduction print

01.3326

This work depicts Dorothy, the daughter of the artist. In this image, she does not appear as an independent subject, but is identified through her relationship to others and by being watched... *From Other's Eyes*... as a daughter in her father's gaze and as a beautiful figure to be viewed. Her dignified and gentle posture reflects the idealized image of women in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. The work reveals how women were shaped into objects of viewing through family relationships, social expectations, and aesthetic norms, entering visual narratives through being named, gazed upon, defined, and preserved.

Mortimer Luddington Menpes

Australia, United Kingdom (1855–1938)

Heavy Laden

1913–1914

colour etching and drypoint on paper

04.0045

Heavy Laden depicts a Japanese woman carrying a sleeping child on her back. The woman's expression is serene, her body bearing not only the weight of the child but also the viewer's imagination of the female caregiver role. Placed in the first section of our exhibition, *From Others' Eyes*, this work prompts asks us to consider how women are often portrayed as objects to be watched, symbols of motherhood, and exoticized figures. The work leads us to further ponder how women are defined and preserved within the context of gender roles, cultural imagination, and the gaze of others.

Mortimer Luddington Menpes

Australia, United Kingdom (1855–1938)

A Woman of 83

1912-1913

etching and drypoint on paper

1995.7002

This print depicts an elderly woman quietly sitting and reading, immersed in the pages and the play of light and shadow.

This work prompts us to consider that even when women are no longer depicted in terms of youth or beauty, they are still often defined by the gaze of others. In the artists' title, the woman has no name but is rather categorized by her age. Through this work, we invite you to reflect on how women are viewed, classified, and enter history with a recognizable identity within the context of museum collections and visual narratives.

Norman Alfred William Lindsay

Australia (1879–1969)

The Graces

1930

print, etching

1970.0124

The Graces depicts a gracefully posed woman accompanied by two men, dressed in 18th-century attire. Her posture, dress, and central placement within the composition reflect how women were often associated with beauty, refinement, and visual pleasure. This work showcases Lindsay's masterful lines and dramatic portrayal. Through this piece, we encourage you to consider how women are shaped as aesthetic objects in the gaze of others, and how images of women enter museum collections and shape visual narratives in such a manner.

Part 2: From Her Eyes

Helen Dora Lempriere

Australia (1907-1991)

Self Portrait – Helen Lempriere (38 Yrs)

1945

oil on hardboard

1996.5000

This self-portrait was created in 1945, when Helen Lempriere had already established a strong reputation for her portraits and landscapes. Painted in the tonal style of Max Meldrum's school of art in Melbourne, the work uses a somber palette and restrained light to shape the figure. Helen appears simply dressed, calm, and resolute, looking directly at the viewer. In this act of self-presentation, she is no longer only an object of gaze, but also the image-maker and the one who returns the gaze. In this part of the exhibition, *From Her Eyes*, this work marks a shift from depiction to self-definition.

Norma Bull

United Kingdom 1906-1980

Australians in London

not dated

painting, watercolor on paper

04.0009

Australians in London depicts a moment of everyday life indoors during wartime. One figure plays the violin, another the piano, while a third listens nearby, in a moment of calm within a period of uncertainty. The work reminds us that wartime experience was not only shaped by destruction, but also by waiting, listening, and shared domestic routines. Seen through a female artist's perspective, this scene becomes more than a simple record of daily life. In the context of *From Her Eyes*, it shows how women could move beyond being represented in images to become observers and recorders of the world around them.

Norma Bull

United Kingdom 1906-1980

The Blitz Kitchen

1940

painting, pen, ink and watercolor on paper

04.0010

This work depicts a wartime scene in which women set up a makeshift kitchen and cook together among the ruins. Rather than focusing on battlefields or heroism, Norma Bull turns to the labour, care, and cooperation that sustained daily life in wartime. In the context of this final part of our exhibition, the work shows how women moved beyond being subjects of representation to become observers and recorders of history. Bull brings women's often-overlooked work to the forefront, revealing strength and resilience within ordinary life.

Norma Bull

United Kingdom 1906-1980

The Harbour Train Runs to Schedule, Despite Enemy Action [Poole Harbour]

c. 1942

watercolor on paper

04.0004

A train approaches, near buildings destroyed by bombs; in the sky, an aeroplane and bombs can be seen. This work depicts the ruins of war and ongoing industry. Such imagery is often presented through grand narratives from a male perspective. In our exhibition, however, we ask you to consider how women might differ in observing and documenting the world. We suggest that the contrast between the ruins and the railroad tracks in this image not only expresses hope for reconstruction but also symbolizes women's shift from being passively viewed to actively observing, reclaiming their voices and expressing themselves within history.

Unknown (creator)

Troubadour

not dated

crayon on paper

04.0075

This work, by an unknown artist, was originally in the personal collection of Ella Grainger's Swedish mother, Hilda Amalia Andersson. The drawing depicts a lute player in a garden outside a castle, rendered in soft and dreamy tones. By placing this work at the end of the exhibition, we aim to pose a question. After experiencing images of female subjects being watched, female artists' self-representation, and the creative acts of women observing the world, you are prompted to ask yourself, is this work a creation of a male or female artist?

Marian Barrett

UK, Australia (1861-1939)

Dainty Blossoms

not dated

oil on canvas

1935.5000

Lady Marian Barrett studied painting at the National Gallery School, Melbourne, and maintained a lifelong dedication to painting and a passion for gardening. This work not only showcases the aesthetic and painting techniques of a trained female artist but also demonstrate how women participate in the construction of visual culture through meticulous and continuous observation. Dainty Blossoms, placed alongside women's depictions of war and society in this part of our exhibition, asks you to consider how women's viewing of the world occurs not only in grand historical scenes, but also in the everyday and in intimate still lifes.