

Female Artists and the British Poster Movement (1919-1939)

1. Introduction

In 1920 the annual publication *The Empire Annual for Girls* printed an interview with the artist Gladys Peto, in which she described the potential for girls 'not only of making a living, but of making a very good living' through poster design.¹

Published at a time of increasing poster production, this interview marked the starting point of a movement in female poster art within Britain, during which **152 women** produced poster designs.

However, despite the significant achievements of these female poster artists, their successes have yet to be discussed within academic accounts

My research aims to rectify this omission, shedding light on the works, careers, and legacies of female poster artists and exploring their position within the art world of the interwar

Fig. 2



Fig. 3



3. Sources

A lack of interest in female artists has meant that often archives on their lives have not been preserved. This makes primary research into these figures more complex, and perpetuates historiography which ignores women's work.

To navigate this I will be using alternative sources in my research

These include...

Company Archives - Meeting minutes, letters, contracts, records of payment

Online databases -. Museum collections, Ancestry UK

Contemporary Accounts - Newspaper reports, interviews, trade journals

4. Impact

- ▶ As the first academic analysis of female poster artists this research **raises the profile of undervalued works of art.**
- ▶ By highlighting the existence and successes of female poster artists I am able to **dispute established historiographic ignorance of women's contributions to 20th century British art.**
- ▶ My **use of alternative archives and sources provides a framework for further analysis of overlooked artists** or figures through primary source research
- ▶ My research contributes to a number of **wider debates** and areas of research including, **histories of women's work and leisure** during the interwar, **feminist art history** and the value and **importance of mass culture.**

2. Methodology

My research uses methods of **feminist art history** to consider the impact of female artists on the wider movement of British poster art.

It does not aim to simply recognise the existence of these women, but is instead intended to demonstrate their **significance** and **importance** to twentieth century British art.

Primary sources reveal that female artists were highly valued during the interwar, with a number of newspapers claiming that '**many of the best poster artists of the day are women.**'²

This makes women's absence from poster history an issue of **historiographic omission** rather than it being a symptom of a lack of female success in this area.



Fig. 1

Fig. 1. Freda Beard, *Shop Early*, London County Council, 1927; Fig. 2. Clodagh Sparrow, *Holidays in Devon*, Southern Railway, 1937; Fig. 3. Artist Herry Perry from *The Sphere*, Saturday 01 June 1929 Backgrounds: Anna Zinkeisen in her studio, *Eve*, June 30th 1926, 734; Photograph, Victoria and Albert Museum, British and foreign posters exhibition, North Court, gelatin silver print, 1931, Department of Science and Art of the Committee of Council on Education

¹ George Wade, 'Poster-Art Work for Girls' *The Empire Annual for Girls*, 1920;

² Elizabeth D'Oyley, *Yorkshire Post* Monday 18th July 1927