

Elizabeth Cumming, *Hand, Heart and Soul: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Scotland*. Edinburgh, Birlinn, 2006, 240 pp., 90 colour and 20 black-and-white illus., £ 16.99

Janice Helland

Volume 33, Number 1-2, 2008

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1069562ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1069562ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Helland, J. (2008). Review of [Elizabeth Cumming, *Hand, Heart and Soul: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Scotland*. Edinburgh, Birlinn, 2006, 240 pp., 90 colour and 20 black-and-white illus., £ 16.99]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 33(1-2), 144–146.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1069562ar>

collaboration with the collecting and exhibiting policies of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. In addition to many other pertinent reflections, this section also includes a sustained discussion of Emily Carr. Attempts to ground a Canadian essence in the land are revealed and opened to the pointed critiques that follow in chapter six, "What is Canadian in Canadian Landscape?" To say that it is no surprise that a singular Canadianness is absent in these pages is not to diminish the import of authors' and artists' insistence on difference in contemporary Canada.

The concluding chapter takes up this theme by canvassing a range of inflected perspectives on the Group, on nature, and on Canadian and other modes of identity. The Group's regional as well as gendered appeal is thrown into relief in "The Expression of Difference: The Milieu of Quebec Art and the Group of Seven" by Esther Trépanier, in an interview with Johanne Lamoureux about landscape versus urbanism in Québec, and in contributions about British Columbia and Newfoundland. Gender stereotypes about the North and Wilderness are challenged in Shawna Dempsey & Lorri Millan's *Lesbian National Parks and Service* project (1997–), and the pressing issues of racial exclusion and belonging are addressed, whether of newcomers in Yin-Me Yoon's telling portraits in *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996) or of aboriginals, as in Edward Poitras's *Offensive/Defensive* (1988) and Rebecca Belmore's recent performances on and about the land.

While I cannot imagine how one could improve this publication, it lends itself more to use as a source book than as a sustained argument that one would read from cover to cover. Because the Group is a constant reference point, across the texts assembled there is an inevitable repetition of basic information and of well-known criticisms. But most readers will dip into chapters, not read them sequentially. And who will read this book? The topic could not be more appealing to a Canadian audience interested in art history and the book simply looks good too. A "popular" audience may not tolerate what amounts to a deflation of the Group's claims and those made on their

behalf, if not the attention its members perennially receive, though many readers will genuinely learn from the revisionist approaches featured here. A more critically informed reader will already know and value much of the writing presented. Crucially, though, there is a large group poised in-between the art intelligentsia and a popular audience: students. There is no more significant constituency, and this book is ideal for them.

In the introductory essays by White and O'Brian, we are reminded that the Group, Canadian national identity, and contemporary art intersect with what has come to be called "landscape theory," a sustained revisionist focus on the genre of landscape art and its critical implications. W.J.T. Mitchell's now rightly famous collection *Landscape and Power* (2nd Edition, 2002) is here a frequent resource for theoretical perspectives on landscape. Yet Mitchell's volume is but one prominent actor in a now busy field that collects not only thinking in art history but also geography, anthropology, science and technology studies, and aesthetics into an area of concern that I would dub "Geo-Aesthetics." *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art* draws effectively on Mitchell and his collaborators. What it promises, though does not fully deliver, is a sense of reciprocity: what do the integrated topics of its subtitle contribute to landscape theory beyond the regional and national contexts?

Beyond Wilderness is a book with a mission. O'Brian, White, and their many de facto collaborators take the Group of Seven as a starting point for reflections much more pressing today than the Group's work itself. In taking us (finally!) beyond the Group, this collection makes possible a reckoning of contemporary art's role in mediating our ideas of landscape, place, nation, and most urgently of all, nature. With sophistication, balance, and purpose, it points to the future.

MARK A. CHEETHAM
University of Toronto

Elizabeth Cumming, *Hand, Heart and Soul: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Scotland*. Edinburgh, Birlinn, 2006, 240 pp., 90 colour and 20 black-and-white illus., £ 16.99.

Recently two major arts and crafts exhibitions opened accompanied by lavishly illustrated books comprised of essays by leading scholars in the field: *The Arts & Crafts Movement in Europe & America* opened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in December 2004, followed by *International Arts and Crafts* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in March 2005. Elizabeth Cumming's *Hand, Heart and Soul* also complemented and

accompanied an exhibition that opened in Edinburgh's City Art Centre in June 2007, then travelled to the Millennium Gallery in Sheffield and Aberdeen.¹ According to Edinburgh's *Evening News*, the exhibition demonstrated "how arts and crafts in Scotland transformed into modernism and the effect as a movement that it had on the whole country" (13 June 2007). Thus, unlike the celebrations of "international" arts and crafts, Cumming's book and the exhibition make a close reading of the impact of the local. The London and Los Angeles exhibitions and books also celebrated the English origins of the movement along with its global dissemination; however, as Alan Crawford maintains,

the movement flourished most fully in London, and most of the leading designers lived there.”²

Elizabeth Cumming’s close examination of the movement as it manifested in Scotland in the late nineteenth century simultaneously engages with “internationalism” and the movement’s associations with London, but is more concerned with exchanges or border crossings than with “origins”: “Although the work carried out in Scotland would have a Scottish accent, it was largely driven by initiatives which were basically British. Baldwin Brown and Newbery were Englishmen, not Scots, and their energies were directed towards whichever community they served” (p. 10). Cumming’s study enhances the reader’s understanding of the entire movement by looking at the microcosm of one geographical area, and thus does not dilute meanings but rather offers the opportunity to pursue an in-depth comprehension of various directions and manifestations. She never denies the widespread development of arts and crafts, but her finely crafted focus provides more meticulous detail than can be found in “international” studies of the movement.

Cumming brings years of study to her project: she co-wrote with Wendy Kaplan *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (1991), a general book on the arts and crafts, and, with Nicola Gordon Bowe, she prepared a study of the arts and crafts movement in Dublin and Edinburgh (1998).³ In addition, she is responsible for the definitive work on Phoebe Traquair (1852–1936), a quintessential designer/artist who flourished in Edinburgh during the height of the movement. Significantly, Cumming locates women artists securely within Scottish arts and crafts, and she situates the gendered home arts and industries movements in the mainstream rather than in the periphery. As Peter Cormack argued in his review of the 2005 exhibition in London: “One of the more bizarre omissions in the V&A’s ‘International Arts and Crafts’ catalogue is the absence of any specific comment on the whole phenomenon of Arts and Crafts feminism.”⁴ Cumming effortlessly includes women artists without glorification or segregation (although she does devote one chapter to “Sister Studios”), and in so doing overcomes the “bizarre omissions” often found in other studies. In this, she was able to build upon the earlier work done by Jude Burkhauer, who organized the exhibition *‘Glasgow Girls’: Women in Art and Design 1880–1920* (1990) and edited a book of the same name. However, Cumming includes women artist-designers from other parts of Scotland as well as those who cross borders. Mary Seton Watts (1849–1938), for example, “was simultaneously part of the Home Arts movement, British Arts and Crafts, and, not least, of Scottish and Celtic identity in the applied arts” (p. 72). Seton Watts designed a carpet that would be retailed by the London department store Liberty, and, although she made her home in England, she established the Aldourie Pottery near Inverness. Dorothy Wemyss (1856–94), who was educated at the South

Kensington School of Art, returned to her home in Scotland and “almost immediately started the Wemyss School of Needlework in 1877.” The school worked to commissions, which “ranged from embroidered curtains to court dress” (p. 72).

Hand, Heart and Soul also deftly negotiates through the issues of “folk” arts, tradition, and modernity. Designers, writes Cumming, were aware of the romanticization of Scottish culture, particularly Highland culture, and “the building of national collections, but they also perceived the positive and negative power of tradition. The past was both friend and foe” (p. 31). Modernity was always part of the movement, blended together with a desire for improved artistic design and a dynamic interest in the handmade. As might be expected, the significant role of architecture is acknowledged, but Cummings ties this to the almost obsession with the interior: “All these designers saw the home as a unified work of art, a relaxing place in which to experience beauty” (p. 114). And, the architects, like designers, crossed borders between Scotland and England: both maintained ties with the metropole and showed designs and objects in London exhibitions.

Her discussion of an icon of the Scottish art world, architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928), keeps him within the realm of collaborative art practices, a difficult feat given the extensive range of Mackintosh scholarship and the keen interest in his partner, Margaret Macdonald (1864–1933). Nevertheless, Cumming maintains a balanced approach to his contributions: “The importance of the Mackintosh circle was its development of the room as a more thoroughly cohesive work of art, where furniture, fabrics and metalwork were all worked in harmony with walls and space” (p. 108). This “development of the room” was championed by Hermann Muthesius in continental Europe, thus putting the Mackintosh circle into an international context perhaps more than other Scottish designers. However, Cumming meticulously traverses the cosmopolitan/rural split by also highlighting artists such as Euphemia Thomson Ritchie (1862–1941) and Alexander Ritchie (1856–1941), who located their studio practice on the remote island of Iona: “The Ritchies’ work was very much an artistic partnership, as close as that of Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald” (p. 180). The couple established a community on Iona, where Euphemia Ritchie taught local girls to embroider and the visitor/tourist frequently became a friend. Cumming postulates their enterprise as a “key example of dedication to craft mixed with small-scale entrepreneurship. Their community linked the past with the present in a unique way” (p. 180). It is here as well that Cumming makes a link between arts and crafts production and tourism, a connection sometimes overlooked, sometimes demeaned; Cumming establishes the link as a meaningful relationship or exchange between producer and consumer, one that enhances both.

While architecture and architects inevitably play a large role in discussions of the arts and crafts movement and Cumming introduces a significant number of them into her text, she does not lionize the buildings or the designers but rather places her emphasis upon the practice and space of the movement. Her chapters are thematic and inclusive, taking the reader through a totality that is both meaningful and erudite. Although "Craft and Community" is chapter six, its title could act as an umbrella for the entire project. Other chapters as well provide evocative connections and explications: "Art for All" sets the tone for the book; "Sister Studios" highlights women's practice; "The Ministry of the Beautiful" draws attention to the sizeable contribution arts and crafts made for ecclesiastical spaces, interiors and exteriors, as well as its intermittent relationship with the spiritual. Here, Cumming is able to bring together a discussion of stained glass, embroidery, and mural painting with architecture. It was in the making of stained glass that Scottish artists, according to Cumming, "most straddled a duality between Calvinist control and a quest for spirituality in design" (p. 158). Although the pre-eminent Scottish stained glass artist, Douglas Strachan, might have dominated this chapter, Cumming again introduces the reader to lesser-known artists such as Margaret Chilton and Marjorie Kemp, who established their own studio in central Edinburgh in 1922. Phoebe Traquair, noted as a church muralist, reappears in the chapter, as does Ann Macbeth, renowned for her exquisite ecclesiastical embroideries.

The final two chapters, "Facing the Future" and "Legacy," chart the movement's continuing influence far into the twentieth century. Cumming addresses the change that takes place in the arts and crafts movement after the Great War, with an emphasis first upon commemoration, then, as the century moved on, to an eclectic melding of arts and crafts with modernism. Here too, Cumming retains her commitment to a totality that encompasses interiors and sculpture, stained glass and architecture, embroidery and space, and, in addition, she introduces the twentieth-century move toward preservation: the National Trust for Scotland for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty formed in 1931. This "drive toward the preservation of buildings, as a major contribution to national culture" (p. 209), was entirely in keeping with the philosophy of the arts and crafts movement, which valued tradition and the relationship between place and location, and thus brings the nineteenth-century movement together with one of its twentieth-century manifestations. In Scotland, the drive to restore and conserve surfaced as early as the 1870s, when architect/designer Robert Rowand Anderson "advised on the future of Paisley Abbey and carried essential consolidation work at Iona and Jedburgh Ab-

bey" (p. 139). Iona and Jedburgh continue to hold the interest of travellers and tourists even today. This, of course, was not only a Scottish development, but by looking closely at Scotland the reader is able to follow an impeccable path through various aspects of arts and crafts.

Cumming's single-authored book, by offering the reader a meticulous discussion of Scottish arts and crafts, contributes a depth to discussions of the arts and crafts in a way that the collection of essays published for the two "international" exhibitions cannot. In this, it is more like Wendy Kaplan's *"The Art that is Life": The Arts & Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920* (1987), which details in the form of an expansive catalogue the arts and crafts movement in the United States.⁵ From embroidery to architecture, from jewellery to stained glass windows, from metalwork to furniture, Cumming takes the reader on a journey through the intricacies of geographic specificity while, at the same time, she situates that specificity within an international community. *Hand, Heart and Soul* is a visual feast with its many illustrations and a thought-provoking narrative about what was and remains a tremendously well-liked and much-studied movement. Its conscientious chronicling of the microcosm, Scotland, greatly enhances our understanding of the broader macrocosm of the entire arts and crafts movement.

JANICE HELLAND
Queen's University

Notes

- ¹ David Patterson, Edinburgh City Art Centre, and Elizabeth Cumming curated the exhibition. The exhibition was in Sheffield until January 2008, then travelled to Aberdeen.
- ² Alan Crawford, "The Importance of the City," in Karen Livingstone and Linda Parry, eds., *International Arts and Crafts* (London, 2005), 62.
- ³ Elizabeth Cumming and Wendy Kaplan, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London, 1991); and Elizabeth Cumming and Nicola Gordon Bowe, *The Arts & Crafts Movement in Dublin & Edinburgh, 1885-1925* (Dublin, 1998).
- ⁴ Peter Cormack, "A Truly British Movement," *Apollo*, April 2005, 50.
- ⁵ Wendy Kaplan's *"The Art that is Life": The Arts & Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920* (Boston, 1987) was published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name that originated at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.