TWO FOR TEA: THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLABORATIONS OF MARGARET MACDONALD MACKINTOSH WITH CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH

by

ROBYNE ERICA MILES

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Dr. Andrew Schulz, Chair of the Examining Committee

8/20/09
Date

Committee in charge: Dr. Andrew Schulz, Chair
Dr. Sherwin Simmons
Dr. Richard Stein

Accepted by:

Dean of the Graduate School

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Title: TWO FOR TEA: THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLABORATIONS OF MARGARET MACDONALD MACKINTOSH WITH CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH

Approved: ______________________________
Dr. Andrew Schulz

This thesis examines the interior design collaborations of Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh with Charles Rennie Mackintosh, most notably for Kate Cranston's Ingram Street Tearooms and Willow Tearooms. By considering these works in terms of a collaborative partnership and in relationship to the concept of the *gesamptkunstwerk*, it is argued that Macdonald possessed a larger role in the overall scheme than previously attributed. More broadly, analysis of these projects leads to a better understanding of a variety of issues that arise in their collaborative work, including not only problems of authorship and attribution but also of style, gender representation, space, and iconography.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Robyne Erica Miles

PLACE OF BIRTH: Miami, Florida

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
University of Glasgow, Scotland
Indiana University, Bloomington

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Art History, 2009, University of Oregon
Master of Literature, Decortive Arts & Design History, 2007, University of Glasgow
Bachelor of Arts, Art History, 1994, Indiana University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Nineteenth Century Art, Architecture and Design, especially in England and Scotland
History of the Decorative Arts, Fashion and Textiles
The Fin de Siécle in Art and Literature

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Administrative Assistant, 'Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland, 1851 - 1951', AHRC & British Academy Research Project, University of Glasgow, 2007 - 2010
Whistler Etchings Project, Intern, University of Glasgow, 2007
Digital Archivist, History of Art Resource Centre, University of Glasgow, 2007
Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Glasgow, 2006 - 2010
Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Oregon, 2004 - 2006
Board of Directors, Maude Kerns Art Center, Eugene, OR, 2003 - 2006
Laurel Curatorial Intern, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, 2004
Director of Operations and Volunteers, The Science Factory, Eugene, OR, 1998 - 2003
Floor Manager, Miami Youth Museum, Miami, FL, 1996 - 1998
Education Intern, Indiana University Art Museum, 1993 - 1995

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

IRUN (International Research universitites Network) Summer Course on European Identity, P. Pázmány University, Budapest, 2009
University of Glasgow, Faculty Scholarship, 2008 - 2010
Pasold Fund PhD Bursary for Textile Research, 2008 - 2010
University of Glasgow AHRC Research Training Award, 2008 - 2009
GF Ponting Memorial Bursary, Fashion Museum, Bath, 2007 - 2008
University of Oregon School of Architecture & Allied Arts Dean's Fellowship, 2007 - 2008
Marion C. Donnelly Travel Award, University of Oregon, 2006
University of Oregon Center for the Study of Women in Society Travel Award, 2005 - 2006
University of Oregon School of Architecture & Allied Arts Student Travel Fund, 2005
Faculty Award for Outstanding Leadership, Recipient: Art History Association, Robyne Miles, Co-chair 2005
Marion C. Donnelly Conference Travel Grant, 2004
Undergraduate Curatorial Research Award, Indiana University, 1993 - 1994

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MMM - Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh CRM - Charles Rennie Mackintosh

(Other artists names are spelled in full)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To give people pleasure in things they must perforce use, *that is one great office of decoration; to give people pleasure in the things they must perforce* make, *that is the other use of it.*

-William Morris, 1877[1]

To get true architecture the architect must be one of a body of artists possessing an intimate knowledge of the crafts, and no less on the other hand the painter and sculptor and other craftsman must be in direct touch and sympathy with architecture.

-Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 1893[2]

At the height of their success, Miss Cranston's Ingram Street Tearooms (1900) and Willow Tearooms (1903) were considered to be exceptional examples of aesthetically inspired interiors in *fin de siècle* Glasgow. Their unconventional proprietor Catherine Cranston (1849 – 1934) commissioned the architect and artist Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868 – 1928) [fig. 1.1] to craft her premises in the new "Art School" style. Not only did they receive a positive critical reception, but the style was quickly copied in the booming catering establishments then gaining popularity in the Scottish industrial capital.

Although these tea rooms no longer exist in their original context, they remain a vital part of Glasgow's cultural and social history: what remains of them forms an important part of the collection of Glasgow Museums, and the Willow Tearoom has since re-opened as a working tea room, replicating aspects of Mackintosh's original. In the area of Mackintosh studies, however, the tea rooms are somewhat controversial. Traditionally, credit has been given solely to Mackintosh for these rooms. More recently, several scholars have strived to show that Mackintosh's wife, the artist and designer Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh (1864-

[1] William Morris, "The Lesser Arts", a lecture delivered before the Trades' Guild of Learning, December 4, 1877; published in pamphlet form as *The Decorative Arts, Their Relation to Modern Life and Progress.* Partially reprinted in *The Industrial Design Reader*, Carma Gorman, ed., 35.

[2] Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the Architectural Papers* (Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade, 1990), 206.

Fig. 1.1 James Craig Annan *Charles Rennie Mackintosh* 1893.

Fig. 1.2 Thomas Craig Annan *Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh in the drawing room at 120 Mains Street,* c.1900.

1933) [fig. 1.2], played an important role in their conception, and some even consider that she deserves joint attribution.[3]

For each of the Ingram Street and Willow Tearooms, Macdonald designed a gesso panel—a canvas layered in plaster with pigment, usually set with mixed media such as glass beads, twine, shells, and modelled plaster—along with smaller pieces including beaten metal panels and embroidered textiles.[4] As will be shown in this thesis, the gesso panels are critical to understanding the overall design scheme and symbolic meaning of each space. Furthermore, each interior, like most others in Mackintosh and Macdonald's oeuvre, were designed holistically; that is, each was a *gesamtkunstwerk*—a total work of art. It follows that if the panel is an essential component in each room, and the interiors were conceptually designed to be a single work of art, then Macdonald, as the author of the panels, likely played a collaborative role in designing the rooms.

Art historian Janice Helland, who wrote the only monograph on Macdonald and her sister (and early artistic partner) Frances Macdonald McNair (1873 – 1921), supports this view in her essay "Collaboration Amongst the Four", where she observes that collaboration "undermine[s] attribution, an important practice that plays a large role in museums and galleries, in the art market, and most significantly, in the ideology that underlies traditional conceptions and definitions of modern art making."[5] In cases like the tea rooms, attribution

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[3] From hereafter, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh will be referred to as Macdonald to avoid confusion with Charles Rennie Mackintosh, as well as with her sister Frances Macdonald McNair.

[4] In fact, Macdonald designed at least eighteen gesso panels that we know of for Mackintosh commissions between 1900 and 1909.

[5] Janice Helland, "Collaboration among the Four", *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, Wendy Kaplan, ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996), 110.

can be tangled up in the desire to credit one maker over another, usually the one who has attained some larger degree of credibility via historical agency, fame, issues of taste, or, in some cases, (male) gender. It is true that Macdonald's contribution to the larger design is both immeasurable and unknowable, but because she has designed important component parts, and because the rooms were designed holistically, it makes more sense for attributions to include rather than marginalize her.

However, not everyone agrees that Macdonald was the designer of the gesso panels. Mackintosh scholar and connoisseur Roger Billcliffe has questioned Macdonald's artistic merit and contribution, stating that "Macdonald is by no means Mackintosh's equal as an artist or designer" and that "the decoration of the tea rooms and domestic interiors is of his own invention, not hers."[6] Billcliffe suggests that Macdonald was merely working to Mackintosh's direction: "I have no doubt that Margaret made the gesso panels, and beautiful objects they are, but I think that is the extent of their collaboration—she was executing designs made by him for spaces conceived by him in a style which is all Mackintosh's own."[7]

This Mackintosh-Macdonald attribution debate is not an unfamiliar problem in art history; over the past few decades there have been many examinations of marginalized wives and partners who have been relegated by history as subordinate to the artful 'genius' of their male partners: Gustav Klimt and Emily Flöge, or Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, to name but two examples. Helland calls this the "myth of the creator-genius".[8] This is exemplary of the plight of many women artists of the 19th and early 20th centuries: "Collaborative work made after their marriages was generally attributed to the husband, perpetuating the myth of the male as producer and the female as helpmate."[9]

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[6] R. Billcliffe, "Mackintosh Furniture…Revisited", *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History* v. 12, 2007 (Oxford: White Cockade), 4-5.

[7] *Ibid.*, 6.

[8] *Ibid.*, 110.

[9] Janice Helland, *The studios of Frances and Margaret Macdonald* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 54.

This is certainly the case with Macdonald who, whilst producing much of her extant work alone, worked collaboratively throughout her career, first with her sister Frances, then also with her colleague J. Herbert McNair (1868 – 1955, who married Frances in 1899), and finally, after marrying Mackintosh, exclusively with him. Where the work was made with Mackintosh, it was often he who received the bulk (or all) of the credit. The entry for Margaret Macdonald from *The Penguin Dictionary of Decorative Arts* perfectly illustrates the problem that Helland relates:

> **Macdonald, Margaret** (1865-1933). Designer, metal-worker and embroideress, trained at the Glasgow School of Art. She worked in a style similar to C.R. MACKINTOSH, whom she married in 1900 and assisted. Also collaborated with her sister **Frances** (1874-1921), a metal-worker who married, 1899, another member of the Glasgow School, the furniture designer J. Henry McNair.[10]

The brief record sets Macdonald as a subordinate: "wife of" and "assistant to" her husband. This problem is exacerbated by the *Penguin* entry for Mackintosh: it is much longer, traces his entire life history and work, does not mention Macdonald, Frances, or McNair, and begins with the aggrandizing statement "Outstanding Scottish architect and designer who was the leader of the GLASGOW SCHOOL and a prominent figure in the international ART NOUVEAU movement."[11] While Mackintosh's work is without a doubt important and influential, the subjugation of his collaborators in the literature about him perpetuates the notion of the "creator genius". The issues surrounding Mackintosh and Macdonald are not just of a woman in the shadow of her husband, however, but are also mired in matters of changing taste and later, connoisseurship. Literature has presented Macdonald as being less talented (as above), and consequently not of a suitably high enough artistic caliber to be given design credit for some of her best artwork.

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[10] John Fleming and Hugh Honour, *The Penguin Dictionary of Decorative Arts: New Edition.* (London: Viking, 1977, 1989), 511. Her sister is treated similarly in her entry, and McNair, whose middle name was Herbert, not Henry as mentioned above, was apparently not important enough to gain his own entry at all.

[11] Fleming, 512.

The problem boils down to this: if one agrees that Macdonald was the author of her gesso panels, then, because the interiors are holistically designed, she deserves joint-credit for the room designs; however, if one believes that Mackintosh designed the panels and Macdonald simply constructed them, then sole credit should go to Mackintosh. While this issue may seem like an art historical splitting of hairs, it is important for the larger problem it presents: the pitting of more traditional notions of taste and connoisseurship against newer methodologies based in historical and technical fact. In an age where the traditional art historian who can, for example, spot and authenticate a Jackson Pollock with their considerably experienced eye, is being challenged by scientific analysis such as chemical sampling of paint cross-sections, this debate is worth careful consideration.[12]

The chronicle of the Mackintosh-Macdonald tea room projects is a story of two artist-designers who worked together to create artistic and functional spaces. Described as the *Künstlerpaar* by critic and close friend Herman Muthesius, this soubriquet denotes a contemporary recognition of the intimate collaborative connection of these two as an artist-couple.[13] The public and private interiors they created were conceived within the atmosphere of their own domestic contentment which, judging by the symbolic themes of union and fertility they depicted, became a source of creative inspiration. This story is, at its core, a bit of a romance. While this is perhaps a highly romanticized assessment of their work, it is nonetheless accurate, because the personal relationship of Mackintosh and Macdonald provides an important context for understanding all of the known interiors (no fewer than nine) they conceived in partnership between 1900 and 1906.

That the Mackintoshes loved each other a great deal goes without question: it is evidenced by quotes from friends, in the remaining letters which Mackintosh wrote to

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[12] For a concise synopsis of the Pollock debate, see for example Randy Kennedy, "The Case of Pollok's Fractals Focuses on Physics"(New York Times, Dec. 2 2006) < www.nytimes.com/2006/12/02/books/02frac.html> [Accessed May 15, 2007]

[13] Pamela Robertson, ed., *The Chronicyle: The Letters of Charles Rennie Mackintosh to Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, 1927* (Glasgow: Hunterian Art Gallery, 001), 17.

Macdonald during his six-week stay in Port Vendres, France in 1927 (hers are unfortunately lost), and has been stated repeatedly, if vaguely, by nearly every scholar who has published on their work. However, the object of this thesis is not to focus on the personal lives of the couple. Rather, this thesis will focus on the interior designs of Macdonald and Mackintosh for Miss Cranston's Ingram Street and Willow Tearooms as a case study in order to better understand their collaborative work not just as decorative interiors, but also as highly symbolic works of art which reflected their artistic interests, design practices, as well as their romantic relationship. In a larger sense, this analysis facilitates an examination of the issues of connoisseurship and technical art history which may seem at odds, but can also work together (and in fact be mutually vital) to reach logical conclusions on a work of art.

Specifically, the *Ladies' Luncheon Room* (Plate III) at the Ingram Street Tearoom and the *Salon de Luxe* (Plate V) at the Willow Tearoom will be the focus of this study, as they are the main rooms in the larger structures that actually house artworks by Margaret Macdonald (as well as the most famous components of each interior), thereby negating any doubt that she contributed to these spaces. It is also worth noting that although each of these spaces is but one in a larger group of rooms that form the "Tearooms" establishment, the Ladies Luncheon Room and the Salon de Luxe are both considered to be the respective masterpieces of each interior scheme; the focus on other rooms from each space has been considerably less.[14]

The first chapter provides a brief history of the tearooms, as well as highlights examples of domestic interiors that reveal the artists' particular aesthetic and symbolic concerns. Chapters two and three focus on Miss Cranston's Ingram Street and Willow Tearooms (respectively), the former including a discussion of gesso technique, and the latter emphasizing the way in which narrative plays a vital role in their designs. Both chapters present iconographic studies of the rooms through analyzing textual and symbolic sources

[14] Some of this is due to the fact that these two rooms have "survived" much better than other of the rooms, however it could be argued that the reason they fared better was due to their aesthetic strength.

used by the Mackintoshes. The conclusion of this thesis revisits the argument regarding Macdonald's place as collaborative partner and synthesizes this material to present an understanding of how these two artists worked together as a unit.

Sources

Despite past attempts by some art historians to study Mackintosh in isolation, recent scholarship has begun to acknowledge his fellow colleagues in order to conduct a fairer analysis of much of his work. However, while recent texts have taken admirable steps to address the imbalance, Mackintosh has historically been given a prominent place as the leader of the Glasgow Style (as noted above). Indeed he is by-and-large the only prominent name in a movement that has, itself, been eclipsed by the movements of modern design it influenced, such as the Vienna Secession and the Bauhaus. Thus Macdonald has traditionally been a minor character in art historical lineage, even though her influence upon prominent artists such as Gustav Klimt, Josef Hoffman, and other Vienna Secessionists was arguably as profound as that of her husband and partner.

Specifically, the obscuring of Macdonald in the history of art can be attributed to three main factors. First, we have very few of her own personal records, as they were reportedly destroyed upon her death. This lack of documentary evidence hinders any attempt to analyse Macdonald's work from her own personally-recorded perspective. Secondly, after her death in 1933, she was undeservedly damned with the deprecatory comments of P. Morton Shand, who, in a letter regarding the 1933 Mackintosh memorial exhibition, stated:

> I hope that the exhibition may not be so arranged or announced as to give the impression that Mrs. Mackintosh was in any sense considered her husband's equal, or 'alter ego'. Outside of circles of loyal friends in Glasgow and Chelsea her work is either unknown, or long since forgotten; and the future is scarcely likely to see her rather thin talent restored to a place of honour.[15]

[15] P. Morton Shand in a letter to William Davidson, dated 31st March, 1933 (Hunterian Art Gallery Archives, University of Glasgow).

He then publicly criticized her in the *Architectural Review* (1935) by stating that she was "of a decidedly inferior artistic calibre."[16] Shand's vitriolic criticism reveals a sentiment that the 'feminine' was distasteful. In fact, the sinuous curves of Art Nouveau were out of style at this time, replaced by the clean lines of Modernism. Shand's extreme censure is exemplary of the disparagement of femininity as being frivolous and not worthy of superior (masculine) artistic sensibilities.

These two circumstances pave the way for the third reason for Macdonald's marginalization: she has simply been overlooked, often in favour of Mackintosh, because little is known about her, and (often patriarchal) art historical practices have more readily focused on the 'genius' of her husband (although no subsequent critic has been as harsh as Shand). Most notable of these were Nikolaus Pevsner, who named Mackintosh one of his *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, and Thomas Howarth who tangentially discussed Macdonald, but focused largely on Mackintosh.[17] Over the past decade, however, several significant scholars, including Pamela Robertson, Jude Burkhauser, and in particular Janice Helland, have done much to bring greater attention to the work of Macdonald as well as her position as collaborator with Mackintosh.

There are numerous publications available on Mackintosh, but very few on Macdonald. She is most often found as a secondary character in Mackintosh's story, with a few notable exceptions. Primary among these is Helland's *The Studios of Margaret and Frances Macdonald* (1996), which provides the most detailed account of their life and work. Helland's work is from a feminist perspective, and she explores their situation through this lens, paying particular attention to the social position of women as well as their particular place as female artists at the time. Class and gender play important roles in her approach, which are quite important to understanding both who these women really were, as well as considering their unusual representations of the female form.

[16] P. Shand, *Architectural Review*, 1935.

[17] N. Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement From William Morris to Walter Gropius*. London: Faber & Faber, 1936.

Jude Burkhauser's *Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design 1880-1920* (1990) is an invaluable resource for this project for the insight it provides into this subject. It is comprised of a series of essays by numerous scholars, and as such provides a diversified view of the topic. Pamela Robertson, Senior Curator of the Mackintosh & Whistler collections at the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, has written perhaps most extensively on Macdonald. Robertson curated the only solo exhibit on Macdonald in 1983, and more recently the *Doves and Dreams* (2006 - 2007) exhibit at the Hunterian Art Gallery, the first ever to focus on the work of the McNairs.

In terms of the tea rooms themselves, two bodies of research have been vital to this thesis. First, the outstanding scholarship of Perilla Kinchin on Glasgow tearooms offers a thorough examination of Cranston's patronage of Mackintosh. Secondly, a recent feasibility study was made to assess the extant pieces of the Ingram Street Tearoom that are in the collection of Glasgow Museums, and curator Allison Brown and her team have been invaluable resources in understanding the spatial issues of this lost interior.

Alan Crawford, author of several works on Mackintosh, and Wendy Kaplan, curator of the major Mackintosh exhibition which travelled internationally in the mid 1990s (and for which the Ladies Luncheon Room was reconstructed), have both contributed a significant amount to the recent scholarship on him, and have dealt with Macdonald as collaborator, if not at times an equal partner. In consideration of iconographic interpretation, Timothy Neat's *Part Seen Part Imagined* includes references to sexuality and fertility, but also more esoteric subjects such as Theosophy and Rosicrucianism, and is important both for the avenues it explores as well as the problems it creates. Similarly, the estimable and thorough scholarship of Roger Billcliffe, particularly his catalogue of Mackintosh's furniture and interiors, has been vital to this research, as have been his more provocative comments on Macdonald, for they have inspired some of the research questions addressed in this study. Mr. Billcliffe was also generous with his time in discussing these issues with the author, and this has considerably helped in shaping the conclusions of this thesis.

All of this scholarship, in turn, owes much to the writing of three contemporaries of the Mackintoshes: Gleason White, who wrote reviews of their work for the influential *Studio* magazine; art historian Richard Muther, a contemporary who wrote of the pair particularly relating to their participation at the Eighth Vienna Secession Exhibition in 1900; and Hermann Muthesius, who, with his wife Anna, was not only a vocal champion of the Mackintoshes' work, but was also a close personal friend of the couple. Through a study of the writings of these three, it is revealed that Macdonald & Mackintosh (along with the McNairs) were *each* well-received, enjoyed creative success (if only for a brief while), and contrary to legend, they were not entirely denounced for their "ghoulish" style, even in their native lands. This thesis rests upon the shoulders of all of these works.

It is hoped that this research will support a re-evaluation of Macdonald's work in harmony with that of her husband, Mackintosh, who is often quoted as having said, "Margaret has genius, I have only talent."[18] His admiration and respect for his wife and her artistic endeavours was quite clear in a letter he wrote to her from France: "You must remember that in all my architectural efforts you have been half if not threequarters *[sic]* in them..."[19] This is arguably questionable evidence that Macdonald was his collaborator, but it would seem to indicate that, at least in Mackintosh's eyes, she was.

[18] Pamela Robertson, "Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh" in *Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design 1880-1920,* Jude Burkhauser, ed. (Edinburgh: Canongate Publishing Ltd., 1990), 115. Also quoted in several other sources.

[19] Pamela Robertson, ed. *The Chronycle: The Letters of Charles Rennie Mackintosh to Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, 1927* (Glasgow: Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, 2001), 56.

CHAPTER II

YIN AND YANG, OR THE MACDONALD-MACKINTOSH PARTNERSHIP

It is far away in that mist encircled grim city of the north which is filled with echoes of the terrible screech of the utilitarian, and haunted by the hideous eyes of thousands who make their God of gold. Vulgar ideals, and the triumph of the obvious, are characteristic of the lives of the greater proportion of its population; and yet, in the midst of so much that is incongruous and debasing, we find a little white home, full of quaint and beautiful things, with a big white studio empty of everything but the Artist's jesso panels, all prepared and made beautiful for her by her artist husband, in order that her genius may have a fitting home, and her exquisite, quiet art congenial and fitting surroundings.

- Desmond Chapman-Huston, "Dreamers in the Moon" ca. 1906[1]

The stories of Mackintosh and Macdonald are so inextricably linked to the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) that it is easy to forget that the imposing edifice on Renfrew Street—designed by Mackintosh himself—did not yet exist when the two met at the school in the early 1890s. The Glasgow School of Art, founded in 1845 and modeled on the South Kensington system of art education, was one of the many Government Schools of Design developed to counter rising unemployment due to the automation of industry. The GSA became quite successful, and quickly outgrew its rented spaces in the McLellan Galleries on Sauchiehall Street. In 1885, Francis "Fra" Newbery, who was heavily influenced by the utopian, socialist ideals of the Arts & Crafts Movement leader William Morris, became the new Headmaster. Collaboration was encouraged and through this, artistic alliances, as well as life-long friendships, were shaped. Activities at the school were not limited to just coursework—clubs were formed, such as the "Glasgow School of Art Club", which organized weekend trips into the country for students and faculty for both study and pleasure. Students participated in a host of extracurricular activities alongside faculty,

[1] Major Desmond Chapman-Huston, Dreamers in the Moon, ca. 1906. Facsimile, Collection of the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow.

including trips, exhibitions, and theatrical events such as costume balls and performances.

Fig. 2.1 The Immortals at Dunure, c. 1895, *snapshot;* left to right: Frances Macdonald, Agnes Raeburn, Janet Aitken, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Katherine Cameron, Jessie Keppie, Margaret Macdonald.

Margaret Macdonald had enrolled at the GSA as a day student with her sister Frances in 1890 (they were raised in Wolverhampton, England, but moved to Glasgow with their Scottish father in around 1888), and studied there for the next few years following a course in applied design.[2] The sisters found like-minded artistic goals and camaraderie amongst a group of friends who referred to themselves as "The Immortals"[fig 2.1], which can be seen as both a reference to their mutual interest in Celtic myth, as well as an irreverent comment on the male-dominated Academy system, in which men sought to immortalize themselves.[3] The group included Mackintosh and Herbert McNair, who were evening students while apprentice architects at the firm Honeyman & Keppie during the day.[4]

It is unclear when the Macdonald sisters met Mackintosh and McNair, but it would have been at some point before the November 1894 "Glasgow School of Art Club Exhibition" at the Institute Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, where they exhibited together. After this, the sisters and the two friends were referred to as "The Four" by friends and colleagues due to their stylistic similarities and seemingly shared artistic vision. In the mid-1890s the Macdonald sisters opened their own art studio, producing a wide array of work from watercolor

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[2] The Annual Report of the Glasgow School of Art, Annual Meeting, 22nd Feb., 1892. Glasgow; K. & R. Davidson, Printers, 1892.

[3] Jude Burkhauser, ed., Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design 1880-1920, (Edinburgh: Canongate Publishing Ltd., 1990), 50.

[4] The group also included Jessie Newbery, who was married to Fra Newbery and who founded the Department of Embroidery at the Glasgow School; Agnes and Janet Raeburn, Jessie Keppie, and Ann McBeth.

illustrations, to embroidery, to beaten metal objets d'art. Mackintosh and McNair continued to work as architects and designers, but their relationships with the sisters clearly developed and grew, as McNair and Frances married in 1899, and Mackintosh and Macdonald followed suit in 1900. After their marriage, Mackintosh became Macdonald's sole collaborator. In addition to the tea rooms, their most noteworthy projects included international exhibitions, such as the Eighth Vienna Secession (1900) and the Rose Boudoir at the Turin Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art (1902) (see below); a folio and plans for the "House for an Art Lover" design competition (1901); and the Salon Waerndorfer (1903-1906), a music room for Secessionist patron Fritz Waerndorfer. Their work for Kate Cranston, however, was arguably their finest.

The (Tea) Merchant's City

Glasgow was a prime place for the birth of the tea room.[5] In the 19th century, Glasgow's chief industries were textile production and shipbuilding on the banks of the River Clyde. It was a booming merchant city, with a thriving working class and a rising wealthy elite. As such, "dining out" became a new way to socialize across the classes.[6] Architecture was also flourishing and, by extension, interior design. Besides the development of businesses and private homes, new interior designs were shown at any number of the exhibitions taking place during this era. Mackintosh & Macdonald participated in several of these "with either secessionist organizations or with independent organizations that objected to the status quo."[7] From their highly influential presence at the Eighth Vienna Secession Exhibition in 1900 (just weeks after the Mackintoshes' August marriage), to Mackintosh designing stalls and Margaret designing menu cards for Miss Cranston's Exhibition Cafe at the 1911

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[5] See discussion in Perilla Kinchin's Tea and Taste: the story of Glasgow's Tea Rooms 1875-1975 (Wednlebury, Oxon: White Cockade, 1991).

[6] For a more detailed account of the rise of catering establishments, see Perilla Kinchin's Tea and Taste, and Alan Crawford's "The Tea Rooms: Art and Domesticity" in Kaplan.

[7] Helland, 97.

Glasgow International Exhibition, the couple enjoyed visibility and success as a direct consequence of the international exposure they received in Gleeson White's article "Some Glasgow Designers and their Work" for the Studio Magazine of Applied Art in 1897.[8] It was around that time that Kate Cranston first commissioned work from Mackintosh.

Cranston was a savvy and progressive businesswoman who created an unrivaled empire of tearooms in fin de siècle Glasgow. She first found success with her Crown Tea Room, opened in 1878, by offering a mid-day meal alternative to pubs (which had self-serve sandwich counters) that were popular at the time, but which also fueled the ongoing problem of "public drunkenness" which plagued Glasgow.[9] Perilla Kinchin reports: "The miseries of alcohol abuse ran in tandem with industrial growth, and Glasgow, 'the Workshop of the World,' was also renowned as Britain's most drink-sodden city."[10] Miss Cranston thus provided a much-needed service in her creation of a respectable—and alcohol free—establishment where Ladies could take lunch and Gentlemen could conduct business in comfort and style.

Nearly ten years later, Cranston opened a second tearoom on Ingram Street (in the business district, now known as the "Merchant City" area of the city center) in 1886, and then added a lunchroom in 1888 as part of the first Glasgow International Exhibition.[11] For this expansion, she hired several established "artistic" decorators attached to the Glasgow School of Art including George Walton, whom she had also commissioned to remodel the Crown Street room. It may have been Walton, also a night student at the GSA, who first introduced Cranston to Mackintosh, but Cranston's own "career of talent-spotting young

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[8] Gleeson White, "Some Glasgow Designers and their Work, Part I" The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art, v.11 (London: The Studio, 1897).

[9] Perilla Kinchin, Taking Tea with Mackintosh: The Story of Miss Cranston's Tea Rooms (San Francisco: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 1998), 15.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 16.

designers" cannot be discounted.[12] She could have quite as easily known Mackintosh for his work on advertising posters, which had gained him some attention.

In 1892, Miss Cranston married the prosperous engineer and industrialist John Cochrane, however in her typical unconventional manner kept the name Miss Cranston for her tearoom business (but was properly referred to as Mrs. Cochrane in private).[13] Cochrane invested in Cranston's business, enabling her to expand her empire. In 1895-97, she opened new, larger tea rooms on Buchanan Street, again hiring Walton (who had designed the Cochrane's home by this point), but also hiring the 29-year-old Mackintosh to execute murals. Pleased with their work, she again hired them for the expansion of her Argyle Street (Crown) Tea Room, reopened in 1899.[14] This time, Walton handled the "decoration and fittings...[including] some of his fireplaces and leaded-glass work"; while Mackintosh designed all the furniture, marking his first major foray into this famous category of his oeuvre.[15]

Alan Crawford observes that: "Mackintosh's work at Buchanan Street and Argyle Street was introductory. Both interiors owed more to Walton than Mackintosh, and in both Mackintosh seemed slightly at odds with the building type."[16] This aspect is important in consideration of the collaboration study at hand: while Walton and Mackintosh work together to create a harmonious space, the overall scheme lacks a certain cohesion that is expressed in the rooms Mackintosh created with Macdonald. The furnishings in Walton's interior owes much to the Aesthetic movement—tastefully decorative, with sunbeam and peacock motifs, that were elegantly ornate, but these are overshadowed by the size and

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[12] Ibid., 18.

[13] Ibid., 21.

[14] Ibid., 33.

[15] Ibid., 33.

[16] Alan Crawford, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 272.

strength of Mackintosh's murals [fig 2.2]. Based on his drawing Part Seen, Imagined Part [fig 2.3], the murals rhythmically depict a female figure (a portrait of Macdonald, according to close friend Talwin Morris) rising from a system of roots and flowering vines—while her torso is seen, her body is vaguely constructed of natural elements. In the middle of the frieze, a plant form, suggestive of a phallus and human being-like in the eye-shaped leaves on either side of its central shaft, leave no question that this work is highly symbolic in character.[17] The murals are somewhat at odds in both style and subject matter with the rest of the room. Cranston, however, was clearly impressed with Mackintosh, for she gave over to him the entire commission for the interiors of two new rooms at Ingram Street: a ladies' luncheon room and a basement billiard room (for male patrons) in 1900. Over the next twelve years, Cranston would expand (and Mackintosh would remodel) nearly all of 205-207 Ingram Street.[18] In 1903, she would also give one final new enterprise entirely to Mackintosh's vision: the most elegant of all Cranston's establishments, the Willow Tearooms on Sauchiehall Street.

Fig. 2.2 *Buchanan Street Tea Rooms, c. 1896* (Source: Glasgow Museums)

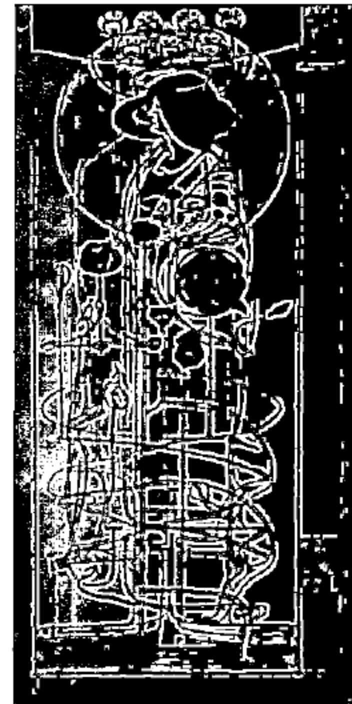

Fig. 2.3 Charles Rennie Mackintosh, ***Part Seen, Imagined Part,*** **1896**

The Ingram and the Willow each comprised a series of dining and entertainment rooms, with some divided in scheme and intention for either male or female use. Each included a tea room designed specifically with female clientele in mind, and for these particular spaces, Mackintosh enlisted Macdonald to contribute to the

[17] Ibid., 270.

[18] Alan Crawford, "The Tea Rooms: Art and Domesticity", in Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Wendy Kaplan, ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996), 272.

decorative scheme; these rooms will be the focus of the next two chapters, however, it is first useful to this analysis to consider some of the other interiors which these two artists worked on in partnership. Because only plans and loose reconstructions of the tea rooms are extant, the surviving domestic spaces the Mackintoshes designed are helpful in understanding how the lost interiors were arranged and how they were experienced, particularly in regards to the complex issues of gendered and allegorical space.

Domestic Interiors: Gender, Space, and Narrative

Mackintosh designed a handful of domestic spaces—including the couple's own home—between 1900 and 1909.[19] Two of the homes still survive as museums and approximate their original context, providing good examples of Mackintosh's use and manipulation of gendered interiors: the "Hill House" (1902-06) designed for the Blackie family; and the Mackintoshes' personal residence at 6 Florentine Terrace (1906), which has been recreated as the Mackintosh House at the Hunterian Art Gallery. Another interior, the Rose Boudoir, was mounted for the Turin Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art in 1902. Although this room is long dismantled, photographs and the component parts survive which allow the consideration of this highly symbolic space in its original context—a vital case study for understanding the couple's use of iconography and narrative in the tearooms.

The debate over Macdonald's level of collaboration should again be considered here. Each of these domestic commissions has a room designed in a feminine scheme, which includes a gesso panel (or in the case of the Rose Boudoir, five panels) by Macdonald. However, although the panels are arguably a focal point of the room, in at least one case—the Hill House—the panel was mostly made in situ almost two years after the completion of the home. This does not make a strong case for Macdonald having played a role in the overall design of the space. However, as shall be seen, the way in which the themes of the

[19] The domestic spaces which can be examined as possible collaborative designs are: their own flat at 120 Mains Street (1900), and later, their home at 6 Florentine Terrace (1906); The Hill House (1902-1906; gesso panel dated 1908); the Rose Boudoir for the Turin Exhibition (1903); the Salon Waerndorfer in Vienna (1903-1906); and the Card Room for Kate Cranston's home Hous'hill (1909).

tearoom designs depend heavily upon Macdonald's artworks supports an argument for the crafting of a style by the two of them together, one which is then used repeatedly to signify certain types of spaces (with masculine and feminine schemes) in later commissions. Thus, although this chapter looks at later works to understand the Ladies Luncheon Room and the Salon de Luxe, the domestic commissions are based upon design motifs laid out by the earlier tea room commissions.

In terms of gendered interiors, traditions of domestic decoration were well established by the end of the 19th century. Those who had written and advised on taste, such as Eastlake, Edis and Mrs. Haweis, all confirm that certain spaces should have a masculine scheme, such as the hall, the dining room, and the library, while others, most notably the sitting room or parlor and the bedroom, should have a feminine scheme.[20] Juliet Kinchin thoroughly explores this subject in her essay discussing 'masculine' and 'feminine' rooms in the 19th century:

> Each room-type was minutely codified in terms of its function, contents and décor. Within these formulae some variety was allowed, but the keynote of the masculine rooms was serious, substantial, dignified (but not ostentatious) and dark-toned. By contrast, the more feminine spaces were characterised as lighter or colourful, refined, delicate and decorative.[21]

The Mackintosh interiors employ these traditions as well. Dark coloured woods dominate the dining rooms and libraries, giving a depth and richness that recalls a forest.

The dining room in the Mackintosh house [fig. 2.4], for example, brings to mind a woodland grove. The walls—originally covered in a simple brown paper—appear a deep greenish brown against the dark mahogany-colored supports and dining furniture. Despite the lighter/cream carpeting and ceiling, the darkness of the effect is offset only slightly by the bay of windows at one end of the narrow room, and even then it would take quite a

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[20] See: Charles Locke Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste in furniture, upholstery, and other details*, 1868; Robert W. Edis, *Decoration & furniture of town houses : a series of cantor lectures delivered before the Society of Arts*, 1880; and Mary Eliza Joy Haweis, *The Art of Decoration*, 1881.

[21] Juliet Kinchin, "Interiors: nineteenth-century essays on the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' room", in The Gendered Object, Pat Kirkham, ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 12-13.

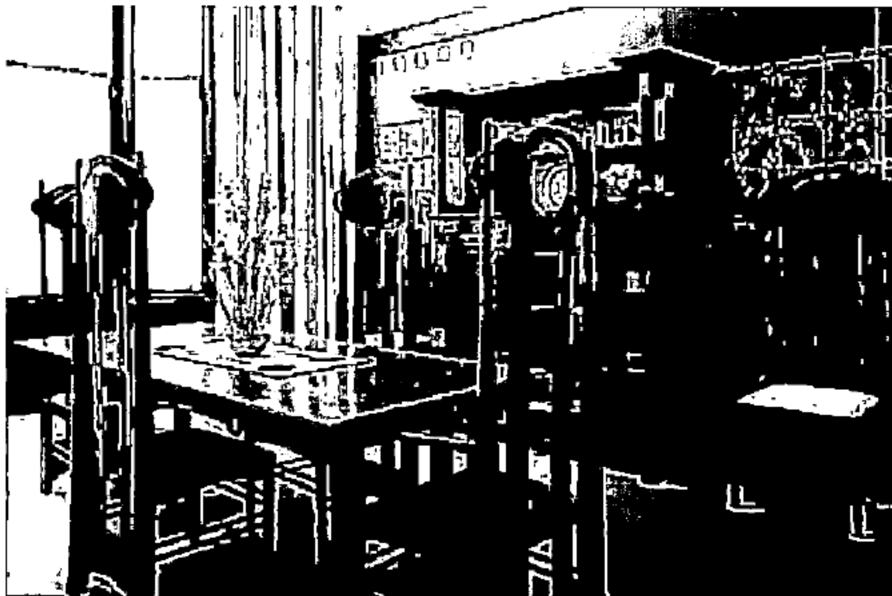

Fig. 2.4 Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, *Dining Room at 6 Florentine Terrace,* 1906. (Now the Mackintosh House at the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.)

sunny day to brighten the space. However, a stencilled rose and lattice motif, very much of the Glasgow style, is enlivened by silver "drops" suggestive of dew-moistened rose petals. They glitter, offering hints of ethereal light in the richly dark chamber.

There is a strong sense of unity in the room, that each part is a puzzle piece in a greater whole. The room is a *gesamtkunstwerk*; this can perhaps be more clearly seen by comparing it to the dining room at "Hill House", where the wood-lined space stays true to the masculine design of the room, and the signature Mackintosh geometry can be seen in the four-square patterns about the fireplace and in the light fixture. However, instead of designing new furnishings, the Blackie family wished to bring their own from their previous home. Their Chippendale dining table and grandfather clock, while of similar tonality, lack the harmony present in spaces completely designed by Mackintosh. In fact, they are downright incongruous, and give the room an unfinished, stylistically confused quality.

The library at the "Hill House" [fig. 2.5], however, was designed entirely in the Glasgow Style, right down to the bookbindings. "Hill House" was designed for Walter Blackie, a successful Glasgow publisher, and Glasgow artist Talwin Morris was his lead designer. The room itself is exemplary of the masculine library through its dark wood fittings and furnishings, and the colorful reds and greens of the bookbindings currently on display

Fig. 2.5 **Charles Rennie Mackintosh,** *Library at Hill House* 1902 -03. (Contemporary Photograph.)

compliment the dark scheme. The Blackie/Morris bindings fit perfectly with the style of the room, and while the space is now a museum, it is not difficult to imagine that the library was designed for the publisher to artistically display the fruits of his labor. It is also adjacent to the front door, and where Blackie would have conducted his business. The room serves as both a traditional masculine symbol of wealth and success, and as a powerful presentation of Blackie's personal authority and achievement as a publisher.

With only slight deviations, the libraries and dining rooms at other Mackintosh domiciles prescribe to this scheme. The dining rooms are all dark-colored, offset with lighter but still earth-toned decorative stencilling: from the interiors designed for their own flat at 120 Mains Street, Glasgow (1900)[22], to the remodelling of Katherine Cranston's house "Hous'hill" at Nitshill (1903-05); and including the one devised for the "House for an Art Lover" competition (1901), which have a similar scheme, but with the addition of small gesso panels by Margaret Macdonald, arranged frieze-like about the room.[23] The libraries are similarly dark, from Mackintosh's first full domestic commission, "Windyhill" at Kilmacolm for William Davidson (1900-01)[24], and culminating in perhaps his most famous library, that of the Glasgow School of Art (1909) (and while not domestic, exemplary of this tradition).

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[22] Roger Billcliffe, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, The Complete Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs (London: Lutterworth Press, 1979), 74.

[23] The original plan for these is unclear in drawings, but they inspired the artists D. and J. Vaughn to create a cycle on the life of the rose when they helped create the room for the version constructed in Bellahouston Park.

[24] 'Windyhill' also had a similar scheme overall to "Hill House" in both plan and design. The property is still in private hands.

Fig. 2.6 Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, *Bedroom, The Hill House,* 1902 - 03.

Fig. 2.7 Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, *Sitting Room/Studio for 6 Florentine Terrace,* 1906. (Now the Mackintosh House at the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.)

These schemes are similar to those found in the male-intended smoking and billiard rooms in the tea room interiors.

Having established that there is a strong (and traditional) masculine scheme in these works, it must be noted that the presiding interior scheme is feminine in nature. The largest and most ornate rooms are those traditionally in the feminine sphere, most notably the sitting room, bedrooms and, where commissioned, the music room. In both "Hill House" and the Mackintosh house, the sitting room and bedrooms are spacious and nearly all white, with subtle touches of pinks and greens and gold in the stencilled and glass details of the walls and furnishings and light fixtures, floral arrangements, and in Macdonald's gesso works [fig. 2.6-7].[25] James Macauley captures the fantastic poetics of the space:

> Unlike the square study and the rectangular dining room, here the plan is irregular with two bays set at right angles to each other. One was for music; the other for conversation or for casual reading… Within this sparkling bower the solidity of the white walls dissolves into the opaque curtains and then beyond the gossamer lines of leaded glass to the infinity of sky and cloud. Step onto the floorboards and one is on the threshold of an arbour defined by the climbing stems of the slim posts, disguising the ends of the couch, and by the gauzy curtains on which the pink squares flutter like butterflies.[26]

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[25] There is evidence that some of the interiors were not originally pure white but a cream color; but the effect is the same.

[26] James Macaulay, Hill House, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, (London: Phaidon, 1994) 21.

It is difficult not to describe these spaces in terms of nature, which reveals the deliberate choices of the artists. Furthermore, feminine associations with nature are well ingrained in symbolic narratives, and are important to the female aspect of the home.

What is the psychological effect of all of this white? In his book White Walls, Designer Dresses, Mark Wigley observes:

> And what was so striking about Mackintosh and McDonald's [sic] work at the time was that its white surfaces cannot be separated from its ornament. The ornamentation is itself white and seems to grow out of the white surfaces that might, at first, seem to merely frame it.[27]

To the Victorians, white became associated with hygiene (for to keep something white was to keep it clean). But it is more of a psychological than an actual effect, as Wigley points out: "Whitewash purifies the eye rather than the building. Indeed, it reveals the central role of vision in hygiene. After all, the "clean" white surface is not such a simple thing."[28] This psychological view becomes even more complicated when considering how it offsets the view outside, particularly for the spaces in Glasgow. In 1910, Desmond Chapman-Houston, close friend of the Mackintoshes, described their home:

> It is far away in that mist encircled grim city of the north which is filled with echoes of the terrible screech of the utilitarian, and haunted by the hideous eyes of thousands who make their God of gold. Vulgar ideals, and the triumph of the obvious, are characteristic of the lives of the greater proportion of its population; and yet, in the midst of so much that is incongruous and debasing, we find a little white home, full of quaint and beautiful things, with a big white studio empty of everything but the Artist's jesso panels, all prepared and made beautiful for her by her artist husband, in order that her genius may have a fitting home, and her exquisite, quiet art congenial and fitting surroundings.[29]

Chapman-Houston paints a romantic aesthetic vision of the artists at home, and one which fits perfectly within the philosophy of the gesamtkunstwerk. But the contrast also provides a barrier between the outside and inside, between "home" and "city", and arguably even

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[27] Mark Wigley, White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 165.

[28] Wigley, 5.

[29] Major Desmond Chapman-Huston, Dreamers in the Moon, ca. 1906. Facsimile, Collection of the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow.

between the "cleanliness" of bourgeois living, and the dirt of the industrial city. Kinchin states: "In the context of urban grime, and related threats of human abasement, crime, pollution and disease, the dominant emphasis on lightness by the end of the nineteenth century can be read as an attempt to control matter out of place, reinforcing threatened boundaries."[30]

Thus a (perhaps false) construction of security is maintained, and at the same time the white (hygienic) interior contextualizes refined behaviour. These ideas will be important in understanding the tearooms, particularly the Ladies Luncheon Room (also called the White Dining Room) at Ingram Street. Kevin Melchionne elaborates the idea that a space can instruct our behavior in his work on another (yet later) famous domicile, Phillip Johnson's 'Glass House':

> In a hyperorganized environment, design leads and habit follows... Domestic practice becomes the art of maintaining the discipline of implication in the order, of more or less forcing habit to follow aesthetic conception... The embodied experience—one might say "synaesthetic"—of being inside, indeed, part of the composition induces in the radical aesthete the greatest of pleasures. Pleasure resides in the implication of the body in an aesthetically pleasing scheme, not just experience of space as an aesthetically pleasing visual field.[31]

This is an useful concept to consider regarding Mackintosh, particularly from a contemporary viewpoint. The sitting room in the Mackintosh house seems particularly discomfiting (one imagines the challenge of keeping the pristine carpet clean, and the Mackintosh chairs are notoriously uncomfortable and wobbly). Even in their own time, their friend Muthesius wrote that their interiors were:

> ...refined to a degree which the lives of even the artistically educated are still a long way from matching. The delicacy and austerity of their artistic atmosphere would tolerate no admixture of the ordinariness which fills our lives. Even a book in an unsuitable binding would disturb the atmosphere simply by lying on the table, indeed even the man or woman of today... treads like a stranger in this fairy-tale world.[32]

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[30] Kinchin, 25.

[31] Kevin Melchionne, "Living in Glass Houses: Domesticity, Interior Decoration, and Environmental Aesthetics", The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 56, No.2. (Spring, 1998), 193.

[32] Muthesius, 52.

But what of the symbolic nature of whiteness? Quite simply, in this context it is the opposite of dark. If dark is associated with that which is masculine – seriousness, intellectuality, and, perhaps even that which is unseen or hidden, then white is its foil. White is light, clean, and revealing. It is not frivolous, but it is honest. It is the feminine aspect. It has a spiritual quality that balances the dark. Like Yin and Yang, the light and dark, masculine and feminine interiors are in balance and harmony. Kinchin observes:

> ...Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret Macdonald chose to re-emphasize the male-female divide, exaggerating and making visible the operation of visual codes which had been 'naturalised' in interior decoration of the preceding century. They subtly manipulated the received conventions in new and interesting ways which reflected a more consensual, positively constructed view of gender relations than that held by the majority of their contemporaries.[33]

This is certainly achieved through the male-dark/female-light relationship, but as stated earlier, the feminine is neither frivolous nor overstated, but refined, elegant, and associated with openness and sincerity in its clean design and revealing nature. It lends gravity to the feminine rooms that elevates them to equal their masculine counterparts.

By the same token, the masculine rooms have features which soften their severity. Natural motifs, particularly the rose but also stylized leaf and vine-work, weave their way throughout the spaces, at home in the feminine rooms and adding a decidedly "feminine touch" to the masculine rooms via the associations of female with nature. Thus despite any predominant scheme of a room, there is a touch of the opposite gender residing in each. This binding element connects the spaces and draws parallels between them that balance and equalize the rooms in terms of gender.

One further aspect of the plan ties together this masculine-feminine balance – the transitional spaces of the stairs and hall. As noted earlier, the entrance hall is a traditionally masculine space. But Mackintosh's halls, although predominantly of dark wood, transcend this by offsetting the wood with white or beige walls, and again through the use of natural motifs. The design of the space itself also helps facilitate this. While the hall at "Hill

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[33] Kinchin, 25.

House" seems quite dark in contrast to the sitting room, the space is large and airy, less of a passage per se and more of a room, and it is softened with pink and beige detailing in the carpet, wall panels, and light fixtures. And rather than a solid wall between the front vestibule and the stairwell, wooden slats are used which allow inhabitants to glimpse what is beyond from either direction. This creates a sort of spatial slippage that both enlarges and contains each area, playing with the public/private relationship of downstairs/upstairs. Thus masculine and feminine spaces flow in and out of each other, again reinforcing the balance and unified composition of the overall scheme. Mackintosh uses these techniques when he remodels the Ingram interior, including the highly architectural furniture, as well as in the mezzanine level design of the Willow tearoom.

The design motifs in the domestic interiors open and expand like the buds of the rose to encompass the entire home. Each of the parts – structure, fittings, furnishings, and decoration—create a cohesive atmosphere in every room. Each room is connected through style and spatial flow to create a holistic domestic interior. And where Mackintosh designed the actual edifice himself, each domestic interior, in its entirety, is enclosed in an architectural exterior articulated by the shape of the interior plan, and whose façade is solid and imposing, yet with delicate hints of the softer interior within. Indeed each has a highly charged atmosphere of a mystical, symbolic kind, the parts representing harmony, balance, and love between the male and female, combining inside the domestic space to make the house in its entirety a symbol of the domestic ideal. The incorporation of the rose motif, the gendering of the space, and the plan and decorative motifs that allow for these ideas to flow into each other create a space symbolic of the love and harmony that can be achieved between the male and female, or, more specifically, the man and woman of the house. Domestic bliss is attainable, and through the instruction and envelopment of the Mackintoshes' design, it can bloom, grow, and thrive within the bosom of the domestic interior.

The highly symbolic aspect of these spaces takes on a more clearly narrative structure in the Rose Boudoir exhibition interior. The Rose Boudoir display was a shallow, wide space in

which there was a room setting comprised of various panels, watercolors, items of furniture, ceramics, and textiles by both artists [fig. 2.8]. At the center of the room was a table topped with an elaborate bowl of flowers, and the space was colored in pinks and lavenders against a creamy white background. The lighting, which Mackintosh cleverly hung at the height of the display (to detract from the high ceiling of the exhibition hall), cast a soft glow around the pastel interior. The White Rose and the Red Rose [Plate VI] hung on the left wall, and The Heart of the Rose [Plate VII] hung on the right.

Fig. 2.8 Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, *The Rose Boudoir,* 1902.

Macdonald's other two gesso panels sat between them in a somewhat unusual place—inside the doors of a writing cabinet [Plate VIII] designed by Mackintosh, The Dreaming Rose in the left door, and The Awakened Rose in the right (an excellent example of their object-based collaborative work). These small panels share a similar composition to the two larger ones: a central female figure designed in dark lines with red and white roses against a golden background. The compositions are balanced, but also dynamic; Macdonald bases them on symmetrical, geometric forms, but she cleverly plays with these shapes by turning heads, adding figures to the right of the vertical axis, and creating lines and curves that are textured and dotted with beads and gems, thus offsetting what would otherwise be perfectly ordered symmetry. The lines serve to lead the eye through and around each canvas, but the decorative details provide places to pause and consider.

The rose theme is found throughout the room, but punctuated by the narrative cycle of Macdonald's gesso panels: two large gessos, The White Rose and the Red Rose and The Heart of the Rose begin and end the narrative; between them are The Dreaming Rose and The Awakened Rose in the doors of the writing cabinet; and at the centre of these, in the heart of the cabinet, is a small metal panel, The Spirit of Love, which serves as a key to understanding the tale these pieces have to tell.

When considered together, the narrative fits directly into the rich iconography of the rose.[34] It was an attribute of Venus, and has been a symbol of love since antiquity. The rose is also a Christian symbol, associated with the blood of Christ as well as the Virgin.[35] Roses have a strong connection to both English and Scottish history – the rose being a symbol of England (the English Rose, and the War of the Roses, for example), while the white rose was a clandestine signifier of Jacobite sympathies in eighteenth century Scotland, and thus a symbol of Scottish patriotism. These connotations of passionate and familial love, spiritual love, and English and Scottish heritage are all fitting lenses through which to view these works.

Yet what is also significant is the way in which these traditional symbols have been appropriated and reinvented for the purpose of the artist. As suggested by the previously discussed domestic spaces, the Mackintoshes were very much Symbolist artists—they took a familiar symbol and re-contextualized it, so that their work was somewhat ambiguous, yet coded for those who wished to find meaning. They offered enough by way of the title to suggest what their narrative intentions were, but beyond this did not publicly explain their work. Roses permeate not just these panels, but also a large portion of Macdonald's oeuvre. She manipulates color and traditional iconography much in the way the Pre-Raphaelites did. Dante Gabriel Rossetti in particular cleverly used color symbolism in works like Beata Beatrix (see discussion in Chapter Three), and was a significant source of influence for Macdonald, as will be seen in the discussion of the Willow Tearoom. Red and white play an important symbolic role in the scheme throughout the Rose Boudoir where the overarching tale is a unique play upon the Virgin & Child motif.

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[34] Two other glass panels by Mackintosh could potentially have been part of this narrative: The Secret of the Rose and The Spirit of the Rose. However, no information beyond their title is available on these panels.

[35] It is the rose cross that is associated with the Rosicrucians. If there was ever a case for suggesting the Mackintoshes had associations with Rosicrucianism, it is in their dominant use of the rose, as well as the prominence of a "divine feminine", particularly in this cycle. However as there is no evidence for this, their involvement in this or any other order will remain a mystery.

In Macdonald's panels, the "roses" are allegorical figures, females that are, again, conflated with nature. The panels can be read as a text, from left to right. The tale begins on the left wall of the Rose Boudoir with The White Rose and the Red Rose.[36] The "White Rose" stands at center, a woman wrapped in a white robe, the folds closed about her like rosebuds. Her gown, the core of her figure, is a rich, fertile green, and in front of her she holds a bouquet of white buds (their stems arguably in a shape which could be perceived as the opening of a vulva). Her dark eyes gaze out at the viewer, while tendrils of her dark hair fall and join the pattern of vines, the rose briar that wraps about her. Behind her and to the right, the "Red Rose", so indicated by the red gown she wears, leans gently towards the "White Rose" as if whispering in her ear. She is Passionate Love, gently coaxing Pure Love to bloom. White and red roses are found about the surface of the canvas.

The second panel, in the left-hand cabinet door of the writing desk, is The Dreaming Rose. Here we find the "White Rose" with her head slightly raised, and her eyes closed, sleeping. We see her dream in the highly symmetrical composition in which she is placed. Her white gown fills the bottom of the square canvas like a teardrop, and is tinged with red about the edges; she is blooming. The vulva shape created by the flower stems in the previous panel is now much larger, extending like her dark tendrils arcing from brow to feet, with the roses at center having gone from white to red. Two of these blooms are at the very center of this opening, with two more flanking and above them, each with vines arcing horizontally from them like flounces of a dress, which have the effect of holding this space open. Two babes hover on either side of her head, their forms outlined in green as if they were encased in pods. These are the seedlings of which her fertile, blooming body dreams, her form tinged in the red of Passionate Love. The dreamspace is a place in between the

[36] This panel was auctioned at Christie's London on April 28, 2008 to a private American collector for 1.7 million British pounds (just over 3 million American dollars), making it currently the highest selling work of Scottish Art ever. Its sister panel, The Heart of the Rose, was sold for £450,000 to a different bidder. Both the separation of these panels and the value placed on them have interesting implications for the future recognition of Macdonald's work.

physical and the material worlds, and like the transfigurative moment of the Annunciation, enables the physical conception of her child.

At the center of the cabinet is a small panel, The Spirit of Love. It is perhaps the most austere of all Macdonald's compositions. Intriguingly, it was decided not to make this panel of gesso, but rather to combine gesso with silver metal, perhaps hinting at the alchemy of creation that the cycle suggests. A softly curved horizontal line divides the square space in the upper quarter, the space above colored the ivory of the panels, the space below the silver of the metal. Just half of a small face appears above this line, with a small red rosebud lying gently next to it, where the other half will form. Two thin lines, a straight one leading up to the face, and a gently curved one leading to the rose, also serve to suggest the form of the body. This simple composition suggests a babe lying under a blanket, sleeping peacefully. This half-formed entity is the resting "Spirit" that Love, the "Red Rose" has placed in the womb of the "White Rose".

In the right cabinet door is The Awakened Rose. The "White Rose" is now in full bloom, her body round as she carries the babe within her. Her head is turned back looking at the face behind her, a spirit watching over her, perhaps that of the "Red Rose". Her gown is still white, although heavily bordered in red to the right, where the "Red Rose" stood in the first panel. Nearly all of the roses that surround her now are red.

Finally, The Heart of the Rose provides a happy ending to this faerie tale. The "White Rose" stands with her garment still blooming, but less full, and in front of her she holds a newborn, swaddled in a red blanket that is distinctly in the form of a rose. The "Red Rose" stands quietly to her right, and these sisters gaze down serenely at the babe, soft smiles on their faces. The child is the "Spirit of Love", the happy ending of a passionate encounter.

The aforementioned domestic interiors are exemplary of the Mackintoshes' work together, and provide evidence for the Mackintoshes' design interests. Their schemes are unified, and use stylized natural motifs, light/dark tonality balance, and allegorical figures

(specifically the divine feminine), to evoke the symbolic presence of the masculine and feminine in unity, as well as the importance of both sacred and profane love to this union. All of these themes are key elements in understanding the Ingram Street and the Willow Tearooms, as shall be seen in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III

THE INGRAM STREET TEAROOM

"Just now, we are working on two large panels for the frieze... Miss Margaret Macdonald is doing one and I am doing the other. We are working them together and that makes the work very pleasant."
-Charles Rennie Mackintosh to Hermann Muthesius, July 1900[1]

So far as we know, the Ladies Luncheon Room at Miss Cranston's Tearooms at Ingram Street [Plate III] was the first interior that Mackintosh and Macdonald worked on together. Kate Cranston, being a professional woman herself, envisaged creating a space where ladies would feel more comfortable conducting business and leisure (away from the affairs, and perhaps gazes, of men). The feminine scheme of the room, particularly in color (largely white, lavenders, and pinks), but most certainly in the elegant female figures depicted in the gesso panels, reflected the intended patrons of the space. Like most of these spaces, it is unknown whether the rooms were designed around the panels, or vice-versa. Probably it was a combination—an overall scheme that harmonized the two. With Mackintosh interested in creating a *gesamtkunstwerk*, it is to be expected that each and every component of the room had a specific place and significance. But it is also likely that the scheme of the rooms evolved organically in the design and construction process. Macdonald was a fitting collaborator for this commission—being an independent woman artist—and created a significant component of the scheme.

The room comprised the front of the main floor of the tearooms, and was separated from the narrow entrance hall by a mid-height screen [Plate III, detail]. The walls were

[1] Charles Rennie Mackintosh, in a letter to Hermann Muthesius, 12th July 1900. Facsimile, Collection of the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery (originals in the Werkbunde Archives, Vienna).

paneled silver and white to a height of ten feet, and the gesso panels—Macdonald's *The May Queen* [Plate I] and Mackintosh's *The Wassail* [Plate II]—sat opposite each other in the upper third of the east and west walls (respectively). A bank of windows stretched along the north wall, allowing natural light to reflect off the white and silver walls below the panels. The light color scheme had feminine associations that echoed the light-feminine/dark-masculine gender coding found in nineteenth century domestic interiors, discussed in the previous chapter.[2] The color, in combination with the natural light, created a gentle and serene environment for quiet conversation. The dining furniture was of dark wood, with long tables and high-backed chairs arranged to emphasize the horizontal length of the space. The elongation of the furniture and the interior was reflected in the elongation of the forms in the gesso panels.

The Physical History of the Gesso Panels

The gesso panels in the frieze are perhaps the most significant aspects of this room. The couple crafted these first panels together in the busy months before their August, 1900 marriage, while simultaneously setting up their own flat at 120 Mains Street, Glasgow, and making arrangements to install their exhibit at the Eighth Vienna Secession Exhibition in October. In a letter to Hermann Muthesius dated 12th July, 1900, Mackintosh reported:

> I am not nearly done with "Miss Cranstons" yet it has involved a great lot of work. Just now we are working at two large panels for the frieze 15 feet long x 5 [feet] 3 ins *[sic]* high... We have set ourselves a very large task as we are slightly modelling and then colouring and setting the jewels of different colours.[3]

Before they were installed at Ingram Street, the gesso panels were shown at the Eighth Vienna Secession Exhibition. *The May Queen* and *The Wassail* were arguably experimental in their construction, and may have proved fragile on their journey to Vienna and back,

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[2] Mackintosh subscribed to these codes, but also manipulated them in his own domestic designs through the use of natural motifs, as in those created for their home.

[3] Charles Rennie Mackintosh, in a letter to Hermann Muthesius, 12thJuly 1900. Facsimile, Collection of the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery (from the original in the Werkbunde Archives, Vienna).

particularly because of their scale.[4] The linear designs were not painted but constructed of twine pinned to the canvas in an almost haphazard fashion, with glass beads, shell, tin, and painted and modeled plaster "jewels", almost an inch in relief, fixed to the surface. All of Macdonald's subsequent panels are much lower in relief, and the linear designs are made of piped plaster instead of twine.

Very little is known about how Margaret Macdonald came to use gesso as a primary medium. The basic use of gesso may have been part of her technical instruction at the Glasgow School of Art (GSA), the school with which her artistic education has been largely associated.[5] However, her artistic training likely began as early as 1877 when she enrolled at age thirteen in the Orme Girls' School (now Newcastle Under Lyme School) in North Staffordshire, which was "extremely progressive" and a "pioneer in the field of female education."[6] Macdonald also studied art privately with J.P. Bacon, headmaster at Stoke-on-Trent School of Art, and it is probable that she travelled to the continent, most likely to France and Germany, as many educated young ladies of her station did, to round out her education.[7] Although the term "gesso panel" has become the accepted classification used for the works discussed here, there is no evidence that either Macdonald or Mackintosh ever used it. On the contrary, in the inventory of the couple's artwork that Mackintosh hand-wrote for the Turin Exhibition, the four panels for the Rose Boudoir were listed as "Plaster Panels". Likewise, the watercolours of *The May Queen* and *The Wassail* were labelled as "Design for Plaster Panel". The photographs of these works in *The Studio* designated them

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[4] See Appendix I for dimensions.

[5] The Annual Report of the Glasgow School of Art, Annual Meeting, 22nd Feb., 1892. Glasgow; K. & R. Davidson, Printers, 1892. The reports only list courses for which students took exams, but technical studios—which taught the basics of painting, drawing, and other elementary design skills—were part of the general coursework.

[6] Ibid., 19. The curriculum included 'Latin… French and German… as well as English, mathematics, music, natural science, ancient and modern history, and art.'

[7] Ibid., 20.

each "Panel in Coloured Plaster".[8] In fact, the earliest documented use of "gesso" in relation to Macdonald was made in Chapman-Huston's 1906 essay, where he refers to her "Jesso-work".[9] However, it is likely that the Mackintoshes called these works "plaster panels" quite simply because they were made from a variety of plaster solutions, as Brian Cardy's 1994-95 conservation of *The May Queen* and *The Wassail* panels reveals.[10]

Gesso, a white material made from chalk (calcium carbonate) or gypsum (calcium sulphate) bound with animal glue (usually derived from rabbit-skin), is often used as a ground for paintings. It is also particularly useful as a foundation for gilded and painted decoration (such as on frames) because it can fill irregularities in base material (often wood) and can be worked to a very smooth surface.[11] Plaster is a blanket term used for "various powdered substances, based on clay, gypsum, or lime that become plastic when mixed with water, then set hard."[12] Gypsum plaster (more commonly known as Plaster of Paris), for example, is gypsum mixed with water; but there is no glue involved in this process. Although gesso may be considered a *form* of plaster (and there are many types of gesso, as will be discussed shortly) plaster *is not necessarily* gesso. It is the addition of sizing to plaster which makes gesso.

Gesso itself is an ancient medium, found, for example, in the decoration and funerary objects in Egyptian tombs, Mesopotamian masks, and in the vaults and interiors of Classical Greece and Rome. It has been used for centuries on art objects such as Italian Renaissance *cassoni*, gilded frames, caskets, furniture, and other decorative items. It enjoyed something of

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[8] "The first International Exhibition of modern decorative art at Turin" The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art, v.26 (London: The Studio, 1902) pp. 91-104.

[9] Chapman-Huston, Dreamers. See opening quote of the introduction.

[10] Brian Cardy, Conservation of two sets of gesso panels: 'May Queen' and 'Wassail' painted by Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret MacDonald., December, 1995 (Archives of the Glasgow Museums).

[11] Lucy Trench, ed., Materials & Techniques in the Decorative Arts: An Illustrated Dictionary (Cambridge: The University Press, 2000), 193.

[12] Trench, 372.

a revival in the late nineteenth century due to the interest of artists like Walter Crane as well as the fashion for decorative plasterwork promoted by artists throughout Britain.

Indeed Crane published an article on the subject in the very first volume of *The Studio* (1893). Macdonald would have been aware of this article, for not only did the GSA subscribe to this magazine from the outset, but the first issue contained other pieces that were of clear influence (the article "A New Illustrator: Aubrey Beardsley", which included one of his famous *Salome* images, for example).[13] Also, *The Studio* was ultimately vital to her own artistic career, as she was featured, along with her sister and Mackintosh, in Gleeson White's 1897 article "Some Glasgow Artists and their Work (Part I)".[14] Crane's article, "Notes on Gesso Work" discusses both the history of gesso, as well as important technical advice on handling the medium.[15] At the outset he champions gesso's versatile merits:

> Decorative design in gesso stands, it may be said, midway between painting and sculpture, partaking in its variations of the characters of each in turn—the younger sister of both, holding, as it were, the hands of each; playful, light-hearted, familiar, associated in its turn with all kinds of domestic furniture and adornment.[16]

Crane also offers different guidelines for mixing gesso depending on artistic requirements (whether decorating an object or painting a panel, for example) and he lauds the durability of the medium ("this panel, though it has been knocked about at exhibitions, remains perfectly sound").[17] But the two most pertinent pieces of technical advice with reference to Macdonald's work are his cautions on size, and his discussion of the character of the materials. In a discussion of a large panel, he states:

> On this scale however, (the original is about three feet deep) plaster and glue cannot be relied on to hold without fibre, and for work on this scale, as also for border

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[13] The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art, v.1 (London: The Studio, 1893).

[14] Gleeson White, "Some Glasgow Designers and their Work, Part I", The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art, v.11 (London: The Studio, 1897), 86-100.

[15] Walter Crane, "Notes on Gesso Work", The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art, v.1 (London: The Studio, 1893), 45 – 49.

[16] Ibid., 45.

[17] Ibid., 47.

> relief, it is advisable to use either tow or cotton-wool—I prefer the latter. You take the mixture of plaster-of-paris and glue as before, but into it you dip small pieces of the cotton wool, pulled out to keep the fibre from growing into hard knots, and having thoroughly saturated them in the gesso, you proceed to lay them on your ground or panel, gradually building up the design and modelling as you go along. The panel may be of fibrous plaster, and suited for insertion in a wall, frieze or ceiling, or fireplace.[18]

On the nature of gesso as a material, Crane suggests:

> ...in laying on and modelling any design in gesso with a brush, he will find the brush and the paste conspire together to favour the production of certain forms in ornament—delicate branch and leaf and scroll work, for instance, and dotted and linear borderings, lines of hair and drapery arranged in patters. Such forms as these the brush charged with gesso almost naturally falls into, and, indeed, leaf shapes may be considered almost as the reflection of the form of the brush itself.[19]

The forms described, which Crane states are well-suited to gesso, are those which Macdonald used in her gesso panels. She used a brush for some of the work, as Crane suggests, but we also know that she may have been inspired by a different sort of decoration, one which Crane himself recognized in the reflection "perhaps the gesso-worker still survives in the adroit Italian artist who squeezes spirals and garlands, in a tinted gesso of plaster and sugar, upon our cakes. Sugar too was, I believe, an ancient ingredient in mixing gesso."[20] Agnes Blackie recalls watching Macdonald working on the gesso panel *The Sleeping Princess* (ca. 1906-1909) *in situ* over the mantle of the sitting room at her family home, The Hill House, as a girl: "She used a piping bag, like you would if you were icing a cake, and then stuck things onto the plaster. It was very beautiful."[21] Could Crane's observation have been an inspiration for Macdonald's technique?

Another possible source of instruction is the book *Plastering, Plain and Decorative: A Practical Treatise on the Art & Craft of Plastering and Modelling,* by the Scottish (but London-

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Crane, 47-48.

[20] Ibid., 46.

[21] Alistair Moffat, "Agnes Black and her sister Ruth Hedderwick, talking to Alistair Moffat, 1985", Remembering Charles Rennie Mackintosh (Lanark: Colin Baxter Photography LTD. 1989), 49.

based) plasterer and modeller William Millar.[22] Published in March, 1897—just three years before the couple's first panels were crafted—Millar's goal was to "help spread a knowledge of the means and methods of executing all kinds of work in plaster, and so cause a greater appreciation of it, and a desire for its wider use, thus bringing about a true revival of the craft."[23] The text includes an entire chapter on "Fibrous Plaster Work", which goes into greater detail than the Crane article cited above, including the history of the medium. For example:

> ...the uses of linen and canvas, in conjunction with plaster and glue, was known and practised by the Egyptians long before the Christian era. From ancient MSS. still extant, and ancient coffins and mummies, now to be seen in the British Museum, it is conclusively proven that linen, stiffened with plaster, was used for decorating coffins, and when embalming human bodies, by the Egyptians, 1500 B.C. Dr Petrie's discoveries at Kahun go even further, for he found that plaster and canvas were used for casting mummers' masks nearly 4,400 years ago.[24]

Millar proceeds to give an extensive list of the recent uses of fibrous plaster, extolling its virtues for works that required "lightness and rapidity."[25] He outlines techniques for every part of the process, from properly cutting canvas for the work, to the testing of size water, to detailed instructions on how to cast the layers of plaster. The thoroughness of this volume is impressive, and would have provided Macdonald and Mackintosh with an invaluable resource for perfecting their technique.[26]

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[22] William Millar, Plastering, Plain and Decorative: A Practical Treatise on the Art & Craft of Plastering and Modelling (London: B.T. Batsford, 1897), vii. This volume comprises over five hundred pages of comprehensive instruction and historical commentary on the use of various kinds of plasterwork, including discussion of materials, compounds, techniques, tools and appliances, as well as advertisements.

[23] Ibid., vii.

[24] Ibid. 343 – 44. In addition to historical accounts like this one, which are riddled throughout this treatise, Millar includes another chapter on "Foreign Plaster Work" where he outlines the history, technique, and style of the plaster work from across the globe.

[25] Ibid., 344 - 45. He specifically mentioned using it for his own set designs at the Royal Theatre and the Lyceum in the 1880s, and at various International Exhibitions.

[26] There is no documentation that they ever saw this text, but the Millar text was enormously popular after its publication, resulting in a 2nd expanded edition in 1899, and is still considered to be the "bible" for the plaster work profession.

Macdonald's early gesso panels are on fiber (later, smaller gessos are on panel). Both *The May Queen* and *The Wassail* panels are coarsely covered in gesso, with the hessian and scrim base showing through in several parts.[27] This may not have been as evident from the panels' elevated positioning in the tea room, but there is a visible texture to them which, deliberate or not, adds richness and depth to their composition.

The 1995 restoration of these works revealed valuable information about their construction. According to the report of conservator Brian Cardy, the gesso material is a gypsum base, and "the original gesso surface has a subtle, slightly polished porcelain-like appearance and its colouration is irregular, being off-white in places and bluish green in others due to a toning of the gesso itself with pigment."[28] The report also reveals a collage-like construction that is in keeping with Walter Crane's advocacy of gesso and associated technical advice. Macdonald and Mackintosh have taken this further by including bits of moulded and painted *gesso duro* (looking much like modern "Fimo" plastic clay), beads, twine, and shell. These high-relief objects appear to sit *on* the surface of these early canvasses, while later panels have a more seamless application of media that are lower relief and moulded *into* the surface. Cardy's report on *The May Queen* confirms the seemingly experimental construction of the panel:

> The surface of the gesso has uneven appearance, with smoothed or textured areas and brushed, raised portions. The outlines of the composition were originally drawn in with charcoal and then emphasized using string attached to the wet gesso surface with pins... Certain areas of each panel were painted with thin translucent washes of oil paint on top of the gesso; these included the hair; hands and faces...[29]

It seems that the supports were another roughly handled aspect of the panel's construction. Cardy evaluated that "the timber framework is of very poor quality wood

[27] Some of this may be the result of over-cleaning done in 1985. See Cardy's report, page 3.
[28] Cardy, 8.
[29] Cardy, 6.
[30] Cardy, 21.

and is made up in a laminate structure which is inherently weak."[30] He also noted that the pieces of wood were not secured properly, having been "partly bonded to another using some gesso, thus allowing a great deal of rigidity", and that the gesso easily breaks at the outer edges because the pieces were not riven, but smooth.[31] Macdonald's technique on subsequent panels is much more refined.

The medium of gesso is more malleable than metal, and more sculptural than paint. It allowed Macdonald to build up highly decorative and elegant surfaces to complement the similarly faceted interiors by Mackintosh. The texture of the gesso matched Macdonald's linear, organic designs, and the practical durability of the medium provided stability for worldwide transport and endurance for long life in Mackintosh's interiors.

However, it may have also been its historical associations that contributed to gesso's appeal to the Mackintoshes. Gesso can be traced back to at least ancient Egypt, where it was used as an ornamental base in much the same way as it was later in the Renaissance. Crane relates this, but emphasizes that it was the Italians who truly mastered its use in the architecture of Pompeii, Roman crypts, and in the altarpieces and "devotional pictures of the early Italian school."[32] The associations with Egyptian magic and Christian worship would certainly have appealed to the Mackintoshes, who frequently used symbolic, pagan-themed subjects in their work. The use of gesso evokes a mythic, spiritual quality associated with votive art that offers the allegorical female figures a sense of divinity. The placement of the panels in altar-like constructions (as shall be seen in the Willow Tearoom) serves to reinforce this sense of "otherness". In the end, with their solid, bejewelled surfaces and stylized female figures, the panels appeared an almost devotional focal point of the interiors they graced.

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Crane, 45.

The *May Queen* and *Wassail* remained *in situ* after Cranston sold all of her tea rooms and retired in 1918-19.[33] They were salvaged from the building in 1971, but they did not, unfortunately, escape unscathed:

> The tea rooms at Ingram Street… ran on… under different management, but with respect for their special character, until 1950. Then came a dark period during in which the interiors were effectively vandalized by a souvenir shop until what was left was finally stripped and stored before the demolition of the building in 1971.[34]

At some point between 1950 and 1970, the rooms, including the panels, were repainted. Glasgow Museums Curator Alison Brown related: "The room paneling had at least seven layers of different white and cream paints—so that gives you an idea of how the rooms were treated."[35] Both the *May Queen* and *Wassail* were painted in the same colors: creamy-white faces with poorly repainted features, the string painted chocolate brown, with the golden background over-painted a jade green and the roses and flowers colored in pink. The damage was fortunately reversible and the paintings were painstakingly cleaned and conserved in 1995. The Ladies Luncheon Room was reconstructed for the 1996 Charles Rennie Mackintosh exhibit which toured the United States, returning the eye of the global art world to the work of the Glasgow school.

Interpretation of the Gesso Panels

The Wassail depicts six female figures: two at center, with their heads inclined towards each other, flanked by two more figures at each side. Like Mackintosh's decoration for the Buchanan Street rooms, these figures are not fully formed, and seem to emerge from a vine-like decorative pattern reminiscent of Japanese design. A large green disk floats halo-like behind the heads of each of the flanking groups. Red roundels—sprouting plant-like from thin stalks—flank the central figures, and stylized roses are found in the hair of the women at left and right. The overall effect of the composition is of ordered, tranquil beauty.

[33] Kinchin, 98.

[34] Ibid.

[35] A. Brown, in an email to Robyne Miles, 30 November, 2006.

By contrast, *The May Queen* is a more complicated composition. Five women are depicted, and their stylized robes make them appear more fully formed than those in *The Wassail.* The figures are inscribed in a rectangle, with three large green disks floating behind the heads of the women at left, center, and right. The Queen is at center in a teardrop-shaped garment, faerie wings inscribed in linear decoration at her back. The figures at left and right stand like ladies-in-waiting, holding garlands of flowers between them which span horizontally in front of and behind the Queen. New shoots of vine spring forth at their feet, and flowers dot the canvas in a random pattern. The contrasting angles and curves in the contours of the design, as well as the women's faces and kimono-like garments, are reminiscent of Japanese woodblock prints.[36] Although symmetrical in design, Macdonald's composition is looser than Mackintosh's. There is energy in *The May Queen* that reflects the birth of spring, while the stillness of *The Wassail* suggests winter's death; they work in unison to convey this cycle.

The positioning of the *May Queen* and the *Wassail* panels suggests a dialogue. They sat at the top of the facing walls, directly across from each other, subtly encouraging a discourse between these two representations of festivals that, like the panels, signify opposite celebration/worship times of the year. *The May Queen* is derived from May-Day celebrations, held on May 1st, whereby a young girl (a virgin) is chosen to be Queen for the day, and celebrants dance with her about a Maypole (a phallus) to celebrate the return of spring; as such, this event can be viewed as a fertility rite. It is possible, too, that Macdonald's image is directly related to a poem by a favorite poet of hers, Tennyson, also titled "The May Queen". The refrain reads:

> But I must gather knots of flowers, and buds and garlands gay,
>
> For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be Queen o' the May.[37]

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[36] Like many other contemporary Aesthetic artists, the Mackintoshes had an interest in the art of other cultures, including Native American and Oceanic Art (known from a letter to Hermann Muthesius), but particularly Japanese Art, and Muthesius gave the couple Japanese woodblock prints which sat on their mantle.

[37] Alfred Tennyson, "The May Queen", from The Lady of Shallot and Other Poems, 1833.

In Macdonald's version, the Queen stands at center, flanked by two figures on either side who stretch garlands decorated with knots of flowers between them.

The Wassail is not as easy to interpret, as there is no direct festival related to it as in *The May Queen*, and no obvious signifiers in the image of what wassail is or means. However, if the May Queen is an aspect of a spring festival, similarly, wassail can be identified with winter. The word comes from the Old English "wæs hæil" which means "your health", and was used as a toast.[38] Later, it came to be the name for the liquor, usually a spiced wine or ale, drunk at Christmas or Twelfth Night Celebrations.[39] Through this, it also became identified as the custom of drinking this libation, usually from a special wooden bowl. Finally, it is a carol, a song to be sung at the event of "wassailing". Thus wassail is many things—a salutation, a drink, a custom, and ultimately, a celebration—which might be fitting for a tea room atmosphere, were it not for the incongruous aspect of wassail being an alcoholic drink, which is at odds with a temperance tea room.

There is also no obvious representation of a drink, a salutation, or a celebration in Mackintosh's panel. It conveys a very quiet and staid atmosphere, as the two central figures mirror each other, heads bowed and eyes closed, within a cocoon-like arrangement of vines. The composition of each of the figures is closed; the sentinels to the right and left have their robes folded close about them as they gaze at two figures at center. Two butterflies, one on either side of the sleeping figures, foreshadow the blossoming of these forms come spring. It is at odds with the idea of festival.

However there is one other possible meaning for wassail which may explain the quiet composition—wassailing was also performed by farmers for the fertility of plants and animals, by either drinking to their health, or pouring a libation into the earth.[40] In fact, an

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[38] Oxford English Dictionary Online, "Wassail, n.", Second Edition, 1989, < http://dictionary.oed.com> [accessed 1/8/2007]

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid. "Wassail, v."

1895 text by Frederick Thomas Elworthy, *The evil eye: an account of this ancient and widespread superstition*, speaks of the "old Christmas Custom of wassailing the apple trees".[41] This idea has roots in Celtic and Germanic traditions of Yule, or winter festivals, that represented the death of the God, or the male aspect of the earth, whose seeds lie dormant in the land until the return of the Goddess in the spring. The red "lollipop trees" in Mackintosh's composition could, in fact, be seen as representations of apple trees, signifying both the cider drink itself, and the plants which are wassailed each winter, the women at either side coming to offer libations for the trees to awaken and grow. Thus *The Wassail* can be seen as a visual representation of winter's sleep, of life lying dormant, the opposite of the blossoming of spring found in the vibrancy of *The May Queen.*

To emphasize this, two repoussé panels, again one made by each artist, were placed next to each gesso panel, Macdonald's metalwork, *The Dew*, next to Mackintosh's panel, and vice versa.[42] Together, they signify a cycle of beginning and end which can be more readily perceived when they physically mirror each other.[43] A dialogue exists between the works, perhaps even an echo of the new bond between the couple. The opposite positioning of the panels in the room creates, however subversively, a symbiotic relationship: a connection between them that can be made in the mind of the patron.

A renewed interest in themes perceived as 'Celtic' or 'pagan' in origin was present in the avant-garde communities across Britain at the time, and Glasgow was no exception. Helland reports:

> Along with visual representations and literary calls for Celtic revival, the Glasgow Celtic Society… actively promoted and preserved the language 'which every true Highlander loves to speak', and tried to record the music, poetry, and even recreate the sports of Celtic Scotland. The Scottish Society of Literature also actively

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[41] Frederick Thomas Elworthy, The evil eye: an account of this ancient and widespread superstition (London: J. Murray, 1895), 105.

[42] No known title exists for Mackintosh's panel, though it is likely that one existed. Both have natural motifs to them, and it is possible that along with the panels, each work represented one of the four seasons.

[43] Today, they sit side by side in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery, and while they are clearly seen as a pair, the sense of unified opposites is largely lost.

> championed the Celtic revival and, in addition, was an early promoter of women's rights in Scotland… [T]he Macdonalds partook of the heady air of an artistic Celtic revival as well as of the stylishness of English Pre-Raphaelites, many of whom made pictures based on the haunting northern myths and legends.[44]

These panels are exemplary of these interests, but extend them to British heritage in general: May-Day celebrations and "wassailing" are particularly English traditions, with roots in Saxon and Nordic cultures. In Scotland, May-Day was known as Beltane, one of the four ancient quarter-days, and was celebrated differently with the lighting of the bael-fire, or bonfire; and the most famous of the wassail carols, 'Here we come a-wassailling', is from the North of England, the birthplace of Macdonald. In this manner, both themes suggest her interests and influence. But that both found such subjects appealing is clear; one does not have to dig very deeply to find a communion with nature and the metaphysical, clear in the abundance of natural motifs and otherworldly females in their work.

The Future of the Lost Room

What artifacts remain of the dismantled Ingram rooms have been carefully cataloged, and were recently the subject of a three-year feasibility study to determine what it would take to reconstruct them. Glasgow Museums has not at this time decided what will be done, as many issues need to be resolved in considering their reconstruction, most notably: can they be displayed in their entirety; what space would hold such a large exhibit; and how would they be viewed and contextualized? They could not be functioning tea rooms again, due to their fragility as well as their historical importance as artifacts. If they were reconstructed, patrons could not necessarily move through them—let alone take tea in them—in a manner that would simulate their full original impact. Some have suggested that a reconstruction might be made from what has been learned from this project, and create a working tea room again which would, perhaps, be the best solution in order to offer patrons an authentic experience of the space. But this would be a great expense, and it must be questioned if this project is of enough cultural significance to be undertaken. All of these questions have

[44] Helland, 71.

most recently (Spring of 2008) been the subject of focus groups with various community stakeholders, but the future of this project is as yet uncertain.

Today, *The May Queen* and *The Wassail* are in the permanent collection of Glasgow Museums and Galleries, at the Kelvingrove, and are on display along with a limited number of artifacts from both the Ingram Street Tearooms and the Willow Tearooms.

CHAPTER IV

THE WILLOW TEAROOM

To enter the studio of Margaret Macdonald is to realise very vividly that only dreams are true.
- Desmond Chapman-Huston, ca. 1906[1]
O Ye, all ye who walk in Willowwood...
- Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Willowwood"[2]

The Ladies Luncheon Room demonstrated the Mackintoshes' interest in Celtic revival, whilst the *Rose Boudoir* evidenced their acuity with symbolism and visual narrative. Both rooms exhibited their proficiency at crafting a *gesamtkunstwerk*, and their attention to room design with a gendered theme. All of these factors combined in their 1903 commission for Miss Cranston's Willow Tearoom on Sauchiehall Street, specifically in the dazzling upper floor room, the Salon de Luxe.

The Willow Tearoom [Plate V], which Cranston opened in November 1903, likely took its name from the street it graces—Sauchiehall—which in Gaelic means "alley of the willows". Sauchiehall Street was then, and is now, one of the most popular shopping streets in Glasgow, and the Willow's clientele would have been just as they are today: middle-class consumers, mostly ladies, stopping for refreshment in the midst of a busy shopping day. It opened to much critical success, as this excerpt from *The Studio* reveals:

> The work of Mr. Charles R. Mackintosh is so well known and appreciated by readers of THE STUDIO that it is unnecessary to describe at length the decorations, here illustrated, which he has recently completed for one of Miss Cranston's tea-rooms in this city. Suffice it to say that the work more than maintains the high reputation of this talented and imaginative designer.[3]

[1] Major Desmond Chapman-Huston, *Dreamers in the Moon*, ca. 1906.

[2] Rossetti, "Willowwood III"

[3] "Studio-Talk", The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art, v.28. (London: The Studio, 1903), 287.

The Willow was the first commission given to Mackintosh inside *and* out. In addition to designing all of the interiors (right down to the cutlery and waitresses uniforms), he remodeled the front of the building to set the façade apart from the other housing structures, and added an extension on the back to allow for a covered glass ceiling over part of the tea rooms, providing much needed natural light for the new spaces below. The rooms were arranged on different levels: a dining room on the ground floor front, with another set on a sort of mezzanine level that wrapped around the space below, under the glass roof. The third floor contained a smoking and billiards room for gentlemen, but the "crowning jewel" of the establishment was the *Salon de Luxe* [Plate V] on the second floor of the building, which took advantage of the light from the north-facing stained glass bow window that Mackintosh designed.

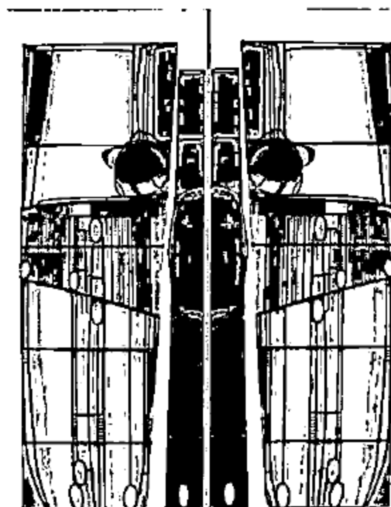

Fig. 4.1 Charles Rennie Mackintosh, *Doors to the Salon de Luxe* 1903. (Source: Glasgow Museums)

Fantastical doors [fig. 4.1], white framed with ornate stained glass patterns reminiscent of willows and wild roses marked the entrance to the chamber.[4] These created a liminal space in both the literal and psychological sense, as patrons passed through them to the luxurious salon within. Beneath the vaulted ceiling, myriad colored glass balls hung from a chandelier [fig. 4.2], casting dancing light over the denizens below. High-backed silver chairs upholstered in purple velvet stood behind silver tables set for high

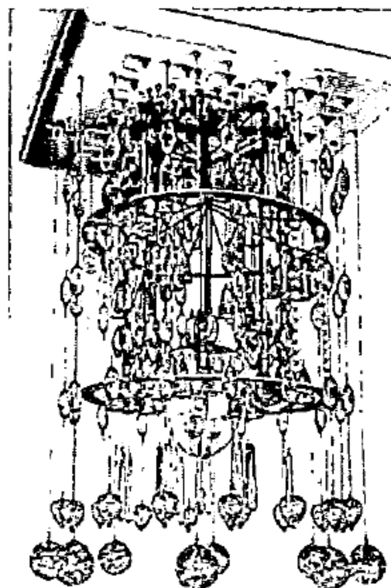

Fig. 4.2 Charles Rennie Mackintosh, *Chandelier of the Salon de Luxe* 1903. (Source: Hunterian Museum Archives)

[4] Although many of these features still exist in the current incarnation of the Willow Tearoom, this description is presented historically because the room at present is not in its original condition, as will be discussed later.

tea. Across from the threshold the wide stained glass bow window, patterned with stylized willows, cast soft pink and purple designs about the chamber. A frieze of mirrors, in lead and glass, repeated this pattern about the room and back to the doors. On the flanking walls, a decorative fireplace sat opposite Macdonald's gesso panel, *O Ye, All Ye, that Walk in Willowwood* [Plate IV]. Both of these were located in an altar-like frame (see below) that lent a votive quality to each. A small mirror above the fireplace reflects the gesso panel directly across the room, placed in a similarly structured frame. The overall effect of this interior was that of a refined and otherworldly space, creating a subconscious metaphysical atmosphere.

Fig. 4.3 Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, *Salon de Luxe, Willow Tearoom,* c.1903

The structure surrounding *O Ye, All Ye, that Walk in Willowwood* (hereafter *Willowwood*) was a wide, beveled frame bordering the sides and top of the panel, with frame and panel flush to a thin plinth on the floor [fig. 4.3]. This placed the panel at the same level as the patrons, as if it sat among them. The frame was flanked by two decorative columns which tapered to the ceiling, where each end joined a single decorative board semi-flush to the arched ceiling, its long flat shape echoing that of the plinth on the floor. The space between the top of the beveled frame and the ceiling was about the same height as the frame, and was left unadorned. As a final touch, two glass spheres (like those on the chandelier) were suspended on either side of each column, hanging about six inches above the top of the frame. The architectonic frame was painted white, and mirrored the framed fireplace on the opposite wall [detail, Plate V]. In addition to the votive, altar-like effect mentioned above, the simple yet impressive frame served to lead the eye to the subject of the panel, drawing attention to the piece as a focal point for patrons' meditations.

This panel itself displays Macdonald's progressive mastery of gesso technique. *Willowwood* depicts three female figures that emerge from an intricate, naturalistic linear design. The full-length foreground figure is in three-quarter view facing front; her head

tilted downward, her eyes downcast. The background figure, which is turned mostly away from us, is in profile, head and eyes similarly downcast. Her body is obscured by a large green oval at center, at the top of which is a lightly-toned face looking straight out at the viewer. The array of linear surface decoration flows over the figures like a beaded curtain. The rich green of the oval offsets the golden glow of the surface, and the cabbage-like roses hover about the image in a delicate yet richly textured pattern.

When considering issues of interpretation, the Salon de Luxe is quite complicated. Multiple layers, from the gendered color scheme, to the interplay of the pristine interior with the grey city glimpsed through the windows offer an array of possible readings of this space. Like the Ingram Street room, the décor at the Willow had a psychological effect, suggesting elegance and refinement that would reflect, or perhaps even instruct, on matters of behavior, style and taste. Macdonald's gesso panel is undeniably beautiful in its serene figures, graceful lines, rich texture and subtle coloring. As decoration, it would simply enhance the overall beauty of the room. However, the title of the panel has a direct literary reference: *O Ye, All Ye, that Walk in Willowwood* is the first line of a sonnet in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's cycle "Willowwood". Despite the fact the average patron would not necessarily have known its subject, the contemplative, serene mood of *Willowwood* evokes and complements the elegant splendor, and indeed femininity, of the lavender, silver and crème colored *Salon de Luxe.* In terms of an art historical analysis of the space and in particular the panel, however, it is important to understand this sonnet cycle in service of a more complete examination of this interior as a (total) work of art.

[5] Jerome J. McGann, "Scholarly Commentary", *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Research Archive,* Jerome J. McGann, ed. (University of Virginia: Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, 2000) [Accessed: May-June 2005] http://www.rossettiarchive.org Comprised of sonnets written between the years of 1847-1870, the text ranges in size depending on its publication date, from the first sixteen-sonnet sequence published in the *Fortnightly Review* in March 1869, under the title "Of Life, Love, and Death: Sixteen Sonnets"; then subsequently added to and restructured until the final version of forty-five were published March 1, 1870.

Analysis of Rossetti's "Willowwood" sonnets

The "Willowwood" sonnets [plate VI] form the heart of a larger work by Rossetti, *The House of Life.* Rossetti scholar Jerome McGann tells us "*The House of Life* project grew out of the composition of these four poems in December 1868."[5] McGann effectively argues that the Willowwood sonnets are a sort of miniaturized version of *The House of Life*, both expressing "a problem about love and the hope of its fulfillment".[6] There are varied interpretations of the sonnets and of the work as a whole, but in Rossetti's own words: "I should wish to deal in poetry chiefly with personified emotions; and in carrying out my scheme of the House of Life (if ever I do so) shall try to put in action a complete 'dramatis personae' of the soul".[7] Thus in this work we can find all of the "characters", akin to emotions, that Rossetti considers are the complete make-up of the soul. On other interpretations, McGann observes: "[e]veryone agrees, however, that the ambiguities all pivot around [Rossetti's] complex love-commitments, and especially his commitments to his wife Elizabeth, on one hand, who died in early 1862, and his friend's wife Jane Morris, on the other."[8]

The sonnets, told in first-person narrative, suggest that the speaker is Rossetti himself; in an attempt to simplify matters (though at the risk of endangering objectivity), the three main characters in this drama will be referred to in the following manner: DGR (the narrator), the Lost Love (the vision of a lost love), and Love (personified).

Willowwood I

The first sonnet opens with the narrator sitting with the personified "Love" by a "woodside well", and introduces the ensuing vision he has as he leans over the water. Upon Love's touching of his lute, DGR recalls the voice of his Lost Love, and begins to weep.

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[6] *ibid.*

[7] *ibid.* Letter to his friend Hake.

[8] *ibid.*

His tears fall into the well, and the rippling of the water creates a vision:

> And at their fall, his eyes beneath grew hers;
> And with his foot and with his wing-feathers 10
> He swept the spring that watered my heart's drouth.
> Then the dark ripples spread to waving hair,
> And as I stooped, her own lips rising there
> Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth.[9]

The vision of his lost love rises to meet him, and DGR leans down to touch his lips with hers on the surface of the water. This image is quite important, as it is symbolically represented in the *Willowwood* panel, and will be discussed further below.

This is the most straightforward sonnet of the group, situating the drama and introducing the vision with which the rest of the cycle deals. It sets up the characters: the narrator, Love, and the Lost Love, a vision of a woman in the well. But Rossetti also establishes important contrasting themes for the rest of the work: passion and sorrow, love and loss. The reader is told clearly that this is a mournful, yearning figure weeping for the voice of a lost love, and enticed towards her vision for a kiss.

"Willowwood I" also serves as an introduction for iconography in the work, and as a reminder of Rossetti's influences. The personification of Love has a long tradition in Western art and literature, particularly in the area of Italian art and poetry that was so influential on Rossetti. Perhaps the most famous personification of Love in this tradition is found in Dante Alighieri's *Vita Nuova*, a work of profound influence on Rossetti. Without delving too deeply into the complex issues surrounding Rossetti's admiration and emulation of his namesake, it is worth noting that Rossetti comes to this theme again and again, such as in his famous *Beata Beatrix* [fig. 4.4],

Fig. 4.4 Dante Gabriel Rossetti *Beata Beatrix* 1868. Oil on canvas. Collection, Delaware Museum of Art

[9] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Willowwood" from *The House of Life* in *The Complete Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. William M. Rossetti (London: F.S. Ellis, 1870), 212.

appropriating Christian iconography and transforming it into his own symbolic convention. In 1873, Rossetti explained *Beata Beatrix* in the following manner:

> The picture must of course be viewed not as a representation of the incident of the death of Beatrice, but as an ideal of the subject, symbolized by a trance or sudden spiritual transfiguration... and in sign of the supreme change, the radiant bird, a messenger of death, drops the white poppy between her hands.[10]

Thus instead of a white dove or a red rose, symbols that are more familiar Christian signifiers, he appropriates the bird/flower iconography of the god/virgin relationship, and creates a red bird/white poppy messenger of death. The symbolic language is familiar, yet unknown, like a different iconographic dialect. Macdonald does something very similar in her gesso panels, particularly in the *Rose Boudoir* panels discussed in chapter two.

Rossetti's unique twisting of iconography appears in both his painting and poetry. Take for example, the central component of the well in Willowwood (which is also the central formal element in the gesso panel). Symbolically, wells are meeting places, especially in Old Testament stories (which is an intriguing consideration for a tea room theme).[11] DGR has two meetings at a well in "Willowwood I": first, with Love, whose eyes he meets in the waters below, and second, with the Lost Love who comes forth from the reflected eyes of Love in the water. The subsequent sonnets, as we shall see, center on this theme of meeting. The well itself becomes a liminal space, a site for DGR to encounter his Lost Love, whether she is a specter of a dead woman, or simply someone out of his reach. Both images suggest a moment between the physical and spiritual, connoted with sensuality and desire through the encounter with Love and the kiss.

With an understanding of how Rossetti uses iconography, and more specifically a clear view of the symbols established with the first sonnet, attention can be turned to the rest of the cycle.

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[10] Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 146.

[11] James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects & Symbols in Art,* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 340

Willowwood II

The second sonnet opens with the words "And now Love Sang"; which would seem to suggest we are about to hear the song. Instead DGR describes the nature of the song, as well as the rising action of the drama that occurs while love sings, indicated by the first words of the last line of the sonnet "And still Love sang." DGR describes the song in complex terms:

> And now Love sang: but his was such a song,
> So meshed with half-remembrance hard to free,
> As souls disused in death's sterility
>
> May sing when the new birthday tarries long.[12]

It has been argued that these lines may somehow reference souls waiting for the "second coming".[13] While Rossetti often plays with Christian themes, as established above, there is precedent for another, more esoteric theme here, that of reincarnation. In 1854, he wrote his poem "Sudden Light" while vacationing with Elizabeth Siddal in Hastings:

> I HAVE been here before,
> But when or how I cannot tell:
> I know the grass beyond the door,
> The sweet keen smell,
> The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.
>
> You have been mine before,—
> How long ago I may not know:
> But just when at that swallow's soar
> Your neck turned so,
> Some veil did fall,—I knew it all of yore. 10
>
> Has this been thus before?
> And shall not thus time's eddying flight
> Still with our lives our love restore
> In death's despite,
>
> And day and night yield one delight once more?[14]

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[12] Rossetti, W.M., 213.

[13] "Dante Gabriel Rossetti" from "The Norton Online Archive" *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*[Accessed: June 1, 2005] www.norton.com/nael/noa/pdf/rossetti_d.pdf. A footnote for this poem in the 7th edition of the Norton Anthology online archive states: "as souls unused in death's sterility may sing when waiting for the second coming (i.e. "new birthday")"

[14] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Poems, A New Edition* (London: Ellis & White, 1881), 242.

There can be little question that reincarnation is the theme of this poem. In this light, the "disused souls" are the souls who would sing a song "meshed with half-remembrance" when their "new birthday tarries long"; in other words when the process of their reincarnation lingers, they are filled with half-remembrances of their former life, or perhaps even their former state of half-life. This interpretation is especially poignant when considering the next lines:

> And I was made aware of a dumb throng
>   That stood aloof, one form by every tree,
>   All mournful forms, for each was I or she,
> The shades of those our days that had no tongue.[15]

The wood is filled with "shades" that DGR identifies as either images of himself, or of his Lost Love. The shades are somewhat ambiguous; they could be shadows of his remembrances, but could also be images of their former selves, either in the days before her death, or in past lives. At the start of the sextet, DGR also acknowledges that they "knew us and were known", and consequently these shades have not just a great stake in the encounter, but an active, attached role: they *are* the very two figures before them. As their voices cry for this love to again be requited, we are returned to the song of love, which is the subject of the next sonnet.

The passion escalates in this sonnet, as does the metaphysical nature of the scene. This metaphysical aspect of the poem is likely a large part of its appeal to Macdonald as a subject. In both the poem and the panel we have not just the phantom-vision of the main character of Lost Love, but also a supplementary cast of shades that increase the suggestion of what McGann calls the "waking dream" of the image.[16] Another important influence on this type of representation is the work of Tennyson. Robillard argues that the Willowwood sonnets take a position in the *House of Life* akin to Section 95 Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, which recalls a moment where Tennyson has an encounter with the spirit of his dead companion

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[15] Rossetti, W.M., 213

[16] McGann

Hallam.[17] Both are intense spiritual encounters with a lost love, steeped in memory and spiritual suggestion. Furthermore, the encounters are similar: both take place out of doors, both have moments where the soul of the living and that of the lost/dead touch in a passionate manner (the "implacable kiss" and, in Tennyson, "the living soul was flash'd on mine. And mine in his was wound and whirl'd..."), and each feature a form of divine music, Love's song and Æonian music. Rossetti was famously a fan of Tennyson (as were the Mackintoshes), and both Rossetti and Macdonald illustrated works by the poet (including, as stated in chapter three, their possible connection as a source for *The May Queen*).

Thus the encounter in "Willowwood II" can be seen as one of a metaphysical nature, more than just a vision, and an actual encounter with the soul of the Lost Love, powerful enough to draw a moan from the shades who moments before stood "dumb" in the woods. The sonnet ends in broken-hearted longing, which foreshadows the subject of the song of Love, sung in "Willowwood III".

Willowwood III (fig.10.3)

This sonnet is the most important for the purposes of this study, as its first line is the title of Macdonald's painting. As has been mentioned, this sonnet is the song that Love sings while DGR and his Lost Love are engaged in their kiss. But rather than being a "romantic" ballad sung by Love the troubadour, it is a mournful song that offers an interesting and poignant message: pining for lost love is fruitless, and will bring naught but more pain.

Here is an appropriate place to address a question that is perhaps the most important in interpreting both Rossetti's poem and Macdonald's work: what is Willowwood? In the poem, it is, possibly, the wood next to the well in which the action takes place. But it also carries with it several symbolic connotations. The associations of the willow with

[17] Douglas J. Robillard, "Rossetti's 'Willowwood' Sonnets and the Structure of 'The House of Life'." *Victorian Newsletter* 22 (1962): 5-9.

sorrow and mourning are evident and are discussed in several scholarly commentaries.[18] In an agricultural light, willows are found near riverbanks, and their roots are excellent for preventing soil erosion. Thus, they are often associated with water (also a signifier of continuity), which is as we have seen a prevalent theme of the poem. Willows were also considered guardians of spirits, and planted around cemeteries to keep the spirits "in". This could apply to the "shades" in "Willowwood II" that manifest themselves each next to a tree, but have no voice to speak with, and which do not approach the action of the scene.

The place that is Willowwood is defined by all of these associations, and also by the action ascribed by Love's song. Those who "walk in Willowwood" are those who mourn yet long ("hollow faces burning bright"), those who have been left behind in "soul-struck widowhood", whose existence has become "one lifelong night". This last could have a double meaning: night, as in the darkness, but also as in the time when spirits can be seen (and perhaps even touched). The song goes on that these souls in vain cultivate their sorrow ("wooed your last hope lost") and "in vain invite your lips to that their unforgotten food". This is a direct reference to DGR's action, of which the shades are all part as manifestations of DGR and the Lost Love, reminding us that Love sings to all the players in this drama. Thus Willowwood is a place of mourning, if not a place of the dead, where longing souls (living or not) dwell, those who attempt in vain to be with those lost to them.

The sextet which follows offers even more insight into Willowwood:

> Alas! the bitter banks in Willowwood,
> With tear-spurge wan, with blood-wort burning red: 10
> Alas! if ever such a pillow could
> Steep deep the soul in sleep till she were dead,—

Again here we find Rossetti's color symbolism: red and white used interchangeably for love, passion, life and death. This is reinforced by the rhyme scheme: the second line of the octet ends "burning white" while the second line of the sextet ends "burning red"; and each have their own associations within their verse: "white" rhymes with "night", "invite", and "light";

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[18] Discussed by Robillard and McGann.

and "red" rhymes with "dead". The word associations within the rhyme serve a similar function to the visual symbolism discussed above in *Beata Beatrix*, to connote color and words in a crafting of a reinvented system of signification.

Like these plants, dwellers in Willowwood are weakened by their tears and burning with their rage and passion. Also interesting to note is the bitter nature of each of these plants: spurge is an invasive plant that consumes and takes over wherever it takes root, and bloodwort was used medicinally to induce vomiting (it would have been known that spurge carries within it a milky white sap, while the red roots of bloodwort are used to make dyes).[19] Thus in a beautiful crafting of language and imagery, Rossetti uses the natural plant-life found on an English riverbank as a tool to describe the bitter emotion involved in this sort of longing. Willowwood here is not just a place of mourning, but the mourning itself made manifest in the bitter banks of which Love laments that one cannot "steep deep the soul in sleep till she were dead" (although taken out of context, one cannot help but think here of Elizabeth Siddal, who steeped herself in sleep with laudanum, then died from it).

The closing lines of the sonnet/song carry the potent message that love wishes to relate:

> Better all life forget her than this thing,
> That Willowwood should hold her wandering!'[20]

In other words, it would be better to forget the Lost Love, than keep her trapped in the place of grief and sorrow that has manifested as Willowwood. But far from offering closure, Love has planted the seed of hope in the midst of his song: the last line of the octet, in the middle of his song, he declares: "Ere ye, ere ye again shall see the light!" Recall its rhymes, which when said together say, not coincidentally, "white night invite light". This promise of light foreshadows the ambiguously hopeful ending of the final sonnet.

Thus in the end, this sonnet defines Willowwood as both a place and a state of being. It is the site of longing, sorrow, and mourning, both (meta)physically and psychologically.

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[19] Inge N. Dobelis, *Magic and Medicine of Plants* (New York: The Reader's Digest Association, Inc. 1986)

[20] Rossetti, W.M., 214.

As such, and in consideration of the overarching themes of the poem, it can be said that Willowwood is also a site of unrequited Love. This interpretation is reinforced in the cycle's conclusion. Similarly, the *Salon de Luxe* is a place which suggests a state of being; a certain manner of presentation and behaviour that is cultivated through the refined décor of the space. It may not be sorrowful, mitigated by the personal interactions of the patrons, but as stated above, the space to have a psychological affect on its inhabitants.

Willowwood IV

The cycle closes with a description of the end of the encounter, and an enigmatic image of hope. Rossetti analogizes the ending of the kiss to two clinging roses who, having withstood the "wind's wellaway" (Love's lamentation), at the end of the day drop their leaves that had been loosened "where the heart-stain glows". The opening line of the octet is also a double-entendre recalling the action of the second sonnet: "as meeting rose and rose" (recall the important of rose symbolism to the Mackintoshes), the intensification of that "implacable kiss". The vision/phantom of Lost Love fades back, "drowned" from view, and DGR reveals uncertainty that he will ever see Her again:

> And her face fell back drowned, and was as grey
> As its grey eyes; and if it ever may
> Meet mine again I know not if Love knows.[21]

Through this point the cycle has reinforced the theme of mourning, longing, and sorrow in vain. Whether the love is Lost by way of death or simply through impossibility, the message is clear: this is a tragic lingering of a love that cannot be. Yet at the end, Rossetti offers a hopeful twist:

> Only I know that I leaned low and drank
> A long draught from the water where she sank,
> 10
> Her breath and all her tears and all her soul:
> And as I leaned, I know I felt Love's face
> Pressed on my neck with moan of pity and grace,
> Till both our heads were in his aureole.

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[21] Rossetti, W.M., 215.

As DGR takes a last draught of his Lost Love's presence, Love leans forward and graces DGR with a blessing through his touch, his "moan of pity and grace", and finally, in a potent visual image, moves his head "till both our heads were in his aureole." It is rather ambiguous as to whom the "both" refers to, Love and DGR, or DGR and his Lost Love, but a potent case could be made for the latter if one recalls themes of Dante's *Vita Nuova* and the repetition of trinities. By encompassing both of the lovers' heads in his aureole, Love joins the three of them, gracing them with his blessed halo and making profane love sacred.

In discussing the various interpretations of the sonnets McGann references this pivotal scene as a benediction, but also states "many others have (rightly) pointed out the dark ambiguities that threaten an emotional resolution to the intense desires driving the work."[22] McGann's conclusions support the interpretation of Willowwood as a site of unrequited love, as does Christina Rossetti's poem "An Echo from Willowwood". The poem tells of two unrequited lovers sitting silently by a pool, their gazes catching each other in the water below. The melancholic work captures a moment where the would-be lovers experience a moment of hope and possibility as a ripple joins their visages as quickly as it parts them. The love is hidden, as told by the beautifully stated metaphor:

> Lilies upon the surface, deep below
> Two wistful faces craving each for each,
> Resolute and reluctant without speech[23]

C. Rossetti's poem is perhaps more straightforward than "Willowwood", but as such creates a very clear message. The title suggests that this poem is a direct reference to the circumstances surrounding the original. That it is an "echo" suggests that this scene is a revival of the circumstances in "Willowwood", and at the same time applies its own clear theme of unrequited love back on to the original.

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[22] McGann

[23] Christina Rossetti, "An Echo from Willowwood", Poems (London: Macmillan & Co., 1890)

It is this interpretation of the Willowwood, as a place of unrequited love, where sorrow and longing mingle passionately with longing and hope that provides the most compelling application to understanding Margaret Macdonald's *Willowwood*.

Interpretation

The *Willowwood* panel is a symbolic illustration of Rossetti's poems. It is in fact a continuous narrative of the vision of the Lost Love in the well, and the shades of her wandering the wood. The green oval at center is the well, and the face that hovers inside it is that of the Lost Love. The similar features and hairstyles, plus an understanding of the poem, tell us that the other two figures are her shades, walking in a circular fashion about the well, inside the wood that is represented by the rhythmic gesso lines on the surface. The narrator and Love are also present, however: a ghostly hand hovers on the surface of the well, the narrator of the poem touching the surface of the water. The ripple it creates is in the form of a rose—this rose, along with the others found throughout the composition, denotes the presence of Love. However, the particular rose that is beneath the hand serves a dual function—it is positioned just over the Spirit's lips, and is therefore also the meeting of lips—the kiss—described in "Willowwood I".

The horizontal orientation of the panel creates a space that is narrow yet not claustrophobic; it is rather a complicated and clever composition that delivers a rich narrative in a confined space. The placement of glass beads on the panel creates more patterns that suggest natural growth or buds upon stalks. There is not a strong sense of light within the work, as the earthy palette offers even tonality and serves to evoke the feel of a wood. The emerald green oval provides a delicate contrast to the pale faces, earth-toned canvas, and darker brown of the women's hair. The overall effect of the color, light, and texture suggests a dense forest with a lush, ethereal atmosphere.

As with the other panels discussed earlier, the placement and framing is another key to interpreting the work. The small mirror above the fireplace opposite the panel reflected the

well-image in the *Willowwood* panel, rather like opposing scrying glasses for peering into other worlds. The room evokes a glittering fae realm, and in that manner calls to mind the liminal, metaphysical nature of Rossetti's poems.

Yet how might this be a fitting theme for a tearoom? Perhaps most notably, the "Willow Pattern" was a popular pattern of china, first designed by Minton c. 1790, and was in fact used in the Willow Tearoom. The tale of the Willow Pattern is, like Rossetti's poem, one of love, life, and afterlife:

> Once there was a wealthy mandarin, who had a beautiful daughter, Koong-Se. She had fallen in love with Chang, a humble accountant, and this made her father cruel with anger. He dismissed the young man and built a high fence around his house to keep the lovers apart...
> The Mandarin was planning for his daughter to marry a powerful duke. Arrangements went ahead and the duke arrived by boat to claim his bride, bearing a box of jewels as a gift. The wedding was to take place on the day the blossom fell from the willow tree...
> Chang, however, was not deterred. On the eve of Koong-Se's wedding to the duke, a mysterious figure disguised as a servant slipped into the palace unnoticed. It was Chang. As the lovers escaped, the alarm was raised...
> But one day the Duke learnt of their refuge. Still hungry for revenge he sent soldiers, who captured Chang and Koong-Se and put them to death. The Gods, moved by their plight, transformed the lovers into a pair of doves...[24]

While tea room patrons may not have been familiar with Rossetti's poem, many would have known the tale of the popular Willow pattern, which was in fact invented by the English themselves, and not a Chinese legend as was commonly thought.[25] Thus this British tradition in china already offered a connection to dining, and could have partially inspired the tea room's name.

However, the connection to Sauchiehall Street—the "alley of the willows"—mentioned earlier was perhaps the most obvious reason for the name. However, it could be that the aforementioned Celtic revivalism was mixed into this. To the Celts, the willow was one of

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[24] "The Story of the Willow Pattern", transcript, website of the Victoria & Albert Museum, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/british_galls/audio_tales/willow/> [accessed April 3, 2008].

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Willows were also considered guardians of spirits, and planted around cemeteries to keep the spirits within its confines. This could apply to the "shades" found in "Willowwood II" that manifest themselves each next to a tree, but have no voices to speak with, and do not approach central the action of the scene.

the sacred trees, "Saille" in the Ogham, the runic alphabet of trees.[26] There is little hard evidence on what exactly this meant to the Celts, but there is one aspect of the willow plant which has an intriguing connection—it is an ancient medicinal plant. The bark and leaves are rich in salicin, a natural glucoside akin to the active ingredient in aspirin, acetylsalicylic acid.[27] The most common way of utilizing the willow's healing properties was to boil it in water and drink it; in other words, *to make tea.* Willow-bark tea is an ancient remedy to cure all kinds of aches and pains. At the very least, the Celts knew of this, as well as the willow's agricultural uses to stave off soil erosion around water sources. Thus the willow was a sacred tree with practical and protective properties.

Likewise, whilst it may have been convenient that Rossetti's poem was about willows, it also embraced perhaps the most idealistic theme of the Mackintoshes' life and work: love. There is a melancholy hopefulness to the theme, that in some other place we shall find those we love, that they wait, and that we should not linger on their loss. In the context of the design scheme, the Salon de Luxe is like a liminal space; somewhere not quite otherworldly, but also hardly typical of a public dining room: a chamber of glittering silver and lavender juxtaposed against the grey city beyond the windows; the musical clinking of china and whisper of voices versus the noise of the street. If the *Willowwood* panel depicts the Lost Love, and the theme extended about the room in mirrors and leaded glass (like water, reflective surfaces), then the room itself becomes the wood in which she dwells. Her accompanying shades are the patrons who come for tea, passing through the fantastical doors to the otherworldly spaces, touching their lips to their libations as the poet who drank from the well. The Salon de Luxe is, in fact, Willowwood.

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[27] Inge N. Dobelis, *Magic and Medicine of Plants* (New York: The Reader's Digest Association, Inc. 1986), 333.

A Ghost of a Room

After Cranston sold all of her tea rooms, the Willow Tearoom remained open until 1927, when the adjacent department store expanded through the common wall. However the Salon de Luxe survived relatively intact, due perhaps to its use as a bridal wear department (that the scheme was appropriate for such a space is telling). The rooms were remodeled in 1980, and the upper floors, including the Salon de Luxe, are again open as tea rooms. The state of the Willow tearoom is not ideal, but it at least exists in a form that can be visited and studied. And, in many ways, it at least offers a glimpse of its former self—one can still take tea in the Salon de Luxe, and listen to the street noises mingling with the clinking of china and the strange whispers of patrons that bounce off the vaulted ceiling. The northern light still falls through the window, glinting off silver chairs and mirrored glass. The panel, however, passed into private hands, was subsequently loaned to the care of Glasgow Museums, and was finally purchased by them in 2000, where it remains on display in the Kelvingrove Museum.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Toshie and Margaret. They were very close indeed. You never saw one without the other. They always did absolutely everything together, hand in glove throughout their lives.
- Lady Alice Barnes, talking to Alistair Moffat, 1986[1]

The artistic partnership of Margaret Macdonald and Charles Rennie Mackintosh was born out of artistic camaraderie, aesthetic sympathies, and the creative pleasure that flowed naturally from their artistic educations, stylistic development and their close personal relationship. When they worked together, it was likely not out of necessity: Glasgow had a rich offering of artisans, and Mackintosh employed them to construct his buildings, create his furniture, and paint the walls of his decorative interiors. The Mackintoshes worked together because they desired to do so, and the two tearooms presented here are exemplary of the work they crafted collaboratively.

For the most part, Mackintosh no longer receives sole credit for these spaces; Macdonald is at least acknowledged, and sometimes even considered his partner. Some commentators are still reticent to credit her in this manner, however; but the fact is that the gesso panels were an integral part of these interiors. As shown in the preceding chapters, they were the keys, the texts, for reading the spaces, and understanding their meaning. They were made in concert with the interiors, and as such were an essential and influential part of the overall interior design. In an interview with Mackintosh scholar Thomas Howarth, Herbert McNair said of the work of "The Four": "…not a line was drawn without purpose, and rarely was a single motif employed that had not some allegorical meaning."[2]

[1] Alistair Moffat, "Lady Alice Barnes, talking to Alistair Moffat, 1986", Remembering Charles Rennie Mackintosh (Lanark: Colin Baxter Photography Ltd. 1989), 103.

[2]Moffat, "J. Herbert McNair", #.

Likewise, the interior designs were significant to the panels. As Helland states, "[t]o isolate the gesso panel out from its environment is to remove from it its power and its purpose."[3] Save for *The Sleeping Princess* at The Hill House, none of Macdonald's gesso panels (or Mackintosh's *The Wassail*) resides in their original homes or settings. *The May Queen* and *The Wassail* are now on display at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow Museums. They are placed at the correct height upon the wall, but they are side-by-side, rather than across from each other. The choice to display the works in this manner was a practical one: gallery space and accessibility concerns required this positioning.[4] The placement allows them to be compared formally, and it is obvious that they are a pair simply by looking at the dimensions and style of the works. However, because they no longer sit opposite, connecting the patron's space below, and perhaps more importantly because they are no longer in the pristine context of the White Dining Room, the subversive discourse and psychological effect that the space created in its entirety is gone.

However, the museum context does not entirely subvert interpretation. In the tea room, the art was functional—it provided an atmosphere for the patron, but it was a secondary thing, a framework for the primary commercial function of Cranston's business. In the museum, the art itself is core, and becomes primary. Now, we look on the panels as objects, not decoration, and the museum environment serves to entice the ontological gaze of the viewer. While the text panels help to provide interpretive context (limited to thirty words), the decorative interior which provided their authentic context is removed, leaving only the gesso panels to stand with each other for scrutiny and reflection.

The state of the Willow tearoom, open again for business after a private purchase and renovation in the 1980s, is not ideal, but it at least exists in a form that can be observed

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[3] Helland, Studios, 132.

[4] A. Brown, in an interview on 7 November, 2006. What remain of the dismantled Ingram rooms have been carefully cataloged, and are the current subject of a three-year feasibility study to see what it would take to reconstruct them. Glasgow Museums has not at this time decided what will be done. While many would love to see the entire rooms restored, there are many obstacles to this idea. The most obvious of these is the space—where would this be done? It would really require a building of its own, as the rooms are extensive.

and studied. *O Ye, All Ye That Walk In Willowwood* is no longer ***in situ***, however, having been acquired by the property developer in 1980 then ultimately purchased by Glasgow Museums. In Kelvingrove, it becomes an artefact, like the *May Queen* and the *Wassail*. But unlike those two panels, *Willowwood* fares somewhat better as it is not dependent on its relationship with a partner gesso panel for a complete understanding of its meaning. Because it has a definable literary source, it can be more easily considered on its own, removed from its tea room context. One can employ art historical methods to "read" the work not just as a decorative object, but also as an artwork with deeper meaning to be examined through its style, as well as through its iconographical, iconological, and historical significance.

This is not to say that there is no loss in its presentation as a singular object—its impact inside the original Salon de Luxe would have been impressive. One only needs to visit the current incarnation of the room, with its overcrowded configuration of tables and chairs, and look (with a heavy heart) upon the faded poster of the panel that sits in its former place to see how vastly the authenticity has been lost both for the panel in the museum, as well as the room sans its focal piece. They are both diminished for this separation, but the ghosts of their former selves linger to offer an imaginative patron a glimpse of their past glory. However, by exhibiting these panels in the Kelvingrove as part of the Glasgow Style gallery, much can be learned about Macdonald and Mackintosh as arbiters of and participants in the Glasgow Style. They can be seen as part of a larger group of important *fin de siècle* artists who had a significant part to play in an international milieu. From Macdonald's willingness to make duplicates of her panels for sale at the International Exhibition at Turin, we can discern that although the Mackintoshes appreciated and even desired crafting the *gesamtkunstwerk*, they *both* understood the ability their work had to stand alone. Furthermore, these powerful works do much to convey the idea of interior design as more than mere decoration, but as an art form in and of itself.

That these designs were an integral part of the spaces they graced has been made clear. But were they Macdonald's designs? If they were not, then giving her even partial credit for the interiors is erroneous. But the only cases for attributing the design of the panels to Mackintosh are based on connoisseurship, which is problematic not only because it is highly subjective, but also because of the extremely similar style shared by "The Four" (the Mackintoshes and the McNairs). While they lacked a written manifesto, the collective body of work of "The Four" shows a unified visual language in the elongated female forms, natural motifs, mythical and spiritual subject matter, and repeated use of symbols—the rose in particular. This can, at times, make attribution confusing and difficult.[5] Other factors complicate this further, most notably the presence or absence of signatures, sketches, or written documentation, and the legacy of marginalization that was laid out by Shand, Pevsner and others after Macdonald's death (as noted in chapter one). More recently, these complications have led to different camps questioning the authorship of Mackintosh-Macdonald projects in two very different ways: those who consider that Margaret Macdonald, as artistic and conjugal partner to Mackintosh, had a much *larger* role in the design of these interiors than previously credited; and those who feel that Macdonald's role was much *less*, and even question her design authorship of the gesso panels. This dispute is limited to the work Macdonald produced with Mackintosh, however; work crafted with her sister remains unquestioned.

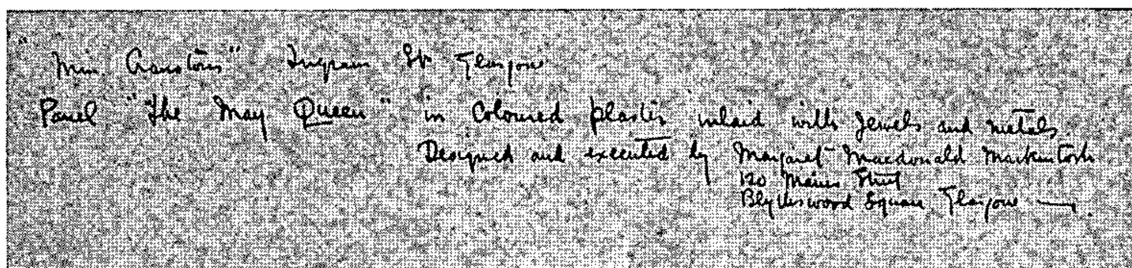
All of Macdonald's gesso panels are stylistically similar, depicting very specific kinds of women: females who are in positions of power that only women can inhabit—Queens, Princesses, Mothers. They are not quite deified, but represent potent forms of feminine power as understood at the time, and, arguably, the stereotypes which many little girls, and even young women, dreamt of becoming. Because they are allegorical, and due to their delicate physical representation, there is a certain exotic quality to these women that

[5] There are subtle differences evident to the trained eye in their individual work, however hand analysis is virtually impossible in works that are jointly attributed.

makes us think they are some kind of "other", whether simply fantasy, possibly faerie, or complicatedly goddess-like. Because they *are* fantastical, perhaps there is even a message to the aforementioned young girls that these women are lovely, but they are not *real.*

Likewise, they all *look* alike: young, beautiful, with the most subtle of expressions. The stylized visages that gaze at us from these panels could all be sisters—narrow faces with long noses, full lips, and, often, diamond-shaped eyes that recall a harlequin masque. Each has long hair, colored either light or dark, that inevitably blends into the design and becomes the trim of their garment, or part of a vine, their bodies hidden in the decorative motif. The linear confections of the surfaces are dotted with jewels, whether made of gesso, glass, or shell. The earthy ground of each ranges from ivory to gold, and is toned with bold pastels of pink, lavender, and green. It wasn't until the making of the last panels that dark tones became predominant. Thus in terms of subject matter and style, these panels are arguably quite feminine. This does not marginalize Mackintosh as a designer, however their kinship with other of Macdonald's undisputed works, such as her watercolors and beaten metalwork (see below), secures her position as author.

The (opposing) arguments laid out by both Billcliffe and Helland raise important points regarding the Macdonald-Mackintosh partnership. From a formal standpoint, it is quite possible that Macdonald did not in fact design all of her panels, however there is no concrete proof of this theory. From a conceptual standpoint, it is possible that Macdonald played a larger role in the overall design of Mackintosh's interiors, however there is no physical evidence to support this, either. What is uncomfortable about this debate is that there seems to be an attempt to split up and sort the different aspects of authorship—creative idea, design, production—in order to make either independent or collaborative attributions. This asks a much larger question: what exactly constitutes authorship? In the discipline of art history, we have relied on one important but sometimes unreliable signifier to answer this question: the artist's signature.



"Miss Cranston's" Ingram St Glasgow
Panel "The May Queen" in Coloured plaster inlaid with jewels and metals
Designed and executed by Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh
120 Mains Street
Blythswood Square Glasgow

Fig. 5.1 Charles Rennie Mackintosh, *Inscription on verso of a photograph of "The May Queen",* c.1900 (Collection, Hunterian Art Gallery)

Macdonald signed many—though not all—of her gesso panels. This could, perhaps, simply reference her as maker. Yet throughout the history of art and design, signatures are moreso a signifier of authorship and credit, *even if the work was not fully executed by the artist.* Traditional artists like Rubens, and even contemporary artists like Damien Hirst, have utilized the skills of master artisans in their vast workshops to complete their ideas, proving that authorship and production do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Signatures, however, *do* tend to signify who is master, or indeed mistress, of the idea, and who deserves attribution for the design. This can also be understood in consideration of makers' marks on art objects such as fine china and silver; they signify who made the design, but not always who produced the item.

The Ingram Street Tearoom panels provide vital evidence in this attribution debate. As shown in previous quotations, Mackintosh spoke to their working process: "I am doing one and Miss Macdonald is doing the other". Furthermore, a watercolor after *The May Queen,* made by Mackintosh likely for exhibition purposes, is labeled "Des. By Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh". Billcliffe states that "des." can sometimes mean "drawn", however, it was he who first proposed that Mackintosh, not Macdonald, "drew" these particular watercolors. Thus if she did not make these watercolors, then it follows that what Mackintosh meant was that she designed the panels. This is still arguable evidence for Macdonald's design authorship. However, on the back of a photograph of *The May Queen* in the collection of the Hunterian Art Gallery there is, inscribed in Mackintosh's own hand: "Designed and executed by Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh" [fig. 5.1]. Would this not signify that she was

creator and executor of an idea, rather than, to use Billcliffe's suggestion, that she merely "drew" the design and crafted the panel? Furthermore, if she was indeed the designer of *The May Queen*, would this not show her design competency growing (perhaps even under the influence and tutelage of Mackintosh), and, in combination with her increasing mastery of gesso technique, make her quite capable of the later, more sophisticated designs crafted over the next nine years?

Billcliffe suggests that Macdonald was working—not without her own artistic input—to Mackintosh's direction as any of his craftspeople might. Putting aside the unquantifiable aspect of her input as wife versus colleague, it seems more likely, based on evidence, that the gesso panels were to Macdonald's design, mitigated by a close collaboration and shared artistic vision with her husband. Similarities in subject matter and composition to the rest of her body of work also support Macdonald's authorship. The panels are not by any means the first place we see her crafting images of women, conflated with nature, in otherworldly narratives. We know from her work with her sister that these romantic themes were prevalent in her earliest watercolors, poster and print designs, and even her metalwork. There is also interrelation between the design elements of varied works. This is not just limited to the repeated use of the stylized rose, but also, for example, the ghostly face in the center of *Willowwood*, with its light eyes and hair, which is very similar to the faces of the standing women in a panel she made for Vienna Secession patron Fritz Waerndorfer entitled *The Seven Princesses.*

Billcliffe's observations are important and should not be discounted; just the ascription of joint-authorship to entire tea room schemes should be met with caution. However, this thesis moves forward with the view that Macdonald was the author of her panels, as physical and historical evidence shows she *was* their author: her signature, Mackintosh's words, and the rest of her *oeuvre* are authoritative enough sources to continue with the accepted attribution (as shown by the labels in Kelvingrove for example, which are careful to state "designed and made by Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh").

Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh was an important artist in her own right, and a key figure in the life and work of the equally significant Mackintosh. She had an artistic agenda, shared with her artistic partners, and displayed her vision both locally and internationally. Viewing her body of work shows that she had an intricate system of signification, technical acumen, and aesthetic talent on a par with her peers of both genders. Her legacy as a decorative and Symbolist artist is clear when looking at her work next to that of Viennese artists like Gustav Klimt, whose gold-toned, textile-like patterns, and exotic females recall those of Macdonald's panels, and who created his *Beethoven Frieze* for the Fourteenth Vienna Secession, 1902, only after seeing the 1900 installation of *The May Queen* and *The Wassail.*

Yet even as this analysis asserts Macdonald's design authorship, it is not without the wary understanding that, in the end, to attempt any concrete attribution or re-attribution to one or the other is futile, and perhaps even irrelevant and antithetical to the collaborative spirit of their work. It pits one against the other in service of a particular art historical agenda—to perpetuate that notion Mackintosh was the superior artist, a "pioneer of modern design" as Pevsner classified him; or for the purpose of reinserting Macdonald, yet another marginalized woman/wife artist, into the annals of art history. It also forces the categorization and ranking of the process of artistic production—idea, design, making—in order to sort and assign authorship. Hermann Muthesius called them the *Künstlerpaår*, or artist-couple, and Mackintosh's own words about his partner indicate his view of their personal and artistic relationship: "You must remember that in all my architectural efforts you have been half if not threequarters *[sic]* in them…".[6] This is perhaps questionable evidence that Macdonald was an equal collaborator, but it would seem to indicate, at least in Mackintosh's eyes, that she was quite a significant source of inspiration, if not an outright artistic partner, and that their art was crafted *together.* However the designs were manifested,

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[6] P. Robertson, ed. *The Chronycle: The Letters of Charles Rennie Mackintosh to Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, 1927* (Glasgow: Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, 2001), 56.

is it not *the end result* that matters? These were two artists working as a unit – or, to borrow the words of E.E. Cummings: "One's not half two, it's two are halves of one".[7]

And therein lies perhaps the most complicated part of this study: that to truly provide a thorough analysis of this subject, one must consider the abstract themes of love and passion, for it cannot be ignored that this collaboration grew as their love did, and that their first great collaborative projects, including the Ingram Street tearoom, happened in the same year they married. The *gesamtkunstwerk* philosophy was not just present in the work they created together, gesso panels and interiors poetically and significantly entwined, but manifested in their very lives as two singular artists working as one. The Ladies Luncheon Room at Ingram Street and the Salon de Luxe at the Willow Tearoom are elegant, ethereal, and symbolic mediators of their artistic partnership.

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[7] E.E. Cummings, "One's not half two, it's two are halves of one", 1944.

APPENDIX

COLOR PLATES

Plate I

The May Queen, 1900

Three panels of oil-painted gesso on hessian and scrim, set with twine, glass beads, thread, mother-of-pearl, and tin leaf; 158.4 x 457 cm

Signature: Unsigned

Collection: Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, E.1981.178.1-3, N/A

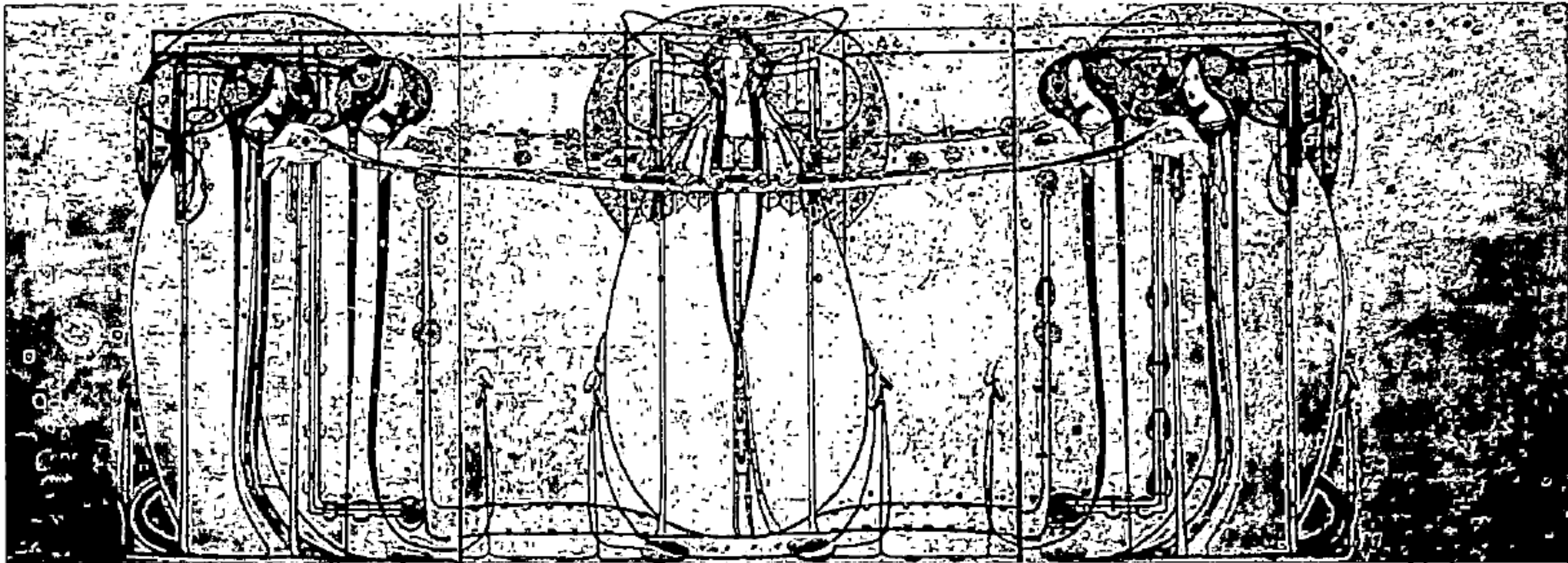


Plate II (Charles Rennie Mackintosh)

The Wassail, 1900

Three panels of oil-painted gesso on hessian and scrim, set with twine, glass beads, thread, mother-of-pearl, and tin leaf; 158.2 x 462 cm

Signature: Unsigned

Collection: Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, E.1981.177.1-3, N/A

Original Location: Ladies Luncheon Room, Miss Cranston's tea rooms, Ingram Street, Glasgow.

Provenance: Removed from the Ingram Street Tea Rooms, 1971; Collection Glasgow Museums and Galleries.

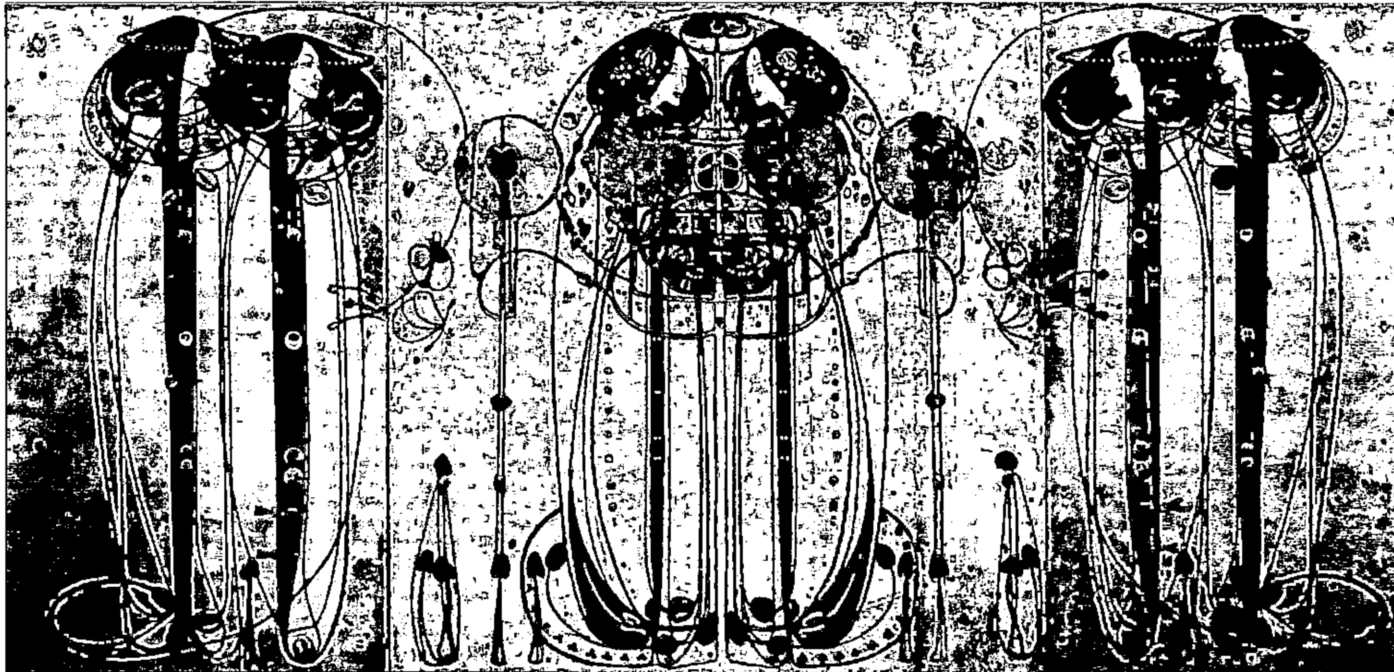


Plate III

The White Dining Room (Ladies Luncheon Room), Miss Cranston's Ingram Street Tearoom, 1900

Reconstruction for the 1996 "Charles Rennie Mackintosh" exhibition; installation by Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (Insets below: Ingram Street today, looking towards *The Wassail,* detail of stained glass in screen.)

Collection: Glasgow Museums

Original Location: 213-215 Ingram Street, Glasgow.

Provenance: In situ until 1971; Glasgow Museums acquisition, 1971.

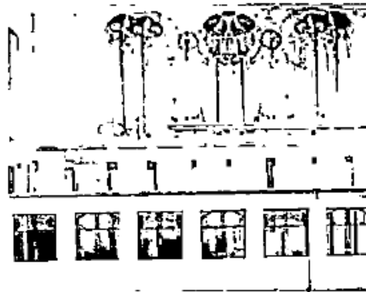


Plate IV

O Ye, All Ye Who Walk in Willowwood, 1903
Painted gesso on hessian, set with glass beads; 164.5 x 58.4

Signature:

LL: 'Margaret | Macdonald | Mackintosh' and date '1903'

Collection: Glasgow Museums, E.2001.6, Purchased with the generous support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, The National Art Collections Fund, Friends of Glasgow Museums, and the many individuals who contributed to the Public Appeal promoted by The Herald, 2001.

Original Location: Salon de Luxe, Willow Tea Rooms, Glasgow.

Provenance: In situ until 1980; Private Collection; Museum purchase, 2001.

Plate V

The Salon de Luxe (Ladies Dining Room), The Willlow Tearoom, 1903

Contemporary photograph of the room today. (Insets below: The Willow Tearoom facade today, view of the room in 1903, detail of fireplace opposite the gesso panel.)

Collection: The Willow Tearoom and Glasgow Museums

Location: 217 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow.

Provenance: Tearoom until 1927; Daly's department store; restored as tea room in 1980. Doors, some furnishings, and gesso panel in the collection of Glasgow Museums. Original light fixture has been lost.

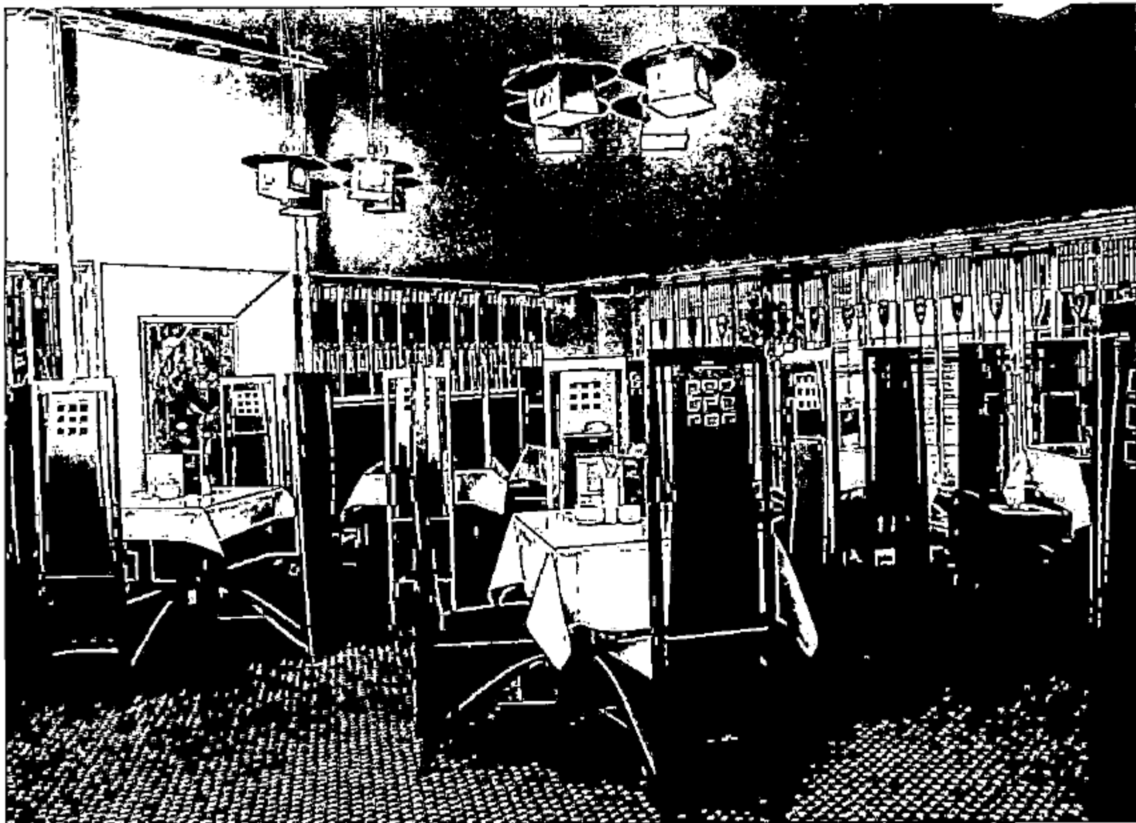


Plate VI

The White Rose and the Red Rose, 1902 (ii)

Gesso and pigment on burlap, with mother-of-pearl (?) and glass beads; 99.5 x 101.7

Signature: Unsigned

Collection: Private Collection

Original Location: For the Rose Boudoir, International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art, Turin, 1902.

Provenance: Fritz Waerndorfer, Esq., 1902; Unknown Private Collector, Chicago c. 1940; Donald and Eleanor Taffner, New York, 1991; Unknown Private Collector, Christies, London, 2008.

Plate VII

The Heart of the Rose, 1902 (ii)

Gesso and pigment on burlap; 97.8 x 100.3 cm

Signature: Unsigned (?)

Collection: Private Collection

Original Location: For the Rose Boudoir, International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art, Turin, 1902.

Provenance: Fritz Waerndorfer, Esq., 1902; Unknown Private Collector, Chicago c. 1940; Donald and Eleanor Taffner, New York, 1991; Unknown Private Collector, Christies, London, 2008.

Plate VIII

Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh

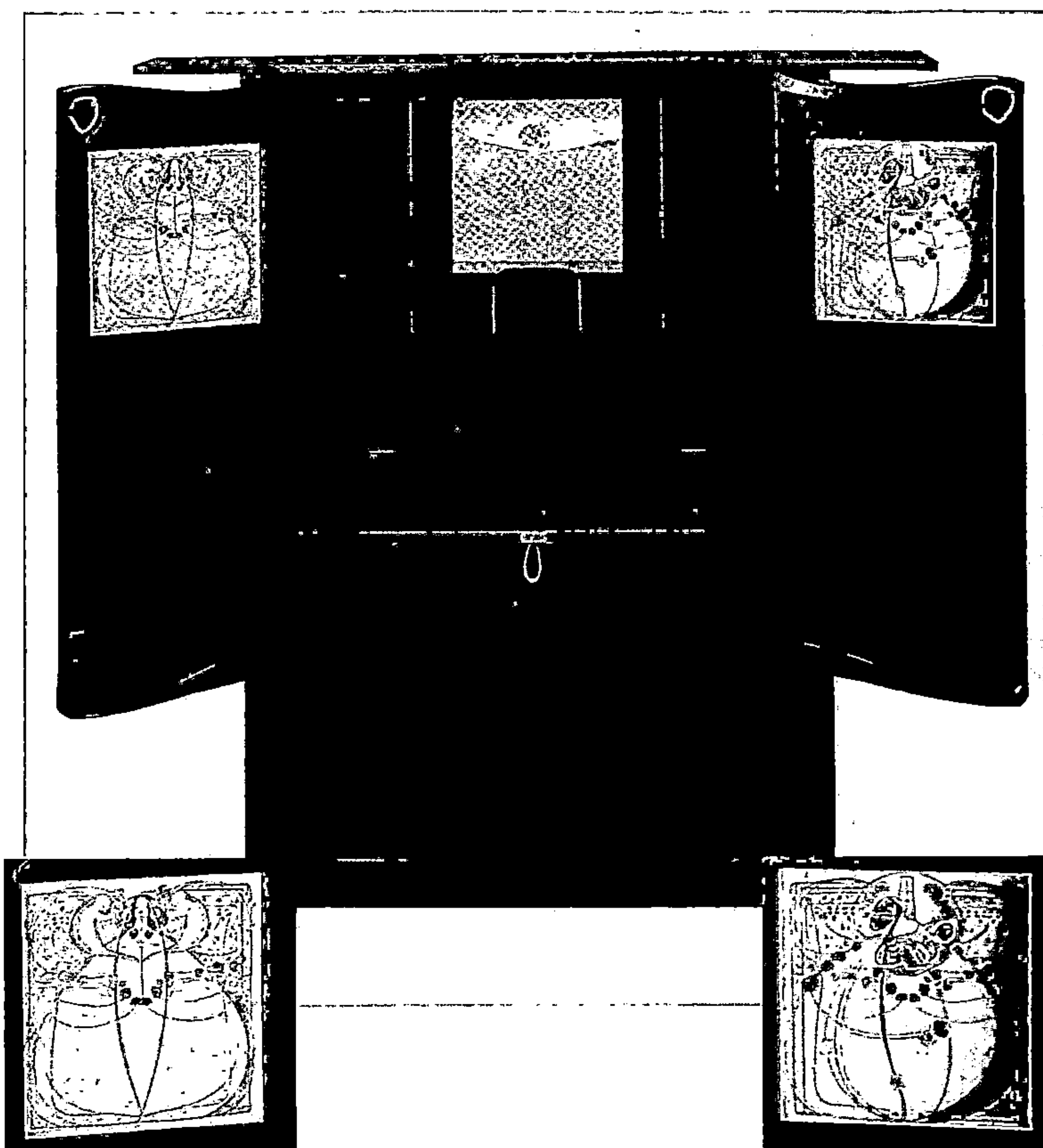
Writing Cabinet with gesso panels "The Dreaming Rose"(left) and "The Awakened Rose"(right); and painted metal panel "The Spirit of Love" (center), 1902

Ebonised wood with glass insets; painted gesso and metal panels; 148 x 124 x 30 cm

Collection: MAK - Austrian Museum for Applied Arts, Vienna.

Original Location: For the Rose Boudoir, International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art, Turin, 1902.

Provenance: Fritz Waerndorfer, Esq., 1902, ... , MAK - Austrian Museum for Applied Arts, Vienna.



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