

**“Women in Art and Science in the Early Modern World”**

**Elaine Ayers**, Assistant Professor of the History of Science, New York University

**“Women, Plants, and Colonial Legacies: Botanical Study, Credit, and Violence in the 19th Century”**

Producing countless illustrations and detailed collections of plants over the course of the 19th century, women botanists like Sarah Anne Drake (1803-1857) and Anna Maria Walker (1778-1852) are often seen as “success stories” in the history of women in art and science, lauded for their contributions to a growing field dominated by men. Drawing on studies in intersectional history that rethink these supposedly triumphant stories, this talk explores the complex colonial legacies that many women naturalists and illustrators, like Drake and Walker, capitalized on in building their careers. Exploiting the violences of empire from both at home and while traveling abroad, these women coopted indigenous knowledge, skills, and labor while producing their botanical illustrations and descriptions. Far from passive observers in the imperial enterprise, these women were colonial agents – both domestically and internationally – whose role must be made visible in writing the history of women in art and science, especially amidst ongoing, *longue durée* conversations about credit and power.

**Janet Browne**, Aramont Professor of History of Science, Emerita, Harvard University

**“Strategy on the Sidelines: Four Victorian Women Try to Contribute to Art and Science”**

Artists like Elizabeth Gould were accustomed to being seen but not heard: her exceptional representations of bird were carried out solely to enhance the beauty and prestige of her husband’s illustrated books, published under his name. The situation was reversed in the case of women wishing to present their own work at meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science: they were heard but not seen. Men read out their findings and even took questions, seemingly an early form of mansplaining. This paper addresses the compromises that a handful of women adopted as they attempted to present their work as their own in Victorian science and art.

**Margaret Carlyle**, Assistant Professor of History, Department of History and Sociology, The University of British Columbia, Okanagan

**“Revealing and Concealing Women’s Secrets: Wax Sculptors in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World”**

This paper provides a comparative study of three eighteenth-century female wax sculptors in the Atlantic world: the Parisian modeler of wax anatomies, Marie-Marguerite Biheron; Patience Wright, whose lifelike sculptures earned her a following on both sides of the Atlantic; and Margaret Salmon, who attracted visitors to her waxworks museum in London before Mme Tussaud became a household name. I suggest that Biheron, Wright, and Salmon drew on the contemporary cachet of “women’s secrets” in order to build their businesses and carve out a

place in the male world of wax sculpting. In showcasing models of their own invention, they revealed the hidden “secrets” of women’s generative bodies while simultaneously concealing their trade secrets—including proprietary modeling materials and techniques—from prying eyes. Biheron revealed the secrets of reproductive anatomy in the lessons she provided to elite girls on her lifelike models, while refusing to divulge her wax recipe to the male naturalists and academies who sought it out. Patience Wright earned the title of “Promethean modeler” for springing forth waxworks that she concealed under apron and Margaret Salmon’s death masks were likewise seen as the products of a fertile feminine touch.

**Nicole LaBouff**, LACMA, Curator, Department of Costumes and Textiles

**“Jane Barrington’s Painted Garden: Artistry and Horticultural Expertise in Georgian England”**

Among the many hidden treasures in the rare books and manuscripts collection at Oak Spring Garden, the former Virginia estate of Paul and Rachel (“Bunny”) Mellon, is a collection of unsigned botanical drawings entitled “Mongewell.” This paper argues that the drawings were the creation of Jane Barrington (1733-1807), who resided at the Oxfordshire estate Mongewell with her husband Shute Barrington (1734-1826), Chaplain to King George III and Bishop of Durham. By examining the Mongewell drawings alongside published descriptions and illustrations of identical plants Jane Barrington cultivated in her hothouses, as well as letters she exchanged with James Edward Smith (1759-1828), founder and president of the Linnean Society, a clear picture emerges of Jane Barrington’s own sense of expertise as an artist and horticulturalist. Far from using her botanical paintings as a “screen” that obscured her (presumably) transgressive forays into the male-dominated field of botany, Barrington shows us that women were accepted members of scientific circles and not afraid to exercise their authority.

**Jessica C. Linker**, Assistant Professor of History and Co-Director of Huskiana Press, Northeastern University

**“Invisible Hands: Women and the Art of Early American Scientific Books, 1800-1850”**

In 1820, Mary Minot of Boston, then a child under ten years of age, produced a manuscript that copied the artwork and coloring, complete with distilled captions and descriptions, from Jacob Bigelow’s *American Medical Botany* (1819-21), which at the time appeared in serialized parts. Minot may have been precocious, but this type of childhood activity could be a step toward a future role in scientific book production. The proliferation of female academies after the American Revolution prepared new generations of young women who were literate in both art and science. In a young republic with a less-established book trade, natural history texts with colored plates were especially risky investments that increasingly relied upon women to complete art production, either as illustrators or colorists. This talk considers the social and cultural momentum that allowed women to fill these roles and the nature of their labor, which was often uncredited. Scientific art frequently determined the popularity or financial success of a book and, in many cases, became the only surviving visual evidence of taxonomic holotypes. In this way, women in art production influenced the dissemination, reach, and record of scientific knowledge.

**Laura J. Mitchell**, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of California, Irvine  
**“Ghosts and Informants: Looking for African Women in Eighteenth-Century Natural History”**

African contributions to western science have been unacknowledged, overlooked, or purposely silenced since at least the sixteenth century. Historians of women and gender have wrestled with a similar methodological challenge: what can we say about people we know were present but about whom less documentation survives relative to male actors? This paper offers a critical reading of the unedited field notes of an eighteenth-century naturalist. Robert Jacob Gordon was a Dutch military officer in the service of the Dutch East India Company at the Cape of Good Hope from 1777 to 1795. A noted observer of flora, fauna, and geological formations, he kept daily logs that survive, but that remained unpublished until the twentieth century. The traces of African informants and collaborators, both men and women, are slight in those pages, but he had more to say about the local sources of his information than others who visited South Africa. His writing was also less dismissive of African people; he explicitly acknowledged African contributions to his knowledge about flora and fauna. A close reading of Gordon’s journals gives us the tiniest of ledges to stand on, a precarious footing from which to see another approach to European knowledge production. My reading offers a version of natural history that acknowledges the input of African and women’s knowledge and labor.

**Carole Nataff**, PhD Candidate in Art History, The Courtauld Institute of Art  
**“Tasteful Science at the *Jardin du roi*: Madeleine Françoise Basseporte’s Shell Paintings on Vellum (1747–1768)”**

The hundreds of paintings created by French miniaturist Madeleine Françoise Basseporte (1701–1780) at the king’s garden include an unusual series of vellums and preparatory sketches that depict not plants but shells. Examining these shell paintings within the epistemological context of the knowledge produced by Basseporte’s collaborators Louis Jean-Marie Daubenton and Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, illuminates a series of questions concerning the agency of women artists in scientific institutions. This paper considers Basseporte’s vellums as part of a broader inquiry into the substance of shells at the king’s garden, to which Basseporte actively contributed as an esteemed collaborator.

As the only woman to hold the prestigious post of miniature painter at the King’s Garden, Basseporte has recently received increasing scholarly attention. Yet the focus on her biography has elided the ways in which her visual practice contributed to the scientific knowledge produced at the King’s Garden. Ultimately, the aim of this paper is to recover Basseporte’s working methods and her role in shaping the king’s garden’s new identity as a fashionable center for natural history knowledge.

**Sarah Waheed**, Assistant Professor, History Department, University of South Carolina  
**“Muslim Women’s Patronage of Art and Science in Early Modern India”**

This paper discusses elite Muslim women’s patronage of art (illustrated manuscripts and poetry) and scientific knowledge production (water infrastructure) in early modern Deccan—a southern region of India frequently overlooked in South Asian historiography. The Deccan historically produced more female sovereigns than any other region of India. Many Muslim queens of this region were active patrons of art and science in early modern India, yet have been sorely overlooked. The water-supply systems of the Nizam Shahi and Adil Shahi dynasties (16th-17th centuries) were the most sophisticated in the Deccan, combining knowledge of local geology and hydrology, lifting water to high plateaus from lowland areas. Hydraulic technologies drew extensively from Persianate knowledge about networks of conduits, pipes, and cisterns. Many Muslim women patronized these projects as acts of piety, for practical purposes. This paper draws from a larger book project about the warrior queen Chand Bibi (1550–1600), known as “Queen of the Deccan.”

**Winnie Wong**, Associate Professor, Department of Rhetoric, University of California, Berkeley  
**“Wives and Flowers: Naming Substitutes in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Guangzhou”**

The Chinese port of Guangzhou was a complicated place for botanizing in the 18th century. While travelers from many parts of the world frequented or worked in the port, most of its spaces of trade and work excluded women, both Chinese and European. For their part, European merchants and naturalists were restricted to the factories and the docks, and they instead employed Chinese painters to depict the people and things they wanted to see. Chinese naturalists and elite artists, on the other hand, enjoyed free mobility but assiduously avoided contact with Europeans, barring them the city's most novel spaces of culture and consumption. This paper examines how the world of botany and the world of painting intersected with women, by searching through European and Chinese archives for how women, their labor and their names, were substituted.