

Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson, eds., *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1870–1970*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill Queen's University Press, 2012, 472 pp., 140 colour illustrations, \$65, ISBN 9780773539662

Lianne McTavish, *Defining The Modern Museum: A Case Study of the Challenges of Exchange, (Cultural Spaces)*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2013, 240 pp., \$50, ISBN 9781442644434

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[See table of contents](#)

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les fondements empiriques de l'application de la perspective par les artistes de l'époque, il remet en question une conception de l'histoire de l'art marquée par l'histoire des idées.

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- <sup>1</sup> Voir Henri Zerner et Marc Bayard, éd., *Renaissance en France, renaissance française?*, Actes du colloque *Les Arts visuels de la Renaissance en France (XV<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles)* tenu à Rome du 7 au 9 juin 2007, Paris, Somogy ; Rome, Académie de France à Rome, 2009.
- <sup>2</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Essais d'iconologie. Thèmes humanistes dans l'art de la Renaissance* [1939], trad. Claude Herbette et Bernard Teyssède, Paris, Gallimard, 2005 ; Ernst Gombrich, *L'Art et l'illusion. Psychologie de la représentation picturale* [1960], trad. Guy Durand, Paris, Phaidon, 2002.

- <sup>3</sup> Voir Francis Ames-Lewis, *Drawing in Early Renaissance Italy* [1982], New Haven et Londres, Yale University Press, 2000 et Robert W. Scheller, *Exemplum: Model-Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages (ca. 900–ca. 1450)* [1995], trad. M. Hoyle, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2000. Récemment, Lizzie Boubli s'est penchée sur les méthodes de travail dans les ateliers italiens au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Voir *L'Atelier du dessin italien à la Renaissance. Variante et variation*, Paris, CNRS, 2003.
- <sup>4</sup> Valérie Auclair, « La compétence du dessinateur en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. La copie et la perspective comme instruments de l'invention », thèse de doctorat en histoire de l'art, Paris, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2003.

Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson, eds., *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1870–1970*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill Queen's University Press, 2012, 472 pp., 140 colour illustrations, \$65, ISBN 9780773539662; Lianne McTavish, *Defining The Modern Museum: A Case Study of the Challenges of Exchange*, (Cultural Spaces), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2013, 240 pp., \$50, ISBN 9781442644434.



The study of professionalism in Canadian art has yielded innovative and foundational results, most particularly in the last five years. Two recent publications, *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1870–1970*, edited by Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson, and Lianne McTavish's *Defining The Modern Museum: A Case Study of the Challenges of Exchange*, explore what Huneault and Anderson identify as “the social formation of professionalism” in terms of women's art practices and pursuits.

These two works bring to mind Ian McKay's seminal essay “The Liberal Order Framework,” in which he proposes that Canadian history be analyzed through a new strategy of reconnaissance as a “historically specific project of rule rather than... an essence,” a project he defines as “the study of the implementation and expansion... [of] liberalism.”<sup>1</sup> Canada's historical distinctiveness, McKay explains, lies not in its “foundation,” but in its shaping of the liberal order inspired by both Britain and America, which it then had to preserve, cancel, and transcend.<sup>2</sup> More to the point, its uniqueness depends upon the liberal imperative, harmonizing “older ways with its new underlying conception of the world.” In the classical nineteenth-century liberal model, the individual was assigned primacy: a “true individual” was he who was self-possessed, whose body, soul, and land were his alone.<sup>3</sup> The qualifications of self-possession and property ownership excluded women, workers, ethnic minorities, and Aboriginal peoples from the liberal model, and they became marked as the “Other.”<sup>4</sup>

Analyzing how particular parties championed the liberal imperative reveals the “insiders” who determined its values, as well as “outsiders” who resisted the project. Positioning Canada as a historically and geographically specific project of liberal rule helps to locate the “problem of Canada” within the history of power relations through which a given hegemonic “social” was constructed, centred, and solidified. Huneault, Anderson, their essayists, and McTavish all seem to share McKay's perspective. They analyze the concepts and processes deployed to consolidate the professionalism of Canada's art world. Their accounts describe different parties working to construct not only Canada's art industry but also its legitimacy, thus pointing to ways in which different ideologies inform history. More importantly, they also remind us that the tenets of modernity have contributed to the development of professionalism in the Canadian

art world. *Rethinking Professionalism* and *Defining the Modern Museum* examine professionalization in Canada's cultural institutions and its impact on women.

A product of the Canadian Women Artists History Initiative (CWAHI) inaugural 2008 conference at Concordia University, *Rethinking Professionalism* is a collection of essays that uses the paradigm of art-world professionalism to critically investigate its relevance for women. It addresses the struggles and achievements of women artists, educators, and photographers, as well as those working in the fields of craft, architecture, and museum work. Taken together, the essays—as described in the preface—“cast into relief both the utility and limitations of professionalism as a conceptual framework,” and so the book as a whole offers various methodological ruminations on ideas, practices, and assumptions that underpin Canada's art history studies.

Huneault's essay “Professionalism as Critical Concept and Historical Process for Women and Art in Canada” is foundational for those studying historical Canadian art and issues of gender. She provides a comprehensive definition of artistic professionalism, which she describes as a “critical concept that has structured our tellings of the past,” and outlines its historical development in Canada in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through an assessment of its historiography and methodology. In doing so, she offers a vast and comprehensive appreciation of the analytical narratives of the contributory essays that follow. These are divided into three sections: “Professionalizing Art,” “Careers for Women,” and “The Limits of Professionalism.”

From the outset Huneault calls attention to issues related to professionalism. She organizes her essay around three questions or issues: the role of a professional framework in written accounts of Canadian women artists; the broad history of women, art, and professionalism in Canada; and the consideration of the consequences of narrating through the lens of professionalism. She provides a factual and critical backdrop against which the chapter case studies of artists and professionalism might be placed. Referencing the writing of Janice Helland and Sandra Alfoldy, Huneault adroitly characterizes professionalism as a site of struggle, one that simultaneously helped and hindered women who worked as cultural producers in Canada's art world.

By tracing the germination of both amateur and professional collectives in Canada, Huneault stipulates that women actively participated in Canada's new professional artistic structures since their inception, calling attention to the ways in which classed and gendered expectations of suitable feminine conduct and behaviours informed the field of women's professionalism as well as the avenues they chose to pursue. Notably, she calls attention to their entrance into, and successes within,

the field of art education, accomplishments that sanctioned women to not only teach and practice art, but also to administer art schools and women's colleges around the country. For example, she cites the work of Anna Leonowens, a suffragist and founder of various women's organizations, who collaborated with other women living in Halifax to establish the Victoria School of Art and Design in 1887 (now Nova Scotia College of Art & Design University). This new art institute educated and trained women in a diverse array of cultural fields and artistic media and went on to hire women for publicly prestigious and senior administrative positions—Katherine N. Evans from Philadelphia, for instance, who served as the institution's principal beginning in 1895. Such types of social services paved the way for the training and career advancement of women as artists working in fields such as painting, craft, and photography.

Huneault demonstrates that Canadian women artists capitalized on these ties between professionalism and social services, thereby at once validating their claims to public status and strengthening their claims to professional status within the context of professional organizations and institutions, or as individuals. More broadly she explores women's relationship to professionalism, interrogating the reasons for its domination and the consequences of this for scholarship. The professions, she points out, “have been bastions of social power, and by virtue of their intrinsically hegemonic functions they have crystallized and made transparent forces of social oppression that were often more subtle and insidious.” These, along with other social forces, often coerced women into conforming to a “normative domesticity,” which has had “a greater impact on women artists' careers than the prejudicial policies of professional associations.”

Art historical discourse, Huneault reminds us, has from its beginnings been shaped by patterns of exclusion. Understanding its engagement with the paradigm of professionalism as part of that process allows us to unsettle or destabilize these patterns and paves the way for more innovative, provocative, and critical scholarship. Drawing on Janice Helland's work, Huneault argues that “the untheorized acceptance of an evaluative division between amateur and professional forecloses opportunities to understand some of the most significant aspects of women's art production.” She follows the development of professional artists' societies, academies, and schools, noting that the designation of a “professional artist” became increasingly specialized during the nineteenth century. She charts the vast numbers of women as cultural producers, spanning across the geographical terrain of the Canadian state, including French-speaking women, Ursuline nuns, Aboriginal women, craftspeople, and photographers. Geography, she points out, is a primary factor to consider when interrogating the development of female professionalism in Canada. She calls for more research in order to “untangle the specific temporal, regional, and media-based

dimensions that factored into professional women's involvement" in the Canadian art world. Accordingly, the contributors to the book further develop the various historical contexts of arts organizations, education, popular print culture, tourism, souvenirs and consumerism, museum work, and architecture.

Anne Whitelaw, for instance, considers the historical roles and status assumed by women volunteers in the Edmonton Art Gallery (now Art Gallery of Alberta) from 1924 to the 1970s. While other writings typically produce narratives about elite philanthropists such as Isabella Stewart Gardner and Abby Rockefeller, Whitelaw's essay explores the duties performed by "ordinary women," middle- and upper-middle-class women whose efforts ultimately allowed the Edmonton Art Gallery to remain in operation. Women curators and administrators and women's voluntary societies raised over a million dollars in five decades and thus funded most of the gallery's programs and acquisitions. Whitelaw argues that the museum board's decision in the 1970s to replace these key women with employed men who were paid regular salaries underscores the perception of women's work as "a voluntary contribution rather than as a professional endeavour."

Whitelaw compares the work undertaken by the Women's Society of the Edmonton Art Gallery with the actions and attitudes of Maud Bowman, the museum's first director (1929–43), and Dorothy Dyde, the chair of the acquisition committee. Her goal is to redress the imbalance in scholarly literature and give greater attention to women's "voluntary labour in the museum, seeking to understand both why it was taken for granted at the time and why it continues to be overlooked in the present." More specifically, Whitelaw explores the tension between the visible and invisible, arguing that the society's activities were not extensively recorded and often went ignored, thereby rendering them invisible. Bowman and Dyde each took on specific duties so that their individual roles "more closely approximate[d] what we might understand as professional museum work," thereby distinguishing them within the museum's institutional history. This chapter thus probes issues related to professionalization, with Bowman and Dyde working to distinguish themselves as professionals rather than amateurs. Professionalization functioned as a gauge by which to measure the merit of their work. What also makes this chapter noteworthy is its consideration of professionalism as an analytic paradigm and its examination of the significance of collectivity—a concept prized amongst scholars as well as those working in the cultural sector, which Lianne McTavish also addresses.

*Defining the Modern Museum* champions the legitimacy of the singular institutional analysis. From the outset McTavish brings attention to the myth of the modern museum, thereby providing an intriguing and compelling introduction to her work. Given that modernity prioritizes progress rather than any

particular outcome(s), the modern museum becomes an impossible dream, a mythical entity that can never be achieved. Accordingly McTavish approaches the museum "as a process—an elusive set of actions that is continually performed but never in exactly the same way." Drawing on archival research undertaken at the New Brunswick Museum (NBM) in Saint John, New Brunswick, McTavish examines various facets of the institution's development, from its initial formation within the context of the New Brunswick Natural History Society (founded in 1862) to the current day.

A number of features makes this particular institution a compelling case study: its combination of natural history, anthropology, fine art, and children's museum in one; its self-proclaimed status as the "oldest continuing museum" in Canada, first established in 1929; and its status as a provincial museum charged with representing regional New Brunswick interests. In her analysis McTavish takes all these factors into account and locates them within a broader context, using her archival research—a result of her self-proclaimed submission to Jacques Derrida's term "archival fever"—to "decentre understandings of the museum and critical museum theory."

Charting the museum's transitional stages, McTavish arranges broader discussions in a thematic and roughly chronological order. She offers a wide-ranging account of the institution's development out of a male-members-only club, tracing the ways in which it fostered innovative lending policies, attracted donors from different echelons of New Brunswick society, featured women as important contributors, and underwent varying degrees of commodification and professionalization. Her research into a vast array of archival sources makes evident the constancy of the museum's metamorphosis, as well as the extensive ideologies and ambitions motivating its different states of being. Her account illustrates how "historically specific articulations of place, land, vision, gender, class, and identity have informed modern museums, ultimately both expanding and undermining current conceptions of the museum." McTavish's consideration of connections between gender, class, and identity in museum formation to advance its so-called "professional" status and operations speaks of current trends in museological and art historical scholarship, as also evidenced by Huneault and Anderson's collection of essays.

McTavish's analysis differs from the accounts of museum theorists and scholars such as Tony Bennett, James Clifford, Carol Duncan, Ruth Phillips, and Lynda Jessup, who focus on the compilation and content of collections. She begins her first chapter in a refreshingly provocative manner, charting the links created between the NBM and a wide range of organizations through the loans and donations it received. She considers the role of the international trade of objects between museums in the nineteenth century—or, as she puts it, the "museum

marketplace”—in fostering social, cultural, and economic connections. The New Brunswick Natural History Society accumulated a collection of fossil and mineral samples, which it packaged up as gift sets and sent out to museums around the world to promote the province as an area rich in natural resources. Through such strategies, the society distributed its geological materials to different collections, established connections, and encouraged reciprocal arrangements with other institutions. These significant international exchanges enriched the reference material for the purpose of studying natural history. McTavish calls attention to the benefits of objects’ movement in and out of the museum’s collection, which exemplifies the timeless tradition of gift-exchange practiced by different societies throughout the world and explored by anthropologist Marcel Mauss.

Initiated by the Natural History Society of New Brunswick, such dealings fostered social relationships between the donors and the recipients, notably based on nineteenth-century social codes of civility. As McTavish adroitly explains, “the conventions of gift giving conveniently associated the Society with middle-class values and the generous effort to share knowledge, rather than pecuniary interests.” Once re-contextualized within the collections of different museums of the society members’ choosing, these packages became status symbols for the donors and the objects were therefore “never wholly separated from their origins.” More to the point, McTavish characterizes the NBM not so much as a repository aimed at preservation and exhibition, but as a temporary storage place—both a warehouse and transfer point—for specimens to be shipped to museums around the world. She likens this function to contemporary digital collections that grant immediate access to collections, thus allowing museums to function as temporary containers. McTavish thus links a seemingly timeless pursuit to museums’ current deployment of information and communications technologies.

The NBM’s gift economy enabled women to pursue numerous strategies so that their contributions to the institution’s development would be known and recorded. By donating objects to the museum’s collection, women ensured their names would be permanently located on official accession records. Women’s involvement in the NBM’s collecting practices and exhibition strategies from 1880 to 1940 illustrates the way in which the modern museum functioned as a venue that was both constricting and empowering to various groups, more specifically middle-class women. In this analysis McTavish concentrates on two examples of women contributors: museum volunteers affiliated with the Ladies’ Auxiliary of the Natural History Society and Alice Lusk Webster (1880–1953), one of the institution’s most prominent benefactors and the museum board’s vice-president’s wife. McTavish compares these two parties and examines the accomplishments and challenges of “women’s work” in North American museums. She highlights

the opportunities available to women at this time while also taking class distinctions into account. In her examination of both parties’ engagement with Chinese visual and material culture, she critically explores how such efforts tended to reinforce dominant discourses of race. A fascinating aspect of this chapter’s discussion—and of the book—is the articulation of how these women’s engagement with Orientalism was simultaneously liberating and confining for them.

This particular chapter is also rife with rich archival documents, both visual and literary. McTavish juxtaposes two archival photographs. The first features unidentified members of the Ladies’ Auxiliary dressed up in Oriental costumes, standing against the backdrop of an Oriental bazaar, promoting the 1924 Oriental Exhibition at the museum. The second captures a view of the museum’s display cases located in the art department, a space initiated, funded, and developed by Alice Lusk Webster. McTavish effectively places the two images side by side to visually emphasize the promotion of female agency, particularly in terms of museum curating and food production. She notes that the photograph of the women donning Asian costume and serving tea to visitors dramatizes the privileges awarded to the members of the Ladies’ Auxiliary as white middle-class women. The Oriental theme of the exhibition, she further posits, may have facilitated women’s entrepreneurship during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as Asian visual and material culture was prominently featured in the decor of shops and tea houses, and in advertisements in Europe and North America. The costumes drew on this popular association between Orientalism and consumerism and allowed the lady volunteers to act in accordance with their white middle-class position, “supporting women’s maternal roles with their charity work.”

The benefactor Alice Lusk Webster, on the other hand, strove to exhibit Asian art based on conventional museum standards prevalent during the 1930s. While the Ladies’ Auxiliary aimed for a particular aesthetic effect, Lusk Webster used her cultural and social position to distinguish her contributions from those of the volunteers. McTavish characterizes Lusk Webster as an individual who committed herself to the professionalization of the NBM. Hailing from a prominent New York Family and educated in France, Lusk Webster specialized in “art making and its history.” Not only did she personally institute and fund the Art Department, including its furnishings, cases, collections, down to the staff salaries, but she went on to act unofficially as its curator. In developing the collection, she relied on ritual methods of gift giving, using her extensive social connections to arrange exchanges. Lusk Webster’s adoption of more strident, mainstream institutional models of exhibition practices demonstrates her concerted and public effort to align herself with the most prominent male curators and connoisseurs of her time.

McTavish argues that the professionalization of the museum entailed the “suppression of women’s long-standing contributions as well as their ‘feminine’ identities.” Significantly, she expands this interrogation of the NBM’s professionalization by charting the administrators’ recruitment of trained specialists and staff, both men and women, against the backdrop of nationwide efforts to advance training programs for specialized work in the museum field. In so doing, her examination reveals tensions related to class, gender, and education, as well as the demotion and ejection of volunteers, many of who had kept the institution operational.

McTavish’s archival work also charts noteworthy developments, such as the formation in 1933 of the Canadian Museums Committee. As part of the Carnegie Foundation, it provided apprenticeship and training programs for graduates to undertake specialized museum research, classification, and curatorship at institutions across North America, including the National Gallery of Canada. Her analysis builds on historian Jeffrey Brison’s *Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Canada: American Philanthropy and the Arts and Letters in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston, 2005), which follows American philanthropists’ funding of programs considered today as distinctly “Canadian.” Significantly, McTavish provides a detailed and authoritative account of how museum training and research programs in Canada came to be conceptualized, shaped, and subsequently institutionalized within the university system, an account sorely lacking in previous literature.

Notable, however, is McTavish’s arguably purposeful oversight of recent publications that examine professionalism and the Canadian art world, such as *Rethinking Professionalism*. Given that McTavish presented at the 2008 CWAHI conference and contributed a chapter entitled “The Rewards of Professionalization: Alice Lusk Webster and the New Brunswick Museum” to the collection, she seemingly had her reasons for not citing this particular tome in her work. She possibly wanted to refrain from privileging the museum’s art department at the expense of her analysis of the Canadian history and natural history departments. Such a lack prevents the reader from appreciating the author’s awareness of and contribution to recent scholarly publications that undoubtedly informed her work.

While McTavish’s extensive archival research has its merits, it can sometimes constrain the analysis. For instance, in her examination of various educational outreach programs and endeavours undertaken by the Natural History Society within schools throughout the province, McTavish reminds readers that institutional hierarchies, particularly ones that privilege research and curatorship over the achievements of education and outreach programs, impede effective institutional analyses. Her

consideration of the construction of looking “as a historically, regionally, and culturally specific act” could be accentuated by examining the work of visual cultural theorists such as Nicholas Mirzoeff and Londa Schiebinger.

McTavish also takes into account the formation and activities of other natural history societies across the country, such as in Montreal, Winnipeg, and Vancouver, and compares them to the New Brunswick Society. Each society, she explains, collected specimens and created libraries based on the premise that “reading and looking were complementary educational activities.” This comparative analysis in the book’s fourth chapter detracts from the cohesive unity of McTavish’s singular institutional case study analysis. Nevertheless these chapters are, like the rest of the book, well informed, researched, and structured. Overall, McTavish’s structure and writing style as she distils the important theories are engaging and she approaches her subject in an enticing and accessible way from the outset, maintaining the reader’s interest throughout her analysis.

Both *Rethinking Professionalism* and *Defining the Modern Museum* provide historical analyses and conceptual frameworks that expand our understanding of historical Canadian art and critical museum studies. Considering how strategies related to artistic practices and museum formation aimed to professionalize Canada’s cultural standing and resources, these works highlight the proliferation of hegemonic processes bound up in cultural pursuits. The authors’ exploration of the analytic paradigm of professionalism demonstrates how scholars, museum practitioners, art historians, historians, and students alike might (re)view—both critically and conceptually—historical processes, artistic trends and practices, and exhibitions. In other words, both works call attention to the fundamental motivations that inform the progressive development of Canada’s art market *and* industry. Ultimately both studies pave the way for a broader range of topics in Canadian art, artists, and museum studies to be further developed as part of this larger expanded discourse.

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## Notes

- 1 Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 4 (2000): 620–21.
- 2 McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework,” 640, 627.
- 3 McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework,” 625.
- 4 McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework,” 626.