

# ULTRA

## Positions and Polarities Beyond Crisis

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# Women, Media, Design, and Material Culture in Australia, 1870-1920

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## Abstract

Over the last forty years feminist historians have commented on the under-representation or marginalisation of women thinkers and makers in design, craft, and material culture. (Kirkham & Attfield, 1989; Attfield, 2000; Howard, 2000; Buckley, 1986; Buckley, 2020;). In response particular strategies have been developed to write women back into history. These methods expand the sites, objects and voices engaged in thinking about making and the space of the everyday world. The problem, however, is even more acute in Australia where we lack secondary histories of many design disciplines. With the notable exception of Julie Willis and Bronwyn Hanna (2001) or Burns and Edquist (1988) we have very few overview histories. This paper will examine women's contribution to design thinking and making in Australia as a form of cultural history. It will explore the methods and challenges in developing a chronological and thematic history of women's design making practice and design thinking in Australia from 1870 – 1920 where the subjects are not only designers but also journalists, novelists, exhibitors, and correspondents. We are interested in using media (exhibitions and print culture) as a prism: to examine how and where women spoke to design and making, what topics they addressed, and the ideas they formed to articulate the nexus between women, making and place.

## Introduction: Women Mapping the Capital

1. See Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Design," *Design Issues*, III, 2 (Autumn 1986), 3-14; Kyriaki Hadjiafendi and Patricia Zareski (ed.), *Crafting the Woman Professional in the Long Nineteenth Century: Artistry and Industry in Britain* (Routledge, 2013); Zoë Thomas, *Women art workers and the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

2. See Andrew Montana, *The Art Movement in Australia. Design, Taste and Society 1875-1900* (Carlton Vic: The Miegunyah Press, 2000).

3. Lynne Walker, "Home and Away: The Feminist Remapping of Public and Private Space in Victorian London" in Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell and Alicia Pivaro (ed.) *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; England: The MIT Press, 2001), 296-311.

4. Walker, "Home and Away", 299.

5. Hadjiafendi and Zareski, "Artistry and Industry," 14.

6. Juliet Peers, "Vale, May (1862-1945)" in Joan Kerr (ed.), *Heritage: The National Women's Art Book: 500 works by 500 Australian Women Artists from Colonial Times to 1955* (Roseville East, N.S.W: Craftsman House, 1995), 468-469.

7. *Official Catalogue/Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1886), 176.

The marginalization and under-representation of women thinkers and makers in histories of design, craft and material culture is well-known. The methodological challenge of incorporating women makers and mediators is exacerbated by women's smaller cohort and fragmented archives.<sup>1</sup> The invisibility of nineteenth and early twentieth-century women is compounded by gender ideologies that aligned middle-class women with the domestic sphere and categorized their genteel making activities as amateur handicraft. From the late 1870s onwards, however, the domestic paradigm was progressively mobilized by women to assert their professional expertise over the decoration and furnishing of the home. In late nineteenth-century Melbourne for example, women were increasingly active as artists, designers and makers and their home studios have provided a focus for scholars.<sup>2</sup>

We argue however, that women's increasing presence within the public sphere of the city across its sites, networks and media industries, offers an alternative way to situate and analyze the work of women makers and writers.<sup>3</sup> Women used the public sphere to 'negotiate a public presence' and assert their professional status.<sup>4</sup> Their access to technical training schools, transnational exhibitions, professional guilds and societies and print culture allowed them to become increasingly visible in design industries and design commentary, as they engaged with the "key structures" that defined professional making: "education, exhibition and remuneration."<sup>5</sup> This paper focuses on the sites of the museum, the salon, the exhibition and public sphere journalism. The tensions they experienced in occupying the public realm through socially legitimated roles whilst attempting to expand beyond circumscribed spheres are evident in many of these projects.

## Women and Imperial Exhibitions, 1851-1886

Women in late nineteenth-century Melbourne were able to access the legacy of the nineteenth-century international exhibitions which had included displays of women's work such as the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, or erected stand-alone women's pavilions as at the Philadelphia Centennial 1876 and the Chicago Columbian Exhibition of 1893. Colonial ambitions in the exhibition sphere could offer opportunities for women, as they did for young May Vale, a student at the National Gallery School in 1880s Melbourne. May had assembled an astounding tableau of two hundred species of Victorian timber, with each timber sample bearing a painted depiction of the leaves and flowers of the tree from which it had been cut. May Vale (1862-1945) had already spent four years in London during her father's residency in the imperial capital from 1874-1878 and in 1875 she had studied at the South Kensington schools of art and design.<sup>6</sup> It was a very large commission for a twenty-four-year-old woman art student. May's connections to South Kensington, as well as her talent, were surely instrumental in securing this commission. The 1886 Exhibition afforded the colony's ambitious administrators a useful opportunity for demonstrating their achievements in furthering industrial, technical and applied education in Victoria.<sup>7</sup> The role of the Technological Museum in the production of the exhibit was noted by

8. *Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1885-1886, Report of the Royal Commission for Victoria at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1885-86, Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by His Excellency's Command* (Melbourne: Robert S. Brain, 1887), ix.

9. *Official Catalogue/Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886*, 190.

10. *The Art Journal New Series, 1886/ The Colonial and Indian Exhibition 1886: Supplement to the Art Journal*, 1886, 20.

11. *Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1885-1886, Report of the Royal Commission for Victoria*, 1.

12. *The Art Journal New Series, 1886/ The Colonial and Indian Exhibition 1886: Supplement to the Art Journal*, 1886, 20.

13. See Hadjiafendi and Zareski, "Artistry and Industry," 13.

14. See Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England, 1760 to 1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

15. Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

16. Cornish, C. F. Driver & M. Nesbitt, "The Economic Botany Collection at Kew: Analysis of Accessions Data" *Mobile Museum Working Paper 1* (June 2017), accessed from <https://www.rhul.ac.uk/mobile-museum>, 24 June 2021), 20.

17. See Tracey Jean Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwn (ed.), *Gendering the fair: histories of women and gender at world's fairs* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

the press who echoed the Official Catalogue in recording that the work "was executed by Miss Vale at the Museum under the direction of Mr J. Cosmo Newbery, the Superintendent." Newbery's ambitions were rewarded. By the exhibition's close the South Kensington authorities had agreed to recognize Victoria's local examinations.<sup>8</sup>

May's timber specimens were exhibited in a separate room dedicated to agricultural products and 'products of the Cultivation of Forests and of the Trades appertaining thereto.'<sup>9</sup> Her work was assembled as it had appeared in the 1884 photograph but it was complemented by a rival display featuring a book of timber samples collated by Baron von Mueller, the Government botanist and a collection of objects "made out of some of the more important (timber) varieties."<sup>10</sup> Their exhibit faced the popular Fernery, whose 600 fern specimens attracted large crowds of visitors and attention from "all the leading illustrated journals"<sup>11</sup> The Official Catalogue, the subsequent Parliamentary Report, and London's leading art and design magazine, the *Art Journal*, all noted and named May Vale as the artist of the timber work.<sup>12</sup>

Her central role in the economic botany display is an important exemplar of the ways in which women's artistic occupations helped them to "negotiate the boundaries of woman's sphere."<sup>13</sup> Women and botany had been a respectable association throughout the nineteenth century and women played a professional artistic and scientific role, notably as botanical artists and modelers of plants in wax.<sup>14</sup> May's work was a serious professional activity rather than "merely" decorative craft. It emphasized the productive potential of the colonies.<sup>15</sup> Vale and Mueller's 'mobile museum' of Victoria's timber species, was of keen interest in the age of High Empire, when Britain was trying to improve plant productivity across its empire.<sup>16</sup> In this context Vale's painting was not ornamental, but a demonstration of the productive economic value of the art training system produced by South Kensington and its network of schools. Although May was working within a traditional female genre, her craftwork was propelled into a professional, scientific sphere. Victorian women were also represented in the domestic decoration and Fine Arts sections of the Court, but May was accorded a unique place. She was publicly visible and recognized, but her alignment to women's domestic work and the private sphere was also reinforced.<sup>17</sup>

## Print Culture 1890-1907

18. Austral Salon, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austral\\_Salon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austral_Salon), accessed 24 June 2021.

Parallel to their occupation with international and inter-colonial exhibitions, women took the opportunities afforded by mass circulation print media to project their views into the public sphere. In 1890 journalists including Mary Hirst Browne, Agnes Murphy and Ada Cambridge founded the Austral Salon for women writers.<sup>18</sup> It was located in the Austral Building at 115-119 Collins Street which by this time was a hub of Melbourne's avant-garde. The Austral Building was a speculative venture by *Melbourne Punch* publisher Alexander McKinley and included retail, professional chambers, and artists' studios on the fourth floor. The model was Grosvenor Chambers at 9 Collins Street, built in 1888 by the Paterson Brothers, owners of a successful decorating firm, as showroom, retail and artists' studios. Between these two buildings circulated many of Melbourne's most important makers,

artists and writers. Among the last, Ada Cambridge (1844-1927?) was the most prominent.

19. Harriet Edquist, "Mapping Modernity in 'Marvellous Melbourne': Ada Cambridge's *A Woman's Friendship*," in Grierson, Elizabeth, Harriet Edquist, Helene Fricot (eds), *De-Signing Design. Cartographies of Theory and Practice*, (Lexington Books 2015), 97-108.

Cambridge is important for this history in that she successfully negotiated a public space for her voice in Melbourne's metropolitan newspapers where her fiction was serialized in the 1870s and 1880s before it was taken up by English publishers. Using serialized fiction as her platform, she asserted her expertise and knowledge of design through the concept of the "artistic home" which appears in a number of her novels such as *The Perversity of Human Nature* 1887, *The Three Miss Kings*, 1891 and *Sisters* 1904. Sometimes, Cambridge gives the reader an interior that in its aesthetic intention offers a setting for a woman's conscious self-fashioning as a modern subject such as Margaret Clive's East Melbourne cottage in *A Woman's Friendship* (1889). Cambridge's sympathy with John Ruskin's 1849 *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and the ethos of the emerging Arts and Crafts movement as promulgated by William Morris are evident here and elsewhere in her work.<sup>19</sup>

At the turn of the century Melbourne's print media offered new avenues apart from fiction for women to engage with and help shape public opinion. On the one hand there were women's magazines such as *The New Idea*, *Southern Sphere* and on the other dedicated women's pages in mass-circulation newspapers such as the *Argus* and the *Age*. Women leveraged these developing media outlets to articulate a position for themselves as journalists, critics and commentators on art and design. As consumers of these magazines women were receiving an education in architecture and design history, and instruction on interior decorating including spatial planning, wall decoration and the choice of equipment and decorative objects.

### **First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work 1907**

20. "Women's Work Exhibition Melbourne, 1907," <http://www.auspostalhistory.com/articles/199.shtml>, accessed 26 June 2021.

21. *First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work 1907 Exhibition Building, Melbourne 23rd to November 30, 2007*, Official Souvenir Catalogue, 27.

The First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work (FAEWW) opened at the Exhibition Building, Melbourne on 23 October 1907 and closed just over five weeks later. With over 16,000 exhibits from all the States of Australia, Britain, Europe, North and South America, India and Africa it showcased the work of women musicians, artists, designers and craftswomen and was visited by over 250,000 people.<sup>20</sup> It was an accelerant to women's growing professional presence in the public sphere and put women's activities as makers and knowledge workers on a national and international stage. The Melbourne project positioned itself within a lineage of women's exhibitions. The Official Catalogue described the growth of women's only presentations, from the first exhibitions in Vienna in the 1860s and more recent Arts and Crafts projects in England before staking its bold claim that the Melbourne exhibition was unique in its global scale, "none had yet been held that embraces so widely the work of women in almost all parts of the world."<sup>21</sup> The exhibition, conceived under a national rather than colonial rubric, constituted a signal achievement of organizational and logistical labour on the part of its primary organizer, Lady Northcote. As a privileged agent within imperial networks Lady Northcote drew on her status to tap the capacity of agents of empire and interested private citizens.

22. Chris Cunneen, "Northcote, Henry Stafford (1846-1911)", Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/northcote-henry-stafford-7861/text13659>, published first in hardcopy 1988, accessed online 27 June 2021.

23. Elizabeth Taylor, 'Lady Northcote: Leading Light and Sponsor of the First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work', [http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/sti/pdfs/03\\_Taylor.pdf](http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/sti/pdfs/03_Taylor.pdf), accessed 26 June 2021.

24. This account of Lady Northcote's leadership differs from that of Elizabeth Taylor who emphasizes the limiting aspects of class and gender on her activities.

25. Lady Northcote contacted Lady Minto in India, Lady Grey in Canada, Lord Aberdeen in Ireland, and Lady Jersey in London for contributions. Others included Princess of Wales, Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein, Duchess of Connaught, Princess Patricia of Connaught, Princess Louise Duchess of Argyle, Duchess of Albany, Princess Alexander of Teck, Princess Henry of Battenberg, Princess Louise Augusta of Schleswig-Holstein, Princess Mary of Denmark, Princess Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, Duchess de Vendome, Princess Stephanie, Arch-Duchess of Austro-Hungary. See Taylor, "Lady Northcote", 48.

26. Taylor, "Lady Northcote", 46.

27. E[dwin]. F[rank] Allan, "Maori, Aboriginal and South Sea Exhibits", *Argus*, November 1, 1907. SLV Manuscripts. MS 10964 BOX 449 516. Mrs Douglas Keep, "Historical Material Relating to First Exhibition of Women's Work 1907". Typescript.

28. Ian D. Clark, "A Peep at the Blacks": *A history of tourism at Coranderrk Aboriginal Station 1863-1924* (Warsaw: De Gruyter Open, 2015), 56.

29. See Louise Douglas, "Representing colonial Australia at British, American and European international exhibitions", *reCollections*, vol.3, no.1 (March 2008). [https://reCollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol\\_3\\_no\\_1/papers/representing\\_colonial\\_australia](https://reCollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_3_no_1/papers/representing_colonial_australia), accessed online 24 June 2021.

Alice, Lady Northcote had arrived in Melbourne in 1904 with her husband Henry Stafford Northcote, 1st Baron Northcote, a British Conservative politician who served in the House of Commons from 1880 to 1899. He had been Governor of Bombay from 1900 until 1903 when he was appointed Governor General to the recently federated Australia.<sup>22</sup> Lady Northcote had worked for the Countess of Dufferin's Fund for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India and has arrived in Melbourne with an active model of vice-regal engagement and a model of working in the interests of women.<sup>23</sup> Armed with a suite of possibilities enabled by her imperial networks, Lady Northcote was also supported by a favorable local environment. By 1907 Australian women had organized themselves into work associations, guilds and exhibition societies, and technical colleges had introduced applied art training from the 1890s which provided the impetus to professionalize domestic labor. While Lady Northcote operated in a context defined by her gender, class and as an agent of imperialism what is of interest here is her leadership in using the exhibition model to communicate to a large audience the value and nature of women's work, to put under notice the category of 'amateur' under which many professional women laboured and so doing, to effect social transformation.<sup>24</sup>

By virtue of her position Northcote had access to Prime Minister Alfred Deakin for support and she formed a working relationship with his wife Pattie Deakin. Using her vice-regal contacts, she sought exhibits from British and European royalty and the aristocracy.<sup>25</sup> She also proposed to the Premier of New Zealand, Sir Joseph Ward, a display of work by Maori women.<sup>26</sup> Indigenous Australian material was included through the auspices of mission societies. The Methodist Ladies Auxiliary (presumably of the Home Mission Society) ensured that material from Melville Island and North Queensland was included. Traditional artefacts (a hat and grass garments) were displayed in contrast to needlework, copybooks and drawing books, all the latter showing the work of the mission in transforming its subjects into "native Christians."<sup>27</sup> The work of women on missions and mission stations' presentation of Indigenous craft wares was threaded through the 1907 displays, across Australia, New Guinea, Canada, India and South Africa. Women's Christian work in the imperial project was a persistent but not prominent feature of the Exhibition. In this context it is noteworthy that basket work of the women at Coranderrk was not represented in the exhibition. Coranderrk, at Healesville not far from central Melbourne, had a thriving tourism industry and women had been selling their baskets to visitors since the 1860s and had exhibited at the 1866 Intercolonial Exhibition. By 1904 the settlement was included in N J Caire and J W Lindt's *Companion Guide to Healesville*, catering to motorists.<sup>28</sup> It is impossible that the organisers of the FAEWW would be unaware of the settlement. It may be that they were sensitive to the growing international condemnation of Australia's treatment of its Indigenous population.<sup>29</sup> Part of the tourist interest in Coranderrk was that its people were deemed to be 'a dying race', soon to disappear. It is also possible that the Exhibition is more evidence of the late nineteenth century development of whiteness as 'a transnational form of racial identification', a historical formation documented by Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds in their book *Drawing the Global Colour Line* (2008).

The opening pages of the Official Catalogue presented a pageant of black and white photographs of royal and aristocratic women, reflecting its vice-regal patronage. This portrait gallery emphasized the respectable nature of the project as a display of genteel women's leisure work. The rhetoric within the Catalogue however, was much bolder and even radical, urging Australian women to take up paid work, particularly as "The conditions of labour in Australia are said to be the best in the world."

30. "Women'sWorkExhibition,Melbourne,1907," <http://www.auspostalhistory.com/articles/199.shtml>, accessed 26 June 2021.

31. E[dwin]. F[rank] Allan, 'A Day in the Creche', the *Argus*, October 30. Typescript. Keep, Mrs Douglas, Manuscript Collection, SLV.

The exhibition made a significant leap by redefining the site of the workplace and the nature of work: home and the studios and club premises which emerged in Melbourne at this time were all sites of women's labour. Furthermore, among the thousands of exhibits of applied art were 1,000 representing teaching, cookery, horticulture, medicine and nursing signifying other sites and forms of women's work.<sup>30</sup> These presentations emphasised the importance of education for women and girls. The Exhibition also drew attention to the infrastructure that underpins women's workforce participation, by placing a creche at the centre of the project. This demonstration of organized childcare and the activities of happy children excited considerable media interest.<sup>31</sup> Women could work outside the home without neglecting their primary duty as mothers.

32. Jane E. Hunt, "Gether, Susanne Vilhelmine (1857-1911)," Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gether-susanne-vilhelmine-12933/text23369>, published first in hard copy 2005, accessed online 1 July 2021.

33. Hunt, "Gether, Susanne Vilhelmine."

The impact of the exhibition can be gauged on a number of fronts: a higher profile for women makers, the entry of women as critics and commentators in the print and periodical press, and as a stimulus to the organization of societies and exhibitions around the Arts and Crafts ethos. One maker whose work made an impact was Suzanne Gether (1857-1913+) a Danish-born craft worker who emigrated to New Zealand in 1890 and spent the decade earning a livelihood by teaching her crafts. In 1899 she relocated to Sydney where she taught woodcarving. In 1906 she became a foundation member of the Society of Arts and Crafts of New South Wales and was on the New South Wales organising committee for the FAEWW for which she and 'a regiment' of wood carvers and leather workers designed a carved rosewood table and six chairs with 'elaborately embossed Australian leather upholstery.'<sup>32</sup> The following year this *tour de force* of women's work was shown in London at the New South Wales court of the Franco-British Exhibition in 1908.<sup>33</sup> In this way the impact of the FAEWW was considerably expanded into the international sphere.

34. "Arts and Crafts in Australia, A Promising Movement," *The New Idea*, VIII no 1 (January 1908): first page.

Gether had also exhibited textiles at the FAEWW woven on a Danish hand loom, presumably imported for the purpose. While the exhibition was awash with textiles constructed by the needle, hand-loom weaving was new in Australia and the impact of Gether's exhibit of woven textiles was immediate. She was invited back the following year to demonstrate her weaving at the inaugural Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria exhibition, itself an outcome of the FAEWW, as was noted by *New Idea*: "The impetus given to the homes arts and crafts movement by the Women's Exhibition has not been permitted to die, and one of the signs of its vigour was an exhibition held in Melbourne last month."<sup>34</sup> Thereafter handloom weaving was one of the crafts taught at the Arts and Crafts clubroom at 357 Collins Street. As Louise Giacco has observed, Gether had exhibited in the Trade section of the FAEWW, signalling that "she was operating as a business." She tested the limits

35. Louise Giacco, 'Suzanne Gether,' in Kerr (ed.) *Heritage*, 120.

of the 'amateur' status of women's work and redefined it by her example and practice as professional, a re-arrangement of social norms that was one of her most enduring legacies.<sup>35</sup>

36. Judith Smart & Marian Quartly, "The National Council of Women of Victoria: Suffrage and political citizenship 1904-1914," *Victorian Historical Journal*, 79 no 2 (2008): 232.

There is also the possibility discussed by Judith Smart and Marian Quartly, that the demonstration of Victorian women's capacity to organise in their own interests as evidenced by the FAEWW had a political outcome and was a contributing factor to the capitulation of premier Thomas Bent to their demands for a suffrage bill which went through the Victorian upper house in 1908. This was six years after non-Indigenous Australian women had achieved the vote in national parliament.<sup>36</sup> British women would not be so successful until 1928.

## Women and Print Media 1907-1920

37. Smart and Quartly, "The National Council of Women of Victoria," 232.

The First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work provided the opportunity for the New Zealand-born lawyer and journalist Stella May Allan (1871-1962) to become a prominent print culture voice for women's design work. Allan had come to Melbourne in 1903 when her husband Frank Allan, formerly a diplomat in the British Embassy in Beijing, joined the staff of the *Argus* as leader-writer. She swiftly put her legal training and her journalism to work as a member of the press committee of the National Council of Women Victorian branch, its social, legal and economic committee as well as the suffrage and rights of citizenship committee. It was Allan who led a deputation to the premier Thomas Bent for women's suffrage in 1906.<sup>37</sup> In 1907 the *Argus* commissioned Allan to cover the FAEWW which thus becomes a key site bringing together the exhibition and print culture modes of work discussed in this paper.

38. Patricia Keep, 'Allan, Stella May (1871–1962),' Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/allan-stella-may-4998/text8307>, published first in hardcopy 1979, accessed online 28 June 2021.

Allan's articles for FAEWW were so well received that she was invited to join the full-time staff of the paper the following year. Adopting the nom de plume "Vesta," her column "Women to Women" was unique in an Australian daily paper at the time, as it "extended to cover every aspect of women's affairs, children's interests and community welfare, and 'Vesta' became a household word for authoritative information and advice on such matters."<sup>38</sup> For 30 years, Stella offered knowledgeable and sensible advice and invited readers to submit their questions and opinions. Significantly, Allan leveraged her reputation in the media to promote other women's issues and institutions; she joined the Women Writers' Club, succeeding Ada Cambridge as president, and in 1912 was a foundation member and later president of the Lyceum Club. She was involved in the Victorian Association of Crèches, the Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria, the Victorian Bush Nursing Association, the Baby Health Centres Association and the Queen Victoria Hospital. She also contributed to national entities such the National Council of Women, first in New Zealand and then in Melbourne, and the Country Women's Association.

Henrietta C Walker's career as a journalist ran parallel to that of Allan, in that she edited a women's page for *The Age* newspaper for seventeen years. She redefined the nature of women's work using her own expertise in rug-making, basketry and home making as exemplars and focused on how women could negotiate their skill in the domestic



39. Henrietta C Walker, *Rafia work: a simple craft, with great possibilities* (Melbourne: Whitecombe & Tombs 1913).

40. Henrietta C Walker, "A maker of homes. What does architecture offer as a career for women?," *Everylady's Journal*, November 1916, 652.

41. Walker, "A maker of homes," 652.

sphere for professional gain. Her articles were sometimes followed by instructional books such as *Rafia work: a simple craft, with great possibilities*.<sup>39</sup> Walker's most important contribution to the articulation of women's work, however, was the book she co-wrote with Margaret Cuthbertson, the first female factory inspector in Victoria. *Woman's Work*, published in 1913, was a guide to the nature, terms and conditions of many kinds of work available to Australian women. *Woman's Work* is divided into two sections, reflecting the expertise of the two authors. The first deals with work open to women as sole agents and includes fashion and advertisement drawing, lace making and needlework, literary work, home decorating, tourism, dentistry, medicine, pharmacy and nursing among others. The second section under the heading of Industrial, deals with women as wage earners in an industrial or factory setting. The omission of architecture from *Woman's Work* reflects the difficulty Australian women faced entering this profession. Walker rectified the omission somewhat in an important but often overlooked article she published in *Everylady's Journal* in 1916, "A Maker of Homes. What does architecture offer as a career for Women?"<sup>40</sup> This is a record of an interview she conducted with Marion Mahony Griffin who had arrived in Melbourne in 1914 with her husband Walter Burley Griffin to undertake their work on the federal capital in Canberra. This article focusses on Mahony's early life, the influence of her mother and family, her early work in Chicago (illustrated), the advantages of an architectural education and affirms more than once that Mahony's drawings for the federal capital were as important as her husband's in gaining the commission.<sup>41</sup>

42. Patricia Keep, 'Allan, Stella May (1871–1962),' Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/allan-stella-may-4998/text8307>, published first in hardcopy 1979, accessed online 28 June 2021.

43. 'Vesta' [Stella Allan], *Recipes for all meals*, Melbourne: Argus, c.1938.

Allan and Walker remained active in the interwar years providing a generational bridge between pioneers such as themselves and younger women who would forge their careers as modernists. In 1924 Stella Allan "was appointed substitute delegate for Australia to the fifth assembly of the League of Nations at Geneva and was a delegate to the second Pan Pacific Women's Conference in Hawaii in 1930."<sup>42</sup> She continued to write for the *Argus* and published a cookbook through the newspaper in the mid 1930s.<sup>43</sup> She spent the war years in England, reporting back to the *Argus* on the welfare of women and children. Henrietta Walker meanwhile settled comfortably into the new format women's magazines such as the smart and long-serving *Australian Home Beautiful*, formerly *Australian Home Builder* until its rebranding in 1925. In its pages and as a member of the Country Women's Association, she continued her championship of a local maker culture.

## **Conclusion**

The gendered ideologies of the nineteenth century had placed middle-class settler women within the domestic sphere. Here their craft work could be described as amateur, and their artistic work could be perceived as ornamental. Nevertheless, women's role as home maker and home expert was increasingly able to be converted into expertise on home decoration and furnishing. The growth of the arts and crafts movement and the expansion of print culture afforded new sites of action, as handicraft and home circulated in public arenas. Gender segregated clubs and activities could be turned to women's advantage, Lady Northcote adroitly fused women's exhibitions with the male dominated sphere of the international exposition and women gained a permanent place in the city's major media outlets as journalists focused on women's issues.