

Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Case of a Designing Woman

Susan Wood
Charles Sturt University

Ann Gillmore Rees was a designer and teacher who used three different names over the course of a career, which began in England in the 1920s and concluded in Australia in the 1970s. Rees illustrated books, designed textiles and exhibited work in a variety of genres. As a teacher she influenced notable Australian women including Marion Hall Best and Joan Law-Smith. It is surprising then that since her death in 1982, Ann Rees has largely been forgotten. In this paper, I reconstruct the story of Ann Rees' career and discuss reasons for her omission from British and Australian art, craft and design histories, concluding that the telling of stories like hers would provide us with a more complete view of our cultural history.

Writing in the late 1990s, Joanna Selborne commented that a number of talented female wood engravers who studied at the Central School in London during the 1920s had for a variety of reasons 'abandoned any idea of commercial artistic pursuits'.¹ One of the women she included in that group was Doris Carter, whose work was included in the annual student shows at the Central School and published in contemporary journals such as *Studio* and *Commercial Art*.² Selborne points out that although Doris Carter's work was well received by contemporary critics she was subsequently forgotten.³ Several years before Selborne made this observation about Doris Carter, Peppin and Micklethwait wrote of the illustrator Ann Gillmore Carter: '[v]ery little has been recorded about the life of this artist, who seems to have had an exceptionally short working career.'⁴ Neither they, nor Joanna Selborne, knew that Doris Carter and Ann Gillmore Carter were the same woman, or that she had a third name – Ann Gillmore Rees – by which she was known in Australia. Rather than being unusually short, Ann Gillmore Rees' career extended from her student days as Doris Carter in the mid 1920s, through her life as Ann Gillmore Carter when she worked as a freelance artist and teacher in London in the 1930s, to her life in Australia as Ann Gillmore Rees where, during the 1940s, she was active in the art and design scene in Sydney.

Over the course of a long and varied career, Ann Gillmore Rees illustrated books, designed textiles and exhibited work in a variety of genres. Historians of the Central School identify her work as among the best produced in the school during her time there⁵ and her work as a teacher in London was singled out for praise by her employers.⁶ As a teacher in Australia she influenced notable Australian women including the interior designer Marion Hall Best, the garden writer Joan Law-Smith and Margaret Oppen, who founded the Embroiderers' Guild in New South Wales. By the late 1950s she was living and working in remote parts of Australia, where a career as a professional designer was not possible. Nevertheless her involvement in art continued and she was still teaching art and design in her seventies. However, when Rees died in 1982 her personal records and the work which remained in her hands were either distributed to friends and acquaintances or discarded, presenting a significant challenge to anyone wishing to research her career. The limited details that were known of her life and work were recorded, not entirely accurately, when some of her work was included in exhibitions in 1984 and 1995 and then Ann Gillmore Rees, like Doris Carter, was largely forgotten.⁷

The name Ann Gillmore Rees first came to my attention in the course of research on embroidery in New South Wales in the mid-twentieth century. She had apparently played a role in promoting the practice of modern embroidery in Sydney, and yet none of the women still alive who had been involved in the Embroiderers' Guild of New South Wales in the early 1960s knew anything about her. Initial curiosity turned into a full-scale investigation and the more details emerged, the more interesting her story became and the more surprising it seemed that someone so active could be left out of histories of Australian and British art, craft and design. Thus, one aim of this paper is to provide a broad outline of the career of Ann Gillmore Rees, establishing what is already known of her life and work and identifying areas where further research needs to be done because, if nothing else, she needs to be acknowledged as a figure of some significance in the art and design scene in Sydney in the 1940s and as a contributor to the development of modern embroidery in Australia.

Another aim is to explore the reasons for this 'forgetting'. Despite all of the arguments in favour of looking at the art world from a broad perspective much of the recent research on women artists in Australia has focussed on those who are already relatively well known.⁸ Perhaps this is inevitable. Archives have limited resources and of necessity restrict their collecting to individuals and organizations of established significance. However, as a consequence some may conclude that if an individual is not represented in a major archive or collection, they are of little significance and do not merit investigation. The case of Ann Gillmore Rees reveals this as a false assumption. Examining the reasons for her omission from British art, craft and design histories serves two functions. First, it suggests that Rees' low profile is due to circumstances rather than lack of merit. Second, it highlights a range of issues that may well have contributed to the absence of other significant women from the historiography of British and Australian art and design.

The early years

Doris Carter was born in Bristol, England, in 1900, into a middle class family, which valued both the arts and education. Her father Thomas was a doctor; one uncle, Edward Tremlett Carter, was an electrical engineer who also wrote science fiction;⁹ another uncle had studied photography; and two of her paternal aunts were teachers – one of music, the other of art. Towards the end of the First World War Carter attended the Bristol Municipal Art School, also known as the Queen's Road School of Art, where she trained to be an art teacher. The school, which was housed in a modern building adjacent to the Royal West of England Academy in central Bristol and run by the local authority, offered a traditional curriculum, focussing on drawing, painting, etching and engraving, and modelling and sculpture. Design for illustration was a minor inclusion, although when the new school buildings were opened in 1913 *The Bristolian* pointed out that modern advertising offered a myriad of opportunities for those skilled in illustration.¹⁰ The initial two-year course led to a drawing examination, followed by another two years of advanced level study.¹¹ For those wishing to be teachers there was a course in the principles and practice of teaching. A Board of Education inspection report from 1920 indicates that there were two female Art Pupil-Teachers among the students at the art school – presumably these were Carter and her friend Mary Kathleen (Kay) Vowles.¹²

Life in London

In the early 1920s Doris Carter left Bristol for London where, together with Kay Vowles, she attended the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Although the college archive does not hold student records from this period, it appears that Carter was a student between 1923 and 1928.¹³ The Central School had been established by key players in the Arts and Crafts movement and in the 1920s many of its staff members were still involved with both the Art Workers' Guild and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. Therefore, central to the teaching at the school was an emphasis on both the handmade autographic mark and the acquisition of highly developed craft skills. At the same time, the Central engaged in debates about the relationship between art and industry, which began in the late nineteenth century and continued well into the twentieth. When Doris Carter was at the school,

students were being trained as designers for industry, rather than as fine artists, and according to C. Geoffrey Holme, then editor of *The Studio* magazine, the Central School did this much more effectively than other institutions in London. In 1927 he commented that '[t]hese [designs from the Central School, including two by Doris Carter] again exemplify the originality and sound training to which we adverted our remarks last month'.¹⁴ Doris Carter studied wood engraving with Noel Rooke and, like many of his students, crossed over into designing for block printed textiles. Presumably she attended the Central School's classes on book illustration and on design for printed textiles and, like most women attending art schools at the time, she studied embroidery, earning a City and Guilds Certificate for Embroidery and Design.

One of the features of the Central School was its practice of linking students with industry. Noel Rooke regularly introduced his students to private press owners and to commercial publishers and it was possibly through his efforts that one of Carter's first professional commissions came about: illustrations for the Mandrake Press 1929 edition of the *Book of Tobit*.¹⁵ Some of the engravings used in this book are held in the Central Saint Martins Museum and Contemporary Collection; in the final publication these were supplemented by additional illustrations (Figure 1).¹⁶ This must have been an exciting opportunity for a designer embarking on a professional career, but unfortunately for Carter this edition of *Tobit* was not widely distributed. It seems that the book was a casualty of the Mandrake Press's financial difficulties, brought about partly by its owner Percy Stephensen's involvement with the notorious Aleister Crowley and partly by the Wall Street Crash in October 1929.¹⁷ Interestingly, Carter submitted some of the original engravings for the book to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society Exhibition in 1931 where copies of the book were available for purchase from the exhibition at a cost of 7s 6d.¹⁸

It was in 1929 that Doris Carter changed her name to Ann Gillmore Carter, at least for some of her work – including that for the Mandrake Press. There is no definitive evidence to explain why Doris Carter changed her name, or why she chose to identify herself as Ann Gillmore Carter for her exhibition and illustration work but continued, until 1935, to use the name Doris Carter when teaching. The former may have been done in an effort to differentiate herself from a Mrs D.A. Carter, who was already working as an artist in London, while the retention of her legal name when teaching may have been necessary because this was the name on her Teacher-Artist Certificate. Between 1929 and 1937, Ann Gillmore Carter worked as a freelance artist, designer and teacher in London. Like many other designers embarking on a career at the start of the Great Depression, she found it necessary to diversify. In addition to the *Book of Tobit*, she illustrated Shaw Desmond's *The Tales of the Little Sisters of St Francis* (1929), a collection of poetry and Irish folk tales, where sections of text are divided by Carter's wood engravings. Another book to include her work was *Turn Again Tales* (1930) by Laurence Housman, where she was one of several illustrators. She designed book jackets, calendars, greeting cards and advertising layouts and sold designs to textile manufacturers (Figure 2).¹⁹ Much of the commercial work of this period is unattributed, this issue itself being the subject of much debate at the time,²⁰ but enough of Carter's work is identifiable to see that she was working in the current style.²¹

Carter's initial training as a teacher was also put to good use. She taught embroidery to postgraduate students at the Institute of Education at London University between 1933 and 1938 and at the London County Council's Women's Evening Institutes. Her work for both organisations was singled out for praise. Annual reports at the Institute of Education comment favourably on Carter's teaching; in the 1934-1935 and 1935-1936 reports, she is the only tutor mentioned by name.²² A report of an inspection of the St Giles-in-the-Field women's evening institute in 1932 commented that the members of the drawing class were 'thinking and feeling for themselves, and ... this attitude is reflected in the quality of their embroidery and handiwork'.²³ These classes in drawing and design and in embroidery were taught by Carter. Carter also continued to exhibit work as an artist. Her wood engravings were included in Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society shows, she contributed to Society of Wood Engravers' exhibitions during the 1930s and her embroidery was included in a large exhibition of modern embroidery held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1933.

The life of a freelance artist has always been a precarious one; very few manage to make a living from their work. It was even more difficult for women artists and designers in the London of the 1930s. The Wall Street Crash and the subsequent Depression had significant consequences, causing the market for luxuries such as art and handcrafted items to contract, while freelance women designers were paid less than males and found it more difficult to establish themselves as professional practitioners.²⁴ Nevertheless Carter managed to carve out a niche for herself and was financially secure enough to take a holiday cruise to the West Indies in 1935, travelling first class. While at the Central School she was in contact with others who were, or were to become, key players in British craft and design: among them, Pearl Binder, Catherine Cockerell, Joyce Clissold, John Farleigh, Theo Moorman and Herry Perry. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s she lived in St John's Wood, a suburb that attracted artists and designers. Its residents included George Clausen, Claude Flight, and Serge Chermayeff, the architect and designer whose modernist interiors for his home, just a few doors along from Carter's flat in Abbey Road, were something of a sensation. There have been suggestions, unsubstantiated, that she was acquainted with members of the Bloomsbury set. Although I suspect that the latter is a fanciful notion, it is fair to say that she was well versed in modern approaches to design and had a substantial network of professional contacts.

The War Years

Ann Gillmore Carter's life in London drew to a close when, in late 1937, she married William Togarmah (Bill) Rees, an Englishman who had been working in rural New South Wales. The two had met in 1935, when she was on holiday in the West Indies and he was en route to England to visit his family. Bill Rees returned to Australia shortly after the marriage, but Ann remained in London for some time. Now known as Mrs Rees, she continued to teach at the Institute of Education, finally departing for Australia in early 1939. This was not the most opportune moment to be attempting to establish a career in a new country but Ann Gillmore Rees came with exceptionally good qualifications and considerable experience and she wasted no time in becoming involved in the local art and design scene. Her first-hand experience in London clearly made an impression. The press coverage of her teaching activities in Sydney – and there was a significant amount of it – invariably stressed her 'experience in London and Paris'.²⁵ In her first six months in Sydney she had sold textile designs to David Jones and exhibited with both the Society of Artists and the Industrial Arts Club. In 1939 Rees exhibited in the Society of Artists annual exhibition and in 1940 and 1941 she participated in exhibitions with the Contemporary Group, which Roy de Maistre and Thea Proctor established in 1926 in order to encourage contemporary artists.²⁶

In 1940 she became involved with the Children's Library and Crafts Movement, an organization that had been established in 1934 to provide free library facilities and craft activities for children. In an expansion of the organization's activities, Rees offered courses in design for the arts and crafts, aimed at 'teachers, students, young married women, mothers of the library members, and anyone else who is interested'.²⁷ An undated syllabus indicates that at least one of the courses included a practical teaching component and was intended to 'give the teacher, the trainee, the social worker, and others, the right approach to the teaching of design, colour and crafts to juniors, seniors or adults'.²⁸ *The Daily Telegraph* reported that by late 1941 approximately 50 women were attending the classes.²⁹ Rees also worked for the Red Cross in Sydney. In late 1942 and early 1943 she was reorganising the rehabilitation centre at Concord Hospital in Sydney and training volunteers and in 1944 selected and arranged an exhibition at the Anthony Hordern's Art Gallery intended to promote the work of the Red Cross.³⁰ She also gave a talk on ABC radio in 1943 on the role of handcraft in rehabilitation work. The talk, presumably informed by her work for the Red Cross, was reproduced in the 1943 edition of the Society of Artists' book.³¹

Ann Gillmore Rees also became involved with the Society of Arts and Crafts of NSW, giving lectures to the Society in August 1944 and again in July 1945. As the war drew to a close and the Society embarked upon a project to establish a craft and design school in Double Bay, Rees appears to have been the ideal choice to oversee the venture. The idea of a design school was promoted by

several members including Nance Mackenzie and Ethleen Palmer, who observed that there was considerable demand but few opportunities for education in craft and design in Sydney. Rees was consulted during the planning process and at a Special General Meeting of the Society in September 1945 was appointed as director of the Craft Training School, also known as the Double Bay Studio. At the same time she was commissioned to develop a correspondence course in colour and design for the Society.³² Classes at the school began in October 1945, with just six students and by 1946 the school was well underway, with a total of sixty-seven students in its first full year.

Rees' aims as a teacher were clearly set out in a report she wrote in 1947 on the Craft Training School. In summary these aims were to stimulate a wider and fuller approach to the arts and crafts by encouraging self expression, observation and appreciation of good work from the past and the present, for 'we need to learn how to make the best use of our native resources and talents and to cultivate an awareness of the contemporary scene far beyond our own frontiers'.³³ Ann Rees' aspirations for her students are further hinted at in the conclusion to Lesson 10 of the Colour and Design course:

We have explored many paths along this course of Design and Colour. You will now feel equipped with a little knowledge of how to design. You will have gained an awakening sense of the many beautiful forms and colours around you. It is important that you go on exploring and foster that growth of what is individual in you.³⁴

The teaching material for the correspondence course offers a fascinating insight into Rees' approach to the teaching of design.³⁵ The early lessons were based upon the ideas of Adolfo Best-Maugard, who had evolved a method of designing in which seven basic motifs were used to develop patterns,³⁶ but subsequent lessons saw students developing counter-change patterns and more complex motifs based on flora and fauna. As well as Best-Maugard's ideas, it is possible to identify the influence of texts by Lewis F. Day and Archibald Christie,³⁷ but Rees' instructions are written in a more conversational tone, and the lessons are lavishly illustrated with her own diagrams (Figure 3). These diagrams show how to approach the required exercises and include examples drawn from a wide variety of sources, including Greek and Islamic pottery, African beadwork and Scandinavian embroidery as well as contemporary work, such as Marion Dorn's printed textiles and rugs.

The classes at the Double Bay studio were offered during the day and in the evening and consisted of three terms of twelve weeks each, a similar structure to that which she had used at the Children's Library and Craft Movement some years earlier. The basic colour and design syllabus was supplemented by visits to the Technological Museum, the Australian Museum and to local textile factories. After completing the initial lessons in design and colour, students went on to apply their new found skills to specific areas: embroidery, fabric printing, weaving and interior decoration among them. Press photographs of work from the school indicate that a significant level of commitment was expected from the students.³⁸ By 1947 numbers had more than doubled. One-hundred-and-twenty-four students were attending classes at Double Bay and Margaret Oppen had been appointed to assist with the teaching there. The increasing student numbers suggest not only that Mackenzie and Palmer were correct about the unmet demand for art and design classes, but also that Rees' approach to teaching was very successful.

In addition to all of these activities, Rees continued to practice as a designer. She established a professional link with Marion Hall-Best, designing fabrics and hand painted tiles, which were sold through Best's Sydney store. Two lengths of fabric screen printed by the Gilkes company to her designs were reproduced in a full-page colour illustration in an article on Australian fabrics in *The Studio* in 1942 (Figure 4).³⁹ Hall-Best's adventurous approach to colour was central to her career as an interior designer and in her unpublished memoir she stated that she had learnt colour theory from Rees. Hall-Best described Rees as a 'very professional teacher and designer' and acknowledged the benefit of her teaching: 'theoretical background is always steady even if one doesn't consciously think about it.'⁴⁰ Despite the disruption caused by her relocation from London to Sydney, Rees had managed to re-establish her career in a new country. However, this was not to last. Ann Gillmore Rees' involvement in the arts and crafts community in Sydney came to a close in early 1948, when

she resigned from her position as a director of the Craft Training School in order to return to England with her husband.

Starting again in Victoria

Details of the next years of Rees' life are sketchy. The couple farmed in Devon but according to her nephew 'that didn't work out' and so they returned to Australia in late 1949. Rather than returning to New South Wales, which would have enabled Rees to pick up where she had left off in 1948, this time they were based Victoria.⁴¹ Initially they lived on the outskirts of Melbourne but eventually returned to 'the bush', where Bill Rees was employed as a station manager. In the late 1950s he was working on a property outside of Coleraine, in the western district of Victoria; later they moved to Woorooma West, in the far south west of NSW. Whilst at Coleraine, Rees made the acquaintance of a group of women who were interested in the arts and once again she began to teach. This time she ran drawing and painting classes and gave lectures on a variety of art related topics to a group that became known as The Gropers. The members included Esther Baylis, who had been the first woman to study architecture at the University of Adelaide, and Joan Law-Smith, who was later to be successful as a garden writer and artist. In 1984, when an exhibition of work by the Gropers was held at the Hamilton Art Gallery, Joan Law-Smith commented that 'Ann Rees was a remarkable woman, with a great gift for teaching ... Ann was the most marvellous thing for us, at a time when we all needed to be in touch with creative things'.⁴² These lessons continued even after Rees left the district. One of the members Lady Mary Gausson, would drive to Woorooma West four times a year and bring Rees back for a week at a time. Rees' teaching career came to a close when the last workshop was held at the end of 1971, but she maintained an interest in the arts until her death in 1982.

Reasons for forgetting

As this account demonstrates, rather than abandoning 'any idea of commercial artistic pursuits' or having 'an exceptionally short career' Ann Gillmore Rees displayed considerable persistence in pursuing a life in art and design. What remains of her work in wood engraving and fabric printing is impressive and by all accounts she was a gifted teacher. How is it, then, that an artist as active as Rees can be overlooked by those writing about art and design in twentieth century England and Australia?

The issue of gender cannot be dismissed from the equation. For much of the twentieth century the story of Australian art was male oriented. As Terry Smith pointed out in his additions to the third edition of Bernard Smith's classic text *Australian Painting*, the section of the book covering the years from 1788 to 1990 mentions just forty-three women artists, of whom only twelve are represented by illustrations.⁴³ Those included were, for the most part, artists like Margaret Preston whose high public profile meant they could not readily be overlooked. The situation had not changed a great deal when Andrew Sayers wrote *Australian Art*. He discusses few women artists in any detail and uses others to segue into coverage of better-known male artists.⁴⁴ Since the late 1970s scholars have turned their attention to recovering the stories of Australian women artists, demonstrating that those grudgingly included by Smith were not aberrations but part of a much larger cohort.⁴⁵ However, the task is immense. When Joan Kerr undertook to write *Heritage: The National Women's Art Book* she was able to include 500 individual women, but noted that there were many, many more for whom there was no space.⁴⁶ Women artists whose work is held in public collections and who left substantial source material for art historians to access have attracted the most scholarly interest. Major retrospectives have been held on the work of a number of women artists in recent years, but it is worth noting that many of them – Preston, Proctor and Cossington-Smith, for instance – were the very women included in Smith's *Australian Painting*. Lesser-known artists like Ann Gillmore Rees are not so well served.

Another reason for the paucity of references to Ann Gillmore Rees in the literature is that much of the work she did falls into the categories of design and decorative arts, areas that are often considered to be less important than painting and sculpture. In terms of her artwork, she was primarily known

as a printmaker, a textile designer and an embroiderer. Printmaking is low on the hierarchy of art media, and block printed textiles lower still. In 1996, at a symposium organised by the Central Saint Martins School of Art to coincide with an exhibition of block printed textiles from their collection, Alan Powers wrote that: 'block printing is external to any progressive narrative about design and society' and that if textiles are modern architecture's 'other', 'block printed textiles – existing at the outer edge of fashion and associated with children, leisure and impermanence – are even more other than textiles'.⁴⁷ It could be argued that embroidery, with its connotations of domesticity, is located in an even more marginal place.

Working in so-called 'minor' techniques is a two-fold handicap. It means that work is less likely to be exhibited in the kinds of exhibitions that leave a record in the form of a printed catalogue. It also means that work is less likely to find its way into public collections or, if it does happen to be acquired, is less likely to be put on public display. As previously noted, the archive at Central Saint Martins School of Art contains a number of student works by Doris Carter, but the National Gallery of Australia has just one of Ann Gillmore Rees' woodcut prints on paper.⁴⁸ All of the work shown in the Hamilton Art Gallery's exhibition of work by the Gropers came from a private collection and has not been publicly exhibited since. None of Ann Gillmore Rees' printed textiles or embroideries appears to be held in any collection in Australia, not even the specialist collection of the Embroiderers' Guild of NSW, despite her close connections with its founder, Margaret Oppen.⁴⁹ The only piece of embroidery in the collection with any connection to Ann Gillmore Rees is a sampler in which the words 'Worked by Ethleen Palmer, under Ann Gillmore Rees, Soc. Arts & Crafts Sydney' are stitched. At the time of writing, the only evidence of Ann Gillmore Rees' embroidery that have been located are a photograph of an embroidered tea cosy reproduced in the Studio in 1927 and a poor black and white reproduction of the canvas-work panel included in the Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition of modern embroidery in 1933.⁵⁰

Exhibition catalogues and inclusion in public collections are two criteria frequently used by art historians as a means of determining the significance of an artist. The consequences of this are illustrated by the disappearance of Ann Gillmore Rees from Alan McCulloch's *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*. The criteria used to determine which artists should be included in this publication changed between the first edition, in which Ann Gillmore Rees is included, and the third edition, in which she is not. In 1968 the criteria were broad; they included purchase for an Australian public collection, the award of a prize in an open competition, a significant contribution to publications of art or a reference to the individual in an existing publication, and an outstanding general contribution to art.⁵¹ By the 1984 edition of the book, the criteria had been reduced to a single point: 'representation, through purchase in a ... professionally staffed and curated public art gallery or museum.'⁵² Ann Gillmore Rees is represented in the National Gallery of Australia, but her work was gifted to the gallery rather than acquired by purchase. She is typical of many artists who are unable to support themselves solely by selling art works and whose careers are therefore made up of a range of different art related activities. Considering Ann Gillmore Rees' career as a whole, McCulloch obviously felt she merited inclusion in the earlier editions of the book. However, if the value of an artistic career is determined on the basis of a single criterion, as was the case with the third edition of McCulloch's *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, then Ann Gillmore Rees – and others like her – fade from the picture.

The 'otherness' of a genre also means those who work in that mode may be overlooked in histories that seek to provide a story of historic progression, such as Grace Cochrane's *The Crafts Movement in Australia: A History* (1992).⁵³ The story of Ann Gillmore Rees and the Craft Training School is absent from Cochrane's narrative because it does not fit the overall theme of that text. The studio was a short-lived venture. It was important to those involved as staff and as students, and some of those individuals are featured in Cochrane's broader story. However, the brevity of the school's existence, its untimely closure, and the declining status of the Arts and Crafts Society of NSW in recent decades mean that this intriguing episode is absent from what is widely regarded as the definitive history of the crafts in Australia.

Given the role played by texts such as Smith, McCulloch and Cochrane in the discipline of art history a cycle of cause and effect is established, the result being the gradual disappearance of some individuals from the annals of art history. In Ann Gillmore Rees' case, this phenomenon was exacerbated by the circumstances of her life, which conspired to render her even less visible than she might otherwise have been. The first, and most obvious, circumstance is that she changed her name; not once, but twice. A name change sometimes works to an artist's advantage. Rose MacPherson turned into Margaret Preston and never looked back. An article in the *Women's Budget* tells us that, like Ann Gillmore Rees, Margaret Preston changed her name twice, beginning her career as Rose MacPherson, changing her working name to Margaret Rose MacPherson and finally becoming Margaret Preston.⁵⁴ The un-named author concludes that Preston's success under the different names is evidence of the quality of her work.⁵⁵ It is true that Preston's career did not suffer as a result of this change of name, but she is the exception rather than the rule. For most people it is as if they are erased and begin again with a blank slate. This is certainly what happened to Ann Gillmore Rees. She may well have made the decision to adopt the name Ann Gillmore Carter in order to create a distinct professional identity, but in the long term this action had negative consequences. When Joanna Selborne conducted research into women printmakers who had studied at the Central School in London during the 1920s and could find no evidence that Doris Carter continued to practice wood engraving, she did not know to look instead for work by Ann Gillmore Carter and concluded that Carter had abandoned her artistic career.

Ann Gillmore Rees's mobility is another significant factor, both in the way that her career played out and in the way in which she was – or rather was not – remembered. She moved from one country to another, an event that led to the severing of one lot of professional connections and necessitated the establishment of new ones. Not only that, she moved around within her new country and to relatively remote locations. At a time when the Australian art community was centred on Sydney and Melbourne this was a great disadvantage. Once she moved to Coleraine, her access to specialist art materials would have been limited, as would have been opportunities to discuss contemporary ideas and critique her own work with other artists. Perhaps the Gropers group fulfilled this function in a limited way, but the evidence suggests that Rees was looked to as the leader of the group rather than as one of a group of peers. The Gropers would not have been a substitute for the kinds of professional networks that led to exhibitions and other career building opportunities. Once Rees moved to western Victoria her public career faltered – there are no records of exhibitions after this time and no evidence of ongoing work as a designer. In rural Australia Rees was out of sight and out of mind, and by the time the Rees retired to the outskirts of Melbourne in the early 1970s the art world had moved on.

Another consequence of Rees' mobility can be seen in the way that her involvement in the Craft Training School run by Society of Arts and Crafts of NSW has been overlooked, even by the Society itself. When Ann Gillmore Rees resigned from her position as Director in early 1948 she recommended Dora Sweetapple⁵⁶ as her replacement. Sweetapple and Ethleen Palmer took over the assessment of the correspondence course, and their names replaced that of Rees on subsequent publicity material.⁵⁷ By the time Rees returned to Australia in the early 1950s, the school had closed and knowledge of Rees' involvement with the School faded. A history written for the Society's one-hundredth anniversary in 2006 devotes just two sentences and a footnote to the Craft Training School, and Ann Gillmore Rees is not mentioned at all.⁵⁸ Perhaps there was an element of parochialism in this, the contribution of an outsider being less valued than that of the local participants.⁵⁹

Finally, Ann Rees' peripatetic life seems to have led to a compartmentalisation of the various aspects of her life and the eventual dispersal of her personal effects. Rees herself had no children and although she maintained contact with the remaining members of the Carter family, they do not appear to have been fully aware of her accomplishments in Australia. In 2004 her nephew Peter Carter commented that 'I didn't realise that Ann had made such a mark on the cultural scene in Australia';⁶⁰ her husband's niece met Ann and Bill Rees only once.⁶¹ When Ann and Bill Rees died in the early 1980s, their estate was left jointly to three female relatives but neither her work nor the possessions accumulated over a life time were returned to England. Instead they were distributed to

friends and acquaintances who knew Ann Rees in the last years of her life, most of whom were also unaware of the extent of Rees' career – or sold at auction. There was no significant body of work in one location, no collection of documents, and no family anecdotes by which the work of this woman could be remembered.⁶² The change of name, the mobility and the disappearance of much of her work all conspired to render Ann Gillmore Rees invisible.

Conclusion

Despite the shifts that have occurred in recent decades, art is still conventionally seen as the preserve of a small number of exceptionally talented individuals and success is still measured largely by auction prices and the acquisition of work by public galleries. For the most part, the women who have been singled out as successful are those whose careers can be presented and discussed in terms of that paradigm. What the case of Ann Gillmore Rees shows us is that a career in the arts, especially for a woman, is often a much more complicated affair. Rees' career was multifaceted, encompassing design work and teaching as well as practice as an exhibiting artist. As I've argued, this diversity contributed to her invisibility but paradoxically, it also played a role in the reconstruction of her story, enabling the tracing of her career through archival sources and newspaper reports. It also means that a detailed evaluation of that career, a task which remains to be completed, must be based on all aspects of her work. Her significance does not rest on a single aspect of her work, although her association with Marion Hall Best may be of greatest interest to some, but on the sum total of a career which encompassed work as a printmaker, designer and teacher and also her persistence in juggling a variety of activities in order to create for herself a rich and satisfying life in art. Her life is, surely, representative of the lives of many other women artists, similarly overlooked, whose incorporation into our art, craft and design histories would provide us with a richer, more complete view of our cultural history.

Figures

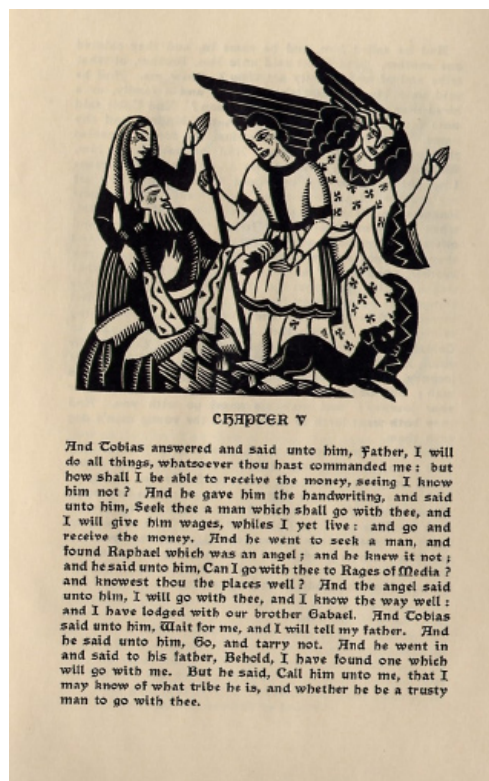


Figure 1. Page layout, *Tobit*, 1929, Mandrake Press. Wood engraving by Ann Gillmore Carter.



Figure 2. Ann Gillmore Carter, block printed textiles, c.1930

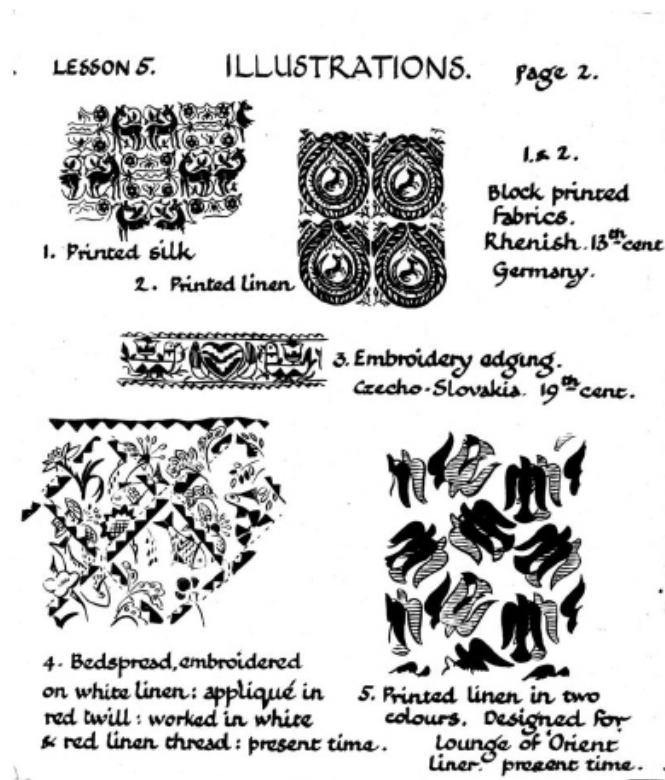


Figure 3. Ann Gillmore Rees, screen printed textiles, c.1942



Figure 4. Ann Gillmore Rees, page of illustrations, *Correspondence Course in Colour and Design*, Society of Arts and Crafts of NSW, 1946.

Notes

- 1J. Selborne, 'An Adventure of Rediscovery. Lesser-Known Pre-war Students of Wood Engraving at the Central School of Arts and Crafts', *Matrix*, Winter 1999, p.174.
- 2*The Studio*, vol. 94, June-December 1927, p.270; *Commercial Art*, vol. 5, July-December 1928, p.137.
- 3J. Selborne, 'Making an Impression', in Sylvia Backemeyer (ed.), *Making their Mark: Art, Craft and Design at the Central School 1896 – 1966*, Herbert Press, London, 2000, p.27.
- 4B. Peppin and L. Micklethwait, *The Dictionary of British Book Illustrators*, John Murray, London, 1983, p.68
- 5J. Selborne, 'Making an Impression', p.24; M. Schoeser, 'Twentieth-century Textiles in the Design Archive', in Sylvia Backemeyer (ed.), *Object Lessons: Central Saint Martins Art and Design Archive: A Centenary Publication*, Lund Humphries in association with The Lethaby Press, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London, 1996, p.73.
- 6National Archive, ED 41/219, St Giles-in-the Fields Women's Evening Institute (Holburn). Education Committee – Higher Education Sub-Committee. Report by the Council's Inspectors on a Special Inspection during November 1932; University of London Institute of Education Annual Report 1934 – 35, Newsam Library and Archives, Institute of Education, University of London.
- 7E. Mooney, *The Gropers*, City of Hamilton Art Gallery, Hamilton, 1984; R. Butler, *Sydney by Design: Wood and Linoblock Prints by Sydney Women Artists Between the Wars*, National Gallery of Australia, 1995.
- 8A.D. Gordon, M.J. Buhle and N.S. Dye, 'The Problem of Women's History' in B.A. Carroll (ed.), *Liberating Women's History*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1976; H. Becker, *Art Worlds*, University of California Press, 1982; H. Topliss, *Modernism and Feminism: Australian Women Artists 1900-1940*, Craftsman House, Roseville, 1996; J. Marsh, 'May Morris: Ubiquitous and Invisible Crafts-woman', in B. Elliott and J. Helland (eds), *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts 1880-1935 The Gender of Ornament*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2002.
- 9T. Carter, *The People of the Moon*, 'The Electrician' Printing and Publishing Company, London, 1895.
- 10*The Bristolian*, November 1913, p.318.
- 11O. Kent, *Bristol School of Art Open Doors Day Guide*, Bristol School of Art, 2003.

- 12National Archive, London, ED 83/154, Report of Inspection of Bristol, Queen's Road Art School, Held on 7, 8 and 9 June 1920.
- 13A college web site records that she was a student in the mid to late 1920s. The Central Saint Martins Museum and Study Collection. Makers Details: Carter, Doris A., viewed 23 March 2004, <http://courses.csm.arts.ac.uk/museum/alumniresult.asp?alumniname=Carter;Doris%20A.;&alumniid=773>.
- 14*The Studio*, vol. 94, June-December 1927, p.270.
- 15For many years this book was thought to have been planned but not produced. In 1985, in the catalogue of an exhibition of the work of the Mandrake Press, R.P. Carr wrote that 'no copy of *The Book of Tobit* has been located ... There is presumptive evidence only that this item, decorated by the woodcuts of Ann Gillmore Carter and printed in black letter type was produced in 1929', see R. Carr, *The Mandrake Press 1929-30: Catalogue of an Exhibition*, Cambridge University Library, September-November 1985, p.48. In fact the British Library holds a copy, as do several Australian libraries, and Dr Carr has since acquired a copy for his own collection.
- 16The Central Saint Martins Museum and Study Collection, plates 440.1-6.
- 17For discussion of Stephensen's involvement with Crowley, see C. Munro, *Inky Stephensen: Wild Man of Letters*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1992.
- 18The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society: Catalogue of the Fifteenth Exhibition, 1931.
- 19All of these activities are listed in a résumé in the Children's Library and Craft Movement archive, see Mitchell Library, Sydney, MLMSS 7550/7/1.
- 20The question of identification of the designers of commercial work was raised in an Art and Industry Report commissioned by the Board of Trade in 1932 and debated in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Art* in early 1934. The manufacturers argued that 'because in the case of mass production a team may be involved assigning the design to any particular individual would be a problem', see Art and Industry Report of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Trade under the Chairmanship of Lord Gorell on the Production and Exhibition of Articles of Good Design and Everyday Use, MHSO, London, 1932.
- 21The Central Saint Martins Museum and Study Collection holds two lengths of fabric hand printed at the Footprints Studio, see T.1.1992.4C; T.1.1992.63, while the Victoria and Albert Museum has a printed Christmas card in its print collection, see E.3949-1934, and the book jacket collection, originally in the British Library and now held in the Archive of Art and Design, contains three items identified as the work of Carter: covers for *Tales of the Little Sisters of St Francis*, L Steni's *Sailor in a Whirlpool* (1930) and H.George Franks' *Queer India* (1932).
- 22University of London Institute of Education Annual Report 1934 -35; University of London Institute of Education Annual Report 1935-1936.
- 23National Archive, London, ED41/219, St Giles-in-the-Fields women's Evening Institute (Holburn). Education Committee--Higher Education Sub-Committee. Report by the Council's Inspectors on a Special Inspection during November 1932.
- 24C. Boydell, 'Free-Lance Textile Design in the 1930s: An Improving Prospect?', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1995, pp.27-42; Jill Seddon, 'Mentioned but Denied Significance: Women Designers and the 'Professionalisation' of Design in Britain c.1920-1952', *Gender and History*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2000, pp.426-447.
- 25The order in which her educational background is outlined in a 1939 curriculum vitae suggests that she spent time studying painting and drawing in Paris between the completion of her art teacher training in Bristol and the commencement of her studies at the Central School of Art.
- 26Catalogue of the Society of Artists Annual Exhibition 4-28 August 1939; Catalogue of Contemporary Group Exhibition, Farmers Blaxland Galleries, 30 July-10 August 1940; Catalogue of Contemporary Group Exhibition, Farmers Blaxland Galleries, 1-12 July 1941.
- 27'Women's Supplement', *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 28 1940, p.10.
- 28Mitchell Library, Sydney, MLM SS 7550/7/1. Syllabus of Design, Colour and Craft Course to be held at the Phillip Part Boys and Girls Library and Crafts Club, Boomerang Street, East Sydney, adjoining the William St Blind Institute.
- 29*Daily Telegraph*, 16 October 1941, p.10
- 301942/43 Australian Red Cross NSW Division Annual Report.
- 31A. Gillmore Rees, 'Art and crafts for the soldier of today and the citizen of tomorrow', *Society of Artists book 1943*, Ure Smith, Sydney, pp.71-73.
- 32Mitchell Library, MLMSS 3645 5(9) MLK 02079, Society of Arts and Crafts of NSW, Minute Book, 1943-1948; MLMSS 3645 3(9) MLK 02077, Society of Arts and Crafts of NSW Diary.
- 33Typewritten report in author's possession.
- 34*ibid*.
- 35Mitchell Library, MLMSS 3645 1(4) MLK 02075, unlabelled folders. Since writing the text of this article a set of the lessons has been given to the author by Ms Katharine Connor who knew Ann Rees towards the end of her life.
- 36A. Best-Maugard, *A Method for Creative Design*, A.A. Knopf, New York and London, 1926
- 37L.F. Day's *Pattern Design: A Book for Students, Treating in a Practical Way of the Anatomy, Planning and Evolution of Repeated Ornament*, first published by Batsford in 1903, and A. Christie's *Pattern design: An Introduction to the Study of Formal Ornament*, first published as *Traditional Methods of Pattern Designing* by Clarendon Press in 1929.
- 38*Australian Women's Weekly*, 4 October 1947, p.56.
- 39'Australian fabrics', *The Studio*, October 1942, pp.141-412. For information on Rees' association with Marion Hall Best, see M. Lech, 'The Gilkes Family, Marion Best Fabrics and early fabric printing in Australia', *Australiana*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2005, pp.6-11 and M. Richards, *The Best Style: Marion Hall Best and Australian Interior Design 1935-1975*, Art and Australia Books, Sydney, 1993.
- 40Historic Houses Trust, MHB/A/1, Unpublished memoir by Marion Hall-Best.

41Correspondence from P.G. Carter, 5 July 2004.

42*The Age*, 24 March, 1984, p.12.

43B. Smith and T. Smith, *Australian Painting* 3rd edn, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1991, p.486.

44A. Sayers, *Australian Art*, Oxford University Press, 2001. See, for example, his treatment of Nora Heysen, p.133.

45For example J. Burke, *Australian Women Artists, 1840-1940*, Greenhouse Publications, Collingwood, Vic, 1980; J. Peers, *More Than Just Gumtrees: A Personal, Social and Artistic History of the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors*, Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors in association with Dawn Revival Press, Melbourne, 1993; H. Topliss, *Modernism and Feminism: Australian Women Artists 1900-1940*, Craftsman House: Roseville East, 1996. Recent monographs include J. Burke's *Joy Hester* (2001), R. Power's *Alison Rehfisch: A Life for Art* (2002) and G. Forwood's *Lina Bryans: Rare Modern 1909-2000* (2003).

46J. Kerr (ed.), *Heritage: The National Women's Art Book*, Craftsman House, Roseville East, 1995, p.viii.

47A. Powers, 'Blocked out?', *Crafts*, no. 139, March/April, 1996, p.34.

48The National Gallery of Australia does hold a collection of print matrices by Ann Gillmore Rees, along with some of her printmaking tools. These items were donated to the gallery in 1992, some ten years after Ann Gillmore Rees died. Where they were in the meantime is a mystery.

49Margaret Oppen was recruited to assist Rees with the teaching at the Craft Training School at Double Bay and later credited Rees with introducing her to modern embroidery (*The Record of the Embroiderers' Guild of NSW*, November 1962, p.7).

50M. Hogarth, *Modern Embroidery: Special Spring Number of 'The Studio'*, C. Geoffrey Holme (ed.), London, The Studio Ltd, 1933, p.93.

51A. McCulloch, *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, Hutchinson, London, 1968, p.7.

52A. McCulloch, *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 3rd edn, revised and updated by Susan McCulloch, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1994, p.6.

53G. Cochrane, *The Crafts Movement in Australia: A History*, NSW University Press, Kensington, 1992.

54*Women's Budget*, 16 December 1931.

55Others, like contemporary critics Sebastian Smee (*The Australian*, 6-7 August 2005) and John McDonald (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 30-31 July 2005), suggest that it may also have had something to do with Preston's capacity for self-promotion.

56Dora Sweetapple was Marion Hall-Best's sister. She also designed for Best and was one of those who taught children's classes at the Children's Library and Craft Movement at the time that Rees was teaching classes to adults.

57For instance, the 'Design and Colour' course was promoted as being 'personally directed by Ethleen Palmer' in *The Weekly Times* (Melbourne), 8 June 1949.

58G. McCracken, *Social Riches: The Society of Arts and Crafts of New South Wales 1906-2006*, Manly Art Gallery and Museum, Manly, 2006, p.14.

59A parallel case is that of Avis Higgs, a New Zealand textile designer whose work at Claudio Alcorso's Silk and Textile Printers was similarly downplayed after her departure from Australia in 1948. See D Lloyd-Jenkins, *Avis Higgs: Joie de Vivre*, Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust, Napier, 2000.

60Letter from Peter Carter to the author, 5 July 2004.

61Letter from Penrose McIntosh to the author, 23 June 2004.

62Between writing the first and final drafts of this paper, contact has been established with another family member in England who has indicated the existence of family memorabilia. This material may serve to fill some of the remaining gaps in the Ann Gillmore Rees' story and to provide a greater sense of her personality than is provided by documents that have formed the basis of much of this research.