

Portraying Women's Suffrage: Visual Arts and the Vote in the United States

ARC Knickerbocker Award Summary
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This summer, archival research for my dissertation, "Portraying Women's Suffrage: Visual Arts and the Vote in the United States," focused primarily on material available at the Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA. Additionally, I visited Kenneth Florey's private collection of suffrage memorabilia and documents in Madison, CT, went through all issues of *The Woman Voter* (published by the Woman Suffrage Party of New York City) at the NYPL, and studied the Macbeth Gallery Papers, 1838-1968, at the Archives of American Art for material relevant to a 1915 women's suffrage benefit exhibition.

The Sophia Smith Collection holds at least five collections of papers that are necessary for my dissertation. Given the scope and size of these collections, I decided to focus on the Alice Morgan Wright Papers, 1873-1994, and a portion of the Suffrage Collection, 1851-2009. My intention is to return to Smith College this fall, and next spring, to complete my research on the remaining papers.

Sculptor, writer, and activist Alice Morgan Wright will figure prominently in my dissertation. Among the twelve boxes of her papers were sketchbooks, scraps of Wright's poetry, photographs of sculptures in her Albany and Paris studios, and other ephemera. Of particular interest to me were unpublished letters from British suffragists Emmeline Pankhurst and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, unpublished letters from Wright to her friend Edith Shepard, dated 1909-12, two sketches and a bust of Pankhurst, a packet of poetry written while Wright was incarcerated in Holloway Gaol (England, 1912) for her suffrage activities, and newspaper clippings related to the imprisonment. As a whole, all this material reveals the artist as an individual who not only addressed suffrage themes in her art, but who was also an active participant in suffrage campaigns in England and the United States.

Also found in Wright's papers were clippings related to the *Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture by Women Artists for the Benefit of the Woman Suffrage Campaign* held in 1915 at the Macbeth Gallery in New York City. Although many of the clippings can be found in the Macbeth Gallery Papers at the Archives of American Art, which I visited in June, it included visual material I had not previously seen and which will play instrumental roles when I research some of the other artists who participated in the show, including modernist painter and patron, Katherine Dreier.

This summer, my research has also taken me to Madison, CT, where I viewed Kenneth Florey's collection of suffrage memorabilia and periodicals. Given the relatively few existing fine art representations of the theme of suffrage, the success of my dissertation relies on discovering works reproduced on postcards, periodicals, and other printed material. Perusing Florey's large collection of postcards, and his issues of *The Suffragist* (published by the Congressional Union of Woman Suffrage) has led to discoveries including the following: Ella Buchanan's sculpture, *The Suffragist Arousing Her Sisters*, which is reproduced on a few postcards; portrait busts by Adelaide Johnson that appear on several covers of *The Suffragist*; and a sculptural relief by Clara Hill entitled, *Modern Womanhood*.

The NYPL's collection of *Woman Voter* also proved elucidating. Artist Ida Proper became art editor of the journal in 1912, and as someone involved with progressive artists in New York at the (ex. artists who contributed to *The Masses*), she was able to include an array of illustrations by artists such as John Sloan and May Wilson Preston, both associated with the Ashcan circle, and Katherine Dreier, a founding member of the Société Anonyme. Going through issues of *Woman Voter* helped to situate image-making and women's suffrage in the progressive currents of the art world.

Although the results of my archival research this summer seem somewhat disjointed, it has provided me many leads for future research, which will include trips to collections at Wellesley, Yale, Harvard, the Library of Congress, and the Archives of American Art.