Tableaux Vivant for Suffrage; An Evening of Art and Politics at the Maxine Elliot Theatre

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Tableaux Vivant for Suffrage: An Evening of Art and Politics at the Maxine Elliott Theatre

by

Shannon Murphy

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts of the City College of the City University of New York
Thesis Advisor: Professor Ellen Handy

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction ................................................................. 4

II. Chapter 1: A Fashionable Identity for Suffrage ............ 15
   Introduction ................................................................. 15
   Organizing the Tableaux Vivant ........................................ 15
   The Gibson Girl as Role Model ........................................ 18
   The Gibson Girl in Tableau Vivant ..................................... 20
   Building the Tableaux Vivant ........................................... 23
   Tableaux Vivant as Noeme ................................................ 25
   Considering the Audience and the Tableaux Vivant’s Effect .. 25
   Developing the Characters ............................................... 27
   Conclusion ....................................................................... 28

III. Chapter 2: A Domestic Joan of Arc ............................. 30
    Introduction ................................................................. 30
    Mrs. Vanderbilt as Joan of Arc ......................................... 30
    Making Suffrage Fashionable .......................................... 33
    The Representation of Joan ............................................. 33
    The Responses ............................................................... 40
    Tableaux Vivant as Political Tool ...................................... 42
    Conclusion ....................................................................... 43

IV. Chapter 3: A Silent and Immobile Modern Woman Speaks .... 45
    Introduction ................................................................. 45
    Choosing Tableaux Vivant as Medium .................................. 45
    Florence Nightingale ...................................................... 47
    Tableaux Vivant and Film ................................................ 47
    Florence Nightingale as Suffragist ..................................... 50
    Marie Curie as Role Model .............................................. 53
    Catherine of Russia ......................................................... 55
    Gould as Catherine the Great .......................................... 56
    Responses ...................................................................... 57
    Conclusion ....................................................................... 58

V. Chapter 4: Tableaux Vivant: When Art Becomes Educational .... 60
    Introduction ................................................................. 60
    Tableaux Vivant and Pageantry ........................................... 61
    Tableaux Vivant Depicting Everyday Scenes ....................... 65
    The Women’s Political Union Tableaux ............................... 66
    Suffrage through Education ............................................. 67
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The College Equal Suffrage League</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tableau of Mary Wollstonecraft</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Conclusion</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Appendices</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Figures</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. Bibliography</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

On the evening of January 17, 1911, a group of elite society women staged a performance of silent poses to proclaim their agenda for suffrage. They posed as Madam Curie (1867-1934), Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), Joan of Arc (1412-1431) and even as poor women trapped to the shackles of the factory lines. The poses were in tableau vivant form, which was a provocative artistic medium and political tool for women during the suffrage movement. The event occurred at the Maxine Elliott Theatre in New York City and was directed by Katherine Mackay (1880-1930), the president of the Equal Franchise Society. Seventeen tableaux were staged by members of four leading suffrage groups. (Appendix I) The event was reported on in newspapers for months anticipating the choices of models and subjects.¹ New York City society members were all in attendance.² The performance was received as a popular spectacle and circulated to the public via the media and picture cards.³

Translated from French, tableau vivant means ‘living pictures.’ During a performance of tableau vivant, a cast of characters represented scenes from literature, art, history or everyday life. During the scene, the models remained in a frozen position.

¹ The New York Herald, Sun, Morning Telegraph, New York Times, Harper’s Bazaar and Tribune are just a few of the papers reporting the event.
² “Women in Historic Poses for Suffrage,” The New York Times, January 18, 1911. A lengthy list of society members can be found in this article: Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson, Mrs. George Gould, Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, Judge P.T. Barlow, Henry C. Frick, Miss Dorothy Whitney, Mrs. Kidder, Mrs. Tiffany Dyer, William Erhart, Stanley Mortimer, etc.
³ “Paid Much For Little,” Tribune, New York City, November 14, 1911. “The tableau given by the Equal Franchise Society were also a great success because of the advertisable qualities, evidently.” said Mrs. Mackay with some bitterness, “picture cards appeal to the public.” The bitterness may have been due to the fact that Mrs. Mackay had recently stepped down as President of the Equal Franchise Society and the organization was losing momentum.
on the stage. The scenarios lasted roughly thirty seconds and may have been accompanied by music or a poem. Particular emphasis was placed on staging, pose, costume, make-up, lighting and the facial expression of the models. Often a stage was set with a large wooden frame around its perimeter, so as to reference the frame of a painted canvas.

Tableaux vivant dates back to the 14th century as a form of royal pageantry. In Europe, victorious battle scenes were often reenacted, as well as scenes that described the origins of royal families and the history of the country. Tableaux vivant gained popularity as a form of entertainment in Europe during the early nineteenth century as a way for high society to demonstrate a deeper appreciation of art. Tableau vivant performances found their way to New York stages after success in London in the early 1830s. In 1847 a critic from the Herald wrote, “We saw accurate representations of the most exquisite works of the most renowned sculptors of the world - such as Titian, van Dyke, Rembrandt, and a host of others, equally celebrated: and we learned from persons present who have seen the originals, the personification of them, last evening, were very accurate.” Accuracy was very important to tableau vivant directors. If one couldn’t physically make it over to Europe to see a Rembrandt, a tableau vivant could offer a way to see and learn about the image through a physical representation of the work of art.

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Tableaux vivant became popular in the United States during the mid to late nineteenth century in public theaters, community pageants and private homes. On the New York stage, tableaux vivant was often a controversial affair because of the suggestive nature of the ‘Model Artists,’ who were typically scantily clad in semi-nude costumes. The tableaux vivant of Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* (1486), for example, was a common tableau that crossed the border from artistry to indecency, so much so that models were occasionally arrested if they revealed too much skin.\(^8\) In community pageants, tableaux vivant was an entirely different amusement. Pageantry was often used to help define the identity of a youthful America in the late nineteenth century and tableaux vivant was frequently employed to tell the stories of America’s forefathers or to evoke spiritual guidance.\(^9\) For example, during a fourth of July celebration in Des Moines, Iowa in 1886, one of the procession floats included a tableau that featured women posed as “Columbia” and “Goddess Liberty” with 13 young girls surrounding them to represent the original colonies.\(^10\) Tableaux vivant also became popular in private middle class homes through the publication of how-to manuals.\(^11\) Women were always central to the pastime, and were on the stage far more often than men.\(^12\) This made the

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\(^8\) Ibid., 45.
\(^10\) Ibid., 18.
\(^12\) Mary Chapman, “‘Living pictures’: Women and Tableaux Vivants in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Culture,” *Wide Angle*, no. 18.3 (1996): 30. Chapman notes fifty percent more roles for woman than men in the manuals she observed.
genre fitting for the suffragists to have adopted in the early twentieth century as a medium to communicate their political agenda.

The suffrage movement began in 1848 and culminated in 1920, when women won the vote with the Nineteenth Amendment. During the Civil War, the movement was suspended, but picked up again in the 1890s. From the beginning, suffragists were divided on their goals. For instance, some believed that only women who were literate should vote. During the early twentieth century in New York, society women informally began to discuss their involvement in the cause over tea. The informal parlor meetings mostly included ““respectable” affluent white women.” While there were many differing opinions among them, campaign tactics created two defined sectors: militant and parlor suffragists. The militants campaigned on the streets, picketed and even lectured on soap boxes, while the parlor suffragists were more reserved in their actions and preferred letter campaigns and private meetings.

Mackay took the lead in organizing New York City’s parlor suffragists and caused a stir to the movement with her popular appeal. She founded the Equal Franchise Society in 1908 with the goal of promoting suffrage through educational

14 Ibid., 27.
15 Ibid., 117.
16 Ibid., 87.
17 Ibid., 86-88.
18 Winfred Scott Moody, “A Society Woman of Serious Interests,” *The American Magazine*, September, 1910, 610. “It had been at a low ebb for a long time, its faithful adherents working away at more or less a routine fashion. Mrs. Mackay’s announcement that she proposed to devote herself to the advancement of the cause sent a thrill through the suffrage ranks of the whole country, and when, in the summer of 1908, she began the organization of the Equal Franchise Society, all the old societies took on a new life.”
means. The group held meetings with motivational speakers, produced leaflets and held fundraisers to support the political cause. The most famous event and fundraiser was the evening of tableaux vivant she directed at the Maxine Elliott Theatre. Throughout this paper I will demonstrate how nearly overnight Mackay created a new identity for the suffrage cause, one that was fashionable, inclusive to many kinds of women and educational. While many literary scholars have looked at tableaux vivant as a medium that exploited women, this paper illustrates how a group of New York City socialites took control of the operation for political gain.

Married in 1898 to Clarence Mackay, the owner of an international telegraph company, Mrs. Mackay and her husband resided in New York City and in their country home in Roslyn, Long Island. Mrs. Mackay was famous for her artistic and luxurious homes where she hosted “talk of the town” parties. She took an active interest in the local community and became one of Roslyn’s school board trustees. She was the mother

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19 The Papers of Harriet Stanton Blatch. Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. “I should like you to bear in mind that according to our constitution the purpose of the Equal Franchise Society “shall be to promote the welfare of women, to secure the national, State and city government, and to aid in procuring the election of fit and efficient persons to public office. The Equal Franchise Society declares its belief in the political and civil equality of men and women, that the electorate should represent the nation, and that a system of government under which one-half of the members of the nation are disfranchised is not a truly representative national system.” Our work is essentially along educational lines.”


of two children and a in her spare time, a fiction writer. Suffragist Harriot Stanton Blatch (1856-1940) strategically recruited Mrs. Mackay to the cause in 1908. Blatch was the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a founder of the women’s rights movement, and a true veteran to suffrage. She understood the benefits of Mackay’s wealth and political connections. While the two women respected each other, they had some disagreements, so Blatch encouraged Mackay to create her own organization to recruit other “women of fashion.” For years suffragists had been admonished with negative stereotypes and it was Mackay’s opportunity to make the cause appealing to a new group of women. Blatch’s biographer described Mackay’s involvement as an enormous shift in the movement. Her connections brought “the cultural power to set standards of what counted as “womanly”.”

A closer look at the tableaux vivant reveals the values of suffragists who were fighting for the opportunity to become public figures in society, and the sensitive condition of the modern woman’s evolving identity. Tableaux vivant made during the suffrage campaign deserve further research because they uniquely connect art and performance during a politically turbulent time period in America. It pre-dates the popularity of performance art by more than a century, and often invokes the history of art

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23 Mackay’s novel The Stone of Destiny was published in 1904 by Harper and Brothers.
24 Ellen Carol Shaw, Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage (Dexter: Thomson-Shore, 1997) 107. “The magnitude of their wealth, what it could buy for the suffrage movement, the political influence associated with it, and the cultural power to set standards of what counted as “womanly” - all of this was new to the suffrage movement and profoundly altered it. The first “queen of society” to associate herself with the twentieth-century New York Suffrage movement was Katherine Duer Mackay, society beauty and wife of the founder of the International Telephone and Telegraph Company.”
25 Cooney, Winning the Vote: The Triumph of the American Woman Suffrage Movement, 110.
26 Shaw, Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage, 107.
through the imitation of famous paintings. That women were the primary artists behind the genre also proves interesting, as their contribution to the art world has often been overlooked. Many of the strategies suffragists used in their tableaux vivant are later echoed in the feminist and performance art of the 1960s.

There are two scholars who have contributed to the research of women’s involvement in creating tableaux vivant in America, Monika Elbert and Mary Chapman. Elbert investigated how women used the genre privately to help form their public identity. She placed her claim in relation to illustrations that appeared in *Godey’s Lady Book*, a popular mid-nineteenth century magazine, and in the literature of Margaret Fuller. Instead of explaining how the genre exploited women, Elbert claimed that it helped women realize their ideal roles in “learning how to integrate their identities as public and private figures.”

She pointed to illustrations and texts that fluctuated between what was and wasn’t socially acceptable for women. She suggested that tableaux vivant was a genre, among other media, that allowed women to present themselves in a fluctuating abundance of new roles. Elbert’s focus was on how women used tableaux vivant privately, while in Mackay’s performance, it was a highly publicized public event.

Mary Chapman questioned the cultural work of the tableaux vivant craze, and focused on the issue of gender in the performances. Her analysis relied heavily on feminist film theory, which was dependent on both observation and the interpretation of the female gesture. In particular, she focused on “how the aesthetic and technical codes outlined in tableau vivant manuals contributed to nineteenth-century constructions of

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27 Elbert, “Striking a Historical Pose: Antebellum Tableaux Vivants, "Godey's" Illustrations, and Margaret Fuller's Heroines,” 236.
women as silent and immobile.”\textsuperscript{28} She used examples from tableaux vivant manuals to show how the female gaze was never direct and often cast down, and explained how the inherent aesthetic of tableaux vivant rendered females to be silent and immobile. Even the stories of heroic women were depicted in tableaux vivant at the scene of their demise. Her research posits an interesting contrast between the gestures made by the suffragists in 1911. In Mackay’s performance, some of the models gazes directly confronted the audience.

In contrast to Elbert’s and Chapman’s research, this thesis focuses on the early twentieth century, the end of the tableaux vivant fad.\textsuperscript{29} With women in colleges, the workforce and fighting for suffrage, the social and political atmosphere is reflected in the Maxine Elliott Theatre performance. By considering feminist identity politics and feminist film theory, I examine the tableaux vivant in relation to the suffrage movement in New York City. Numerous primary sources, including tableaux vivant manuals, essays on suffrage and clippings from the Mackay Family Scrapbook Collection, provided information about the performance, the people who were involved and the time it took place.

In the following chapters the imagery of the Maxine Elliott Theatre performance is analyzed in four sections. The first chapter focuses on the opening tableau put on by Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson depicting ‘Motherhood’ based on Raphael’s painting \textit{Madonna} (1512-1514) at the Dresden Gallery (Figure 1). As the model for the infamous Gibson Girl, Mrs. Gibson embraced a signature image of the New Woman (Figure 2), she

\textsuperscript{28} Chapman, “‘Living pictures’: Women and Tableaux Vivants in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Culture,” 27.

\textsuperscript{29} McCullough, \textit{Living Pictures on the New York Stage}, 144. Tableaux vivants lost popularity with the invention of the cinema.
was educated, interested in public affairs and beautiful. Her tableau, however, depicted her in a traditional role as a mother. How was this paradox an image that was beneficial to the suffrage cause? Suffragists frequently lauded that while they wanted the vote, they were mothers first and foremost. Critics suggested that they couldn’t be both. In the ‘Motherhood’ tableau, the identity of the New Women was revealed, and it turned out that suffrage was inclusive to many kinds of women, even mothers.

The second chapter focuses on Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt’s tableau of Joan of Arc. Prior to the event, a member of the planning committee had leaked to the press that Mrs. Vanderbilt would be wearing the armor actually worn by the patron saint. However, on the night of the event, Mrs. Vanderbilt instead wore rags and re-enacted the painting of *Joan of Arc* (1879) by Jules Bastien-Lepage from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 3). Why was this elaborate scheme created for the star of the event, and what does the change in costume say about the strategies of the suffragists? The choice of representing a youthful Joan during a time of spiritual guidance instead of a battle scene is significant. Women were frequently represented as abstract virtues in tableaux vivant, such as peace, liberty or freedom. Mrs. Vanderbilt, with her prestigious social position, put on the mask of Joan of Arc, but also toyed with the symbolism of the mask by choosing what kind of Joan to be.

The third chapter focuses on the tableaux of *Florence Nightingale on the Battle-Field* by Mrs. Clarence Mackay (Figure 4), *Discovery of Radium or Mm. Curie in her Laboratory* by Mrs. Archibald Mackay (Figure 5) and *Catherine of Russia* by Mrs. George Gould (Figure 6). In contrast to the folk heroine Joan of Arc, Catherine and

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Madam Curie represented successful women who employed non-traditional roles. Mrs. Gould went to great lengths to accurately present her tableau. She even sent a sketch artist to visit the Hermitage in Russia to render each historical detail of the portrait. Numerous photographs exist of these tableaux, which provide evidence for analyzing the details of the scenes. How do the backgrounds, costumes, props and most importantly, gestures, affect the interpretation of these tableaux vivant? Using feminist film theory, like Mary Chapman, the pictures reveal a change in the identity of the American suffragist.

The final chapter places the evening in context with social reforms of the early twentieth century. How were the tableaux vivant performed at the Maxine Elliott Theatre educational in nature? Tableaux vivant has a history in social education in the United States. A number of the tableaux were arranged to be didactic and play off each other as a lesson to the audience. For instance, the Women’s Political Union, led by Blatch, created two tableaux vivant depicting everyday scenes that were meant to contrast with each other. The first, *Inside the Home: Eighteenth Century* (Figure 7), and the second, *Outside the Factory: Twentieth Century* (Figure 8). The coupling of images demonstrated how the modern woman was not content at home, but instead on the streets, looking for work.

Tableaux vivant may have gained popularity as a simple pastime, but it evolved into a provocative tool for political change. Katherine Mackay’s usage of the medium was an artistic achievement that profoundly affected the suffrage movement. She was the first “queen of society” to enter the movement in New York, which inspired others to

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join. She directed a performance of women, by women, at a time when equality between the sexes was deeply contested. By rallying the support of high society, she was able to create a shift in the spirit of the suffrage movement by making it fashionable.  

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Chapter 1: A Fashionable Identity for Suffrage

Introduction

When Katherine Mackay joined the suffrage movement, the struggle to win the vote had already been going on for nearly five decades. Many suffragists were doubtful of their old strategies, and sought new ideas during the early twentieth century.\(^\text{34}\) Mackay was one of those new ideas. She represented elite society, a group of women who had not yet joined the movement. She brought new momentum to the cause by carefully reconstructing its image. The evening of tableaux vivant in particular, became her opportunity to create a new identity for the suffragist. She built this image on a pre-existing one, the Gibson Girl, America’s first sweetheart. The Gibson Girl was a fictional illustration created by Charles Dana Gibson (Figure 9). She was the first commercial New Woman in America. She was dignified, interested in social activities, educated and beautiful - just like Mrs. Mackay.\(^\text{35}\)

Organizing the Tableaux Vivant

Mackay rounded up her friends to begin the Equal Franchise Society in 1908.\(^\text{36}\) Compared to other suffrage organizations, she prided herself in promoting suffrage through educational methods.\(^\text{37}\) In a speech given in 1910 she said:

> We are convinced that suffrage is coming, and nearly every man and woman I have talked to has said the same thing to me, ‘Oh, it is coming.’
> Well, all right then. Let us be prepared for it. It is not a political

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\(^{34}\) Cooney, *Winning the Vote: The Triumph of the American Woman Suffrage Movement*, xxi.

\(^{35}\) A number of scholars have written about the Gibson Girl as America’s New Woman, including Martha Banta, Lynn D. Gordon, Robert Koch and Martha H. Patterson.


propaganda and it is not a browbeating propaganda. The idea of this society is to present our case through the prism of different kinds of minds.38

The idea that suffrage was inevitable certainly must have frustrated suffragists who had been fighting for the cause for decades. They had no way of knowing how close they actually were to succeeding. Mackay’s goal of presenting suffrage through a “prism of different kinds of minds,” speaks to her devotion in making suffrage accessible to many kinds of women.

The evening of tableaux vivant at the Maxine Elliott Theatre was carefully orchestrated down to the smallest details. Along with choosing the subject matter of the tableaux, Mackay excelled in choosing talented and fashionable people to work with. Behind the scenes, she worked with two well-known male artists in preparation for the performance. Everett Shinn (1876–1953) was a realist painter from the Ashcan school who was hired to paint backdrops and create the preliminary color drawings of the tableaux to be used as a model for the set builders.39 Wilfred Buckland (1866-1946) was an art director and lighting designer for theater, who later became well known for his film work in Hollywood.40 He was hired to set the stage for each tableau performance. Mackay was particular about using the finest furniture, tapestries and costumes. One reporter wrote, “Yesterday Mr. Shinn and Mr. Buchland labored as if their hearts and souls were in the cause, changing the scenery here and adjusting a costume there,

38 Katherine Alexander Duer Mackay, An address on suffrage … January 15, 1909.
focusing a little more light at this point or softening a harsh light at that.”

The performance was treated as a highly professional venture, with much excitement from the press and by the people involved. For many women, one of the greatest benefits of suffrage was the frequent opportunity to assemble publicly. During 1911, the movement was just beginning to gain renewed momentum, which must have sparked excitement over the performance.

Besides the Equal Franchise Society, Mackay invited three other suffrage groups to contribute to the performance. By doing this, she reminded her audience that the suffrage cause was multi-dimensional, with many types of women involved. Each group revealed something of their character in the type of tableau they arranged. The Women’s Political Union, which was lead by Harriet Stanton Blatch and made up of seasoned suffragists, arranged two tableaux depicting scenes of hardship workingwomen faced. The College Equal Suffrage League, mostly Barnard students, arranged two grand scenes depicting women working collectively, with an emphasis on education. The Woman’s Suffrage Party and the Equal Franchise Society arranged scenes depicting women from history, art and literature; both real and imaginary. While Mackay could have worked only with the Equal Suffrage Society, she attached her name (and fashionable reputation) to these other groups.

Motherhood, arranged by the Equal Franchise Society and posed by Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson, was the opening tableau. The scene depicted Raphael’s Madonna (1512-

41 “Suffragettes to Pose,” Tribune, New York City, January 16, 1911.
42 Linda Lumsden, Rampant Women: Suffragists and the Right of Assembly (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 17.
1514) from the Dresden Gallery. In the painting, the biblical Mary embraces her son, Jesus, with Saint Sixtus and Saint Barbara on either side of the couple. While a photograph of this tableau was not printed in the media, Mackay’s description of the scene was. Her aptitude for creative writing is evident in her description of the tableau, “Across the soul lies the shadow of every mother’s eternal doubt. ‘What shall life bring my child?’ The pathos of it is poignant. Raphael could have paid no higher tribute to the woman who was the love of his life than to leave her face as the living symbol of the noblest joy and sacrifice of womanhood.”

Using Gibson as the model for this tableau truly set the tone for the performance because Gibson was the real New Woman looking upon her child, the future generation. The model, Gibson, was as popular as the famous painting, and a striking opening image for Mackay’s performance.

**The Gibson Girl as Role Model**

Mrs. Irene Gibson was the wife of the famous illustrator Charles Dana Gibson, who originated the Gibson Girl, a popular illustration that featured America’s New Woman. The Gibson Girl became a national obsession and a successful commodity beginning in the late 19th century. Images of the Gibson Girl appeared not only in magazines, but on china, hairpins, candlesticks and brooches. With a slender figure and a large bosom and hips, she generally pinned her hair up in a loose bun and wore a flirtatious and confident facial expression. It was interesting to have Mrs. Gibson pose in the first tableau for suffrage because countless women had actually already become her in

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their own recreational tableaux.\textsuperscript{46} It was a pastime for women to depict themselves in famous Gibson Girl scenes, wearing sophisticated clothing and trying on new public roles; perhaps playing sports or gossiping about men as foolish creatures. The Gibson Girl was a fashionable icon, women of all social standings re-enacted famous Gibson Girl scenes in tableaux vivant because it was the closest way they could get to becoming her.\textsuperscript{47}

The identity of the real Gibson Girl, the woman who Charles Dana Gibson drew his inspiration from, was often speculated and frequently considered to be his wife, Mrs. Gibson. In an interview Mr. Gibson stated, “The ‘Gibson Girl’ does not exist. She has been as the grains of sand in number. I imagine that folks must recognize ‘United States’ in her, and that it’s that which makes them think she’s all, or nearly all the same. She isn’t really.”\textsuperscript{48} Charles Dana Gibson’s words about the Gibson Girl came after years of commercial success. There was a public obsession with making the Gibson Girl real and finding out the true identity of the woman Gibson used as a model. Although she may have resembled certain actresses, she was always a fabricated illustration inspired by countless women. The Gibson Girl came to symbolize the New Woman in America when it needed a female role model. By the year 1900, the identity of the Modern Women had consumed America, as seen through photography and illustrations. Women were

\textsuperscript{46} Fairfax Downey, \textit{Portrait of an Era As Drawn by C.D. Gibson} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), 211.
\textsuperscript{47} Martha H. Patterson, \textit{Beyond the Gibson Girl: Re-imagining the American New Women 1895-1915} (Chesam: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 33.
classified by types, merging their private virtues and their public image. The question still remained; who was the real Gibson Girl, and could she be a suffragist?

In 1902, *Collier’s Magazine* published an article featuring seven kinds of Gibson Girls. Women could choose which type best suited them; the Beauty, the Boy-girl, the Flirt, the Sentimental, the Convinced, the Ambitious or the Well-Balanced Gibson Girl.

Now women could typify themselves as a more unique Gibson Girl. They could choose to be a tomboy (the Boy-girl) if they so chose, perhaps playing sports, flying a kite or driving a car. Choice played a large role in the development of modern female identities during the turn of the century. Yet, while a New Woman had some choice in which she wanted to be, she was still restricted by Victorian values. The Gibson Girl embodied these controversies by depicting modern ideals through a safety net. For instance the Gibson Girl played sports, but in a full length skirt, never in trousers. Women used the Gibson Girl image as a way to try on new roles, relying on the safety of her image as a respectable public figure.

**The Gibson Girl in Tableau Vivant**

Monika Elbert has claimed that performing tableaux vivant provided women with a safe way to experiment with their identity and try on new roles. She specifically argued that women during the antebellum period used tableaux vivant as a way to see themselves

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50 Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Re-imagining the American New Women 1895-1915*, 34.
51 Wiley Todd, *The “New Woman” Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street*, 2-5.
in idealized roles. As they tried on new hats and costumes, some that were acceptable and some that were not, they learned how to merge their private and public identities.\textsuperscript{53} This strategy of playfully altering their identity was fitting for the suffragist whose public identity was particularly scrutinized. Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson had two roles the night of the performance at the Maxine Elliott Theatre, both the Madonna and Child and the Gibson Girl. She was simultaneously an extremely classic figure and an acceptable New Woman. The only controversy was that Mrs. Gibson didn’t actually identify herself as a suffragist in 1911. Her politics were generally aligned with her husbands, and Mr. Gibson was not interested in suffrage.\textsuperscript{54} By participating in the event, she truly tried on a new role.

In 1911, Charles Dana Gibson created the illustration “A Suffragette’s Husband” (Figure 10) which was featured in \textit{LIFE} and \textit{Other People} magazines.\textsuperscript{55} Here the communication between the figures is very clear. The feeble husband sits across from his wife in a worried pose, wearing a troubled expression on his face. His wife is clearly a militant suffragist. She reads her newspaper in a relaxed posture, yet dominates the space with her weight and confidence. Other illustrations represent the Gibson Girl in a positive and more assured position on suffrage. For example the illustration from the Studies in Expression series, “When Women Are Jurors,” shows how dignified a suffragist can be in the form of the Gibson Girl (Figure 11). Seated among many other types of women, the Gibson Girl is poised and assured of her role as a public figure. Charles Dana Gibson

\textsuperscript{53} Elbert, “Striking a Historical Pose: Antebellum Tableaux Vivants, "Godey's" illustrations, and Margaret Fuller's Heroines,” 236-237.


\textsuperscript{55} Patterson, \textit{Beyond the Gibson Girl: Re-imagining the American New Women 1895-1915}, 30.
clearly saw suffrage as a possibility, but with restrictions. Only the Gibson Girl could pull off such radical behavior.

Mrs. Gibson embodied the Gibson Girl persona much more than the persona of a suffragist. When it was announced that Charles Dana Gibson was to be married to Irene Langhorne, it was said that Mr. Gibson had finally met his Gibson Girl. Langhorne’s grandson and biographer described his grandmother as a Gibson Girl through and through.

The Gibson Girl was Irene, full of the juice and spontaneity of youth, daring, charismatic, and sensuous. Like Irene, she was flirtatious, reveling in the power she had over men and needing their attention, but every inch the lady. She flaunted her sexuality, but with subtlety and style. Irene loved the outdoors. She was athletic, an excellent horsewoman, a golfer, a swimmer, and an avid cyclist. So was the Gibson Girl. Irene adored elegant balls and dinner parties, the beach, the hunting field and horseshows. So did the Gibson Girl.56

Charles Dana Gibson, the illustrator of the New Woman, married her in real life. She was also just the sort of person a parlor suffragist like Mrs. Mackay required to lead an evening of politically charged images because she subverted the controversies.

While a reproduction of Mrs. Gibson in tableau at the Maxine Elliott Theatre was not printed in popular magazines, her image was used to advertise the event (Figure 2). The real Gibson Girl on the program was sure to pique interest. Mrs. Gibson might have been a fan of tableaux vivant as she was documented in tableau wearing Greek garb as a youthful teenager (Figure 12). It is unclear, however, whether she was a member of any of the suffrage groups participating in the event.57 Her grandson speculated in her biography that she may have been a member of one of the suffrage groups. Her personal

56 Ibid., 134.
57 Ibid., 178-179.
politics around 1911 sided along with other progressive reformers who believed that women could be political without needing the vote. She publicly stated that she was not a suffragist in 1913, yet she was willing to stand up for the cause in tableau and try on the suffragist role. Later, Mrs. Gibson did begin an active political life. In 1916 she was appointed Chairman to the Democratic Campaign and became involved in other humanitarian efforts.58

Mrs. Mackay chose the real Gibson Girl to be the face of her performance for suffrage because she could appease the skeptics in the audience. In anticipation of the event, a columnist wrote, “Sistine Madonna! Ah, the nib of my hard pen grows soft, By Mrs. C.D. Gibson we have cherished long and oft. Will doubtless merit our applause, yet, in uncertain way. I scratch my head and wonder what the priests will have to say.”59 Both the Madonna and Mrs. C.D. Gibson were cherished, and so made a fitting compliment to present a new identity for suffrage. Columnists frequently used humor when they reported on the performance to attract an audience. The sophisticated choices Mrs. Mackay made in her line-up of tableaux were not meant for humor, but instead they were subversively calculated to be politically charged.

**Building the Tableaux Vivant**

The theme of motherhood was presented as the first message of the performance. For suffragists, motherhood was a topic that was frequently scrutinized. Critics of suffrage complained that a woman’s role was to care for her children above all civic duties. They worried that mothers who engaged in the public would then neglect their domestic duties. A divide was drawn between the militant suffragists who believed it was

58 Ibid., 177-180.
59 “All Alive and Blooming,” *Town Topics*, New York City, December 1, 1910.
part of their role as a mother to be involved in civic duty, and the parlor suffragists who were adamantly mothers first. Mackay played to her audience of conservative suffragists and showed Mrs. Gibson as a mother, first and foremost in her appeal to educate the jaded audience. She even included a real baby in the tableau to make the message of domestic priorities that much stronger.

During the actual Madonna tableau, the baby Spencer cried during his performance, which caused the audience to laugh and provided the media with more comic relief. On stage, Mrs. Gibson’s tableau opened without Spencer, but his cries could be heard from backstage and the audience applauded while he was brought on stage for a moment. The spectacle was ridiculed by the press, “But to those who know how fiercely the primitive male can resent “votes for women” it was perfectly evident that what Baby Spencer was saying was something like this: “Ow - these dreadful advanced women - ow - I do not think women ought to vote - ow - take me home to my cradle and mama!”

Spencer’s fictional words could very well have represented the silent skepticism of the audience. His place was at home with his mother, not out in public. Many other news reports scrutinized the event by pointing out that the suffragists were neglectful mothers and used baby Spencer’s cries as their proof. Even Mrs. Gibson wrote to her son about how the baby crying during her performance was funny. The goal for the evening was certainly not to humor the audience and press, however, Mackay’s messages were never direct. They were penned to leave a lasting impression, rather than a loud statement. She commented during the performance that it was recommended to her by professionals that

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60 Lumsden, *Rampant Women: Suffragists and the Right of Assembly*, 47.
she use a fake baby, but she ended up listening to the amateurs and used a real baby instead.\textsuperscript{63} Although she played to the humor of the situation, it’s significant that Mackay chose to listen to the amateurs, because by doing so, she chose for the performance to remain realistic and authentic. Perhaps by creating this quality of realism in the performance, Mackay could reach the skeptics in the audience and convince them that the merits of women through history was real, and so was the country’s need for suffrage.

**Tableaux Vivant as Noeme**

On writing about photography, Roland Barthes suggested that the amateur photographers were actually the professionals because they were most able to get to the *noeme* of photography.\textsuperscript{64} The *noeme*, or “that has been,” is a moment experienced with a certain amount of indifference by the amateur, so as to reveal an essence.\textsuperscript{65} A tableau vivant is very similar to a photograph in that it represents an event during a specific moment in time. The performance at the Maxine Elliott Theatre was amateur in many regards. Professionals were certainly brought in to improve the quality of the performance, but most of the models were not professional actresses.\textsuperscript{66} Their amateur quality brought a realistic effect to the performance, or a *noeme*, which brought an authentic quality to the story they told.

**Considering the Audience and the Tableaux Vivant’s Effect**

In 1910, a year before the tableaux performance, Mrs. Mackay was featured in an article in *Harpers Bazar*. The author described Mackay as a busy workingwoman who

\textsuperscript{63} “Objects to Suffrage,” *Tribune*, New York City, January 18, 1911.


\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 77.

\textsuperscript{66} Mrs. George Gould, who posed as *Catherine of Russia*, was formerly a successful stage actress.
valued her work for suffrage. Mackay described her target audience as the people who were uncertain and uncaring about suffrage. While men might be easily swayed, she described the real competition to suffrage as the “deadly inertia of rich women.” This was just the audience that Mackay reached for in the performance at the Maxine Elliott Theatre. She could have staged more lectures, tea parties or printed pamphlets, but instead she chose a performance. Tableau vivant performances were a fashionable entertainment for society women, and historically women understood the genre as a platform for a molding identity. Certainly even her star model, Mrs. Gibson, was among the impressionable rich women who were skeptical of the cause.

Mrs. Gibson, whose image embodied an era of modern women, initially laughed at her involvement in the performance. Years later she endorsed the suffrage movement by marching in the streets and publicly endorsing the cause. The real Gibson Girl could be a suffragist. Perhaps by literally putting on the costume of a suffragist, she was able to try on the role and found it was one that she could actually embrace. An entire audience of society members were educated that evening. A reporter wrote, “some of the skeptical say that they will do more for the cause of suffrage than hundreds of street corner talks and bombardments of male tribunals.” Mackay’s performance reached the masses through the media, and hit home with high society because the messages for supporting

68 Gibson, The Gibson Girl: Portrait of a Southern Belle, 180. “Suffrage probably was not a burning, personal issue for Irene, and most likely she was ambivalent on the question. Later she endorsed the suffrage movement. I know this only because one of my father’s favorite stories was watching his mother marching in a suffragette parade, one hand holding a placard, the other holding up her bloomers, which had become unsnapped or unbuttoned, threatening to fall around her knees.”
69 “Suffragettes to Pose,” Tribune, New York City, January 16, 1911.
suffrage were delivered with subtlety. She created bold imagery that left a lasting impression on an audience who was ambivalent to suffrage and needed inspiration.

**Developing the Characters**

Mackay developed the characters of the evening of tableaux by choosing subjects, like Mrs. Gibson as the Madonna, and in creating a specific sequence of images. The sequencing was important because it allowed Mackay to insert more controversial or rebellious subjects in between characters who were socially acceptable. For instance, Hypatia (AD 351-370 - 415), the famous fifth century Greek philosopher known for her work in mathematics, was inserted between two mothers, the Madonna and Cornelia. Hypatia was murdered by a Christian mob who felt threatened by what she symbolized; the advancement of science and education by women. The fear of advanced women in the twentieth century was still an issue and therefore made Hypatia a more controversial subject. Mrs. Edward Thomas posed as Hypatia in a scene of scholarship, rather than a scene of her martyrdom. She stood tall and proud next to a lectern, holding a scroll in one hand, and allowing her opposite hand to hang down, with her palm open towards the audience (Figure 13). Her hand gesture, exposed and welcoming, signaled that there was something outside of the scene to grasp; the desire for equality through suffrage.

Following Hypatia was the famous socialite and suffragist Inez Milholland as Cornelia (BC 191-190–100). With a relaxed, but direct gaze upon the audience, Milholland posed as the proud mother with two of Mrs. Pearce Bailey’s sons (Figure 14). A columnist from the Tribune wrote “Two of the pictures showed woman in an entirely...” 

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different light. Some might have thought it a mistake to put them in a suffrage demonstration. They may even go so far as to say that it is a palpable case of playing to the public, in this instance the male public.\textsuperscript{71} Even the reporters picked up on the subversive undertones of the tableaux. Beautiful women were enlisted not only to bring appeal to the performance, but also to distract the audience from the assertive political nature of the evening. Ironically Milholland was far more militant than many of the other women posing for suffrage that night. Being a great beauty afforded her some leniency in her rebellion. Her inclusion in the event further demonstrates the range of people who were invited by Mackay to perform. Milholland was already developing her own personal strategies as a suffragist. She balanced more scandalous acts, like dressing sensually and marching in parades, with conservative arguments at the podium.\textsuperscript{72} She later became a recognized leader and symbol for the movement, often leading parades on horseback.\textsuperscript{73}

**Conclusion**

Besides the famous Gibson and Milholland, other socialites brought appeal to the event, such as Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt and Mrs. George Gould. Their participation attracted the audience that Mackay was appealing to; other wealthy women she hoped to educate. Mackay made the event inclusive by welcoming other suffrage groups, such as the College Equal Suffrage League who brought a youthful appeal to the cause. With such a diverse group of participants, together they were able to discover their new public identity as suffragists. Mackay directed the performance in a number of ways, but most importantly she chose the right actors and characters for the performance. She showed the

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Banta, *Imaging American Women Idea and Ideals in Cultural History*, 67.
audience that the real Gibson Girl, the symbol of the New Woman, could in fact become a suffragist. Mackay also demonstrated that suffragists were made up of many types of women, just like the Gibson Girl. Her types went beyond simple Gibson Girls like “the Flirt,” or “the Sentimental.” Mackay’s types were revolutionary; they were college students, scientists, writers, mathematicians and more.
Chapter 2: A Domestic Joan of Arc

Introduction

Katherine Mackay relied heavily on the symbolic nature of tableaux vivant during the Maxine Elliott Theatre performance. She used masks and costumes as her tool to symbolically convey the need for suffrage. A close look at the Joan of Arc tableau reveals just how thoughtful Mackay was about the choices she made while directing the performance. The fact that Joan of Arc (1412-1431) was a popular historic figure and often used in private theatricals, helped Mackay’s audience pick up on the subversive political messages it contained.74

Mrs. Vanderbilt as Joan of Arc

Joan of Arc’s story is both real and at times allegorical. She was born a peasant in Domrémy, a rural town in France. According to history she had proven her faith in God by fighting for the King of France during the Hundred Years’ War.75 The folkloric woman was popular in the news around the time of the tableaux vivant performance because John Pope Pius X beatified her in 1909.76 Since her death, the Pope affirmed that she had cast three miracles and was now on the road to sainthood. Mrs. Mackay invited Mrs. Virginia Fair Vanderbilt to pose as the soon to be patron saint. Vanderbilt was an established member of New York City high society, particularly because she had married

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74 Joan of Arc appears as a scene in many tableaux vivant manuals.
into the prestigious Vanderbilt family.\textsuperscript{77} She could easily wear the costume of Joan of Arc and not be overshadowed by the stigmas that surrounded the historic woman.

Mrs. Vanderbilt was frequently in the spotlight of high society and she had even staged an evening of tableaux vivant for her own fundraiser a few years earlier.\textsuperscript{78} Her name on the bill was an added promise that the media would follow the event. During dress rehearsals, a member of the planning committee leaked to the press that Mrs. Vanderbilt would be wearing the armor actually worn by Joan of Arc.\textsuperscript{79} It was said that the armor was part of her private collection. However, on the night of the event, Mrs. Vanderbilt instead wore rags and re-enacted a painting by Jules Bastien-Lepage, \textit{Joan of Arc}, 1879, found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 3). A reporter described Mrs. Vanderbilt in her tableau. “‘The Maid’ was barefooted and clad in her shabby peasant’s frock - a loosely laced gray wool bodice over a faded brown skirt. She was standing not far from her humble dwelling, looking up with a rapt expression as if listening to her ‘voices’.”\textsuperscript{80} The change in costume from a warrior Joan to a peasant Joan was significant. Why was this elaborate scheme created for a high profile star of the event, and what does the change in costume say about the strategies of the suffragists?

Mrs. Vanderbilt had not been a public advocate for suffrage, but she was definitely a strong, modern woman. She enjoyed playing sports and invested her time

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\textsuperscript{77} Steven H. Gittleman, \textit{Willie K. II: A Biography} (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Inc., 2012), 115. Virginia Fair and William K. Vanderbilt Jr. were married in 1899 in New York City. She came from a wealthy family in California. Her father, James Graham Fair, made his fortune from mining. She was a devout Catholic, which prevented her from divorcing when she and her husband split in 1908/09. She was a prominent socialite, who always rose to expectations.


\textsuperscript{79} “World’s Heroines to Live Again as Aid to Suffrage,” \textit{World}, New York City, December 18, 1910.

\textsuperscript{80} “Suffragists in Tableaux,” \textit{Sun}, New York City, January 18, 1911.
supporting charities. In 1909 she learned how to fly a plane. Because it was an unladylike activity, she wrapped herself up in a heavy dark veil around her face to conceal her identity in the airfield. In the plane she abandoned her reserved nature and pressed the gas pedal with full force. When the pilot grabbed her foot, she replied, “All right, I’ll be good.”

Mrs. Vanderbilt’s sense of adventure made her a good match for her husband, Willie K. Vanderbilt II, who was a well-known sailor and racecar driver. However, their priorities diverged as they grew older, and Mrs. Vanderbilt matured. Willie K. never grew up and continued his adventurous pursuits, ignoring his family responsibilities. Mrs. Vanderbilt formerly separated from her husband in 1910, but she refused a divorce because they had two children together, and she was a strict Catholic.

Mrs. Vanderbilt was as a social belle who always met the expectations of society and wouldn’t have wanted to stir trouble by being involved with radical suffrage campaigning. When it was announced that she would perform in the tableaux vivant, the media reported that she would lend herself to just about any charity. While she was a philanthropist and supported many causes, suffrage wasn’t on her agenda. Why then did Mackay invite Vanderbilt to perform a leading role? Perhaps Mrs. Vanderbilt embodied the “deadly inertia of rich women,” that Mackay was hoping to transform during this performance. She was a great beauty, and her name was likely to draw a crowd of wealthy connections to the theater (Figure 15). She may have also been a safe choice as a model for a controversial picture like Joan of Arc. After all, Joan was a militant woman

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82 Ibid., 121.
83 Ibid., 19.
who exchanged her traditional domestic role for a traditionally male role as a soldier.

Because Vanderbilt held an elite status in society, it would have been hard to suggest that her behavior was anything except refined. If she could break from gendered conventions and fly an airplane, she could easily get away with wearing the costume of a radical woman.

**Making Suffrage Fashionable**

While introducing the tableau vivant to the audience, Mrs. Mackay said, “If I were to tell you what I think of Joan of Arc you wouldn’t like it, so I won’t tell you.”

This sentiment clearly insinuates Mrs. Mackay’s disregard for Joan. The historic figure was far too militant for a cool parlor suffragist like Mackay. The campaign tactics that Mackay embraced for suffrage were always “safe.” When Harriot Stanton Blatch recalled Mackay’s involvement in the cause, she said “There was an unspoken gentleman’s [sic] agreement between Mrs. Mackay and me. She never mentioned parades, Votes-for-Women balls, and other beating of the drums of public propaganda. And I, on my part, never suggested she might wander forth on these thorny paths.”

Mackay was a silent partner in the suffrage movement. Her role was to make suffrage fashionable and usher in a wealthy and connected audience.

**The Representation of Joan**

During the late nineteenth century, new studies of Joan of Arc were being explored by historians, the Catholic Church and by authors of literature. Americans had varying perceptions of her new image during the time of her beatification and then sainthood in 1920. The historian Dominique Goy-Blanquet suggested that the majority of

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Americans accepted her as a patriot, but only a small minority wanted to honor her as a saint. Controversies surrounded Joan as a radical Protestant, or simply a figure who stood for rebellion against authority. Because the interpretations of Joan could be read in many ways, she was a touchy historical figure to include in the line-up of tableaux vivant. Still, she was also an obvious choice because the suffrage campaign had already adopted her.

Suffragists frequently used the image of Joan of Arc because she was a patriot. In 1913 the *Suffragette* newspaper, published by the Women’s Social and Political Union, described Joan of Arc as “not only the perfect patriot but the perfect woman.” Mrs. Mackay’s disdain for Joan of Arc might have been related to her religious values, her politics related to war or her attitude towards militant suffragists. Joan was an aggressive leader, and Mackay refused that aggression. As a new leader to the suffrage movement, Mackay made sure not to associate herself with militant suffragists. Yet, by including her, she continued to promote the idea that the suffrage campaign was made up of many types of people, all of whom needed to be seen or heard.

While it was Mrs. Vanderbilt who was actually wearing the costume of Joan of Arc, Mrs. Mackay was hiding behind a mask with this sentiment. The historian Mary Chapman wrote about how women used masquerade to their advantage in tableaux vivant by embellishing their female charms to hide controversial or radical behavior. She referenced Joan Riviere in her 1929 essay ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade,’ who suggested “that women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to

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avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men.”

For Mrs. Mackay it would have been more womanly to insinuate her dislike for Joan of Arc, because after all, Joan was a woman who took on a man’s role by joining the war. Mrs. Mackay was also interested in joining a battle, the male dominated political arena. Certainly a refined woman like herself couldn’t compare her actions to Joan’s. She acted defensively and her attitude suggested that the image of Joan of Arc was a happenstance inclusion to the program. Her art, the evening of tableaux vivant, was much more radical than her words to the public.

The power of a mask was a definite appeal to the creation of a tableaux vivant, especially among high society. According to the historian Melanie Dawson, tableaux vivant was one of many leisure activities that late nineteenth and early twentieth century Americans participated in “to claim (as well as hone) dynamic, hopeful, and transformative experiences.”

An example of this kind of experience can be found in Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*, published in 1905, just a few years before Mackay’s performance. In the middle of the story, the main character Lily Bart performs in a tableau and reveals a side of herself that no one had seen before. She reenacted the painting *Mrs. Richard Bennett Lloyd*, 1775-76, by Sir Joshua Reynolds and masked herself in another woman’s beauty in order to reveal her own true beauty. Her simple performance stirred the emotions of her male suitors and even became the talk of town.

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The tableau vivant marked a turning point in Lily’s story in her efforts to be loved and climb the ranks of high society.

While Mrs. Vanderbilt’s tableau was not published in the media, reporters closely followed her role in the performance. The details of her costume were elaborately described prior to the event, “the audience will see her in a suit of golden armour of the period of La Pucelle, and which she herself -who knows?- may have worn in battle. Now it is the property of Mrs. Vanderbilt, and so, too, is the little malled skirt which she will wear, as La Puselle sometimes did, though not in battle, probably.”92 Other details such as a tunic with the fleur de lys sewn on it were also said to be part of her costume. As well, a collection of vessels and a golden chalice from the Vanderbilt’s collection of treasures were said to be part of the scene.93 Certainly Mrs. Vanderbilt’s wealth was the media’s focus of attention, and her connection to the suffrage cause was minor, if at all a factor. The authentic quality of Mrs. Vanderbilt wearing Joan of Arc’s real armor, while possibly just a rumor, was important because it did promote the performance as a highly serious endeavor. Mrs. Mackay’s emphasis on historical accuracy was considered to be on par with the richness of a museum exhibition.94

During the dress rehearsal, one reporter noted that Mrs. Vanderbilt did not rehearse in her rumored costume of armor. Instead, she proudly posed within the gold frame wearing a tailored suit. He described a possible “hitch” in her costume or the

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93 World’s Heroines to Live Again as Aid to Suffrage,” *World*, New York City, December 18, 1910.
94 “For Mrs. Mackay’s Tableaux, Historical Accuracy Will Mark the Performance,” *Sun*, New York City, December 8, 1910.
scenery as the reason she didn’t rehearse in full costume. While there could be a number of reasons why Mrs. Vanderbilt had a costume change, it’s more likely that it was part of a scheme created by Mackay. She was strict about all of the details of the performance, and if Mrs. Vanderbilt were going to change her costume and wear rags instead of armor, surely by the time of the dress rehearsals the costume (of simple rags!) would have been ready to try on. This scheme was a subversive tool to symbolically demonstrate the kind of Joan that this group of suffragists supported. A female warrior would have been too assertive a figure for Mackay to include in her performance, but an innocent young Joan standing in her yard, being beckoned by voices, was safe and non-threatening.

Jules Bastien-Lepage’s *Joan of Arc* was painted in the late nineteenth century, during the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war when Joan’s image had gained new symbolic relevance to France. Lepage was interested in bringing Joan back to her natural setting, where she had grown up in Lorraine. Instead of using a single model, he painted her as a composite woman of the Lorraine race. Without the confines of a model, Lepage could then paint her as both strong, and beautiful with painfully wide open eyes. The painting was made in a naturalistic style with a young Joan standing in a yard behind her house. She wears a simple outfit of a blouse and skirt that are ill-fitting.

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95 “Rehearse Poses for the “Cause”,” *Morning Telegraph*, New York City, January 16, 1911.
96 “Women Rehearse ‘Votes’ Tableaux,” *Herald*, New York City, January 16, 1911. “The subjects for these pictures were chosen by Mrs. Mackay when the tableaux were planned.” She then worked with Everitt Shinn to sketch each scene. “Greatest Women to Live Again in Aid of Suffrage,” *World*, New York City, January 16, 1910. By the time of the dress rehearsal, a backdrop had been painted for each and every tableau.
and tattered at the edges, simple rags. The many trees and bushes painted around the perimeter of the painting serve as a way for Joan to show her connection to nature with an outstretched hand touching a single branch. A stool is knocked down, insinuating that Joan had just gotten up from her seat where she was spinning thread. The painting diverges from realism only to include the three saints that were said to have spoken to Joan as a young teenager: Saint Margaret, Saint Catherine and Saint Michael. The scene emphasizes Joan’s domesticity. She only rose from her seat because she was called to do so. Even during Joan of Arc’s trials, her domestic talents, including spinning, gardening and sewing, were documented. Mackay chose for this Joan to be her symbol for suffrage, the domestic Joan.

It was common for suffragists to try and prove that their domestic nature and skills would not diminish if they received the vote. In a 1912 Good Housekeeping article entitled, “The Feminine Charms of the Woman Militant,” the author Mary Holland Kinkaid demonstrated how suffragists continued to embrace their domesticity while still battling the cause. She highlighted famous suffragists, and focused on their domestic expertise, such as Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt’s famous pumpkin pie. She also referenced the beautiful home of Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mrs. Susan B. Anthony’s aptitude for needlepoint. Mackay was also highlighted in the article, and was praised for how flawlessly and elegantly she managed her estate affairs. This skill complemented her new role managing the Equal Franchise Society. Kinkaid suggested that Mackay’s core interests in suffrage were related to her aptitude for improving familial conditions. “Mrs. Mackay’s interest in politics may be traced to the instinct for improving home conditions.

and whatever in the established order of things fails to contribute to the highest welfare of family.\textsuperscript{100} Her artistic homes were praised, the successful children’s birthday parties she threw and her skills in managing the many servants employed in her mansion. All of the women in the article were identified by their domestic talents in relation to their pursuit for suffrage. Their politics never took precedent.

The historian Lisa Tickner suggested that Joan of Arc was a powerful symbol for the suffrage movement because she transcended identification barriers. “She was a universal female figure who eluded the categories in which women gained status - neither a queen, courtesan, mother, artist, nor ever saint until her canonization in 1920 - and the significance of her life was never stable, but gained its impact from the various cultural and political contexts in which she was used.”\textsuperscript{101} In Vanderbilt’s tableau of Joan of Arc, it’s impossible to see Joan as a universal figure. One cannot ignore the fact that Mrs. Vanderbilt was a wealthy woman who was wearing rags. Lepage’s painting and the tableau that was staged showed Joan of Arc before she became famous. Instead of a scene depicting the great warrior, we have a scene of the wealthy Vanderbilt wearing an inexpensive costume, showing us that she is sympathetic to the poor. Combating poverty was a philanthropy that Mackay’s elite society was used to supporting, and suffrage was not.\textsuperscript{102} The combined imagery of Joan of Arc, a wealthy Vanderbilt and a poor woman

\textsuperscript{100} Kinkaid, “The Feminine Charms of the Woman Militant,” \textit{Good Housekeeping}, 152.
\textsuperscript{101} Lisa Tickner, \textit{The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 210-211.
\textsuperscript{102} Cooney, \textit{Winning the Vote: The Triumph of the American Woman Suffrage Movement}, 204. The entrance of wealthy and socially connected women to the suffrage movement helped to change it’s image. When elite women joined the suffrage scene the influence of working and trade union women declined.
show how contrived the performance was for its audience to send a political message, suffrage was here and high society needed to be sympathetic to the cause.

The Responses

The media’s coverage of the performance rarely disregarded the political motivation for the event, yet they tended to focus on the other aspects of the performance more than its political aspirations. The fashion, wealth, people involved and most importantly the symbolism of the event was frequently documented.

A Goddess of Liberty will be born Jan. 17 at Maxine Elliott’s Theatre in the person of Mrs. James Stillman, who in a magnificent setting will typify her own interpretation of the freedom of women almost gained — a goddess climbing toward the light out of mire that obscured her. The standard she bears still dim and faintly outlined, its stripes apparent, but the stars (for suffrage) not yet risen.  

Suffrage was the hidden symbol within the stars, and within parenthesis of the text, it was rarely the main focus of the media. Perhaps reporters, like many of the women involved in the performance, believed that suffrage was inevitable or unimportant, so it didn’t need to be the highlights of their reports. More likely the reporters and society women involved were all too aware that women should not appear too assertive in public. Still, suffrage was the message of the performance, which could not be ignored. In staging tableaux vivant performances, the women relied on a safe form of expression for their gender.

One of the more controversial tactics that suffragists took on, both in London and then in the United States, was parading in the streets. In some instances, they concluded the parade with a pageant that included tableaux vivant. Mary Chapman looked at how

103 “World’s Heroines to Live Again as Aid to Suffrage,” World, New York City, December 18, 1910.
suffragists used tableaux vivant during the 1913 suffrage parade on Washington DC as a way to counteract the radical nature of their march. This event occurred just two years after Mackay’s landmark performance. The tableaux vivant during the 1913 pageant depicted women in traditionally feminine roles as symbols of virtue, truth or freedom; appropriately clad in Greek garb. While the parade remained political as a visual demand for democracy, the pageant counteracted the political nature by reverting back to old customs. Women were once again representing allegories and abstractions, rather than themselves. They used tableaux vivant to avert tensions of suffrage issues, accept their gender role and even hide behind a costume so as to not reveal the offensive nature of their conduct. The parade organizers certainly understood that both the parade and pageant were strong forms of expression, but Mrs. Mackay’s demonstration was private, so it allowed for a more revealing form of expression through tableaux vivant.

The media focused on the beauty and fashion of both the 1913 pageant and Mackay’s 1911 performance. However journalists downplayed the political nature of the parade much more by focusing on the beauty of the women involved in the march. A reporter after the 1913 pageant wrote:

[the official programme [sic] of the day announced that these tableaux expressed the dreams and ambitions of militant womanhood. Perhaps they did. Probably not one spectator would have guessed it. What they did express however, and not a single man or woman in the crowd misunderstood the interpretation - was that the American woman is about the most beautiful and graceful creature of the earth.]

In contrast, after the Maxine Elliott Theatre performance a reporter wrote:

105 Ibid., 352.
If there were any among the audience who came with the idea that this was only one more splendid entertainment gotten up by a few prominent people in order to collect money for some vague sort of charity, but in reality to amuse and gratify and fill the leisure hours of wealthy women, they were very much mistaken. Mrs. Clarence Mackay meant to reach out into new fields for propaganda by pictorial means, but she made the pictures tell more than their own story by her own spoken introduction to each tableau.\textsuperscript{106}

The descriptions aptly represent the different goals of each of the tableaux vivant performances. For the 1913 pageant, it was the ideals of American beauty the women represented. For the Maxine Elliott Theatre performance, it was the strength of the visual codes the women were representing in tableaux to support the suffrage cause.

**Tableaux Vivant as Political Tool**

Alice Paul was the organizer of the 1913 suffrage parade. She was known for bringing suffrage tactics from England over to America. The English were far more militant in their strategies for suffrage, which Paul tried to downplay in the parade by emphasizing the beauty of the procession of women, the colors they wore, and the appeal of womanhood in the pageant.\textsuperscript{107} The goal of the parade was to appeal to the masses, but the suffragists soon learned that the parade was a mere spectacle and decided the better route would be to “convert a mass of individuals.”\textsuperscript{108} Chapman argued that 1913 pageant failed in converting individuals into thinking that women were anything more than beautiful creatures. Mackay’s performance, while it may not have conquered the masses either, likely did much more to succeed in converting ideals by appealing to a smaller and more specific audience.

\textsuperscript{106} “Society Poses in Historic Roles,” *Vogue*, New York City, February 15, 1911.
\textsuperscript{108} Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign*, 146.
Wealthy women, lawyers and politicians were among the audience at the Maxine Elliott Theater. When Mrs. Mackay introduced the performance, she said “It is a very great pleasure to welcome so many at our tableaux this afternoon and I am sure a veteran suffragist could not resist making a speech, but I am going to let the pictures speak for themselves.” It’s ironic for Mackay to have resisted giving a speech because she had given speeches on suffrage in the past. She was an eloquent writer, who had even published a work of fiction. Either she was playing to her audience, who she knew she couldn’t connect with directly regarding suffrage, or she actually believed the images could speak loudly.

Conclusion

Mackay chose Mrs. Vanderbilt to depict the controversial image of Joan of Arc because she was one of the most famous and beautiful socialites in the bunch. The symbolism of the character was multi-faceted because Mackay chose for the wealthy Vanderbilt to become a poor, domestic Joan. She fooled her audience by suggesting a controversial image of a fighter, and instead produced a soft maiden. This tactic was common for the suffragist, to symbolically demonstrate their intentions instead of saying them out loud, or in this case, actually wearing a suit of armor. Mrs. Vanderbilt was one of the wealthiest women who took part in the performance. She proudly played her part in the scheme, symbolizing a nascent hope for women’s suffrage for all of her society to

109 “Two Babies Balk in Midst of Brilliant Suffrage Tableaux; Cry Out for Their Mammams During ‘Motherhood’ Group,” Herald, New York City, January 18, 1911.
see. When wealthy women were involved, a reporter noted “the papers were compelled to follow... Suffrage became popular, practically overnight.”\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{110}Cooney, \textit{Winning the Vote: The Triumph of the American Woman Suffrage Movement}, 117.
Chapter 3: A Silent and Immobile Modern Woman Speaks

Introduction

Numerous news reports and photographs exist from Katherine Mackay’s evening of tableaux vivant at the Maxine Elliott Theatre. The tableau of *Florence Nightingale on the Battle-Field* by Mrs. Clarence Mackay (Figure 4), *Discovery of Radium or Mme. Curie in her Laboratory* by Mrs. Archibald Mackay (Figure 5) and *Catherine of Russia* by Mrs. George Gould (Figure 6) are of interest because they reveal symbolic gestures that subversively promote suffrage and the modern woman. An unconventional gaze, a bold facial expression or a tilt in the body were all subtly calculated into the tableaux vivant to express messages of a new equality. By examining these photographs with consideration to the characters they represent, including their costume, facial expression, body language and most importantly, their gaze, I will explore how this evening of tableaux vivant exemplified a major shift in the upper classes attitude towards the suffrage movement in New York City.

Choosing Tableaux Vivant as Medium

Tableaux vivant were traditionally non-threatening, silent poses for entertainment. Mary Chapman’s research focused on the relationship between the audience and the performers discussed in tableau vivant manuals. She studied descriptions of the scenes in the manuals and looked at how women were instructed to perform in relation to the audience. She discovered that the female gaze was never direct and often cast down, and explained how the inherent aesthetic of tableaux vivant
rendered females to be “silent and immobile.” In many ways, Mackay’s performance broke from this tradition. How did the performers reflect the modern woman beyond “silent and immobile?” To begin, it’s important to note that in Mackay’s evening of tableaux vivant the audience and performers were part of high society. This fact allowed for the performers to take liberations in their tableaux vivant which may not have been acceptable to the middle class or in a public sphere. As well, they were not following the guidelines of a manual, but instead Mackay’s, a woman’s, direction. Mrs. Mackay’s authorial voice was frequently documented by the press:

Costumes, settings and every detail will be faithful copies of the originals. Famous scenic artists have reproduced the background, and every separate picture will have the wonderful glaze, the lights and shadows of an oil painting. The gorgeous hangings, the furnishings, the armor of historic value, the silver and gold of altar services that graced private chapel and ancient abbey and the wonderful gowns of the women themselves will make it the most costly and marvelous pageant of woman’s courage and glory as monarch, soldier, political leader, that has ever been shown.

During most of the performance, Mackay introduced each tableau vivant and set a tone for how the image should be read. A fiction writer herself, Mackay controlled the majority of the performance, from suggesting tableaux, inviting guest models, and

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112 “N.Y. Society Suffragist Women Seen in Tableaux,” American Boston, Massachusetts, January 18, 1911. Numerous reporters commented on the cost to produce the event. Mrs. Mackay’s tableau, for instance, was rumored to have cost $1,000.
113 “Living Pictures to Prove Women Deserve Ballot,” World, New York City, November 27, 1910. Mrs. Mackay is frequently cited as the director of the performance. The models must have been in conversation with her about the details of their scene: “While each of the models of these living pictures is permitted to select the phase of the original she best likes, it is believed there will be a few departures from the great paintings.”
114 “Mrs. Mackay Plans Suffrage Tableaux,” World, New York City, January 8, 1911.
sequencing the scenes. She was the director and narrator, until she herself took a role in a tableau vivant, and so became part of the performance.

**Florence Nightingale**

In Mackay’s tableau, *Florence Nightingale on the Battle-Field*, she performed as the heroic nurse aiding a war victim. Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) served as a nurse during the Crimean War and became known as the founder of modern nursing. In Mackay’s tableau, a soldier lies down on the ground while Mackay props his body upon a stone. She cradles his head and reaches for his heart. This is one of the few tableaux vivant that features an adult man and it is no surprise that his gaze does not meet the audiences. Instead, we see Mrs. Mackay looking down upon her patient while the man is unconscious of her assistance. Painted in the background, soldiers lie deceased in the distance. In the foreground we see woven baskets that are falling apart. In the caption of the photograph in *Harper’s Bazaar*, the author suggests similarities between Mackay and Nightingale’s cause, “Nothing in the history of nations has emphasized more strongly what can be accomplished by steadfast devotion, courage, and the ability of the part of a single individual in the face of ignorant, not to say brutal, antagonism and prejudice.”

While this endorsement is supposed to be for Nightingale’s efforts in revolutionizing modern nursing, it also speaks to Mackay’s suffrage work with the Equal Franchise Society. She, too, was a single individual fighting the face of ignorance.

**Tableaux Vivant and Film**

When comparing a tableau vivant to a film, it is important to note that there are many similarities and differences. They’re both performances with actors and audiences,

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they both tell stories and require a support crew. Their most obvious difference is the inclusion of movement in a film. However this performance of tableaux vivant truly deviates from film in another important way, it has a female director, Mrs. Mackay. Most classical film directors were men who controlled the patriarchal perspective of their film from the outside. Kaja Silverman, a feminist film critic, argued that the director as author “may in certain situations constitute one of the speakers of his or her films, and that there may at times be pressing political reasons for maximizing rather than minimizing what might be said to derive from this authorial voice.” While a director is supposed to remain behind the scenes, Silverman suggested that he or she may actually be represented in one of the characters of the film. For instance the director Alfred Hitchcock appeared in cameos, as the voiceover, or, critics may argue, could be seen as sympathizing with a particular character. In the tableau vivant performance, Mackay physically inserted herself into the narrative as Florence Nightingale. She maximized her authorial voice by demonstrating that she too was just as “silent and immobile” as the other women who took the stage. By choosing the role of a nurse, she symbolically conveyed the necessity for assistance.

The spectator may have no longer identified Mackay as a leader, but instead as a symbol of virtue like all of the other women up on stage. Women cannot fight this war, but men can. Mackay was suggesting that the men in the audience should aid the cause because it’s their duty. Their role as male members of high society ought to be that of the hero. They’re the privileged few that know the references that are being made throughout

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117 Ibid., 202-204.
the performance. Hypatia, Sarah Siddons, Mary Wollstonecraft and Joan of Arc, all female role models who would only be known by people of culture. The men also know that they’re not looking at any old Joan of Arc: they’re looking at their Joan of Arc, by Jules Bastien-Lepage found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Mackay may have used Joan of Arc, a universally known heroine, but she made her personal by connecting her to the audience. If suffrage was inevitable as they said, then it was their responsibility to take control over the movement.

Art historian Laura Mulvey in her seminal essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” outlined the patriarchal roles of men and women in classical cinema using Freudian and Lacanian theories of psychoanalysis. She suggested that women traditionally played the part of the passive, erotic symbol, while the male controlled the gaze of the spectator (his audience) and was the hero who steers the story. She wrote, “the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man’s role as the active one of advancing the story, making things happen. The man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle.”118 The two characters in Florence Nightingale on the Battle-Field, the female nurse and male soldier, play out these gender roles. His gaze was in the same direction as the audience, looking back towards the painted backdrop of soldiers bodies lying on the ground. Both the soldier and the audience were looking at “silent and immobile” bodies on the backdrop. The message was clear, the audience was

meant to sympathize with him, the male hero, to further the story. The nurse, Mackay, was merely the object of temptation between the soldier (the male hero) and the audience.

**Florence Nightingale as Suffragist**

Another way that Mackay’s tableau vivant stood out from the others was in its presentation. Her tableau took up the entire stage and was shown without the traditional frame around it. Some of the smaller tableaux were presented on wheeled platform with a frame around the scene and the larger tableaux were presented with heavy frames mounted to the ground. Mackay’s picture was the largest with curtains pulled back, as if to invite the audience in. Gauze was placed between the stage and the audience to promote the illusion of reality between the real objects on the stage and the painted backdrop. The lighting was dimmed and Mackay’s lantern, a lone bright light, on the foreground stood out in the center of the composition. The barrier between the audience and the performers was removed with the loss of the frame and dramatic lighting. The effect was that the audience was made to feel as if they were actually there on the battlefield with her, invested in the struggle as the hero who needed to swoop in and save her; save suffrage.

Ironically, Mackay was perfectly capable speaking to a crowd on her suffrage convictions. Prior to the Maxine Elliott performance she confidently stated her goals to an audience made on January 15, 1909 on the topic of suffrage. She began by modestly reminding her audience that she wasn’t used to addressing crowds, but that the subject

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120 “Great Women to Live Again,” *Tribune*, New York City, December 18, 1910, and “N.Y. Society Suffragist Women Seen in Tableaux,” *American Boston*, Massachusetts, January 18, 1911. The news reports described the frames around the tableaux better than some of the pictures could convey.  
121 Ibid.
was too close to her heart to deny the opportunity. During her speech she suggested that she wanted to do all that she could to convince women to join her. Women were singled out as her main target in the speech and she made no strides in suggesting that she was reaching out to men as well. She described the United States as a young country that had slowly transformed its government from a brute force to a government of people who honored ideas and morals. She said, “The establishment of equal suffrage in America will be conclusive evidence that the human race is no longer to be governed by the bludgeon, the club, and brute force, but by the highest element in humanity, the spirit of justice, fairness, generosity and unselfishness.”

Mackay was clearly not afraid to use her voice and evoke strong metaphors in her address to suffrage supporters. However, when she spoke to a mixed audience at the Maxine Elliott Theatre, she addressed men subtly through visuals. Mackay let the pictures speak, instead of her. Perfectly capable of giving a speech, Mackay’s pictures were politically and socially charged to subversively suggest that the audience, the men, must take action in the suffrage movement.

The sequencing of the pictures, the models, characters and all the details were a work of visual art. Today this would be categorized as performance art, but in the early twentieth century a performance of tableaux vivant still fell into the category of a feminine amusement. The characters and scenarios that Mackay chose for the performance were bolder than her words. A reporter asked, “In what garden does the Equal Franchise Society grow this marvelous suffrage output? In the social directory, my

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122 Katherine Alexander Duer Mackay, An address on suffrage ... January 15, 1909
123 “Two Babies Balk in Midst of Brilliant Suffrage Tableaux; Cry Out for Their Mammmas During ‘Motherhood’ Group,” Herald, New York City, January 18, 1911. “It is a very great pleasure to welcome so many at our tableaux this afternoon and I am sure a veteran suffragist could not resist making a speech, but I am going to let the pictures speak for themselves.”
friends, and with a well working, rich blue pencil. Why, suffrage will become so exclusive soon that there will be waiting lists in the prosperous clubs with no guest privileges. Suffrage will be a plain, smart fact, and there you are.”

Mackay was a tactful director who knew just how to capture her audience’s interest. By making the performance exclusive, it became fashionable. Voyeurs found out about the performance through the media. Stories were printed about the rehearsals for weeks, discussing the cast, the women’s costumes and the roles they would play. Picture cards of the tableaux were even created to advertise the event after it was placed. This technique is similar to how modern performance artists work, in documenting their performance through photography and video so the work of art will have an afterlife.

Mackay was tactful in the categories of tableaux she created. She included a series of historical women, some of whom were lauded for their bravery and others who went unrecognized for their talents. There were actresses, biblical figures, mathematicians and writers. She created a diverse cast of figures, which kept the performance neutral. There weren’t too many martyrs or mothers. There was also a category of historical and contemporary scenes that were created to contrast each other. They were intended to reveal the modern conditions women faced out of their homes, and in factories. Lastly, there was a group of allegorical tableaux that were presented to convey ideas of acceptable modern female attributes, such as *The Conference of Degrees* and the most stereotypical feminine virtue, *The State of Liberty*.

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125 “Paid Much For Little,” *Tribune*, New York City, November 14, 1911. “The tableau given by the Equal Franchise Society were also a great success because of the advertisable qualities, evidently.” said Mrs. Mackay with some bitterness, “picture cards appeal to the public.”
Marie Curie as Role Model

While not one of the most aesthetically provocative pictures of the evening the, *Discovery of Radium or Mme. Curie in her Laboratory* by Helen Gansevoort Mackay (1876-1961) stands out from the rest. Curie was not a historical figure, but a living and working heroine. It’s curious that Mackay chose another writer to stand in for Marie Curie. Perhaps it was as an endorsement to living women who were succeeding as professionals. Helen Mackay was a fiction writer and lived in both France and the United States. She was part of high society. Her husband came from an old New York family and was involved in real estate. Helen Mackay’s closeness to France, where Curie worked, and her professional work ethic as a writer, made her a likely choice to wear Curie’s costume.

The tableau was rather simple compared to some of the more elaborate designs from the evening. Helen Mackay stands next to her modest laboratory holding up a scientific vial and peers at it. Her gaze is intensely on her work. It’s not offstage, or romantically lifted up to the heavens in a spiritual pursuit, instead her gaze is on something physical and scientifically important. The composition of this scene is unlike those of film where the traditional male gaze, as described by Mulvey, steers the action of the story. Here, Mme. Curie, a woman, is in the leading role, and her gaze is steering the action of the story, the *Discovery of Radium*. This tableau vivant breaks from stereotypical gender traditions just as Curie did in her career as a scientist.

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126 Listed as Mrs. Archibald K. Mackay in most news reports about the performance.
Marie Curie (1867-1934) was the first woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize in physics in 1903. After her husband’s death in 1906, she continued their work on her own, and went on to achieve another Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1911. She was a role model for women around the world as a pioneer scientist. She was also a mother. The scene was depicted after a photograph, which gave it a different mood than the other tableaux that were recreated after paintings or sculptures.\textsuperscript{128} The tableau is simple and straightforward in how it tells Curie’s story. The laboratory furniture and the walls constructed for the background create modern grids. The emphasis is not on the fact that Curie is a mother, or that she is a beautiful and wealthy woman. Instead, the emphasis is on her concentration and intellect.

It’s interesting that Curie was added to the list of historic women because she was alive and far from “silent and immobile.” She was treated as a character in a series of historic female heroines, so as a character, and not herself, something about her couldn’t be real. Inez Milholland, one of the models from the evening of tableaux and a famous suffragist, made a comment about the real Mme. Curie. She had taken a trip to France to learn more about the suffrage movement there and found that it was surprisingly weak. She said to a reporter, “Why, there were even women on the Stock Exchange in France, and, of course, well-informed people know that the leading scientific man of France is a woman, Mme. Curie.”\textsuperscript{129} Curie was a character in the list of tableaux vivant because she wasn’t a scientific woman, she was a woman wearing the mask of a scientific man. In

\textsuperscript{128}“Tableaux of Noted Women of History,” \textit{Harper’s Weekly}, New York City, January 28 1911. It is noted that the tableau of Marie Curie was created after a photograph, but does not illustrate or specify which photograph.

reality, Curie was reserved and preferred to stay out of the political and social spotlight, even though she was an advocate for suffrage.\textsuperscript{130} It was a brave choice by Mackay to include Curie in the roster and to promote a living woman who embodied the ideals she was propagating. However, one can only wonder, if Curie had been more outspoken on suffrage issues or if she was not a mother, would she have made the cut?

**Catherine of Russia**

The tableau of *Catherine of Russia* by Mrs. George Gould is strikingly different than the simplicity of Curie’s picture. Catherine the Great (1729-1776) was the longest-ruling female leader to reign over Russia during its Golden Age. The tableau was described by reporters as the most brilliant of the smaller pictures because of its wealth.\textsuperscript{131} Gould (also known by her stage name Edith Kingdon), was a successful actress who decided to stand during her performance, rather than sit on her throne.\textsuperscript{132} Everything about her costume was royal, from her dress and robe, to her jewelry, the scepter she held in one hand and the tall crown she wore on her head. She stood boldly with her arms outstretched. One critic wrote, “The outstretched hand, in gesture of command, proclaims the ruler.”\textsuperscript{133} Her facial expression is one of the more interesting parts of the photograph because she appears to be wrapped up in a vision, as if she’s blinded by the audience and caught in a thought. Her gaze is not directly at the audience, but right over their heads. Her authoritative power is echoed by the single Greek column painted in the background.

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\textsuperscript{130} “Mm. Curie is Dead; Martyr to Science,” *The New York Times*, July 5, 1934.
\textsuperscript{131} “Great Women to Live Again,” *Tribune*, New York City, December 18, 1910.
\textsuperscript{132} “For Mrs. Mackay’s Tableaux, Historical Accuracy Will Mark the Performance,” *Sun*, New York City, December 8, 1910.
\textsuperscript{133} “Greatest Women to Live Again in Aid of Suffrage,” *World*, New York City, January 16, 1910.
Many columnists writing about the performance commented on the expense of the spectacle, and the cost of Gould’s costume was by far the most outrageous. They even joked that of all the women to be Catherine of Russia, it had to be Gould because she could afford the jewels.\(^{134}\) Her dress was made by Redfern, a couture house in Paris, and was reported to have cost $2,000. The Redfern designers even sent an artist to the Hermitage in Russia to sketch the robes and jeweled ornaments Catherine wore in paintings.\(^{135}\) The dress included a petticoat of golden cloth and golden embroidery, an overdress of blue satin and a velvet rose colored cloak lined and embroidered with ermine.\(^{136}\) It was designed to be authentic to commemorate the power and achievements of Catherine the Great.

**Gould as Catherine the Great**

Gould was a serious actress who cared deeply for the dramatic discipline. In a *New York Times* article she gave advice to young actresses: “She must tell herself ‘I will suffer. I will work. I will not allow discouragement to gnaw at my heartstrings.’” She was truly the best person to play Catherine the Great because as an actress, she could convey a mixture of emotions for the complicated figure. She knew she was being looked at and conveyed an image of a woman who embraced her duty as a ruler with all of its complications. She conveyed herself as a femme fatale, a seductive and mysterious woman with a secret agenda.

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\(^{134}\) “All Alive and Blooming,” *Town Topics*, New York City, December 1, 1910.

\(^{135}\) “Women Rehearse ‘Votes’ Tableaux,” *Herald*, New York City, January 16, 1911. The specific paintings that were sketched were not reported on.

\(^{136}\) “Many Prominent Society Women to Appear in Tableaux to Aid Suffrage Cause,” *Press*, New York City, January 17, 1911.
Gould’s tableau could have easily suggested that women who want the vote, want to govern, but the abundance of wealth in the image reminds the audience that Catherine wasn’t just any woman, she was nobility. Similar to the audience that afternoon at the Maxine Elliott Theater, which was made up of wealthy and socially distinguished families, Gould’s wealth was the focus of this picture. “Beauty and millions!” the tabloids exclaimed over the performance. Catherine is often credited for seeking advice from the philosopher Voltaire, who was bitterly misunderstood in his time. His idea that great power brings great responsibility, is easily presumed in this tableau. The audience members of the event could connect with Catherine’s responsibilities. If their perspective as the audience is of the male gaze, it’s then their turn to become the hero in this story and save the day. However, it wasn’t Catherine’s story they needed to be concerned with, because she was a historical figure after all, but the story of suffrage. As elite members of society they had a responsibility to guide politics, and if suffrage was inevitable as the performance proclaimed, they had to control the direction it was going in.

Responses

Not all of the reports of the performance were positive as some speculated on why it was necessary to host an evening of tableaux when the women who hosted it could

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have more easily donated money to the cause. One reporter asked, “what has all of this to do with the suffrage?” and went on to criticize the artistry of the performance, “When they talk about realism they mean, of course, that there are a lot of foolish little details reproduced with photographic accuracy, and they are quite unaware that such imitation is death to art.” The author’s critique is suggestive of the time and the perceptions of photography in regard to fine art during the early 20th century. Nonetheless, the impact of the performance was very real. Women’s artistic work, such as quilting, ceramics or embroidery are today still under scrutiny and sometimes considered a mere hobby. Tableaux vivant fit in with these genres because women predominantly created its popularity and production.

**Conclusion**

Florence Nightingale, Mme. Curie in her Laboratory and Catherine of Russia are all heroines, but Mackay used their images beyond their fame. She used the medium of tableaux vivant to symbolically convey the complexity of the modern woman’s role in society. From sequencing, presentation, and the inclusion of her own authorial voice, Mackay invited her audience to connect with the female heroines by making their struggles relevant to the present day and the suffrage campaign. The Catherine of Russia tableau reminded the audience that they were responsible leaders as members of the upper class. The modern woman, as exemplified by Mackay’s role as performer and

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139 “Woman’s Realm: In the Cause of Suffrage,” *Times-Union*, Albany, New York, February 10, 1911. “We are willing enough to believe that it was “in the cause of suffrage, but in what way can the suffrage benefit from it? If the cause needs money, why do not some of these ladies give it, as they could quite easily without depriving themselves of even the smallest of their luxuries? And think of the labor involved! We have been hearing about these precious tableaux for months!”

140 Ibid.
director or Mm. Curie in the field of science, may be “silent and immobile,” but she was also a leader. Moreover, these tableaux demonstrated that women identified with suffrage and were ready for it.
Chapter 4: Tableaux Vivant: When Art Becomes Educational

Introduction

During the early twentieth century, many suffragists believed that the best way to support the cause was through education. Lectures and leaflets were common educational tools, but what about an evening of tableaux vivant? How was the performance at the Maxine Elliott Theatre educational in its nature? By tracing the reasons why tableaux vivant were performed in the United States, I propose that the pastime went beyond a parlor entertainment and was also used as a political educational tool. Under the guidance of Katherine Mackay, the performance at the Maxine Elliott Theatre reflects the efforts of a number of groups and individuals who were more interested in suffrage education than a forceful political demonstration.

Could a woman ride a bicycle, and if so, what should she be wearing while she rides? Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, women used tableaux vivant to try on varying roles in their search to discover an acceptable public identity. They were involved in creating tableaux vivant far more often than men, especially after the widespread publication of how-to manuals. Take for example a tableau description entitled “Women’s Rights,” from the 1889 manual Tableaux Charades and Pantomime:

A domestic scene, in which the duties of the sexes are reversed. One man should be at the wash-tub; another paring potatoes and rocking the cradle with his foot. A woman should be reading the newspaper

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141 Cooney, Winning the Vote: The Triumph of the American Woman Suffrage Movement, 117.
leisurely; another with pen over her ear, should be poring over some accounts.  

Before a role reversal like this was even dreamed about, women tried on stereotypical male roles for “fun,” through a tableau vivant. The harmless game was a kinesthetic learning experience that had an educational value. It was a way to try on the role to see if it could fit, far before it was socially acceptable to wear the role out in public.

**Tableaux Vivant and Pageantry**

During the nineteenth century in America, tableaux vivant were frequently created as a community-building tool. As towns and cities were growing with a great amount of diversity, tableaux vivant found their way into pageants. They were used within pageants (which may have also included theater, dancing, etc.) to form a local identity through a display of collective storytelling. The themes were varied and sometimes they were simple and locally connected. An example might be a scene of Puritans on their way to a meeting or a Colonial Wedding. Sometimes grand scenes from American history were reenacted, like the signing of the Declaration of Independence or George Washington’s crossing of the Delaware. One of the beauties of pageants was the number of people involved. A large number of volunteers were enlisted behind the scenes to sew costumes, build stages sets, produce and act. The audience was invited to view the spectacle free of charge, which would then draw another large crowd.

Advocates of pageants suggested that each new city that opened a public library should

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also hire a pageant master to run annual festivities.\textsuperscript{145} Stories were important to tell and learn from, even visually and physically through tableaux vivant. A pageant master, Ralph Davol, advocated for the educational value of pageants. He wrote:

As education aims to call forth and harmonize all the powers of the individual, so the pageant must aim to enlist and permeate the whole life of the community. The pageant is not designed to store the head with loads of “learned lumber”, but to stimulate and enrich the mind through agreeable sensations; not to shatter cherished traditions but to maintain the best ideals of the Past and carry them on to the future purified and ennobled.\textsuperscript{146}

Davol was a progressive thinker in valuing a form of education that was artistic and created through a physical experience. Pageantry also became a tradition at female colleges, such as Bryn Mawr and Barnard. It was described as "a hundred-headed teacher, converting the pasture into a schoolroom."\textsuperscript{147} During these performances, women could focus on stories from the past, and even advocate for current social or political needs, such as child labor laws.

Tableaux vivant also found its way into local parades. Predominantly women performed atop floats, silent and frozen, as they were wheeled through the streets. They frequently represented allegorical tableaux such as “Columbia,” “The Goddess Liberty,” or “the Thirteen Original States.”\textsuperscript{148} Men marched in the parade with other male groups, such as local businessmen, civic officials, clergy and veterans. While groups of men banged on drums and tooted horns, the women were responsible for quietly expressing a symbolic American virtue. Here, women’s involvement in a public affair was acceptable

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{148} Glassberg, \textit{American Historical Pageantry}, 18.
because they were demonstrating their patriotism. Often dressed in Greek or Roman garbs, their image recalled America’s idealistic past. It’s no wonder tableaux vivant became part of suffrage protests. Suffrage was about expanding women’s roles in public and tableaux vivant was a practice women had already experienced on the streets.

During the early twentieth century, tableaux vivant were frequently used as a form of advocacy or protest. The largest display was during the 1913 suffrage parade on Washington DC. The famous suffragist Inez Milholland represented the future, leading the parade of 8,000 marchers on horseback. The parade ended on the treasury steps with a performance of tableaux vivant thematically contrived to celebrate women’s past achievements.¹⁴⁹ Men occasionally used tableaux vivant during demonstrations, too.

W.E.B. DuBois created a pageant to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the emancipation proclamation: The Star of Ethiopia. It premiered in NYC in 1913, and then went on to DC in 1915 and then Philadelphia in 1916.¹⁵⁰ Another famous pageant occurred at the Madison Square Garden in 1913 during the Patterson strike for workers rights. For six months, silk mill workers from Patterson, New Jersey went on strike to demand better working conditions and an eight hour work day. A number of Greenwich Village artists helped by organizing a pageant where scenes from the strike were set to the stage. Like the Maxine Elliott Theatre performance for suffrage, it was both a fundraiser and a visual form of protest meant to educate the audience.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Glassberg, American Historical Pageantry, 132.
From intimate settings, to public displays, the creation of tableaux vivant was an educational tool that quietly impacted America’s identity socially and politically. In James H. Head’s popular tableaux vivant manual, he described the entertainment as an art form. “Art should not be confined entirely to the studio of the artist. Her presence should embellish every home; her spirit should animate every mind.”\(^{152}\) While Head advocated for trained artists (expert painters or illustrators) to direct tableaux vivant, amateurs were welcomed to partake in the production. People were recruited to model, draw the curtain, sew the costumes and announce the pictures. The production of manuals made the once high culture pastime, a socialist activity.

During the early twentieth century, America was filled with progressive ideas about art and education. John Dewey wrote in \textit{Art as Experience}, “The doing or making is artistic when the perceived result is of such a nature that \textit{its} qualities as \textit{perceived} have controlled the question of production.”\(^{153}\) Dewey referred to dance, painting, singing, and all of the artistic mediums in his idea that the audience experiences as work of art through its qualities of production that are perceivable to them in the same sequence that the artist created those qualities. There is a process of reading a work of art that manifests a beginning, middle and end. Because tableaux vivant are determined with a set amount of time, the medium insists that the viewer has an experience with the work of art. A program of tableaux can also be read as a whole experience, with vignettes of pictures and stories that connect through the viewer’s perception. Mackay, as the director of the


program, used this function of multiple images in an educational format by emphasizing sequential visual didactics.

**Tableaux Vivant Depicting Everyday Scenes**

The most didactic set of images was presented by the Women’s Political Union (WPU), led by Harriet Stanton Blatch. They performed two tableaux vivant depicting everyday scenes that were meant to contrast each other.\(^{154}\) The first, *Inside the Home: Eighteenth Century* (Figure 7), and the second, *Outside the Factory: Twentieth Century* (Figure 8). *Inside the Home: Eighteenth Century* featured a simple arrangement with two women at work spinning and weaving.\(^{155}\) Their somber gaze was fixed on their handiwork. *Outside the Factory: Twentieth Century* was meant to represent a scene outside of the potteries in Trenton, New Jersey.\(^{156}\) A group of depressed women stood in a line, outside in the cold, looking for factory work. Their gaze was down and low, all except for one brave woman, who broke from conventions and dramatically confronted the audience. The pictures reminded the audience that a woman’s working role had changed with the advent of technology. Instead of working in the home, working-class women were seeking work in factories. Their situation landed them on the streets, in the public sector. In between the lines, the pictures show that the need for suffrage was determined by a changing society, not by a righteous desire for equality. The women

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\(^{156}\) Ibid., Mrs. A.F. Townsend arranged the modern day tableau: “It represented a scene outside the potteries at Trenton, New Jersey. A group of women were pressing forward toward the gates of the works, only to be met by the announcement that “no more hands were needed.” The wonderful background of this tableau was painted, as a gift to the Union, by Mr. Everett Shinn.”
working in the factories not only needed to be protected by laws, but they also needed to be prepared to join men and accept their public role in society.

The Women’s Political Union Tableaux

Harriet Stanton Blatch, the leader of the WPU, was the force behind these politically charged pictures. Blatch was the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a pioneer in the suffrage movement. Blatch spent close to twenty years living in Great Britain as an adult raising her family. Upon her return to the United States she discovered that the suffrage movement had lost its momentum. “The only method suggested for furthering the cause was the slow process of education. We were told to organize, organize, organize, to the end of educating, educating, educating public opinion.”157 Blatch was inspired by the militant strategies she witnessed in England but understood that the factions of women within the suffrage movement in the United States each had something to contribute. While she created a political-minded and dramatic campaign, she also supported Mackay’s approach which was softer and equally important. Blatch recruited working-class women to the cause while Mackay focused on high society.158

Blatch’s tableaux of women at work, past and present, illustrated just how topical the suffrage cause was, especially in urban areas. Many suffragists described unfavorable social conditions to convert the antis, the anti-suffragists, to illustrate the necessity for suffrage. Reverend Anna Howard Shaw, a leader of the suffrage movement, gave a speech in this regard to the Equal Franchise Society on January 13th, 1910 at the Garden

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Theatre. Shaw presented the idea that the suffrage movement had moved beyond righteous demands, the necessity for equality between men and women, and now focused the positive impact it would have on society if women could vote. She advocated for equal wages and equal conditions men received from the government. She identified the *antis* as the people who most needed to be converted because they were holding back the progress of women.

If it is true that women are still children in their intellectual development, if it is true that they are unable to recognize great problems, if it is true that they would demand frivolous legislation, as we were told in that anti-suffrage meeting, to try to compel men to be good, whether men wanted to be good or not - if they could do all that sort of thing, then let us ask what is the old form of silent education of women doing for them, or what has it done for them during the last six thousand and more years?²

Her demand for the ballot was not for direct political reasons, but for the development of the women who were against suffrage and had the most to benefit from an education.

**Suffrage through Education**

Max Eastman, a founder of the Men’s Suffrage League, also attacked the anti-suffragists in a speech he made to the Equal Franchise Society in 1909. He outlined a number of opinions that he considered outdated, including the idea that it was a woman’s prerogative to be beautiful instead of thoughtful, that a woman’s place was in the home, and that a woman’s focus should be on raising her children, not meddling in public affairs. He noted that the group of women that had the most to benefit from lawmakers were in the factories, but felt that there was a much more important reason for suffrage, and that without it, “it denies to a great many people the possibility of a reasonable

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¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 10.
adjustment to their circumstances.” Without education, women would remain stagnant and at the mercy of the world evolving around them. Only suffrage, a stake in civil duties, would allow women to progress.

The Equal Franchise Society also promoted lectures on suffrage in universities where social and economic issues were addressed. John Dewey gave the first of a series of lectures at Columbia University on July 27, 1909. He spoke to roughly 200 female student teachers about the benefits of suffrage and singled out the particular prejudice that women faced in the field of education. He pointed out that janitors and engineers had more influence on the school board, merely because they were male and could vote. Female teachers could demand equal compensation and expect more dignity in their field through suffrage. The students were enthusiastic about the cause and signed a petition to request more lectures on suffrage. Mackay also got college students involved in the Maxine Elliott theater performance by inviting The College Equal Suffrage League (CESL) to perform.

**The College Equal Suffrage League Tableaux**

The CESL staged two tableaux that were meant to be sequentially didactic and contrast each other. The first, *The Court of Love* (Figure 17) was a scene from Eleanor of Provence’s court. The *New York Times* described it as a “gay scene of an old time.” Conversely, the *The Conferring of Degrees* (Figure 18) was meant to show the progress of modern women in a scholarly setting. *Harper’s* described the first image as “Woman’s kingdom as man made it for her,” and the latter as “the kingdom of woman as she is

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making it for herself to-day: direct, responsible expression, in every walk of life where she can earn her living and use her brain with honor and with dignity, as is becoming to her sex."\textsuperscript{164} Although on the surface the two images were meant to demonstrate progress, the emphasis was actually on how little had changed through time. Both tableaux depicted a scene of privileged white women. The stage and the background were practically the same, both featuring an altar and a kingdom painted in the distance. The number of performers were relatively the same and each scene included both male and female models, which insinuated the idea of an enduring equality between the sexes. During the time of \textit{The Court of Love}, a woman’s power was indirect and she held “sway”\textsuperscript{165} over political decisions. In \textit{Conferring of Degrees} their power was direct and equal to a man’s, made evident by their entrance into the collegiate system. The tableaux suggested that women have \textit{always} been present in politics, so there was nothing to fear. Suffrage wouldn’t change the political system, because women always had a role there. The older system was reliant on nobility, but the modern system was democratic and dignified.

During the performance of \textit{The Court of Love} Mackay read a poem written by G. Constant Lounsbery, one of the college students in the CESL. (Appendix II) The poem consistently returned to a theme of truth behind costumes, which was appropriate for an evening of tableaux vivant filled with subversive messages. “Custom and costumes change and pass, But not the heart of the lad or lass. To-day within the lists, revised, we women tilt all undisguised.” Lounsbery claimed the modern woman needn’t wear a mask

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
to have her say. Ironically, most of the women were wearing masks and costumes that
evening at the Maxine Elliott theater. However the costumes of collegiate caps and
gowns worn in *The Conferring of Degrees* were different. In 1913, women were
increasingly accepted in colleges and graduating with men, they were undisguised.\(^{166}\)

The *Conferring of Degrees* was connected to the audience because it was a scene
of affluent white women receiving their diplomas, the same class as the audience. The
CESL was founded in 1900 by Maud Wood Park and Inez Haynes. The young college
graduates began the CESL foremost because they felt privileged to have received an
education and felt obligated to pay their debt to society.\(^ {167}\) The CESL recruited both
college students and recent alumni. Similar to the Equal Franchise Society, the CESL
focused on raising suffrage awareness through educational means. They utilized their
schools publications and contributed essays, short stories, poems and articles dedicated to
suffrage. They also hosted speakers at their universities, held public debates, tea parties,
fundraisers and performed plays. Their target group was also the anti-suffragists. If they
could convert them, then they were truly meeting their goals.\(^ {168}\) *The Conferring of
Degrees* served as a reminder of the public duty the audience had to the cause because of
their own privileges.

The CESL drew a comparison between *The Court of Love* and *The Conferring of
Degrees* to discredit the idea that women were never actively involved in politics. The
CESL made it a priority of theirs to refute arguments against suffrage to prove their case.

\(^{166}\) Gordon, “The Gibson Girl Goes to College: Popular Culture and Women’s Higher
\(^{167}\) Meis Knupfer and Woyshner, *The Educational Work of Women’s Organizations,
1890-1960*, 85.
\(^{168}\) Ibid., 86
Their strategy was to teach women how to articulate the benefits of suffrage so they could join the public debate.\textsuperscript{169} Sadly, as Blatch had complained, education was a slow method of progress for the suffrage campaign. The media rarely reported on the context of CESL’s and the WPU’s contrasting tableaux vivant, surely because fashionable women were not involved in their creation. One reporter did however make the connection that the CESL’s two scenes were “intended to convey the fact that education was the foundation upon which all freedom was based, and education alone means the fruition of a woman’s possibilities and ambitions in any chosen walk of life.”\textsuperscript{170} This sentiment truly connected with the goals of the Equal Franchise Society and the performance as a whole.

**The Tableau of Mary Wollstonecraft**

Each of the tableaux had a role in the performance, and while not all of them were arranged to be outright didactic, they were educational in other ways. The tableau of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) as performed by Mrs. Bourke Cockran after John Opie’s portrait (Figure 19 and 20) is one example. In 1792 Wollstonecraft authored *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, one of the earliest written documents of feminist philosophy. During this tableau, Mackay said, “She dared to write her vindication of the rights of women in spite of the violent and unanimous criticism of all sorts of people. Here is the great phrase. ‘If children would be educated to understand the true spirit of patriotism their mother must be a patriot’.”\textsuperscript{171} By offering a nod to motherhood as educator, Mackay reminded her audience of the abstract patriotic virtues women had long

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{170} “Society Poses in Historic Roles,” *Vogue*, New York City, February 15, 1911.
\textsuperscript{171} “Suffragists in Tableaux,” *Sun*, New York City, January 18, 1911.
been responsible for upholding. She introduced her audience to this heroic, and lesser known figure through a simple, patriotic quote.

**Conclusion**

The combination of historic and present-day women in the performance truly set the audience up to recognize suffrage as a cause that had been growing throughout time. Looking through tableaux vivant manuals, emphasis on past and present, and rarely upon the future is present. The medium encouraged the viewer to ponder what will happen next, or perhaps even to consider her or his role in the scenario. James H. Head, author of the manual *Home Pastimes: Or Tableaux Vivants*, wrote in the preface “The delineation of the natural and poetical, its realization upon canvas, or upon paper, or in the living picture, tends to improve the mind, assimilates the real with the ideal, conforms taste to the noblest standard, overflows the heart with pure and holy thoughts, and adorns the exterior form with graces surpassing those of the Muses.” When a tableau vivant “assimilates the real with the ideal,” it provokes a contrast for the viewers. The “real” is readily available to be interpreted, but the “ideal” can only be created by the viewers experience and the mystery of what will happen next. Is it a picture they will remember? Will the picture change their perspective? As a living experience, the medium sets viewers up for an engagement, unlike a painting or sculpture. The experience could last even longer with a token photograph of the tableaux vivant that the audience could take home after the performance.

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John Dewey wrote, “Every experience, including the most generous and idealistic, contains an element of seeking, of pressing forward.” More than anything, Mackay’s performance of historic women promoted political change and progress. The time and energy that went into the performance sought an effect. The Equal Franchise Society published their intentions to hold a performance of tableaux vivant in June, 1910, eight months prior to the performance. They also held a dress rehearsal two days prior to the performance attended by the media. The performance could be examined the same way Dewey outlined an art experience. The lasting effect, or the educational value of the performance, was heightened by the many factors that contributed to the construction of the performance. The audience was invited to learn about talented and working women, from history and the present day, by experiencing the art. Each picture contained messages that connected with the next. As a medium, tableaux vivant has a history of effecting social and political changes in American culture. At the Maxine Elliott Theatre, we see an example of its powerful effect on the suffrage campaign.

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175 “Suffragettes to Pose,” *Tribune*, New York City, January 16, 1911.
Conclusion

The American suffragists, who were notoriously divided on political strategies, were the first group to employ tableaux vivant for political change in the United States. The genre suited the needs of the Equal Franchise Society in 1911 for reasons beyond fundraising. Tableaux vivant allowed many different opinions to be suggested in an artistic manner that was acceptable relative to their gender and class, and it provided the suffragists with an educational tool necessary for political reform. Tableaux vivant held the power to convey messages through subtle choices of sequencing, costume, gesture, political and historical references. The women on January 17, 1911 played on the symbolic powers of the silent medium to reveal the identity of the modern woman and the social reforms they stood for changing.

The Equal Franchise Society had refused to march in a New York City suffrage parade in 1910 because they thought it was un-feminine, however they were happy to stage an evening of tableaux vivant to propagate their cause.176 They had the advantage of wealth, the support of their husbands, and high society to put on a performance like no other. They used tableaux vivant as an educational tool for political change, making the cause fashionable. After the performance there were a number of reports on the effects of the tableaux for suffrage. The following statement was printed in the Morning Telegraph:

“The spirit of ridicule in the suffrage is over. The suffrage propaganda has been read and digested: the politicians can read the signs in the gorgeous output of society’s best, and the vote in New York soon will be won, if indications are now read aright.”177 The

177 “Mrs. Mackay’s Tableaux Will Speed the Day of Votes for Women,” Morning Telegraph, New York City, January 20, 1911.
evening of tableaux changed the public’s attitude of the suffrage movement. The images of women presented in the performance may have seemed “silent and immobile,” but they were really colored with subversive ideas about a New Woman who was prepared to join the political arena through suffrage. Three years after the performance, New York passed a law allowing women to vote, and then three years after that the federal government followed.\textsuperscript{178}

Katherine Mackay, the president of the Equal Franchise Society, is frequently credited for her contribution to the suffrage movement, but never as an artist. The tableaux vivant genre was suited to be a successful feminine artistic practice in the early twentieth century because women had been practicing for decades. Female artists are renowned for their feminist performance practice during the 1960s in America. Mackay made an early, and little known contribution to the genre. As a writer, she knew just how to direct the evening of tableaux vivant to subversively promote suffrage as a visual performance. In an illustration by Paul Stahr entitled “Another Declaration of Independence,” (Figure 21) we see Mackay standing among other prominent suffragists.\textsuperscript{179} She proudly stands in Thomas Jefferson’s role, holding the declaration. Between Harriot Stanton Blatch and Carrie Chapman Catt, Mackay, with her artistic integrity, leadership skills and social connections, held the key to suffrage.


\textsuperscript{179} Cooney, \textit{Winning the Vote: The Triumph of the American Woman Suffrage Movement}, 117. Other suffragists include Harriot Stanton Blatch to Mackay’s left and Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, sitting at the desk.
A performance of tableaux vivant could easily be compared to the work of early performance art because of its relationship to gender, societal commentary and mixture of disciplines. The two genres are not typically linked together because tableaux vivant is more closely related to theater, and performance art to the visual arts. While definitions of performance art are still changing today, the preeminent scholar RoseLee Goldberg once defined it as “a medium that challenges and violates borders between disciplines and genders, between private and public, and between everyday life and art, and that follows no rules.” Tableaux vivant was also a medium that violated borders. It was a still picture, set to the stage, where movement was typically meant to occur. As well, tableaux vivant challenged gender roles and acceptable public behavior. Most importantly, just like performance art, the distinction between everyday life and art was purposefully obscured in a tableau vivant.

While historians and theater scholars categorize tableaux vivant as a form of avant-garde theater, the Maxine Elliot performance is better defined within the visual arts, namely because artists and non-theater professionals were directing and motivating the performance. Mackay was a published writer, not a theater professional, who chose to work with an established painter, Everett Shinn, on the production. This evening of tableaux vivant is also more closely linked to the visual arts in the scenes that were being performed.

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181 Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routeledge Taylor and Francis Group, 1996), 105. Another example of a work of performance art often considered avant-garde theater were the Happenings of the 1970s. Carlson notes other artists, such as the futurists, dadaists and surrealists who also created performances frequently classified under theatrical avant-garde. He stated, “It is important to remember, however, that these movements were really movements in other arts, organized by non-theatre artists, that expanded in performance art.”
depicted. As many as possible were faithfully copied after photographs, sculptures or paintings. It becomes interesting then to compare this evening of tableaux vivant to the performance art women were involved in during the 1960s.

Artists like Yoko Ono (1933- ), Yvonne Rainer (1934- ) and Carolee Schneemann (1939- ) were just beginning to explore feminist issues in their work. In a 1972 interview, Rainer said, “I imitated women in the subway. I had screaming fits. I was sexy. I was always being someone else on the stage... What I was doing was taking things from life and transposing them in a dramatic form.” Rainer’s words about her art are strikingly similar to the work that was being done to create tableaux vivants. One woman could become many different women on the stage during a performance. This was a lesson that Rainer could have learned from tableaux vivant manuals. She also mentioned taking her inspiration from life and transposing it to an artistic form, which is similar to the history and life women tried to breath into tableaux vivant performances. The difference in time shows how acceptable it was for women to speak out in public. Mackay had to speak subversively through pictures while Rainer could scream.

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182 Ibid., 159.
Appendices

I. The Tableaux

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model:</th>
<th>Scene:</th>
<th>Arranged by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson</td>
<td>Motherhood</td>
<td>Equal Franchise Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Edward Thomas</td>
<td>Hypatia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Charles Tiffany</td>
<td>Aspasia and Pericles</td>
<td>Woman Suffrage Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Inez Milholland</td>
<td>Cornelia</td>
<td>Woman Suffrage Party</td>
</tr>
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<td>St. Cecelia</td>
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<td>Miss Charlotte Teller</td>
<td>St. Elizabeth</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Joan of Arc</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Catherine of Russia</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Mrs. Bourke Cockran</td>
<td>Mary Wolstonecraft</td>
<td>Equal Franchise Society</td>
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<td>Mrs. Sarah Siddons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Pearce Bailey</td>
<td>Molly Pitcher</td>
<td>Woman's Suffrage Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Archibald Mackay</td>
<td>Discovery of Radium or Mme. Curie in her Laboratory</td>
<td>Equal Franchise Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Clarence Mackay WPU members</td>
<td>Florence Nightingale</td>
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<td>WPU members</td>
<td>Inside the Home: Eighteenth Century</td>
<td>Women's Political Union</td>
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<td>WPU members</td>
<td>Outside the Factory: Twentieth Century</td>
<td>Women's Political Union College Equal Suffrage</td>
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<td>CESL members</td>
<td>The Court of Love</td>
<td>League</td>
</tr>
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<td>CESL members</td>
<td>The Conference of Degrees</td>
<td>College Equal Suffrage League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. James Stillman</td>
<td>The Spirit of Liberty</td>
<td>Equal Franchise Society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Sonnet by G. Constant Lounsbery

Welcome, ye dames of modern day,
To wile a winged hour away,
When demoiselle and damoiseau
Flirted, and loved, a fleur-de-peau.

Delicious, daring, delicate,
With half a laugh at baffled Fate,
Here Coeur de Lion rhymed his praise,
Here Blondel sang his sweet lays,

Unrivalled, till a student’s song
Outwitted them and worked them wrong,
When Bérenger, the boy, became
Unmasked – a golden love-locked dame!
For when the Court of Love held sway,
A woman ever had her way.

Love, lord of ritornelle and rhyme,
Holds in his dimpled fist all time.
Custom and costumes change and pass,
But not the heart of lad or lass.

To-day within the lists, revised,
We women tilt all undisguised,
We crown the conqueror, beguile
The obstinate with sigh or smile.

We point the pathways toward the light,
World’s peace, world’s freedom, life’s delight.
Good friend, bear well this truth in mind:
In every century you’ll find,
Whatever Court of men holds sway,
A woman’s wish shall win the day.

\[184\]

Figures

Figure 1

Figure 2
Figure 3
Figure 4
Figure 5

Figure 6
Figure 7

Figure 8
Figure 9
Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12
Figure 13
Figure 14

![Cornelia](image)

Figure 15
Giovanni Boldini, *Virginia Fair Vanderbilt*, 1905, Oil on canvas, 80 1/4 x 45 1/4 in., de Young Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco.
Figure 16

Figure 17
Figure 18

Figure 19
John Opie, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 1797, Oil on canvas, 30 1/4 x 25 1/4 in, National Gallery, London
Figure 20

Figure 21
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