

‘A material influence imperceptibly exercised on the taste and judgement of the public’: The Burlington Fine Arts Club and the history of collecting

Review of:

Stacey J. Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions, and the Shaping of Art History in London. The Burlington Fine Arts Club*, London, Routledge, 2017; 222pp; 10 col. plates, 24 b. & w. illus., £120.00 hdbk; ISBN 978-1-138-23262-4

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Founded in 1866 by the South Kensington curator John Charles Robinson, the Burlington Fine Arts Club played a critical role in the landscape of collecting and display over its near century long history. Occupying a unique space between museums, commercial art galleries, learned societies and traditional gentlemen’s clubs, it functioned as a point of intersection between public and private collecting spheres and gave rise to a number of seminal exhibitions that continue to be cited in auction catalogues today. Despite this, it has remained on the periphery of studies of the history of collecting. Stacey Pierson’s history of the Club, which is part of Routledge’s series *Histories of Material Culture and Collecting, 1700-1950*, seeks to address this gap in historiography, situating the Club and the networks that emanated from its membership within recent histories of collecting, museology, exhibitions and the art market. Making use of the Club’s extensive archive, held at the National Art Library, Pierson’s aim is not only to illuminate the role the Club played in galvanising networks of collectors, dealers, and museum professionals, but also to underline its hitherto overlooked contribution to the formation of the art historical canon and present the Club as a locus where ‘new categories of art were defined and old ones expanded.’¹

While this volume is the first comprehensive history of the Club, recent work in the field of the history of collecting has shed light on particular areas of its activities. The origins of the Club were initially explored by Ann Eatwell in her 1994 article on the history of its predecessor, the Fine Arts Club, which underlined the connection between the Club and the South Kensington Museum that manifested in both the Club’s membership and its approach to exhibition and display.² The significance of the Club has been touched upon by scholars in recent histories of museums, biographies of key individuals, studies of the art market, as well as in histories of private societies and gentlemen’s clubs, yet without a study that drew together the Club’s impact across these

¹ Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London: The Burlington Fine Arts Club*, *Histories of Material Culture and Collecting, 1700-1950*, New York: Routledge, 2017, 161.

² Ann Eatwell, ‘The Collector’s or Fine Arts Club 1857 - 1874. The First Society for Collectors of the Decorative Arts’, *The Journal of the Decorative Arts Society 1850 - the Present*, no. 18 (1994): 25–30.

different areas.³ Pierson explains the absence of a critical history of the Club and its legacy as reflective of a historiographical bias in the field towards the fine arts, arguing that the history of paintings and prints 'is normally assumed to have been the benchmark for art collecting in the time period covered by this book', a suggestion supported by the fact not only that important publications such as Dianne Sachko Macleod's study of middle-class collectors concentrate on the picture market, but also that key tools in the digital humanities such as the Getty art sales database are limited to fine art sales.⁴ While Pierson's study reveals that paintings, prints and drawings did in fact constitute the most popular and prominent themes for Club exhibitions, given its close links with South Kensington the Club's initial focus was upon decorative art objects, and the book does much to illuminate crossovers in collecting interests between collectors.

The main focus of the volume is explored through four chapters, which each examine the Club's approach to a particular category of object. These topics (Paintings and Prints in Europe and Britain; Ceramics East and West; Persia, Egypt and India; Indigenous and Primitive Art) are tackled through case studies of key exhibitions, which demonstrate the chronological development of appreciation of that theme, the evolution of connoisseurship through the critical response to objects, as well as biographical sketches of significant lenders. Thus the selected exhibitions collectively demonstrate both the Club's approach to display and its impact on the scholarly field, with an Appendix providing a comprehensive, chronological list of the Special Exhibitions. These sections are bookended by an introduction presenting the Club's origins, development, and membership constitution, and a brief epilogue which aims to address the Club's legacy of art historical practice and historiography.

The Introduction extends Eatwell's work in highlighting the symbiotic relationship between the Club and the South Kensington Museum. With Robinson as founder and Henry Cole as a founding member, the Club was designed to support the Museum's objectives, operating both as a tool to cultivate collectors and a means of setting standards of public taste and connoisseurship.⁵ Pierson draws out important parallels between the Club and the benchmark 1862 Special Exhibition at South Kensington, with members not only recruited as lenders but also as participants on the

³ See, for example, David M. Wilson, *The British Museum: A History*, London: British Museum Press, 2002; Anthony Burton, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London: V&A Publications, 1999; Marjorie L. Caygill and John Cherry, eds., *A.W. Franks: Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, London: British Museum Press, 1997; Jonathan Conlin, 'Collecting and Connoisseurship in England, 1840–1900: The Case of J. C. Robinson', *British Models of Art Collecting and the American Response*, Burlington, 2014; Pamela M. Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, eds., *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London 1850-1939*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.

⁴ Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London*, xii; Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; 'Provenance Index Databases (Getty Research Institute)', <http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/search.html>.

⁵ See also Anthony Burton and Elizabeth Bonython, *The Great Exhibitor: The Life and Work of Henry Cole*, London: V & A Publications, 2003; Burton, *Vision & Accident*.

exhibition committee.⁶ Although the very nature of an exclusive, members-only institution that was limited to the wealthy seemed to contradict the egalitarian and liberal ethos that underlay South Kensington, as Ann Eatwell emphasised in a later article, the institution was dependent on its networks private collectors for loans and donations.⁷ Throughout the text Pierson elucidates the implications of these networks for the Museum in her discussions of Club members such as George Salting and Constantine Ionides who would go on to leave major bequests.

Where the Club diverged from its predecessor, however, was in the establishment of designated, permanent premises. The Fine Arts Club required members to hold meetings and *conversazione* in their own homes, limiting opportunities for the display of objects and prioritizing social interaction over the discussion and examination of objects. The Club's new Burlington location offered not only a suitable location for temporary exhibitions, but also situated it within the epicentre of the art world, surrounded by auction houses, dealers, exhibition societies and the Royal Academy, as recent work by Mark Westgarth and Heimlich and Fletcher has demonstrated.⁸ Pierson emphasises the importance of the physical premises in her assertion that this became a 'London base' for members, yet its absence of accommodation and limited dining space suggest that it operated in tandem with comparable gentlemen's clubs and societies such as the Athenaeum, and that further consideration of these parallels in membership further would prove revealing.

The discussion of the Club's membership and constitution offers an illuminating insight into collecting networks in Britain. Key members, such as George Salting, whom Pierson identifies as 'a representative member of the Club, in his wide ranging taste, wealth and public philanthropy', are discussed in brief biographies, as well as throughout the main body of the text in terms of their specific loans and collecting taste.⁹ An Appendix, which provides an important reference tool for all scholars engaged in the history of collecting, offers a biographical index of both members and active non-members, illuminating the contributions made by those prohibited from formal membership.

The extent to which the Club adopted a museological approach to its activities emerges throughout the chapters discussing the Club's annual 'Special' exhibitions. In a similar manner to the South Kensington Museum, the Club appointed a committee, consulted external advisors, and assembled loans drawn from a cross section of the collecting community within modern museum display cases. Prominent curators such as Augustus Wollaston Franks, John Charles Robinson and Charles Hercules Read contributed regularly as organisers and advisors, while the publication of often lavishly

⁶ Victoria and Albert Museum, *Catalogue of the special exhibition of works of art of the mediæval, renaissance, and more recent periods, on loan at the South Kensington Museum, June 1862*. Edited by J. C. Robinson, London, 1862.

⁷ Ann Eatwell, 'Borrowing from Collectors: The Role of the Loan in the Formation of the Victoria and Albert Museum and Its Collection (1852 -1932)', *The Journal of the Decorative Arts Society 1850 - the Present*, no. 24 (1 January 2000), 20–29.

⁸ Mark Wilfred Westgarth, 'The Emergence of the Antique and Curiosity Dealer 1815 - c.1850 : The Commodification of Historical Objects', Ph.D., University of Southampton, 2006; Pamela M. Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London 1850-1939*.

⁹ Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London*, 37.

illustrated exhibition catalogues also emphasised the curatorial, academic approach towards its private loan exhibitions. The case studies thus serve to emphasise the extent to which the exhibitions functioned as key points of intersection between the public and private collecting worlds, emphasising the Club's role within the development of professional curatorship.¹⁰

Chapter 1, which covers exhibitions of European Paintings, Prints and Drawings, explores the role the Club played within the development of the art historical canon through its application of contemporary connoisseurship to its displays. The 1877 exhibition of Rembrandt etchings marked a departure for the Club in its approach to the hang, which drew on contemporary French connoisseurship to present exhibits chronologically as opposed to by subject matter. Earlier subject-based displays of Rembrandt's etchings had, according to the organiser Seymour Haden, 'confused the senses, perverted the judgement, and rendered crucial examination and comparison impossible', a quotation which demonstrates the Club's ambitions; rather than a display of treasures of private cabinets, the objective was to advance connoisseurship through comparison, to shed light on an artist's oeuvre and enable more secure attributions.¹¹ Pierson rightly stresses the significance of this private initiative; the National Gallery's attempts at a systematic hang by school and chronology were frequently thwarted by limitations of physical space as well as stipulations that particular bequests could not be separated.¹² In addition to its innovative arrangement, the exhibition was also significant in its promotion of etching as a form of fine art, deserving of the same attention as paintings (perhaps unsurprising given Haden's own profession as an engraver). This advancement of contemporary connoisseurial approaches through display is supported in Pierson's discussion of the exhibition of paintings from Ferrara-Bologna held in 1894, which was not only novel in its definition of and focus on this particular school of Italian painting, but also in its use of photographs to illustrate key paintings that could not be included, in a model of connoisseurship promoted by Bernard Berenson (indeed, Berenson deemed it to be 'one of the finest retrospective exhibitions that has ever been seen in London').¹³ In addition to reinforcing current scholarship, the Club's exhibitions also presented novel approaches to artists or schools. The Milanese exhibition of 1898, for example, sought to redefine the category based on 'affinities' rather than geographical or historical bases, and introduced sub-schools based on style. Pierson convincingly argues that through these approaches the Club engaged in a form of 'active connoisseurship', viewing their exhibitions as a contribution to an ongoing, developing field of scholarship.

The following three chapters concentrate on the Club's role in drawing attention to neglected areas of non-Western art. Using examples of exhibitions of ceramic art (porcelain, oriental ceramics, Greek ceramics) Pierson successfully emphasises the Club's

¹⁰ For more on the rise of modern curatorship, see Elizabeth Heath, 'The Emergence of the Museum Professional in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Journal of Art Historiography* 18, June 2018, <https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/18-jun-18/>.

¹¹ Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London*, 28.

¹² Charles Eastlake, 'Picture-Hanging at the National Gallery', *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, Mar. 1877-Dec. 1900, no. 130 (1887): 817–826; Susanna Avery-Quash and Julie Sheldon, *Art for the Nation: The Eastlakes and the Victorian Art World*, London: National Gallery, 2011, 169.

¹³ Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London*, 41.

assertion of ceramics as a form of fine, rather than functional art, by concentrating on ornamentation and aesthetic properties over those of technique or process. Pierson's point that the Club was 'unusual' in this respect requires qualification; although earlier exhibitions had presented ceramics within broader displays of decorative art, within these displays particular cases highlighted the artistic qualities of certain classes of ware; at the 1862 South Kensington exhibition, for example, the display of Saint Porchaire ware was designed to showcase its rarity, value and art historical significance as emphasised by John Charles Robinson in the accompanying catalogue, with *The Times* singling out this display as 'the most extraordinary case in the whole collection' for its artistic importance.¹⁴ Similarly, Robinson had placed maiolica on an equal footing to cinquecento painting in his catalogue of the exhibition of the Soulages Collection at the Museum of Ornamental Art in 1856.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the case studies clearly demonstrate the extent to which the Club drove taste and specialisation amongst collectors for particular categories of wares. The most frequent subject for ceramic exhibitions were Oriental objects, with members displaying a particular interest in Chinese wares. The 1895 exhibition of 'blue and white' Chinese porcelain, for example, was not only the first exhibition of Oriental ceramics to have a published catalogue, but was also the first to be focussed on a single category. Given that there were no similar commercial exhibitions of ceramics at the time, the exhibition theme must have been driven by the particular collecting tastes and interests of Club members, as opposed to being reflective of a wider trend in museums or the market. Indeed, in her discussion of the 1910 exhibition of early Chinese pottery and porcelain Pierson notes that the exhibition inspired dealers to turn their attention towards Han and Song wares, rather than the exhibition theme and content being inspired by prevailing market trends. By analysing the objects specifically singled out for reference in the catalogue, the author elucidates prevailing taste for specific styles and designs, such as the 'hawthorn' pattern popularised by Rossetti in the 1895 exhibition, or the taste for monochromes in the 1896 exhibition.

Chapter Three continues to emphasise the Club's promotion of non-western works of art through a series of case studies of its Persian, Egyptian and Indian art exhibitions. Despite the enormous popularity of Islamic Art collecting in Britain, the 1885 exhibition was the first temporary exhibition specifically dedicated to Persian art. As Moya Carey has recently outlined, in its emphasis on Kashan lustre ware the exhibition reflected the approach shown by the South Kensington Museum's permanent display of Persian works of art, which had been installed in 1876, again reflecting the Club's role in transferring a museological approach to display to private collections.¹⁶ The catalogue, written by South Kensington advisor Henry Wallis, reinforced recent developments in connoisseurship, for example in its distinction between Persian, Damascan and Rhodian wares and asserting a more academic, analytical approach to objects. Similarly, the

¹⁴ Victoria and Albert Museum, *Catalogue of the special exhibition of works of art of the mediæval, renaissance, and more recent periods, on loan at the South Kensington Museum, June 1862*. Edited by J. C. Robinson., 88–109; *The Times*, 5 June 1862, 6.

¹⁵ John Charles Robinson, *Catalogue of the Soulages Collection; being a descriptive inventory of a collection of works of decorative art, formerly in the possession of Jules Soulages*. (London, 1856), 1–2.

¹⁶ Moya Carey, *Persian Art: Collecting the Arts of Iran for the V & A*, London: V&A Publishing, 2017, 114.

discussion of exhibitions of Egyptian art emphasises the Club's promotion of the aesthetic and artistic importance of areas neglected by art historians, on objects that, according to Henry Wallis 'lie without the range of the department of art hitherto claiming the attention of the connoisseur', having previously been the sphere of interest of archaeologists.¹⁷ Indeed, by setting the objects within the luxurious interiors of a private club, rather than alongside maps, photographs and evidence of excavation, and adopting a Waagenesque model of art history in the catalogue, the Club enabled the objects to be reappraised as works of art rather than as archaeological specimens. The fact that this initiative was the result of a private members' club, as opposed to a public institution, underscores the role played by private collectors in driving taste and appreciation. Likewise, despite a proliferation of displays of Indian art in Britain throughout the nineteenth century, Pierson describes the 1931 Art of India exhibition as the first dedicated survey of Indian Art in London, another logistically ambitious project with loans drawn from the Indian government as well as from the Club's British membership, in an approach that parallels that of public institutions in enabling objects to be viewed by British audiences for the first time.

The final group of case studies continues to assert the Club's innovative approach in the variety of nations and cultures represented in its Special exhibitions of indigenous and 'primitive' works of art, to support Pierson's statement that the 'global turn took place well before the mid twentieth century'.¹⁸ Again, the Club pioneered exhibitions in particular areas; organizing, for example, the first major display in Britain devoted to indigenous American works art in 1920, with objects loaned by both the British Museum and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge, while the final case study, the 1935 exhibition of 'The Art of Primitive Peoples' presented objects from Alaska, New Zealand, Polynesia, Africa and Japan. The display continued the Club's aim of asserting the aesthetic and artistic value of objects; as the Burlington Magazine commented, that 'the BFAC is to be congratulated on giving its aesthetic patronage to this exhibition of objects which, twenty years ago, would have been regarded as of merely ethnological interest.'¹⁹ Despite this, with a narrative founded on the 'three age system' concept, based on metalwork specimens, and the conflation of African, North American and Polynesian objects, the approach was clearly already outmoded in academic circles where developments in anthropology and ethnography called for a less comparative approach to material culture.

The discussion serves to indicate how, with the formalisation of scholarly disciplines within the academy, universities began to occupy a domain previously occupied by curators, collectors and connoisseurs, rendering the Club effectively redundant by the mid twentieth century, as Pierson goes on to discuss in the brief Epilogue. Created for a wealthy, aristocratic leisure class, the Club was outmoded within the atmosphere of post-war austerity. As the Burlington Magazine reflected upon the

¹⁷ Burlington Fine Arts Club, *Exhibition of the Art of Ancient Egypt: 1895*, London: Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1895, v.

¹⁸ Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London*, xi.

¹⁹ Stacey Pierson, 146.

Club's closure in 1950 'it could never have adapted itself to modern conditions without radically altering its character.'²⁰

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Several key themes emerge from Pierson's study which merit additional attention. Firstly, the overlap between the Club and public institutions. Throughout the text Pierson highlights points of intersection between public and private collections, such as the work done by prominent private collectors, and Club members, such as Richard Fisher, W. H. Willshire and Charles Fortnum, to catalogue public collections, or the active involvement of museum professionals such as John Charles Robinson, Augustus Wollaston Franks and Charles Eastlake in Club exhibition organisation and loans. In the case of John Charles Robinson, Pierson argues that the Club enabled him 'to function both within the institutional art world, through his museum, and outside it, with the Club facilitating and making possible such movement across boundaries,' and that this public-private intersection 'would not have been considered improper at that time'.²¹ Of course, there were numerous institutions and initiatives preceding the foundation of the Club that already enabled and facilitated this interaction; especially the learned societies. Given that so many members were also active in other collecting networks, including the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Archaeological Institution, the Royal Academy and the Royal Society, it would be useful to probe further the differences between the membership demographics and reinforce the role the Club played in forging networks by identifying those connections unique to the Club. This would also enable further interrogation of the relationship between collecting and the establishment of scholarly fields of Archaeology, Anthropology and Art History. Pierson writes that 'traditionally these are considered to be separate developments', and that '(t)he perception is that it is only Art History that was driven by art collecting', seeing the Club as a decisive driving force in this relationship.²² Yet arguably in their contributions to the Archaeological Institute collectors such as Franks and Albert Way were furthering knowledge in the field from the 1840s; indeed Franks's early work on Limoges enamels as an art form, for example, went on to provide the basis for the Club's 1897 exhibition on European Enamels.²³

An important strand of the volume lies in Pierson's exploration of the networks inspired or strengthened by the Club and its activities. Rather than confining her investigations to members and their interests, the study also encompasses those without formal membership but who lent objects, assisted with exhibition organisation, and contributed to exhibition catalogues. The result demonstrates the extent to which the Club acted as a nexus for collectors, antiquarians and scholars at all levels, both in Britain and abroad. Her discussion of the 1895 display of Egyptian art is particularly fruitful in

²⁰ 'The Burlington Fine Arts Club', *The Burlington Magazine* 94, no. 589 (1952), 97–99; Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London*, 160.

²¹ Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London*, 10.

²² Stacey Pierson, 19.

²³ A. W. Franks, 'On Certain Ancient Enamels', *Archaeological Journal* 8, no. 1 (1 January 1851), 51–64; For more on collectors associated with the Society of Antiquaries and the development of Archaeology, see Christopher Evans, 'The Birth of Modern Archaeology', in *Making History: Antiquaries in Britain, 1707–2007*, London: Royal Academy, 2007, 185–86.

this regard; the exhibition was co-organized with the Egypt Exploration Fund, with the three most prominent names in the field of Egyptian Art at the time, Sir Flinders Petrie, Professor Gaston Maspero and Professor Dr Adolf Erman, acting on the committee. Loans were drawn not only from the South Kensington and Liverpool Museums, but also from the Royal Museum Berlin, demonstrating the international scope of its networks and influence. Within Britain, the Club acted as an epicentre of the collecting community, drawing aristocrats, plutocrats and Randlords together with doctors, lawyers and academics. While the Club had comparatively few aristocratic members, the discussion of the Netherlandish Art exhibition in 1892 reveals that it drew heavily upon aristocratic non-members, with loans contributed by the Duke of Devonshire, Earl Spencer and the Earl of Pembroke. Pierson argues that 'the Club...changed the identity of their objects by presenting their works as similar to other collected art, in a new space, thus removing the objects from the sphere of luxurious household furnishings and the country house'.²⁴ Although the precedent for the reappraisal of aristocratic collections outside of the country house had been demonstrated previously in the extensive loans from the aristocracy to the Manchester exhibition in 1857, as well as to the South Kensington Loan Exhibition in 1862 and subsequent temporary displays, the Club offered a fixed site where Special exhibitions reinforced these connections annually.

Importantly, this approach also enables Pierson to shed light on neglected areas of collecting history, especially in her attempt to reconstruct the involvement of women within the Club. Although women were denied membership, Pierson's research demonstrates that they were active as lenders and advisors to key exhibitions, arguing that the evidence 'challenges the common characterisation of women as partners of collectors, or secondary collectors, rather than as primary collectors, particularly as participants in exhibitions of collections.'²⁵ Recent work has illuminated the contributions made by women to the collecting sphere, in spite of limited surviving evidence in sale records and exhibition documentation.²⁶ Pierson makes an important contribution to this field in emphasising the broad range of female collectors' interests, the status of their loans, and their academic authority. For example, her point that Mrs. Henry Oppenheimer lent objects to Club exhibitions independently of her husband repositions her subsequent bequest to the National Gallery as an independent act rather than the implementation of the wishes of her husband. In the absence of surviving biographical information, Pierson lists instances of female lenders, which, while limited, serves to emphasise both the presence of women in the field and to demonstrate the wide range of their collecting habits. Key individuals, such as Lady Eastlake, or the artist and archaeologist Adela Breton, are given more extensive treatment. Together, these various approaches build up a nuanced picture of active female agency within the collecting landscape.

Dealers were similarly barred from membership and yet the relationship between the Club's activities and the art market is a recurring theme. While dealers played an important role in the Club's activities as both lenders and advisors on key exhibitions, the

²⁴ Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London*, 35.

²⁵ Stacey Pierson, 30.

²⁶ See, for example, Kate Hill, *Women and Museums 1850–1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge*, Manchester University Press, 2016.

Club itself also acted as a site for the trading of objects, with exhibitions enabling collectors to display potential sales and inspect future acquisitions. Famously, less than three months after their display at the Club in 1897, a group of hardstone vessels belonging to the Duke of Devonshire had made their way into Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild's vitrines at Waddesdon Manor, and the Club undoubtedly facilitated the movement of objects between collections.²⁷ While Pierson asserts that 'it is very likely...that after such a provenance and exhibition history has been established there would have been an impact on sales of objects', or 'it is possible that its display by the Club may have positively affected its value', further consideration of the relationship between the Club and the market could be traced through probing the prices and circumstances of exhibits' subsequent acquisition.²⁸ In Pierson's view loans to Club exhibitions became 'significant provenance sources for later collectors, such as Morgan.'²⁹ Exhibitions certainly added a stamp of authenticity and status at a time of anxiety surrounding the prevalence of fakes and forgeries (hence the frequent references to Club exhibitions in auction catalogues), and it would be interesting to consider this motivation further, especially with collectors such as Morgan who had a tendency to purchase objects 'en bloc'.³⁰ In spite of the ban on those involved in trade, therefore, the Club was a key instrument in the fluctuations of the art market, and further scrutiny of this relationship would prove fruitful.³¹

A fascinating aspect revealed by Pierson's analysis of loans is the extent of overlap between particular collecting interests, especially evident in loans of ceramic objects. Key figures in the fine art world are here reframed as decorative art lenders, including Roger Fry, who features both in his contributions to fine art catalogues but also in his loans of ceramics, and the dealer William Agnew, considered primarily a dealer of paintings, but who similarly displayed an interest in ceramics in his loans to Club exhibitions. This analysis sheds further light on the role played by contemporary artists in the decorative art market. Although the Club did not display work by living artists, the ceramic loans contributed by artist-collectors including William Holman Hunt, William Morris, Edward Burne Jones and Frederic Leighton demonstrate their roles as taste-makers beyond the inclusion of particular designs and styles of objects included in their work. This indicates that decorative art collecting was far more widespread and popular than perceived, highlighting the need to redress recent historiographical bias prioritizing fine art collecting. Indeed, Pierson notes that objects were included even in dedicated fine art exhibitions, such as the pieces of furniture shown in the Florentine Painting before 1500 display in 1919. The fact that these objects were omitted from exhibition minutes suggests that contributions were reflective of members' personal initiative and taste rather than the

²⁷ The objects are now in the Waddesdon Bequest at the British Museum (WB.68-72).

²⁸ Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London*, 13, 43.

²⁹ Stacey Pierson, 31.

³⁰ Morgan himself contributed a large number of loans to Club exhibitions, including the 1908 exhibition of Illuminated Manuscripts and the 1912 exhibition of Italian Renaissance sculpture. Flaminia Gennari-Santori, "'I Was to Have All the Finest': Renaissance Bronzes from J. Pierpont Morgan to Henry C. Frick', *Journal of the History of Collections* 22, no. 2 (1 November 2010), 312.

³¹ Interestingly, an exception seems to have been made for John Webb, the dealer, advisor and agent to the South Kensington and British Museums, one of the founding members of the Club, although absent from this study.

result of a formal call, demonstrating the extensive interest in decorative art amongst fine art collectors. Interestingly, Pierson notes that the earliest exhibition of Italian works of art in the club was a display of the work of Marcantonio Raimondi held in 1868, raising the question of whether this was also driven by the Club's interest in decorative art; the exhibition presented work by subject matter rather than chronologically, an approach which would certainly have aided members to trace the compositions replicated on maiolica or Limoges enamel wares in their collection.

Given how much the field of the history of collecting is dominated by institutional histories or individual biographies, Pierson's work serves an important purpose in asserting the collective role that private collectors played in driving taste, demonstrating throughout the volume that the subjects chosen for Club exhibitions reflected not only prevailing taste amongst members, but more specifically a desire to further understanding of certain styles and types of object, or to highlight neglected areas of study. Just as museum curators used the Club's networks to forge relationships with potential donors, so too collectors leveraged the Club's scholarly connections to develop knowledge about their own works of art. Pierson concludes this valuable study by asserting the Club's unique place within the collecting world: in taking a museological approach and applying it to the private sphere, the Club redefined art historical categories through its exhibitions. Its legacy lies primarily in its contributions to the art historical canon through its lavish exhibition catalogues, but also, as she clearly demonstrates throughout the text, in the wealth of objects that today are housed in public collections as the result of these private-public collecting networks.

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