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HOW TO DRESS THE BODY ARTFULLY: THE "ART IN DRESS" COLUMN IN *THE ART AMATEUR* MAGAZINE, 1881–1883

Irene Gammel and Ingrid Mida

ABSTRACT

From 1881 to 1883, the New York art periodical The Art Amateur *featured a remarkable column entitled "Art in Dress," wherein writer Mary Gay Humphreys sought the opinions of American artists associated with the National Academy of Design on how women should dress. In analyzing this column's critical approach to modern fashion with its advice on how to dress artfully in an American way, we reflect on the discursive construction of the natural female body in print culture and highlight the relationship between gender, dress, American arts institutions, and popular aesthetic culture of the late nineteenth century.*

KEYWORDS: The Art Amateur *(magazine), gender and the domestic arts, artistic dress, advice columns, National Academy of Design*

It is natural that there should be a radical difference
between artists and women on the subject of dress. The artist
seeks in it beauty of line and color in relation to the wearer.
Women seek in it novelty and diversion.
The artist regards it as a part of the woman.
—Mary Gay Humphreys, December 1881[1]

The Art Amateur, from which the epigraph is drawn, was an art periodical published in New York from 1879 to 1903, the brainchild of New York editor

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and publisher Montague Marks (1847–1924).[2] From its inaugural issue in June 1879, the periodical invited a readership of women to master the arts and crafts of the household, including painting on textiles, lace making, needlework, tapestry, ceramics, china painting, etching, wood carving, and house and mantlepiece decoration, to name a few.[3] Proclaiming itself "A Monthly Journal Devoted to the Cultivation of Art in the Household," its inaugural cover (Fig. 1) located the female art amateur's subject in the home, a subjectivity constructed through the decorative wallpaper and painter's palette. The journal, which was generous in size (measuring 36 × 42 cm), could be purchased for 25 cents for a single copy and three dollars for a yearly subscription.[4] Boasting approximately 10,000 readers in its prime, *The Art Amateur* was targeted at middle-class readers, and all those interested in the creation of cultivated homes, while also fostering connections with leading art schools, academies, and art-focused high schools.

Our focus in this article is the periodical's "Art in Dress" column running from December 1881 until June 1883, which provides artistic opinions that celebrate the "natural" female body, critiques the extravagances of high fashion, and comments upon dresses, hats, shoes, colors, bows, and other accessories.[5] The column was written by Ohio-born women's rights activist and author Mary Gay Humphreys (1843–1915) with secondary articles by Mississippi-born Constance Cary Harrison (1843–1920).[6] The launch of the column was announced on page 2 of the December 1881 issue, the publisher's editorial asserting: "If any reason be necessary for the introduction of our new department of 'Art in Dress,' it may be found in

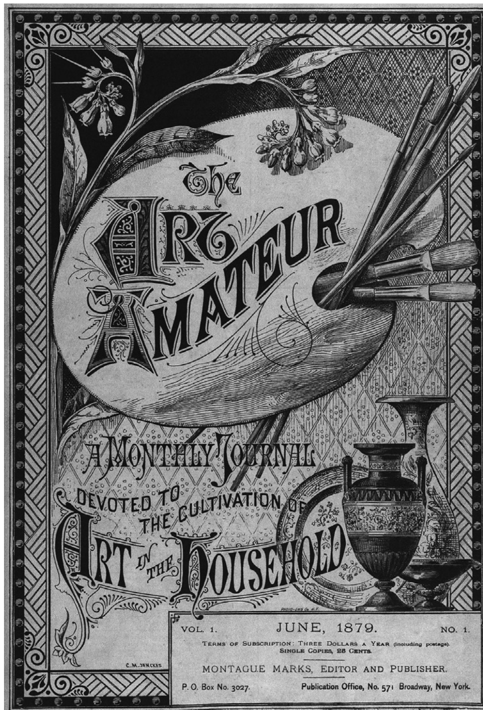

FIG. 1 Cover of *The Art Amateur* 1, no. 1 (June 1879)

the fact that no publication in this country has hitherto attempted to criticize seriously the passing fashions, or give suggestions from an artistic standpoint for their improvement."[7] The new column proposed to use the principles of art to emancipate women from the tyranny of "uneducated dressmakers and milliners." In enacting such a reform, the column would assert the theoretical knowledge and expertise of "the gentlemen who decorate the walls at our art exhibitions" in conjunction with the practical advice offered by the "ready pen of a clever woman of society" who is able to "pierce a passing fashion bubble."[8] This unsigned editorial, presumably written by editor and publisher Montague Marks, situated the female body at a nexus of tension, positioning the magazine in opposition to the emerging fashion consumerism, which was then beginning to fuel rival fashion and homemaking periodicals with countless advertisements. By teaching art appreciation and encouraging art making in the private home, the editorial also communicated aspirational values for women readers, inspiring them to become better dressers by cultivating artistic sensibilities. The column's seriality was part and parcel of a desire to mobilize a network of female readers who would help sustain the periodical through their subscription, while also being situated at the intersection of the era's key social discourses through print media.

By excavating "The Art of Dress" with textual and visual examples, we consider the context of both American and British periodical culture of the era, including the connections between reform dress, with its many stylistic and ideological associations, and aesthetic dress as a relevant discourse in America in the late nineteenth century. The analysis sheds light on the era's persistent focus on femininity and domesticity in print culture, anticipating other emerging journals like *Good Housekeeping* (1885–ongoing) and *Ladies' Home Journal* (1883–2016) that were intent on constructing women's identities through the domestic arts. In this, the column raises pertinent research questions such as: What values underpin the discursive construction of the "natural body" through fashion and dress? How are the social categories of gender, sexuality, race, and class negotiated in the column? How does the style of the American painters discussed reflect issues of social and stylistic conservatism or modernism? By addressing these questions, we argue that *The Art Amateur* offers a unique and detailed glimpse into popular aesthetic culture in that period and location, which in turn influenced female readers who wished to dress artfully, in an American way. Ultimately, by unpicking the threads of gender and dress

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in the column, we hope to open the topic for further development by other researchers looking for useful primary source material in this area.

ARTISTIC DRESS, CITIZENSHIP, AND PERIODICAL LITERATURE: THE BRITISH AND AMERICAN CONTEXTS

The Aesthetic movement in Britain (1860–1900) focused on the ideals of beauty by blurring the boundary between the fine arts and decorative arts, between art and life. Aestheticism is often associated with male aesthetes like Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, as well as painters Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones, who depicted long-necked, sinewy, and sensuous women in flowing dresses. The Aesthetic movement rediscovered the Renaissance and the Greek arts, and their beliefs and art expressions permeated British magazines like *The Woman's World* (1886–1890), *The Yellow Book* (1894–1897), and many domestic print periodicals. While women artists were admittedly sidelined and their contributions often forgotten in this male movement, women writers nonetheless actively engaged aesthetic tropes and symbols, and many middle-class women aspired to the male-conceived aesthetic ideals of beauty in the following decades.[9] Moreover, some women writers, such as Lucas Malet (Mary Harrison), Alice Meynell, and Una Ashworth Taylor, sadly forgotten until recently, rewrote Aestheticism's female literary archetypes of the New Woman and the Angel in the House.[10] As the Aesthetic movement transitioned to modernism during the years 1870–1910, women and domesticity played an important role. Women were not content with only being the means for male aesthetic practices but strove to become agents in shaping its expressions. This is evidenced in British author Mary Haweis's 1879 book *The Art of Dress*, which was excerpted and circulated internationally, spreading the Aesthetic movement's influence in North America through periodicals like *Cassell's Magazine of Art* (1878–1904).[11]

In Gilded Age America, from the 1870s to 1900, wearing artistic dress emerged as a personal expression analogous to the creation of a work of art, while the topic of artistic dress proliferated in both North American and British periodicals during the 1880s.[12] This focus on aesthetic dress also went hand in hand with the Arts and Crafts movement, evidenced by the rising appreciation for handcrafted products and handmade economies.[13] At the same time, even as the values of the Aesthetic movement permeated

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long-established American monthlies like the Philadelphia *Godey's Lady's Book* (1830–1898) and the New York *Delineator* (1875–1937), these journals of fashion, culture, and fine arts, and notably the latter, revealed advertisements for dresses, accessories, and cosmetics, evidence of the accelerating mass commodification of fashion within the rapidly expanding consumer culture. The era was marked by a tension between the ideals of fashion as art making, on one hand, and fashion consumption, on the other, with trends shifting toward the increasing dominance of fashion as consumption.[14] During the early 1880s, this tension was played out in *The Art Amateur* with its critique of commercial fashion.

The Art Amateur belongs to a broader periodical culture, including art journals, with their focus on high art and high values, and fashion journals, with their commitment to mass journalism and consumption. Echoes of Humphreys's advice to art amateurs can be found in Percy Fitzgerald's 1880 article "The Philosophy of a Statue" published in *The Art Journal* (1875–1887), which reads: "Dress is secondary to the figure, and should be dealt with in subjection to the curves, muscles, etc., of the figure."[15] Similarly, M. G. Van Rensselaer's June 1880 article "Artist and Amateur" for *The American Art Review* (1879–1881) celebrates the teaching of aesthetic values: "I allow, he who is not only amateur, but connoisseur in the strictest sense, he who teaches others in words of permanent value, he whose speech is as truly a part of the aesthetic treasures of his nation as are the works he studies,—such a one, I allow, must be born as well as made."[16] Philosophically, pedagogically, and pragmatically close to the art journals above, *The Art Amateur* cultivated its readership by providing art lessons, expertise, and advice, even excerpting readers' questions and answering them in the "Correspondences" sections. Touting itself as the "best and largest practical art magazine," *The Art Amateur* disseminated its lessons in myriad home arts across North America. With its manifesto-like editorial call for a "Rise of Art in the Household," *The Art Amateur* advertised itself as "[i]nvaluable to all who make a living by Art, or who take up Art as an accomplishment."[17] Aiming to help democratize art in America, publisher and editor Montague Marks declared: "To domesticate art and make it a part of the household [was] one of the most strongly pronounced tendencies of [his] time."[18] This he saw as "a movement of progress which must be carried through to-day or to-morrow."[19] American institutions of art instruction like the National Academy of Design and the Decorative Art Society were essential to this goal, and the

names of their key artists would soon appear throughout Humphreys and Harrison's columns.[20]

At the same time, the reform discourses threading through the "Art in Dress" column reveal the same contradictions found in the era's periodical literature more broadly. Marks's rhetoric echoes what Diana Maltz calls a "missionary aestheticism," whose goal was to teach the values of beauty to working class people.[21] In exploring the intersection of aesthetics and philanthropy, including "slum philanthropy," Maltz's book *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870–1900: Beauty for the People* documents the social networks that bonded aesthetes to reformers, referencing British aesthetic philosophers and writers John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold who commented on the moral and social benefits of disseminating the arts.[22] Like the British reformers who rejected the alienated labor of modern industrialism, Montague Marks invoked the Arts and Crafts movement's twin ideals of the Renaissance (an art movement marked by the flourishing of sculpture, painting, and decorative arts) and the Medieval ages (known for its expert handcrafting of art and utilitarian objects). Quoting one of the era's leading anarchists and socialists, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who had provocatively likened ownership to theft, Marks wrote, "Art is to be found in everything."[23] Moreover, like the British reformers discussed by Maltz, Marks did not advocate the overthrow of America's unjust economic and racial divides that profoundly marked the lives of individuals, families, and the nation; he merely criticized the robber barons for ostentatiously collecting European art and "Oriental" rugs, encouraging instead the cultivation of contemporary American art.[24] Marks's idea of a revolution was located in the American home, as the "influence exercised by ladies on the formation of modern art has never been fully realized by art historians."[25] In other words, women were important as *agents* of an American artistic and national ideal, not merely the means of developing it. "We are at the threshold of a new era in aesthetic education—the Renaissance of the Nineteenth Century," Marks proclaimed, handing the baton to the women columnists of *The Art Amateur*.[26]

Such female-centered agency is essential in considering gender as a social category in constructing the domestic arts and national ideals.[27] Thus, conceptions of citizenship were mediated through periodical literature, just as femininity was being constructed through magazine culture (including advertisements).[28] Given their strong opinion content, advice columns help us put the spotlight on the negotiation of these tensions and

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contradictions. With an accessible structure that had wide appeal, advice columns were as popular during the late nineteenth century as they are today. "Advice literature flourished in the Victorian era," as Thad Logan writes, noting that it encompassed diverse topics, "including spiritual direction, guidance in the intricacies of etiquette, and aids to successful investment. From their earliest beginnings in the eighteenth century, magazines that identified themselves as catering to women included advice on manners and morals."[29] Advice columns offered instruction for the intended betterment of readers, notably women, on areas of everyday self-construction, from what to wear or how to wear it, to how to flourish in their marriages and through different developmental stages of their lives. Such advice columns function on multiple levels: they engage readers directly in a rhetoric of improvement and self-transformation, as well as shape and communicate social norms that can be internalized. At the same time, however, they produce an internalized surveillance gaze on the reader's everyday behaviors and transgressions, whereby the reader's attempts and failures to meet idealized objectives keep them coming back for more, thereby strengthening the bonds of loyalty between the magazine and its subscribers. So how does Humphreys's "Art in Dress" advice column negotiate ideological contradictions including the social categories of gender, sex, race, and class? To help address these questions, the column's text and images provide insight.

THE "ART IN DRESS" COLUMN, 1881–1882

From December 1881 to November 1882, the lead columnist of "Art in Dress" Mary Gay Humphreys marshalled the opinions of ten contemporary American artists as art experts in support of her views on how women should dress in relation to artistic principles.[30] She introduced a multiplicity of American artists' voices and styles, with most of these artists having their studios in New York. Missouri-born James Carroll Beckwith (1852–1917), Indiana-born William Merritt Chase (1849–1916), New York City-born Daniel Huntington (1816–1906), and Maine-born Eastman Johnson (1824–1906) had distinguished careers as portrait artists, painting many prominent figures from American society including presidents. The English-born Seymour Guy (1824–1910) and Massachusetts-born Frank Millet (1848–1912) were well-known genre painters with studios in New York City. Brooklyn-born Walter Satterlee (1844–1908) produced

engravings, while New York City-born Elihu Vedder (1836–1923) was a book illustrator and symbolist painter. In considering women outside the home, Humphreys also solicited the viewpoints of two painters who specialized in landscapes—Alfred Bricher (1837–1908), who was born in New Hampshire and later associated with the Hudson River School of Painting, and New York City-born Bruce Crane (1857–1937)—focusing on women within a leisure context. Among this group of exclusively white and male artists, only one, Eastman Johnson, was known for depicting African American themes. Most used oil on canvas as a preferred medium and shared a realist mode of rendering the world.

All ten men were active in the National Academy of Design, an honorary association of American artists founded in 1825 and based in New York City, and a key anchor for the "Art in Dress" column. Modeled after the Royal Academy of Arts in London, members were elected and gathered to promote the fine arts in America through instruction and exhibition.[31] Painter Daniel Huntington served as president from 1862 to 1869 and again from 1877 to 1891 while also serving as the vice-president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1870–1903).[32] Huntington was the first artist to be featured in Humphreys's column and may have asked or possibly offered his suggestions to Humphreys as to other artists that could be consulted for her column. With his credentials as the "honored President of the National Academy of Design," Humphreys established Huntington as an expert on women's fashion since "by virtue of his profession he has had to consider seriously the underlying principles of drapery" to create aesthetic effects.[33]

By enlisting a national institution of art education, Humphreys's column constructs American women through art education, inviting women to inscribe their bodies artfully following the advice of leading American portraitists. At the same time, although the artists' opinions on women's dress are expansive, it is not clear where the line between artists and Humphreys's opinions is drawn, and often the column reads as if Humphreys sought opinions of artists that aligned with her own, making her the agent of the arguments. Although the ten artists differed in age, education, experience, and style, their voices converge in chorus, with each monthly column framing their opinions to align with Humphreys's key thesis on artistic dress.[34] She first asserted her thesis with the help of Huntington, who suggests that "the human body furnishes the suggestion for all dress" and that dress that alludes to the classical ideal is both graceful

and beautiful: "In beauty nothing exceeds the long sweeping lines which characterize this dress, because they come nearest to being identical with the lines of the body in action."[35] In January 1882, Humphreys amplified the idea of natural form, explaining that too often women create distortion of their bodies by wearing corsets. She cites New York artist Seymour Guy, known for his work in painting children, who observes that "the corset improves some forms, as those of obese flabby women, with relaxed muscles, by confining them into a definite shape. But a woman of good form is only spoiled by the corset" since the result is a "hard cross-line of the bust, which distinctly shows, as do often the laces under a tightly fitting dress."[36] What renders this argument complex is the fact that even the natural silhouette of the body is constructed, and even when a corset is rejected, other less structured forms of support were adopted, as documented in Edwina Ehrman's book *Undressed: A Brief History of Underwear.*[37] Since the visibility of underwear draws attention to the body's eroticism, the construction of the natural line of the body through relegating undergarments into invisibility has the dual effect of sublimating and obscuring the erotic, while also rendering invisible the labor of dressing the natural body.

Still, Humphreys and painter Seymore Guy suggest that the natural, toned body is superior, noting the celebrated London model Madame de Lucy as an example, and recommend that women and girls adopt "a course of free gymnastics which would harden the muscles, and furnish the proper support for the body without the intervention of the corset."[38] This focus on physical exercise prefigures the ideal of the aesthetic, long-limbed woman reflecting both America's cosmopolitanism and its wide-open spaces.[39] Indeed, Humphreys's idea of "the body in action" is a leitmotif, the artistic dress being one that allows the body and subject to move. As Humphreys writes: "The long lines of the dress simply follow the outlines of the figure. While this is in a sense obscured in the folds of the train, it is constantly suggested by the lines which the train takes in following the action of the body."[40] Clothing helps facilitate mobility, artfully enacted through the contrasting colors of the lining even when sitting. Visually—and linguistically—the train mobilizes the sitter, using aesthetic means to accentuate movement, as Humphreys explains further: "The separation of the train and the petticoat, which in this dress is shirred, is so distinct that the train with every movement assumes a form whose lines differing from those of the figure only serve to emphasize it."[41] The viewer's perception of mobility, extending

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the body through a rippling effect or afterimages, is an aesthetic experience, rendering the American woman in and through a gallery of moving images.

At the same time, American painters' opinions also reveal the tension between the demands of modernity (women's mobility and independence) on the one hand and prescriptive conservatism on the other, the latter evidenced in the opinions of painter James Carroll Beckwith (1850–1917). Beckwith was a successful portraitist who painted "many imaginative figure studies, usually of women," and a longtime instructor at the Art Students League of New York.[42] For Beckwith, the act of dressing is akin to stage direction in which the director must carefully arrange the props to focus the attention of the public's eye on the star, and the strategic use of color should aim to "forward the good points" and "conceal the bad."[43] Or as Humphreys translates Beckwith's opinion into prescriptive discourse: "An artist naturally regards the dress of women as either 'paintable' or 'unpaintable.'"[44] In Humphreys's column, Beckwith expresses admiration for the management of color as practiced by women of southern Europe. Where others might handle yellow and red obtrusively, he asserts, "the Spaniard will veil it mysteriously in black, and her bit of pure color she uses in the flower half hidden in the coils of her hair behind her ear, making it only part of the surroundings which are to set off her face and not a thing of itself."[45] With his focus on the woman's face and hair, Beckwith's theory of the black "mystery" illuminated by a yellow flower speaks of a sexual fetishizing and of invigorating a pale face with foreign "Otherness." Representing "something positive, vigorous, and wholesome to women," colors are required to combat the sickliness of the aesthetic ideal. Humphreys continues: "Mr. Beckwith has no sympathy with the languor of the aesthetic movement, with its sad tints, and its limp attitudes. At the same time his views on dress have some points in common with those of the 'aesthetes,' although he expresses them with more robustness."[46] Indeed, Humphreys recasts the aesthetic ideals, validating the vigorous body in ways that create an arc anticipating the healthy, athletic American look of later decades.

Threading through each installment of the column, this dual approach exposes the unnatural constraints of modern high fashion while advocating for naturally artful and timeless dress. In the same vein, Humphreys criticizes contemporary high fashion for its role in deforming and concealing the natural line of a woman's body. The fashionable dress of the early

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1880s created a narrow silhouette when viewed from the front, but when seen from the side or back reveals the distortion of the body created by the bustle and heavy draping (Fig. 2).

The contrast between the unnatural lines of high fashion and the natural lines of Greek statuary is illustrated on a page adjacent to the "Art in Dress" column. In a reproduction from *L'art de la mode* (1880–1972), a newly launched French luxury fashion periodical, two chic Parisians are depicted; one wears a dress with an unnaturally pinched waist while the other wears a mantle with boxy shoulders (Fig. 3). The narrow skirts of the dresses limit mobility and constrain their legs from moving freely. The caption describes the women's street attire as "the latest assault upon the principles of beauty in the female form."[47] On the same page, an illustration of a Greek walking costume emulates the classical ideal in showing a figure dressed in a flowing gown and mantle (Fig. 4).

FIG. 2 Silk dress, ca. 1880. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Object #1880.39.83.2ab. Gift of Finley J. Shepard, 1939.

This Greek walking statue visually reveals the unimpeded flow of the dress from head to toe, refusing to visually decapitate the neck by the imposition of "unnatural" fashion. As such, painter Daniel Huntington suggested that women avoid wearing for their portraits a "low-necked dress, whose hard line virtually cuts off the head and neck."[48] Indeed, the desired aesthetic refuses to arrest the natural line, which must continue uninterrupted.

FIG. 3 "Walking Costume of Today," *The Art Amateur* 6 no. 1 (December 1881): 11

This visual rhetoric is deepened in April and May 1882 with the insights of thirty-four-year-old Frank Millet, an American painter, sculptor, and lithographer specializing in American and English costume genre paintings. Earlier that year, Millet had delivered a series of lectures at the National Academy of Design on the garments, shoes, and accessories worn by ancient Roman men and women. April's "Art in Dress" column described these lectures noting the flattering effects created by the lines of the toga worn by men and the *strophium*, a simple band worn around the chest by women. While these garments are admittedly not practical for the occupations or climate of Humphreys's era, she notes in her May column that classical costumes are "fertile in suggestion for three things : . . . simplicity, the right use of ornament, and the artistic value of folds."[49] Thus the construction of a uniquely American female subjectivity and aesthetic occurred in negotiation with these ethnically European roots.

As frames for the face, hats play a particularly critical role in this discursive negotiation of the aesthetic, the ethnic, and the moral, therefore arousing especial criticism in the column. In February 1882, the secondary "Art in Dress" columnist Constance Cary Harrison declared the use of birds and feathers in the service of fashion to be "utterly barbarous."[50] This anticipates sociologist Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), where he links the trophy wife to the "barbarian" culture of conquest.[51] This critique is continued in the hat-themed issue of March 1882, with Eastman Johnson, who had his studio in New York and cofounded the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and whose strong opinions about women's fashions are paraphrased in Humphreys's article: "Left to themselves women commit

FIG. 4 "Greek Walking Costume of 500 B.C.," *The Art Amateur* 6 no. 1 (December 1881): 11

the greatest sins against their own physiognomies."[52] What makes Johnson an authority on hats is his oil painting *The New Bonnet* (Fig. 5), thematizing the social dynamics of headwear.

This work depicts an old-fashioned winter kitchen with two women on the right intently inspecting the new purchase of an ostentatiously plumed bonnet adorned with ostrich feather and long veil, critically thematizing the new fashion consumerism, which also conflicted with animal rights.[53] Judging by the women's quizzical looks, the purchase leaves a sense of ambivalence, highlighting fashion's deception, when the perfect, much simpler hat is already perched on the woman shopper's head. Her father has turned his back, warming his chilled fingers at the hearth, his top hat, providing warmth, still on his head after returning from his walk in the cold outside. The clash of traditional and modern, of inside and outside, as visualized in this work, amplifies Humphreys's and Johnson's commentary in the column, recommending simple styles of hair and dress that framed the face in a flattering way. Semiotically, the painting encodes social values suggesting that pragmatism and modesty take precedence over fashion and vanity, the painting effectively communicating anti-consumerist and anti-modernist values.

In the same issue, Humphreys also consulted with William Merritt Chase, one of the few artists featured in her column who embraced an impressionistic style, and who by 1896 would launch the Chase School (today the Parsons School of Design) with a focus on cultivating students' creative design and individualistic expression. Chase found hats to be an effective face-framing device, advising women to take care in selecting a hat that complemented rather than detracted from their facial features. Humphreys writes: "One thing he asserts as final, and that is that a large poke bonnet goes with an aquiline nose, and should be chosen with hesitation for more wayward features."[54] As with Johnson, this

FIG. 5 Eastman Johnson, *The New Bonnet*, 1876. Oil on board (52.7 x 68.6 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, Object #25.110.11. Bequest of Collis P. Huntington, 1900.

paraphrase derives its authority from Chase's painting of the poke bonnet in his renowned portraits of Harriet Hubbard Ayer (1849–1903), whom he painted in 1879 and in 1880 respectively. In both portraits, Chase depicts the Chicago-born sitter who stunned America's Gilded Age with her vision of beauty and her aptitude for business. (In 1886, she launched a cosmetics empire, the Recamier Manufacturing Company).

In Chase's 1879 *Portrait of Harriet Hubbard Ayer* (Fig. 6), a black bonnet that sits back on her head reveals her face. For this portrait, painted by Chase when she was thirty years of age, Harriet Hubbard Ayer posed in a black dress designed by Charles Frederick Worth.[55] Although Hubbard Ayer was in mourning following the death of a child, Chase depicted the dress with a translucent bodice and sleeves that reveal skin and suggest an erotic subtext. In the portrait, her straightforward gaze, conveying confident self-reliance and intellectual curiosity, is framed by the black bonnet, which sits at a fetching angle drawing the viewer into a relationship with an intelligent woman whose strength is tangible even before her rise to fame. A year later, in 1880, Chase painted her again in *Harriet Hubbard*

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FIG. 6 William Merritt Chase (American, 1849–1916), *Portrait of Harriet Hubbard Ayer*, 1879. Oil on canvas (48 1/8 × 32 1/4 inches). Image courtesy of Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, Museum Purchase 1981.1.

Ayer (1880), with a blue and yellow bonnet framing her slightly unruly bangs *à la Titus*.[56] In wearing a neoclassical Directoire-style dress for this portrait, she recalls Madame de Récamier, the inspiration for the name of her business empire launched in 1886.[57] Here, the bonnet, a nineteenth-century head covering associated with streetwear and the public, works as a tribute to a woman's entrepreneurial and independent spirit—concretizing the sense of the modern woman who refuses to be restrained within hearth and home. In this subtly modern way, Chase's treatment of dress in portraiture challenges the more restrictive gendered categories of Humphreys's column.

This tension is also evident in the exploration of the outdoors when Humphreys invites landscape artists to provide input on women's dress, such as Bruce Crane (1857–1937), who was known for his plein-air landscapes and impressionistic style. In her lengthy June 1882 column, Humphreys links Crane's views on "the relation of dress to the landscape," and how women should dress for the beach. She writes in praise of Crane's visual aesthetic: "No better background is offered to women than the beach, where the large lines and broad tints of sand and sea only bring her figure into stronger relief. It remains to a woman to throw herself like a blot of color into the scene or to make a part of the whole."[58] With its conspicuous focus on leisure inside and outside of the house, the column says little about the fashion of the working woman, relegating women's work into the margins of the

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text and into social invisibility, even though women's roles were changing dramatically in the nineteenth century with women becoming industrial and clerical wage earners outside the home and producers of clothing and home decorations inside.

Moreover, the traditional gender divide is confirmed as male dress remains underrepresented and is largely invisible in the "Art in Dress" column ("I will admit, though, that a man's dress is hopeless," painter Elihu Vedder observes in November 1882), leaving unchallenged the conventional impression that dress is mostly a female concern.[59] Conversely, male painters are overrepresented in the column, with women featured as actresses, singers, and models, but not as painters. The advice Humphreys sought came exclusively from male artists, further suggesting impediments and gender distinctions of art, domesticity, and home space. While the designation of women artists as artists within the home during the era had the effect of elevating home art, it also functioned to denigrate unfairly female artists as mere "amateurs." During the era, decorative arts were systematically dismissed as lesser feminine arts even more as an increasing number of women practiced them and made their income with them in their homes.[60]

After November 1882, the "Art in Dress" column continued to appear in the periodical but no longer solicited the views of artists. Instead, the column focused on a history of fashion with a particular emphasis given to shoes, bonnets, and jewelry. Most of these columns are unsigned. The periodical encouraged women's artistic professionalism in the home during the last two decades of the nineteenth century when women were pushing into public life and professions in increasing numbers. By the time *The Art Amateur* folded in 1903, it had been run by a female publisher, Anne N. Van Oost, whose husband John had purchased the periodical from Montague Marks in 1897. When Van Oost filed a petition in bankruptcy in November 1903, Marks was among the creditors.[61]

In conclusion, the "Art in Dress" column gives insight into the aesthetic ideals of dress and its role in upholding nineteenth-century American art and society, while intervening in social transitions using as a tool American art—itself located in a seesaw between modernity and conservatism. Despite limits of gender representation, the "Art in Dress" column generates important momentum and new knowledge by bringing into conversation historical ideas at the intersection of dress, art, and gender. Many of the reinventions performed through the column reflect the adherence

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to the aesthetic and artistic dress movements that equated greater mobility in dress with a more natural form of beauty. The focus on engaging artists through the periodical's serial structure created a dialogue between the National Academy of Design and *The Art Amateur*, both of which were propelled by a mission to educate and instruct, amplifying mutually shared values, while obscuring the tensions between these institutions. It is difficult to ascertain information about the readership today, since the reader letters published in the journal are primarily inquiries or comments on art problems to be solved rather than responses to articles. However, the cost of art supplies and the focus on leisure in this journal makes it probable that the readership consisted of mostly middle-class aspiring practitioners plus a smaller group of secondary readers from the working class who did not have the money to pay for a subscription but were able to access discarded copies.[62] Ultimately, analysis of *The Art Amateur* and "Art in Dress" column serves to contribute to a growing body of scholarship that shifts attention to the art press itself (reviews, magazines, and periodicals) as historical and critical texts. In this context, much is to be learned not only about art and fashion, but also about the complex dynamics and interactions between periodical culture and art and dress culture during a transitional period in history.

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NOTES

1. Mary Gay Humphreys, "Artists Views on Woman's Dress," *The Art Amateur* 6, no.1 (December 1881): 10.
2. Montague Marks was also the author of *Home Arts and Crafts*, London, 1903, another work championing the values of the arts and crafts movement.
3. *The Art Amateur*'s most direct competitor was *The Art Interchange* (1878–1940), a biweekly paper published in connection with the Society of Decorative Art, whose board included Mrs. J. J. Astor; see "The Art Interchange," *New York Times*, 25 September 1878, 8. The beautification of the home was also a concern of *Godey's Lady's Book* (1830–1878), *Ladies' Home Journal* (1883–2016), and *Good Housekeeping* (1885–ongoing).

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4. This information is found on the cover; Charles M. Jenckes (illustrator) and Montague Marks (editor), Cover, *The Art Amateur* 1, no. 1 (June 1879). The cost of the periodical in 2021 terms is estimated to be $6.50 for a single issue and $78 for an annual subscription based on the CPI conversion calculator for US dollars; accessed 8 August 2021.

5. Two additional columns for "Art in Dress" followed unsigned in April 1884 and October 1885, respectively, but did not solicit the opinions of artists. The "Art in Dress" column was subdivided into "Artists Views on Woman's Dress," written by Mary Gay Humphreys, and another column on fashion called "Notes on Dress," signed by Constance Cory Harrison; the latter appeared six times during this interval and included observations and tips on dressing, as well criticism on fashion faux pas.

6. Mary Gay Humphreys was born in Ridley, Ohio, and served as a nurse in the Civil War and the Philippines; see Mary Gay Humphreys, "As Men Suffer and Die," *New York Times*, 4 July 1915, 10. A prolific author of magazine articles and book reviews, she also wrote popular novels under her pseudonym Henry Somerville. Her feminist and patriotic leanings are evident in *Catherine Schuyler: A Woman of the Revolution* (1897), recently reissued (Hudson Valley: HVA Press, 2020). Constance Cary Harrison was born in Mississippi into an aristocratic family. Harrison moved to New York after the war and married Burton Harrison, who had served as the private secretary for Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Her 1911 memoir, *Refugitta of Richmond: The Wartime Recollections, Grave and Gay, of Constance Cary Harrison*, ed. Nathaniel C. Hughes Jr. and S. Kittrell Rushing (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), has been recently reissued.

7. [Marks], "Art in Dress," *The Art Amateur* 6, no. 1 (December 1881): 2.

8. [Marks], "Art in Dress," 2.

9. Anne Anderson, "Aesthetic Woman: The 'Fearful Consequence' of 'Living Up' to One's Antiques," in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. Katharina Bohm (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 177–96. Robyne Erica Calvert, "Fashioning the Artist: Artistic Dress in Victorian Britain 1848–1900" (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2012).

10. Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 34–72.

11. Patricia A. Cunningham, "Artistic Dress in America," in *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850–1920* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003), 135–44.

12. Mary W. Blanchard, "Boundaries and the Victorian Body: Aesthetic Fashion in Gilded Age America," *The American Historical Review*, 100, no. 1 (February 1995): 21–50. See also Kimberly Wahl, "Popular Culture and the Fashioning of Aestheticism," in *Dressed as in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in an Age of Reform* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013), 102–40. Wahl does not include *The Art Amateur* in her comprehensive survey but rather focuses on fashion and popular women's journals.

13. See, for example, the essays collected in this volume: Janice Helland, Beverly Lemire, Alena Buis, eds., *Craft, Community and the Material Culture of Place and Politics, 19th–20th Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Karen Zukowski, *Creating the Artful Home: The Aesthetic Movement* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2006); and Virginia Gunn, "The Art Needlework Movement: An Experiment in Self-Help for Middle-Class Women, 1870–1900," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 10, no. 3 (March 1992): 54–63.

14. Christopher Breward, "Femininity and Consumption: The Problem of the Late Nineteenth-Century Fashion Journal," *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 2 (1994): 71–89.

15. Percy Fitzgerald, "The Philosophy of a Statue," *The Art Journal* 6, (1880): 25–26.

16. M. G. Van Rensselaer, "Artist and Amateur," *The American Art Review* 1, no.8 (June 1880): 342.

17. Advertisement for *The Art Amateur, McClure's Magazine* January 1896.

18. [Montague Marks]. "Rise of the Art in the Household," *The Art Amateur* 1, no.1 (June 1879): 1.

19. [Marks], "Rise of the Art in the Household," 2.

20. Index to volume 1 (June to November 1879), *The Art Amateur* 1, no.1 (June 1879): iii. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25626763.pdf.

21. Diana Maltz, *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870–1900: Beauty for the People* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 2.

22. Maltz, *British Aestheticism*, 3.

23. [Marks], "Rise of the Art in the Household," 2.

24. [Marks], "Rise of the Art in the Household," 2.

25. [Marks], "Rise of the Art in the Household," 1.

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26. [Marks], "Rise of the Art in the Household," 2.
27. See Fiona Hackney, *Women's Magazines and the Feminine Imagination: Opening up a New World for Women in Interwar Britain* (Bloomsbury Publishing, forthcoming); Hackney documents that during the interwar period, periodical literatures such as the British monthly *Modern Woman* (1925–) and the weeklies *Woman* (1937–), *Home Chat* (1895–1959), and *Woman's Weekly* (1911–) helped expand female readerships by giving women scope for the imagination, creating the metaphoric room with a view for women readers. See also Alice Wood, "Housekeeping, Citizenship, and Nationhood in Good Housekeeping and Modern Home," in *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918–1939: The Interwar Period*, ed. Catherine Clay, Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green, and Fiona Hackney (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 210–24; Wood documents that during the interwar years from 1918 to 1939, British women were being called up as British citizens within and outside the home in George Newness's periodical *Modern Home*, which identified homemaking as women's chief role and service to the British nation.
28. Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett, *Fashioning the Feminine: Representation and Women's Fashion from the Fin de Siecle to the Present* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001).
29. Thad Logan, "Advising Women: Writing on Domestic Decoration in the Lady's Home and the Lady's Realm," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 51, no. 2 (2018): 230.
30. The "Art in Dress" column continued to appear in the periodical but after November 1882 no longer solicited the views of artists. Instead, the column focused on a history of fashion with a particular emphasis given to shoes, bonnets, jewelry. Most of these columns are unsigned.
31. "Historical Overview," National Academy of Design.
32. "Daniel Huntington," The Smithsonian American Art Museum.
33. Mary Gay Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Woman's Dress," *The Art Amateur* 6, no. 1 (December 1881): 10.
34. This is also noted in the November 1882 column: "Any one who has read attentively the opinions expressed in these articles must have observed how closely the different artists agree in all essentials." Mary Gay Humphreys, "Art in Dress: Artists' Views on Woman's Dress VII," *The Art Amateur* 7, no. 6 (November 1882): 130.
35. Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Woman's Dress," 10.
36. Seymour J. Guy qtd. in Mary Gay Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Woman's Dress II," *The Art Amateur* 6, no.2 (January 1882): 42–43.
37. Edwina Ehrman, *Undressed: A Brief History of Underwear* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2016).
38. Seymour J. Guy, "Artists' Views on Woman's Dress II," 42.
39. Rebecca Arnold, *American Look: Fashion and the Image of Women in 1930s and 1940s New York* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).
40. Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Dress II," 42.
41. Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Dress II," 42.
42. Doreen Bolger Burke, *American Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Volume III, ed. Kathleen Luhrs (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art: 1980), 135.
43. Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Women's Dress III," *The Art Amateur* 6 no. 3 (February 1882): 58.
44. Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Woman's Dress II," 42.
45. Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Woman's Dress III," 58.
46. Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Woman's Dress III," 58.
47. Constance Cary Harrison, "A Glance at Street Costumes," *The Art Amateur* 6, no. 1 (December 1881): 11.
48. Daniel Huntington qtd. in Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Woman's Dress," 10.
49. Mary Gay Humphreys, "Classic Hints on Modern Costumes," *The Art Amateur* 6, no.6 (May 1882): 131.
50. Constance Cary Harrison, "Notes on Dress," *The Art Amateur* 6, no. 3 (February 1882): 59.
51. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Penguin, 1994); see especially chapter 7, "Dress as an Expression of the Pecuniary Culture."

52. Jonathan Eastman Johnson paraphrased in Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Woman's Dress IV," *The Art Amateur* 6, no. 4 (March 1882): 86. The fascination with physiognomy had its racial connotations as well, as noted by David Brody in his analysis of *The Art Amateur*: "The media used this 'science' [of physiognomy] in the colonial setting, where reading Philippine culture was problematic guesswork." See David Brody, *Visualizing American Empire: Orientalism and Imperialism in the Philippines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 63.

53. Hundreds of thousands of birds—peacocks, birds of paradise, and hummingbirds—were imported from Southern countries to satisfy the insatiable demand for feathers for fashionable hats. Since expensive feathers in hats signaled high-class status, Harrison, whose role was typically to expose fashion follies, sounded the alarm. Little is known about the columnist's engagement with related debates, such as the anti-vivisection movement, founded in 1883 in Philadelphia; the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, formed in 1866, affirming rights to care for animals, and the moral issue of being agents in animal suffering; or the legislative protection of birds, with a first bill presented to the British House of Lords in June 1881. See also Malcolm Smith, *Hats: A Very Unnatural History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020).

54. William Merritt Chase qtd. in Mary Gay Humphreys, "Artists' Views on Women's Dress IV," *The Art Amateur* 6, no. 4 (March 1882): 86.

55. See Annette Blaugrund, "Harriet Hubbard Ayer and William Merritt Chase: A Mystery Solved?" Fineartconnoisseur.com January/February 2020.

56. William Merritt Chase, *Harriet Hubbard Ayer*, 1880, oil on canvas (27 ¼ × 22 ¼ inches), Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco. Chase exhibited this painting under the title *Portrait of a Lady*.

57. See Blaugrund, "Harriet Hubbard Ayer and William Merritt Chase."

58. Mary Gay Humphreys, "Artist's Views on Woman's Dress V," *The Art Amateur* 7, no. 1 (June 1882): 18.

59. Elihu Vedder qtd. in Humphreys, Mary Gay Humphreys, "Artist's Views on Woman's Dress VII," *The Art Amateur* 7, no. 6 (November 1882): 130.

60. See April F. Masten, *Art Work: Women Artists and Democracy in Mid-Nineteenth Century New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson, *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850–1970* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 1–43; and Rosalind Galt, "Ornament and Modernity: From Decorative Art to Cultural Criticism," in *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 97–140.

61. Anne Van Oost had previously been employed by Montague Marks as his financial manager and bought the publication from him in 1897. As of November 25, 1903, her liabilities were listed in the petition for bankruptcy as $24,020 of which $16,220 was secured. See "Business Troubles," *New York Times*, 25 November 1903, 11. Van Oost's estate went up for auction on 2 April 1904; see "Bankruptcy Auction Sales," *New York Times*, 2 April 1904, 12. John W. Van Oost was listed as the publisher in advertisement, but when the publication went bankrupt, his wife alone took the petition publicly.

62. For example, Canadian artist Mary Riter Hamilton credits *The Art Amateur* with educating her, as she lived far from the art schools and galleries in the backwoods of Ontario and Manitoba, "learn[ing] china painting from a book. *The Art Amateur*, a magazine of those days came into her hands, so she experimented by herself. She was always trying to get someone to instruct her, but found very little help." Mary Riter Hamilton qtd. in Irene Gammel, *I Can Only Paint: The Story of Battlefield Artist Mary Riter Hamilton* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020), 16–17.

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