

**The Artist's Household: On Gender and the Division of Artistic and Domestic  
Labour in Nineteenth-Century London**

**Lara Perry**

Contemporary art and art histories are currently having a productive reckoning with the material demands of domestic work and parenting, considered as both a stimulus and constraint to art production. Resonating with the concept of 'immaterial labour' that has become prominent in explorations of the structures of contemporary art, feminist artists and critics have exposed the important gendered dimension of the immaterial and socialreproduction labour involved in the career of the contemporary artist. Art projects such as CASCO's long-term programme (2009-) *User's Manual: The Grand Domestic Revolution* and *The Mother House* project in London (2016) have picked up where Mierle Ukeles Laderman's performance works of Maintenance Art in the 1960s and 1970s left off, and analysts have similarly refocused their efforts to include considerations of the gendered impact of parenthood on art production. For example, in her book *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (2013) Angela Dimitrakaki explored the impact of constant travel and around-the-clock schedule on women's art careers; that this is more of an issue for mothers than for fathers was confirmed by a survey of Swedish artists made by Marita Flisbäck and Sofia Lindstrom (also

published in 2013), which offered evidence that the careers of male artists benefit from a greater degree of freedom from the work of the household.<sup>1</sup>

All of this activity is associated with the investigation of contemporary rather than historical art practices. The reasons for that association are several and importantly include the predominance of performance and ‘socially engaged’ art practices as the forms through which domestic and maternal labours have been addressed by artists. The shift of art practice in the 1960s away from the production of artefacts to include performance, service, and networking activities has latterly been approached in relation to patterns of labour in capitalist economies after globalisation by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, among others, while the connections between art, immaterial labour and globalised (post-1989) capitalism have formed the dominant lens through which these questions have been enunciated.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the problems of social reproduction in art are not indicated in the form or content of a nineteenth-century painting such as Leighton's

---

<sup>1</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2013. Marita Flisbäck, and Sofia Lindstrom, ‘Work-family Conflict among Professional Visual Artists in Sweden: Gender Differences in the Influence of Parenting and Household Responsibilities’, *Nordisk Kulturpolitisk Tidskrift*, vol 16, no 2, 2013, pp 239-268

<sup>2</sup> Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Gregory Elliott, trans, Verso, London, 2006. On the importance of gendering these discussions see Helena Reckitt, ‘Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics’, in Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, eds, *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2013, p 138

*Captive Andromache* (1888), seen in Figure 1, in the way that they are in the artwork **Commented [LP1]: Insert Figure 1 here shown in the** foreground of that image, Suzanne Lacy with Meg Parnell's *Cleaning Conditions* (2013). But to explore the gendered labour of social reproduction *exclusively* in the context of contemporary art does not account for gender difference in art production before the innovations of the 1960s, although studies of women artists of earlier periods (particularly those which focus on Britain and France) have disclosed women artists' careers that were constrained by gender categories which typically excluded women from access to professional life.

Art historians have explained this older pattern with reference to women's exclusion from art educational institutions and professional associations, and with contextual ideological, psychic and spatial boundaries that sustained those barriers; but the examination of institutional barriers to women's careers as artists before 1968 also needs to be extended to the institution of the family. Art history, particularly the history of modernism, pushes back against such an inquiry. Flisbäck and Lindstrom's 2013 study connects the pattern of the divisions of family/professional labour to a historical legacy in which art is designated as 'autonomous' (243). It is this quality of 'autonomous' practice which studies such as Christine Battersby's powerful *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (1989) and Linda Nochlin's answer to her question 'Why have there been no great women artists?' identify as inaccessible to women because of their attachment to the mundane work of (aesthetic) imitation and routine household labour. As Griselda Pollock argued in her chapter on 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', the motifs of domesticity are precisely those which have been rejected by scholars such as TJ

Clark as instances of emergent modern art.<sup>3</sup> The pressure to dissociate the production of art from the material context of family life has been tremendous.

Establishing the importance of the family in the history of art practice requires a method of enquiry which shifts the focus from the artist and her products to the artist's total engagement with labour both artistic and domestic. While Flisbäck and Lindstrom devised questionnaires which asked artists to self-report their participation in domestic duties, this is, to state the obvious, not a method which can be used retrospectively. Yet we do have access to a significant and extensive source of data about the constitution of households in Great Britain from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present, which is the decennial census.<sup>4</sup> The census form used from 1841 onwards collected information about the names, ages, occupations and birthplaces of householders, their families, visitors, and resident servants, thus providing a snapshot of the household and its total capacity for labour. Historians frequently use census data in conjunction with other kinds of primary documents to evidence labour history; in this article, I have adopted their methods in relation to a small sample of census records from artist families/households of later nineteenth-century England.

Figure 2 shows a summary of the 26 census entries referred to in this article, which **Commented [LP2]:** Insert Figure 2 here represent the census records for 18 artists' households (some artist's households are represented more than once). The table draws most

---

<sup>3</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, Routledge, London and New York, 1988, pp 50-90

<sup>4</sup> The census was first taken in 1801 and then every ten following years, and from 1841 created a centralised record of the names, ages, places of birth, relationship of the individual to the head of household, occupation and birthplace of every person who was in residence at a given address on the census day.

extensively from the 1881 census, and was produced by searching for the names of specific artists (the easiest way to access the machine-searchable enumerator's records). I was conscious of building a sample of records that included different kinds of households, as well as artists practicing in different media including photography, sculpture, painting, and graphic art, and with greater and lesser degrees of commercial success.<sup>5</sup> The artist or artists in the household are denoted by their names appearing in colour – men in blue and women in red. Most of the artists in the sample are at least a little known and some of them were among the most prominent artists of the period, including two presidents of the Royal Academy (Frederic Leighton and John Everett Millais).<sup>6</sup> The resulting list should not be understood as a representative sample of all practicing artists, and it must be noted that the records (bar that for Julia Margaret and Charles Cameron in 1861) are for families resident in London. So while the sample represented here is not an adequate representation of British artists in general, it does include a variety of artist circumstances within London.

I have interpreted this data to explore three different topics in the relationship between the artist and household labour: the first section deals with the intimate spatial relationship

---

<sup>5</sup> The 1881, 1891 and 1901 records for Louise Jopling were kindly provided to me by Patricia de Montfort, author of *Louise Jopling: A Biographical and Cultural Study of the Modern Woman Artist in Victorian Britain*, Routledge, London, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> The information about occupation and the constitution of the household has been drawn from digital copies of enumerator's records, which Edward Higgs and Amanda Wilkinson, 'Women, Occupations and Work in the Victorian Censuses Revisited', *History Workshop* 81, 2016, p 22 conclude should be seen as a reliable source for information about women's occupations. However, neither Emily Osborn; Julia Margaret Cameron; Georgiana Burne-Jones; nor Laura Alma Tadema were listed as having an occupation although known to be practicing artists. A large number of women are named as artists in the census records (Pamela Gerrish Nunn's *Victorian Women Artists*, The Women's Press, London, 1987 reports 278 women listed as artists in the census of 1841 and 1069 in 1871, p 3), the entries for occupation seem incomplete when it comes to women artists.

shared by art work and family life; the second section explores some of the expanded labour associated with art-making which was taken on by members of the artist's household (especially social or entrepreneurial labour of the type that interests many contemporary theorists); and the third section discusses mundane domestic work. Each section seeks to establish the significance of gender (and to a lesser extent, class and rank) in ordering the labour that was performed by each member of the household, whether explicitly artistic or not. In the conclusion to this article, I use these findings as the basis for some speculation as to the reasons for the continuities between this apparently remote artistic scene and art's present concerns.

### ***WORKING AT HOME: ART WORK***

Art historical methodologies tend to separate the artist from the family in which she or he worked, but the empirical evidence provided by the census, biographical accounts and architectural histories suggests that in London at least, nineteenth-century artists' work remained firmly located within family life. In this respect, artists' families were not an exception to the working patterns of professionals more broadly. While the transformations of the industrial revolution are often characterised through the idea of the separation of 'spheres' into distinct spaces for family and affective life (the domestic) on the one hand, and the places of productive labour (paid work), on the other, historians now recognise that this division was normative but invariably compromised in practice, because every home

was somebody's workplace.<sup>7</sup> Artists' families were among those least likely to absolutely separate the domestic labour of the household from the productive labour of its commercial undertakings, because those occupied through selfemployment – whether in the professions or in small business – often involved the combination of employment and domestic life in one building, where whole 'families', including servants, lodgers, and children, lived out their daily lives.<sup>8</sup> While the places where artists were trained and where artworks were exhibited for sale were, like products manufactured in more obviously industrial ways, increasingly migrating to specialized commercially run exhibition spaces, the *production* of artworks remained spatially intertwined with domestic life.

An impressive home with a studio was a status symbol for artists and often provided a semi-public space which could accommodate both the production of artworks and *the social interactions* that were part and parcel of publicising and selling artistic outputs. From the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, homes which were purpose-built or adapted for artists included studio space as part of the house or grounds. The house constructed for Valentine Prinsep in 1864 dedicated the first floor to the studio with the relatively modest domestic accommodation on the ground floor; that commissioned by the prominent Thornycraft family of sculptors and painters in the 1870s included ample domestic accommodation plus an elaborate network of studios dedicated to different kinds of art labour (a sculpture yard,

---

<sup>7</sup> Moira Donald, 'Tranquil Havens? Critiquing the Idea of Home as the Middle-Class Sanctuary', in Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, eds, *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior*, Manchester University Press, Manchester pp 103-20

<sup>8</sup> The authoritative work on this topic is Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1987, see pp. 364-74

a painting studio) including a gallery which sat between the reception rooms and the studios, providing a space for exhibiting work to visitors.<sup>9</sup> Linley Sambourne, who as a 'black and white' artist/illustrator earned a much more modest income than a fine artist, set up his drawing board in the (re-modelled) drawing room of his ordinary Kensington terraced townhouse, and frequently used both interior and exterior space as a photography studio for the production of reference works.<sup>10</sup> In these cases, the artists' homes reflect the principle of the period that dirty or noisy work was ideally conducted at a distance from social and domestic activities, but that professional or business activity was acceptable and indeed would take precedence in the allocation of the space commanded by any household.<sup>11</sup>

While the creation of substantive studio space within the homes of many of the artists in my sample provides a useful corrective to a model of a studio practice isolated from domestic life, in most cases the whole or primary space for artistic practice was allocated to the 'head of the household', usually a man. This allocation of space within a family property typically reiterated the privileging of adult males as economic subjects during the nineteenth century. The prioritisation of domestic space allocation tended to follow a hierarchy according to which status accrued to the oldest male in the household who was expected – and enabled – to pursue the family income. While men and women were understood to need segregated space within the home for activities ranging from personal

---

<sup>9</sup> Giles Walkley, *Artists' Houses in London 1764-1914*, Scholar Press, Aldershot and Brookfield, VT, pp 50 and 67-68

<sup>10</sup> Shirley Nicholson, *A Victorian Household*, Barrie and Jenkins, London, 1988, pp 14-15

<sup>11</sup> Hannah Barker and Jane Hamlett, 'Living above the Shop: Home, Business, and Family in the English 'Industrial Revolution'', *Journal of Family History*, vol 35, no 4, 2010, pp 311-28



washing to entertaining friends (even though some activities such as dining involved the whole family), the allocation of work and leisure space within the home privileged the male 'head of the household'. Only in some circumstances (most often widowhood) might women hold this status in their home. In consequence, women's entitlement to space for art work in the household would not be guaranteed, especially in households where there was competition for space.

The detailed evidence provided in architectural histories and biographical material bears out this proposition. In the large home built for the Thornycroft family, space for artistic practice was allocated to several members of the household. The primary studio was occupied by the family head, Thomas Thornycroft, and the plans for the home show the 'Miss Thornycrofts' Painting Studio' and a 'private studio' adjoining the Gallery which, according to Giles Walkley, was used by Mary Thornycroft.<sup>12</sup> Laura AlmaTadema too had studio space in her home, although as Deborah Cherry notes, the small suite of rooms at her disposal did not compete with the palatial studio in the prized firstfloor location, which was her husband's.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Louise Jopling's autobiography reveals a picture of studio access in which the designation of her husband as 'head of household' in the 1881 census is at odds with her role as a successful artist and family breadwinner. According to her autobiography, throughout the 1870s she had financial responsibility for her household including two young children, and she worked in a studio located in the front room of her rented houses; later, she had a studio built in the garden of a home in West London, which upon her marriage to Joseph Jopling she shared with her husband. When the studio-sharing arrangement proved impracticable, her husband moved his work to a rented studio in Trafalgar Square, leaving her as sole occupant of the garden studio; when they moved to

Chelsea, around 1880, they built separate but adjacent studios in the garden.<sup>14</sup> The Joplings married after Louise had

<sup>12</sup> Walkley, *Artists' Houses*, op cit, p 68

<sup>13</sup> Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists*, Routledge, London, 1993, p 42

<sup>14</sup> L.J.M. Jopling-Rowe, *Twenty Years of My Life 1867-1887*, John Lane the Bodley Head, London 1925, see pp 30, 51, 125, 134-35 [ADD PUBLISHER]

established her commercial career, and their marriage accommodated her continuing in that work: if Joseph Jopling was the nominal head of the household, Louise Jopling maintained a privileged position in respect of the organisation of family life to sustain her artistic practice.

These examples show that during the period in which modern art was emerging, its products were typically, or least ideally, produced in a workshop arrangement that combined both domestic and working life. An artist's home, like that of a physician or a writer, was not necessarily separated from his or her place of work, and access to dedicated or private space for work within the home and its grounds seems to have been the ideal to which successful artists aspired. The allocation of that space normally followed a gendered order that prioritized access for the (prototypically male) head of the household, with adult children and spouses occupying secondary spaces for art working where they were available. Louise Jopling's household reversed the normal gendered order of this arrangement; but even in the case of such a role reversal, conventional patterns of gendered labour persisted in the undertaking of social duties associated with art practice.

### ***WORKING AT HOME: LABOURING FOR ART***

The artist was not the only person in his or her household who contributed to the labours involved in art making, and members of artists' households made tangible contributions to artistic production in practical ways. Here I am going to chiefly consider the social labour associated with the entrepreneurial side of artistic careers, and briefly modeling, as two aspects of art production in which the artist relied on contributions from members of her or his household. These activities were typically performed in the service of the 'head of the household' and have largely remained invisible as elements of artistic practice because their contribution to the production of the artwork is not immediately visible in the end product. Current debates around the formations of art practice in the contemporary art world have focused on the central role occupied by the performance of social labour as a novel form of art practice. But in the nineteenth century, perhaps even more than now, the work of forging and maintaining social connections was essential for artists; this work relied in a material way on the participation of the artist's entire household.

The art market was being transformed by the emergence of the independent art dealer and the expansion of print culture in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and artists were experimenting with varied ways of selling their work: traditional patronage which involved direct sales was still important as was selling to private collectors through an intermediary dealer; mounting paid exhibitions of spectacular paintings; and selling copyright for reproductions of popular works to printsellers. Women were explicitly disadvantaged in these relationships since, as Maria Quirk has written, the expectation that women should exist in a state of economic dependence compromised women's negotiating position with some dealers and patrons.<sup>15</sup> This is not to say that women were innocent of

commercial knowledge: Malcolm Warner, writing on the prominent artist John Everett Millais, can only reconstruct the commercial history of Millais's career because much of the detail was reported in letters to his wife, who would have been

<sup>15</sup> Maria Quirk, 'Portraiture and Patronage: Women, Reputation, and the Business of Selling Art, 1880–1914', *Visual Culture in Britain*, vol 17, no 2, 2016, pp 181-99  
personally acquainted with Millais's patrons and business partners and was seemingly his greatest confidante in his business affairs.<sup>12</sup>

The rituals that governed social interactions among middle- and upper-ranking families in the nineteenth century were highly formalised, and the introduction of new acquaintances including patrons and other professional contacts was conducted on very prescriptive terms. Because a studio was often part of an artist's home, the reception of visitors involved professional entertaining. It was customary for artists to show works in their studio before sending them for a public exhibition in a gallery, and for this to have been a social occasion for the artists, their families, and their visitors; Shirley Nicholson finds Marion Sambourne's diaries full of accounts of visits to artists' studios in the weeks leading up to the Royal Academy annual exhibition. The significance of this whirl of social activity was multiplied by being reported in the press. As Julie Codell has argued, the publication of artists' biographies and accounts of their studio homes was a key part of the diet of Victorian art journalism, and the publicity generated through these publications was, alongside the exhibition reviews, a tangible element of the emerging 'dealer-critic

---

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm Warner, 'Millais in the Marketplace: The Crisis of the Late 1850s', in Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, eds, *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2011, pp 216-36

system'.<sup>13</sup> Transactions between dealers or collectors and artists may have taken place in private, but a wide range of social encounters, including those that involved the artist's home and family, were part of the wider context of those relationships.

The staging of all of these activities took place within a framework in which the adult women played a supporting role to the male head of the household in the conduct of his affairs. Women undertook to receive and entertain visitors to the home, and to pay the required reciprocal visits. The custom of the adult women of a family holding a day 'at home' to receive visitors was a routine mechanism for forging social bonds. The artist Anna Lea Merritt is now best remembered for this pithy reference to the importance of

this work, which appeared in a 1900 essay counseling aspiring artists:

The chief obstacle to a woman's success [as an artist] is that she can never have a wife. Just reflect what a wife does for an artist, Darns the stockings; Keeps his house; Writes his letters; visits for his benefit; Wards off intruders; Is personally suggestive of beautiful pictures; Always an encouraging and partial critic. It is exceedingly difficult to be an artist without this time-saving help. A husband would be quite useless. He would never do any of these disagreeable things.<sup>14</sup>

Merritt's insight into the requirement for social labour (letter writing, visiting patrons, diverting unwelcome visitors) performed by the artist's wife, but not an artist's husband, suggests how unequal were the structures that organised the social labour necessary to the

---

<sup>13</sup> Julie F. Codell, 'The Art Press and the Art Market: The Artist as "Economic Man"', *ibid*, pp 136-44

<sup>14</sup> Anna Lea Merritt, 'A Letter to Artists: Especially Women Artists', reprinted from *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 65, March 1900, pp 463-69 together with her 1892 autobiography, *Love Locked Out: The Memoirs of Anna Lea Merritt with a Checklist of Her Works*, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, nd, p 237

artist's career. It was not only the unequal balance of expectations between husband and wife that disadvantaged the woman artist; as Merritt observed in her autobiography, even fashion favoured the men:

A portrait painter must associate with his patrons – unless he knows their ways and surroundings, it is not possible to give the right atmosphere. A man can do this at far less cost than a woman. His evening dress is far less expensive and it is possible at night to go in a bus, which is impossible for a lady's dinner dress.<sup>15</sup>

This startling observation suggests not only the extent to which entertaining and visiting was an integral part of the professional life of the artist, but how differently women were given access to that social scene.<sup>16</sup>

The importance of the wife (or adult daughter) in performing the supportive social activities that were required by the artist is also suggested by what happened in her absence: two male bachelor heads of household in my sample (Frederick Leighton and Valentine Prinsep) and in 1881, the widowed artist Anna Lea Merritt, were all named as the head of a household that included a *butler*. It seems that Merritt, Leighton and Prinsep found in a butler the answer to the problem of not having a wife.<sup>17</sup> The designation of butler suggests the performance of *social* duties as opposed to manual ones (Millais retained a male footman, and the Thornycrofts a 14 year-old male 'studio sweeper'). The presence of any manservant in an urban household is now interpreted as a signifier of social status, but it is

---

<sup>15</sup> Merritt, *Love Locked Out*, op cit, p 192

<sup>16</sup> See also Quick, 'Portraiture and Patronage', op cit, p 186

<sup>17</sup> Edward Burne Jones' household also shows a butler in 1891. His wife Georgiana was by then more often living at their house in Rottingdean, near Brighton, than in London.

to be remarked that artists availed themselves of a butler in the absence of a literal or metaphorical 'wife'. This pattern indicates the importance of otherwise feminised *social* labour in the artist's household.

The complex interactions between class and gender that shaped the social engagements which sustained art practice are perhaps at their most poignant in relation to modeling. Studio models were still an integral part of the artistic process for artists whose work included figures, as many artworks then did. Employing workers paid on a daily basis as needed was the normal route through which an artist obtained a model, and models could enjoy the status of a skilled worker if they were a particular favourite. The work of models in the nineteenth century is a complicated and fascinating topic because of how the physically intimate relationship between model and artist frequently challenged the conventional spatial arrangements that divided professional from labourer, and women from men.<sup>18</sup> While the intimate relation between artist and *muse* is often regarded as a privileged relationship, it appears that family being called to the often menial work of modelling was commonplace: John Everett Millais, father to a large family, reportedly posed his children, wife and sister-in-law as models for his paintings; Nicholson recounts Linnell Sambourne directing children and visitors in the frequent production of reference photographs, and Julia Margaret Cameron's reliance on her domestic servants and family

---

<sup>18</sup> Martin Postle, 'Behind the Screen: The Studio Model', Martin Postle and William Vaughan, eds *The Artist's Model from Etty to Spencer*, Merrell Holberton, London, 1999, pp 55-79. See also Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996, pp 196-202

members as models for her photographs is well documented.<sup>19</sup> Modelling was clearly one area where the labour of the whole household could be put at the disposal of the artist in the development of their work, and no doubt one of the distinctive, intimate domestic chores associated with living in an artist's family.

### **WORKING AT HOME: LABOURING FOR THE ARTIST'S FAMILY**

The work which artists' households devoted to the chores associated with artistic life such as modeling, receiving and paying visits with other artists and patrons, as well as painting, drawing and building maquettes (or sweeping the studio after), took place alongside a huge amount of domestic labour that was essential for the functioning of the household. While the work of maintaining the home and the people who lived in it was of a generic sort which all families required, the census records summarised in Figure 2 make clear that artist families relied on an extensive network of paid and unpaid labour to perform essential household work: conversely to the art labour to which men had privileged access, this domestic work was primarily allocated to women. That women were given the job of

maintaining the home followed, as Leonore Davidoff discusses in her study of housekeeping as paid work, from 'the division of the sexes and the creation of a special domestic sphere with higher standards of cooking, cleaning, laundry and mending, [which] promoted male expectations of being "serviced" by women, whether wives or daughters, employees or neighbours.'<sup>20</sup>

Nineteenth-century homes utilities were typically still supplied room-by-room, and materials such as coal, candles,

---

<sup>19</sup> On Sambourne's photography practice see footnote 10. Cameron's practice of posing her grandchildren and servants for the allegorical and biblical subjects for which she was most famous is documented in every discussion of her work, including a recent exhibition catalogue, Marta Weiss, *Julia Margaret Cameron: Photographs to Electrify You and Startle the World*,

London and Tonbridge, MACK in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015

<sup>20</sup> Leonore Davidoff, 'The Separation of Home and Work? Landladies and Lodgers in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century England', in Sandra Burman, ed, *Fit Work for Women*,

Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1979, p 76



and water had to be carried in and out as they were used. Sewing machines and ready-to-wear manufactured clothing were only invented around this time, and without washing machines, the maintenance as well as the production of clothing was burdensome. The tasks were many and the standard of execution mattered: the cleanliness of homes and family members were essential to social success.<sup>21</sup> The use of paid domestic labour to perform the work was extensive.<sup>22</sup> Across the United Kingdom, the number of people whose formal employment was domestic work constituted an army: Moira Donald suggests that 10-13% of the working population was employed in domestic service in the second half of the nineteenth century, more than was employed in factories.<sup>23</sup>

**Commented [AD3]:** Lara, isn't this tautological? Should the heading change? - The heading contrasts with the previous, which shows

The census records allow us to ascertain the number of domestic workers resident with the families of artists and usually identify (through employment titles) the kind of work that servants were assigned to perform. Table 1 indicates the number and duties of servants listed on the household census form, and codes them red/blue for female/male to allow a visual indication of the prominence of female servants. A common pattern was to have at least two women servants (cook, housemaid); sometimes further women servants and a childminder or 'nurse' for small children (see Figure 3, the Sambourne family census record, as an example). Male servants are much rarer; that artists' homes serviced **Commented [LP4]:** Insert Figure 3 here their domestic needs with predominantly female servants is consistent with patterns of labour in urban households from the late eighteenth century onwards.<sup>24</sup> The employment of domestic servants itself created additional work for the family in the management of the servants; this task normally fell to the head of household's nearest female relative (wife, mother or daughter). Nineteenth-century families were concerned to regulate the standards

---

<sup>21</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, op cit, pp 380-88

<sup>22</sup> Edward Higgs, 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England', *Social History*, vol 8, no 2, 1983, pp 201-210

<sup>23</sup> Donald, 'Tranquil Havens?', op cit, p 104

<sup>24</sup> Male servants appear in six of the census records in Table 1. I have excluded W. Reynolds living with the Joplings in 1891 and listed as a stonemason; he was probably the husband or brother of their cook Emma Reynolds and not working for the family. The gender of domestic

of performance and behaviour of their domestic staff as reflecting on themselves, and the complaints of middle-class women the burdens of managing servants are extensive.<sup>29</sup>

One way of rationalising the quantity of labour required to maintain a household was by adults sharing an existing home, an arrangement which increased the work of the women responsible for maintaining it.<sup>30</sup> In working-class South London, the photographer William Strudwick and his wife took in a boarder, whose contribution to the net family income probably offset the cost of the single, young female servant who lived in the house; more genteel versions of the same principle pertained where bachelor family members resided with their relatives' established families. In Figure 2, we find Edward Burne-Jones's nephew, John Everett Millais' brother, and Luke Fildes's brother-in-law Henry Woods all affording themselves of the comforts of their married relatives' family homes. In the case of Henry Woods and Millais' brother, the arrangement was in place on two census dates, suggesting that it was permanent. In addition to four instances

service has been widely debated by historians especially of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For a discussion of the issues and a summary of some of the data, see Leonard Schwarz, 'English Servants and Their Employers during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Economic History Review*, vol 52, no 2, 1999, pp 236-56

<sup>29</sup> See Barker and Hamlett, 'Living above the Shop', op cit, for a detailed discussion of the moral governance of the household. Hamlett, *Material Relations*, op cit, contains a general discussion of social relations between servants and employers pp 55-59; Nicholson in *A Victorian Household*, op cit, writes about Marion Sambourne's trials with servants on pp 65-6 <sup>30</sup> Davidoff, 'The Separation of Home and Work?', op cit, pp 83-89

of male family members sharing the houses of their relatives we find adult children, male and female, living with their parents, and in 1871 we find Louise Jopling (then Romer) residing in the very large household of a married couple described in her autobiography as

'kind friends', though her two small children and their nurse Emily Baldwin were then 'boarded out' with Emily's aunt and uncle in rural Kent.<sup>25</sup>

That Louise Jopling would not have wanted to impose on her friends by bringing her two children and their nurse to a house which already included nine children of various ages and six servants is not surprising. Although by her own account she was very attached to her children, they also often lived apart from her. Young children require attention from adults which prevents the latter from engaging in other pursuits: in the families in my sample, this was compensated for by recruiting additional paid domestic help. All the families with children under five years of age – the Williams family, the Oulesses, the Sambournes, the Millais, Louise Rowe/Jopling, and the Allinghams – employed at least one nurse. As the Fildes family grew from one young child to in 1881 to four in 1891, their household grew to include an 'undernurse' as well as an 'underhousemaid'. In the 1891 census records, John Millais' household included both nurse and undernurse, presumably the carers for two grandchildren also recorded at the address on census day. In 1881, Valentine Prinsep employed a married couple as butler and housekeeper; they had three children under five years of age, and in turn employed a nursery maid. Working mothers, regardless of the nature of their employment, needed help with their children.

The nurse would normally cohabit with young children in a designated part of the house (the nursery) away from the adult rooms: a typical arrangement was to have the nursery at the top of the house, with the family's adult bedrooms and the living and working rooms

---

<sup>25</sup> Percival and Hilda Romer are listed on the 1871 census record for the Sevenoaks Road (Kent) household of Thomas Usherwood, together with their nurse, his niece, Emily Baldwin. The Usherwood household also included Thomas's wife, Susanna and their 3 daughters, but no servants.

on the lower floors.<sup>26</sup> This separation of young children from adults within the home sometimes was replicated out of it. The Sambournes, who would not have considered themselves to be very well off, rented separate accommodation for their children and nurse during family holidays at Marianne Sambourne's parents' second home in the Kent countryside, so that the children could visit or be visited but the adults left to enjoy their own company.<sup>27</sup> Children of school age may have been educated away from their parents' home. Louise Jopling's autobiography records that her first income from her painting was immediately spent on 'a little daily nursemaid to take my two little boys out walking, and [...] the necessary materials for study.'<sup>28</sup> The demands of childcare were the first to be given over to paid domestic labour.

While artist families routinely employed domestic help to care for their children, and normally had between two and six additional domestic servants living in to attend to housework and meal preparation, two households in my sample recorded no domestic servants on the day of the census. These are Rebecca Solomon's residence at Great Tichfield Street in 1881, a flat in a building occupied by working class tenants (other heads of household include a master builder, a courier, and a general labourer). The other is the Chelsea home of French painter Adrian Coiffier and his wife and teenage daughter in the same year. Either case may reflect happenstance of the servants being away from home on census day, but we should take seriously the possibility that these families availed themselves of daily (rather than residential) domestic help, or none at all: none of the other

---

<sup>26</sup> Jane Hamlett, *Domestic Interiors and Middle-Class Families in England, 1850-1910*,

Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2010, pp 111-20

<sup>27</sup> Nicholson, *A Victorian Household*, op cit, p. 30

<sup>28</sup> Jopling-Rowe, *Twenty Years of My Life*, op cit, p 10

households in Rebecca Solomon's building recorded any servants living in. These two are exceptionally small households in the sample, and it was probably a complex relationship between gender, class, and poverty that led to the absence of servants in the Solomon and Coiffier households.<sup>29</sup> In the absence of sufficient income to retain a servant, the adult women of the family were evidently tasked with undertaking the domestic work of the household.

Although these arrangements were not exclusive to artist families, artist households appear to have conformed to a pattern in which the adult women – regardless of their other commitments – were expected to devote daily more of their time than adult men to the needs of the household. This is suggested by all the evidence of women's contribution to the domestic establishment, but also by some simple comparisons: the two single male householders in my sample (Prinsep and Leighton) maintained the same numbers of resident servants as did the Thornycroft household of five adults, or that of Linley Sambourne, his wife and two small children. Who then must have provided the extra work involved in caring for a larger family? Families in which both the head of the household and his wife were practicing artists (the Thornycrofts, Allinghams, the Burne Joneses, Alma-Tademas, and the Joplings) did not employ larger domestic staffs than the households in which the wife was not listed as having employment; in fact, none of the two-artist families had more than three servants. Even in the absence of the labour of

---

<sup>29</sup> Little is known of Rebecca Solomon's life at this time, although her circumstances following the death of her brother Abraham in 1862 and the imprisonment of her brother Simeon in 1873 seem to have been in decline. A serviceable biography of Rebecca Solomon and her family can be consulted at the Simeon Solomon Research Archive,

<http://www.simeonsolomon.com/rebecca-solomon-biography.html>, accessed 28 February 2017

childcare (which was routinely allocated to servants) the conclusion that the women artists were normally bearing what is now known as the 'double burden' of paid work and domestic labour is indicated.<sup>30</sup>

### ***CONCLUSIONS: THE DOMESTIC LIFE OF MODERN ARTISTS***

Nineteenth-century artist families seem to have organised their overall labour according to typical patterns in which the greatest burden of the work of the household clearly fell on women. Most of the domestic labour involved in the care of infants, cooking and cleaning was devolved to paid female household labour; the census data shows that the employment of female domestic help by artist families was commonplace, although the number and kind of servants varied according to a family's income, composition, and status. Men by default took the role of the 'head of the household' which was associated both with commercial activity and with the command of the household resources. While women could access the resources to practice as artists, it seems that they rarely inhabited the role of 'head of the household' that prioritized their art production: the exceptions in my sample are Louise Jopling (who was separated/widowed then remarried), Anna Lea Merritt (who was widowed after a brief marriage) and Rebecca Solomon (unmarried).

Within a marriage it was usual for the head of household role to default to the man; but women sustained artistic production by contributing to the necessary (unwaged) social

---

<sup>30</sup> The Allinghams and the Thornycrofts are households where both husband and wife are listed as practicing artists and have 3 servants, whereas the Sambournes, the Fildes, and the Oules family, in which only the husband is listed as having employment, had three or more servants.

labour that supported a commercial career, as well as undertaking ancillary production in the form of journalism and criticism.<sup>31</sup> That all of that work is normally considered simply as ‘service’ or ‘context’ for the production of art proper is characteristic of a commercialised art world that fetishes the work of art as a (saleable) commodity.

So accustomed are we to proclaiming the autonomy of the artwork that the significance of domestic and social labour to sustaining the artist and his or her practice has largely gone unremarked in our histories, at least since the emerging market for ‘modern art’ proposed the alienation of the artist and his art from routine social life. Harrison and Cynthia White’s account of the formation of the ‘dealer-critic system’ in the third quarter of the nineteenth century had as its primary aim to explain the aesthetic changes associated with modern art in relation to the changing structures of the art market; but the ‘dealer-critic system’ that they described also hints at why the family has been sidelined from accounts of arts histories. Inspired in part by the statements of Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler, the prominent twentieth-century art dealer, the Whites suggested that ‘[t]he speculative motive reinforced the concern of the dealer with the total career of the painter’<sup>32</sup> which was most marketable when ornamented with a reputation for genius. It is one of the hallmarks of genius that it operates independently or in opposition to the ordinary; the routine; and particularly to the feminised sphere of the domestic.

---

<sup>31</sup> Hilary Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century: Looking like a Woman*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014; Meaghan Clarke, *Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain, 1880-1905*, Ashgate Press, Aldershot, 2005

<sup>32</sup> Harrison White and Cynthia White *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World*. John Wiley and Sons, Inc. London, New York and Sydney, 1965, pp 94-99

The valorisation of the eccentric genius notwithstanding, women arguably fared better in the new patterns of exhibition-making which emerged around 1875 than in the system of the Academies which it displaced, because commercial exhibitions were unregulated by formal structures of membership, and often integrated fine art with decorative concerns in a way that was more hospitable to women artists.<sup>33</sup> Establishing women's participation in the art market is the subject of a growing interest; but whatever we discover about women artists' place in the art market, its explanatory significance can only be developed in relation to an understanding of the complementary context of women's (and men's) participation in domestic work.<sup>34</sup> The significance of the division of 'public' (as in trade, business and politics) from 'private' life (as in the concerns of the nuclear family) alongside the emergence of modern capitalism in nineteenth-century Europe is well-known, and as Silvia Federici's work reminds us, was an essential feature of the structuring of the industrial economy.<sup>35</sup>

A key suggestion that arises from this study is that the role and status of women in the history of art since the nineteenth century is aligned to the gendered structure of a

---

<sup>33</sup> See for example Colleen Denney and Susan Casteras, eds, *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*, Yale University Press, London and New Haven, 1996, and on France, Patricia Mainardi, *The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993

<sup>34</sup> See Quick, 'Portraiture and Patronage', op cit, for example; Maura Reilly included women's secondary market earnings as well as other measures of commercial success 'Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures and Fixes', published in *Artnews*, June 2015, <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/>, accessed 7 June 2017

<sup>35</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, Autonomedia, New York, 2004



capitalist economy which assigns to women undervalued (low-paid or unpaid) domestic labour; this structure is *continuous* rather than discontinuous, extending from at least the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. The fractures in art's history that are marked by the terminology of movements and periods underplays the importance of the more entrenched division of domestic from artistic labour that underpins the production of artworks and access to the professional identity of the artist in Euro-American cultures. Understanding the extent to which the work, as in the *labour*, of art is structured by a long-term, pervasive gendered division of labour invites a shift in art historical investigation away from the fetishised commodity (as the saleable output of artistic labour) and onto a complex economy of production found to be, perhaps remarkably, very close to home.