



Crafting Empire: Intersections of Irish and Canadian Women's History

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The home arts movement is a valuable and unique part of the history of late nineteenth-century art and display practices and their intersection with Victorian women's working lives. Centrally organized through the London-based Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA), the British home arts movement promoted the concept of handicrafts as an alternative mode of production through the ideal of rural workshops for the hand production of exquisitely crafted objects.¹ Both the Dun Emer Guild (Dublin, 1902) and the Canadian Handicrafts Guild (Montreal, 1905) subscribed to the home arts ideals of advocating the handmade, supporting rural regeneration, and promoting artistic innovation as these gained a global currency at events such as international expositions and world fairs.²

At the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, both the Irish Dun Emer Guild and the Canadian Handicrafts Guild displayed craft objects and their makers for the many international visitors welcomed to the Irish Pavilion and the Canadian Building. Within the Fair, the Dun Emer Guild exhibited at the Irish Industrial Exhibition, organized by the Irish government's Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. This pavilion presented a variety of craftwork produced by Irish home arts and industries associations. Similarly, the Canadian Handicrafts Guild – still, at this time, the Home Arts and Handicrafts Committee of the Montreal branch of the Women's Art Association of Canada (WAAC) – received a substantial grant from the Canadian Department of Agriculture.³

The Canadian Handicrafts Guild exhibit at St. Louis was often presented in glowing terms by the press, with one report describing how “two niches contain green stained oak cabinets, in one of which [is] some lovely Irish lace, made in Canada by the same Irish woman who made the flounces for Her Majesty's [Queen Alexandra's] wedding gown.”⁴ A rare photograph of this craftswoman's lace work was later published in the *Canadian Geographical*

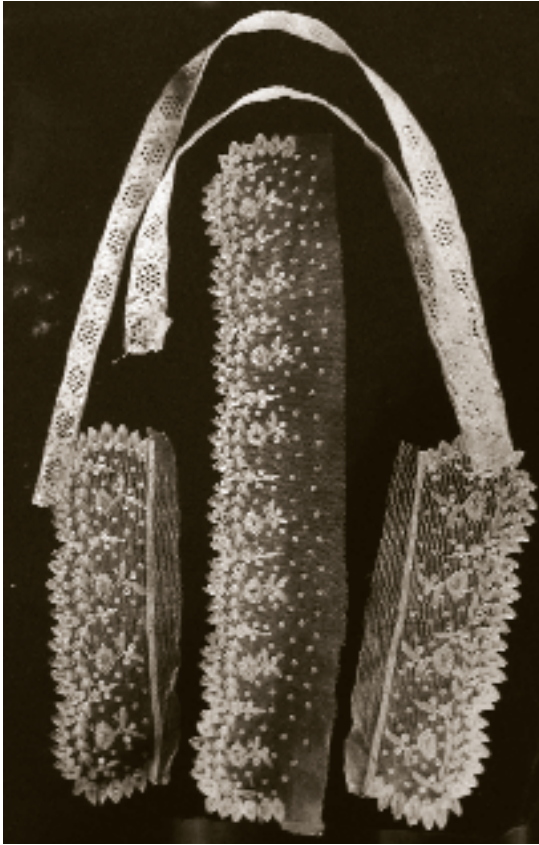
Detail, Dun Emer postcard, ca. 1911. Guild worker May Kerley wears a “rational dress” with Celtic style embroidery, made at Dun Emer. (Photo: Courtesy of the Board of Trinity College, Dublin)

Journal, which explained that this piece of fine lace had been produced by an “Irish immigrant woman” as part of another Canadian Handicrafts Guild gift, this one to Queen Mary on the occasion of her coronation (1911) and representing “each craft practiced in Canada”⁵ (Fig. 1). In a draft letter to the Queen, Guild members hoped that “these specimens will express to Your Majesty the tribute of many hearts, emanating in various chords and quaint strains, but uniting in one earnest, patriotic prayer for the happiness of Your Majesty.”⁶ The intersections of Irish and Canadian craft history discussed in this paper are embodied in this one anonymous lacemaker – a craftswoman singled out in most accounts of the Canadian Guild and always described in terms of her immigrant status in Canada, her Irish origins, her contribution to these royal gifts and, by extension, her participation in these gestures of colonial deference to the British metropole.

In this article I will highlight the “quaint strains” of Irish Canadian craftswomen in order to explore how women of differing political, social, class, and religious affiliations performed the nation (whether Irish or Canadian) at these guilds through the processes of encouraging, making and displaying beautifully crafted objects. These women were expected to identify with the cultural nationalism imagined by each guild’s middle-class founders and presented in the design and material of the craftwork on view at important international displays, such as the World’s Fair, where it was reported that the Canadian Building housing the display of craft was “the most popular on the ground.”⁷

The historical diversity within Canada is evident in the frequent references to the cultural origins of craft practices promoted by the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, including the Irish tradition of lacemaking. In her writing on Canadian historiography, Magda Fahrni underlines the importance of examining “particular localities” in their broader contexts, while keeping in mind their links with other localities, and the ways in which these might be structured by, and participate in, networks of communication and exchange – borrowing, lending and sometimes excluding people, goods and ideas.⁸ It is the existence of such a mutually constituting network of people, craft traditions and material objects that I wish to reveal by exploring the particular intersection of Canadian and Irish women’s history that emerges through the shared international exhibiting activities of the Montreal-based Canadian Handicrafts Guild, the Dun Emer Guild in Dublin, and the Home Arts and Industries Association in London.

In these three different settings – international display, the craft revival of the home arts movement and the guild model – the crafted object worked to establish social relationships among women on a global scale, and these in turn developed a network significant in promoting the creative lives of



1 | Photograph of Canadian Handicrafts Guild lacework by “an Irish immigrant woman.” Published in *Canadian Geographical Journal* (October 1934): 202. (Photo: author)



2 | Photograph of a Dun Emer Guild hand-tufted wool carpet of Celtic design. Published in *The Studio* (January 1905). (Photo: author)

women in Ireland and Canada. In examining this social network, I will begin in Ireland and work my way toward Canada by tracing the working lives of craftswomen involved in this international craft movement.⁹

The Intricacies of Crafting Women’s Social Networks: The Dun Emer Guild

In January 1905, the London-based art journal *The Studio* singled out a magnificent hand-tufted wool carpet with Celtic design woven by rural Irish women working at the Dun Emer Guild (Fig. 2).¹⁰ The journal praised the Dun Emer craftswomen for their ability to produce the swirling interlace pattern of the carpet, something difficult to work in hand-weaving on an



3 | Photograph of the craftswomen of the Dun Emer Guild gathered around its founders: Evelyn Gleeson, centre in black dress, with Susan Mary (Lily) Yeats and Elizabeth Yeats, kneeling with her elbow on her sister's lap. (Photo: Courtesy of the Board of Trinity College, Dublin)

upright loom. In addition to its visibly Irish design, the object's materials and its makers were also Irish. The "Irishness" woven into this Dun Emer carpet, by both its makers and by the press, indicates how the crafted object is culturally marked and how perceptions of it might change according to variables in what, following anthropologist Igor Kopytoff, we might term its "cultural biography."¹¹

Founded as part of the home arts movement in 1902, the Dun Emer Guild was, in part, a response to increased rural depopulation in Ireland. The three educated, middle-class women who directed the Guild – Evelyn Gleeson (1855–1944) with Lily (1866–1949) and Elizabeth (1868–1940) Yeats – sought to bring together the exhibition and sale of beautiful objects with improved living and working conditions for Irish peasants and rural labourers. The Guild specialized in weaving, embroidery and printing on a hand press. Although most accounts of the Dun Emer Guild focus upon the Yeats sisters, it was Evelyn Gleeson who initiated the Guild and who was responsible for the astounding success of its weaving department (Gleeson is pictured at the centre of Figure 3 among the Dun Emer Guild's craftswomen, ca. 1905).¹²

Following the workshop model favoured by the home arts movement, the Dun Emer Guild was installed in a large home in the Dublin suburb of Dundrum.¹³ The embroidery, tapestry and weaving workrooms were on the upper floor of the house in a large room, while the printing press was set up in a separate room. The Yeats sisters lived with their father some twenty minutes away, but Evelyn Gleeson lived at Dun Emer with her sister, Constance McCormack, and her nieces and nephew.¹⁴ Every Thursday, the workrooms were opened to the public for viewing, along with a display room exhibiting finished works. At Dun Emer, public and private space was conflated, as industry and the buying public converged inside one woman's home.

Under Evelyn Gleeson's guidance, Dun Emer weaving and tapestry regularly won prizes and received awards at national and international exhibitions (including those of the Irish Industries Association, the Royal Dublin Society, and the HAIA). This international acclaim allowed the Guild's middle-class founders to advance an agenda of social and political activism based on fostering the self-sufficiency of women through active creative labour. For Gleeson, this activism had been nurtured during her earlier involvement in both feminist and Irish nationalist organizations. In 1881, she served as the Vice-President of the Athlone branch of the Irish Ladies' Land League – a nationalist organization that rallied support for impoverished tenant farmers.¹⁵ Then in the 1890s, after a move to the English capital, Gleeson became a member of the suffragist Pioneer Club of London, establishing in 1897 a “women's information bureau” in order to help to “raise the position of women, to open them to new avenues of influence and to provide them with wages as good as men's in the same kind of work.”¹⁶ Membership in these organizations foreshadowed her later craftwork, which brought both strands of Gleeson's activism together. A 1911 Dun Emer postcard, for example, depicts May Kerley, a Guild worker, wearing a “rational” dress made by the Dun Emer Guild with Celtic-style embroidery in the form of interlace on the collar, hem and purse.¹⁷ Here, the sense of pride in Irish culture that was evident in the design and material of every object at Dun Emer is conjoined with a feminist concern for women's health, comfort and freedom of movement, and both agendas are intertwined with yet another priority, set out in early Guild prospectuses: that of developing “new trades and industries” by fostering the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of the “local talent,” i.e. working-class women.¹⁸

In considering whether the middle-class women who founded this craft Guild succeeded in their practical goal of mentoring others, it is instructive to examine the experiences of Dun Emer craftworkers during and after their time with the Guild. Take the example of May Kerley, seen in the



4 | Dun Emer postcard, ca. 1911. Guild worker May Kerley wears a “rational dress” with Celtic style embroidery, made at Dun Emer. (Photo: Courtesy of the Board of Trinity College, Dublin)

rational dress of Figure 4. An award-winning weaver and, later, designer, who worked at Dun Emer, Kerley trained with the Guild and ran its stall at several exhibitions before leaving to manage the Glenbeigh Industries in County Kerry. While working at the Guild, Kerley was singled out for special mention by art critics writing in widely circulated newspapers such as the *Times*, and this pattern continued after her move to Glenbeigh. *The Studio*

included regular coverage of Glenbeigh's work, which was also frequently praised in Irish nationalist publications, including the *Irish Homestead*. The Irish paper's review of the Irish Art Industries Exhibition in Dublin (1905) highlighted the Glenbeigh Industries, explaining that "Glenbeigh, we are glad to see, is following the footsteps of Dun Emer, and the rugs exhibited by this industry are delightful."¹⁹ Such instances of home arts industries run by craftworkers from Dun Emer suggest that the Guild did achieve its goals, at least in part, and Kerley's experience confirms Evelyn Gleeson's claim, made in a Guild report of 1905, that the women weavers might "become teachers to others" and be "of material help to their families."²⁰

That Dun Emer women were "of material help to their families" seems clear: the craftswomen were initially paid wages, and as they became more experienced there were options for profit-sharing.²¹ Several instances of siblings working together at the Guild – Rosie and Margery Gallagher in the weaving department, for example – suggest that this craftwork could indeed have had a significant impact on a family's income. Certainly, Gleeson's own family benefited from her artistic training, business savvy, and teaching skills. Her nieces, Grace and Katherine McCormack, were both trained as weavers at the Guild, with Katherine eventually developing into one of the leading designers at Dun Emer, involved in running the organization with Gleeson after the Yeats sisters left in 1908 to form their own Cuala Industries, in nearby Churchtown.²² Thus the Dun Emer Guild can be read as a site of cultural formation and exchange, where meaning and purpose were constantly shifting as workers were given more authority in the design and production of the works, were paid higher wages according to merit, became involved in the daily operation of the industry, and branched off to start other artistic ventures.

Many of these strategies were designed to offer creative work to women in rural Ireland. Indeed, the home arts movement's craft guilds were generally established as a reaction to and a remedy for the effects of industrialization, urbanization, and emigration. Thus, one of the main goals of the Irish Industries Association (IIA) – which was the leading body of the home arts movement in Ireland – was to prevent rural Irish women from leaving the Irish countryside, whether for urban centres or, still further afield, for places such as Canada, which was a frequent destination for the Irish diaspora. Despite the best efforts of the Dun Emer Guild and the IIA, however, emigration remained central to the Irish experience in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, I contend that it is precisely *through* this immigrant experience that an international context for the home arts movement may be established. The concern for emigration, with its narrative of dislocation and ethnicity, in the Irish craft context leads directly to the craft revival

movement in Canada and to the incorporation of “Irishness” into the identity of Canada’s regional and national crafts.

Forging New Bonds of Empire: The Canadian Handicrafts Guild

Some of the earliest and most important exhibitions of craftwork in Canada were organized in Montreal by the Home Arts and Handicrafts Committee of the local branch of the WAAC, notably in 1900 and again in 1902. The first exhibition of artistic craftwork produced under the direction of the Committee set the tone for future displays and was ceremonially opened by Lord Strathcona at Morgan’s, a prestigious Montreal department store. Two years later, in 1902, the Montreal branch of the WAAC opened its own retail location; located downtown on Peel Street, *Our Handicraft Shop* became a prominent centre for the display and sale of Canadian craft (Fig. 5).²³ The Handicrafts Committee of the WAAC’s branch in Montreal became such a going concern that it soon split off to form its own organization, based on the familiar guild model. Thus, in 1905, the Canadian Handicrafts Guild (CHG) was founded, led by the energetic efforts of prominent Montrealers Alice Peck (1855–1943) and May Phillips (1856–1937). Before long, the Guild had also opened a depot on London’s fashionable Bond Street, where objects produced in Canada by Irish women were sold as “Canadian” craftwork to the English cultural elite.

Not surprisingly, the Canadian Guild’s colonial status was a recurring theme in press coverage both at home and abroad. Regarding the WAAC Handicrafts Committee’s inclusion in the 1904 HAIA exhibition, one English reviewer noted that this was “the first time that the English association has had an exhibit from one of the Colonies, so it will be an attractive feature for those interested in handicrafts.”²⁴ Coverage of the 1902 WAAC Montreal show by the British women’s newspaper *Queen* referred to Canada as “that important colony” and the Handicrafts Committee as “doing a splendid work in promoting the revival of these arts and making them known to the outside world.” The review ended by asking its readers: “Would not the creation of an interest in these . . . arts in England do much to encourage their revival, and furnish a new bond between the component parts of the empire?”²⁵

Historian Laura Peers contends that in many ways the empire referred to here existed materially, not simply as networks of people and politics but also of the objects they worked with, exhibited, sold, brought home, commented on, and consumed: that it was an “empire of goods” as much as of political structures.²⁶ Objects and their consumption performed and articulated identity, status and allegiance, acting as potent symbols within the complex cross-cultural realities of colonial society. This is revealed in the exhibiting



5 | Photograph showing the interior view of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild's *Our Handicraft Shop*, ca. 1934, Peel Street, Montreal. (Photo: Courtesy of the McCord Museum, Montreal)

practices of both the Canadian and the Irish guilds, in the movement among various parts of empire of colonial workers (in this case Irish women who embodied particular craft skills and traditions), and in the craft objects themselves. All were participants in a complex transnational network of connections and meanings.

One point of access to this network is through the prominent public figure Ishbel, Lady Aberdeen (Fig. 6). As the former viceregal consort to



6 | Ishbel, Lady Aberdeen, ca. 1900, President of the International Council of Women (1893–1936) and the National Council of Women, Canada (1893–1899). (Photo: Toronto Public Reference Library)

Canada, and patron of the Irish Industries Association, Lady Aberdeen's connections crossed oceans with ease.²⁷ Her mutual interest in the crafts of Ireland and Canada, brought her into correspondence with Alice Peck of the CHG (Figs. 7–8), and the two women exchanged ideas about the promotion of a national craft organization in each country. For example, one letter addressed to Peck from Aberdeen enclosed the most recent report of the IIA (1907), a special edition of the political *Irish Homestead* magazine (1897) and a book about the Home Industries Section of the Irish International Exposition of 1907 with a foreword by Lady Aberdeen herself.²⁸ The two women met in 1909 at a reception hosted by the CHG for the International Council of Women, which was meeting that year in Montreal. Here, Peck addressed Aberdeen and the other delegates by presenting a history of the Canadian Guild's activities. Referring specifically to the Guild's participation in the 1904 English HAIA exhibition, the 1907 Irish International Exposition (Dublin) and a later one in Australia, Peck explained how, "being a strongly imperialistic



7 | Alice Skelton Peck
(1855–1943), ca. 1890.
(Photo: Courtesy of the
Barbara Carter Collection
and Ellen Easton McLeod,
In Good Hands, 12)

guild, we were glad to feel that even in our humble way we might add one little link to the chain that binds the empire together.”²⁹

This network (or chain) of women also extended into Scotland. Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland (née St. Clair-Erskine) was a leading member of the Scottish Home Industries (comparable to the Irish Industries Association and HAIA), and she invited the Canadian Handicrafts Guild to contribute to her 1903 exhibition of Scottish, Welsh and Irish women’s craft at the Women’s Institute in London. Evelyn Gleeson of the Dun Emer Guild also had dealings with Millicent Sutherland. In her 1904 correspondence, Gleeson refers to a Dun Emer rug purchased by the Scottish aristocrat and also enquires, on behalf of May Kerley, about employment opportunities at her Technical Training School in Golspie – on the Sutherland estates and affiliated with the Scottish Home Industries (established 1889).³⁰

This network was structured by class and ethnic identities. Whether at Morgan’s in Montreal or on Bond Street in London, the women who could



8 | Alice Peck on her loom at her summer home in Lachute, ca. 1934. Peck was an accomplished weaver, dyer, printer, and needleworker. (Photo: Courtesy of the Barbara Carter Collection and Ellen Easton McLeod, *In Good Hands*, 23)

afford to buy handcrafted items for sale were not those who made them. Indeed, the home arts industries existed precariously on the line between collaboration and exploitation, social concern, and social control. Both the Dun Emer Guild and the CHG, for example, participated in the 1904 HAIA exhibition, where the artistic elite and wealthy connoisseurs of London frequented their displays and purchased the work made, demonstrated, and sold by rural or working-class craftspeople.³¹ In these exchanges between producers and consumers of cultural goods, taste functioned as a marker of social class. Certainly the Canadian Handicrafts Guild lost no opportunity to highlight the concern for Canadian craft demonstrated by royal and aristocratic English patrons; Queen Alexandra and Princess Louise both purchased goods through the Guild's London depot, as did Lady Grey, who was deeply interested in the development of the home industries in Canada, and the Guild regularly mentioned such prestigious connections in its

published accounts.³² Through such lofty associations, Canadian goods were also made to appeal to many middle-class consumers already well-versed in the patriotism and social consciousness advocated by the guilds. Thus social relationships were developed through the craft objects that women helped to produce, organize, display, distribute, and deploy within the cultural dynamics of colonialism. These crafted objects served to perform colonialism, to articulate this social network in tangible form, at these intersections of community, material object and people.³³

One of the objects in which narratives of class, nationhood and empire intertwine most emblematically is lace: the craft most often linked to Irish settlers in the literature, exhibition material, and press coverage of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild (as may be seen in the 1907 catalogue whose illustrations highlight the lace made by craftswomen of the Guild). The Guild collected lace made in Ireland to serve as exemplars to Canadian craftswomen, and its archives contain several photographs of the exquisite Limerick Lace owned by Canadian supporters, with a “Miss Esdaile” singled out among the collectors. Indeed, the craft’s strong national associations are frequently evident in references, such as these, to the “lovely Irish lace, made in Canada by an Irish immigrant woman,” or the “Limerick lace . . . which gives credit to the dainty fingers of the maids of the Shamrock,” or “the fine point laces from Irish settlers,” and the “cobwebby collar of Irish lace – Carrickmacross.”³⁴

That lace is the craft most often singled out is indicative of its status as a collectable and fashionable object at this time. Yet there is no little irony in the fact that an object so redolent of Irishness would also be made to signify high social standing, for much of the Irish diaspora – including that of Quebec in the nineteenth century – was brought into being by hardship and famine in Ireland. Indeed, many Irish remained impoverished once here and these were among the women the Montreal Guild sought out to offer assistance through craftwork, including lacemaking.³⁵ In her work on Irish lace, however, art historian Janice Helland explains that its history “was intimately related to privilege, wealth and social status and thus attracted consumers who desired to ‘own’ or to display their ownership of these characteristics.”³⁶ Indeed, lace was more recognisably elite than almost any other fabric, according to Helland, and attracted collectors who purchased it in much the same way that they purchased jewels or paintings. Certainly in photographs of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild’s exhibitions throughout this time, lace is usually displayed behind glass, apart from the other textiles, as art object rather than wearable item, signalling to the viewer its privileged status.

Notable lace collections mentioned in Canadian Handicrafts Guild literature help to trace the network of international connections and

associations that cohered around this particular material object. These include the collection of Mary F. Fisher (Mrs. Roswell C. Fisher), sister-in-law of Sydney Fisher, Canadian Minister of Agriculture when his Department awarded the Guild a grant to participate in the St. Louis World's Fair. Mary Fisher's impressive lace collection was loaned to the Guild and formed the majority of the work displayed in a 1907 exhibition. Fisher's sister, Dr. Octavia Grace Ritchie England, was also active in the larger Canadian community through her work in women's health and suffrage, as well as her involvement with the International Council of Women whose publication *Health of Nations* (1906) she helped to write and to which she represented Canada as a delegate at the 1914 Council meeting in Rome. Given this, it is also likely that both sisters knew Lady Aberdeen, who was president of the International Council of Women for thirty-six years. Lady Aberdeen was also a staunch promoter of both Irish and Canadian craft, and was of material support to the CHG during its participation at the 1907 Dublin International Exhibition.

These and other exchanges over lace on the part of elite collectors and the Guild highlight the social relationships established or maintained through this valuable textile.³⁷ Despite the vast social, cultural and geographic divides of oceans and international borders that separated these women, all were participants in a colonialism whose effects continued to be felt in both Ireland and Canada during the time period under consideration and which set the terms of the "dynamics of contact between distinct cultures."³⁸

One such term of shared contact – revealed through the exquisite craft objects produced by women and displayed for international consumption at large-scale events – was a transnational concern about the effects of emigration on craft production. The Irish and Canadian cultural narratives are strikingly similar here, with the worry over emigration familiar from the Irish context closely paralleled by apprehensions about rural depopulation that shaped the Canadian Guild's own mandate. A 1903 flyer of the Handicrafts Committee (frequently quoted in the press) explained:

The encouragement of an industry within the home solves in a great measure the problem of keeping the brightest and most intelligent of our young women in their own homes . . . preventing emigration to the cities and large manufacturing in the [United] States . . . Those who know country life in Canada realise the fact that money on a farm is scarce, to the women almost unknown, hence discontent among the younger members, and flight to the independence of the city . . . Now is the time to prevent our home arts – those brought in to us by our immigrants – all already on the decline, from disappearing altogether.³⁹

The parallel narratives of emigration (between countries and within them) set out in Guild rhetoric involved a complex layering of gender, class, age and ethnicity onto the reception of Canadian craft in the international settings its founders sought for the craftwork.

Increasingly, Canadian nationalism took its place amongst these factors, as the former colony sought to develop its own national identity – a project necessarily rendered complex by the settler histories of much of its population. A changing relation to the imperial centre thus underwrote the dynamics of contact established through objects and spread across networks, and this mix of interests is apparent in the coverage accorded to the Dublin exhibition by the English-Canadian press in Montreal. Predictably, reviews of the event exuded colonial deference for “the kindly interest shown in the Canadian Handicrafts exhibit” by their Excellencies Lord and Lady Aberdeen, to whom “the Guild is much indebted.”⁴⁰ The rest of the review, however, struck a slightly different and more self-interested note: “It is hoped that the interest taken in this exhibition of Canadian work abroad will help the workers here, and that Canadian home industries will take their proper place both at home and abroad.”⁴¹ That Canadian industries were worthy of such a place was a clear undercurrent in press descriptions of the Canadian Building as “a most popular place,” being “charmingly decorated with the materials made by our Canadian workers, and attract[ing] much admiring attention.” Notably the Canadian-made laces on display in the building were presented as comparing “most favourably with the laces of the Irish Home Industries” – a rather lofty claim, given the considerable reputation of Irish lace at this time.⁴²

Canadian-made Irish lace was part of a nascent and uniquely diverse Canadian national identity, together with the full range of crafts marketed by the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, and it is noteworthy that the Guild itself was intimately tied to some of the nation’s flagship institutions and organizations. As “Canadian Folk Song and Handicraft Festivals” were starting to be held across the country, the Guild’s objects were presented at exhibitions sponsored by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and sold at its popular hotels. The Guild was also sponsored by the Canada Steamship Lines, which distributed Canadian Handicrafts Guild pamphlets to its immigrant travellers as they entered the ports of Montreal and Quebec.⁴³

In seeking to understand the cultural biography of Canadian-made Irish lace, questions of class, colonialism and ethnicity thus coincide with those of national self-image. Canadian craft historian Sandra Flood suggests that in the late nineteenth century craft was seen as having a “unique and pivotal role in constructing a national image, in nation building and in providing a common meeting ground between the component ethnic groups” within Canada.⁴⁴ It is, therefore, critical to explore issues of ethnicity within the Canadian

craft community, in this case specifically with regard to the Irish immigrant women settling in the province of Quebec.

The ideal of a “Canadian mosaic” – a vision of a united Canada comprised of distinct cultural identities (popularised most prominently by CPR publicity agent John Murray Gibbon later in his CPR-sponsored Folk Song and Handicraft Festivals) – surfaces throughout Guild literature and display practices, including St. Louis. The American press singled out the display of Canadian craft at the Fair, commenting: “a new and very interesting feature of the Canadian Pavilion at the World’s Fair is the exhibition of handicrafts from Quebec . . . Fine point laces from . . . Irish settlers of that province are exquisite both in pattern and execution.”⁴⁵ At the Fair, these Irish settlers were expected to perform their past (via these material objects) while at the same time being asked to proclaim their allegiance to their present and future in Canada. Participation in these visible exhibitions of difference under the unifying label of Canadian craft enacted a mosaic of comfort, utterly non-threatening, where ethnicity was made manageable.⁴⁶

In this way, the Canadian Handicrafts Guild established an international reputation and presented its craftwork as a government-endorsed signifier of a unified vision of “Canadian” craft, despite the varied backgrounds of its producers (including those recently emigrated from Ireland). In this instance, any “Irishness” associated with the work by its newly-arrived makers was absorbed into the cohesive Canadian identity presented by the Guild. At the World’s Fair, St. Louis, the craftwork of women from the Irish countryside was viewed both as uniquely Canadian (in the case of emigrant women) or purely Irish (in the case of those who remained), depending on where it was displayed.

Histoires croisées: Approaches to Women’s History in Ireland and Canada

From the “Irishness” of the Dun Emer carpet illustrated in *The Studio*, by way of the St. Louis World’s Fair, to the Irish lace displayed as some of the finest examples of Canadian craft, this essay has sought to think transnationally about the impact of the home arts notion of the craft guild and workshop as a socially collaborative experiment. The “educative nationalism” of the Irish Dun Emer Guild was woven into the fabric of every item produced in this home art industry, while this same impulse is evident in the Canadian context through the lens of the mosaic.

Both the Dun Emer Guild and the Canadian Handicrafts Guild operated at the intersection of what Peers suggests are the most intimate frontiers of empire, those of the home, the family and, most significantly for my purposes, the things one made and used within those spaces. The material

objects crafted at these guilds offer evidence of a wide social network of women engaged at these frontiers (of home, family, craft object, its making and use), advocating sustainable craftwork for women in Ireland, to prevent emigration, and in Canada, to keep women actively engaged in rural communities.

That this story, within Canada, centres on activities of women in Quebec is apt. As historian Magda Fahrni has observed, an “implicit separatism” plagues Canadian historiography, wherein Quebec is often written apart from the rest of Canadian history and experience. Yet as Fahrni notes, Quebec, in its history of double European colonization and complex relations with successive metropolises, offers a lens through which to understand Canadian history in terms of a multiplicity of transnational relations.⁴⁷ Thus, by focussing on the Irish experience within Quebec as it contributed to a Canadian craft identity that was showcased to the world at international venues (the HAIA shows, world fairs, Irish expositions, among others), this essay is one attempt to avoid such separatism. In its place, I suggest that an important facet of the Canadian experience is revealed by understanding the relationships – professional, creative, and activist – among many different women *across* several borders. Foregrounding a social network of women working with other women (whether rural women, working-class women in industrial centres such as Montreal, or wealthy pillars of elite society such as Lady Aberdeen and Alice Peck) provides a basis from which to develop a transnational approach to craft history as it emerged within the context of the late-nineteenth-century home arts movement.

Thus, rather than offering multiple histories for comparison, the overlapping and parallel histories of the Dun Emer Guild and the Canadian Handicrafts Guild are presented here instead as *histoires croisées*, or for their “processes of mutual influencing, in reciprocal or asymmetric perceptions,”⁴⁸ where they form an exciting part of *one* history – that of the international home arts movement. This history is traced through the migration of ideas, of women and of exquisite craft objects along these intimate frontiers of empire. Untangling the *histoires croisées* of these networks of women committed to the craft revivals of Ireland and Canada provides a useful model for the task of writing Canadian women into a wider, more global craft history.

NOTES

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- 1 HAIA was founded in 1884 by the British social reformer Eglantyne Jebb.
- 2 These two guilds were run independently from the HAIA but regularly exhibited at its annual shows and followed the lead of the earlier English Association's model for craft revival. All three are instances of the *international* scope I am claiming for the home arts movement. For an excellent historical background to the home arts movement, see Janice HELLAND, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries, 1880–1914: Marketing Craft, Making Fashion* (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2007); and, in the Canadian context, see Ellen EASTON MCLEOD, *In Good Hands: The Women of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press for Carleton University, 1999).
- 3 The Canadian Guild also sent some of its craftswomen to the Fair to run the exhibit and then remain for six months to promote Canadian craft in the United States. This was a successful strategy with commissions for Guild work coming from prominent organizations including, among others, the Chicago Art Institute and the Women's Art Club of Chicago ("Of Interest to Women: Women's Industries: Canadian Exhibit at St Louis Much Admired," *Daily Witness*, 29 Dec. 1904). For more on the craft guilds at the St. Louis World's Fair, see E.C. PATERSON, "'Meet Me in St. Louis': Emigration and Craft Revival in Nineteenth-century Ireland and Canada," *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* (forthcoming 2013); draft histories and archival material related to the Women's Art Association of Canada, Montreal branch, are available in the Fonds P125 at the McCord Museum Archives, Montreal, Canada. The WAAC remains active. Accessed 16 July 2013, <http://www.womensartofcanada.ca/>
- 4 "At St. Louis Fair," *Winnipeg Telegram*, 1904. Press Clipping Book 1904–1905, Canadian Handicrafts Guild Archives, Montreal, Canada, (CHGA).
- 5 *Canadian Geographical Journal* (October 1934): 202.
- 6 Canadian Handicrafts Guild Draft Letter to Queen Mary, 1911, CHGA.
- 7 "Canada At the World's Fair." Press Clipping Book 1904–1905, CHGA.
- 8 Magda FAHRNI, "Reflections on the Place of Quebec in Historical Writing on Canada," in *Contesting Clio's Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History*, ed. C. Dummitt and M. Dawson (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, University of London, 2009), 20.
- 9 This exploration of craft history as an international network differs from much of the literature which tends to focus instead on the regionalism and/or nationalism of craft. There are two significant exhibition publications that offer an international view of the better known Arts and Crafts Movement: Karen LIVINGSTONE and Linda PARRY, eds., *International Arts and Crafts* (London: V&A Publications, 2005); and Wendy KAPLAN, ed., *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America: Design for the Modern World* (New York: Thames & Hudson in association with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2004). Yet both of these exhibitions presented national manifestations of this Movement as a comparative series rather than closely attending to the interconnections developed through this Movement among those involved with the crafts in each geographical area.
- 10 The Guild was named after the Lady Emer, the wife of Irish legend Cúchulainne, famed for her skill in needlework.
- 11 Igor KOPYTOFF, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–91.

- 12 This emphasis on the Yeats sisters over Evelyn Gleeson in writing on the Dun Emer Guild may be, in part, due to their famous brother the Irish poet W.B. Yeats's involvement as editor of the Dun Emer Press (the poet, at times, also provided some financial support to the Press). As a result, Gleeson's important feminist and nationalist influences on the Guild, along with questions of gender and inter-arts relationships, have not yet been fully addressed in the literature. Karen BROWN's *The Yeats Circle: Verbal and Visual Relations in Ireland, 1880–1939* (London: Ashgate, 2011) touches briefly on this as does my own "Crafting a National Identity: The Dun Emer Guild, 1902–1908," in *The Irish Revival Reappraised*, ed. J. Murphy and B. FitzSimon (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 106–18.
- 13 For more on the workshop as an organizational model, see Elizabeth CUMMING and Wendy KAPLAN, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991).
- 14 Geraldine Plunkett Dillon Memoirs (transcribed by her granddaughter, Honor O'Brolchain, from notebooks in her possession as well as from interviews recorded in the 1980s, and deposited at the National Museum of Ireland). My thanks to Honor O'Brolchain for sharing her work with me.
- 15 Historian Margaret Ward explains that the formation of the Ladies' Land League signalled "an acceptance (albeit temporary) of women's right of entry into the public sphere. They were no longer sporadic participants in the defence of community and home, but members of a movement that included women from different class and religious backgrounds, united in a shared identity." Margaret WARD, "The Ladies' Land League and the Irish Land War 1881/1882: Defining the Relationship between Women and Nation," in *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ida Bloom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall (New York: Berg, 2000), 229–43; see also Adrian N. MULLIGAN, "By a Thousand Ingenious Feminine Devices': The Ladies' Land League and the Development of Irish Nationalism," *Historical Geography* 37 (2009): 159–77. For more on women's social activism in Ireland, see Maria LUDDY, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- 16 Letter to Augustine Henry, 15 June 1897. Evelyn Gleeson Papers, National Library of Ireland.
- 17 For a detailed discussion of the political and social implications of rational dress, particularly as they relate to women's suffrage in nineteenth-century Britain and Ireland, see Diana CRANE, "Clothing Behaviour as Non-Verbal Resistance: Marginal Women and Alternative Dress in the Nineteenth Century," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 3:2 (June 1999): 241–68; and the historical AGLAIA: *The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union* (1893 on).
- 18 Draft of Guild prospectus intended for potential shareholders, Evelyn Gleeson Papers, Trinity College, Dublin.
- 19 "Irish Art Industries," *Irish Homestead* (1905).
- 20 Dun Emer Guild Report, 1905, Evelyn Gleeson Papers, Trinity College, Dublin. The report listed thirteen women working at the Guild in 1903 and nineteen women by 1905.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 For more on the history of the Guild, see PATERSON, "Crafting a National Identity," 106–18.

- 23 Minutes of Meeting, 30 Nov. 1904. Women's Art Society of Montreal Fonds, P125, McCord Museum Archives, Montreal.
- 24 "Home Arts and Industries" *Argus* (6 May 1905).
- 25 Maud OGILVY, "Review of the 1902 WAAC exhibition of crafts in Montreal," *Queen* (24 May 1902), 865.
- 26 Laura PEERS, "Material Culture, Identity, and Colonial Society in the Canadian Fur Trade," in *Women and Things, 1750–1950: Gendered Material Strategies*, ed. Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (London: Ashgate, 2009), 55. I thank Janice Helland for drawing my attention to this work.
- 27 It is worth noting that Lady Aberdeen was viceregal consort of Canada (1893–1898) and then vicereine of Ireland (first, briefly, in 1886 and again in 1905–1915) during the time frame discussed in this essay. For more on Lady Aberdeen's work in Ireland with the Irish Industries Association, see Janice HELLAND, "The Performative Art of Court Dress," in *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts 1880–1935: The Gender of Ornament*, ed. Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland (London: Ashgate, 2002), 96–113; and her "Rural Women and Urban Extravagance in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Rural History* 13:2 (2002): 179–97. For more on Lady Aberdeen's time in Canada see Carolyn MACHARDY's essay, "Kodaking and Being Kodaked: The Guisachan Album of Ishbel, Lady Aberdeen," in this special issue.
- 28 *The Irish Homestead* (1895–1923) was a weekly journal founded by Sir Horace Plunkett as the organ for his Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. Its editors included T.P. Gill, 1895–97, and George Russell, 1905–23. The journal advocated self-governance or Home Rule but not militant nationalism.
- 29 Alice Peck, Draft of address delivered at the Montreal reception of the International Council of Women, 1909, CHGA.
- 30 "Thursday: Exhibit of Canadian Women's Work," 29 Oct. 1903. Press Clipping Book 1904–1905, CHGA: "work on view is to be sent on November 1st to London, Engl. To be shown at the Women's Institute in connection with the handicrafts of the Welsh, Scotch and Irish women." Janice Helland discusses the Scottish Home Industries and Millicent Sutherland in *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries*.
- 31 At the 1904 HAIA exhibition, Dun Emer embroidery won five stars, two of which were gold (Draft of Guild prospectus intended for potential shareholders, Evelyn Gleeson Papers, Trinity College, Dublin). The Canadian Handicrafts Guild Archives (May 1904–October 1905) lists a large shipment of objects to the 1904 HAIA Exhibition, Royal Albert Hall, London, confirming the significant presence of the Guild at the show in London (CHGA, C11 D1 029 1905).
- 32 "Canadian Industries in the Home," *Industrial Canada* (March 1907): 646.
- 33 PEERS, "Material Culture, Identity, and Colonial Society in the Canadian Fur Trade," 69.
- 34 "Handicraft of the Women of Canada" *Winnipeg Telegram*, 1904, and the Press Clipping Book 1904–1905, CHGA.
- 35 The history of the Irish diaspora in Quebec is unique in Canada. Layers of religious, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and class affiliations mark the complexity of the Irish experience in Quebec. Among the most significant groups of immigrants to the province, after those from France and England, the Irish in Montreal and Quebec consisted of up to ten per cent of the population in each city throughout the nineteenth century (Canada Census 1911, vol. 2, 372–74). In the Canadian social context, Irish immigrants were typically among the poorest of newcomers, confined

to jobs and neighbourhoods of low social standing (examples in Montreal include work on projects such as the Victoria Bridge and the Lachine Canal, with many unskilled Irish labourers living in areas known as Griffintown and Pointe St. Charles). This immigrant community was also ravaged by disease en route to and while awaiting entry to Canada, most notably in 1847 at the height of the Famine in Ireland when thousands of Irish died at Grosse-Île, Canada's main quarantine station from 1832 to 1937 and a required stopover for immigrants on their voyage up the St. Lawrence River to the Port of Quebec. These experiences left many Irish children orphaned, some of whom were fostered by Catholic French Canadian families (and many of these children kept their Irish surnames), further adding a layer of complexity to the Irish Canadian identity which is specific to Quebec.

By the time the CHG was promoting the craftwork of these Irish settlers in the early twentieth century, however, the Irish in Quebec had the collective will to establish North America's longest running St. Patrick's Day Parade (est. Montreal 1824) and the financial wherewithal to build St. Patrick's Basilica (1847), the mother church of the English-speaking Catholics of greater Montreal (see <http://stpatricksmtl.ca/>, accessed 16 July 2013).

For more on the history of the Irish in Quebec see Ronald RUDIN, *The Forgotten Quebecers: A History of English-Speaking Quebec, 1759–1980* (Quebec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1985); Robert J. GRACE, *The Irish in Quebec: An Introduction to the Historiography* (Quebec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1993); Marianna O'GALLAGHER and Rose MASSON DOMPIERRE, *Eyewitness: Grosse Isle, 1847* (Sainte-Foy: Livres Carraig Books, 1995); and Simon JOLIVET's *Le vert et le bleu: Identité québécoise et identité irlandaise au tournant du XXI^e siècle* (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2011), particularly his chapter on cultural nationalism within the Irish (and, by extension, Irish Canadian) and French Canadian contexts.

- 36 Janice HELLAND, "'Caprices of Fashion': Hand Made Lace in Ireland 1883–1907," *Textile History* 39:2 (November 2008): 216.
- 37 While lace is the tie that binds these disparate people, other material objects, such as woven rugs and embroidery, created similar social relationships. A Dun Emer rug, for instance, brought Millicent Sutherland into contact with Evelyn Gleeson and this led to shared exhibitions, discussions over labour, and exchanges over opportunities for other working women.
- 38 FAHRNI, "Reflections on the Place of Quebec in Historical Writing on Canada," 16.
- 39 "Canadian Home Arts and Handicrafts," *Montreal Star*, 9 Jan. 1904.
- 40 A clipping in the 1907 press scrapbook of the CHG notes that "when Miss [Christine] Steen, who was in charge of [the CHG] section [at the Dublin International Exhibition] was obliged to return to Canada, Her Excellency arranged that Miss Paton of Cork . . . be left in charge of the Handicrafts exhibit." CHGA.
- 41 Review of Canadian Handicrafts Guild participation in the 1907 International Exposition in Dublin, Ireland (in Canadian Building) by "the Montreal press," 17 Aug. 1907. Press Clipping Book 1907, CHGA.
- 42 Reviews of 1907 International Exposition in Dublin, 17 Aug. 1907. Press Clipping Book 1907, CHGA.
- 43 James MURTON, "La 'Normandie du Nouveau Monde': la société Canada Steamship Lines, l'antimodernisme et la promotion du Québec ancien," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 55:1 (Summer 2001): 3–44.

Interestingly, a substantial lender of lace to the CHG was the Scottish-born professional Montreal photographer Alexander Henderson (1831–1913) who had been Manager of the Canadian Pacific Railway Photography Department in the 1890s and who was best known for his book *Canadian Views and Studies* (1865). Alexander Henderson Fonds, McCord Museum, Montreal.

- 44 Sandra FLOOD, *Canadian Craft and Museum Practice, 1900–1950* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2001).
- 45 *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, 31 July 1904. Press Clipping Book 1904–1905, CHGA.
- 46 Stuart HENDERSON, “‘While there is Still Time . . .’: J. Murray Gibbon and the Spectacle of Difference in Three CPR Folk Festivals, 1928–1931,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 39:1 (Winter 2005): 139–74. The ideal of the mosaic, evocative yet ultimately imaginary, is described by GIBBON in his *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation*. As Henderson notes, Gibbon’s view of the “modern Canadian nation,” or mosaic, was made up of various ethnic groups, each subject to the dominant “founding races” of British and French. This representation of a pluralist Canada was built upon a stable foundation of “white Anglo-Celt (male) hegemony” (HENDERSON, 140, 152).
- 47 FAHRNI, “Reflections on the Place of Quebec in Historical Writing on Canada,” 2.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 17. For a useful analysis of the differences between comparative history and *histoire croisée*, Fahrni suggests J. KOCKA’s “Comparisons and Beyond,” *History and Theory* 42:1 (2003): 39–44.

L'art domestique et l'Empire : L'histoire croisée des femmes irlandaises et canadiennes

ELAINE C. PATERSON

Pan important et unique de l'histoire de l'art et des pratiques d'exposition de la fin du XIX^e siècle, le mouvement de l'art domestique touche la vie professionnelle des femmes de l'époque victorienne. Centralisé à la Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA) de Londres, le mouvement des arts domestiques britanniques favorisait l'artisanat comme mode parallèle de production et prônait l'idéal de la fabrication manuelle d'objets d'art dans des ateliers ruraux. Aussi, la promotion du travail à la main, la revitalisation rurale et l'innovation artistique représentaient-elles des idéaux auxquels adhéraient la Dun Emer Guild (Dublin, 1902) et la Canadian Handicrafts Guild (Montréal, 1905). Ces idéaux étaient d'ailleurs de plus en plus en vogue dans le monde, notamment dans les foires et les expositions internationales.

En 1904, à l'exposition universelle de Saint-Louis, L'Irish Dun Emer Guild et la Canadian Handicrafts Guild avaient présenté les œuvres et leurs artisans aux nombreux visiteurs internationaux que les pavillons irlandais et canadiens avaient accueillis. Lors de cette foire, la Dun Emer Guild participait à l'Exposition industrielle irlandaise, organisée par le Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction d'Irlande. Ce pavillon présentait un grand choix d'objets artisanaux produits par des associations d'entreprises et d'artisans irlandais. La Canadian Handicrafts Guild avait aussi reçu une subvention substantielle du ministère de l'Agriculture du Canada.

L'exposition de la Canadian Handicrafts Guild à Saint-Louis avait souvent reçu des critiques élogieuses de la presse. Un compte rendu faisait notamment la description de deux niches qui contenaient des armoires en chêne teint en vert, dont l'une était garnie d'une jolie dentelle irlandaise, confectionnée au Canada par la même artisane irlandaise qui avait fabriqué les volants de la robe de mariée de Sa Majesté. Une rare photographie du travail de dentelle réalisé par cette artisane a été publiée ultérieurement dans le *Canadian Geographical Journal*. On y expliquait que cette pièce de dentelle fine avait été produite par une « immigrante irlandaise » et faisait partie d'un présent offert à la Reine par la Canadian Handicrafts Guild. Les croisements de l'histoire de l'artisanat canadien et irlandais étudiés dans le présent article sont incarnés par cette dentelière anonyme – artisane citée dans la plupart des récits de

la Canadian Guild et dont la description mentionne toujours son statut d'immigrante, ses origines irlandaises, sa contribution à ces cadeaux royaux et, par extension, sa participation à ces gestes de déférence coloniale envers la métropole britannique.

Dans notre article, nous soulignons l'expérience des artisanes canado-irlandaises afin de découvrir comment les femmes de diverses affiliations politiques ou sociales, ou encore de classe ou de religion différente, ont représenté la nation (qu'elle soit irlandaise ou canadienne) au sein de ces guildes en encourageant, en réalisant et en exposant de magnifiques objets d'art. Ces femmes devaient s'identifier au nationalisme culturel, tel qu'il avait été imaginé par les fondateurs de classe moyenne de chacune des guildes et présenté dans le design et le matériau de l'objet exposé dans les foires internationales importantes, comme l'exposition universelle de Saint-Louis, dont le bâtiment canadien abritant les travaux artisanaux était, selon certains dires, « le plus prisé de tous ».

La diversité historique du Canada est manifeste dans les allusions fréquentes aux origines culturelles des pratiques artisanales promues par la Canadian Handicrafts Guild, notamment la tradition irlandaise de la dentellerie. Dans ses écrits sur l'historiographie canadienne, Magda Fahrni souligne l'importance d'examiner les « localités particulières » dans leur contexte étendu, tout en gardant à l'esprit leurs liens avec d'autres localités, leurs méthodes de structuration éventuelle et leur participation aux réseaux de communication et d'échange – emprunt, prêt et parfois, exclusion de gens, de marchandises et d'idées. C'est l'existence de ce réseau mutuellement constitué de personnes, de traditions artisanales et d'objets matériels que nous souhaitons révéler en examinant le croisement particulier de l'histoire des femmes irlandaises et canadiennes qui apparaît à travers les activités partagées d'exposition internationale de la Canadian Handicrafts Guild de Montréal, de la Dun Emer Guild de Dublin, et de l'Home Arts and Industries Association de Londres.

Dans les trois différents cadres examinés – les expositions internationales, la revitalisation de l'artisanat entraînée par le mouvement des arts domestiques et le modèle de la guilde –, les objets artisanaux ont joué un rôle dans l'établissement des relations sociales entre les femmes à l'échelle mondiale, et celles-ci ont à leur tour développé un réseau important pour la promotion de la vie créative des femmes en Irlande et au Canada. Pour étudier ce réseau social, nous commençons en Irlande et poursuivons jusqu'au Canada afin de suivre la vie professionnelle des artisanes participant à ce mouvement international.

Du tapis « typiquement irlandais » de la Dun Emer illustré dans *The Studio* (1905), grâce à l'exposition universelle de Saint-Louis, à la dentelle

irlandaise exposée comme l'un des plus beaux fleurons de l'artisanat canadien, cette dissertation cherche à réfléchir sur l'influence transnationale de la notion d'arts domestiques réalisés dans des ateliers et sur la guilde artisanale en tant qu'expérience de collaboration sociale. Si le « nationalisme éducatif » de la guilde irlandaise Dun Emer était incrusté dans chaque objet produit par cette industrie artisanale, cette même impulsion était manifeste dans le contexte canadien à travers la lentille de la mosaïque.

La Dun Emer Guild et la Canadian Handicrafts Guild ont fonctionné à la croisée de ce que l'historienne Laura Peers appelle les frontières les plus intimes de l'Empire, celles de la maison, de la famille, et plus particulièrement des objets confectionnés et utilisés dans ces espaces domestiques. Les objets matériels réalisés dans ces guildes témoignent d'un vaste réseau social de femmes engagées dans ces frontières, d'une part en Irlande, en faisant la promotion de l'artisanat durable auprès des femmes pour empêcher l'émigration, et d'autre part au Canada, en encourageant leur participation dans les collectivités rurales.

Une facette importante de l'expérience canadienne est révélée en comprenant les relations qui existent – dans la profession, la création et le militantisme – entre de nombreuses femmes différentes *à travers* plusieurs frontières. La mise en avant d'un réseau social de femmes travaillant avec d'autres femmes (qu'il s'agisse de femmes des régions rurales, d'ouvrières dans des centres industriels comme Montréal, ou de femmes riches, piliers de la haute société, comme Lady Aberdeen et Alice Peck) jette les bases de l'élaboration d'une approche transnationale de l'histoire de l'artisanat, tel qu'il apparaît dans le contexte du mouvement des arts domestiques à la fin du XIX^e siècle.

Les histoires chevauchantes et parallèles de la Dun Emer Guild et de la Canadian Handicrafts Guild sont présentées ici comme des *histoires croisées*, où elles forment une partie passionnante d'une *seule* histoire – celle du mouvement international des arts domestiques. Cette histoire relate la migration des idées, des femmes et des objets d'art le long de ces frontières intimes de l'Empire. Démêler les *histoires croisées* de ces réseaux de femmes vouées à la résurgence de l'artisanat de l'Irlande et du Canada constitue une façon utile d'inscrire les femmes canadiennes dans la vaste histoire mondiale de l'artisanat.