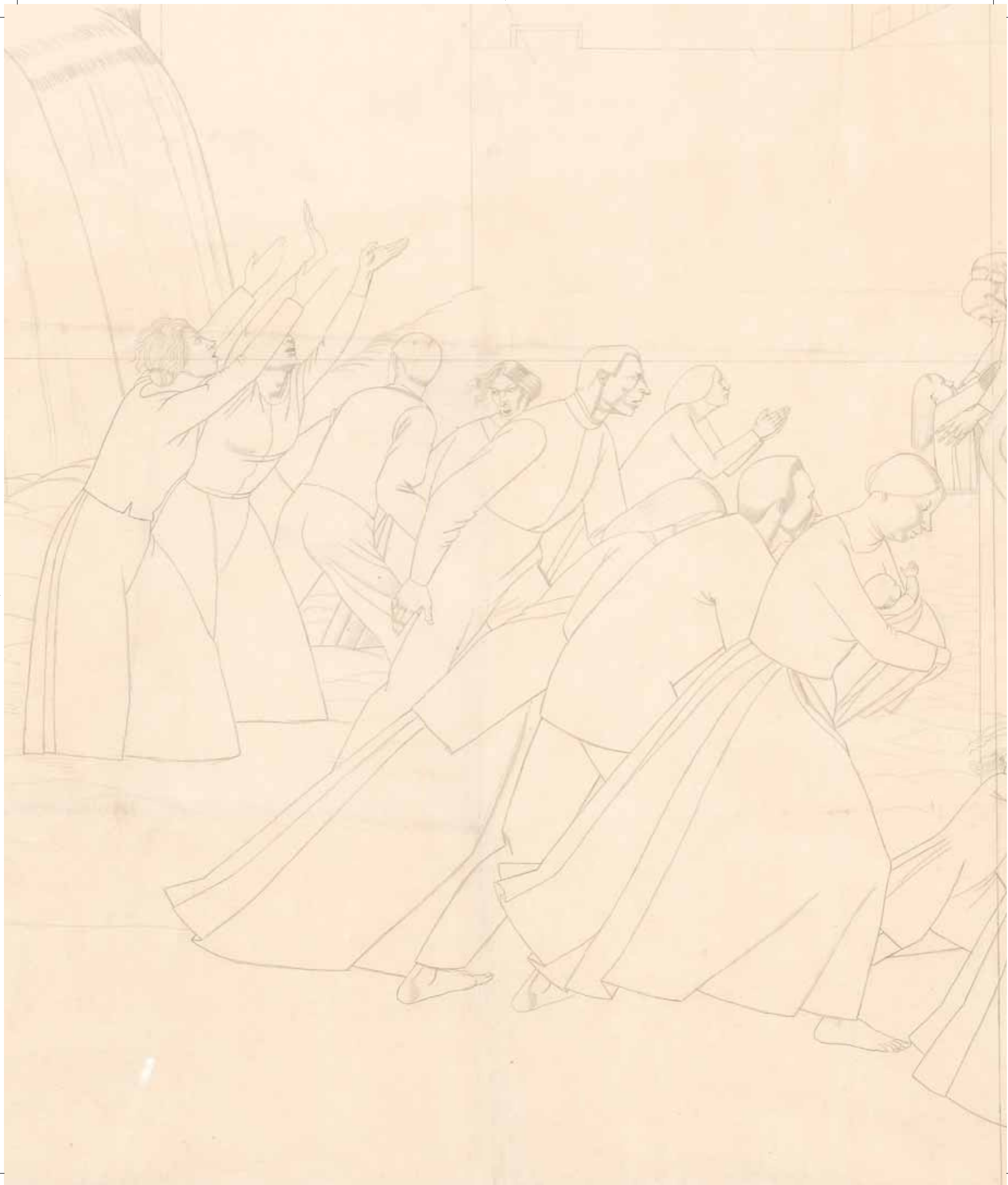


# WINIFRED KNIGHTS



# WINIFRED KNIGHTS

1899–1947

SACHA LLEWELLYN



DULWICH  
PICTURE  
GALLERY

LUND HUMPHRIES

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Cartoon for *The Deluge*, 1920  
Pencil on tracing paper, squared  
152.9 × 183.5 cm (60 1/8 × 72 1/4 in)  
Private Collection

'Nothing in essence dies, and nothing in mortal form remains'  
Edward Carpenter, *The Songs of the Birds, Who Hears*, 1883  
This book is dedicated to the memory of my mother

#### Note

Original titles (as used by Winifred Knights) are cited in *italics*. All other  
titles are descriptive. Measurements are given to the nearest millimeter,  
height before width. Pictures have been reproduced in full, except in a  
few cases where blank margins have been cropped slightly. Sketches from  
letters have been extracted and reproduced as details.

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# FOREWORD

IAN A. C. DEJARDIN

SACKLER DIRECTOR, DULWICH PICTURE GALLERY

This exhibition is the latest in a series of shows devoted to critically neglected twentieth-century British artists. The exhibition and this publication – the first monograph on the artist – will establish Knights as one of the most original artists of the first half of the twentieth century. Supported by numerous painstaking studies, it reunites all five of her major paintings for the first time since they were created.

One of the most successful shows of recent years at Dulwich Picture Gallery was 2012's *A Crisis of Brilliance*, which looked at the effect of the First World War on a generation of young Slade School artists including Mark Gertler, Dora Carrington, Stanley Spencer, David Bomberg and C. R. W. Nevinson. Like them, Knights was a favoured student of Henry Tonks, attending the Slade from 1915–17 and 1918–20 – four years that would prove definitive in terms of her artistic development. It was here that she was taught the importance of drawing as a means of developing composition and form over producing a finished academy work – winning in 1917 a first class certificate for figure drawing, in 1919 the prestigious summer composition prize, and a scholarship.

It has been particularly gratifying to welcome Sacha Llewellyn – specialist, scholar and champion of Knights – as guest curator of the show. Her careful

selection has created another startlingly beautiful exhibition, and an extremely enjoyable collaboration. Sacha's masterly catalogue text provides a unique account of the artist's biography and unprecedented insight into Knights' major works.

We are deeply grateful to the lenders of this exhibition – the many private owners as well as Directors and Trustees of Museums who have parted with important works from their collections to make the show possible. We are particularly indebted to UCL Art Museum as the most generous lender to the exhibition.

At Dulwich Picture Gallery the exhibition has been organised by Phoebe Newman, Exhibitions Coordinator, Louise Smith, Assistant Exhibitions Coordinator with Clare Simpson, Head of Exhibitions. My thanks to Lucy Myers, Sarah Thorowgood, Lucie Ewin and Eleanor Rees at Lund Humphries for producing this superb catalogue and Webb and Webb Design for such beautiful design.

My thanks to The Canadian Friends of Dulwich Picture Gallery, Cockayne – Grants for the Arts and the London Community Foundation, the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, and AlixPartners – without their support and advocacy this important milestone exhibition and publication would not have happened.

I Self-portrait, 1920  
Pencil on paper  
18 × 15 cm (7 × 6 in)  
Private Collection





## INTRODUCTION

## WINIFRED KNIGHTS 1899–1947

## IN SEARCH OF PARADISE

A photograph dated 1923 (ill.2) provides an arresting image of Winifred Knights in her studio at the British School at Rome. ‘I am the first woman to gain the scholarship,’ she wrote, ‘and the School is very proud of me.’\* Studio props and personal possessions are attentively placed, each object interconnecting with Knights’ unique creative vision. The mood is one of quietude and reflection; ‘calmness of mind’ was, as Slade Professor Henry Tonks observed, essential to the expression of her artistic self.<sup>2</sup> Knights described her studio as ‘just like a tomb’ though during the day the brilliant sunlight streaming through an immense window provided luminosity. Accessed by a solid wooden staircase, the studio gallery contained the artist’s sleeping quarters; she felt content in her ‘dear little bedroom with ... a lovely comfy bed’.<sup>3</sup>

Knights wears a painter’s smock of her own design, with ‘a split up the side to show my legs to admiring Italians’.<sup>4</sup> Aware of her own beguiling beauty, she cultivated a dress style based on purity and simplicity, in hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, combining elements drawn from Renaissance painting and ‘aesthetic’ dress to create a compelling statement of feminine artistic identity. Draped over the bannister are the cloak and broad-brimmed black hat that were the signature of her refined persona in Rome. Hanging nearby is a straw hat of the type worn by peasants and shepherds, a symbol of her longing to share the

virtues that lay in a physical communion with the earth. Living among the peasants during the long summer months, she discovered an ideal community. ‘One might be in Paradise,’ she wrote.<sup>5</sup> She shared D. H. Lawrence’s vision of Italy as ‘so primitive, so pagan, so strangely heathen, and half-savage’.<sup>6</sup>

On the long wooden sideboard, a pot of hyacinths, a bouquet of ivy and a single seashell attest to Knights’ intense love of the natural world, the eternal source of her creative inspiration. She was deeply suspicious of modern civilisation, and her work reflected a desire for a simple and traditional life lived in harmony with nature, a continuity of vision that was embedded in the utopian ideologies of her childhood hero, the socialist philosopher Edward Carpenter. For all creative work, Carpenter professed, ‘one should have the quietude and strength of Nature at hand like a great reservoir from which to draw’.<sup>7</sup>

Hand-painted china cups purchased in Florence, also visible on the sideboard, were used to give tea to the steady stream of diplomats, politicians, artists and socialites who came to visit the artist in her studio. Knights’ leather Gladstone bag, in which she carried her Royal Sovereign pencils and other artist’s paraphernalia, is stowed beneath. Travel was central to her vision, bringing with it new modes of consciousness and enhancing her artistic insights. She did not perceive Italy as a place of ruins and art galleries, but as a living landscape that revitalised her creative spirit. ‘I feel happier and more sure of the course I am going to take in painting,’ she wrote after a walking expedition through Tuscany.<sup>8</sup>

2 Winifred Knights in her studio at the British School at Rome, 1923  
Photograph  
Private Collection

\* In quoting from Knights’ letters, punctuation in the form of capital letters, commas and full stops has occasionally been added for clarity.

A black-and-white reproduction of Antonello da Messina's *Portrait of a Young Man* (c.1475), which Knights had seen on many occasions at the Galleria Borghese, is propped up on the sideboard, one of hundreds of Anderson and Alinari prints purchased during her Italian sojourn. Her admiration for the painters of the Italian Renaissance, whom she referred to as 'Blessed' and 'Beloved', would provide inspiration and influence throughout her life. The Renaissance, however, was never slavishly imitated, but reinterpreted in terms of modern preoccupations with the dictates of Decorative Painting, an aesthetic philosophy which would define the whole of her artistic journey. Always referring to her pictures as 'decorations', she lived by the assertion that this was 'the greatest of all the Schools of the art of painting', fulfilling her belief that art should serve the community.<sup>9</sup>

The wooden birdcage fixed to the easel, holding captive a white canary finch (named Wee), was presented to Knights by Colin Gill, a fellow Rome Scholar. Gill declared his love for Knights in a sonnet ('She holds my heart like a bird in a cage') and produced one of the most enduring images of her, a full-length portrait in which she holds a birdcage, in his celebrated Rome School painting *Allegro* (1921; ill.104). Italy provided freedom and inspiration for Knights, a place where she could lead a more instinctive life, far removed from the moral structure of post-Edwardian England: 'I have had lots of love affairs you never dreamed of,' she confided to her mother.<sup>10</sup>

In the background of the photograph, the partially completed *The Marriage at Cana* (1923; ills 3 and 118), the magnum opus of Knights' Roman sojourn, is suspended from the beams. Like all her compositions, it was a deeply autobiographical work through which she explored woman's autonomy. Presenting herself as the central protagonist, and selecting models from her inner circle, Knights consistently rewrote and reinterpreted fairy tale and legend, biblical narrative and pagan mythology to create visual distillations of her own lived experience. The conflict between female

self-empowerment and subjugation was a recurrent theme, explored through women's relationship to the natural world, to working communities, to marriage, motherhood and death. Her vision was shaped by her maternal aunt and mentor, Millicent Murby, Treasurer of the Fabian Women's Group and prominent campaigner for women's emancipation, pay parity and the right for married women to work.

A preparatory drawing for one of the figures in *The Marriage at Cana*, leaning against the wooden 'donkey' stool, is the subject of Knights' intense gaze. Closely following Renaissance compositional processes, her finished paintings were created from a multitude of studies, in pencil, watercolour and oil. Marvelling at their extraordinary beauty and exquisite draughtsmanship, the artist D. Y. Cameron found 'much of Leonardo da Vinci in Winifred' and wondered 'if she dreams similar dreams of spiritual loveliness?'<sup>11</sup> To Knights' right, a quarter-filled wine carafe placed on a white tablecloth, a three-dimensional still-life, is the subject of profound study: 'My picture will be very beautiful. I have drawn 11 plates of melon, pink melon, 9 glasses of wine some empty, partly because they have run out, and 38 people.'<sup>12</sup>

*The Marriage at Cana*, though highly evolved, would progress slowly and remain unfinished. Nonetheless, when it was exhibited in 1929 at the Imperial Gallery, London, it was singled out for its 'artistic and spiritual authority' and considered to overshadow all other exhibits.<sup>13</sup> The 'calmness of mind' that was vital for Knights' creative output – the sanctuary that is so palpable in this photograph – proved all but elusive during her professional life. While the demands of her meticulous technical methodology ultimately prevented the completion of a greater number of paintings, the remarkable studies she created argue passionately in favour of a reassessment of her place within twentieth-century British art. As her husband, Thomas Monnington, sought to reassure her: 'Leonardo is not so well known because of the amount of work he left, but for the extraordinary quality.'<sup>14</sup>

- 3 Detail from *The Marriage at Cana*, 1923  
Oil on canvas  
184 × 200 cm  
(72 ½ × 78 ¾ in)  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington





## CHAPTER ONE

## THE EARLY YEARS: 1899–1915

‘OUR HAPPY CIRCLE’<sup>1</sup>

Winifred Knights was born on 5 June 1899 at 54 Hitherfield Road in the developing South London suburb of Streatham. Her parents, Walter and Mabel, had married nine months previously and, after a honeymoon spent in the Lake District, had moved into the modest semi-detached, two-storey villa which they named ‘The China’. The suburb-dwellers’ predilection for assigning ‘high-sounding titles’ to their villas was attributed by the Liberal politician Charles Masterman to ‘unconquered human aspiration’.<sup>2</sup> Walter and Mabel’s aspirations for their own advancement extended to their children, especially Winifred, whose upbringing was characterised by an ever-present expectation of high achievement. ‘Nothing will delight Daddy’s heart more’, Walter wrote to her on her third birthday, ‘than to see his little daughter and firstborn, as the years go over her head, coming to him in all her triumphs.’<sup>3</sup>

Walter (1868–1935) was the second of six sons born to Edward and Elizabeth Knights. His family lived in a large three-storey Victorian terraced villa at 42 Geneva Road in the adjacent suburb of Brixton. Grandfather Edward was a joint partner of Knights and Cottrell, a successful firm of bookbinders, tool cutters and general engravers with offices and workshops in Tudor Street in London. Rather than joining the family firm,

however, Walter decided to seek his fortune in the City of London, the great financial and commercial centre of the British Empire. By the time Winifred was born, he had become Secretary and Treasurer of the Schoonoord Sugar Plantation Company Ltd, situated at 21 Mincing Lane in the heart of the City. The company, which owned sugar plantations and a refinery in British Guiana, belonged to Anna Matilda Fryer, a wealthy heiress who was to become a generous benefactress of the Knights family (see ill.68, p.80).

Winifred’s mother Mabel (1874–1930) was born at 26 Canterbury Road, Brixton, the seventh of Thomas and Emma Murby’s twelve children. Thomas was a violinist and composer and the founder of an educational publishing firm, Thomas Murby & Co. A member of the Fabian Society, he instilled in his eight daughters the importance of women’s education, personal freedom and economic independence. In 1913 he published an influential study about women and labour, *Conflicting Ideals: Two Sides of the Woman’s Question*, written by the Fabian economist Barbara Hutchins.<sup>4</sup> Before her marriage to Walter, Mabel was Assistant in Decorative Embroidery at the School of Art Needlework in Exhibition Road, London, as well as a part-time theatrical singer.<sup>5</sup> By the turn of the century, conventional roles were being challenged by suffrage societies and the emergence of the ‘New Woman’, a stereotype associated with a modern generation of

4 Illustration to Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market*, 1916  
Pen and ink and watercolour on paper  
21.4 × 17.9 cm (8 3/8 × 7 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



*Clockwise from top left:*  
 5 Winifred Knights on  
 Empire Day, 24 May  
 1902  
 Photograph  
 Private collection

6 Winifred, Joyce  
 and Eileen Knights,  
 1910  
 Photograph  
 Private Collection

7 Madeira Road,  
 Streatham, c.1908  
 Photograph  
 John W. Brown, Local  
 History Publications

8 Mabel and Winifred  
 Knights in the garden  
 at 54 Hitherfield Road,  
 Streatham, 1901  
 Photograph  
 Private Collection

women who lived independently and had established careers.<sup>6</sup> A photograph of Mabel taken in 1901, (ill.8) in which she is playing with Winifred in the garden of Hitherfield Road, shows her wearing a version of the comfortable 'rational dress' popularised by the 'New Woman' in the 1890s, consisting of plaid blouse, loose tie and dark skirt cinched at the waist by a wide belt.<sup>7</sup>

Although Winifred's maternal aunts, all of whom were strong-willed, independent women with professional careers, had a strong presence during her childhood, it was her aunt Millicent (1873–1951; ill.31, p.41) who was to become her mentor and closest confidante.<sup>8</sup> A close friend of George Bernard Shaw, who described her as 'a good-looking and clever person', Millicent Murby was a committed feminist, lecturing for the Women's Institute and regularly contributing to the *Freewoman* and the *New Age*.<sup>9</sup> In 1908 she became Treasurer of the Fabian Women's Group, which had been set up to 'define the intimate relationship between the two most vital movements of the time, Socialism and Women's Emancipation' and specifically 'women's economic independence in relation to socialism'.<sup>10</sup> Murby introduced Winifred and her family to the writings of the socialist philosopher Edward Carpenter (1844–1929), with whom she was acquainted through the Fabian Society. Carpenter's belief that the liberation of women required both real economic freedom and a change of women's consciousness was in line with her own writings on the subject.<sup>11</sup>

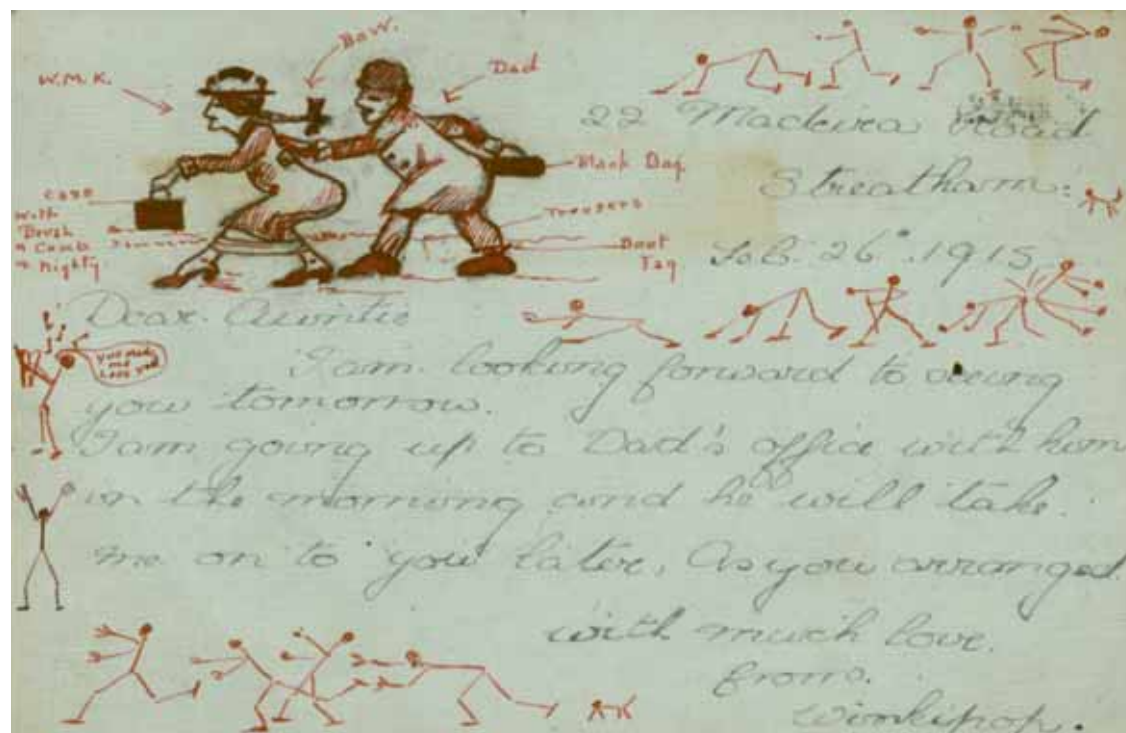
Winifred was the eldest of four children born to Walter and Mabel. Joyce, two years her junior, suffered from a speech impediment caused by a cleft lip, which prevented her from living a fully independent life. Eileen, born in 1906, was a gifted pianist, obtaining a degree from the Royal Academy of Music in 1927. In 1914 a brother, David, was born, but he failed to thrive and died in infancy. A studio photograph (ill.6) depicts the three Knights girls wearing white 'Sunday best' frocks with wide berthastyle collars; a talented seamstress with an interest in needlecraft, Mabel ensured that her three daughters were always well dressed.

## CITY AND SUBURB

With the opening of three new railway stations between 1856 and 1868, Streatham, along with much of outer London, became a vast sprawling building site as the new ease of City commuting led to large numbers of middle-class workers moving into the area. Between the censuses of 1871 and 1901, the population of Streatham rose from just over 12,000 to almost 71,000.<sup>12</sup> Lamenting the destruction of beautiful areas of London and the surrounding countryside, writers and commentators from the 1880s onwards perceived suburbia in terms of stifling monotony. Published in 1883, Percy Fitzgerald's *London City Suburbs as They Are To-day* offers a typically dreary account, describing the 'curious and now almost insipid tameness' of the southern suburbs, made up of 'long, monotonous roads, lined with villas, detached and semi-detached, with neat but rather desponding [sic] looking gardens in front'.<sup>13</sup>

By 1907, the Knights family's fortunes had risen sufficiently for them to move to a larger terraced house at 22 Madeira Road. An early photograph showing gas lamps, a well-swept road and neatly tended trees attests to an affluent middle-class neighbourhood (ill.7). With a large attic bedroom, the family could now employ Annie, a Welsh maid of all work, as well as Mrs Neil to do the household washing.

Each weekday and half-day Saturdays Walter dressed for the City and, carrying his black leather Gladstone bag, joined the commuters at Streatham Station, taking the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway to its terminus at London Bridge Station. The steam train passed by the bottom of the garden at Madeira Road, and Winifred and her sisters would wait at the fence to wave goodbye as the train disappeared into the tunnel. In the evenings Walter would return home with provisions, including fruit and nuts from Leadenhall Market and flowers for Mabel from a stall in London Bridge station yard.



Like many suburban children, the Knights girls grew up expecting their father to be absent all day, seeing him briefly in the evenings and otherwise at weekends. There were also long absences: in 1910, Walter spent four months in British Guiana to sort out company business, bringing back three gold nuggets panned at the foot of the Kaieteur Falls. The distinction between Walter's public world of business and finance in the City and travel abroad, and Mabel and her daughters' comparatively domestic world – of routine at home and activities in and about Streatham – was almost complete. Occasionally, however, Winifred would spend the day at her father's office in Mincing Lane, a street described in Henry Benjamin Wheatley's *London Past and Present* (1891) as the 'great market for tea, sugar, spices and colonial produce ... wholly occupied by merchants and brokers congregated in offices and chambers'.<sup>14</sup> A sketch on a postcard (ill.9) which Winifred sent to her aunt Millicent Murby in 1915, conveys her impression of the daily toil of the City, according with Edward Carpenter's description of its occupants as 'pushing wrestling shouldering, against the tide, face after face, breath of liquor,

money-grubbing eye, infidel skin, shouts, threats, greetings, smiles, eyes and breasts of love'.<sup>15</sup>

## AN EDUCATION

In 1907, Winifred began her education at St Helen's private school for girls in Streatham High Road. Here she excelled in Botany, which, as in most girls' schools, was taught as the main science subject.

Although Streatham had over forty educational establishments in the years leading up to the First World War, in 1912 Walter and Mabel decided to continue Winifred's education at James Allen's Girls' School (JAGS) in East Dulwich, a 45-minute journey by foot and steam train.<sup>16</sup> While a majority of the pupils on leaving the school took up careers in commercial clerkships, the Post Office or domestic science, others went on to universities and higher education.<sup>17</sup> The Head Mistress, Mary Agnes Howard (a published author on medieval history), instilled in JAGS pupils her belief in the value of community, quoting from William Morris' socialist novel *A Dream of John Ball* (1888), 'Fellowship is life, lack of fellowship is death.'<sup>18</sup>

9 Illustrated postcard, 'Going up to Dad's office', 1915  
Pencil, pen and ink  
Private Collection





The curriculum embraced a broad spectrum, including lessons in English, Arithmetic, Geography, History, French, Science, Music, Art and non-denominational Religious Teaching. A Board of Education Report in 1915 noted the high level of seriousness in the teaching of Art and 'the excellent opportunities which the building affords for study of interiors, and for demonstration of perspective principles'.<sup>19</sup> A special feature of the school was the teaching of Botany by the science mistress, Dr Lillian Clarke, who after joining JAGS in 1896 set about developing botanical gardens in the school grounds to serve as outdoor laboratories. She created 'Natural Order Beds' where pupils could study families of plants, as well as a series of beds reproducing British habitats, including a salt marsh and a pebble beach (ill.10).<sup>20</sup> When war broke out in 1914, the girls took part in charitable endeavours for the war effort, turning many of the botanical beds over to bulb growing for military hospitals.<sup>21</sup> Clarke's teaching exercised a strong influence over Winifred, developing her childhood interest in nature into a lifelong love of plants and their habitats. Her son John Monnington recalled his mother's 'encyclopaedic knowledge of the various flora and

fauna that was to be seen in the countryside', as well as 'trees, seashells, the colour of soils etc.'<sup>22</sup>

## TOWN AND COUNTRY

The Knights family, like many late-Victorian and Edwardian city dwellers, responded to the negative aspects of suburban living with nostalgic yearnings for the countryside and nature. 'I suppose Spring is coming down your way,' Winifred wrote to Aunt Florence in 1915 from Streatham. 'It is nothing but bitter winds and cold rains with an occasional burst of sunshine up here. How I should love to see the primroses in your woods and lanes just now.'<sup>23</sup> At Madeira Road, pictures depicting idealised views of the English landscape and the rural labourer, by Frederick Morgan (1847–1927) and Walter's childhood friend Adam Proctor (1864–1913), hung about the walls. Edward Carpenter's writings, in which he championed ruralism through a utopian vision of a simple pastoral economy as an alternative to urban industrial capitalism, exerted a profound influence on the Knights family. His articles written for the *New Age* were passed on to them by Millicent Murby, along

10 The botanical gardens at James Allen's Girls' School, Dulwich, c.1915  
Photograph  
James Allen's Girls' School  
Photographic Archive



with his books *Towards Democracy* (1883), *England's Ideal* (1887) and *Civilization: its Cause and Cure* (1889).<sup>24</sup>

Knights nevertheless found beauty in Streatham, in small pockets, in the lanes and open fields where nature had survived amidst the endless house-building developments.<sup>25</sup> Only a ten-minute walk from Madeira Road, she and her sisters were free to amble on Streatham Common, which boasted a rich profusion of 'wild flowers, grasses, ferns, mosses and algae', as well as a wide variety of trees.<sup>26</sup> In 1927, a London's Tramways poster, 'Streatham Common and the Rookery', portrayed the common as a rural idyll with easy access to the City.<sup>27</sup> When Knights later expressed her joy in these pockets of rurality, Allan Gwynne-Jones responded with typical anti-suburban prejudice: 'I want to hear about your lanes, "lanes" really? In Streatham? With wild plums? I am sure no one else at Streatham finds them and that really they sprout out of the lamp-posts.'<sup>28</sup>

In 1909, Charles Masterman, commenting on the growing predilection for summer holidays, noted how, in August, 'the whole suburbs [are] transported to the more genteel of the southern watering places'.<sup>29</sup> The popularity of seaside holidays not only reflected medical opinion on the benefits of sea air and swimming and the therapeutic nature of sunshine, but also a cultural desire for escape from the commercialised, denatured and time-pressured world of city life.<sup>30</sup> 'Suppose you went to stay away in the country or at the seaside for a fortnight,' Knights wrote in a school essay about the effect of the sun on the colour of petals. 'When you came back everyone would say how much better you looked.'<sup>31</sup>

Writing in the *New Age*, Carpenter lamented the popularity of 'the crowded promenades of Brighton' over 'wilder and more intimate haunts'.<sup>32</sup> The Knights' family holidays, which were mostly spent at the quiet and traditional South Devon resorts of Sidmouth, Seaton and Beer, reflected their desire to experience something closer to Carpenter's ideal. In Stephen Reynolds' *A Poor Man's House* (1908), recording the fishing community in Sidmouth,

Devon is portrayed as a repository of traditional values, in which people's lives were bound by the turning of the seasons and the traditions of their earthbound way of life.<sup>33</sup> Knights developed a deep attachment to nature from these early childhood holidays, spent walking in the hills and collecting shells and driftwood on the seashore to arrange into compositions.<sup>34</sup> An early watercolour, depicting a mermaid seated on a rock contemplating the sea under a spirit-like moon, anticipates a recurrent theme of Knights' later work – the harmony that exists between humanity and nature (ill.11).

## EARLY ILLUSTRATIVE WORK

In 1920, the *Streatham News* recorded that Winifred Knights had begun to draw at a young age: 'Even before she could properly talk the young artist cried out for "Chalk, Chalk", which her mother supplied, and she was happy.'<sup>35</sup> An early sketchbook (1912–15), containing over 100 pages of highly finished drawings, provides an insight into her early development. Many of the drawings are copied from dress catalogues and fashion magazines, with Knights transposing her own likeness on to the models. In one watercolour (ill.12), which is similar to a studio photograph dated 1914 (ill.13), she portrays herself wearing a layered dress with her hair drawn back into an enormous black taffeta bow, the latest style for a modern generation of lively, independent adolescent girls. The drawings, in pencil, pen and ink and watercolour, are characterised by clearly delineated outlines and asymmetric, sinuous forms typical of the Art Nouveau aesthetic of the period.

Like many middle-class consumers, Walter and Mabel indulged a taste for lavish colour-plate gift books and it was by these illustrations that Knights' early imagination was stimulated. At the end of the nineteenth century, new photomechanical techniques increased the efficiency of image reproduction in books, while improvements to the

11 A mermaid on the seashore, c.1909  
Watercolour on paper  
20 x 15 cm (8 x 6 in)  
Collection of Catherine Monnington



12 Self-portrait, inspired by a fashion plate, c.1914  
Pencil and watercolour on paper  
25.5 × 18 cm (10 × 7 in)  
Private Collection

13 Winifred Knights, 1914  
Photograph  
Private Collection



three-colour printing process permitted publishers to incorporate colour plates on an unprecedented scale. As a result, a new generation of artist-illustrators began to transform existing volumes of black-and-white engravings into a multicoloured world of fairy tale and fantasy. These illustrators became household names, their annual books eagerly awaited and their original artwork exhibited at the Leicester Galleries, London and in other commercial venues.<sup>36</sup>

Knights rarely made copies of existing illustrations, but synthesised the work of her favourite illustrators, including Jessie M. King (1875–1949), Florence Harrison (1877–1955), Arthur Rackham (1867–1939), Charles Robinson (1870–1937), Edmund Dulac (1882–1953) and Kay Nielsen (1886–1957), to create her own imaginative visions of fairy tale and legend.<sup>37</sup> Although the majority portray women in traditional roles of princess, fairy or nymph, usually dressed in gowns of medieval or oriental style, her heroines are never defined in relation to their male counterparts. Composed and reflective, with tall and slender forms and a strong element of self-portraiture, they exist in the imagined past that Knights herself wished to occupy; ‘I wish I was My Lady in the sketch picking primroses’, she wrote longingly in a note sent to Aunt Florence to accompany a gift of a fairy-tale illustration.<sup>38</sup>

In 1913, Knights entered a poster competition organised by Peek Frean’s Biscuits. For her chosen subject, an illustration to Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market* (1859) (ill.14), she won a Winsor & Newton paint box that she would use all her life. In contrast to Laurence Housman’s celebrated illustrations, published by Macmillan & Co in 1893, which made use of religious typology to contrast the sisters’ moral responses to temptation with sexual suggestiveness, Knights portrayed Rossetti’s heroine Lizzie as strong and composed in the face of impending danger.<sup>39</sup> That Knights created at least five versions of *Goblin Market* between 1913 and 1916, one of which achieved an award from the



Royal Drawing Society (ill.4, p.12), indicates that the poem held a special significance for her; its themes of female independence, strength and courage and sisterly love, as well as Rossetti's gender as a female poet, undoubtedly resonated with her own ideals.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, the poem's subject matter, often viewed as a metaphor for sexual awakening, would have had an obvious appeal to an adolescent of Knights' age, be it a conscious reference to her own growing self-awareness or an unconscious expression of her development towards maturity.<sup>41</sup>

In 1915 Knights produced an illustration to Algernon Blackwood's visionary novel *The Centaur*, published in 1911 (ill.15).<sup>42</sup> 'It is a very beautiful book,' she observed. 'The author must be a disciple of [Edward] Carpenter's for he quotes him at the head of practically every chapter and the whole book is full of ideas like Carpenter's.'<sup>43</sup> Set in the Caucasus between the Black and Caspian Seas, *The Centaur* tells the story of a journalist of mystical temperament who rejects the pace of the

modern world for a lifestyle that is closer to nature. Knights' illustration, which was inspired by W. G. Robertson's design for the endpaper which adorns *The Centaur*, depicts the 'strange dreamy forms of almost impossible beauty ... hair flying past them like a rain of summer flowers'.<sup>44</sup> The composition, in pen and ink and watercolour, is stylistically close to Edmund Dulac's 'Nocturnes'.<sup>45</sup>

Walter and Mabel felt confident that their daughter could achieve artistic recognition and financial success as a book illustrator, a profession that was increasingly open to women. The development of provincial art schools at the end of the nineteenth century, many of which were embedded in the Arts and Crafts movement, had provided new opportunities for women in the decorative arts, and female illustrators such as Jessie King, Florence Harrison and Annie French (1872–1965) had achieved considerable acclaim, providing a source of reference and inspiration to aspiring women students.<sup>46</sup> In 1901, an article in

14 Illustration to Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, 1913  
Pen and ink and watercolour on paper  
44.5 × 58.5 cm  
(17 ½ × 23 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



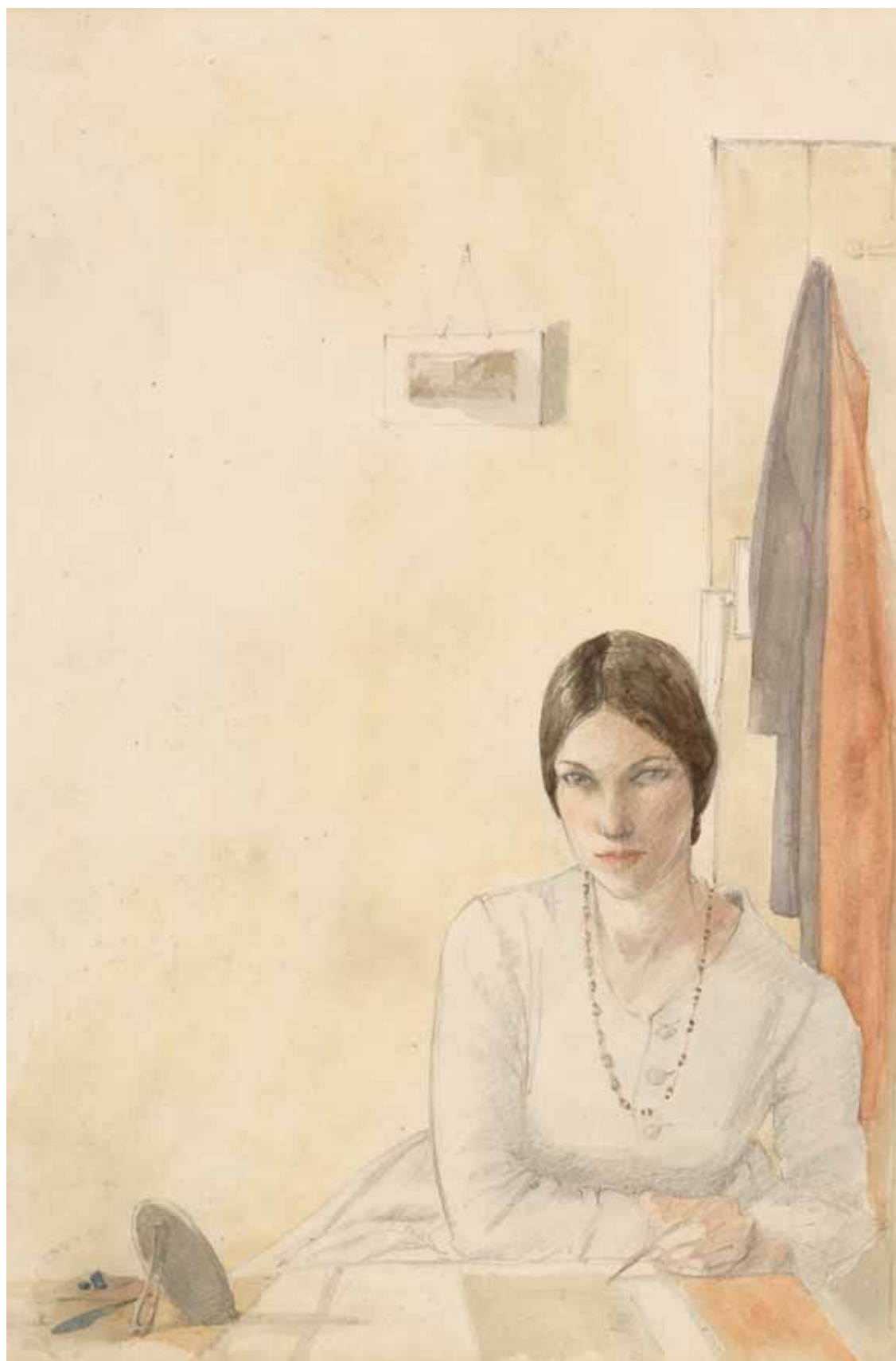
The Studio acknowledged women's growing success in illustration, but attributed this phenomenon to the fact that 'decorative pen work is the legitimate descendent of embroidery and the purely feminine arts'.<sup>47</sup> The classification of aesthetics into a hierarchy was typical of the period, with subjects drawn from history and mythology deemed to be the most 'important' and the lesser genres, including still-life, flower painting, domestic subject matter and illustration, thought especially suitable for women.<sup>48</sup>

In 1912, on the advice of Walter's friend Adam Proctor, Mabel took her daughter to see

Professor Frederick Brown at the Slade School of Fine Art in Gower Street, London, to show him her illustrative work. Proctor, whose own father, John Proctor (1836–1914), was a successful illustrator for the *Illustrated London News* and other journals, had been taught by Brown in the 1880s at the Westminster School of Art and was aware of his belief in the dignity of illustration as an art in its own right. Indeed, in the 1890s, Brown had invited the American illustrator Joseph Pennell (1857–1926) to deliver a series of lectures at the Slade on 'The Art of Illustration' (later published in *The Illustration of Books* (1895)), which set out their jointly held conviction that 'until you can draw, and draw well, you cannot illustrate'.<sup>49</sup> Recognising Knights' potential, Brown encouraged her to begin her formal art school training at the Slade in the autumn term of 1915, three months after her sixteenth birthday.

When Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914, the Knights family were distracted by Mabel's late pregnancy (she was 40). David died the following year on 14 March, aged five months. He was buried at Streatham Park Cemetery, on which occasion Knights implored Aunt Florence to send her mother one of Edward Carpenter's books. 'Mother does want it so much, she says it would comfort her.'<sup>50</sup> Mabel's health would never recover, and she suffered from a weak heart and low spirits for the rest of her life. Knights, too, was deeply troubled by her brother's death, expressing her contempt for the clergy who had officiated at his funeral: 'The Reverend O. C. Morton is just as silly as ever. The Reverend Engelbach is still growing thinner and taller. The Reverend J. Andrews grin is getting larger and larger and Mr Westerdale seems to be enjoying himself at the Front and there is nobody left but [me].'<sup>51</sup> She subsequently abandoned the Sunday morning Anglican service at St Peter's Church, Streatham, which had formed part of her childhood ritual, and would never again take part in communal worship or show any sign of religious devotion.<sup>52</sup>

15 Illustration to Algernon Blackwood's *The Centaur*, 1915  
Pen and ink and watercolour on paper  
25.5 × 18 cm (10 × 7 in)  
Private Collection



## CHAPTER TWO

## THE SLADE, PART I: 1915–1917

‘ONE OF THE MOST VIRTUOUS  
AND HARDWORKING FEMALES’<sup>1</sup>

The Slade School of Fine Art was founded in 1871 following a bequest by the antiquary and collector Felix Slade (1788–1868).<sup>2</sup> The first Professor, Sir Edward Poynter (1836–1919), was a key figure in the development of the ethos that defined the school, instigating a programme of progressive art training based on the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, with its emphasis on drawing and intensive study from the life model.<sup>3</sup> By the time Knights enrolled in 1915, the Slade was considered to be ‘the most famous London Art School’ and the only one that enjoyed a prestige equivalent to the Paris Ateliers.<sup>4</sup> The teaching staff was seen to comprise ‘some of the most brilliant and original portrait and landscape painters and draughtsmen of the day’, including Frederick Brown, Henry Tonks and Philip Wilson Steer.<sup>5</sup> The continued association with Poynter, who acted as Visitor until his death in 1919, further secured the school’s reputation.<sup>6</sup>

On 4 October 1915, Mabel recorded in her book of ‘Interesting Events in My Life’, ‘Winifred started at Slade Art School.’<sup>7</sup> At 10 am, carrying her new overalls and artist’s materials, Knights handed her registration form to the Tutor to Women Students, Winifred Smith BSc, before signing her name in a heavy cloth-bound ledger on the left-hand page marked ‘LADIES’. The Slade was situated on the front quadrangle of University College London’s neo-classical building on Gower Street,

Bloomsbury, and its surroundings were described by the writer Gladys Beattie Crozier as ‘delightful’:

In the centre of the quadrangle lie wide-spreading green turfed lawns bordered with trees and flower-beds, and surrounded by a broad, stone-flagged walk where a large number of girl art-students, clad in workmanlike painting overalls of various soft artistic hues, may be seen strolling together on sunny days during the breaks which occur in the class-rooms while the models rest.<sup>8</sup>

When selecting an art school for their daughter, Walter and Mabel would have been aware of the Slade’s many advantages. As early as 1883, the writer and artist Charlotte Weeks described the teaching as ‘careful, modern and thorough’, noting that ‘instruction and opportunities are available on an equal basis to both sexes.’<sup>9</sup> The Slade was renowned for being the first art school to allow female students access to the life room from its foundation in 1871, a privilege that was not extended to female students at the Royal Academy until 1893. For female students, a further appeal of the Slade was its location as part of University College London, where they were permitted to attend lectures on the same basis as men.<sup>10</sup>

16 Self-portrait sketching  
at a table, c.1916  
Watercolour over pencil  
on paper  
38.5 × 24 cm  
(15 1/8 × 9 3/8 in)  
Private Collection



17 Illustrated letter, 'Some Sladites!!', 1915  
UCL Library Special  
Collections, University  
College London

There were, however, some distinctions between the treatment of male and female students, in the distribution of study spaces as well as in regulations and discipline. During the admissions procedure, only women were required to prove their respectability by presenting 'an introduction or reference which the Tutor to Women Students ... may deem satisfactory'.<sup>11</sup> Women had their own Female Tutor and refreshment rooms and were placed in a separate room for study from the life model. The demarcation of spaces at the Slade was deemed important from the outset for encouraging women to enrol. The University College Calendar of 1871 attested to the fact that the building had 'been carefully designed in such a way as to make due

provision for the admission of Ladies as Students of the Fine Art School'.<sup>12</sup> As such, for parents like Walter and Mabel, the Slade reconciled their requirements for serious art training with well-defined notions of decorum; Mabel would later criticise the British School at Rome for allowing 'far too much freedom [between] the men and women students'.<sup>13</sup>

From the outset, Knights expressed frustration with some aspects of Slade regulations, especially those that concerned women only: 'The Provost (wretched man) has made a rule that all women students are to have their hair up.' Despite complaining that 'my neck is still suffering from a slight chill' and 'hairpins do hurt', Knights acquiesced, conceding that 'they seem to like it up so it's all right'.<sup>14</sup> In a drawing titled 'Some Sladites!!' (ill.17) she depicts her new centrally parted style, drawn low over the ears with the side hair plaited into an elaborate coil. Other Slade students, including Dorothy Brett (1883–1977), have short bobbed hair, a style popularised by the 'Slade Cropheads' in 1911 in protest at the Provost's regulation.<sup>15</sup>

Knights' atypical hairstyle, which recalls the 'Madonna' style of the 1840s as well as Renaissance prototypes, such as *La Belle Ferronnière*,\* would become one of several idiosyncrasies through which she would now construct her artistic identity. A photograph used for a wartime permit (ill.18), allowing Knights to sketch out of doors, shows that after enrolling at the Slade she adopted an increasingly 'artistic' form of dress, the plain fabric and moderately low, rounded neckline contravening fashionable lines and cut. The only ornament, a fabric butterfly motif stitched on to the dress, reflects her interest in traditional handicrafts.

## THE SLADE AT WAR

When Knights arrived at the Slade in October 1915, Britain had already been at war for 14 months.

\* Attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, in the collection of the Musée du Louvre, Paris.





18 Winifred Knights, 1916  
Photograph  
Private Collection

According to Gilbert Spencer (1892–1979), the Slade was ‘fading out’ as ‘absentees from the classes became more and more obvious’.<sup>16</sup> Although female students consistently outnumbered male students at the Slade by a ratio of at least three to one, their increasing predominance during the war moved Knights to describe the spring term of 1916 as ‘shockingly dull’.<sup>17</sup> Dullness, however, was not the only impact of the war. Each term, the *Union Magazine* listed an increasing number of losses at the Front among former students, and on mild days, wounded and convalescent soldiers, being treated at University College Hospital, sat about the front quadrangle. The atmosphere at the Slade was reflected in the London streets outside, which according to Lady Ottoline

Morrell ‘had become entirely changed by the War’. The profusion of recruitment posters, soldiers in uniform, empty houses and ambulances carrying the wounded to hospital left ‘no spot that one touched that didn’t fly open and show some picture of suffering, some macabre dance of death’.<sup>18</sup>

However, compared to the period immediately preceding the outbreak of war, 1915 was a year of relative calm in the art world. Between 1910 and 1914, radically new ideas and practices had been introduced to Britain through a series of key exhibitions in London, including Roger Fry’s ‘Manet and the Post-Impressionists’ (Grafton Gallery, 1910–11) and ‘Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition’ (Grafton Gallery, 1912), the international touring ‘Exhibition of Works by the Italian Futurist Painters’ (Sackville Gallery, 1912) and Frank Rutter’s ‘Post-Impressionist and Futurist Exhibition’ (Doré Gallery, 1913).<sup>19</sup> The writer and critic Charles Lewis Hind (1862–1927) recalled the excitement of this period during which ‘art people were talking about art, arguing about it, fighting about it. Art was upon the town.’<sup>20</sup> Writing from the perspective of 1932, Henry Tonks considered, however, that this turbulence had only mildly affected the Slade: ‘The Slade students remained calm ... and beyond occasional violent experiments in composition, and new ideas as to the proportions of the human body, everything went on quietly.’<sup>21</sup> In the context of the Slade ethos, which demanded respect for tradition and artistic precedent, even those students who engaged with modernism, including Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957), C. R. W. Nevinson (1889–1946), Helen Saunders (1885–1963), Edward Wadsworth (1889–1949) and David Bomberg (1890–1957), did not do so fully until after they had left the school.<sup>22</sup>

With the outbreak of war, the burgeoning Modernist movement was dealt a heavy blow by the suspicion that it was unpatriotic, even anti-British, and there was a widespread return to earlier conventions as people looked to traditional and reassuring values. ‘You would think’, Wyndham Lewis wrote in *Blast* 2 (1915), ‘that the splendid

war army of England were fighting to reinstate the tradition of Sir Frederic Leighton.<sup>23</sup> In his rejection of the tradition of Leighton, Lewis was keen to dismiss an artistic movement that represented the past; Pre-Raphaelitism and late Victorian art, with which Leighton was associated, were still regarded by teachers and students at the Slade as guiding movements extending unbroken to the present day.<sup>24</sup> Until the early 1920s, the Slade retained Charles Shannon's Pre-Raphaelite-inspired design from the 1890s for the cover of its Sketch Club pamphlet, depicting a damsel drawing the abundant flora and fauna by which she is surrounded. Interest in the Brotherhood remained much in evidence. The Tate (then known as the National Gallery of British Art, Millbank) held Pre-Raphaelite exhibitions in the winter of 1911–12 and again in 1913;<sup>25</sup> in 1916 the gallery acquired a collection of 14 works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown, and in 1918 paintings by William Holman Hunt and J. R. Spencer Stanhope were added to its collection.<sup>26</sup> Literature on the subject steadily increased; in 1906 Everyman's Library published a compendium of John Ruskin's writings on Pre-Raphaelitism, and Percy Bate's *The English Pre-Raphaelite Painters* (1899) appeared in its fourth edition in 1910.<sup>27</sup>

## BROWN AND TONKS

When Knights enrolled at the Slade, Professor Frederick Brown (1851–1941) had been in charge for 23 years. A committed educationalist, he was credited with making the Slade into a 'fruitful and famous' art school where students reached 'a level of draughtsmanship unknown previously in this country'.<sup>28</sup> In 1886, along with a small group of other painters who had all studied in Paris, he set up the New English Art Club (NEAC) as an alternative to the Royal Academy.<sup>29</sup> The club's exhibitions, in which drawings and watercolours played as important a part as oil paintings, were seen to reflect that 'revival of traditional methods of drawing and painting'

practised at the Slade.<sup>30</sup> The art historian Mary Chamot (1899–1993), a former pupil of Brown's, believed that the encouragement he gave to women students was greater than they had ever received.<sup>31</sup> During a speech in 1893, Brown went so far as to state that women painters did better work than men.<sup>32</sup> He was responsible for extending full facilities for life drawing to female students and his own collection of pictures contained many examples by female artists, including Mary McEvoy (1870–1941), Ethel Walker (1861–1951) and Ursula Tyrwhitt (1872–1966).

When Brown took up his appointment at the Slade, he invited his former student Henry Tonks (1862–1937), a brilliant young surgeon and anatomist with an aptitude for art, to become his assistant (ill. 19). By the time Tonks retired from the Slade in 1930, after 38 years of teaching (first as Assistant Professor and from 1918 as Professor), he was celebrated for having 'played a foremost part in the revival of English drawing'.<sup>33</sup> Supported by carefully chosen assistants who embraced their values, Tonks and Brown instilled in their students the principle that a positive, intellectual attitude to drawing was the foundation of all good art, an ethos that was to profoundly shape Knights' development as an artist.<sup>34</sup>

Tonks described the Slade's method as based on the emulation of past traditions of draughtsmanship: 'It is my opinion and the basis of my teaching that the classic tradition of drawing was born in Italy where it flourished during the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, was carried on in France by Poussin, later by Ingres, and finally by Degas the last of the great classic draughtsman.'<sup>35</sup> Tonks disliked the Modern Movement in France, which he referred to as 'The Deluge', and came to see Post-Impressionism as 'an evil thing that had seduced the most gifted of the Slade students.'<sup>36</sup> He opposed the rejection of nature and representation as the basis of art: 'Hunting for abstract form is as likely to meet with success as a child's search for the noise in the interior of a drum [for] if we have exhausted the world about us we have come to the end of our art.'<sup>37</sup> Gaining a somewhat draconian reputation for his prejudices,



19 Portrait study of Henry  
Tonks, c.1919  
Pencil on paper  
44.8 x 30.3 cm  
(17 5/8 x 11 7/8 in)  
Private Collection



he used his position at the Slade to promote particular artistic values and to suppress others. Thanking her aunt Millicent for a book on James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Knights wrote, 'happily a liking for Whistler's things is allowed by the Slade'.<sup>38</sup>

Despite Tonks' dogmatic approach, emphasis on the science of drawing at the Slade was balanced by an equal belief in the importance of self-expression. In 1909, commenting on the diversity of styles at an 'Exhibition of Drawings, Paintings and Etchings by Slade students and Teaching Staff', P. G. Konody wrote that 'pupils are not taught mere tricks of thumb, but are instructed to use their own eyes and to paint and draw what they feel'.<sup>39</sup> Tonks believed that expression in drawing could not be taught: 'you need to be a poet to produce a beautiful drawing, and that no man can impart to any other man.'<sup>40</sup>

The Scottish artist Sir Muirhead Bone (1876–1953) wrote that 'an unexpected side of Tonks was his intense sympathy with women artists and a complete belief in their powers of achievement in pictorial art'.<sup>41</sup> Receiving guidance, support and encouragement from Tonks during her time at the Slade and for many years subsequently, Knights was never subjected to the disparaging remarks that he notoriously made to female students, repeated in numerous accounts.<sup>42</sup> While this evidence suggests that Tonks could make use of demeaning gendered language when criticising the work of female students, his biographer, Joseph Hone, refuted the view of him as a misogynist, arguing that 'his sarcastic wit' and 'biting utterance' were applied without 'distinction of the sexes'.<sup>43</sup> Tonks was an active member of the Three Arts Club, meeting in 1918 to consider the plight of women artists affected by the war; he also secured mural commissions for female students on numerous occasions.<sup>44</sup>

Marjory Lilly, a student at the Slade in the 1910s, voiced concern, however, that Tonks' views about women were illogical: 'He took great interest in their work and encouraged them with all his might, while realising that their interest in art would probably peter out in their twenties if they

were considering marriage or that if it persisted the cares of a family threatened to smother it for good.'<sup>45</sup> When Knights' friend Mary Attenborough left the Slade in 1921, Tonks implored her to 'never get married. You have got to give up everything.' When she did marry six years later he thought it 'a tragedy', writing that 'their work always deteriorates when they get married'.<sup>46</sup>

When Knights enrolled at the Slade, Tonks was in Italy working as part of a volunteer Red Cross unit. By January 1916 he was back in England with a temporary commission as a lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps attached to the Cambridge Military Hospital at Aldershot, continuing his attendance at the Slade whenever he was free from other engagements.

## THE SLADE CURRICULUM

Two months after starting her studies at the Slade, Knights was, according to her mother, 'sticking to her work with no thought for anything else, which is quite as it should be'.<sup>47</sup> The Slade curriculum made great demands on its students. Aside from the long working day (9.30 am until 5 pm) and the journey to and from Streatham, Knights often had work to undertake at home, including compositions for set subjects and books to read. She wrote to her childhood friend Awdry Clarke that 'when I get home in the evening I am so fagged that I only just manage to keep awake and sit in a chair'.<sup>48</sup>

Students entering the Slade were required to draw from the Antique until judged sufficiently competent to draw from the life model. Courses in Portraiture, Anatomy, Perspective and Ornamental Design were offered as supporting disciplines. When the required level of proficiency had been achieved in drawing, students joined the painting classes, initially in the Antique Studio and subsequently in the Life Room.

Seated on a low, narrow bench known as a 'donkey', and with a drawing board propped against

20 Illustration from a letter, 'I went home like this yesterday after it all', 1915 UCL Library Special Collections, University College London



a wooden T-shaped easel, Knights thus began her formal training in the Antique Studio. Described as ‘a magnificently lighted room, capable of accommodating a large class of students’, the Antique Studio contained plaster casts of late Greek, Greco-Roman and Italian Renaissance sculpture (ill.21).<sup>49</sup> Although the Slade ethos prioritised life drawing, it was believed that students should first ‘acquire some kind of power of using their materials and ... some acquaintance with the general character and proportions of the human figure, before attempting the study of the living model’.<sup>50</sup> As well as serving as an academic exercise, the study of classical sculpture allowed students ‘to construct the history of the Ancient World’, the cultural heritage of which had embodied the highest aims of art since the Renaissance.<sup>51</sup>

During Tonks’ wartime absences, it was the Australian-born painter Derwent Lees (1884–1931) who guided Knights through an intense study of drawing. A student at the Slade from 1905 to 1908, Lees was appointed Assistant Teacher of Drawing halfway through his course (a position he retained

until he was committed to an asylum in 1918). He replicated Brown’s and Tonks’ methods of teaching by communicating his ideas in conversations with students and by marginal drawings on the students’ work sheets. In a letter to Awdry Clarke, Knights described Lees’ lessons as ‘ripping’ and ‘beautiful’. Sketching herself feeling happy and confident after a lesson during which he had praised her work, she confided, ‘I am falling in love with him’ (ill.20).<sup>52</sup>

Knights progressed to the Women’s Life Room during the spring term of 1916. The study of the human figure, which formed the core of the Slade curriculum, was considered not only an ennobling subject for artistic advancement but also essential for the creation of large-scale figure composition, a category of work that was traditionally most highly esteemed.<sup>53</sup> Students initially joined the life class for the last hour of the day, when the model would hold a series of poses lasting between five and ten minutes. These taught the student to grasp the vitality of the human form quickly and understand its essential underlying structure. A sheet of four studies of a man (1916, private collection), which

21 Photograph of the Antique Studio, from Gladys Beattie Crozier’s *The Slade School of Art*, 1912



22 Life study, three-quarter-length frontal view  
Pencil on paper  
36.6 x 20.9 cm  
(14 3/8 x 8 1/4 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

23 Portrait study, *Autumn Term 1916*, 1916  
Pencil on paper  
51 x 30.8 cm  
(20 x 12 1/8 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



Knights titled *1st Life Drawings*, exemplifies the swift linear drawing technique that was taught at the Slade.

In the Women's Life Room strict rules of propriety were observed, and only female models posed naked, while male models were draped.<sup>54</sup> Models stood or sat on a throne under a top north light, with a plain grey or khaki cloth hung behind them to create a neutral backdrop. Students were taught to emphasise the expression of form through the primacy of line rather than tone, and no attempt was made to build up surface texture. Tonks explained: 'The pleasure of drawing is in the production of much by little means ... a single line may mean nothing beyond a line; add another alongside and both disappear, and we are aware only of the contents, and a form is expressed. The beauty of a line is in its result, in the form which it helps to bring into being.'<sup>55</sup>

Students were instructed to pay close attention to the structure, angles and junctions of the body where the contours changed direction. Knights described how during one lesson 'Lees gave me a ragging about bad contours or proportions in the figure of a man I was drawing, and told me to alter them'.<sup>56</sup> A study of a model from this period shows Knights using delicate parallel hatching (a technique introduced by the second Slade Professor, Alphonse Legros (1837–1911)) to create a convincing illusion of volume (ill.22). By faithfully recording her subject without idealising the form, Knights applied the Slade's tenet that 'nature, in the shape of the human form, must not be improved by the draughtsman'.<sup>57</sup>

The depiction of drapery and studio prop furniture was also a subject taught in the Life Room. Knights recalled that Lees 'showed a surprising amount of knowledge about silks, satins, velvet, serge, cotton and the way they hung in folds and the way to drape figures ... and not to let the figure be subordinate to the garment'.<sup>58</sup>

Portraiture was another important part of the Slade curriculum, with instruction taking place in

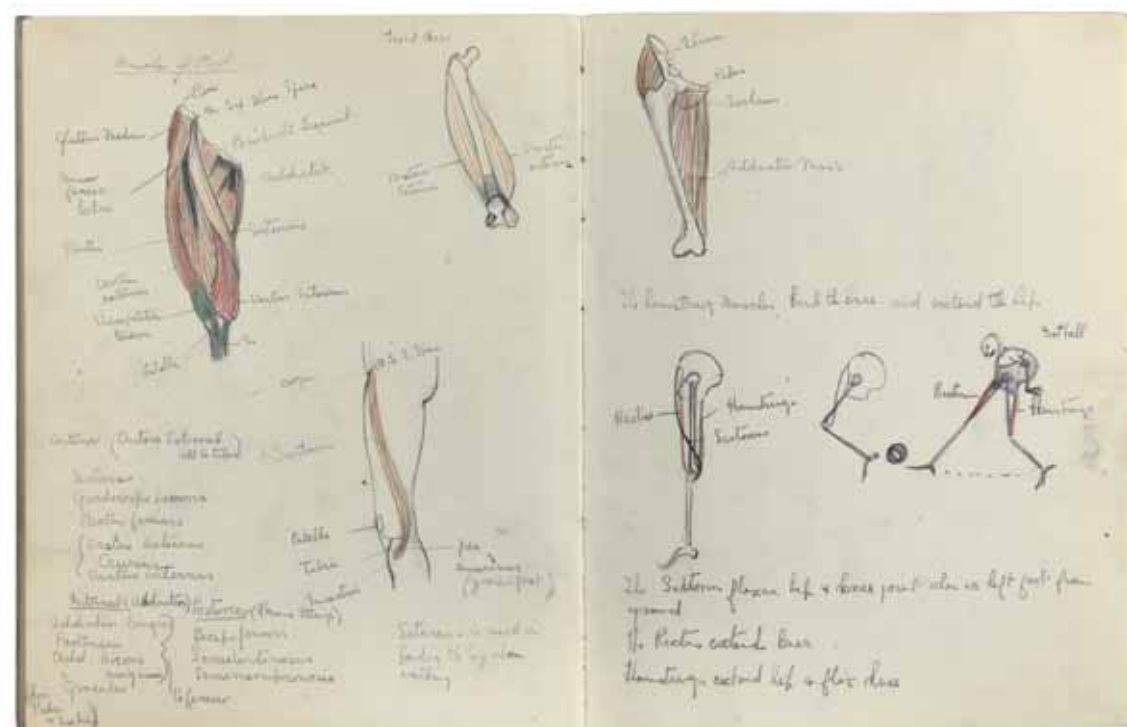


24 *Eileen*, 24 April 1917  
Pencil on paper  
19.5 × 15 cm (7 5/8 × 6 in)  
Collection of  
Mr Martin Palmer



25 Self-portrait, c.1916  
Pencil on paper  
28.3 × 38.1 cm  
(11 1/8 × 15 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London





smaller and more intimate studios. According to Gladys Beattie Crozier, 'individuality of treatment and breadth of view' were the defining aspects of these lessons.<sup>59</sup> A pencil portrait, inscribed 'Autumn Term 1916' (ill.23), shows Knights' early development in this discipline. Though attentively observed and with a competent use of cross-hatching, the less resolved areas of the sitter's left eye and outline of her hair reveal a hesitancy that might be expected in the work of a student only just embarking on her second year. Away from the Slade, Knights drew portraits of her family, in particular her mother and sister Eileen (ill.24), both of whom were willing sitters and would subsequently act as the models for many of her compositions. These portrait drawings show a greater degree of fluidity, the artist being naturally more at ease with models who formed part of her own intimate space.

Knights also made her first attempts at formal self-portraiture (ill.25). One example shows the artist observing herself in a mirror, a frontal view drawn at eye level (ill.16, p.22). Making use of strong outlines and soft shading, Knights' direct gaze conveys a sense of growing self-confidence. With paintbrush in hand, she emphasises her professional

role, a contrast to the self-portraits in the guise of fairies, nymphs and other heroines, which were common in the years leading up to the Slade.

Knights attended lectures on Anatomy given by Professor George Dancer Thane (1850–1930). This subject, taught 'with special reference to the requirements of Fine-Art students',<sup>60</sup> was a central feature of Slade training, allowing students to gain an understanding of the body's underlying three-dimensional structure and how the interaction of muscles determines surface contours.<sup>61</sup> Working alongside a hospital attendant and a living model and making constant reference to specimens in bottles, Thane prepared diagrams on a blackboard which he coloured in as he talked.<sup>62</sup>

The content of Thane's lectures is clearly laid out in Knights' Anatomy sketchbook (ill.26). Drawings and diagrams of bones, joints and muscles, as well as 'compound tissues' such as skin, nails and hair, are accompanied by extensive commentary: 'Nothing in body is straight; curves in body not regular ... proportions are calculated from skeleton, the stature of a person is determined by the length of the lower limbs and not by the trunk'. A study of human evolution and 'Types'

26 Slade Anatomy sketchbook, 1916  
Private Collection



was taught as an aid to the painting of historical subjects: 'British Stock = long-headed; Invaders, Saxon = short headed'. In one lesson, movement in the leg was demonstrated by the kicking of a ball: 'the Sartorius flexes hip & knee joint when we lift foot from ground.'<sup>63</sup>

Knights also attended a course in Perspective and Solid Geometry given by the Irish artist Joseph Poole Addey (1852–1922). During these lessons she was taught to work 'sight size' – a drawing technique, according to Tonks, that was based on 'well-known rules of perspective, instead of on the size of the sheet of paper ... Rembrandt and all the great masters ... were guided by this natural way of drawing.'<sup>64</sup> While the teaching of perspective was principally scientific, students were also made aware of its potential to heighten emotion through use of space: 'There have been men like Uccello and Piero della Francesca, a very high order of artists, who found in perspective inspiration.'<sup>65</sup>

In 1913, Tonks invited Sydney Mawson (1849–1941) to teach a new course at the Slade on Ornamental Design and Historic Styles. Tonks saw the study of fine art and design as complementary: 'Such close connection as there is between the measurements of Nature and Art can not be mere chance.'<sup>66</sup> Tonks explained to Mawson that 'what makes me want to develop this side of our work, is ... that there does seem a desire on the part of students to concentrate on the Decorative side'.<sup>67</sup> As both a landscape painter and a designer, Mawson was well placed to teach the course. A frequent exhibitor at the NEAC, since the 1880s he had also designed wallpapers and printed textiles for Thomas Wardle, Jeffrey & Co., Liberty, Turnbull & Stockdale and Warner amongst others.<sup>68</sup>

The headings in Knights' Ornamental Design sketchbook relate closely to the themes of Mawson's lectures: 'Parallelism (Flat Design)', 'Principles of Nature', 'Principles of Detail', 'Tangential Radiation', 'Traditional Forms for Carpets' and 'Construction of Plants'.<sup>69</sup> Importance was given to creating design devices, so that

plants, fruit and trees, instead of being accurate renderings from nature, are simplified or drawn with an emphasis on their underlying geometry; for example, on one page a drawing of an imaginary flower is marked 'combination of two forms'. 'Unity' is emphasised throughout the book, for 'lack of unity spoils design'. During a lesson on 'Radiation', Knights noted that 'lines are more exciting if they go to infinity and never touch', which is directly related to Tonks' belief that a good drawing must have 'no edges'.<sup>70</sup>

Knights made numerous visits to the British Museum, London, the dates of which are recorded in her Ornamental Design textbook, before its closure in March 1916 for the duration of the war. Here she made copies of carpets, textiles and ceramics, supplementing her drawings with extensive notes. Mawson recommended the study of Japanese prints, which he considered to be excellent examples of design. Noting down the titles of two books on Japanese art, Laurence Binyon's *The Flight of the Dragon* (1911) and Yoné Noguchi's recently published *Spirit of Japanese Art* (1915), Knights also recorded a visit to the new galleries of the Prints and Drawings Department, where Arthur Morrison's collection of Ukiyo-e (woodblock prints and paintings) was on display.<sup>71</sup>

## PRIZE WINNING

In his lecture 'The Value of Prizes', delivered at the end of the first session of the Slade School in 1872, Sir Edward Poynter explained that 'it is only when the students are spurred on to their best efforts in the struggle for a prize that the teacher is enabled to judge accurately of the progress they have made'.<sup>72</sup> Annual prizes awarded at the Slade included Life Drawing, Life Painting, Anatomical Drawing and Head Painting, with the Summer Composition Competition being the most highly valued. From 1897, the Slade began to collect the prize-winning works, some of which, according to Gladys Beattie

27 Full-length Seated Female Nude, three-quarter view, 1917  
Pencil on paper  
39 × 31.5 cm  
(15 3/8 × 12 3/8 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



Crozier, 'adorned the walls of the staircase and corridors'. Crozier added that 'women have always done well at the Slade and some of the finest prize pictures on the walls are the products of a feminine brush'.<sup>73</sup> With part of their training taking place in separate spaces, competing for prizes provided women with an important opportunity to prove themselves alongside their male contemporaries. Knights' comment, 'I am at present one of the most virtuous and hardworking females', demonstrates that she otherwise had little choice but to measure her progress in relation to female students.<sup>74</sup>

Walter and Mabel attached great importance to the winning of prizes; on leaving the Stationers' Company's School in 1883, Walter had been awarded the prestigious Thomas Brown Medal for Excellence, an achievement he remained proud of all his life. At the end of the summer term of 1917, Knights wrote nervously to her aunt Grace that 'it is our prize-giving ... I hope I have got a certificate, I don't know though'.<sup>75</sup> In the event, she achieved more than she had hoped for, her mother recording in her book of 'Interesting Events in My Life' that 'Winifred won Prize for Figure Drawing, £2.00, also First Class Certificate!'.<sup>76</sup> The prize-winning drawing depicts a female model seated

on a stool in a three-quarters pose seen from a low viewpoint, the arrangement of the legs, one raised, the other extended, adding complexity to the composition (ill.27). Constructed with firm outlines and soft modelling, the subtle highlights and dark shadows convey the surface of the model's skin and the underlying musculature of her anatomy, demonstrating what Tonks called 'the exquisite transition of one surface to another'.<sup>77</sup>

Monthly prizes were also awarded for the best compositions exhibited at the Slade Sketch Club, which was structured around a series of set subjects under the general headings of 'Special Figure', 'Figure', 'Animal' and 'Landscape'.<sup>78</sup> Pictures were hung anonymously in the Lecture Room at a given time each month and were assessed by Tonks (a process referred to as 'criticism'), or in Tonks' absence by one of the drawing masters. A former student recalled that Tonks 'criticised' the drawings 'from the point of view of execution and pervasive qualities and said nothing illuminating about composition'.<sup>79</sup> Knights described a Sketch Club Criticism which took place in the summer term of 1916:

Last Friday was the last criticism and at 3.45 I went down to the Lecture Room. I found

28 Illustration from a letter, 'Tonks criticised the pictures', 1916 UCL Library Special Collections, University College London

that nearly everybody had taken their places and was just going to resign myself to an 1-1/2 hrs. stand when Braamcamp a Portuguese girl asked me to sit with her on a high table which can be placed along the sidewall ... Awdry, have you ever been stuck up in front of about 30 men all young? (ill.28)<sup>80</sup>

The Sketch Club provided Knights with an opportunity to develop her skills in illustrative composition. During one Sketch Club Criticism, she recorded that Tonks awarded her three marks out of a possible four for two illustrations.<sup>81</sup> In 1916, recognising the heroines scribbled in the margins of a life drawing, Lees exclaimed to Knights, 'it's you who do those fairy-tale drawings for the Sketch Club', adding that 'when one is drawing from imagination one invariably gets one's own likeness ... that explains why you always get your figure drawing slender.'<sup>82</sup>

## AN UNFORESEEN INTERRUPTION

By the spring of 1916, Knights felt that she was making great progress:

I am getting on nicely if you want to know and am improving rapidly (you may think I am suffering from swelled head but that is not so. I speak the truth when I say that there is a decided improvement in my drawing) ... The Pro[fessor] said the other day that with a little more fire and water I should do very good ... drawing.<sup>83</sup>

When, by 1917, she had still not progressed to the painting class, Walter grew impatient and wrote a letter of protest to the Slade. In his reply, Brown reassured Walter that 'Miss Knights is rapidly approaching the standard at which permission is given to paint from the cast – it will not be long

before she will start doing so.'<sup>84</sup> However, as the experience of war on the Home Front increasingly took its toll on Knights' emotional state, this anticipated progression was delayed.

From early 1915, Zeppelin airships began raiding England, forming the dominant experience of threat for the civilian population. On 23 and 24 September 1916, 32 bombs were dropped on Streatham, causing damage to properties and significant loss of life.<sup>85</sup> The psychological effect of these raids was considerable, provoking for Knights a lifelong abstract terror of death from the sky: 'I have got to this state that I can't let an aeroplane pass over my head without feeling terribly ill and shaky,' she wrote in 1918.<sup>86</sup>

A few months after the raids on Streatham, in the early evening of 19 January 1917, the munitions factory of Messrs Brunner Mond Ltd in Silvertown exploded, killing 73 people and injuring 400. The painter A. S. Hartrick recorded that 'the destruction from it extended across the river and for miles round ... while windows were broken 15 miles away, as far as Streatham'.<sup>87</sup> Knights, travelling over Blackfriars Bridge on the top deck of a tramcar, witnessed the event and was deeply traumatised as a result. As one commentator observed, 'those of us who serve have become accustomed to sights of suffering and death on the battlefield, but it seems a hundred times more terrible when these things happen so far away from the shock of war, and involve so many helpless women and children'.<sup>88</sup>

Although she registered at the Slade on 1 October 1917 for the start of her third year, the strain of being in London was too great for Knights, and Mabel decided that she should take refuge at Walter's cousins' farm in Worcestershire, recording in her diary for 3 October, 'Win[ifred] went to Lineholt. Fear of Air raids'.<sup>89</sup> Walter, however, strongly disapproved of the interruption to his daughter's art training and 'uttered things which I would not have done in calmer moments'. He forewarned Knights 'to do your level best when normal conditions again come about'.<sup>90</sup>



## CHAPTER THREE

## WORCESTERSHIRE: 1917–1918

‘THE QUIETUDE AND STRENGTH OF NATURE AT HAND’<sup>1</sup>

Knights arrived at Lineholt Farmhouse (ill.30) on 3 October 1917. The farm, which belonged to her father’s cousins, Frances and Joseph Williams, was situated near Ombersley, described in the *Birmingham Gazette* in 1915 as ‘a beautiful Worcestershire village nestling away from the rush and dust of the highway, where life seems to be very easy and far removed from the distractions of a great city’.<sup>2</sup> The land had been farmed by the family since the early eighteenth century and followed the traditional mixed pattern, combining arable cultivation with the raising of livestock. The Williams were in desperate need of extra help to run the farm. Charles, the elder of their two sons, had been killed at the Front soon after enlisting, and Joe had just returned home having being invalided out of the army. Furthermore, the farm’s heavy horses had been requisitioned by the War Office.

In a letter to Millicent Murby, Knights thanked her for not disapproving of ‘my sojourn on the land’.<sup>3</sup> During the war it was usual to see women from all backgrounds working as agricultural labourers; the Women’s Land Army (WLA), which had been set up in March 1917 ‘for the all-important work of maintaining and increasing the Food Supplies of the Country, so seriously menaced at the moment by the enemy’, had recruited over 23,000 female workers by 1918.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to

other types of war work undertaken by women, such as the production of munitions or Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nursing, working on the land was widely perceived in terms of a return to a ‘natural order’, a place where the psychic and social wounds of wartime could be soothed and good health restored. ‘Agriculture is the antithesis of warfare,’ said R. Hew of the Agricultural Section of the British Association in 1915. ‘Farming is pre-eminently a peaceful avocation, and farmers are essentially men of peace ... [the farmer’s] intimate association with the placid and inevitable processes of Nature engenders a calmness of spirit which is unshaken by catastrophe.’<sup>5</sup>

The winter of 1917–18 was bitterly cold, and Knights described the deep snow in Lineholt as being ‘over 1½ feet in the shallowest parts and when it thawed the floods were terrible’. During this time she worked indoors alongside the Williams’ five daughters, ‘sorting apples, coaxing the hens to lay and doing odd jobs about the house’, as well as ‘making a fishing net to catch salmon in the Severn’.<sup>6</sup> In December, she received the devastating news of the death of her cousin Ted Murby, who had been killed at Passchendaele in Belgium while serving with the Royal Field Artillery. On his finger was the gold ring engraved with his initials that Mabel and her sisters had presented to him three weeks earlier, when he had

29 The Potato Harvest, 1918  
Watercolour over pen and  
ink on paper  
29.7 x 38.5 cm  
(11 ¾ x 15 ⅛ in)  
Private Collection



been on leave to celebrate his twenty-first birthday. 'I am enjoying my holiday top hole', he had written to Knights on this occasion; 'it's much nicer being in England than Flanders.'<sup>7</sup>

In February 1918, Knights wrote that 'my nerves don't seem to have improved'.<sup>8</sup> She immersed herself in the poetry of A. E. Housman (1859–1936), particularly his cycle of 63 poems which made up *A Shropshire Lad*. Although first published in 1896, the themes of lost love, lost youth and early death greatly increased the popularity of the poems during the First World War. She copied out in full 'Into my Heart an Air that Kills', whose 'land of lost content' made up of 'spires', 'farms' and 'blue remembered hills' would have resonated with both her own emotions and her experience of rural life.

By the spring of 1918, Knights' spirits had begun to lift. She felt a deep attachment to her rural surroundings and now enjoyed working on the land, experiencing the life prescribed by Edward Carpenter in its free, natural, outdoor state. Indeed, at the end of September 1917, she had travelled to Leicester to meet Carpenter, who was staying with Millicent Murby (ill.31) at her house in Mowacre Hill, Leicester. Although Carpenter warned Murby, 'I find miscellaneous talking rather

tiring!', over the course of three days Knights had ample time to discuss with him his ideals and beliefs.<sup>9</sup> She attended two of his lectures at the Memorial Hall in Leicester, 'Beauty in Daily Life' and 'The Liberation of Industry', based on his recently published book *Towards Industrial Freedom* (1917).<sup>10</sup> In this book he wrote of the devastating consequences for mankind when 'we leave the fields and pass into the factories – away from the redeeming influences of the open air'.<sup>11</sup>

Knights began to discover in nature and rural life a deep spiritual meaning that was to become a welcome substitute for her childhood religious observance. This inspiration echoed Carpenter's belief that it was more fulfilling to find 'a sense of divinity in Nature and Life' than to attend 'some stuffy chapel or church, with greasy pews and ill-smelling hymn-books, and ever-closed windows'.<sup>12</sup> The vision that this philosophy engendered in Knights would become the central theme in all of her subsequent work. She noted in a sketchbook her vivid impressions of the natural world surrounding Lineholt Farmhouse: 'Joe still out cutting clover ... lactifer bawling to be milked ... the bright new robin singing, and owl calling, cuckoo down by Severn, noticed lovely dog roses, just perfect deep pinks, not quite in full bloom & garden honeysuckle out'.<sup>13</sup>

Advocating the importance of beauty in the 'arts of life', Carpenter maintained that for all creative work it was essential to 'have the quietude and strength of nature at hand, like a great reservoir on which to draw'.<sup>14</sup> Soon Knights began to sketch again, finding inspiration in the Worcestershire countryside and local towns. 'I have gained much in certain ways which are worth more in the end than the actual, technical study which I missed,' she explained to Millicent Murby. 'There are many beautiful things hidden behind sprout picking and the clearing out of pig-stys.'<sup>15</sup>

In early summer, Knights began work on a composition depicting the potato harvest. An early study (ill.32) shows three barefooted female farm workers gathering potatoes, a reference to

30 Frances and Joseph Williams in front of Lineholt Farmhouse, Ombersley, Worcestershire, c.1915 Photograph Private Collection





31 Portrait of Millicent Murby,  
September 1917  
Pencil on paper  
16.5 × 11 cm  
(6 ½ × 4 ¾ in)  
Collection of Mr  
Martin Palmer



Carpenter, who considered liberating the feet to be of the utmost importance: ‘who does not know the pleasure of grasping the ground – the bare earth – with his bare feet?’<sup>16</sup> A later, more finished version of the same composition (ill.29, p.38) depicts Knights’ cousins – Joe, Violet, Ethel, Grace and Dora – transferring potatoes into a traditional clamp, covered in straw and enrolled in earth to bring about anaerobic preservation. Knights features prominently in the foreground in a pose reminiscent of the peasant women in Jean-François Millet’s *The Gleaners* (1857, Musée d’Orsay). In contrast to Sylvia Pankhurst’s essay ‘The Potato Pickers’ (1909), which portrays women workers as an underclass, *Knights* provides a dignified representation of the farm workers and the continuities of the traditions of rural labour.<sup>17</sup>

As the first of Knights’ compositions to portray the harmonious interaction of male and female workers, *The Potato Harvest* is a seminal work. Millicent Murby’s contention that female emancipation could only be achieved through economic equality exerted an important influence on Knights in this period. In 1906, Murby presented evidence on behalf of first-class women clerks to the government’s select committee on wages and conditions of employment in the Civil Service.<sup>18</sup> In an article written for the *New Age* in 1908, she noted ‘the daily increasing desire of women to cooperate in furthering humane enterprise in a healthy spirit of comradeship’.<sup>19</sup> The dramatic increase in the involvement of women in the workforce during the First World War, even if their wages remained significantly lower than those of their male counterparts, had gone some way to fulfilling Murby’s cause.<sup>20</sup>


Both the arrangement of the background landscape into a flattened patchwork quilt of contrasting colours and the frieze-like placing of foreground figures seen in *The Potato Harvest* would become favourite compositional devices for Knights, as would the use of motifs such as the ladder and haycocks. The palette of closely

contained primary colours is complemented by greens and browns in ordered combinations to create a natural harmony between the landscape and the farm workers.

Knights and her female cousins are depicted wearing simple working dress. Edward Carpenter identified dress as both a symbol and a means of reinstating freedom, and praised the clothing of farm workers, ‘so native, so unrestrained’ in hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, as an ideal.<sup>21</sup> He argued for fewer garments, ‘all simply made, easily washable, and often washed’.<sup>22</sup> Murby, too, deplored ‘the adulteration of the stuffs [women] wear, and the manufacture of worthless articles that literally impoverish the State that sanctions them’.<sup>23</sup> Knights was greatly impressed by her cousins’ clothing and began to cultivate an individual dress style – subsequently retained all her life – consisting of simple ankle-length skirts and loose blouses and jackets in subdued colours. This timeless style, made of enduring fabrics, was part of a wider reaction against the mass-produced and short-lived factory fashions now associated with modernity, as expressed, for instance, in Arnold Bennett’s *The Old Wives’ Tale* (1908).<sup>24</sup> The style also reflected the wartime move towards simplicity in women’s fashions – a response to new roles and the associated need for practicality. In an article entitled ‘War and the Fashions’ (1916), a correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* noted that ‘simplicity is indeed, the ruling note of the hat as well as the dress’ and that ‘quiet colours such as dark blues and fawns and browns are the first to be considered by the woman of taste’.<sup>25</sup>

## ILLUSTRATION

During her time in Worcestershire, Knights continued to develop her illustrative work. Based on a Brothers Grimm fairy tale, a drawing of *The Goose Girl* (May 1918; ill.33) is set against the backdrop of the sea, recalling the Knights’ family

32  Sketchbook page, study for *The Potato Harvest*, 1918. Watercolour over pen and ink on paper. 12.6 x 18.2 cm (5 x 7 1/8 in). UCL Art Museum, University College London.



33 *The Goose Girl*, May 1918  
Pencil and watercolour on  
paper  
29.5 × 19.5 cm  
(11 ½ × 7 ⅝ in)  
Collection of Robin  
de Beaumont



34 *Little Miss Muffet*, June 1918  
Ink and watercolour on  
paper  
27 × 27 cm (10 5/8 × 10 5/8 in)  
Private Collection



35 The artist in a dress of her own design, 1918  
Pen and ink and watercolour on paper  
38 × 28 cm (14 7/8 × 11 in)  
Private Collection

holidays spent on the Devon coast. With its medieval-style architecture, the country offers a view of a pre-industrial and feudal way of life. The overall composition, especially the placing of the figure, the rendering of the geese and the inclusion of the title and date within a scroll, has much in common with Arthur Rackham's illustrations to the same story (1909).<sup>26</sup> A pen-and-ink and watercolour illustration depicting Little Miss Muffet (June 1918; ill.34) reveals a strong sense of design which marks a clear departure from Knights' more conventional, earlier Art Nouveau-inspired compositions such as *Goblin Market* (1916; ill.4, p.12). Knights portrays herself as the protagonist, the horizontal and vertical stripes of her dress offset by her headscarf's plain field of colour. The treatment of face and hands – elongated and symmetrical, with strong outline and an emphasis on the underlying anatomical geometry – would now become a defining characteristic of her figurative work. A third illustration from this period shows Knights wearing a version of 'artistic' dress (ill.35), the embroidered bee motifs added for their decorative effect and possibly their esoteric iconography. The ribbon-laced shoes, a fashion popularised by the celebrated ballerina Anna Pavlova (1881–1931), would be a style favoured by Knights throughout her life.

## WEST HOATHLY

As an extension of her 'funny year in the country', in the early summer of 1918 Knights joined her family in Sussex, where they had rented rooms at Hook Farm, just outside the village of West Hoathly.<sup>27</sup> Accompanied by her mother and sister, she spent her time sketching the local buildings and surrounding landscape (ill.37). In *The Barn, Hook Farm, West Hoathly* (1918, UCL Art Museum), the freshly mown hay piled up alongside a traditional thatched barn conveys a rural idyll removed from modern life and the destructive forces of the war.





36 Bow Cottage, West Hoathly, Sussex, 1918  
Pen and ink and watercolour on paper  
26 x 50 cm  
(10 ¼ x 19 ¾ in)  
Collection of Catherine Monnington

37 *The Artist's Mother and Sisters, Tanner's Meadow, West Hoathly, Sussex, 1918*  
Pen and ink on paper  
14 x 50.9 cm (5 ½ x 20 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

38 Portrait study of Joyce Knights, *During Thunderstorm, May 1918*  
Pencil on paper  
38 x 28 cm (14 7/8 x 11 in)  
Collection of  
Mr Martin Palmer



To Mabel and Walter's delight, the watercolour by Knights of Bow Cottage in West Hoathly village (1918; ill.36) was selected for the West Hoathly Summer Exhibition. In a letter to Millicent Murby, Knights hinted that the bold use of sepia ink lines and washes, as well as the controlled arrangement of tones, had been absorbed from images she had seen in a book about James Abbott McNeill Whistler.<sup>28</sup>

After a nine-month separation from her family, Knights was relieved to be part of her 'happy circle' once again.<sup>29</sup> A portrait of her sister Joyce (ill.38), inscribed 'During Thunderstorm', shows a notable advance from the already competent portrait of Murby conceived just a few months earlier (ill.31, p.41). Drawn as a three-quarter profile view (thus avoiding her cleft lip), Knights' observation is tenderly focused on the nape of her sister's neck, which, bathed in a delicate lattice-work of cross-hatching, is cast in the softest of shadows. A profile portrait of Mabel (ill.39) presents an equally sensitive response, a visual distillation of Walter's admission that 'your mother's anxieties have been many'.<sup>30</sup>

Knights experienced her time at West Hoathly as a source of regeneration and peacefulness, and her

sense of well-being rapidly improved. A photograph showing her triumphant as Aphrodite in the Stoneland Players' adaptation of Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytus*, performed in West Hoathly during the summer of 1918, records this new resurgence of confidence (ill.41).

At the end of August, Knights wrote to Murby that 'the flowers and things are just perfect now. I dread the idea of going back to London just at the most beautiful time of the year.'<sup>31</sup> But a return to London and a new year at the Slade beckoned. To ease the transition, Walter vacated his study at Madeira Road, removing his leather-topped kneehole desk to the dining room to make a combined studio and bedroom for Knights. In many Edwardian annals, the father's study is represented as a sacrosanct male space within the organisation of the middle-class household, and through this symbolic gesture Walter sent a clear message to his daughter: 'I implore you to now make earnest endeavours to perfect yourself, to become a working bee in your particular bent, and so re-find the hearts of all of us who are so deeply interested in your welfare.'<sup>32</sup>

39 Portrait study of the artist's mother, West Hoathly, Sussex, 1918  
Pencil on paper  
28.2 × 21.8 cm (11 × 8 ½ in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

40 *The Artist's Mother's Boots and Father's Trousers*, West Hoathly, Sussex, 1918  
Pencil on paper  
28.2 × 21.5 cm  
(11 × 8 ⅜ in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London





41 Winifred as Aphrodite  
in Euripedes' *Hippolytus*,  
Stonelands House, West  
Hoathly, Sussex, 1918  
Photograph  
Private Collection



## CHAPTER FOUR

## THE SLADE, PART 2: 1918–1919

‘THE EYE TO SEE, THE MIND TO RETAIN,  
AND THE HAND TO EXPRESS’<sup>1</sup>42 *Eileen*, November 1918

Pencil on paper  
30.5 × 23 cm (12 × 9 in)  
British Museum

43 Charles K. Wilkinson  
*Winifred Knights at The  
Slade Ballet + The Balloon  
Bursting Party*, 1919

Pencil and watercolour on  
paper  
28.1 × 19.6 cm  
(11 × 7 ¾ in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

Knights returned to the Slade on 4 October 1918, reporting to her aunt Millicent Murby that she ‘felt very strange ... after my funny year in the country’. She added that ‘there are many new students, and only a few of my old set left. Tonks is our Head now, he is a great man, we have only him and Professor Brown at present.’<sup>2</sup>

When the Armistice was announced on Monday 11 November, she rushed to Trafalgar Square with fellow students:

It was a glorious day. One that will be with me always. It was so wonderful to feel oneself again, with a great multitude which had in a few minutes thrown away care and grief and become so joyous. We all ran down to Trafalgar square and stood in the crowd for hours just bathing ourselves in the great waves of cheering and the lovely sound of St Martin’s bells. All this sounds very high flown doesn’t it. But I just wished I could do a great drawing of that day and show how it was. I have never seen such thousands of happy eyes.<sup>3</sup>

Because of her fragile state of mind, Knights attended the Slade for only two or sometimes three days a week until the following May.<sup>4</sup> Although her father had fitted out her new studio at Madeira Road

to provide the best working conditions, installing ‘a small gas fire and gas ring on which to boil a kettle’, Knights confided to Murby that working at home ‘seems impossible’.<sup>5</sup> A pencil portrait of her sister Eileen (ill.42), dated November 1918, suggests, however, that she was making progress. In its use of decisive contours and subtle shading, the drawing demonstrates an awareness of the work of Alphonse Legros and William Strang (1859–1921), whose pencil portraits exemplified the Slade tradition which sought to emulate the draughtsmanship of earlier masters such as Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867). The placing of date and elaborate monogram at the bottom right-hand side add to the formal quality of the portrait. The compositional format, head and shoulders in three-quarter view, presents a strong and candid outline of Eileen’s profile, while the treatment of her features (without flattery but with gravitas) corresponds with Strang’s conviction that there should always be ‘some touch of [the] sitter’s ugliness revealed in the beauty of the draughtsmanship’.<sup>6</sup>

As students and staff began to return to the Slade after they were released from war service, Knights began gradually to re-establish her position at the school and gain in confidence. Mary Attenborough (1900–81), later Mary Potter, who had joined the school on an Orpen Bursary,



- 44 Portrait study of a woman, possibly Mary Attenborough, c.1919

Pencil on paper  
28.1 x 19.6 cm (11 x 7 ¾ in)  
British Museum

- 45 Arnold Mason  
*Portrait of Miss Winifred Knights*, 1919

Pencil and black chalk on paper  
30.1 x 21.7 cm  
(11 ¾ x 8 ½ in)  
The Royal Collection/  
HM Queen Elizabeth II

*Opposite:*

- 46 Arnold Mason  
*Miss Winifred Knights*, c.1920  
Oil on canvas  
89 x 68.5 cm (35 x 27 in)  
Private Collection courtesy  
of The Maas Gallery, London

became her closest female friend. Knights' male friends included Arnold Mason (1885–1963), who had served with the Artists' Rifles and the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, and Allan Gwynne-Jones (1892–1982), who had won a DSO for bravery at the Battle of the Somme in the Cheshire Regiment. George Charlton (1899–1979), who served with the 1st Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers, confided to Knights that during his time in the army 'I kept a drawing of you next to my breast. I saw you before me always on the cold nights and the hot marches.'<sup>7</sup>

Correspondence from this period suggests that Knights began to enjoy an active social life, attending dinner parties and dances as well as trips to the theatre and opera. 'I want to dance and dance and dance like Little Red Shoes,' she wrote to her aunt Florence during the summer term; 'I love it.'<sup>8</sup> Her new friends, who now formed part of her intimate circle, naturally became the subjects of her portraits (ill.44). Cultivating an increasingly striking persona, Knights in turn became the subject of pictures by them (ill.43), especially Mason, who produced at

least four portraits between 1919 and 1920 (ill.45). In May she wrote to Florence Murby, 'Tomorrow I am going to Chelsea to sit for Mason ... I shall love to see myself in the RA (vain little pig).'<sup>9</sup> The resulting portrait, which was exhibited at the Summer Exhibition in 1921, reveals a new air of individually stylish sophistication (ill.46). Knights wears Victorian pique pose earrings, 'tortoiseshell with the gold and silver ever so slightly inlaid', presented to her by Gwynne-Jones; striking antique jewellery would increasingly play a role in her wardrobe. Her bodice is now front-buttoned and fitted subtly to accentuate her figure. While retaining the basic principles of practicality and simplicity promoted by Edward Carpenter, the discernible modification in Knights' style during 1919 may have been inspired, in part, by the 'Bohemian' clothing worn by Augustus John's models, described as 'part aesthetic, part gypsy, part peasant, a timeless style with gathered skirts and moulded bodices'.<sup>10</sup> A letter dated 1919 provides evidence that Knights was in awe of John (1878–1961): 'I was invited to dine with Augustus John & Company





47 Full-length female nude,  
rear view, 1919  
Oil on canvas  
78.8 x 51.3 cm  
(31 x 20 ¼ in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

[and] being highly honoured, I accepted. Which to my disgust John did not turn up, he had a tummy chill. I had hopes of being his 9th unofficial wife!!!'<sup>11</sup>

## THE PAINTING CLASS

'I have just begun painting', Knights wrote in January 1919, 'and am consequently in the depths of despair!'<sup>12</sup> The painting classes, which took place in the Life Room under the guidance of the Assistant Professor of Painting, Philip Wilson Steer (1860–1942), were conducted with constant reference to the life model, who adopted the same pose over a period of six days.<sup>13</sup> According to Randolph Schwabe, who succeeded Tonks as Slade Professor in 1930, Steer inspired his students with 'acute judgment and great knowledge', which he shared by working directly on to their canvases.<sup>14</sup> Knights' earliest surviving life painting, a rear view of a female model, uses the sparse backdrop of the studio wall to focus the viewer's attention solely on the figure (ill.47). In its exploration of anatomy, this painting is broader in its approach than her life drawings, although the modulated tonal gradations produced by light and shade are skilfully rendered and the model convincingly occupies her space. The thinly applied oil paint, which would become a consistent characteristic of Knights' painting method, was a technique encouraged by Tonks and Steer for its ease of correction, rapid drying and the fact that it left fewer brush-mark traces.<sup>15</sup> John Wheatley, who taught at the Slade in 1920 and 1921, recounted that one of Steer's most common sayings was 'Forty years of a wasted life – forty years I have painted thick and I ought to have painted thin.'<sup>16</sup>

Although Tonks maintained that 'painting cannot be taught except in certain questions', leaving its instruction largely to Steer, a former student recalled that 'he would sit and talk about the kind of painting that he loved – painting that observed tonal relations, the subtleties of gradation produced by the fall of light and the modifications of colour

produced by light and shadow'.<sup>17</sup> Tonks also advised novice students to begin with 'a limited palette' and to regard 'colours not in isolation but in as much as they interacted with each other'.<sup>18</sup>

Alongside the painting classes, in keeping with the Slade curriculum, Knights continued to spend time on life drawing. Her facility in drawing was now greatly admired at the Slade. 'Oh how I envy you your draughtsmanship,' Gwynne-Jones commented, 'I toil and toil and you would just take the pencil and do it so directly & well.'<sup>19</sup> Knights' son, John Monnington, later recalled that when his mother produced a drawing, 'the subject was somehow quite clear in her mind and put down without even the slightest modification'. He recorded that she favoured Royal Sovereign pencils, which had 'an extremely sharp point achieved by laying the pencil down on the lid of her box at the precise angle to support the lead which was shaved down with a scalpel'.<sup>20</sup>

## COMPOSITIONS FOR THE SLADE SKETCH CLUB

During 1919, Knights began to excel in the imaginative composition exercises for the Slade Sketch Club, writing to Florence Murby: 'You will be interested to hear that another Sketch Club crit[icism] is being held next week. Last Sketch Club I had a very good crit[icism] from Tonks. I have sent in two compositions this time. Such a lot of people want to buy them.'<sup>21</sup> At the beginning of the academic year, Knights was still considering submitting illustrative work to the Club, as she had done in 1916, but this idea was soon abandoned in favour of more ambitious figure compositions.<sup>22</sup> A subject pamphlet for 1918 shows that the Club favoured contemporary themes, such as 'Shopping', 'Sport', 'Railway Station' and 'Pigs', above more traditional and Biblical subjects.<sup>23</sup>

Knights' compositions for the Club consistently recalled scenes and settings witnessed during family holidays in the countryside, rather than London



48 An allotment, Hayling Island, 1919  
Watercolour over pencil  
on paper  
26.5 x 33 cm (10 3/8 x 13 in)  
Private Collection

or its suburbs. Although inspired by real localities, she subverted topographical accuracy in the interest of compositional purity. Unlike her illustrative work, which focused on narrative, her Sketch Club submissions are preoccupied with achieving formal compositional effects. To this end, she regularly arranged the foreground and background of the landscapes into semi-abstract patterns, interwoven with a series of diagonals (rows of buildings, vegetables, furrows, fields and walls) which, combined with raking views and high horizons, helped to create the visual tension she sought. A discourse between town and country, tradition and modernity, underlies all of these compositions. Consistently devoid of specifics such as time and weather, the sun's presence is only indicated by the patterns made by shadows.

During a holiday spent on Hayling Island in Hampshire in April 1919, Knights produced a number of pictures recording men and women working on allotments (ill.48), an idyllic and harmonious subject sacramental to her physical and emotional attachment to cultivation.<sup>24</sup> The democratic nature of allotments would have appealed to her socialist convictions; in 1918, an ex-servicemen's Allotment Society was created at Hayling Island to provide 'a very useful link in the "unity is strength" chain'.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the portrayal of allotments had a strong contemporary resonance; during the First World War their number had increased from 570,000 to over 1.4 million as local councils, in an attempt to address food shortages, supplied land for free and encouraged the keeping of bees, poultry and rabbits.<sup>26</sup>





49 A Bank Holiday fair, 1919  
Watercolour over pencil  
on paper  
26.5 x 33 cm (10 3/8 x 13 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



50 Arnold Mason  
Portrait of Winifred  
Knights, c.1919  
Oil on canvas  
52.2 × 44.5 cm  
(20 ½ × 17 ½ in)  
Private Collection

In June, Knights began to work on another Sketch Club composition (ill.49), its loose topography possibly inspired by the sandstone cliffs and viaduct at Bewdley in Worcestershire, a town Knights had visited in early 1918.<sup>27</sup> The picture is again constructed on strong diagonals, the red and white stripes of the awning echoing the patterns of neat rows of vegetables in the allotments. It is likely that this scene, which was probably conceived in response to the Club's set subject 'Gypsies', or 'Bank Holiday', recalled the Bank Holiday fair that Knights had witnessed on 10 June, in Seaton, Devon, when the town was 'filled with holiday folk' and 'the weather was ideal'.<sup>28</sup> A sense of disharmony is introduced by the ghostly appearance of the vast and sinister gasholders which tower over the houses, part of an ever-increasing urbanisation and industrialisation that was viewed

negatively by Knights.<sup>29</sup> The contrast between the fashionably dressed figures queuing up to purchase tickets for an entertainment and the simply dressed, barefooted gypsies on the other side of the road again sets up a discourse between modernity and tradition. Casting herself in the role of the outside observer, Knights, identifiable by her slender form and side-plaited hairstyle, appears standing among the gypsies.

That Knights should choose to associate herself with gypsies is significant; her interest in Edward Carpenter's ideals of a 'simple' and 'outdoor' life extended to an empathy for gypsies, with their free way of living uncompromised by the advance of industrial society.<sup>30</sup> As one gypsiologist, Arthur Symons, wrote in 1908, gypsies 'stand for the will of freedom, for friendship with nature, for the open air ... for all of us that are in protest against progress ... the Gypsies represent nature before civilisation ... the last romance left in the world'.<sup>31</sup> Knights would have certainly been aware of the images of gypsy culture that an earlier generation of Slade students, led by William Orpen (1878–1931), Augustus John and Derwent Lees, had turned into a genre. In 1919, Arnold Mason painted Knights in the role of a gypsy (ill.50), the vibrant fabric of her headscarf characteristic of the Omega Workshop textile patterns produced by the Bloomsbury Group.

Another Sketch Club composition (ill.51), an evocative portrayal of everyday life in a market town after the war, depicts a lively scene, with a sheep auction taking place in the foreground and mingling crowds behind, some watching a street juggler. In the background the viewer's attention is drawn to the stripey awning of a carousel and chequered patterns of the buildings behind, an approximate recollection of the market square at Leicester viewed from the steps of the Corn Exchange, with Morley and Sons drapers situated to the rear of the picture. In common with its predecessors, the subject combines the theme of town and country and the composition is set out along strong diagonal lines.

A later Sketch Club submission, *Leaving the Munitions Works* (ill.52), uses a similar format to the



51 A market square with  
sheep auction, 1919  
Watercolour over pencil  
on paper  
25.8 x 32.4 cm  
(10  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 12  $\frac{3}{4}$  in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



52 *Leaving the Munitions Works*,  
1919  
Watercolour over pencil  
on paper  
27 × 32 cm (10 5/8 × 12 1/2 in)  
Private Collection

Bank Holiday and Hayling Island compositions, with a diagonal road dividing a walled allotment from a factory building, with houses and a patterned landscape behind, placed high on the horizon. A stylistic development is apparent, with figures no longer portrayed in isolated groups but interacting convincingly. The three female workers, who walk arm in arm, form a striking motif, as do a well-dressed couple walking out of the foreground towards the viewer. Strong shadows foreshortened into geometric patterns complete the picture's underlying rhythm.

*Leaving the Munitions Works* may have called on Knights' memories of the Blackpole Munitions Works, just eight miles from Lineholt Farmhouse. As Worcestershire's largest munitions producer, by 1918 the factory was dispatching nearly three million cartridges a week. Its large female workforce, known nationally as 'munitionettes', had a strong presence in the immediate area and were frequently photographed for the local press.<sup>32</sup> With some 950,000 women employed by the Ministry of Munitions by Armistice Day, 'munitionettes' were the most visible face of the female worker in the First World War.<sup>33</sup>

Knights' composition, which depicts the 'munitionettes' wearing the 'national shell overall' and drawstring cap, records a consequence of the war which challenged traditional stereotypes; married women, having spent the day at work, are reunited with their husbands and children. This involvement of married women in the workforce had gone some way to fulfilling aunt Millicent's appeal for their right to work and their entitlement to 'a legally-recognised emolument beyond support according to the husband's status'.<sup>34</sup> Although munitions production was a dangerous job that often involved working with hazardous chemicals, it was a relatively well-paid role for women, offering a degree of real independence.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the Bank Holiday composition (ill.49, p.57), where modernity implies an encroaching evil, the mood of *Leaving the Munitions Works* is altogether different. Through the depiction of a predominantly female workforce who present a unified and bold sisterhood,

progress is seen to bring with it the economic emancipation of women rather than the destruction of the human spirit, and accordingly, industry is shown to be in harmony, not at odds, with nature.

With demobilisation, however, women were gradually dismissed from their jobs, the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act (August 1919) forcing the pace of female redundancies. The momentary period of dominance by female workers in a traditionally male area was already at a close by the time Knights painted this composition. The choice of subject may have been partly directed towards attitudes at the Slade; as a male student jibed, with reference to the proportion of women at UCL during the war: 'on what entrenched lines will they, side by side with their industrial and commercial sisters, now retire?'<sup>36</sup>

Allan Gwynne-Jones purchased *Leaving the Munitions Works* and, as a result of his showing it to Malcolm Salaman, it appeared as an illustration in *Londoners, Then and Now* (1920), with the caption 'Prototypes in overalls and trousers ... a very ably designed drawing'.<sup>37</sup>

Like *Leaving the Munitions Works*, many of the submissions for the Sketch Club during 1919 drew on students' memories of the war. George Charlton submitted numerous works recording life at the Front, including *German Prisoners Surrendering* (May 1919).<sup>38</sup> Tonks encouraged Slade students to call on their 'fields of memory' when working out a composition: 'Imagination ... is but the power to make use at the present moment of something put away in the past. The eye to see, the mind to retain, and the hand to express, are the means by which works of imagination are produced.'<sup>39</sup>

Through her submissions for the Sketch Club, Knights began to engage with contemporary subjects. Far from producing conventional genre scenes, however, she chose to engage with deeply personal themes that were preoccupations for her, and would remain so all her life: war and peace, tradition and modernity, town and country, and the social and economic status of men and women. 'How splendid to have such a clear vision!' Gwynne-Jones wrote enviously at the end of the summer term.<sup>40</sup>



## CHAPTER FIVE

# THE SLADE, PART 3: DECORATIVE PAINTING

## ‘FORM WITH COLOUR AND PATTERN AS ACCESSORIES’<sup>1</sup>

Knights’ first surviving composition in oil, *Design for Wall Decoration* (ill.53), bears on the reverse the number 11575, under which it was exhibited anonymously, as required by the Sketch Club rules. It is likely that this was her submission for the ‘Special Figure’ subject ‘Design for a Decoration’, conceived as practice for the important Summer Composition Competition.

‘Wall Decoration’, a term interchangeable with ‘Decorative Painting’ or ‘Mural Painting’, traditionally referred to a work designed for a particular architectural space. Alfred Kingsley Lawrence (1893–1975), a Rome Scholar who was appointed Assistant at the Royal College of Art’s Department of Mural and Decorative Painting in 1926, considered that ‘the greatest of all Schools of the art of painting’ was Decorative, its compositional discipline implying: ‘Scale of figures, the use of perspective, groupings of figures, respect for the picture plane or plane of the wall and the fall of light in the picture ... the use of scale drawings, the preparation of full-size cartoons, the use of simple colour schemes, and above all the insistence upon form with colour and pattern as accessories.’<sup>2</sup> Lawrence acknowledged, however, that the ‘Decorative’ was a notoriously difficult genre to define, its purpose not to ‘decorate’ in the frivolous sense of the word, but to ‘convey an idea, to put into pictorial form the artist’s feeling

and understanding of a great theme ... suggested by the nature of the building’.<sup>3</sup>

Addressing the Art Workers’ Guild, a membership organisation which was set up in 1884 under the slogan ‘Art is Unity’, the architect Herbert Baker (1862–1946) argued that paintings possessed ‘a greater glory when woven as a permanent and integral part of the fabric of the habitations of man, instead of being chattels which may be carried from one building to another or bought and sold at Christie’s or even find an honourable resting place in the Tate or the Luxembourg’.<sup>4</sup> The cultural discourse around the higher aims of Decorative Painting and the social and moral role that it implied had achieved particular prominence in the Victorian period, growing and developing in the early twentieth century to become what the art historian Morna O’Neill has identified as ‘a key part of Edwardian cultural politics, because decorative art could be, and often was, public art’.<sup>5</sup> That her art could eventually play a public role forged in the service of a collective whole was a concept that appealed to Knights and was undoubtedly encouraged by Millicent Murby; the lectures of the Fabian Arts Group, founded in 1907, specifically addressed ‘the relation of art and philosophy to Socialism’.<sup>6</sup> It was Murby who presented Knights with Edward Carpenter’s *Angel’s Wings: A Series of Essays on Art and*

53 *Design for Wall Decoration*,  
1919  
Oil on canvas  
64 × 76 cm  
(25 ¼ × 29 ⅞ in)  
Private Collection



*Its Relation to Life* (1898). His endorsement of the relationship between 'the decorative tendency' in art and the wider cause of social collectivity influenced artists and critics well beyond the 1890s, and the book was published in its sixth edition in 1920.<sup>7</sup>

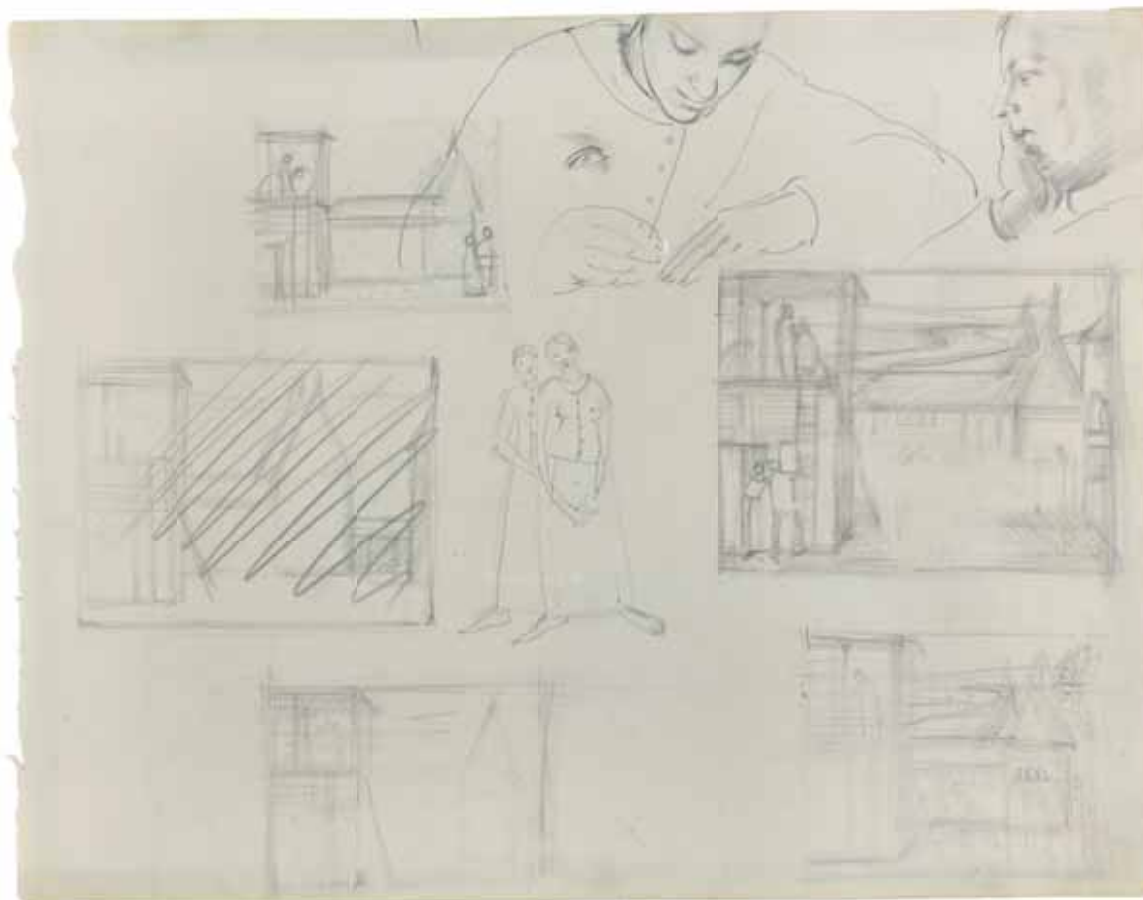
During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there had been numerous institutional initiatives to provide a new impetus for Decorative Painting in England. These included the introduction of a prize for 'the design of a decoration of a public building' at the Royal Academy in 1881, the establishment of a school of Decorative Painting at the Royal College of Art in 1901 and the founding of the British School at Rome's Scholarship in Decorative Painting in 1912.<sup>8</sup> By 1920, it had become such an integral part of the teaching at the Slade that Frederick Brown made an urgent request 'for accommodation for work in Decorative Painting', considering the temporary use of the Cast Gallery of the Bartlett School of Architecture insufficient 'for this purpose'.<sup>9</sup>

The principal advocate of Decorative Painting at the Slade was Henry Tonks, who was described in *The Times* as 'an artist deeply interested in wall decoration, anxious to see it used, and fully aware that unless the artist is caught young he will never succeed at it'.<sup>10</sup> In 1912, Tonks sat on a committee, alongside Walter Crane (1845–1915), William Rothenstein (1872–1945) and Mary Sargent Florence (1857–1954), for an 'Exhibition of Designs for Mural Painting and for the Decoration of Schools and Other Buildings', held at Crosby Hall in Chelsea. By 1919, he had identified a 'real desire on the part of students to concentrate on the Decorative side. I cannot help thinking that the internal decoration of public buildings and private houses has been overlooked as a means of giving work to artists and I do not want only to put out picture painters.'<sup>11</sup> During the 1910s and 1920s, he was successful in promoting public mural projects on which his students could work.<sup>12</sup>

Slade students were encouraged to read Walter Crane's *Line and Form* (1900) and *Ideals in Art* (1905),

54 Sheet of studies with self-portrait for *Design for Wall Decoration*, 1919  
Pencil on paper  
21.6 × 27.9 cm  
(8 ½ × 11 in)  
Private Collection





55 Sheet of studies for *Design for Wall Decoration*, 1919  
Pencil on paper  
21 × 27 cm (8 ¼ × 10 ⅝ in)  
Private Collection

which promoted Decorative Painting and provided practical advice.<sup>13</sup> An early member of the Fabian Society, Crane was described in 1902 as the artist who had done most 'to remove art from the sacred precincts of the galleries and academies, and to apply it in varied forms to those interests that lie close to daily life'.<sup>14</sup> In an essay titled 'The Relation of the Easel Picture to Decorative Art', Crane argued that portable pictures could achieve the same effect as Decorative Painting if they possessed 'a mural feeling', identified as 'a certain flatness of treatment with choice of simple planes, and pure and low-toned colours, together with a certain ornamental dignity or architectural feeling in the structure of forms and lines of composition'.<sup>15</sup> The painter and teacher Hubert Wellington (1879–1967), writing in John Fothergill's *The Slade* in 1907, noted that a 'Decorative effect' had become the dominant style in student works from 1905 onwards, replacing the earlier conventions of history painting.<sup>16</sup> The 'Decorative genre' thereafter took on a separate life and came to exemplify the highest aims of painting;

Knights would invariably use the term 'decoration' rather than 'painting' to refer to her artworks.

The compositional process that Knights employed for *Design for Wall Decoration* – which involved numerous preparatory studies in pencil and watercolour – is evidence of the importance the Slade attached to a carefully worked-out design. Tonks shared with his students his interest in Renaissance drawings, which he admired not only for their aesthetic qualities but also for their practical nature as working tools. He wrote, 'A working drawing – a drawing a man intends to use to paint from is nearly always the best kind of drawing.'<sup>17</sup> On various sheets of pencil drawings (ills 54 and 55), Knights explored the composition freehand, focusing on the disposition of figures and architecture within an outdoor setting, often combining several related studies on the same sheet. A watercolour sketch of a river bend (ill.58), painted *en plein air*, demonstrates that a number of the studies were done on the spot. While it is not known exactly where these drawings were made, Knights' strong



56 Study of three figures  
for *Design for Wall  
Decoration*, 1919  
Pencil on paper  
62.5 × 45.7 cm  
(24 ½ × 18 in)  
Private Collection

feeling for nature and place may have called on memory; during her stay at Lineholt Farmhouse in Worcestershire, she recorded, amongst other activities, ‘sorting apples’ with her cousins.<sup>18</sup>

A more resolved compositional study in watercolour (ill.57) shows a greater sense of unity and pictorial depth, the squaring-up of the sheet indicating that Knights was already thinking in terms of the final dimensions; while the canvas submitted for the Sketch Club measures 64 x 76 centimetres, the proposed mural was to be conceived on a scale of 2.5 x 3 metres. A large squared-up fragment of a cartoon shows a detail of the composition in full-size (verso) and a half-size study of three female figures (recto) (ill.56).

On the final canvas, the squaring-up lines are still in evidence beneath the thin paint surface. This complex process of creating designs for transfer was one that Knights would use all her life; in 1932 Robin Guthrie (1902–71), a fellow student from the Slade, wrote, ‘I am making considerable efforts to copy my sketch ... putting in a little piece at a time in something like your way.’<sup>19</sup> The inclusion of *pentimenti*, however, does indicate that Knights continued to make changes to her composition after she had transferred the drawings on to the canvas.

In the process of transfer, naturalism and detail underwent a paring-down to achieve the desired ‘Decorative’ effect. The anatomy of the three female models in the half-size cartoon is reduced on the final canvas to simple geometrical shapes filled with plain fields of colour. Non-essential details such as buttons and shirt collars, carefully noted in the preparatory drawing, are eliminated. The same process is evident in the formation of the landscape, whose undulating river, pastures and hills are reduced to their essential geographic features, giving the picture a homogeneous quality devoid of location and time. Charles Lewis Hind identified this treatment of landscape as stemming from a School of ‘Decorative Pattern Landscapists’ at the Slade, led by James Dickson Innes (1887–1914) and Derwent Lees: ‘Nature, as Constable knew her, an activity of blowing wind, wet rain, and shining sun, quick and changeable, does not



57 Compositional study for  
*Design for Wall Decoration*,  
1919

Watercolour over pencil  
on tracing paper, squared  
10.3 x 13 cm (4 x 5 1/8 in)  
Private Collection

58 Landscape study for *Design  
for Wall Decoration*, 1919

Pencil and watercolour on  
paper  
24.5 x 33.6 cm  
(9 5/8 x 13 1/4 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



exist for [them]. With them all is still and rhythmic, nature ... is merely requisitioned to assist the form and intricacy of the pattern.'<sup>20</sup>

A harmonious use of colour was considered essential for achieving decorative unity. In *Line and Form*, Crane suggested that 'in arranging our design of colour we can have no better guide, as to proportions and quality, than nature'. He encouraged artists 'as a matter of practice, to take a flower, or the plumage of a bird, or the colours of a landscape, and adapt them to some particular pattern or scheme of decoration, following the relative degrees'.<sup>21</sup> A pencil study, *The Oast House* (1919, UCL Art Museum), whose colour notes relate closely to the finished painting, shows that Knights explored close tonal harmonies, consciously selecting relative tints of single colours. Yellow, for example, is explored as 'yellow', 'more yellow', 'little darker yellow' and 'yellowest'.<sup>22</sup>

In line with previous compositions, *Design for Wall Decoration* represents a timeless vision of the countryside where tradition, engagement and continuity are virtues enshrined in working the land. The rural labourers, who evoke a strong sense of human kinship and social order, are in perfect harmony with their surroundings, conveying a feudal view of a pre-industrial way of life unchanged by modernity. The seated lady to the left bears a close resemblance to Knights' mother, Mabel, while the two female workers in the foreground, whose simple dress bestows on them a sense of universality, appear as a kind of alter ego, as Knights actively participates in the harvest.

## THE SUMMER COMPOSITION COMPETITION

During the summer holidays, while staying in an idyllic thatched cottage in Roydon, then a quiet rural haven in Essex, Knights began work on an ambitious figure composition centered around Roydon Mill (ill.59).<sup>23</sup> This was to be her entry for the most prestigious prize at the Slade, the

59 *A Scene in a Village Street with Mill-hands Conversing*, 1919  
Tempera on canvas,  
laid on board  
91.4 × 122 cm (36 × 48 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London







Summer Composition Competition, which was considered the final test of a student's capacity to intergrate the lessons of the Life Room, Anatomy and Perspective lectures and the study of Old Masters on a large scale.<sup>24</sup> Hubert Wellington explained the qualities that the examiners were looking for, emphasising the requirement for 'Decorative' elements to be subordinated to clarity of compositional construction: 'In composition, fundamental principles such as balance and arrangement of masses are constantly considered ... Importance is attached to the expression of substance and relief in figures and setting, and a decoratively pleasing composition of line is not allowed to justify unnatural movement and lack of construction.'<sup>25</sup>

When Knights' picture was exhibited at the Grafton Gallery in Mayfair, London, in 1920, the *Evening Standard's* critic, referring to the figure wearing a red jacket, understood the narrative to represent 'a female evangelist to mill-hands in the dinner hour'.<sup>26</sup> The fact that a majority of the

painting's participants wear no form of headwear, at a time when convention dictated that women wear hats out of doors, suggests that this may indeed have been an informal gathering during the lunch break. The absence of a Bible, however, suggests that the reviewer was not referring to an evangelist in the sense of 'one who preaches the gospel', but more likely 'a zealous advocate of a cause or promulgator of a doctrine'.<sup>27</sup> Students at the Slade during the 1920s knew the picture as 'Mill-hands on Strike' and its title is listed as such in *The Slade 1871-1971*.<sup>28</sup> Knights' narrative was probably conceived as a response to the wave of strikes that overran England in 1919.<sup>29</sup> A watercolour study of the same date (in a private collection), depicting a line of male and female strikers holding placards, suggests that Knights was indeed working around this theme for her summer composition.

Closely bound up with the economic history of Roydon, the mill was a principal source of employment, aside from agriculture, for local residents. It seems likely that the 'evangelist' who

60 Compositional study for  
*A Scene in a Village Street with  
Mill-hands Conversing, 1919*  
Pencil and watercolour on  
paper  
22.5 x 29 cm  
(8 7/8 x 11 3/8 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



61 Study of Mabel Knights for  
*A Scene in a Village Street with  
Mill-hands Conversing*, 1919  
Pencil on paper  
27.7 × 21.5 cm  
(10 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 8 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

62 Study of Arnold Mason for  
*A Scene in a Village Street with  
Mill-hands Conversing*, 1919  
Watercolour over pencil  
on paper  
39.1 × 27.8 cm  
(15 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 11 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



stands centre stage in *Mill-hands*, is a female trade unionist arguing for better conditions for women's labour or equal rights for women workers, an interpretation supported by the attitude of the male figures, who either carry on working or show a disregard for the discourse in hand.<sup>30</sup> The choice of striking red for the 'evangelist's' jacket may allude to revolution in Russia and Herbert Asquith's government's manifest fear of the spread of Bolshevism.

It is tempting to read the 'evangelist' as a representation of Aunt Millicent Murby, the strong facial features and arrangement of hair giving credibility to this theory. Knights, wearing a light-brown belted jacket and side-plaited hairstyle, stands close by listening animatedly to the discourse. Murby is known to have attended meetings of the Women's Trade Unions and the Women's Labour League, and was committed to the cause of 'equal pay for equal work', writing in *The New Age* in 1912, 'we want no privilege before the law on the ground of sex alone ... [but] the male proletarian justly complains of his wages; and what of women who receive from one-half to one-third the amount of such inadequacy?'<sup>31</sup> During the war she headed a clerical department in the War Office, and in 1916, joined the newly-formed Federation of Women Civil Servants with the objective of achieving equal pay for all female clerical workers.<sup>32</sup> As treasurer of the Fabian Women's Group, she was aware of the Fabian Society's appeal for pay parity during the war; in 1919 Beatrice Webb published the Fabian tract *The Wages of Men & Women: Should They Be Equal?*<sup>33</sup>

Many of the models in the picture are identifiable as members of Knights' family; the three seated figures are (from left to right) her Lineholt cousin Frances Williams, her mother (ill.61) and sister Eileen, while Joe Williams is the model for the man standing centre-right with his arms crossed. The man standing behind the wall to the right is Arnold Mason (ill.62), who is known to have visited Knights in Roydon during

this period.<sup>34</sup> It is likely that the other models were Roydon inhabitants and mill workers with whom Knights had become acquainted during her two-month holiday. Two of the female figures wear white aprons over their simple dress, an unequivocal symbol of manual or domestic work, reinforcing their occupation and status. Woollen shawls, the staple outerwear for mill workers at this period, are worn by the older women.<sup>35</sup> The Knights family did not perceive the countryside as metropolitan tourists; their admiration for country people extended to adopting their lifestyle and participating in the customs of rural life. 'Give my love to all Roydon folk,' Knights wrote to her mother in 1921. 'I often think of the lovely time we had.'<sup>36</sup>

Rather than painting the flat meadows of the landscape around the mill, Knights chose instead to animate her composition by setting it against a backdrop of rolling hills and landscape elements she had seen near Nether Hall, one mile southwest of Roydon. Typically, there is some truthfulness in her presentation – the author Charles Barrett described taking a path towards the mill 'leading over a high hill, and before ascending I pause to look back across a cornfield ... just visible between the trees' – but compositional considerations again take precedence over topographical accuracy.<sup>37</sup> The landscape is reduced to a geometric patchwork, the use of strong diagonals (railway viaduct, walls and path) leading the viewer's eye to and from the mass of buildings which dominate the composition's middle ground. The figures are designed in tandem with their setting to establish compositional unity through a rhythm of alternating figure groups and intervals.

When *Mill-hands* was exhibited in February 1920, the *Observer's* critic P. G. Konody admired its 'intelligently adapted principles of Quattrocentist art'.<sup>38</sup> With its flattened perspective, shallow picture plane and frieze-like arrangement of figures, *Mill-hands* reveals Knights' growing admiration for the artists of the Italian Renaissance, whom

she would refer to as 'Beloved', citing 'Masaccio, Giotto and all the rest of the blessed company'.<sup>39</sup> In terms of Decorative Painting, Walter Crane set the artists of the Italian Renaissance, 'from the time of Giotto ... to the time of Michelangelo', within a hierarchy that presented their work as pinnacles of artistic achievement.<sup>40</sup> He especially recommended students to study Italian Quattrocento fresco cycles for their 'quiet decorative effect of tapestry' and 'feeling for the repose and flatness of the wall surface', which he considered to be the essential qualities of Decorative Painting.<sup>41</sup> An aesthetic philosophy which looked back to the purity and simplicity of the early Renaissance was in evidence at the Slade in the years leading up to the war in the work of the self-styled 'Neo-Primitives', a group of students who included C. R. W. Nevinson, Mark Gertler (1891–1939), John Currie (c.1884–1914) and Stanley Spencer (1891–1959). These artists, nourished by the cumulative effect of a series of exhibitions of early Italian painting held in London before the war, and Roger Fry's Post-Impressionist exhibitions in 1910 and 1912, worked in varied degrees towards a synthesis of contemporary French and early Renaissance painting in the search for a new visual language through which modern art could be reconceived.<sup>42</sup> Looking back from the vantage point of 1926, Charles Aitken, the Director of the Tate Gallery, considered that whereas Spencer's generation had evolved 'a kind of neo-Pre-Raphaelitism under stress of Post-Impressionism', Winifred Knights was solely 'under the dominating spirit of Piero della Francesca and Signorelli'.<sup>43</sup>

Knights' knowledge of the Italian Renaissance was derived partly through the lecture courses of Carl Tancred Borenius (1885–1948), a Finnish art historian who had succeeded Roger Fry as Slade Lecturer in 1914. Considering The National Gallery, London, to be 'one of the world's greatest treasuries of Italian Art', Borenius encouraged his students to study and copy the paintings there, despite the display being greatly reduced due to the Ministry





63 James Wilkie  
*Reconstruction: A Horse  
 and Cart with Figures in a  
 Sandpit*, 1919  
 Oil on canvas  
 91.5 × 122 cm (36 × 48 in)  
 UCL Art Museum,  
 University College London

of Munitions' occupation of numerous galleries until 1921.<sup>44</sup> In 1919, Allan Gwynne-Jones invited Knights 'to take me to the National Gallery ... for needless to say I would like it very much better with you'.<sup>45</sup>

A natural consequence of Knights' interest in Italian Quattrocento painting was her use in *Mill-hands* of tempera, which was undergoing a revival during the first two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>46</sup> In 1901, the Society of Painters in Tempera was set up to share experimental processes, expanding in 1912 to become the Society of Mural Decorators and Painters in Tempera. Tempera, as defined by the society, was a process of mixing pigment with egg yolk, slightly thinned with acetic acid or water.<sup>47</sup> With its rapid, almost instant drying qualities, the technique required more thorough method and craftsmanship than working with watercolour or oil. It was therefore considered an important training for artists in Decorative Painting, reflecting a desire for discipline in technique and composition. For Roger

Fry, writing in the *Burlington Magazine*, the tempera method, with its 'clearly-marked contours rather than vague and soft effects', had reached its apogee during the Quattrocento.<sup>48</sup>

It is not certain where Knights learnt the technique, although from 1912 to 1913 Dora Carrington is known to have attended lectures at the Slade given by Mary Sargent Florence, a leading figure in the tempera and fresco revival.<sup>49</sup> Knights was certainly acquainted with Sargent Florence; in 1920 Gwynne-Jones wrote to inform her that 'Mrs Sargent-Florence [sic] lent me a studio for you to put a party in'.<sup>50</sup> Tonks was also familiar with the technique; in 1911, when working with students on a mural scheme for Bishop Creighton House in Fulham, he wrote to Ronald Grey that 'painting on a wall beats all the oil paintings into a cocked hat ... I am doing this in tempera on plaster and you would delight in the medium.'<sup>51</sup>

Soon after returning to the Slade for her fourth year, Knights and James Wilkie (1890–1957) were announced as the joint-winners of the coveted



Summer Composition prize. While the title of Wilkie's picture, *Reconstruction: A Horse and Cart with Figures in a Sandpit* (1919; ill.63), may have held some contemporary relevance ('Reconstruction' being a term widely used to describe the post-war era), no aspect of the subject matter indicates that this is a contemporary scene.<sup>52</sup> The composition is entirely conventional in its approach, falling back on obvious nineteenth-century prototypes such as Ford Madox Brown's *Work* (1852–65) and William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal* (1856–61). Indeed, in its focus on an all-male workforce, the picture takes no account of the changing labour conditions that had been witnessed during the war. By contrast, the contemporaneous subject of *Mill-hands* was considered 'wisely chosen' by P. G. Konody, who praised the 'subject taken from modern, every-day life, with an equally modern setting of factories and workmen's dwellings'.<sup>53</sup>

Helen Lessore, a student at the Slade in the 1920s, recalled that of all the prize-winning works adorning the corridors, it was 'Stanley Spencer's *Nativity*' (1912; ill.64) and Winifred Knights' *Mill-Hands on Strike*' that clearly demonstrated Henry

Tonks' belief 'in the sufficiency of the old traditions for equipping us to deal with the contemporary world', and it was for this reason that they occupied the most prominent position.<sup>54</sup> A comparison between the two prize-winning pictures demonstrates that Spencer and Knights both drew inspiration from the Quattrocento, with the use of compositional devices such as flattened perspective and close tonal harmonies. While Knights' choice of tempera connects her work to the practice of Renaissance painters, the monumentality of Spencer's figures shows a greater debt to Piero della Francesca (c.1412–1492). Spencer's use of carefully observed details of the natural world, which are absent in *Mill-hands*, shows his further debt to Pre-Raphaelite artists.

It is interesting to consider the Summer Composition Competition prize works, all held by UCL Art Museum, for the period 1910–15 (the competition was suspended during the later war years). Aside from Gilbert Solomon's *Biblical Composition* (1911), which is set within a columned terrace, all the pictures evolved around the placing of figures within a landscape. In accordance

64 Stanley Spencer  
*The Nativity, 1912*  
Oil on canvas stuck on to  
plywood panel  
101.2 × 152.4 cm  
(39 7/8 × 60 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



with the dictates of Decorative Painting, the figures – which conventionally represent all ages of man – are placed harmoniously within their settings and the narratives are devoid of dramatic effect. Within these formulations, the huge variety of stylistic responses is striking, and accords with Hubert Wellington's assertion that the competition 'afforded scope for original and imaginative creation'.<sup>55</sup> Elsie MacNaught's *A Frieze of Figures Standing in a Landscape* (1910) evokes the work of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824–98) in its palette and its arrangement of figures in a single plane. Ruth Humphries' *Figures in a Landscape* (1913) draws on the work of Edwardian book illustrators such as Charles Robinson (1870–1937). Thomas Tennant Baxter's *Landscape with a Woman in a Donkey Cart* (1914) is closely allied to late-nineteenth-century English Impressionism, both in subject and in treatment, the soft palette reminiscent of paintings by Tonks and Steer. Gilbert Spencer's joint prize-winning work of the same year, *Summer: Composition with Three Children Seated in a Meadow*, depicts a faux-naïve rural scene recalling the work of Henri Rousseau (1844–1910). Antonia Violet Hamilton Bradshaw's *The Flight into Egypt* (1915) is clearly indebted to the decorative cycles of Augustus John.

Reflecting on these prize-winning works from the standpoint of 1920, Gwynne-Jones wrote to Knights:

I think it a little pity that so many of the pictures don't have a more coherent figure design. I mean the figures having a relation to one another besides that of being placed at a becoming distance from one another, & I think there is a tendency to be too enthusiastic about babies, which is a little too well known at the Slade.<sup>56</sup>

## A SLADE SCHOLARSHIP

As well as winning the prestigious Summer Composition prize for 1919, Knights was also awarded, along with her friend Mary Attenborough, a Slade Scholarship for the academic year 1919–20. Two scholarships a year to the value of £35 were awarded to those students, 'irrespective of sex', who were considered to have submitted 'the best works of drawings and paintings including compositions'.<sup>57</sup> In winning this scholarship, Knights joined the ranks of female scholars who had gone on to establish successful careers, including Evelyn De Morgan (1874), Edna Clarke Hall (1897), Anna Airy (1902) and Dora Carrington (1912), as well as male scholars including Augustus John (1896), Wyndham Lewis (1898), Randolph Schwabe (1906), Stanley Spencer (1910) and Colin Gill (1911).

At the end of the autumn term, Knights wrote to Millicent Murby to describe the Slade festivities. In an accompanying illustration, clearly inspired by her recent achievements, she annotated her self-portrait 'The Great Winifred Knights' (ill.65). The only other student who is accorded the accolade 'Great' is Gilbert Spencer, who had recently completed a prestigious commission for the Ministry of Information for a war picture of a Stationary Hospital in Sinai.<sup>58</sup> Despite Knights' initially uncertain return to the Slade, the academic year 1918–19 had brought with it extraordinary prizes and considerable accolades. Greater achievements, though, were still to come.

65 Illustrated letter, 'The Great Winifred Knights', 1919  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



## CHAPTER SIX

THE ROME SCHOLARSHIP IN  
DECORATIVE PAINTING: 1920'O BATTLING IN BLACK FLOODS  
WITHOUT AN ARK!'<sup>1</sup>

In her book recording 'Interesting Events in my Life', Mabel Knights noted: 'Win[ifred]'s paintings and drawings sent in for Prix de Rome Scholarship, Jan 31, 1920'.<sup>2</sup> During the autumn term of 1919, Knights, along with seven other Slade students, had been selected by Henry Tonks and Philip Wilson Steer to enter the competition for the Rome Scholarship in Decorative Painting offered by the British School at Rome, considered at the time to be 'the highest distinction of its kind in the Empire'.<sup>3</sup> The scholarship, which was worth £250 per annum for a three-year tenure (more than seven times the value of a Slade Scholarship), was open to British subjects under the age of 35.<sup>4</sup>

A British School at Rome was established in 1901 at the Odescalchi Palace as a centre for historical and archaeological study.<sup>5</sup> An opportunity to relocate and reconstitute the school came with the International Exhibition staged in Rome in 1911, when the site of the British Pavilion, overlooking the Valle Giulia, was offered to the British nation. The Royal Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851 financed the conversion of the temporary pavilion (built by Sir Edwin Lutyens) and sponsored three new residential scholarships in 'Monumental Art', comprising Architecture, Sculpture and Decorative Painting. Faculties in the three disciplines were created to select and monitor the scholars; in 1920, the Painting faculty had ten

members, including representatives from the Royal Academy Schools (Charles Sims and William Blake Richmond), the Royal College of Art (Professor William Rothenstein) and the Slade School of Fine Art (Philip Wilson Steer).

The scholarships were founded on a presumption that public commissions would materialise for the chosen scholars, and coincided with a nationalistic impulse and recognition of the need for state support and patronage of the arts. One of the chief promoters of the scheme, Sir Rennell Rodd (1858–1941), British Ambassador to Italy, envisaged the extended school as 'a great National and Imperial centre of culture ... a training ground for the humanists of a new Renaissance'.<sup>6</sup>

Candidates for the scholarship entered a two-stage competition, the criteria of which were established to demonstrate 'a fair understanding of the problems to be dealt with in the execution of any painting, the main purpose of which is the permanent decoration of a wall surface in relation to its architectural setting'.<sup>7</sup> The aims and scope of the competition were laid out by Evelyn Shaw (1882–1974), the Honorary General Secretary:

Just as the Grand Prix de Rome has helped to make the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris the foremost Art School in the world ... the British School at Rome [will] give an

66 Compositional study for  
*The Deluge*, 1920  
Oil over pencil on paper  
26.7 × 31.9 cm  
(10 ½ × 12 ½ in)  
UCL Art Museum  
University College London

impetus to artistic training throughout the Empire, and enable students of the Art School not only to compete with their fellow students, but with the picked students of other institutions.<sup>8</sup>

The first two Painting Scholarships were awarded to Slade students, Colin Gill (1913) and John Benson (1914); after Italy's entry into the war in May 1915, the scholarships were suspended until peace was re-established.

The first stage of the competition was 'An Open Examination', which required candidates to submit up to 12 works, including 'two figure compositions in colour suitable for wall decoration, and a full size uncoloured cartoon of a portion of one of these', 'one painting of a head, and one painting of a figure from the life in oil or tempera', 'drawings of the nude figure from life' and 'sketches of designs for Decorative purposes'.<sup>9</sup> In February 1920, the submissions of 17 selected candidates – nine women and eight men – were exhibited at the Grafton Gallery, London, in order to allow critics and the public 'an opportunity to compare the works ... and criticise decisions ... a very useful means of keeping the juries on their toes'.<sup>10</sup> The exhibition was widely attended, and reviews appeared in numerous journals including the *Athenaeum*, the *Evening Standard*, the *Observer* and *The Times*.<sup>11</sup> In the *Observer*, P. G. Konody considered 'the odds slightly in favour of Miss Knights', whereas *The Times's* critic considered James Wilkie's submissions to be 'the most original and also the most unaffected'.<sup>12</sup>

Knights submitted to the Open Examination a number of compositions that she had produced earlier in 1919, including *A Scene in a Village Street with Mill-hands Conversing* (ill.59, p.68) and *Leaving the Munitions Works* (ill.52, p.60). Additionally, she submitted at least three paintings in oil specifically conceived for the competition: a direct study from the nude (ill.67), a head portrait and a figure composition.

Commenting on Knights' submissions, the *Evening Standard's* critic admired her 'intelligent idea

of the conditions of decorative painting', noting that 'even her direct study from the nude is planned out with a view to design'.<sup>13</sup> Selecting Eileen as a model, Knights portrayed her 14-year-old sister seated full-length, with arms and legs arranged subtly off-centre to create an asymmetrical stress within the composition. Eileen recalled that Knights carefully worked out the format, 'placing one of Walter's armchairs on his black, ocean-going trunk to create a high view-point, with partially draped heavy velvet curtains over one side of the window for background, with half-light falling on the right side of the model'.<sup>14</sup> Using their mother's cutting-out scissors, Knights cut Eileen's hair short 'in order to allow the full force of daylight to fall on the flesh', provoking indignation from her father, who 'refused to speak to her for a week'. To thank Eileen for posing, Knights invited her to the Slade, where she 'sat on the model's throne dressed in my best' followed by 'a seat with the students in the Gallery of the Alhambra Theatre to watch the Diaghilev Ballet'.<sup>15</sup>

Eileen recalled that while Knights was painting this life study, she kept to hand a reproduction of Stanley Spencer's *Zacharias and Elizabeth* (1913–14, Tate), a picture she had seen at the New English Art Club in January 1920 and greatly admired.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to her earlier life studies, with their faithful exploration of anatomy, Eileen's form is treated with the same gentle monumentality that characterises Spencer's figures. Further connections with Spencer's painting include the strong asymmetrical emphasis on hands and feet, the methodical modelling of skin and flesh and the projection of shadows against the plain backdrop of a wall. Later, Knights affirmed that she considered Spencer to be 'the most wonderful painter in England now, not even excepting [Augustus] John'.<sup>17</sup>

To fulfil the competition's requirement for a 'painting of a head', Knights submitted a portrait of Anna Matilda Fryer (b. c.1863) (ill.68), the owner of the Schoonoord Sugar Plantation Company, for whom Walter worked as secretary and treasurer. Described by Eileen Knights as 'not quite white', she was born in British Guiana



67 Life study, Eileen Knights  
1920  
Oil on canvas  
76.7 × 50.8 cm  
(30 ¼ × 20 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London





and had inherited the Schoonoord Estates, in the coastal region of the British colony, on the death of her father in 1904.<sup>18</sup> Possessing great wealth, Anna Fryer developed a keen interest in Knights, taking her for rides in the country in her chauffeur-driven car and for outings to the popular musical comedies of the time, including *Chu Chin Chow* and *The Maid of the Mountains*, followed by tea at her house at 63 Evelyn Gardens in South Kensington, London. Writing to her father from Rome in 1920, Knights described having ‘a wad of Miss Fryer’s money which I changed at 96.50’.<sup>19</sup>

Anna Fryer is portrayed seated in a three-quarter-length frontal view, her eye-level gaze focused straight ahead, far outside the field of vision as defined by the canvas edge. Upright and poised but not aloof, this dignified presentation conveys Knights’ respect for her mentor and father’s employer. With its sharpness of contour and emphasis on angularity, the picture marks a notable departure from Knights’ earlier, more naturalistic portraits. This striking change almost certainly resulted from her encountering the work of Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920) at an exhibition of ‘French Art 1914–1919’ held at Heal’s Mansard Gallery in the summer of 1919. Although the exhibition showcased more established painters, including André Derain, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and André L’hote, Osbert Sitwell, the joint organiser, believed it was ‘the newcomers’, and especially Modigliani, ‘who made the sensation in this show’.<sup>20</sup> With its elegantly elongated neck, strong stylised features and high coiffure, the *Portrait of Madame Lunia Czechowska in Profile* (1919, private collection), included in the exhibition, was probably the direct inspiration for Knights’ portrait. Modigliani’s customary presentation of his sitters in stark, black-and-white V-neck garments set against a graduated single-colour background was also a compositional device adopted by Knights.<sup>21</sup>

While critics perceived Modigliani’s use of ‘angular movement’, ‘strong sense of character’ and ‘astonishing distortions’ as entirely ‘modern’, his development of a ‘pictorial, sculptural idea of form’

and ‘sensation of quiet and rest’ were seen as evidence of his connection to Florentine Quattrocento painters, an inspired combination with which Knights felt a natural empathy.<sup>22</sup> Not all of her Slade contemporaries, however, were so convinced. Presenting Knights with a copy of the catalogue, George Charlton commented that he found Modigliani’s pictures ‘boring and depressing, it is like taking away one’s eyesight, at times they seem to gain something, but only at the expense of losing everything else’.<sup>23</sup> Heralded as ‘the best and most inspiring exhibition which has occurred since the Post-impressionists at the Grafton Galleries’, the Heal’s exhibition revived some of the controversies about modern art which had occurred in London before the war.<sup>24</sup>

When George Charlton visited the exhibition of Rome Scholarship submissions at the Grafton Gallery, he wrote to Knights to say how much he admired her pictures, especially ‘the painting of your mother’.<sup>25</sup> This was a small oil painting of Mabel seated in a sun-drenched hayfield, the third of Knights’ submissions specifically produced for the competition (ill.69). Showing a marked progression from her earlier landscape compositions, for instance those done for the Slade Sketch Club in 1919 (ill.48, p.56 and ill.49, p.57), this painting again reflects the influence of recent avant-garde developments in the visual arts, especially in the combined angularity of the haystacks and their shadows, which recede towards a mass of dark foliage in the background. The haystack, a motif which would appear frequently in Knights’ work, was a form full of resonance; an instantaneous moment in nature’s temporal cycle, it symbolised the harmony between humankind and the natural world. The light shades of Mabel’s ivory parasol and blue dress and the green grass contrast with the foreground mass of strong, dark greys, which convey the feeling of an impending storm. In its treatment of subject, the picture bears some similarity to the stormy landscapes of Maurice de Vlaminck (1876–1958), several of which had been on display at the Mansard Gallery exhibition.

68 *Portrait of Anna Matilda Fryer, 1920*  
Oil on canvas  
50.8 × 40.7 cm (20 × 16 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



69 Mabel Knights seated  
in a hayfield, 1920  
Oil on panel  
16.5 × 19 cm  
(6 ½ × 7 ½ in)  
Private Collection

*Opposite top:*

- 70 Study of trees at Roydon,  
Essex, 1920  
Oil on board  
17.8 × 22.9 cm (7 × 9 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

*Opposite middle:*

- 71 Landscape at Roydon,  
Essex, 1920  
Oil on paper  
17.8 × 22.9 cm (7 × 9 in)  
Collection of  
Peyton Skipwith

*Opposite bottom:*

- 72 Landscape at Roydon,  
Essex, 1920  
Oil on paper  
17.8 × 25.4 cm (7 × 10 in)  
Collection of  
Peyton Skipwith

On 6 February 1920, whilst staying with her aunt Millicent Murby in Leicester, Knights received news that, together with three other Slade students, James Wilkie, G. C. L. Underwood (1890–1975) and Arthur Outlaw (1889–1966), she had been selected to enter the final stage of the Rome Scholarship competition, the precise details of which would be conveyed to the four finalists on 5 July.

At the end of the summer term of 1920, Knights entered the portrait of Anna Fryer for the Slade Head Painting Prize. It achieved second place, behind *Portrait of a Bearded Man* by Daphne Pollen (1904–86); though clearly a tour de force from a 16-year-old girl, Pollen's portrait offers an entirely more conventional representation, in the 'grand manner' style of George Frederic Watts (1817–1904).<sup>26</sup>

On 5 June, Knights celebrated her twenty-first birthday at the White Horse Inn in Shere, Surrey, which belonged to her father's childhood friend,

the painter Adam Proctor. Arnold Mason and Mary Attenborough were among the guests, who, after 'a magnificent cold-buffet lunch walked up Newlands Corner to the sacred site of the Silent Pool before returning to tea at the Inn'.<sup>27</sup> Six days later, the Knights family returned to Roydon for a three-week holiday, inviting Mason to join them. Although Mason had married in 1918, he was separated from his wife, and around this time formed a romantic attachment to Knights.<sup>28</sup> Knights assured Millicent Murby that she was 'not tied up. I don't think I ever shall be, much as I love [Arnold]'; they did exchange rings, however, and Mason certainly considered himself betrothed to Knights especially once his divorce had come through in 1921.<sup>29</sup>


During this holiday, Knights painted a series of small *plein air* studies in oil, many depicting the landscape around the Stort Navigation (ills 70–72). *Plein air* painting was encouraged at the Slade; in 1910,



Vanessa Bell (1879–1961) was sketching at Corfe Castle and found ‘the whole country was like a Steer ... I expected to see many Sladites perched on the surrounding hills like myself, but luckily the season was too late for them’.<sup>30</sup> In common with her figure compositions, Knights’ landscape studies are unified by a simplification of form, although she deliberately left the brushwork visible, a technique considered appropriate when capturing the natural landscape at a precise moment in time. Allan Gwynne-Jones wrote of Knights’ deep attachment to Roydon: ‘I see your country very clearly just because it is yours, I see the cool river and the silver trees and the untrampled grass at the edge of the stream.’<sup>31</sup>

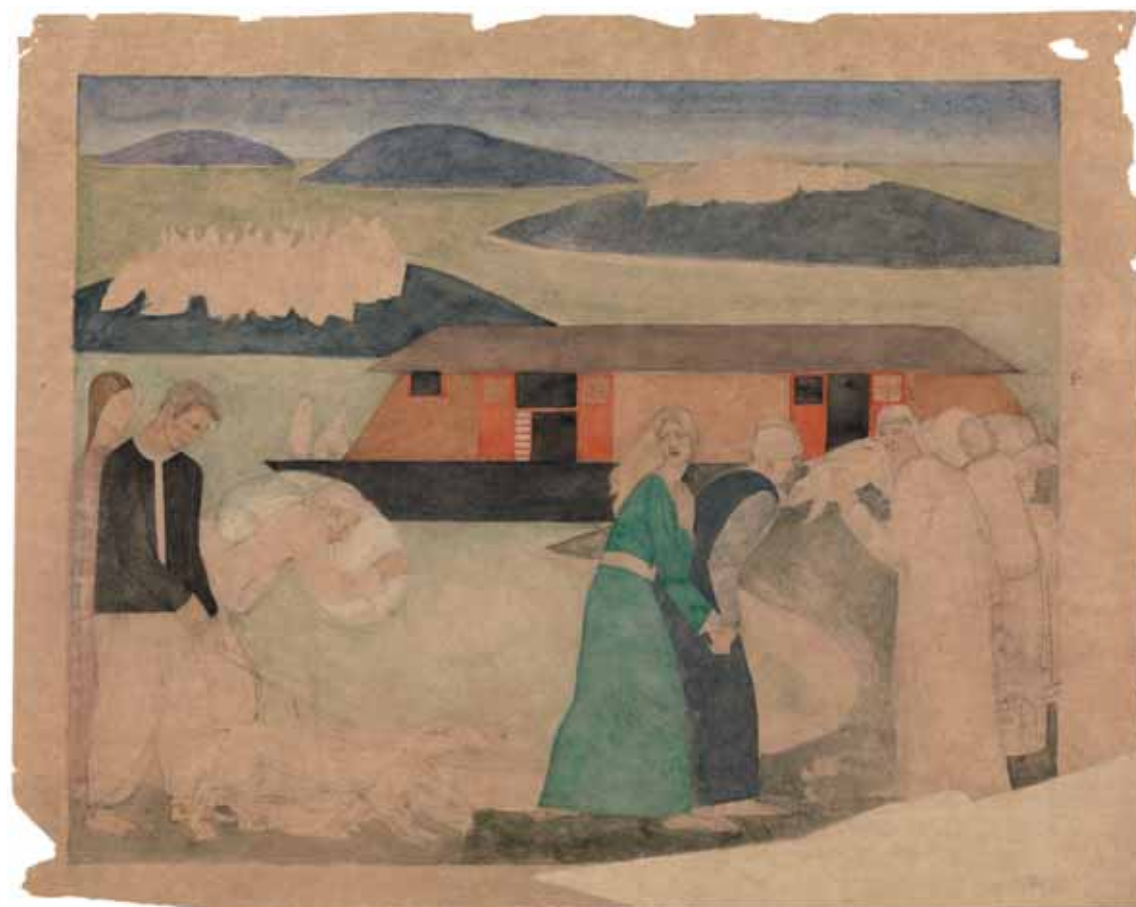


## THE DELUGE

On the morning of 5 July, Knight  lected the terms and conditions for the final Rome Scholarship competition, learning that the set subject was ‘The Deluge’ and that each finalist was required to ‘produce a painting in oil or tempera, and a cartoon’ five by six feet (150 x 180 cm) in size, to be completed within eight weeks. Each candidate was allocated a studio at the Slade (open six days a week from 9 am to 7 pm) and was forbidden to admit any unauthorised person except models, for whom a £16 allowance was provided.<sup>32</sup>



Knights would have been aware of the biblical narrative of the Deluge (Genesis 6:9–8:22) from the Sunday morning Anglican service that had formed part of her childhood ritual, as well as from lessons in Religious Teaching that she attended at James Allen’s Girls’ School. The story of Noah’s ark was also a popular subject for illustrated books, the colourful depictions of familiar and exotic animals firing children’s imagination.<sup>33</sup> An early preparatory design (ill.73) shows that her first ideas evolved around the depiction of Noah and his household entering the sanctuary of the Ark: ‘And Noah with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood’



- 73 Early compositional study  
for *The Deluge*, 1920  
Watercolour over pencil  
on paper  
23.2 × 29.1 cm  
(9 ¼ × 11 ⅜ in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

*Opposite top:*

- 74 Early compositional study  
for *The Deluge*, 1920  
Watercolour on paper  
12.5 × 19 cm  
(4 ⅞ × 7 ½ in)  
Private Collection

*Opposite middle:*

- 75 Compositional study for  
*The Deluge*, 1920  
Watercolour over pencil  
on paper  
19 × 25.5 cm (7 ⅜ × 10 in)  
Collection of Mr and Mrs  
W. Corbett-Winder

*Opposite bottom:*

- 76 Compositional study for  
*The Deluge*, 1920  
Watercolour on paper,  
squared  
26.8 × 34.8 cm  
(10 ½ × 13 ⅝ in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

(Genesis 7:1–24). A focus on salvation tended to be the most common pictorial interpretation of the narrative. Margaret Gere's colourful and sentimental *Noah's Ark* (c.1912, Tate), with its pleasing array of children, adults and domestic and exotic animals, provides a typical response to the subject.

In Knights' early design, a pageant of figures, whose simple robes, flowing headdresses, turbans and harem-style trousers locate them within biblical times, occupy the composition's foreground. In the background, doomed souls are stranded on a rounded hill surrounded by floodwaters. Rendered in light tones of green, grey, black, salmon pink and red, this initial study shares much in spirit with Walter Crane's popular children's book, *The Noah's Ark Alphabet* (1872, second edition 1890).<sup>34</sup> The central female figure, who is stylised in the distinctive elongated form of Knights' early illustrative work, bears an obvious element of self-portraiture; her gaze, as she looks back at the world

she is leaving behind, remained a constant focal point as the composition developed. It is likely that Knights based her simple, angular Ark on a painted plywood toy model that her son John later recalled playing with as a child.

A subsequent study in watercolour (ill.74) shows a dramatic change in the mood and treatment of the subject, with a darkened palette and all sense of salvation now lost. The Ark has vanished, and emphasis is placed on the victims, the scene specifically relating to Genesis 7:18: 'The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth.' A man enfolds a woman in his arms, while another hauls an ailing soul up the hill, their specific bearing recalling pictorial representations of Christ's Deposition.

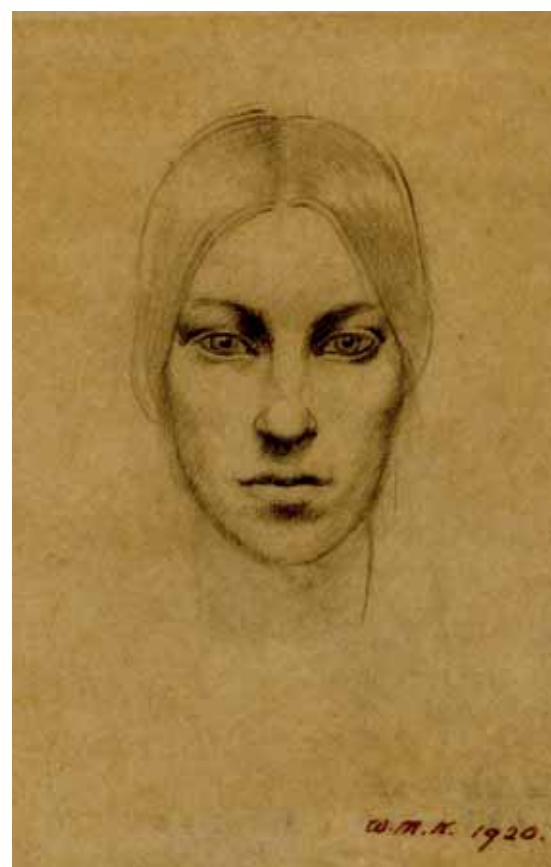
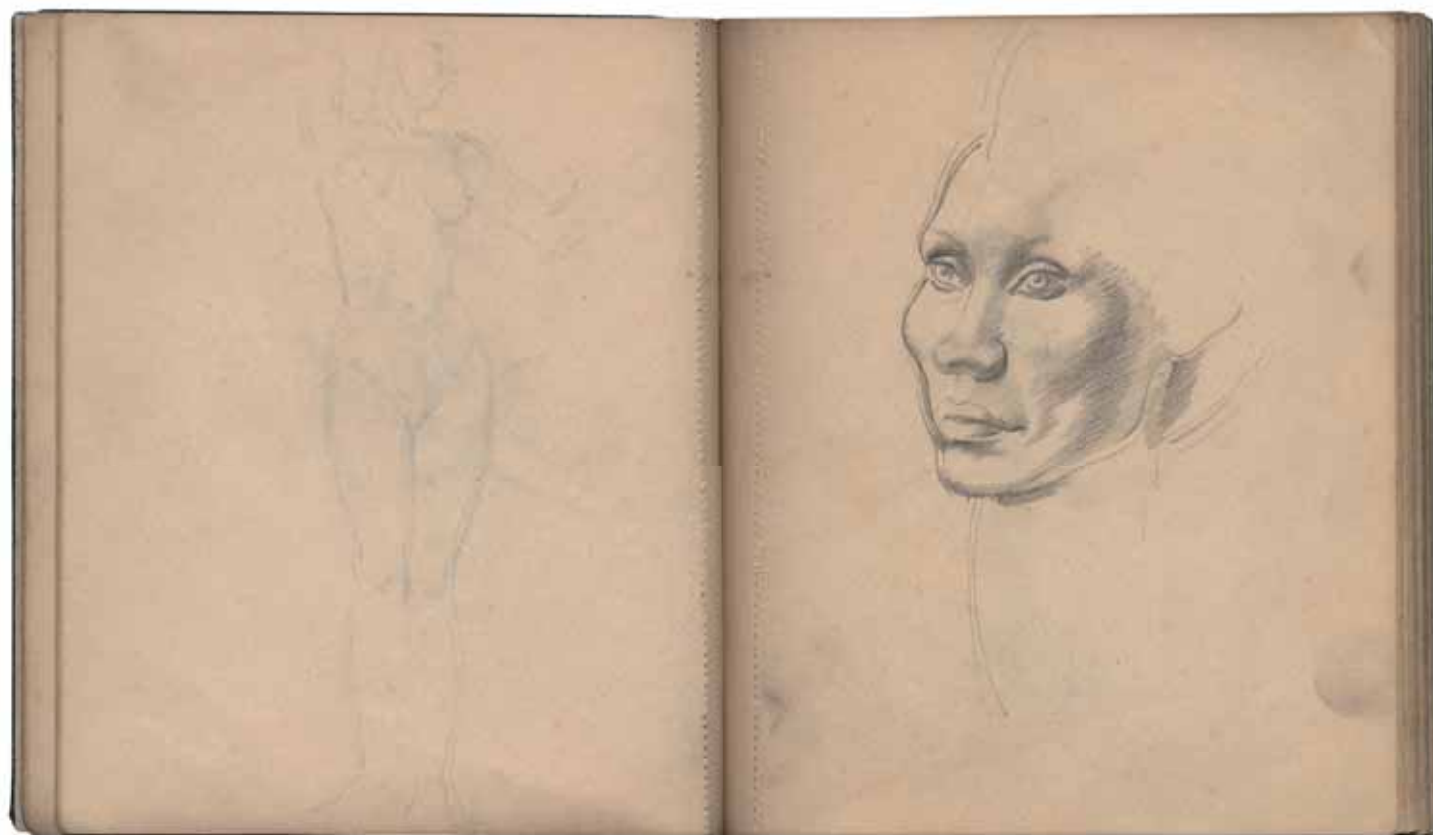
Developing the basic structure of this intermediary study, Knights appears to have rapidly resolved upon her final design, with a change in the distribution of the figures resulting in nearly half now clambering up the hill (ill.75). A wall,

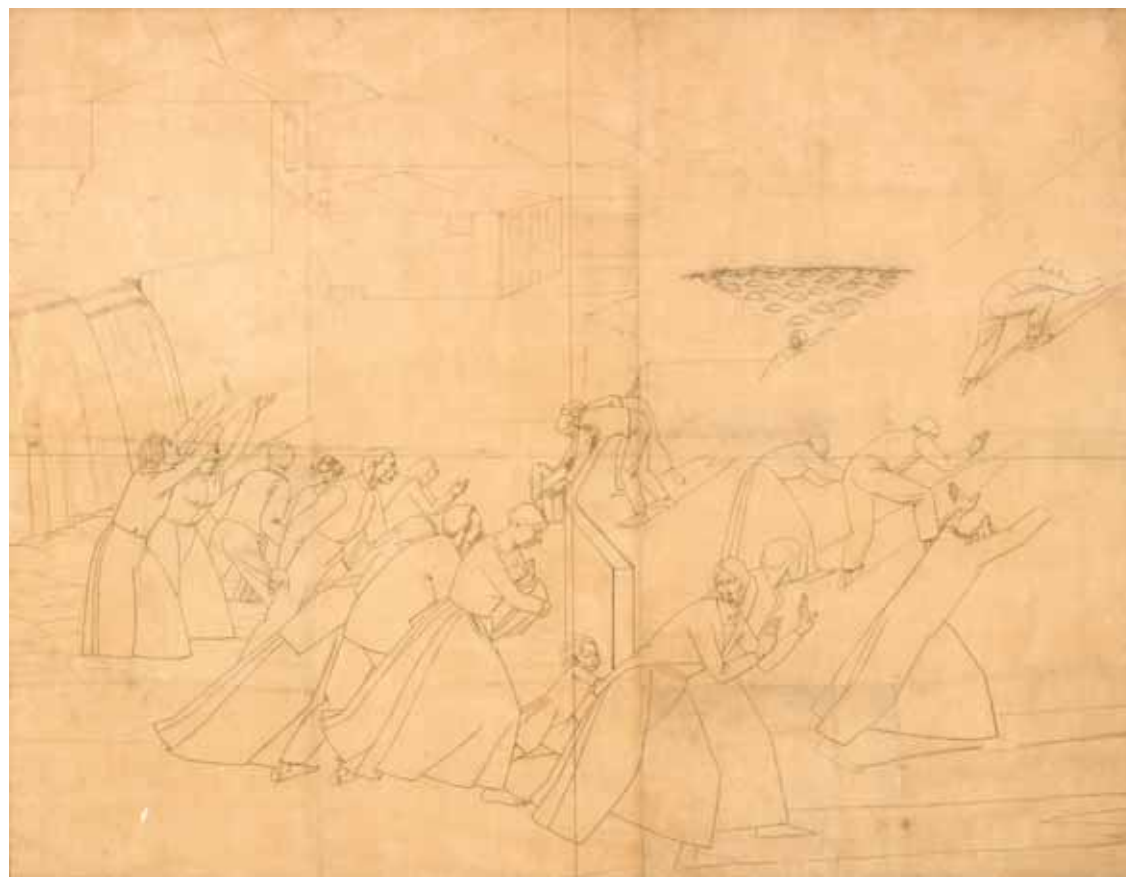


drawn in elevation, divides the pictorial space in two, a compositional motif she may have borrowed from Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Visitation* (1485–90, Tornabuoni Chapel). Spencer's *Zacharias and Elizabeth*, which had been a source of inspiration for the life study of Eileen (ill.67, p.79), may have additionally reinforced Knights' idea of employing this device. Having resolved the relationship of the figures, Knights squared up a further study for enlargement, with land masses and buildings drawn in outline (ill.76). A similar study in oil, which retains the dramatic and sombre tonality of the earlier intermediary design, was worked up to finalise the relationship of tone, colour and form (ill.66, p.76).

A sketchbook inscribed 'My Book of studies for the Rome Scholarship' indicates how Knights sought to resolve specific details. There are numerous portrait studies of the artist's family and closest friends, amongst them Mabel, Eileen and Anna Fryer (ill.77). Individual studies of hands and feet reveal a sense of visual tension which would be used in the final composition to reinforce the depiction of fear through gesture, prayer and flight. The sketchbook also contains studies of landscape, including the waterfall at Roydon Weir, as well as vernacular architecture, such as a simple farm building, the outline of which Knights would use for the half-submerged construction in the background of the final work. Five self-portraits contained in the sketchbook, as well as a number on separate sheets, reveal a new intensity of expression and introspection (ill.78, p.86, ill.176, p.181), qualities which would be transposed into the final work with the inclusion of two self-portraits. Gwynne-Jones sought to tease Knights about her purchase of a full-length mirror: 'I was rejoicing in the pretty picture of [Knights] jumping out of bed in the morning and seeing herself for the first time in a long mirror, and being so entranced that all the day she could not leave, when Alason spoil it by explaining you were using yourself for a model in your picture.'<sup>35</sup>

Making use of the same methodology employed for her previous Decorative paintings, Knights used





- 77 Portrait study of Anna Matilda Fryer from 'My Book of studies for the Rome Scholarship', 1920  
Pencil on paper  
12.8 × 11.5 cm (5 × 4 ½ in)  
Private Collection

- 78 Self-portrait, 1920  
Pencil on tracing paper  
9.5 × 7 cm (3 ¾ × 2 ¾ in)  
British Museum

- 79 Study of Arnold Mason for *The Deluge*, 1920  
Pencil on paper  
24.5 × 25.3 cm  
(9 ⅝ × 9 ⅞ in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

- 80 Cartoon for *The Deluge*, 1920  
Pencil on tracing paper, squared  
152.9 × 183.5 cm  
(60 ⅞ × 72 ¼ in)  
Private Collection

the squared compositional study, supplemented with details from her sketchbook and other sheets, to create two cartoons, the first a highly finished drawing on paper (ill.81), the second an outline drawing on tracing paper (ill.80). The latter was squared up for transfer allowing the essential forms of the composition to be scored through the tracing paper onto the final canvas. The importance attributed to the cartoon by the Painting Faculty, who considered it 'the principal feature of the competition', reflected an academic desire, in line with contemporary teaching practices in Decorative Painting, for discipline in technique and composition.<sup>36</sup> Areas of scraping back on the final painting, however, show that Knights continued to make changes to her composition after the transfer had taken place, with certain details such as the dog and small central island conceived later on.

The final composition (ill.82) brings together 21 figures (nine men, nine women, two children and a baby), who clamber towards and up a mountain,

soon to be submerged by the flood.<sup>37</sup> In the background, three further figures try desperately to reach safety on a rounded hill. On the left, two women implore, in vain, to the raging heavens, while in the centre a man and woman lift a child to safety. The figures, who display a wide variety of attitudes and gestures, show that Knights was keen to demonstrate that she could assimilate skills developed in the life class into her composition.

Knights had already shown her technical ability to paint in tempera with *A Scene in a Village Street with Mill-hands Conversing*; she elected, however, to paint *The Deluge* in oil, as tempera, a more labour-intensive process, would have put her at a disadvantage in a competition where time was paramount. She nevertheless applied her paint thinly in order to achieve the same opaque yet translucent effect as that produced by tempera. As with her previous Decorative paintings, naturalism was pared back in the transfer process, leading one critic to comment that the picture contained 'little detail and no regard for archaeology'.<sup>38</sup> The landscape



81 Cartoon for *The Deluge*,  
1920  
Pencil on paper, squared  
147.3 × 177.8 cm  
(58 × 70 in)  
The Wolfsonian –  
Florida International  
University, Miami Beach,  
Florida, The Mitchell  
Wolfson, Jr Collection





82 *The Deluge*, 1920  
Oil on canvas  
152.9 × 183.5 cm  
(60 1/8 × 72 1/4 in)  
Tate



forms, such as mountains and paths, and the architectural features of walls, buildings and the Ark are reduced to their essential graphic features. The only surface modulation is provided by the haycocks, which are used as a formal device to create a sense of depth and contour through shadow, their horizontal arrangement recalling the painting of Mabel in a hayfield submitted for the Open Examination (ill.69, p.82).

Evidence suggests that as her composition evolved, Knights looked for inspiration to the most renowned historical depictions of the Flood, and especially to those pictures where the narrative was subverted to focus on the suffering of victims. From Michelangelo's celebrated composition (1508–9, Sistine Chapel) she is likely to have adopted the notion of figures escaping to high land. J. M. W. Turner's *The Deluge* (1805–13, Tate) may have been the inspiration for the sombre palette and expressive contrasts of light and shade. Of most significance, however, was Nicolas Poussin's *Le Déluge* from the cycle of *Les Quatres Saisons* (1660–4, The Louvre). Knights first encountered Poussin's oeuvre during a Slade lecture course, 'Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century French Art', given by Carl Tancred Borenius in 1919, during which he praised *Le Déluge* for not 'relying upon the landscape alone, but also upon human action'.<sup>39</sup> Amongst elements she borrowed from Poussin's composition are the device of the flooded landscape divided into two levels and joined by a waterfall, the motif of a child being pulled from the water, the submerged figures and the gesture of raised hands imploring salvation.

For most critics, however, there was no doubt that Knights had primarily based *The Deluge* on 'the study of the Primitives', a term widely used to refer to Italian art from Giotto to the later Quattrocento.<sup>40</sup> As the Rome Scholarships had been created 'for the benefit of British Students pursuing serious studies in Italy', it was considered important for candidates to demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of Italian painting; in 1927, Sir George Clausen (1852–1944), the Chairman of the Painting



faculty, criticised Glyn Jones' scholarship works for 'showing little influence of Italian art'.<sup>41</sup> As well as the holdings of The National Gallery, Tancred Borenius, who considered printed texts essential for helping students value Renaissance painting, recommended Professor Adolfo Venturi's illustrated, multi-volume *Storia dell'arte italiana*, available in the Slade Fine Art Library, as 'the constant companion of our studies and investigations'.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to using Italian Renaissance compositional devices, Knights also quoted directly from Italian paintings. The terror-stricken gaze and wide-open mouth of her central self-portrait was inspired by the central female figure clutching a baby in Fra Angelico's *Massacre of the Innocents* (1451–2; ill.83). For her fleeing figures, Knights replicated the postures of the monks in Vittorio Carpaccio's *St Jerome and the Lion* (c.1502, ill.84). The complex arrangement of the three central figures in *The Deluge* is manifestly similar to that of the terrified monks fleeing the lion in the Carpaccio panel; the slanted, forward-thrusting pose of each monk, with the front leg bent and the back leg stretched out, was a motif that Knights employed for several of her figures. In 1920, George Charlton purchased the English translation of Pompeo Molmenti and Gustav Ludwig's monumental *The Life and Works of Vittorio Carpaccio* (1907), writing

to Knights, 'I have a great treat in store for you, I have bought a huge book on Carpaccio ... and you clearly understand, this book belongs not to me, but to us.'<sup>43</sup> *St Jerome and the Lion* was illustrated on page 125; for the authors, it was 'the expression of fear' that made the painting so remarkable and set it apart from the simple and lyrical gesturalism of most Quattrocento art.<sup>44</sup> For the central child in *The Deluge*, Knights made drawings (ill.85) from a plaster cast of Andrea del Verrocchio's *Putto with Fish* (sculpted c.1470, cast c.1888) in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, which she described as 'that beautiful little babe with the Dolphin'.<sup>45</sup> The frequent depiction of greyhounds in Renaissance painting in a variety of settings from sacred to secular, with an emphasis on the hunt, may also have provided a model for the dog in *The Deluge*.

While celebrated historic images of the Deluge and Italian Renaissance art greatly informed Knights' composition, it was also shaped by recent developments in the visual arts. As with the three works she had submitted for the Open Examination, it was this synthesis of traditional and modern that served to create the highly individual language that was her own. When *The Deluge* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in February 1921, critics struggled to categorise the painting: 'The picture might be

- 83 Fra Angelico  
*The Massacre of the Innocents* (1451–2)  
Fratelli Alinari print  
from Knights' collection
- 84 Vittorio Carpaccio  
*St Jerome and the Lion*,  
from P. Molmenti and G.  
Ludwig, *The Life and Works  
of Vittorio Carpaccio*, 1907
- 85 Study of Andrea  
Verrocchio's *Putto with Fish*,  
from 'My Book of Studies  
for the Rome  
Scholarship', 1920  
Pencil on paper  
12.8 × 11.5 cm (5 × 4 ½ in)  
Private Collection

Cubist or Futurist, but the critics will not have it that it is either. Some describe it as an example of anarchy in art, original, tragic and inspiring [and] as something distinctly new and compelling in its treatment of a great theme.<sup>46</sup> One critic, describing the picture as ‘Cubist-like’, found that Knights’ knowledge of angles ‘was only used to revivify what the old successful men knew’.<sup>47</sup>

Having visited the Heal’s exhibition of ‘French Art 1914–1919’, Knights was familiar at first hand with contemporary advances on the Continent. Stylistic developments closer to home also clearly exerted an influence. An exhibition of ‘The Nation’s War Paintings and other Records’ at the Royal Academy over the winter of 1919–20 (ill.87), which was described as ‘the most interesting and the most stimulating Exhibition of pictures that has yet been held in London’, showcased 925 contemporary works by British painters who had been commissioned under the various war art schemes.<sup>48</sup> The Slade School of Fine Art was strongly represented, with a large number of works by teachers (Philip Wilson Steer and Henry Tonks) and past and present students (for example, Colin Gill, Paul Nash, William Orpen, Stanley Spencer, Gilbert Spencer and G. C. L. Underwood). In his review of the exhibition, C. J. Holmes (the Director of The National Gallery) considered that the war had heralded ‘the arrival of a new artistic movement’ and praised as more relevant the ‘decorative experiments’ of the younger and more radical artists, ‘the best of which were actual products of the Slade School’, above the traditional representations of conflict. ‘Technical competence’, ‘a scrupulous regard for truth of modelling’ and ‘force and delicacy of line’ were seen to be the means through which a new kind of British modernism had evolved.<sup>49</sup>

Knights was deeply impressed by the exhibition, and some of the pictures included were clearly a source of inspiration for her own composition. Her favourite picture, she later told Meredith Monnington, was Stanley Spencer’s *Travoy's Arriving with Wounded at a Dressing Station at Smol, Macedonia, September 1916* (1919, Imperial War Museum).<sup>50</sup> The dark red,

grey, brown and aubergine colours of *The Deluge*, as well as the use of black cast shadows, may have been directly inspired by Spencer’s painting. Indeed, the *Liverpool Courier* concluded that ‘the influence of Stanley Spencer is clearly shown ... in Miss Winifred Knights’ *The Deluge*, which is highly decorative and unnaturalistic, but very vigorous and essential’.<sup>51</sup> Paul Nash’s *The Menin Road* (1919, Imperial War Museum), in its terrifying equation of the destructive forces of nature to war, also held a deep iconographic significance for Knights; the beams of light streaming downwards from the sky were a motif she may have borrowed, and the treatment of the buildings in *The Deluge* echoes the simplified concrete *repoussoir* blocks in Nash’s painting. The exhibition included a number of works by former Slade students who had formed part of the Vorticist group before the war; the sideways dynamism that gives *The Deluge* its underlying rhythm is also apparent in William Roberts’ *A Shell Dump, France* (1918, Imperial War Museum) and Percy Wyndham Lewis’ *A Battery Position in a Wood* (1918, Imperial War Museum).

## A METAPHOR FOR THE GREAT WAR

That the Painting faculty of the British School at Rome selected ‘the Deluge’ as the competition’s set subject was hardly arbitrary; as part of the wider context of Christian rhetoric used to manipulate all manner of war experience, the biblical story was frequently cited. In 1915, as Minister of Munitions, David Lloyd George proclaimed:

[The war] is the Deluge, it is a convulsion of Nature ... bringing unheard-of changes in the social and industrial fabric. It is a cyclone which is tearing up by the roots the ornamental plants of modern society ... it is an earthquake which is upheaving the very rocks of European life. It is one of those seismic disturbances in which



86 Front cover of *War Pictures*, official record of 'The Nations War Paintings and Other Records'. Royal Academy exhibition, 1919

nations leap forward or fall backward generations in a single bound.<sup>52</sup>

Calling upon the same metaphor in 1917, now in his role as prime minister, Lloyd George spoke of the war as 'the greatest catastrophe since the days of the Deluge ... there would be an end to this Deluge, but the waters had not yet gone down'.<sup>53</sup>

Establishing a link between the narrative of the Deluge and the Great War provides the key to understanding the context in which Knights created her response to the subject. In the Book of Genesis (7:1–11), God sends his Flood to rid the earth of guilty human beings with a corollary reading of His preservation of the faithful: 'The Lord said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation."' In popular theology, the Ark was widely understood as a divinely intended type of the Christian Church. William Wordsworth, for example, wrote of 'The Second Ark, Christ's Church'.<sup>54</sup> The connection between preserving the good and destroying the evil provided a structure that recurred frequently in biblical history. In *The Typology of Scripture* (1845–7), Patrick Fairbairn explained that 'this principle of salvation with destruction, which found such a striking exemplification in the Deluge, has been continually appearing anew in the history of God's dealings among men'.<sup>55</sup>

When the Great War erupted, the biblical Deluge provided a natural metaphor for the destruction of evil whereby the Allies were cast in the role of instruments of divine justice. In 1918, the Bishop of London urged the need to punish Germany 'for the greatest crime committed in the world for a thousand years. God looks to us now to punish the wrongdoer'.<sup>56</sup> Commenting on the Church's alignment of Germany with the barbaric civilisation of the infidel, Vera Brittain (1893–1970) noted that 'dons and clerics were ... doing their best to justify the war and turn it into England's Holy Crusade'.<sup>57</sup>

During the early years of the war, the Deluge's corollary reading of salvation also provided a moral

framework through which personal sacrifice was assimilated, a basic tenet of the Christian faith that served not only to exonerate the idea of war but also to justify the bloodshed it entailed. In *Wake Up, England* (1914), Robert Bridges (1844–1930), the Poet Laureate, compared the cleansing effect of the shedding of blood to the salvation achieved in the biblical Flood.<sup>58</sup> Parallels were frequently drawn between the decadence and complacency of the pre-war era and the history of the world before the Flood, providing justification for the war as a force by which the nation would be cleansed. Mildred Burton's 'Not Peace, but a Sword!' (1917) combines all the arguments for such an interpretation; the sonnet begins,

Britain was sleeping in luxurious ease.  
Forgetful of times past, forgetting God . . .

It ends on the celestial note: 'Britain will rise again, but purified'.<sup>59</sup>

As the war dragged on, the use of Christian rhetoric came under increasing scrutiny. In her pacifist memoir *A Woman at War* (1929), Maude Onions, who had been a signaller in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, recalled a conversation with a corporal about the 'Christian' aspect of the war. He remarked that 'if this war can be justified from the teachings of Christ, we must look for something else to put the world right'.<sup>60</sup> Moral revulsion against the cruelty of the Deluge narrative especially, with its instances of divine justice and eternal damnation, played a major role in this process of theological re-evaluation.<sup>61</sup> In 1916, during an address at the Tunbridge Wells Scientific Congress, the Reverend T. R. R. Stebbing 'passed under review the biblical account of the Deluge' and, in 1919, the Dean of Lincoln began a nationwide debate when he stated that he could 'no longer believe in this wonderful story of Noah and the Floods'.<sup>62</sup> George Bernard Shaw, in his preface to *Back to Methuselah* (1918–20), wrote that 'the feeling against the Bible has become so strong at last that educated people ... refuse to outrage their intellectual consciences by reading the

legend of Noah's Ark'.<sup>63</sup> Given her aunt Millicent Murby's close friendship with Shaw, Knights is likely to have been aware of such opinions; *Back to Methuselah* was inspired by the principles of evolutionary change (according to the Lamarckian view) expounded in Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1907), the English translation of which was edited by Murby.<sup>64</sup>

Joining the crowds at Trafalgar Square to celebrate the victorious end of the war on 11 November 1918, Knights had initially felt euphoric. She wrote to Murby: 'I must do a Futurist picture of little pairs of smiling eyes mixed up with omnibuses sprouting bunches of little people, a man dancing the hornpipe on a taxi-roof, showers of paper, a whisky bottle and tin pot lids clashing.' She added that a fellow Slade student had suggested she illustrate James Thomson's long poem *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874). 'I have it', she explained, 'but I do not yet feel in an unhappy enough frame of mind to attempt it.'<sup>65</sup> Thomson's bleak and sombre poem describes the narrator's journey through 'doleful' London, a city imagined metaphorically and allegorically as a place of spiritual despair: 'There is no God; no Fiend with names divine'.<sup>66</sup>

On the first anniversary of the Armistice, and four months after the signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty, the *Evening Post* conveyed the general feeling of despondency in Britain, as each survivor, civilian or combatant, male or female, had to shoulder a deep individual anguish or the burden of loss. It was a day 'charged with sadness', as it had been a year earlier 'when the air was full of farewells to the dying and mournings for the dead'.<sup>67</sup> Reflecting on war's meaning from the standpoint of 1920, did Knights now feel 'unhappy enough' to respond to the Deluge set subject as one of Thomson's 'Melancholy Brothers ... battling in black floods without an Ark'?<sup>68</sup>

For Knights, the death of her baby brother David in 1915 had begun a process which resulted in the abandonment of her childhood faith. The deep trauma that she suffered during the war, as a result of the air raids over Streatham and the

Silvertown factory explosion, as well as the death at Passchendaele of her cousin Ted Murby, completed her journey from Christianity to atheism. 'Perhaps I am another person now,' Knights had written to her childhood friend Awdry Clarke in 1917. 'I expect you would say so if you saw me.'<sup>69</sup> In *The Deluge*, there is no covenant-sign of a rainbow to bear a message of hope or to dilute the horror of the narrative. The Ark of Salvation, which has been pared back to its essential outline, sails ghostlike out of the picture. The scene is suffused with darkness and the little light there is becomes incandescent as a result, highlighting the predicament of the terrified victims as they perceive the magnitude of the approaching cataclysm. Among the fleeing figures a cleric features prominently in the foreground on the right-hand side, a clear metaphor for the Church. His own flight is in vain, and he cannot lead the other protagonists to salvation; the Ark has already departed.

The bleak message of Knights' *The Deluge* is further accentuated by comparison to the other finalists' compositions, all of which focus on salvation as represented by the Ark, Noah, his household and animals (ill.87). James Wilkie's narrative, which shows an interior view of the Ark, is perhaps the most original, but all three compositions are situated in a distant past and are unobtrusive in their narratives, denying the viewer any occasion to draw parallels with the devastation of recent years.

Critics recognised the figures in Knights' painting as depicting 'present-day men and women', comparing them specifically with the popular image conveyed by the 'early residents of the Hampstead Garden Suburb', which included 'people of artistic leanings ... flannel shirted, sometimes even sandaled'.<sup>70</sup> Hampstead Garden Suburb was created in the early twentieth century by Henrietta Barnett (1851-1936), according to principles that resonated with the socialist and utopian ideals of Edward Carpenter. Knights' choice of simple clothing in plain fabrics and bare feet for all of the figures demonstrates her continuing allegiance to these ideals. Like the haystacks in the distance,



however, which serve as a reminder of the beauty of the natural world and a traditional life of cultivation, these sacrosanct ideals are shown to be under threat from the encroaching apocalypse. Carpenter, a critic of the war, believed that it was indeed ‘the spirit of enmity and inhumanity’ caused by ever-increasing industrialisation that had resulted in the ‘thunder of guns and the drenching of Europe in blood’.<sup>71</sup>

The autobiographical significance of *The Deluge* underwrites every aspect of the composition. Knights includes herself twice, with a striking central self-portrait and as the fourth figure on the left. Mabel is depicted cradling her baby son whom she will not be able to save; referring to David as ‘my babe’, she never fully recovered from the pain and anguish caused by his death in 1915. Eileen is shown as the girl being lifted to safety, while Millicent Murby is identifiable as the first figure on the left of the canvas, raising her arms to the heavens. Arnold Mason appears twice, as the first

figure climbing the hill and the fifth figure on the left (ill.79, p.86). The distinctive features of Anna Fryer can be discerned in the profile of the figure peering over the hill at the back of the picture.

While Knights avoided making any overt reference to the war, *The Deluge* is imbued with its presence. The disposition of the fleeing figures, described by the *Manchester Guardian* as ‘splitting out in sharp lines as if there had been an explosion’, is likely to have drawn upon her first-hand experience of the terror and havoc wreaked by the Zeppelin raids over Streatham, the effects of which may likewise be represented by the partially destroyed wall situated above the descending torrent of water.<sup>72</sup> The figures clambering up the hill also bring to mind images of soldiers going ‘over the top’, an association which perhaps serves to align the suffering of civilians at home with that of the men at the Front.<sup>73</sup> The same discourse is apparent in the bleakness of the setting – the

87 Photographic record of the four finalists’ entries British School at Rome Historic Archive



88 Winifred Knights and  
Arnold Mason, Ludlow, 21  
September 1920  
Photograph  
Private Collection

floodwaters and barren hills – which recalls images of the desolate landscape of no-man’s-land.<sup>74</sup>

Through the Deluge narrative, Knights expressed the pain that she had personally experienced as a result of the events of 1914–18. She also expressed a communal trauma, evident in the shared sense of humanity that characterises all of the paintings’ participants. Her distress, with no outlet for relief, had remained fragmented and unresolved. Her father’s insensibility to her mental collapse in 1917 and his subsequent incomprehension of Mabel’s ‘anxieties’ – ‘for she has been spared the additional stress which would have been involved if [her children] had been of the other sex’ – was part of a wider culture that tended to routinely devalue women’s war experience.<sup>75</sup> Allan Gwynne-Jones described to Knights how the suffering he lived through in the trenches was a life-changing experience, rendering him ‘unbelievably wise and benevolent, with each glance of one’s eyes a blessing’. He added complacently, ‘God bless you dear, you could not understand for the war was in your childhood.’<sup>76</sup>

The expression of female experience was also largely muted by the dominant male artistic culture that existed during the war. Of the 925 exhibits at the ‘War Paintings’ exhibition, only 15 paintings and a small number of sculptural models were by female artists, a reflection of the fact that, partly due to their non-combatant status, women were largely excluded from the government’s war artist schemes.<sup>77</sup> At the Slade, the momentary period of pre-eminence that women artists had enjoyed during the war was rapidly curtailed as soldiers returned from the trenches. The *Union Magazine* commented on the ‘increasing cynicism’ shown towards female students since the war’s end: ‘the other day a trill of feminine laughter from the passage provoked from one of our younger members only the stern comment “Silly Creatures!”’<sup>78</sup> Through their active participation in the war effort, both in the civilian workforce and as nurses, ambulance drivers and doctors, and having taken a step towards universal suffrage with

the Representation of the People Act (1918), women had undoubtedly made some progress, yet in many ways the war had only served to reinforce masculine values and ideals.

During the final stage of the Rome Scholarship competition, Knights was subjected to unscrupulous behaviour by two of the finalists, G. C. L. Underwood and Arthur Outlaw. According to Gwynne-Jones, they had colluded to prevent the granting of extra time to Knights, who had been in bed with a ‘septic sore throat’ from 22 July until 2 August, an act which elicited his fury: ‘What swine those other two are, it makes me hot every time I think of it.’<sup>79</sup> Knights confided to Millicent Murby, however, that ‘while their treatment did not do me any good ... it made me feel rather hard’.<sup>80</sup> *The Architectural Review* considered that if ‘the painter was strong enough to flout convention ... there must be in her picture merits which far outweigh flatness and angularity’.<sup>81</sup> The determination and sense of purpose that Knights felt throughout the competition resulted in a painting that other critics described as ‘vigorous’ and ‘bold’, qualities usually only deemed appropriate for male artists’ work.<sup>82</sup> In 1924, Henry Tonks contended, in what *The Times* described as ‘a pleasant little “feminist” note’, that women artists ‘had something peculiar to them, a faint indication of romance differing from that of man’.<sup>83</sup>

## SUCCESS

On 21 September 1920, while on holiday in Ludlow with Arnold Mason, Mary Attenborough and her father, Knights learned that she had won the British School at Rome Scholarship in Decorative Painting for 1920 (ill.88). Henry Tonks wrote to congratulate her on her picture: ‘It was by far the best illustration of the subject, and a very interesting composition.’<sup>84</sup> According to one newspaper report, ‘it was John Singer Sargent himself who insisted that the prize should be given to Miss Knights’.<sup>85</sup> It is not difficult to see why the Painting faculty awarded Knights the





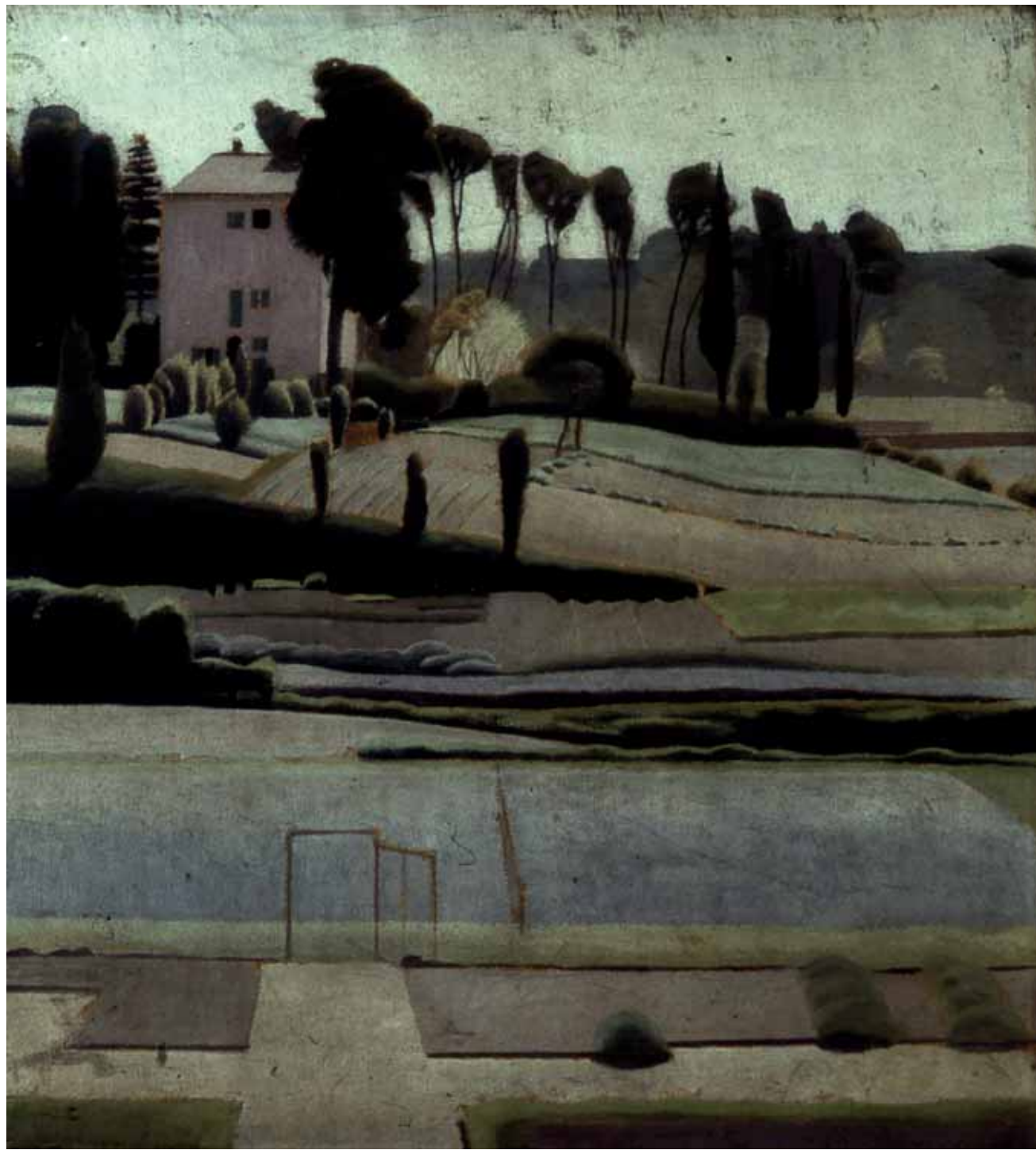
- 89 Charles K. Wilkinson  
*The Easel Chorus*, 1920  
 Watercolour and pencil  
 on paper  
 25.3 × 17.7 cm  
 (9 7/8 × 6 7/8 in)  
 UCL Art Museum,  
 University College London

scholarship, for the integrity of her design allied to its emotional content made the other three entries seem ‘very vague and piecemeal’ in comparison.<sup>86</sup> Gwynne-Jones felt that the other finalists had not done justice to the theme, writing, ‘I have such faith in your design ... & it appears to me that the others had been too warily satisfied with their designs in their anxiety to “get something done”.’<sup>87</sup> A humorous sketch by fellow Slade student Charles Wilkinson (1897–1986)

shows a determined Knights putting the final touches to her composition, with her three adversaries diminished in her presence (ill.89).

Press reports focused on Knights’ success in the context of her female status. The *Manchester Guardian* additionally considered her achievement all the greater for the fact that she was nine years younger than her opponents, ‘who had already made their reputations in public exhibitions’.<sup>88</sup> Such a positive attitude to her success was not universal. Knights related to Murby that ‘people seem to be sorry for the other men ... why should they be, they had just the same chances as I and more.’<sup>89</sup> One explanation for this commentary may have been the underlying prejudice that because Knights was a woman, and was therefore not under a necessity to make a living from her work, the prize should have gone to a man. This was a common sentiment of the times; the feminist author Irene Clephane recalled how, after the return of ex-servicemen, ‘women were degraded in the public press to the position of ruthless self-seekers depriving men and their dependents of a livelihood,’ a theme already examined by Knights in her painting *Leaving the Munitions Works* (1919; ill.52, p.60).<sup>90</sup>

Knights felt ‘a little bewildered’ by her success: ‘I came home from Ludlow on Monday as Mother seemed rather anxious about newspapers and such things and I found her in an over-excited state and we have both had a rather trying time.’<sup>91</sup> Mabel could hardly contain her pride, writing to Evelyn Shaw: ‘I should like you to know that Winifred is the Grand-daughter of the late Mr. Thomas Murby, Educational Publisher and Composer of Children’s music. I mention this because I feel so sure it would be of interest to so many people in the musical as well as the art world.’<sup>92</sup> She took Knights to the society photographer Paul Laib (1869–1958) to have her picture taken to send to the papers (ill.175, p.181). This photograph was published in the *Daily Sketch*, which confused Knights’ name with her mother’s middle name in its caption: ‘We take our hat off to Miss Gertrude Knights for looking the part as winner of the Rome Scholarship in Decorative Painting’.<sup>93</sup>



## CHAPTER SEVEN

## ITALY, PART I: 1920–1921

‘THE WONDERFUL WEDDING CAKE, ALSO KNOWN AS THE TOMB, ALSO KNOWN AS THE BRITISH SCHOOL AT ROME’<sup>1</sup>

90 A view to the east from the British School at Rome, 1921  
Oil on panel  
26 × 23.8 cm  
(10 ¼ × 9 ⅜ in)  
Private Collection

91 The British School at Rome, photograph taken by Winifred Knights, 1920  
Private Collection

**O**n 25 October 1920, Thomas Ashby (1874–1931), the Director of the British School at Rome (BSR), received the following telegram: ‘Miss Knights is leaving London ... with her Aunt Miss Murby. They will stay a night or two in Paris and will telegraph to you from there the time of their arrival in Rome.’<sup>2</sup> Nervous about undertaking the journey alone, Knights was relieved when Murby suggested herself as a travelling companion, writing, ‘you are a dear to come out with me, it’s just what I longed for.’<sup>3</sup> After a rough crossing from Dover, they arrived in Calais where everything ‘seemed very strange ... but we had a very nice journey ... to Paris in a carriage upholstered in pale grey with white lace coverings’. In Paris they visited Notre Dame, the Sainte-Chapelle and the Louvre Museum, ‘where I saw all the pictures I wanted to’, before setting out on the final journey to Rome.<sup>4</sup>

The journey offered a broad perspective to the two women, who were armed with air cushions and travelling second class. Modane was ‘a filthy place’ and at Oulx they had to abandon their train because of floods and ‘struggle over a bridge with our hand luggage in torrents of rain, thick snow underfoot and climbing over horrible sleepers with a tremendous rushing flood just beneath us, a horrible flimsy little temporary bridge and swarms of panic stricken people’. After Pisa, the weather

improved and Knights noticed ‘little white towns clustered on the hills ... and the sweet scent of the air. It is quite different to anything in England.’ She described their carriage as full of ‘wine drinking peasants that flopped all over the place and hardly left us any room. Poor Auntie Milli[cent] and I were sick to death of it all.’<sup>5</sup>

As Knights and Murby rode in a ‘queer little cab’ from Termini Station in Rome to the Valle Giulia, they marvelled at ‘the great tall palaces and immense fountains splashing’. Describing the Lutyens-designed facade of the BSR as ‘a wonderful wedding cake’ (ill.91), Knights found it ‘so comforting to come back to English people after all the shrieking foreigners’.<sup>6</sup> Her unfurnished studio appeared ‘just like a tomb, dreadful place at present’, but she loved her ‘dear little bedroom with a window with green shutters and a lovely comfy bed’.<sup>7</sup>

## STAFF AND SCHOLARS

Ashby, who had been the Director of the BSR since 1906, was a renowned topographer, archaeologist, art historian, bibliophile and photographer.<sup>8</sup> Although he was a shy man who lacked social skills, Knights developed a deep fondness for him, teaching him to dance and accompanying him on tours of ancient ruins, villas, aqueducts and towns, during



which 'he was quite, quite happy ... running down holes & Roman drains like a terrier'.<sup>9</sup> The Assistant Director, Eugénie Sellers Strong (1860–1943), was considered to be 'the most distinguished woman scholar to be found anywhere today'.<sup>10</sup> Acting as administrator and hostess, as well as scholar and lecturer, Strong aimed 'to make the British School at Rome representative of English interest in Italy, and so be of some great patriotic use'.<sup>11</sup> Although Knights admired Strong's scholarship and intellect, she found her 'extraordinarily selfish'. In time, however, the two women established a friendship, Knights writing, 'Mrs Strong is much better now she knows she can't bully me.'<sup>12</sup>

Thirteen scholars were in residence when Knights arrived, among them Colin Gill and John Benson (Painting), Alfred Hardiman (Sculpture), Job Nixon (Engraving), F. O. Lawrence (Architecture) and various classicists, historians and archaeologists. Knights found that the painters 'were rather in the background ... that's the pity of Mrs. Strong and Ashby being archaeologists'.<sup>13</sup> She despised the archaeologists, who 'get my goat, they are all so darned superior, & clever, they always talk shop', and found that the two female classicists were 'just the type I expected (you know)'.<sup>14</sup> The social activities hosted at the BSR, in particular dances and fancy-dress balls, were, however, an opportunity for all

the scholars to come together, and even the most serious amongst them appear to have succumbed to frivolity (ill.92). Knights loved designing and making costumes for these occasions, which she sketched and described in detail in her letters home (ill.93).

Knights' beauty and striking persona attracted attention from the moment she arrived. Evelyn Shaw, the BSR's Honorary General Secretary, informed Ashby that 'Nixon has been worrying her, i.e. he has been making love to her'.<sup>15</sup> Joaquín Valverde Lasarte (1896–1982), a scholar at the Spanish Academy, had 'swept her off her feet and proposed marriage'.<sup>16</sup> 'I have had lots of love affairs you never dreamed of Mum dear,' she confided. 'An engagement ring is no protection from artists.'<sup>17</sup> Knights discovered that in Italy she could lead a more instinctive life based on fidelity to her own emotions. D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930) expressed a similar sentiment in 1913 when he wrote, 'One must love Italy, if one has lived there. It is so non-moral. It leaves the soul so free.'<sup>18</sup> After reading *Twilight in Italy* (1916) and *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), Knights declared that Lawrence 'gets Italy perfectly, it is almost like being there ... most philistines say he is sexual and immoral and all sorts of damned rot. I may be lacking in something but I can't see what they mean.'<sup>19</sup> A two-week unauthorised trip to Arezzo with John Benson resulted in Knights being severely reprimanded, and

- 92 Fancy-dress ball at the American Academy in Rome, 1921  
Photograph  
British School at Rome  
Historic Archive

- 93 Design for the artist's fancy dress, 1921  
Pencil on paper  
28 × 21 cm (11 × 8 ¼ in)  
Private Collection

Opposite:

- 94 Colin Gill  
*Jane*, 1921  
Pencil on paper  
43.8 × 32.4 cm  
(17 ¼ × 12 ¾ in)  
Private Collection





only the intervention of her mother ensured the episode subsided without further consequences: 'With regard to her morals ... if she has a spark of her parents in her she can be trusted implicitly.'<sup>20</sup>

During her first year, Knights formed a close friendship with Vera Southby (1895–1987), 'a tall, very pretty girl', and a former student of the Chelsea Polytechnic School of Art who was staying at the BSR on a year's travelling scholarship.<sup>21</sup> She also spent much time with Colin Gill, attending balls, the Russian Ballet and the opera, visiting flower markets and making trips to the seaside. In early 1921, Knights wrote that 'Gill is doing a very nice drawing of me, I had to let him, he asked so nicely.'<sup>22</sup> Gill's pencil portrait depicts Knights from the waist up, wearing the broad-brimmed black felt hat that would become the signature of the persona she adopted in Rome (ill.94). Knights produced a sensitive, reciprocal portrait study of Gill (1921, private collection), in which he is shown in a three-quarters view, his eyes tilted deferentially away from his enchantress; despite being married with a son, Gill developed a passionate love for Knights, sending her love letters and sonnets which she kept all her life: 'My God, you are that to me that only happens once in life and I cannot have you.'<sup>23</sup>

Although there was no consistent educational policy at the BSR – 'we shall be able to do what we like, it is very free here' – during her three-year scholarship Knights received numerous visits from Faculty members, sent out to Rome to monitor scholars' progress.<sup>24</sup> In 1923, D. Y. Cameron, who was to become a keen supporter of Knights' work, reported that 'her pictures filled me with joy – there are big things in store for [her]'.<sup>25</sup> Evelyn Shaw provided the vital link between the scholars and the Faculties, giving some guidance through memorandums and 'Courses of Study': 'The first year will be generally spent in learning as much as possible of the art, language and history of the country and making sketches and preparing for the Decoration which will be expected from the student at the end of the Second Year.'<sup>26</sup>

During their first month in Rome, Knights and Murby (who was staying in Eugénie Strong's apartment at the BSR), frequently accompanied by Gill, Nixon and Southby, visited the museums and monuments of Rome, including 'the Colosseum, Forum, St Peter's, Vatican, Appian way, Palatine Hill and Catacombs ... also various churches and museums and the Colonna Gallery'.<sup>27</sup> An intriguing

95 Job Nixon  
*The Temple of Venus and  
Roma, Rome, 1921*  
Engraving and drypoint  
20 × 35.5 cm (7 7/8 × 14 in)  
Private Collection

vignette of these outings is captured in Job Nixon's *The Temple of Venus and Roma*, c.1921, which depicts Knights, accompanied by her aunt, seated sketching in the foreground (ill.95). Knights' experience of Rome, however, failed to match the expectations that she had brought from home and her letters soon conveyed a feeling of disappointment: 'I got rather oppressed by the Roman ruins and general air of archaeology, broken pots & bits of mosaic ... Rome is a lovely place for a time, but not alive and if you are not careful you sink down into a stodgy comfortable state and lose all energy and will to do work.'<sup>28</sup>

Since the establishment of the Rome Scholarships in 1912, the question as to whether 'Rome was the most suitable art centre for the environment and mental development of young British students' had been much debated.<sup>29</sup> In 1910, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944), the founder of the Futurist Movement, had identified the commercial cities of Genoa, Turin and Milan as 'the new renescent Italy', while Paris, Munich, Vienna and Berlin were considered the vital centres of modern art.<sup>30</sup> A younger generation of British artists thought Rome was an artistic backwater and the BSR an anachronism that exemplified an outmoded era of study and practice which could only impede, not aid, personal artistic development. Mark Gertler discouraged Dora Carrington from applying for the 1914 scholarship, citing the importance of working in 'cities that have a future, not merely a past, you mustn't be out of things'.<sup>31</sup>

In a 1924 pamphlet published by the BSR, Evelyn Shaw justified the choice of Rome, explaining that for 'Monumental Art' there was no other city 'whose traditions and atmosphere offered ... the most advantages for final training'.<sup>32</sup> Underlying the creation of the scholarships was the desire to preserve the 'classical tradition' against the alarming encroachment of modernism, a sentiment clearly expressed by the President of the Council of the BSR, Prince Arthur of Connaught, when he spoke of the urgent need for artists 'to follow a little more closely in the footsteps of the old masters

instead of indulging in the fantastic vagaries of artistic licence which we see occasionally in exhibitions of modern art at the present time'.<sup>33</sup>

## THE CAMPAGNA

Although Marinetti had criticised John Ruskin for 'his morbid dreams of primitive rustic life', for most British travellers Italy continued to represent a rural idyll whose traditions remained unchanged by the passage of time.<sup>34</sup> In a survey account of books about Italy by British writers, Thomas Ashby's close friend James Sully confirmed that the majority sought to conjure up a vision of Arcadia, containing 'all the allurements of her sunny climate, of her natural scenery and of her fruits and flowers', to bestow upon the reader 'a flood of perceptions with sentiment'.<sup>35</sup> Through the window of their carriage just beyond Genoa, Knights and Murby had caught the first glimpse of the Italy they had 'dreamed of': 'yellow and pink houses, grey olive groves, stretches of shining sea, and glorious warmth'.<sup>36</sup> Knights' knowledge of Italian Renaissance painting further evoked the country she now longed to discover.

It was in the semi-rural countryside around the BSR that Knights first identified 'some nice bits to paint ... lots of lovely country houses, pale pink in colour and farmyards & olive trees only a few minutes away'.<sup>37</sup> From her bedroom window, she painted a view to the east (ill.90, p.98), of 'a pink house & some trees, cypresses'.<sup>38</sup> The countryside, with its mounds, paths and neatly cultivated geometric plots of land divided by hedges, is rendered with loose but precisely orchestrated brushwork. While the sky remains uniform, a lighter palette of pinks, pale blues, greys and greens reveals Knights' response to the southern light.

A far reaching view of the Campagna Romana – the countryside surrounding the city – from a vantage point near Fiano Romano, looking South West towards the Alban Hills and the Apennines with the tree crested hill of Monterotondo to the left,



96 *Italian Landscape*, 1921

Oil on board  
30.5 x 32.4 cm  
(12 x 12 ¾ in)  
Tate





was to provide the subject for another composition (ill.96): 'This afternoon I went to the country . . . and began a landscape with a farm in the foreground and mountains in the distance.'<sup>39</sup> Thomas Ashby, who 'for some thirty years had devoted to the exploration of the Campagna the prime of his physical powers', inspired his students with his scholarship and his emotional attachment to the area.<sup>40</sup> Knights' painting captures the many qualities Ashby held so dear: 'The wonderful lights of sunrise and sunset, the atmosphere, so clear without ever being hard, the background of mighty mountains to the East, of lesser hills out to the North and South'.<sup>41</sup> Although Ashby considered that 'much beauty is still left', he lamented the sweeping changes that had taken place in the Campagna since Rome had become the capital of the kingdom of Italy in 1871, in particular the reclamation of land for cultivation through the drainage of marshy areas near to the Tiber, and the associated building of modern farmhouses, stables and storehouses.<sup>42</sup> Knights accompanied Ashby on a tour of the Campagna in 1921, writing that 'it was lovely but very tiring, all up and down hills and over ploughed fields but we found some lovely bits'.<sup>43</sup>

Ashby's scholarship extended to a profound knowledge about artistic representations of the Campagna Romana, which he admired not only for their 'artistic beauty' but also for their

'intrinsic interest' as topographical records.<sup>44</sup> His large collection of black-and-white reproductions was made available to students and in 1921 he informed Shaw that Knights 'was very interested in my photographs of Turner's drawings'.<sup>45</sup> Unlike Turner's views of the Campagna, consisting of vast uncultivated spaces, distant hills and isolated ruins, usually devoid of figures, Knights' interest lay in the beauty of the living landscape and its inhabitants, whom she depicted with immediate intuitive understanding.

'The Tiber Picture', as Knights referred to it, was more specifically described by Thomas Monnington in 1958 as 'A View of the River Tiber from the outskirts of Rome to the North'.<sup>46</sup> In common with her pre-Rome work, however, compositional purity took precedence over a faithful representation of the setting. The inclusion of a figure group with father, mother and child may indicate that Knights was additionally exploring the biblical narrative of the Flight into Egypt. Claude Lorrain (c.1600–82), who Ashby believed 'caught the spirit of Rome and the Campagna like few other men', depicted the Flight set within the Campagna many times, reproductions of which works also formed part of Ashby's collection.<sup>47</sup> For Knights, however, as for Lorrain, the religious theme was secondary to an Arcadian vision and the study of light and atmosphere.

97 Landscape study, Italy, with colour notes, 1921  
Pencil on paper  
14 x 28 cm (5 ½ x 11 in)  
Collection of  
Nancy Balaban

A newly-built farmhouse located above the Tiber, whose low course winds along a broad plain of cultivated fields divided by walls and hedges, provides the focal point of the composition. Sun and clouds are absent from the sky, but the fading light give a sense of early evening, while the rows of haystacks, now a favourite motif for Knights, situate the painting during harvest time. Clerics, visible below the farmhouse, were a common sight during the harvest period, when they came to perform mass from altar-carts for the many itinerant workers. A female peasant, wearing local costume – consisting of long skirt, full-sleeved blouse and black bodice – stands in front of the farmhouse while a male figure reaps. In the foreground, a mother, whose coral necklace and *ciocce* (raw skin sandals tied with leather straps) were typical peasant attire, nurses her baby while a man rests alongside. Knights would have witnessed many rural women breastfeeding in the Campagna; traditionally they kept their children with them in the fields until they were about 18 months old.<sup>48</sup> The image of breastfeeding – a symbol of the fecundity of nature and the bond that is forged between mother and child – is extended in Knights' picture to encompass the unity that exists between the peasants and their natural surroundings. On witnessing a similar scene in the Campagna Romana, Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832) remarked on the devotion of the nursing peasant woman, whose interest in 'the present moment was the whole of her existence'.<sup>49</sup>

It is likely that the family group which Knights portrays formed part of 'the temporary inhabitants of the Campagna' (known locally as *Braccianti*) who travelled from the Apennines, Sub-Apennines and the Abruzzi to work during harvest time.<sup>50</sup> They stayed overnight in *Capanne* (traditional huts made with a chestnut wood frame and built up with straw and broom), two examples of which are visible to the right of the picture. Knights was deeply interested in vernacular details such as these huts, collecting postcards of them and recording

them in a sketch (1921, private collection). Ashby compiled an extensive photographic archive documenting the customs and dress of peasants, fearing that rural traditions were under threat from the transformations that were sweeping away old customs and practices.<sup>51</sup> That Job Nixon also made these migratory peasants the subject of a picture (1921, private collection) suggests that Ashby encouraged scholars to take a special interest in their heritage.

In 1922, the Tate acquired Knights' picture, a great accolade for the 23-year-old artist. With characteristic modesty, she wrote to Shaw: 'It is good of you to arrange about the Tiber picture ... I do wish I had a better thing for them. But if they like it then I can do nothing else but approve, and I fully appreciate the honour conferred on me.'<sup>52</sup> When Knights' Slade friend James Wilkie saw the picture hanging at the gallery, he congratulated her for 'mastering the beautiful Italian landscape ... it all appears magnificent and Priestly'. He also noted how she had 'carried the spirit of the Great School into your picture of the Tiber ... it is splendid to have a revival of such a fine tradition and for you to be the Author, I bow in adoration of your powers.'<sup>53</sup>

## EXPLORING ITALY

The ancient town of Tivoli, in the Lazio about 19 miles northeast of Rome, became one of Knights' favourite places to visit. In early 1921, Evelyn Shaw, during a visit to the BSR, took a group of students to lunch at the Hotel Sybil, where they sat 'on a terrace under the Temple of Vesta ... brilliant sunshine & the sound of the waterfalls'.<sup>54</sup> They visited the sixteenth-century gardens of the Villa d'Este, which were 'built by Fairies, all waterfalls & cypress trees, we spent all the afternoon wandering through the many alleys, one with a hundred fountains, dear little things'.<sup>55</sup> Water permeated the gardens in the form of fountains, cascades, channels and ponds, and Ashby was



98 The Fountain of Ovate,  
Villa d'Este, Tivoli, 1921  
Oil on panel  
12 × 14.8 cm (4 ¾ × 5 ⅞ in)  
Collection of Robert Bates

99 Figure group in a landscape,  
Italy, 1921  
Watercolour over pencil  
on paper  
38.2 × 31.9 cm  
(15 × 12 ½ in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London





100 Study of a sawfly orchid,  
Rome, 1921  
Gouache over pencil on  
paper  
16 x 9 cm (6 ¼ x 3 ½ in)  
Private Collection

keen to direct scholars' attention to the threat posed by the diminution of the flow of water from the River Aniene caused by the requirements of modern industry: 'The Villa d'Este will lose half its charm if its fountains are deprived of their supply, which is the source of their life.'<sup>56</sup> Making use of the swift, broader technique of her previous plein air work, Knights painted a tiny picture of the Villa's oldest fountain, the Fountain of Ovate (or Fountain of Tivoli) with its concave arcade, delighting in the veil-like effect of the water's overflow (ill.98).

For Sir Augustus Moore Daniel (1866–1950), former Assistant Director of the BSR (1906–07) and later Director of The National Gallery (1929–33), it was perfectly evident that the Roman heritage had failed to inspire Knights. On a visit to the School in 1921, he reported to Henry Tonks that she 'had not done much, some drawings & a landscape sketch, but she felt Rome so strange & disturbing that she had not found anything to her mind'. He added that 'the Florentine Quattrocento painters are those whose works most appeal to the Slade – for their passion for drawing & their use of the model. And I found curiously in mentioning a female portrait by Piero di Cosimo in the Corsini Gallery, she remembered it at once & delighted in it.'<sup>57</sup> For Knights, an opportunity to see the works of her 'beloved Masaccio, Giotto & all the rest of the blessed company' came in March 1921, when Colin Gill and his sister Marjory (1897–1976) invited her to join them on a tour of Italy.<sup>58</sup> Marjory had just completed a diploma in Horticulture at the University College of Reading and had been given permission to stay at the BSR to make use of the library, which held many rare books on landscape gardening.

Starting their tour at the medieval town of Ronciglione in the Cimini Mountains, Knights and the Gills set off on foot 'through beautiful country to Soriano, Caprarola, Bagnaia and Viterbo' (ill.99).<sup>59</sup> They were joined halfway by Reginald Clifford Allen, 'a ripping man' who had been a

prominent pacifist during the war. They visited the gardens of the Villa Farnese and the Villa Lante, admiring the geometric formations with shorn edges of box, alleys of laurel and myrtle, shaded walks, grottoes, loggias and woven arbours. Marjory Gill shared her knowledge of plants with Knights, who delighted in sketching the masses of wild flowers in the woods and meadows while her new friend measured and took notes (ill.100). They took a bus to Orvieto, which was 'hardly a real place, the houses, the people, everything is different on that strange rock', and stayed 'three happy days', visiting the Luca Signorelli frescoes in the Capella Nuova. Knights wrote to Murby that when they were awakened one night by 'the most delicious sounds of a violin & a flute', she 'nearly wept with the beauty of it'.<sup>60</sup> They then visited Assisi, where 'after seeing the Giotto frescoes, we had lunch & climbed up to the old castle and sat under the walls in the hot sun on a grass bank completed with those lovely pink anemones'.<sup>61</sup>

In Florence, they took rooms in a *pensione* overlooking the Arno: 'every morning we fling open our window and lean out in the sunshine and look at the houses on the opposite side and beyond them to the top hillside covered with olives and cypresses'.<sup>62</sup> Soon after their arrival rioting broke out between Socialists and Fascists. In a rare mention of the social conflicts and political instabilities that then racked Italy, Knights wrote: 'The first few days it seemed very grim & full of all its old tragedies and people went about rather fearful ... but terror suits it.'<sup>63</sup> As soon as the rioting subsided, Knights set out to discover the city that she most closely associated with the early Renaissance artists whom she so admired, writing, 'I love Florence, it is much more alive & beautiful than Rome, and the mass of pictures!!! & lovely frescoes in the churches!!!'<sup>64</sup> At the monastery of San Marco she admired the frescoes by Fra Angelico and 'went to Savonarola's cell & touched his desk and the chair he sat on'.<sup>65</sup> The Benozzo Gozzoli frescoes in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi

were ‘wonderfully preserved and the colours are scarlet, gold & pale greys & greens’. She was also delighted to see Andrea del Verrocchio’s *Putto with Fish* in the courtyard of the Palazza Signoria – ‘a delicate beautiful little thing just like a butterfly settled on that fountain in that gloomy courtyard’; she had used the figure as a model for her fleeing child in *The Deluge*. They visited the Uffizi, where she particularly admired Botticelli’s *Primavera* (c.1482) and drawings by Leonardo da Vinci. On her return to Rome, she informed Shaw that ‘I have learnt a great deal in these last three weeks after seeing Giotto & all the lovely things at Florence, & I feel happier & more sure of the course I am going to take in painting’.<sup>66</sup>

During the tour, Knights bought ‘dozens of postcards’ as well as photographic reproductions of the pictures she most esteemed, the majority of which were produced by the firm Fratelli Alinari, founded in Florence in 1852.<sup>67</sup> The rich tones and consistent quality of their photographs, which were available for purchase in churches and museums, as well as from the Alinari showroom in Via Nazionale, had achieved international renown.<sup>68</sup> Often analysing them in the quiet of her studio or hotel room, and later referring back to them for inspiration, Knights retained these precious mementoes all her life in envelopes sorted by school and subject (ill.83, p.90).



- 101 Anticoli Corrado, 1921.  
Sitters include Winifred Knights, Colin Gill, Marjory Gill, Lady Ottoline Morrell, Julian Ottoline Vinogradoff and Job Nixon.  
National Portrait Gallery, London

- 102 Arnold Mason  
Winifred Knights sketching in the house of Rosa Ceccarelli, Anticoli Corrado, Lazio, April 1921  
Oil on canvas board  
17 x 15 cm (6 ¾ x 5 ⅞ in)  
Private Collection

- 103 Arnold Mason  
Winifred Knights seated on a mule, Anticoli Corrado, Lazio, 1921  
Oil on canvas board  
16 x 18 cm (6 ¼ x 7 ⅞ in)  
Private Collection

## ANTICOLI CORRADO

After the joys of her excursion, Knights was disappointed to return to Rome; the sense of otherness and escape offered by the tour contrasted sharply with the overwhelming feeling of stifling familiarity at the BSR: ‘I am getting exasperated by this beastly school, how I hate it and all the people in it.’<sup>69</sup> Along with Nixon, Southby and Benson, Knights arranged to spend the summer months of 1921 at Anticoli Corrado, a beautiful hilltop village in the Lazio, about 25 miles northeast of Rome.





Having loaded up a mule cart 'with donkeys, easels, trunks, a big tin bath to wash in ... & a big umbrella', Knights travelled 12 hours to her destination.<sup>70</sup> She rented two rooms in the centre of Anticoli (ill.102), with 'bunches and bunches of orange maize heads' hanging from the low ceilings, as well as a studio 'overlooking the town and the valley below and a wonderful range of hills', which she shared with Nixon and Southby.<sup>71</sup> Colin Gill joined the party for two weeks at the beginning of May before his final departure to England to rejoin his wife and child.

Anticoli was an established artists' colony, attracting in the summer months visitors from all over Europe, who came to work with the local models and sketch the dramatic Sabine mountains with the richly cultivated valley below. Knights' first vivid impressions were of 'a fine place, the town a pigsty, you meet herds of swine roaming quite loose in every street, the hills are lovely, very sharp and bare with jagged rock showing through like teeth, it's so fierce and splendid, so are the people'.<sup>72</sup> She described a typical day to her mother: 'you tame lizards & bath in a fountain, pose your models in the garden, eat quantities of ripe peaches & figs etc. and have a gorgeous time.'<sup>73</sup> Knights greatly admired the Anticoli women, who she described as 'beautiful things, so brown & tall, lovely round

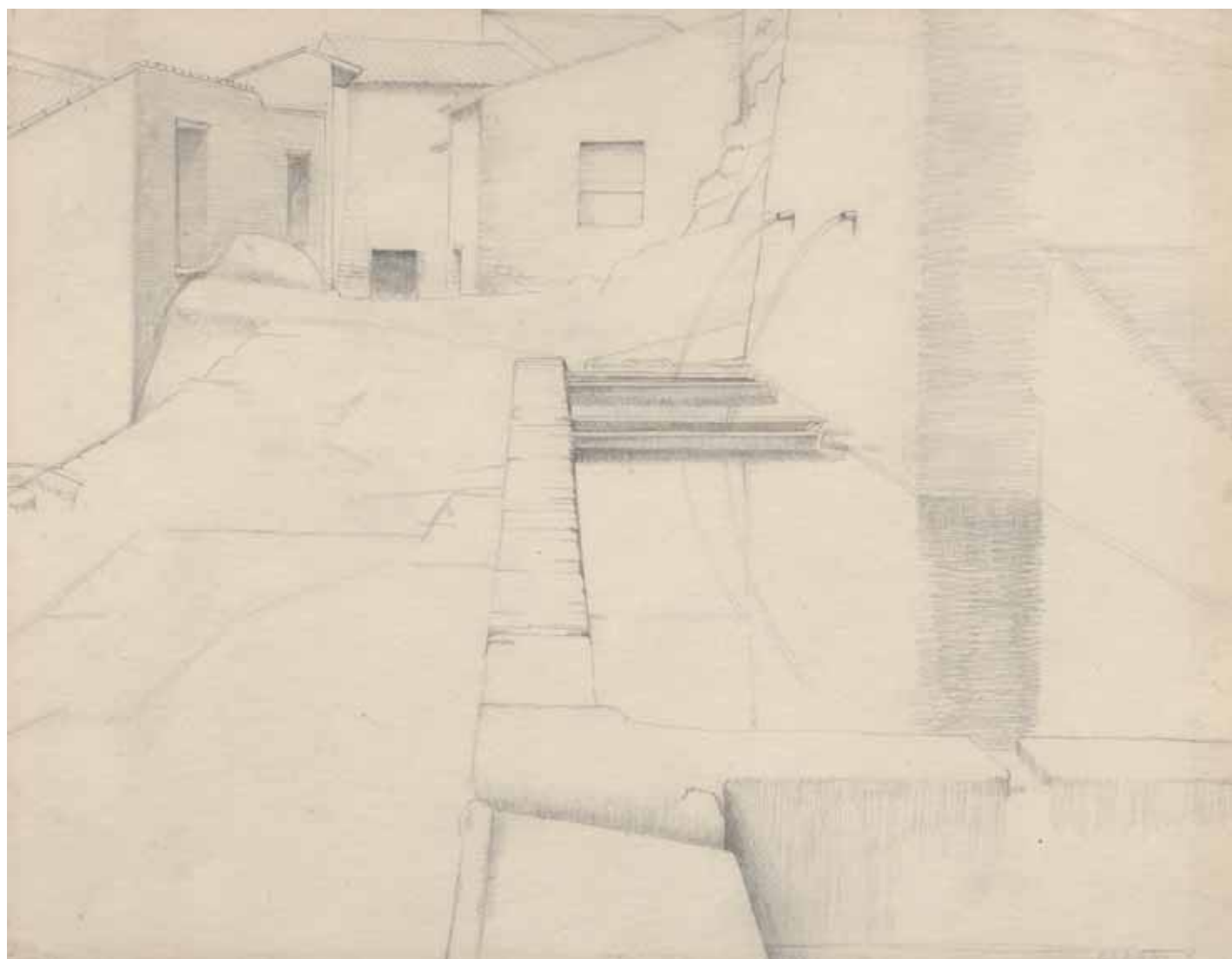
breasts & skirts like ballet dancers'. She ordered a traditional costume consisting of 'very full skirt, full sleeved blouse & corset outside ... sandals all unprepared, hide with the hair on'. To complete her new persona, she purchased a coral necklace and matching earrings, as 'the peasant women have lovely fat coral beads round their necks'.<sup>74</sup>

Gill had begun the tradition of Rome Scholars spending the summer months at Anticoli and *Allegro* (1921; ill.104), his third-year envoi painting, conveys a utopian vision of life at the village interwoven with lines from Milton's pastoral poem 'L'Allegro' (1645):

To many a youth, and many a maid  
Dancing in the chequer'd shade,  
And young and old come forth to play  
On a sunshine holyday.<sup>75</sup>

A letter from Gill (1921, private collection) contains a pen-and-ink drawing of Knights in her loggia awaiting his arrival; he was still in Rome completing his composition: 'I have just been up on the roof [of the BSR] to look across to your mountains, they looked beautiful enough to contain you and were blushing with pleasure at your being there ... I have been finishing your painting & have made it very like you. It's not dry enough to kiss yet, though!' Reversing the pose of

104 Colin Gill  
*Allegro*, 1921  
Oil on canvas  
117 x 228.5 cm (46 x 90 in)  
Private Collection



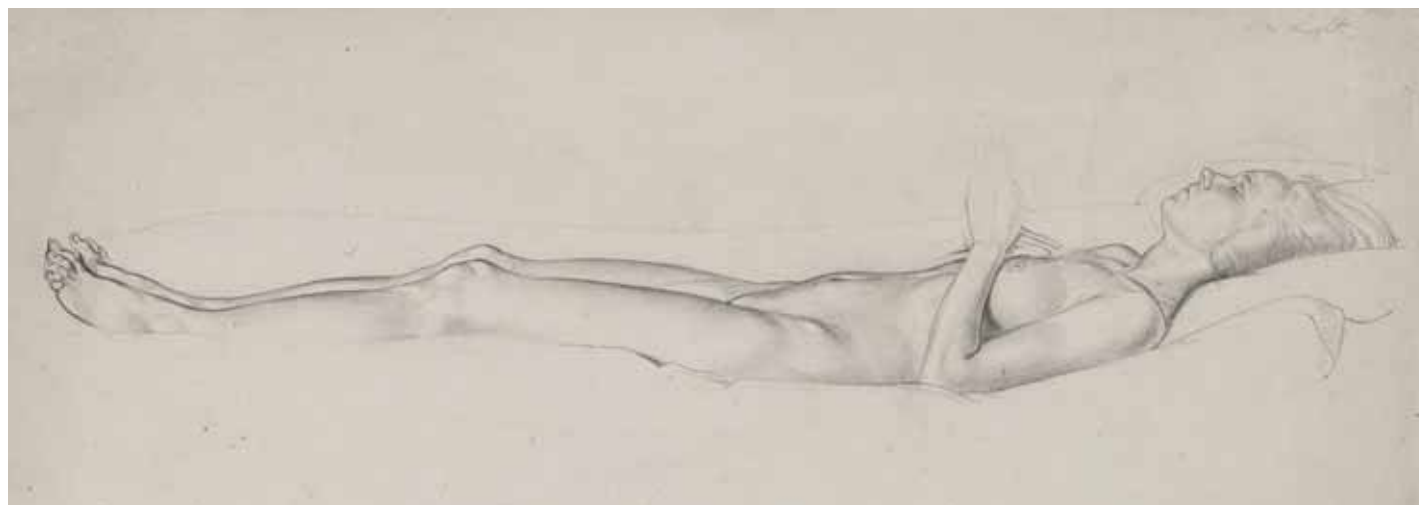
105 Study of water basins at Anticoli Corrado, Lazio, 1921  
Pencil on paper  
21.1 × 26.9 cm  
(8 ¼ × 10 ⅝ in)  
Private Collection

his earlier drawing (ill.94, p.100), Gill painted a full-length portrait of Knights holding a birdcage on the left of *Allegro*, replacing an earlier depiction of a crucifix. In a sonnet, Gill referred to his spirit as 'bound' by his love for Knights: 'She holds my heart like a bird in a cage'.<sup>76</sup>

The new environment of Anticoli Corrado – the sunshine, the natural beauty of the landscape, the food and wine, the warm-hearted nature of its inhabitants and above all the traditional way of life untainted by industrialisation and modernity – revitalised Knights' spirit. 'I have done more work these last few days than all the time since I left you,' she wrote to her mother. 'There is heaps of work here, the place is bursting with things

to do' (ill.105).<sup>77</sup> As well as sketching the village, 'all grey houses with green moss coloured roofs just springing out of the precipice like a bunch of toadstools', she began work on a composition based on the resurrection of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21–43, Matthew 9:18–26, Luke 8:40–56).<sup>78</sup> It is likely that the choice of subject reflected the resurrection in Knights' own consciousness brought about by the regenerative power of her surroundings, a riposte to the desolate message of *The Deluge* (ill.82). The subject may also have stirred up feelings connected with her brother's early death; on the hills surrounding Anticoli she gathered wild flowers and sent them home, asking her mother to place them on David's tomb.<sup>79</sup>





Knights envisaged the setting of the composition as her own bedroom in Anticoli with its 'old bed and lovely old beams across the ceiling'.<sup>80</sup> Although the painting was never completed, the ideas behind the composition were clearly highly evolved (ills 107 and 109), with Nixon modelling for Peter, a visiting painter, Charles Cundall (1890–1971), for John; her landlady Maria for the mother, and 'I have got a model coming for the daughter' (ill.106).<sup>81</sup> Arnold Mason, who had obtained permission from Knights' father to join her for the summer, was modelling for Jesus.

Inspiration for the composition – Knights' first interior scene – came from Fra Angelico's predella panel *The Healing of Justinian by Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian* (1438–40), which she had seen at the monastery of San Marco in Florence. The use of flooding light from a left-hand window to illuminate the bed and the intimacy of the pared-down interior provide both paintings with the constituents of a closely observed still-life. Vittorio Carpaccio's *The Dream of St Ursula* (1495, Gallerie dell'Accademia) may also have been a reference; two prints of this composition, in colour and black-and-white, formed part of Knights' collection.

During her time in Italy, Knights favoured biblical themes for many of her paintings. Such subject matter not only provided powerful images and an easily accessible narrative, but also made a direct link between her art and the Italian Renaissance. Eugénie Strong, who believed that art divorced from religious

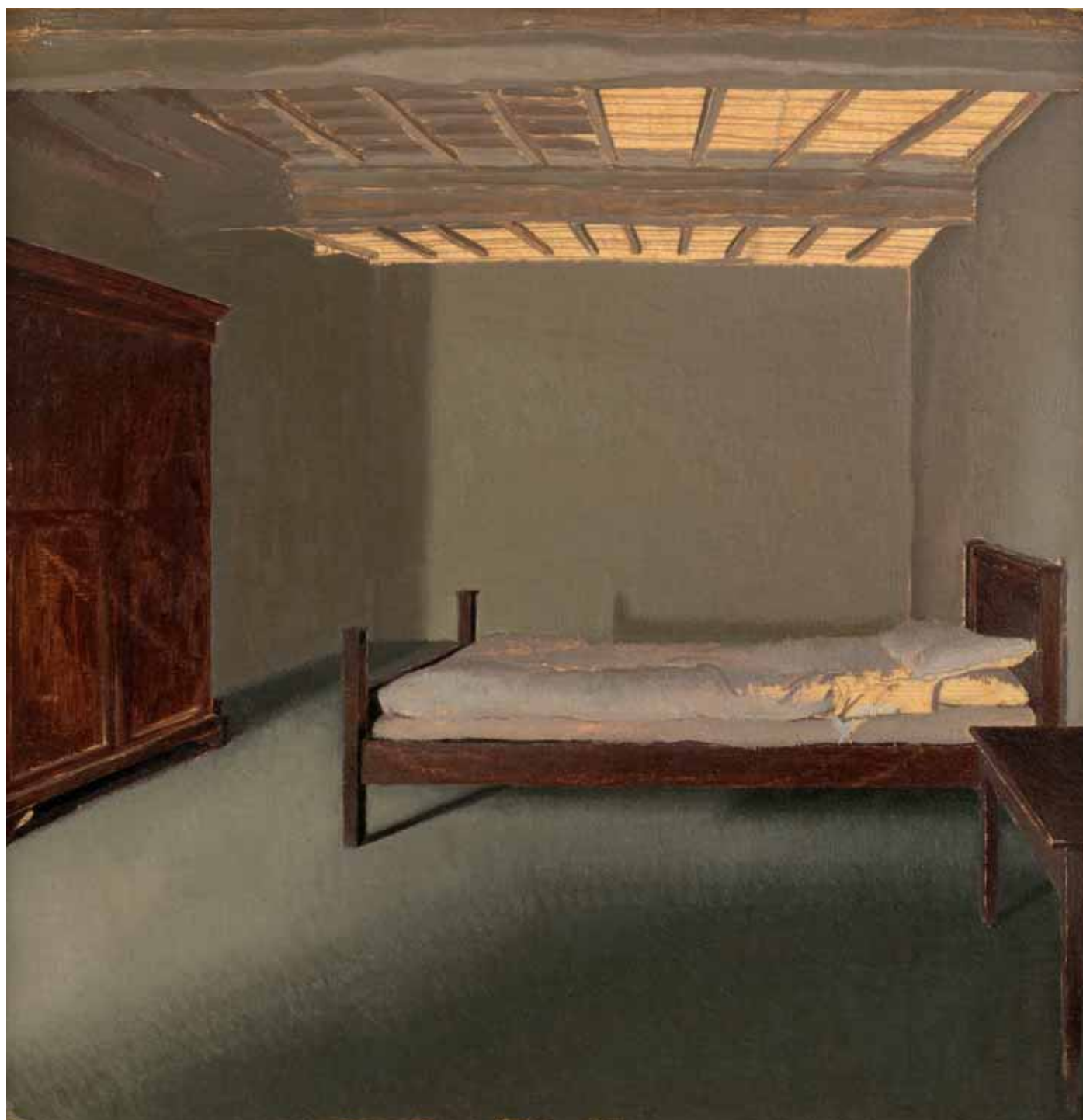
content lost 'its primary source of inspiration', and that 'the only vital art forms left to us in modern times are portraiture and landscape', may have encouraged her in her choice of subjects.<sup>82</sup> In 1921, an article in the *Architectural Review* noted a resurgence of religious subject matter since the end of the war: 'old fashions in art often recur. For a considerable time Scriptural subjects were taboo. Now they seem to have come into favour again.'<sup>83</sup> Knights' continued admiration for Stanley Spencer, which she expressed in a letter to her mother, may have reinforced her interest in fusing everyday life with religious themes.<sup>84</sup>

Knights expressed delight in the ritualistic way of life of Anticoli's inhabitants – symbolised by the Ascension Day Festa during which 'the priest and several other men [took] the entire contents of the church for a pilgrimage all round the town . . . the women follow in their best clothes, the colour is simply immense'.<sup>85</sup> She did not, however, in any way experience a revival of religious faith herself. This sentiment – exalting in the religious experience without partaking in it – was not uncommon. After seeing Giotto's St Francis cycle in Assisi during their tour of Italy, Clifford Allen was moved to write, 'I am a complete Pagan rejoicing in all the lusts of the flesh which [St Francis] eschewed, and yet I love him'.<sup>86</sup>

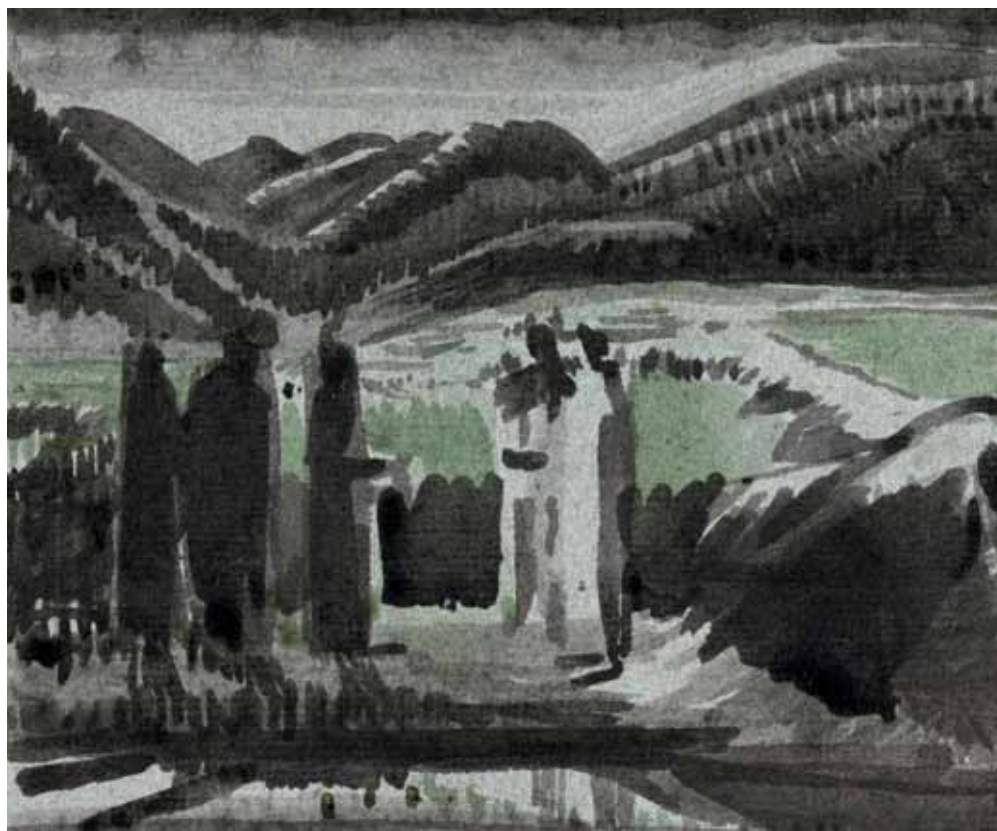
While Knights worked on *Jairus' Daughter* during the day, in the early evening she spent her time on another composition, *Paradise* (ills 108, 110 and 111), 'partly because it is an evening effect, partly because

106 Study of sleeping nude for *Jairus' Daughter*, 1921  
Pencil on paper  
26 × 41 cm  
(10 ¼ × 16 ⅛ in)  
Private Collection

107 and 108  
Compositional sketches for *Jairus' Daughter* and *Paradise*, from an illustrated letter, July 1921  
UCL Library Special Collections, University College London



109 Study for *Jairus' Daughter*,  
1921  
Oil on tracing paper  
31 × 31 cm  
(12 ¼ × 12 ¼ in)  
Collection of Anthony  
Crichton-Stuart



II0 Compositional study for  
*Paradise*, 1921  
Watercolour on blue paper  
42.3 × 23.2 cm  
(16 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 9 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in)  
The Fitzwilliam Museum,  
University of Cambridge

III Compositional study for  
*Paradise*, 1921  
Watercolour on paper,  
squared  
23.2 × 26.5 cm  
(9 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 10 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in)  
The Fitzwilliam Museum,  
University of Cambridge





112 Coastal view, Beer, Devon,  
1921  
Oil on panel  
15.2 × 19 cm (6 × 7 ½ in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

116 WINIFRED KNIGHTS



it is too hot to struggle up the hill to it in the day'. She described the composition as consisting of 'dark purple brown hills with lilac, grey rocks poking out like currants and little dark green round cushiony bushes dotted all over it. In the foreground, pale green gold cornfield half-cut & a windy silver river with a little one arched bridge & in front, some people having a very good time, some bathing, some eating & some playing musical instruments'.<sup>87</sup> 'One might be in Paradise', she exclaimed, writing of her idyllic life in Anticoli. 'There is a shepherd boy just coming down the path with a reed pipe and a flock of goats. Tonight we are going to have spinach & trout from the river ... Nightingales sing outside the door.'<sup>88</sup>

In what would become a recurrent characteristic of Knights' working process, *Paradise*, like *Jairus' Daughter*, though greatly advanced in studies of tantalising beauty, was never realised as a full-scale painting. The central theme of *Paradise*, the harmony of Knights' own communion with nature,

would, however, provide the basic outline for a later masterpiece, *The Santissima Trinita* (1924–30; ill.139, p.140). As such, the creative process through which Knights worked, though complex and ultimately dispiriting, ensured a continuity of vision.

Knights returned to England at the end of September, spending three weeks with her family at the coastal village of Beer in southeast Devon. Here she painted two *plein air* panels (ills 112 and 113), reacquainting herself with the landscape of England. In October, she received a letter from Evelyn Shaw informing her that the Painting faculty, having been 'charmed with the sincerity, feeling and thoroughness' of her work, had unanimously agreed to a renewal of her scholarship for a second year.<sup>89</sup>

113 Cliffs at Beer, Devon, 1921  
Oil and pencil on panel  
14 × 17.8 cm (5 ½ × 7 in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London



## CHAPTER EIGHT

## ITALY, PART 2: 1921–1923

‘QUIETLY ABSORBING A GREAT DEAL OF KNOWLEDGE’<sup>1</sup>

When Knights returned to Rome for her second year, on 18 November 1921, John Benson was the only other Painting Scholar now in residence, the Faculty having considered none of the submissions for the 1921 Competition of a high enough standard to merit an award being made. During her second year, Knights formed close friendships with Violet (née) Clifton White, the wife of the 1920 Sculptor Scholar, Alfred Hardiman, and with Lilian Whitehead (1893–1979), the new Engraving Scholar, with whom she had been acquainted at the Slade (ill.117).

## POMPILIA

Knights settled into Colin Gill’s old studio, which was ‘ten times more comfy’, and on a large canvas which he had left behind she began work on the required ‘Decoration’, which according to BSR regulations was ‘not to be less than 30 feet in size’.<sup>2</sup> Her choice of subject was inspired by Robert Browning’s narrative poem *The Ring and the Book* (1868–9), which recounts a seventeenth-century trial in which Count Guido Franceschini is found guilty of murdering his adulterous young wife, Pompilia Companini. More abstractly, the poem highlights Pompilia’s attempts at self-determination in defiance of the authorities of husband, Church and state.

It is unlikely that Knights progressed Pompilia beyond a few preliminary sketches (ill.115). A watercolour study presented to Marjory Gill indicates that ideas for the composition evolved around a self-portrait, with Knights, wearing her signature broad-brimmed hat, seated at the feet of Pompilia (ill.116). Through her nakedness, Pompilia, a kind of alter ego for Knights, undergoes an apotheosis in which she puts her doomed marriage behind her to ‘withdraw from earth and man/to my own soul’.<sup>3</sup>

As a Roman subject, Pompilia would have had an obvious appeal for Knights, but it is evident that there were other motivations behind her choice. Knights had developed deep misgivings about her betrothal to Arnold Mason, in a parallel to Pompilia’s dilemma. Two of her closest confidantes at this time encouraged her to extricate herself from the arrangement; Millicent Murby warned her that ‘it is wrong to bind oneself’, while Lilian Whitehead wrote, ‘I make so bold as to hope you will not marry Mason.’<sup>4</sup> Knights, however, was under pressure from her family, who were eagerly awaiting the end of her scholarship in order to formalise the marriage. When Knights travelled to Arezzo with John Benson in April 1922, Thomas Ashby recalled that ‘her people and Mr Mason who was half-engaged to her ... got anxious ... and Mr Mason came out, only two days in fact before they returned.’<sup>5</sup>

114 Compositional study for *The Marriage at Cana*, c.1922  
Oil on paper, squared  
31.1 × 35 cm  
(12 ¼ × 13 ¾ in)  
Private Collection

115 Compositional sketch for *Pompilia* from an illustrated letter, January 1922  
UCL Library Special Collections, University College London



116 Compositional study for  
*Pompilia*, 1922  
Watercolour and pencil  
on paper  
22.5 x 20 cm  
(8 7/8 x 7 7/8 in)  
Private Collection

Benson, however, was not Mason's only rival. When Thomas Monnington (1902–1976) arrived in Rome on a probationary scholarship in February 1923 and promptly fell in love with Knights, Mabel sprang into action, asking Evelyn Shaw, 'with the distraction of the young man ... will she be able to work out her desire?'<sup>6</sup> Knights, however, was delighted with the new 'distraction' and at last found the courage to break off any obligation to Mason: 'life has been very, very exciting these last three months. But I am free once more thank heavens ... engagement is a beastly word.'<sup>7</sup>

## THE MARRIAGE AT CANA

Early on in the evolution of her composition, Knights replaced *Pompilia* with a related subject –

*The Marriage at Cana* (1923, ill.118). Both narratives explore the theme of marriage; in *The Ring and the Book*, Pompilia bitterly recalls how a cynical priest preached 'the Miracle of Cana' to symbolise the value and honour a wife receives in union with her husband: 'Honoured indeed, since Christ thus weds the Church, and therefore turned water into wine.'<sup>8</sup>

The Gospel narrative of the Marriage at Cana recounts Christ's first miracle, when he transformed water into wine (John 2:1–11). In early Renaissance art, the story had a standard iconographic identity, as Knights must have known from her interest in painters such as Giotto and Fra Angelico.<sup>9</sup> While the narrative was typically situated within an interior, historical precedents for an exterior setting include Paolo Veronese's monumental version (*The Wedding Feast at Cana*, 1563, The Louvre), which Knights is likely to have seen during her visit to Paris. Julius





Schnorr von Carolsfeld's *The Marriage at Cana*, painted in Rome in 1819 (Kunsthalle, Hamburg), which features a formal Italian garden with the main banquet table set beneath a classical loggia, may have been a direct influence.

For Knights, however, the main source of inspiration was Piero della Francesca's fresco cycle *The Legend of the True Cross* (c.1452-c.1460, Basilica di San Francesco, Arezzo), which she had made a point of visiting at Arezzo in May 1922, wanting 'very much to see them ... before starting to paint my design for a Decoration'.<sup>10</sup> She had been introduced to Piero della Francesca's oeuvre in 1919 during a Slade lecture course on 'Tuscan and Umbrian Art of the Renaissance' presented by Carl Tancred Borenius. Borenius, who recommended Piero as 'the artist who surpasses all of his contemporaries', considered his work to embody all the essential qualities for two-dimensional surface decoration: 'He possesses the secret of achieving a perfect rhythm and balance in his compositions by devices of apparently the utmost simplicity and the severity of his art is wonderfully tempered by his exquisite feeling for harmony and colour.'<sup>11</sup> During one lecture, Borenius specifically praised the Arezzo cycle for its 'wonderful diffusion of radiance and crystalline clearness of tint'. He recommended that Slade students should emulate Piero's rendering of figures, in particular their

interrelationships, which remain opaque, as they occupy their own individual spaces:

They belong to a race of semi-gods rather than to that of ordinary human beings. Their movements are slow and majestic, the facial expression one of aloofness and solemnity, and all their doings receive irresistibly to us a mysterious, hieratic significance; while at the same time, in the face of this unruffled calmness we feel like stronger and freer individuals ourselves.<sup>12</sup>

Knights particularly admired the combined scene of *The Queen of Sheba in Adoration of the Wood* and *The Reception in Solomon's Palace* (ill.157, p.157), purchasing a Fratelli Alinari reproduction as well as three details of the figure groups. Assimilating the air of stillness that pervades Piero della Francesca's scene, she was also clearly influenced by more formal elements: the combination of an ideal landscape with an interior architectural setting, the arrangement of figures grouped in circular depth around Solomon and the transparent rendering of the River Shiloh, at which the Queen kneels – all find echoes in her composition.

Other sources of influence possibly include Masaccio's *Tribute Money* (1425–6, Brancacci Chapel, Florence); an analogy is discernible in the compositional construction of the scene as well as in the vignette of Peter catching the providential fish, comparable to Knights' young boy washing in a stream. The setting of the marriage table within a loggia is reminiscent of Filippino Lippi's *Esther Chosen by Ahasuerus* (c.1457–1504, Musée Condé, Chantilly), a black-and-white print of which Knights had in her collection. The resting man with bent knees in *The Marriage at Cana* (the renowned Anticoli model *Gigi il Moro*, ill.119), as well as the seated female leaning against a tree, may have been influenced by similar figures in Georges Seurat's *Dimanche d'été à la Grande Jatte* (1886, Art Institute of Chicago). The quiet monumentality and reflective mood of Seurat's

117 Winifred Knights, Violet Hardiman and Lilian Whitehead in the garden of the British School at Rome, 1922  
Photograph  
Private Collection



paintings led contemporary commentators to draw parallels to Piero della Francesca's work.<sup>13</sup>

When *The Marriage at Cana* was exhibited at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, in 1924, one critic noted 'the same dramatic tension, the same deliberation of planning, the same taste and restraint in the setting of the palette' that had made *The Deluge* so successfully modern.<sup>14</sup> For the *Morning Post*'s critic, however, the treatment of *The Marriage at Cana* was more restrained, avoiding 'the grotesque exaggeration' of recent developments in the visual arts.<sup>15</sup> While there is no evidence that Knights visited exhibitions of contemporary Italian art while she was in Rome, she kept abreast of developments in England, requesting Eugénie Strong to subscribe to *Colour Magazine* and 'most particularly to those monographs *Masters of Modern Art*' of which the library already possessed *Augustus John*.<sup>16</sup>

By August 1922, Knights' composition was progressing: 'My picture will be very beautiful. I have drawn 11 plates of melon, pink melon, 9 glasses of wine some empty, because they have run out, and 38 people.'<sup>17</sup> Using a system of strong horizontals and verticals in the form of bridges, hedges, trees, tables and benches, Knights carefully structured her composition to achieve a perfect rhythm and balance. The foreground table is set as an orthogonal in a perspective projection that leads the eye to the background table and the gardens beyond. The building to the right of the picture, with its receding parallel lines, has a perspectival coherence relating to the tables and benches in the foreground. The severity of these lines is counterbalanced by the curvilinear forms of the coral necklace, watermelon slices, jars and wine decanters. Rows of guests seated at tables are set in opposition to the circular rhythm of the group around Jesus. The restricted palette of flat colours in pale greens, pinks, browns and creams with patches of black, which serves to unify the composition, conveys an impression of faded fresco.

The meticulous planning of every detail of the scene is recorded in a large number of preparatory studies. Three sketchbooks, in the collection of

the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, contain studies of people, hands and feet, tables and chairs, tableware and landscape. Knights worked through a series of compositional studies in pencil and watercolour before resolving upon her final design (ills 114, 121 and 122). A study in oil shows a marked evolution in the palette, with the light, brighter colours of an earlier colour study replaced by a more sombre tonality (ill.123).

Calling on the same methodology employed in her previous Decorative paintings, Knights used squared-up compositional studies to create a full-sized cartoon. This drawing (ill.124), which is recorded through a photograph, bears a close compositional relationship to the final work, although the columns of the interior room, through which Knights sought to suggest a cloister, have disappeared in the final painting, as have two figures – a boy alongside the river and a man (modelled on the wood engraver E. M. O'R. Dickey), originally standing behind the master of ceremonies at the head of the main table. As in her other Decorative paintings, in the process of transfer, naturalism and detail were simplified to achieve the desired effect.

By depicting the moment before the miracle takes place, when Jesus asks the servants to 'fill the jars with water' (John 2:7), Knights places emphasis on the human over the sacred. While the wedding guests gaze intently on, a sense of drama is created through the monumental figure of the servant (modelled by Knights' sister Eileen) who bends over to fill the jugs, effectively denying the viewer any glimpse of the imminent moment of miraculous transformation. To the left of the canvas, figures washing, resting and sketching are oblivious to the miracle about to occur. Knights' presentation of Jesus, wearing a simple robe and without a halo or other divine attributes, stresses his humanity. The model for Jesus was a visiting Dutch scholar, Dr Kamstra.

Knights chose to situate the narrative in the Villa Borghese gardens, located just below the BSR. She was more usually inspired by the Italian

118 *The Marriage at Cana*, 1923

Oil on canvas  
184 × 200 cm  
(72 ½ × 78 ¾ in)  
Museum of New  
Zealand Te Papa  
Tongarewa, Wellington



- 119 Study of Gigi il Moro, three-quarter rear view reclining, for *The Marriage at Cana*, 1922  
Pencil on tracing paper  
17.6 × 26.7 cm (7 × 10 ½ in)  
British Museum

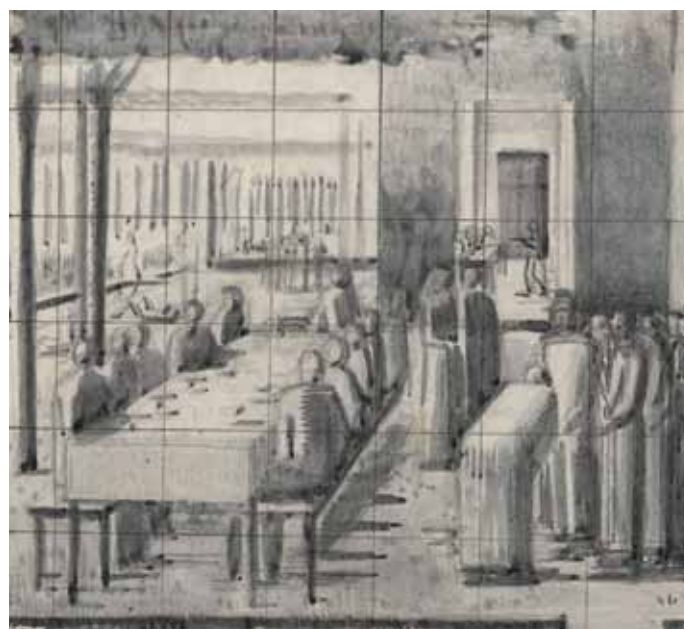
- 120 Study of a seated woman for *The Marriage at Cana*, 1922  
Pencil on paper  
25.2 × 20 cm  
(9 ⅞ × 7 ⅞ in)  
British Museum

countryside, but her decision was in part driven by circumstance. In Italy, it was not considered prudent for a woman to travel unaccompanied by a man, and, apart from her infamous trip to Arezzo with Benson and a few outings to the Campagna with Ashby, Knights spent the second year of her scholarship in Rome. 'I do wish I had a man to look after me,' she wrote to her mother. 'It is not safe for a woman.'<sup>18</sup> As a result, Knights and Whitehead spent long hours in the Borghese gardens, walking among the romantic 'ruins', fountains and avenues; sketching under the shade of oaks, ilexes and umbrella pines; and taking 'views' with Knights' portable Kodak camera. The bustling life of the gardens was the subject of a wood engraving by Whitehead, a copy of which she gave to Knights, describing the scene as 'containing trees, nursemaids and prams, family parties and old gentlemen reading newspapers'.<sup>19</sup>

While the Borghese gardens provided the setting for Knights' composition, her representation of the narrative in the manner of a realistic feast was almost certainly informed by the lunches and dinners hosted by Eugénie Strong at the BSR. Indeed, the simple tables and benches that appear in the composition are faithful representations of those that were used before Lord Esher's gift in 1924 of more imposing tables and chairs, which

are still in use today. Among the eminent guests that Knights recorded meeting at the feasts were Lord Beauchamp, Sir Rennell Rodd, Lady Ottoline Morrell, Countess Annesley and Muirhead Bone. At one such event, she described with awe the lavish food that was served: 'Hors d'oeuvres (sardines & butter & ham & then sausage slices) then veal, fried potatoes & cauliflower, then a most wondrous pudding with sponge cake, wine-soaked, and white of egg snow & drops of burnt sugar to brown it, then fruit and coffee and heaps of red wine'.<sup>20</sup>

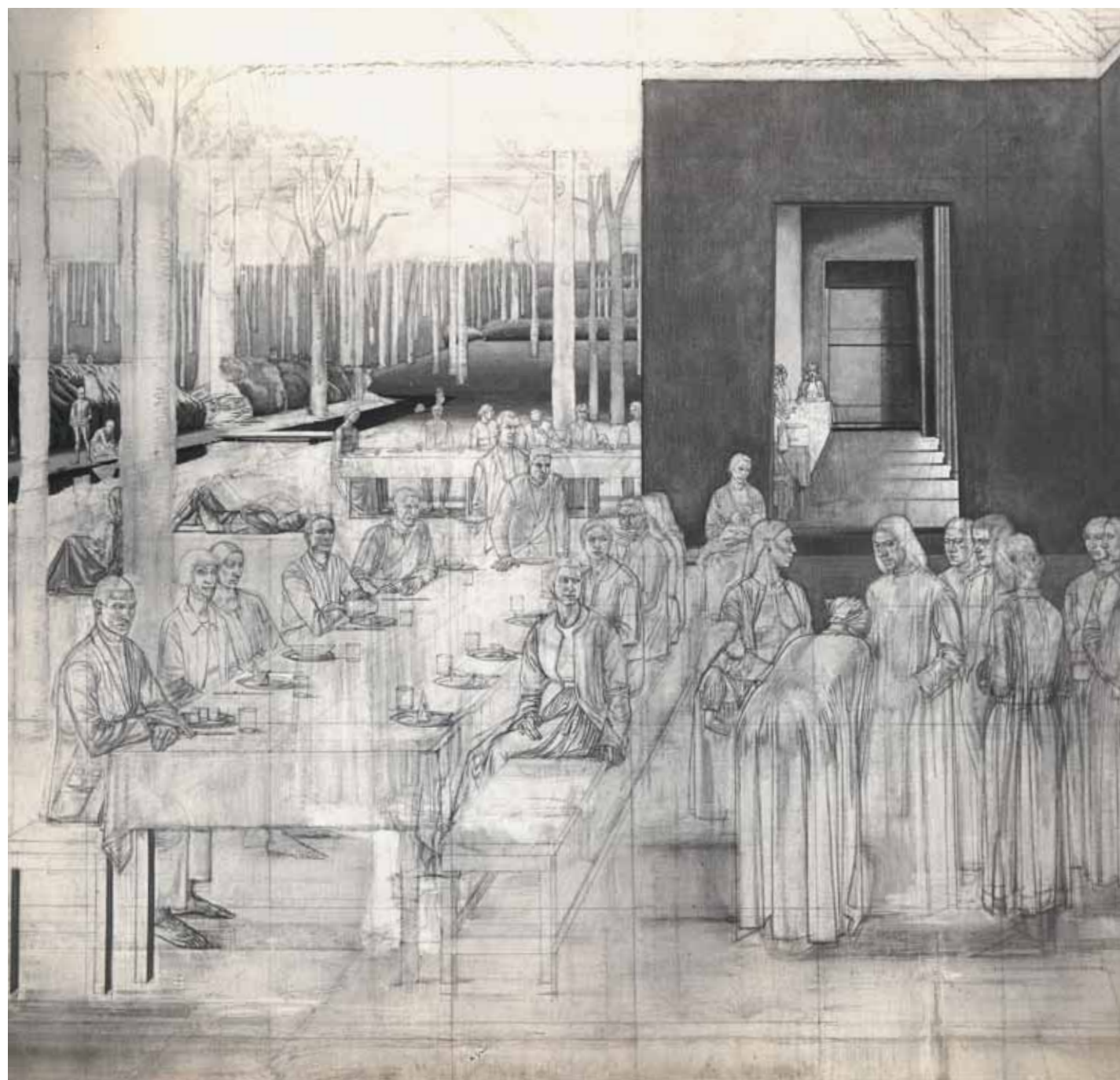
Choosing to depict a moment towards the end of the feast when the wine is running low, Knights provides the wedding guests with slices of watermelon (ill.125), reflecting the local culinary tradition in formal dining of serving fruit after the dessert course. The watermelon, whose luminous pink was described by one critic as 'the most magical effect of colour we have ever seen', presents the composition with carefully arranged focal points.<sup>21</sup> Described as 'the Roman's favourite fruit', watermelon was little known in England, and visitors to Italy delighted in describing its beauty: 'It is a sort of fruit-vegetable, and is delicious in hot weather; it tastes like sugared snow, while its rose-coloured flesh, strewn with jet-black pips, and its dark green skin, appeal to the aesthetic mind.'<sup>22</sup> At Knights' wedding feast, the guests eat the melon



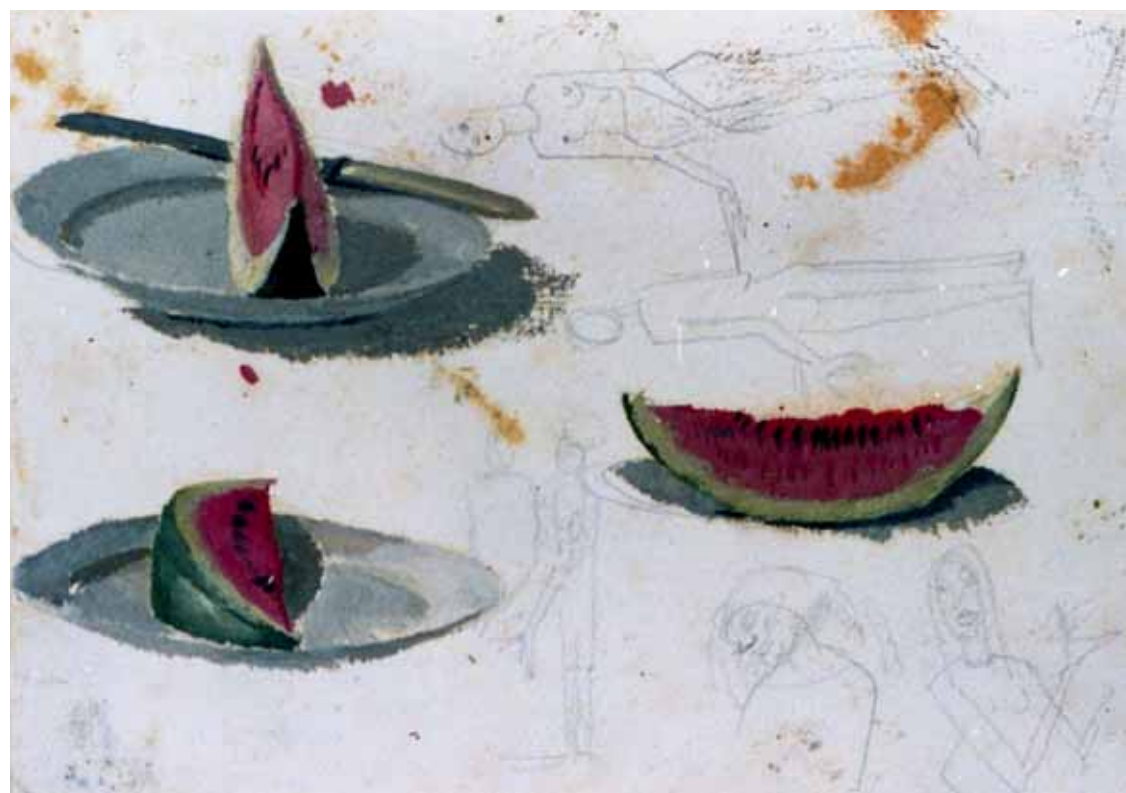
121 Compositional study for  
*The Marriage at Cana*, c.1922  
Wash on paper, squared  
15 × 16.5 cm (6 × 6 ½ in)  
Private Collection

122 Compositional study for  
*The Marriage at Cana*, c.1922  
Pencil, watercolour and  
gouache on paper  
19 × 25 cm (7 ½ × 9 ⅞ in)  
Private Collection

123 Compositional study for  
*The Marriage at Cana*, c.1922  
Thinned oil on tracing  
paper  
28 × 31 cm (11 × 12 ¼ in)  
Private Collection



124 Cartoon for *The Marriage at Cana*, 1923  
Photographic record  
British School at Rome  
Historic Archives



125 Study of watermelons  
for *The Marriage at Cana*,  
c.1922  
Oil over pencil on paper  
12.6 × 18 cm (5 × 7 in)  
Private Collection

neatly cut with a knife, or in the manner of the locals, 'who tell you laughing, as they bury their noses in a slice, a corner projecting beyond each ear: "si mangia, si beve et si lava la faccia" (you can eat, drink and wash your face with it)'.<sup>23</sup> While artists of the High Renaissance, including Caravaggio (1571–1610), frequently dwelled on the erotic associations of watermelon, contemporary literature also made use of its iconography to express sensual possibilities. In Janet Ross' *The Fourth Generation* (1912), watermelon was thought to inspire 'lusciousness' in Italian peasants, while in Axel Munthe's *The Story of San Michele* (1929) the slices of watermelon offered by an Italian maid are compared to her red lips.<sup>24</sup>

Knights includes her own likeness at each of the three tables, a reflection, perhaps, of the fact that she was always placed prominently at social functions: 'I am always seated on the honoured guest's right hand because I am the first woman to gain the scholarship and the School is very proud of me.'<sup>25</sup> While many historical depictions of the *Marriage at Cana*, such as Veronese's celebrated version, emphasise the opulence of tableware and dress, Knights' wedding

feast mirrors her own tastes for simplicity and dislike of ostentation. Initially enthralled by the BSR's social events, she soon began to perceive them as 'hateful', 'dreadful' and 'splendid time-wasters'. At one tea party, she deplored the behaviour of the millionaires' wives and Italian counts, who were 'so stupid and shallow and affected, raving for an hour on end about a pair of beastly candlesticks ... it was all money, money and I. I. I. from the Americans.'<sup>26</sup> She took solace in Hugh Walpole's *The Green Mirror* (1917), borrowed from the English Library in Rome, which relates the gradual breakdown of the tightly woven values and the conspicuous consumption of an upper-middle-class family at the turn of the century.<sup>27</sup>

On her arrival in Rome, Knights had been delighted to find that 'there is no dressing for dinner, we just change blouses or into an afternoon frock'.<sup>28</sup> The clothing worn by the majority of the guests in *The Marriage at Cana* reflects the simple and restrained dress code that Eugénie Strong established at the BSR to promote her own sartorial preferences. In 1913, Strong wrote an article for *The Times* titled 'Dress and Undress' in which she

argued for simple and comfortable clothing for working women, asking: 'so much for beauty, are we so badly off from the point of view of utility?'<sup>29</sup> Knights found that the simple clothing style she had already developed in England was perfectly adapted to her new environment and asked her mother to make up dresses for her in plain and striped cotton, 'beautifully useful and comfortable, just right for here'.<sup>30</sup> Her female friends at the school also adhered to this simpler, looser style, far removed from the tubular silhouette so fashionable at home; Lilian Whitehead described Violet Hardiman's plain clothing to Knights as 'reminiscent of yours and mine mixed up'.<sup>31</sup> In depicting her wedding guests with bare feet, Knights bestows upon the scene a sense of timelessness (appropriate to a story from the Bible), but also affirms her continuing adherence to Edward Carpenter's philosophy, which advocated liberating the feet as part of a free and natural state of being – in 1921 she recommended his writings to Colin Gill.<sup>32</sup>

Coral, which introduces key touches of accented colour in the form of a necklace worn by the lady seated in the foreground and earrings worn by the figure sketching under a tree (a self-portrait), held deep symbolism for Knights. She greatly admired the 'lovely, fat coral beads' worn by Italian peasants and purchased a chain and some earrings for herself. Colin Gill expressed his love for Knights through reference to her coral necklace:

Dreams. But perhaps to the South there's  
an isle  
Of white sand,  
Like your throat  
And around it a pink coral band  
Afloat  
On the plum-coloured sea  
If so – it is you  
You are she.<sup>33</sup>

At jewellers' shops, potential customers were frequently made aware of 'the many pictures of the

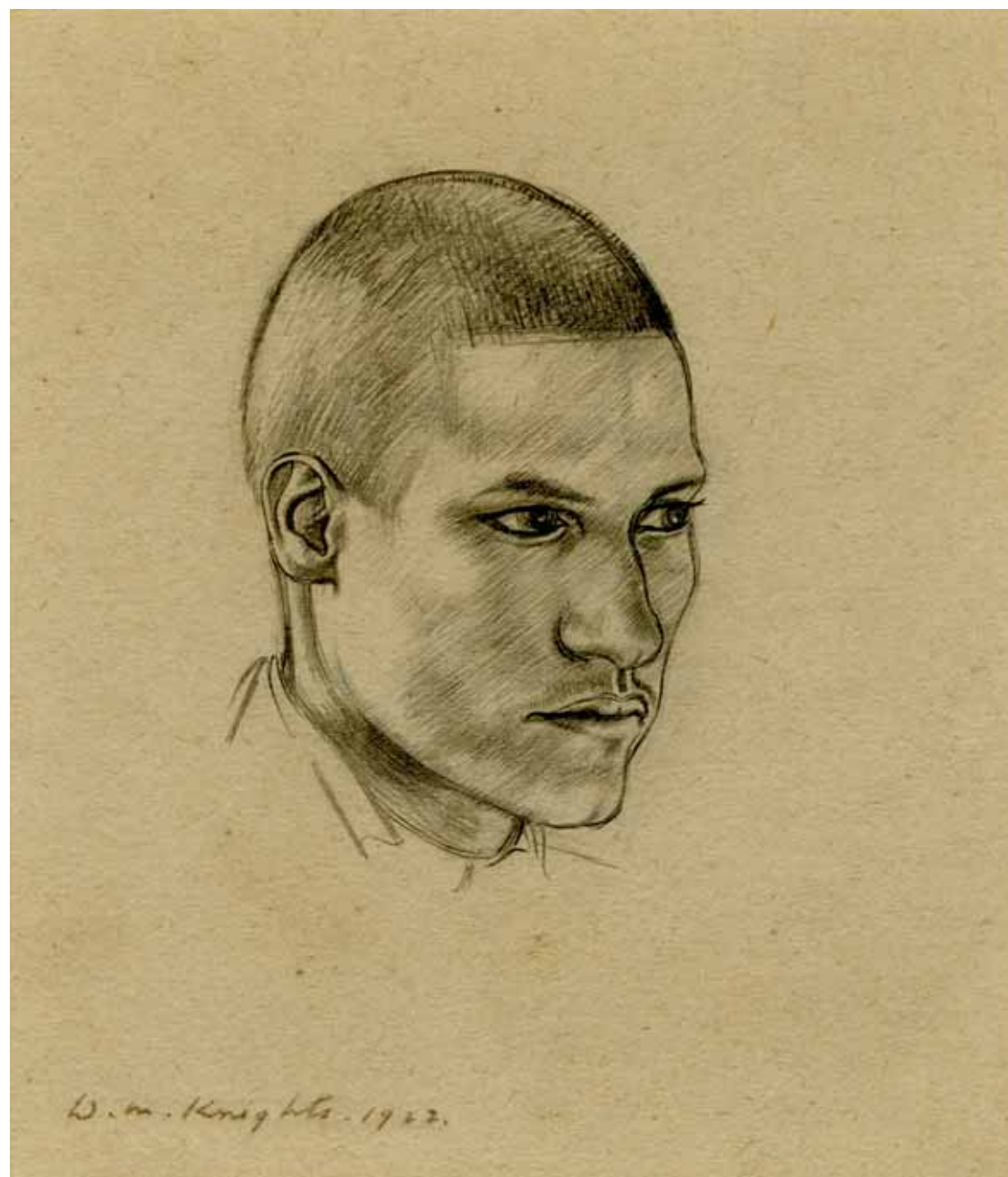
Madonna and Child which have a coral necklace on the Babe'; thought to be a powerful amulet against evil, in Christian theology the colour of coral was symbolic of Christ's blood sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> It can be assumed that the female figure seated prominently in the foreground, wearing a coral necklace and facing the viewer, is a representation of Mary – the empty seat beside her has been vacated by Jesus, who, at her request, is resolving the crisis over the sudden shortage of wine. Mary is also represented in the nursing mother who occupies the central focal point as the picture plane recedes. Knights' presentation of her, barefooted, with her head bowed, and wearing a simple brown shawl and skirt, makes reference to the iconography of the Madonna of Humility, which attained wide popularity in Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>35</sup>

For Knights, the picture clearly held a deep personal meaning and she subverted the narrative accordingly. Although the Bible story refers to Mary as the only woman present, Knights depicts a predominance of female guests at the feast. Chosen from her intimate circle, the models and their disposition bear a strong element of autobiography. Violet Hardiman, the model for Mary, is seated opposite Knights on the main table, her husband Alfred diagonally opposite (ill.126). Lilian Whitehead (with her distinctive bobbed hairstyle) is accorded the traditional place of honour, seated to the artist's right.

In most pictorial representations, the bride occupies a central position in the marriage feast; in Knights' composition, however, the bride, whose features strongly resemble those of the artist, is marginalised, seated in the loggia at the back. It was perhaps this characteristic that led one critic to remark on the 'somewhat joyless' atmosphere of the painting, so at variance with a scene of nuptial celebration.<sup>36</sup>

Knights was still 'half-engaged' to Mason when she first conceived *The Marriage at Cana*; he appears twice in the composition, seated at the main table, fourth from the left and third from the right. It

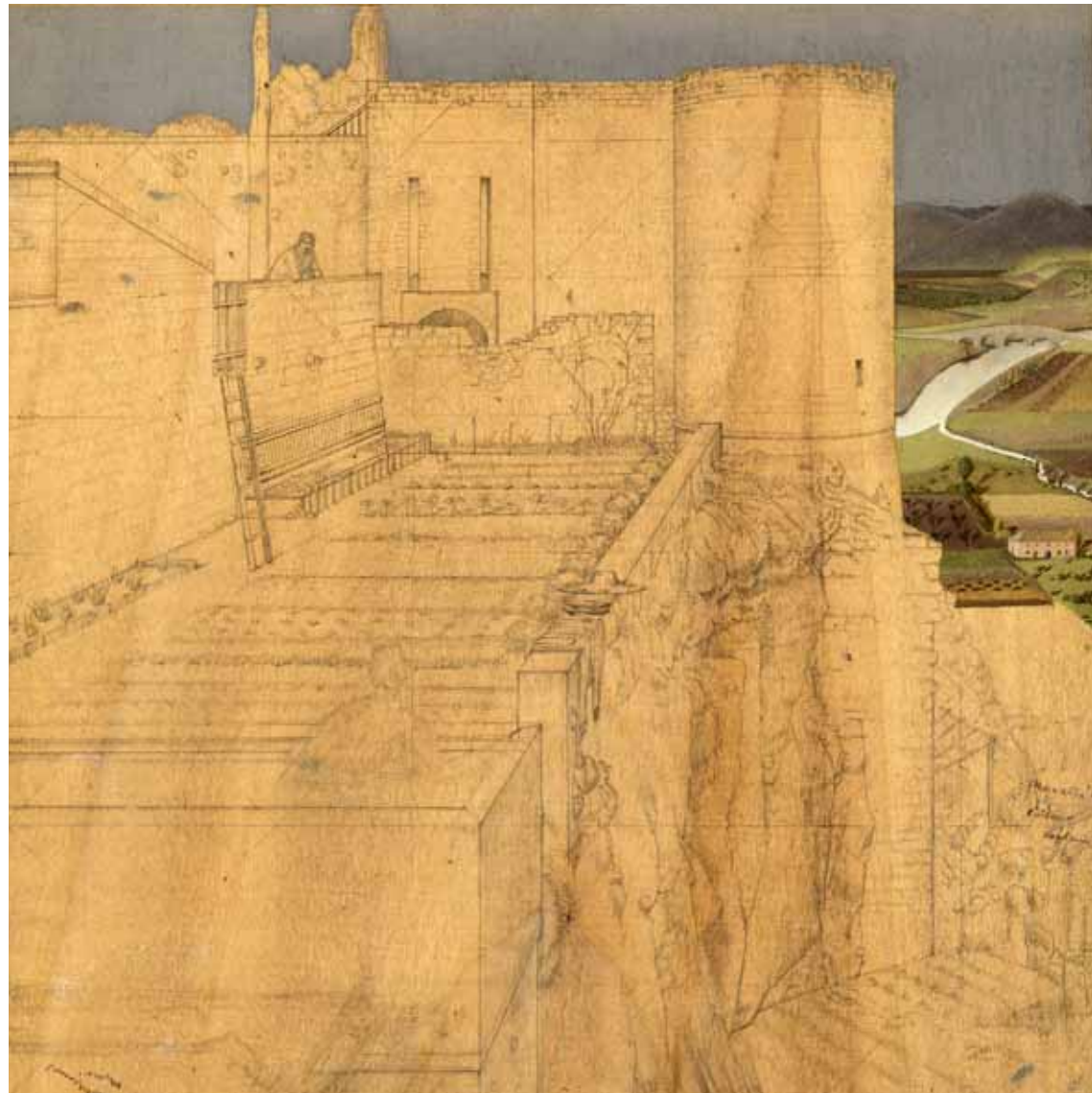




126 Portrait study of Alfred  
Hardiman for *The Marriage  
at Cana*, 1922  
Pencil on paper  
18.3 × 18.2 cm  
(7 ¼ × 7 ⅛ in)  
British Museum

is notable that while Knights is seated in close proximity to Whitehead, there is a tangible sense of distance between her and Mason, whose folded arms convey an air of discontent. The arrival of Thomas Monnington in Rome was propitious for Knights; his subsequent addition to the wedding feast (on the main table separated from Knights by Mason, but on the background table seated by her)

brings hope to an event otherwise so drearily imagined. In Christian theology, the turning of water into wine is symbolic of the Eucharist and Christ's blood; the joyful transformation that Jesus will perform in the painting's narrative might therefore be seen to prefigure the happy transformation that would imminently take place in Knights' life.



## BATHSHEBA

With the arrival of Thomas Monnington at the BSR in February 1923, an opportunity for Knights to travel had at last presented itself: 'Monnington has turned up & is a very pleasant fellow,' Thomas Ashby informed Stanley Quick, the school's Assistant Secretary. 'He's gone off with Knights and Whitehead to Orvieto.'<sup>37</sup> Since her first visit to Orvieto in 1921, Knights had longed to return there to paint, thinking it 'a wonderful place, perched so high up on this great rock like an island in the centre of Italy'.<sup>38</sup> Monnington was equally

impressed, writing, 'I love Orvieto and regard it as my home in Italy more than any other place.'<sup>39</sup>

The Fortezza dell'Albornoz, with a far-reaching view over the verdant valley of the River Paglia and the Apennines beyond, became the setting for a composition based on the Old Testament story of Bathsheba: 'And it came to pass in an evening tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the King's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon' (2 Samuel 11:2). Two pencil sketches survive, together with a partially completed panel (ill.127), the realisation

127 *Bathsheba*, 1923  
Pencil and oil on panel  
39.8 × 27 cm  
(15 5/8 × 10 5/8 in)  
Collection of Alan Powers

of which was only frustrated by the requirement of completing *The Marriage at Cana*.

In the foreground, Bathsheba is presented bathing, her clothes neatly laid out on the fortress's wall. Knights' choice of subject may have been suggested by the experience of bathing out of doors, which the temperate climate of Italy permitted. In several of her letters she refers to her pleasure in this activity, which made her feel 'clean & fresh & happy', especially in the 'big tin bath' which she placed in the garden of her studio at Anticoli Corrado.<sup>40</sup> For English travellers to Italy, the sight of women bathing in this manner could recall the Old Testament story; in 1908, on a visit to the Apennines, the writer and journalist Lina Duff Gordon witnessed 'a beautiful, broad-chested peasant woman washing herself ... like a veritable Bathsheba'.<sup>41</sup>

For Knights, however, the Old Testament story held an additional, deep personal significance; amongst the clothes laid out is her signature broad-brimmed hat, suggesting that she was casting herself in the role of Bathsheba. In the Bible, King David could only be united with Bathsheba once her husband, Uriah the Hittite, had been eliminated. Knights was still betrothed to Arnold Mason, but the sojourn in Orvieto was clearly the start of her romance with Thomas Monnington. Though Monnington was clearly no King David (even if a much-repeated family anecdote recounts that Mason's and Monnington's rivalry resulted in a duel), circumstances did conspire to allow Knights to marry him 14 months later.

Employing the same square format and small scale of other panels from this period (*A View to the East from the British School at Rome*, *The Fountain of Ovate* and *Italian Landscape*), *Bathsheba* combines Knights' favourite diagonally arranged motifs: a ladder, rows of vegetables neatly tended and intersecting stone walls. A pictorial tension is established between the static and dynamic elements of the composition through this use of strong diagonals within a structure of predominantly horizontal and vertical lines. The landscape in the middle ground is arranged into a Quattrocento-inspired patchwork of fields

transversed by a river and tributaries, with rows of haystacks in the foreground and the purple hills of the Apennines in the background.

## THE END OF THE SCHOLARSHIP

Back in Rome, Knights worked meticulously and very slowly on *The Marriage at Cana*, leaving herself insufficient time either to complete *Bathsheba* or to work on the collaborative scheme that was a requirement of the third year.<sup>42</sup> She wrote despairingly to Evelyn Shaw: 'It has been a wretched failure from the first, and I am very depressed about it and several times I have longed to give it up and start afresh, it is so frightfully bad but the thought of all the money I have spent trying to do it has saved it from complete destruction.'<sup>43</sup> However, Thomas Ashby and Eugénie Strong, as well as numerous visiting artists, considered that Knights' painting was a success. Shaw related to Knights' mother Mabel: 'Although she is very slow to accomplish her aim the technical people tell me that she is quietly absorbing a great deal of knowledge and that the difficulties which she is encountering in expressing her convictions are the natural result of the working of a very highly sensitive mind.'<sup>44</sup>

When Knights' three-year scholarship came to an end in September 1923, she returned to her family, who were now the proud owners of a large house in Caterham, Surrey, purchased with proceeds from the sale of the Schoonoord Sugar Plantation Company in 1920. She set out to complete *The Marriage at Cana*, which was still unfinished on her return, but found her new environment incompatible with the spirit of the Borghese gardens: 'I am trying to paint a stream at the bottom and discovering what an extraordinary number of motor-cycles come up Godstone Road. The two occupations go very, very badly together.'<sup>45</sup> She feared she had not captured Italy's 'intense beauty' in her work, despairing that 'it is too great for a silly little English person to grasp'.<sup>46</sup> With £150 put aside from her scholarship money she resolved to return to Rome for a fourth year.



## CHAPTER NINE

## ITALY, PART 3: 1924–1925

## AT THE FOOT OF A SACRED GROVE



128 *Edge of Abruzzi; boat with three people on a lake, 1924–30*  
Oil on canvas  
68.5 × 68.5 cm (27 × 27 in)  
Private Collection

129 Winifred Knights and Thomas Monnington on their wedding day, 23 April 1924  
Photograph  
Private Collection

Knights returned to Rome on 27 March 1924, explaining to Evelyn Shaw that ‘London was horrible after Italy’.<sup>1</sup> A few weeks later, on 23 April, she married Thomas Monnington at the British Consulate at Rome, in a ceremony officiated by David Lindsay, Lord Balniel (1900–75), the honorary attaché in the British Embassy, with Thomas and May Ashby acting as witnesses (ill.129). ‘I am extraordinarily happy,’ Monnington wrote to his brother Meredith. ‘But then I have an extraordinary wife.’<sup>2</sup> Knights’ parents had at first been reluctant to lend their support, considering Monnington’s youth (he was 22) and inexperience detrimental to their daughter’s career. In reply to an inflammatory letter from Walter, Monnington acknowledged his new father-in-law’s concerns: ‘You know me so very little and consequently can have no very great confidence in me as a husband to your daughter. Also you will feel so very anxious as to her future as a painter considering that I am so unable to do everything that I should for her.’<sup>3</sup>

Eugénie Strong cautioned Knights against letting ‘happiness or new responsibilities interfere with work or hamper it’.<sup>4</sup> The newly-weds, however, had no intention of slackening the pace: ‘we have a honeymoon every Sunday. Weekdays we work from 8–7.30, which means getting up at 6.30 am.’<sup>5</sup> The Sunday ‘honeymoons’ were mostly spent at Tivoli or walking along the Tiber Valley or around

Lake Nemi. During this period Knights delighted in carefully recording the local flora: ‘The passion flowers have been wonderful this year ... I have picked heaps & tried to draw them, they are most wonderful’ (ill.130).<sup>6</sup>

At the British School at Rome, Knights and Monnington were reunited with scholars from the previous year – A. K. Lawrence (Painting), Charles Murray (Engraving) and David Evans (Sculpture). Knights posed for a series of photographs for Evans, undertaken as studies for a portrait bust which he exhibited at the BSR in 1926 (ill.132).<sup>7</sup> New scholars for 1925 included Robert Lyon (Painting), W. E. C. Morgan (Engraving) and John Skeaping (Sculpture).

Since scholars’ wives were not permitted to reside at the BSR, Knights rented two rooms a few minutes’ walk away, ‘scrupulously clean with ... an English tub, and a kitchen you’d be proud of with rows of aluminium pots and pans’. She complained to her sister Joyce, ‘I hardly see [Monnington] at present. We have both got such a mass of work to do and he only comes here now and again in the evenings.’<sup>8</sup>

## PIEDILUCO

Following the tradition of escaping the heat of Rome during the summer months, Knights and Monnington spent July and August 1924 in Piediluco,



130 Study of passion flowers,  
1925  
Watercolour and pencil  
on paper  
35.5 × 29 cm  
(13 ¾ × 11 ⅜ in)  
Private Collection

'a little village hanging over a lake in the mountains behind Terni', where they rented a lakeside apartment, consisting of two rooms and a 40-foot loggia (ill.131).<sup>9</sup> During the daytime, Knights worked in the shade of the loggia and in the evenings she sketched out of doors on the rugged shores: 'There is a flight of stone steps leading down to an iron gate which opens on to the lake ... it is rather lovely to be able to go down to one's boat that way and put all one's paraphernalia into the boat and pull off to work' (ill.131).<sup>10</sup> Knights' 'paraphernalia' included a three-legged stool with a canvas seat, and a soft canvas bag in which she carried her sketchbooks and a wooden case containing Royal Sovereign pencils, sharpened, with long leads, a scalpel and little bits of soft eraser rubber. She also carried small bottles of water, paintbrushes and the Winsor & Newton

watercolour box that she had been presented with in 1913, as well as rags and bits of stale bread used for cleaning her paper.

Knights confided to Millicent Murby that she was 'in love with mountains'.<sup>11</sup> She climbed the jagged, steep hills nearest to the lake, which on clear days afforded 'a wonderful view of mountains all around us as far as we could see, right into the Abruzzi'.<sup>12</sup> On one occasion, she and Monnington set off on foot through the Apennines to Leonessa, a town in the province of Rieti, where they had 'wild adventures ... fairy tales, wolves & wood cutters' huts for nights, lost paths too which we found by day'.<sup>13</sup> Knights hoped that her 'personal experience' of the mountains would result in 'better or perhaps more fearsome drawings'.<sup>14</sup>

Knights was enchanted by the panorama and the tranquillity of Lake Piediluco, a subject that



Clockwise from top left:

- 131 Illustration from a letter,  
'Here is a picture of our  
house', 28 July 1924  
UCL Library Special  
Collections, University  
College London

- 132 David Evans  
*Winifred Knights at the  
British School at Rome*, 1925  
Photograph  
Private Collection



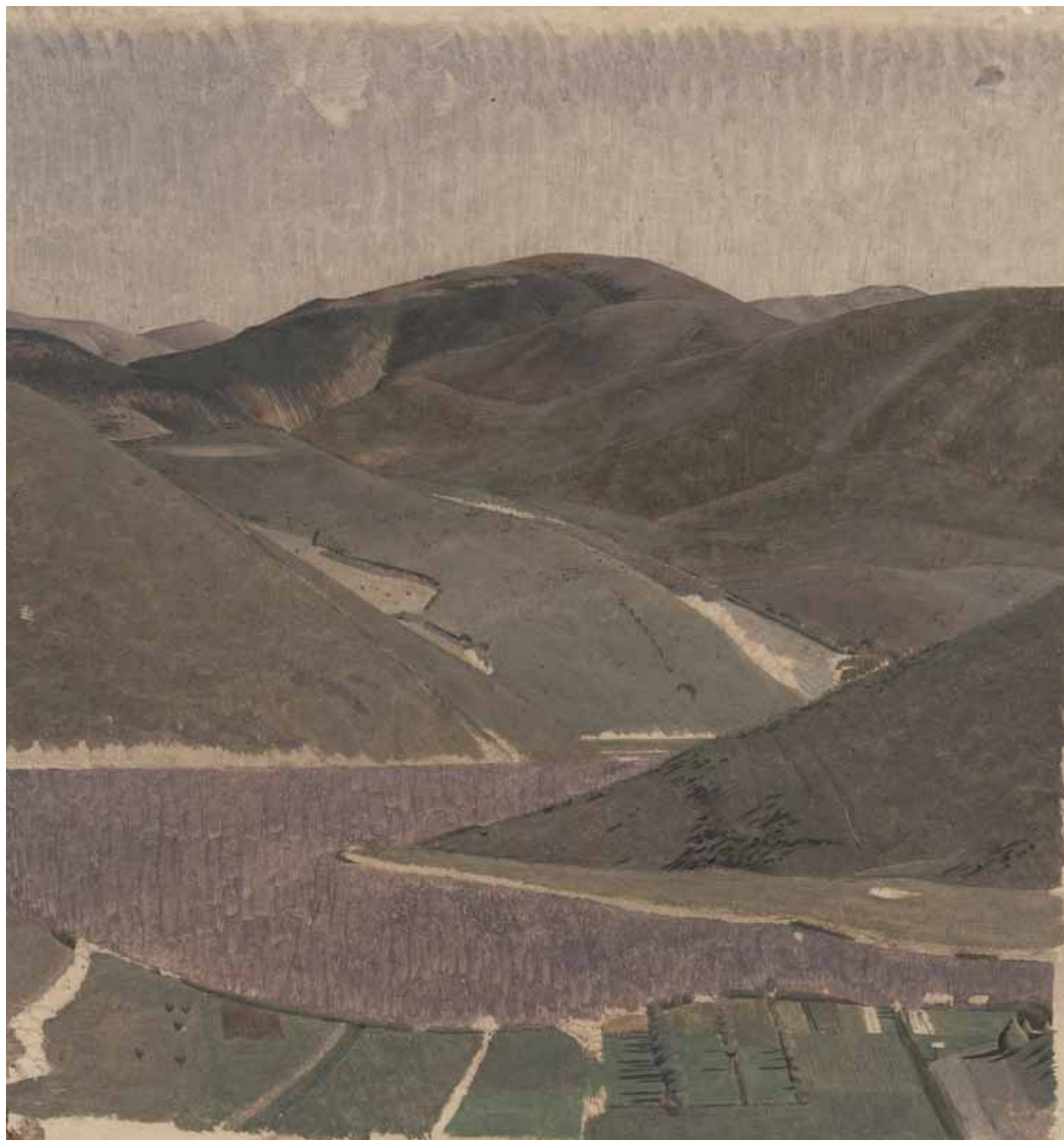
- 133 Study of the exterior of a  
house by Lake Piediluco,  
1924  
Oil and pencil on tracing  
paper  
26.2 x 24.2 cm  
(10 ¼ x 9 ½ in)  
Private Collection

- 134 Study of Monte dell'Eco,  
Piediluco, 1924  
Pencil on paper  
29 x 27.8 cm (11 ⅜ x 11 in)  
Private Collection

- 135 Study of Monte dell'Eco,  
Piediluco, 1924  
Brown ink on tracing paper  
laid on paper  
29.4 x 26.3 cm  
(11 ⅝ x 10 ⅜ in)  
Private Collection

had similarly inspired Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot during his visit to the area in 1826.<sup>15</sup> The landscape studies that she produced here range from small oil sketches, painted *en plein air* (ill.133), to highly worked compositions in pencil. Monte dell'Eco, one of the most distinctive summits rising out of the lake, which Knights described as 'just like a pyramid covered with short trees', was the subject of studies produced in triplicate (ills 134–136), a technique which she had learnt at the Slade as a means of exploring tone, colour and form.<sup>16</sup> Producing first a highly finished drawing in pencil, she then transferred this in pen and ink on to tracing paper, with a third version, also on tracing paper, worked up in thinned oil. 'The painted tracing is very dark green,' she commented. 'It looks well, and balances the darks.'<sup>17</sup>









- 136 Study of Monte dell'Eco, Piediluco, 1924  
Thinned oil on tracing paper  
29.4 x 26.3 cm  
(11 5/8 x 10 3/8 in)  
Private Collection

- 137 Landscape study for *Edge of Abruzzi; boat with three people on a lake*, 1924  
Thinned oil over pen and ink on tracing paper  
28 x 38 cm (11 x 15 in)  
Private Collection

Knights employed studies undertaken during the sejour at Piediluco (ill.137) to create a composition in oil, *Edge of Abruzzi; boat with three people on a lake*, which she was to work on periodically over the next six years, from 1924-1930 (ill.128, p.132). Setting the scene in the evening light, in the hope of capturing 'a feeling of clear coolness', she described the picture as being in the manner of 'J. V[ermeer] (Delft), Fred Walker, Walter Crane and those people'.<sup>18</sup> The pellucid clarity of the lake is mirrored through orchestrations of colour so subtle that the blue of the water and sky appear uniform: 'Evening Lake: the lake is greyed, blue, green coloured, very much greyer than the sky, which is best cool pale blue.'<sup>19</sup>

At the far side of the lake, the cornfields of a cultivated plain are interspersed with a variety of trees (holm oaks, maples, birches and firs) and tributaries from the River Nera. A range of hills, which Knights described as 'small, but very steep and conical', dominates the background, while the

majestic grandeur of the Monte Terminillo massif looms behind.<sup>20</sup> To create the 'satiny' appearance of the mountains during sunset, she used a 'strong maroon brown' with 'shadows well-defined'.<sup>21</sup>

In the foreground, one female and two male figures traverse the lake in a boat, described by Knights as 'more like a sledge than anything else'.<sup>22</sup> A Rome Scholar from New Zealand who was also staying at Piediluco posed for the bearded figure, while Monnington provided the model for the seated rower.<sup>23</sup> The female figure facing the viewer bears an obvious element of self-portraiture, suggesting that Knights' composition had a deeper significance for her beyond that of capturing the captivating beauty of her surroundings.

A notebook, which includes written descriptions of Lake Piediluco and the surrounding landscape, records Knights' growing interest in pagan mythology, including a reference to an ancient feminine spirit of sacred springs and



rivers: 'I must do Melusina.'<sup>24</sup> In European folklore, Melusina (or Melusine) was cursed by her mother to take the form of a serpent every Saturday. When Melusina's husband discovered her dark secret, she was condemned to wander the earth as a doomed spirit.<sup>25</sup> In Knights' composition, the ghostly complexion and languid countenance of the female figure accord well with the Melusina myth. With its tragic heroine, the story was consistent with other themes treated by the artist in Italy; *Bathsheba* (ill.127) and *Pompilia* (ill.116) both explore the conflict between female self-empowerment and subjugation. In a similar vein, Knights also noted her intent to produce a composition based on the Phoenician princess Europa and her bull.<sup>26</sup>

During the two-month sojourn in Piediluco, Monnington made numerous studies for *Allegory* (ill.138), the major composition he produced during his scholarship's tenure. This was purchased by H. S. Ede for the Contemporary Art Society (who presented it to the Tate Gallery in 1939), the negotiations taking place in early 1925 while it was

still incomplete. Knights' painstaking processes and clear vision exerted a profound influence on Monnington's work in this period, leading Charles Ricketts, on a visit to the BSR, to call him 'Mr Knights'.<sup>27</sup> Monnington was guarded about the meaning of *Allegory*; 'the whole design ... was an attempt to express in pictorial form my attitude to life – almost my faith'.<sup>28</sup> However, the figures are clearly personifications of Monnington and Knights and the picture as a whole an expression of their union and their shared love for Italy. The etymology of Piediluco derives from the Latin 'at the foot of' (*pie'di*) 'a sacred grove' (*lucus*); in both their compositions, Knights and Monnington responded to the sense of mysticism in the subject as well as the topography.

## THE SANTISSIMA TRINITA

While Monnington was enjoying the patronage of Ede, through the intervention of her aunt Grace

138 Thomas Monnington  
Study of Winifred Knights  
for *Allegory*, 1924  
Oil on canvas  
28 × 48.2 cm (11 × 19 in)  
Private Collection

Murby, Knights had received a commission from Jack Addinsell (1896–1987), a wealthy businessman, for ‘an Italian narrative picture’ to hang in the drawing room of his residence in Hyde Park Gate, London. In January 1925, she reported that she was making progress, although she feared ‘Mr. Addinsell will not like this one, it is so different from the others I have done, much better, but he may think it too much of a landscape.’<sup>29</sup>

In common with Knights’ 1921 composition *Paradise* (ill.110 and ill.111, p.115), the lower Aniene Valley in the Lazio region, with the Simbruini mountains behind, was to provide the setting for this ambitious new painting (ill.139). Knights returned to Anticoli Corrado in May 1924 to make studies of the landscape, which she described as ‘dark purple brown hills ... grey rocks poking out like currants and little dark green cushiony bushes ... a pale green gold cornfield half-cut and a ... silver river’.<sup>30</sup> She initially envisaged the composition as ‘a very big picture of reapers resting’, inspired by Alexander Pope’s ‘Summer: The Second Pastoral’ (1709), a poem which evokes a sylvan scene of mountains, forests, streams and cornfields peopled by ‘weary reapers’.<sup>31</sup> The imagery of agricultural workers at rest formed part of a pastoral tradition which enjoyed particular currency in nineteenth-century France in the work of Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–1884), Léon-Augustin Lhermitte (1844–1925) and François-Alfred Delobbe (1835–1920), and among their New English Art Club followers George Clausen, H. H. La Thangue (1859–1929) and Edward Stott (1859–1918). At Anticoli Corrado, the harvest provided the subject for many paintings by resident artists; the German-born Brazilian artist, Pedro Weingärtner (1853–1929), for example, produced a series of pictures recording such scenes during his sojourns in 1899 and 1903.<sup>32</sup>

According to Monnington, early on in the conception of her painting, Knights modified the context to ‘depict peasants resting among the mountains on a pilgrimage to the Festival of the Santissima Trinita at Vallepietra ... she gave it the

title of The Santissima Trinita’.<sup>33</sup> In the company of a group of peasants from Anticoli Corrado, Knights and Monnington undertook the pilgrimage on two occasions, in 1923 and 1924.

The Sanctuary of the Trinità, situated in a natural grotto and its associated outer chapel, near to the village of Vallepietra, was one of the most celebrated pilgrimage sites in the province of Rome, attracting over 100,000 pilgrims each year.<sup>34</sup> In a letter to her sister Eileen, Knights described how she travelled along a narrow and precipitous track on a hired mule to the sanctuary, where a twelfth-century fresco fragment depicting an analogous representation of the Trinity still survived:

Peasants from miles and miles and days away tramp from all parts of the Abruzzi to come and worship at this chapel and to see the miracle. It is a most wonderful sight. Thousands of pilgrims some of them barefoot, all swarming up this narrow path ... singing hymns all the way ... We went with the crowd into the little chapel & there all the peasants were kissing the floor and walls, they have made it quite shiny with kisses.<sup>35</sup>

Having venerated the Trinity fresco, Knights recorded that ‘the peasants chopped down whole trees and made a huge bonfire which we all lay round in our blankets, it was ripping sleeping out in a beech wood.’<sup>36</sup>

It is likely that Thomas Ashby encouraged Knights and Monnington to participate in the event; in a series of photographs and a written account he documented the pilgrimage, believing that such festivals would ‘lose their distinctive old-world features and relapse into country fairs of the ordinary kind, that renders it most desirable that they should be properly studied before it is too late’.<sup>37</sup> He was especially interested in the pagan origins of the festival; the strategic location of the site (at an intersection between Lazio, Abruzzo,



Campania and Molise), in an area rich in caves and subterranean water, was suggestive of ancient rites in sacred woods and the cult of freshwater springs.<sup>38</sup> The discovery in the nineteenth century of votive objects further attested to the use of the grotto as a pagan shrine. Even the analogous representation of the Trinity was thought to have originated from a pre-Roman dedication to a 'Triade' associated with the Equi religion practised by an Italic population living between the Sabine region and Marsica. According to Monnington, it was precisely this 'Christian survival of a Pagan ceremony' that had so inspired Knights.<sup>39</sup>

The landscape that Knights depicts presents the course of the eight-hour procession to the sanctuary from Anticoli Corrado: the foreground being the lower Aniene Valley (the point of departure), the rocky middle ground the high plain of the Campo Secco, and the hilltop village (based on studies made at Labro near Piediluco) representing Vallepietra, the point of arrival. In the composition, the *Stendardo* (banner), portraying an image of the Trinity, which was carried by the people of Anticoli, provides the central motif. The religious significance of the composition, however, is otherwise subverted. Although the pilgrimage took place each year on Trinity Sunday, the presence of haystacks and uncut corn sets the scene in late summer. Both Knights and Ashby recorded that the pilgrims slept outside in the mountains beneath the sanctuary, yet Knights' narrative takes place in a field in the lower Aniene Valley, close to the point of departure. Never intended as a faithful representation of the pilgrimage, the composition provided Knights with an opportunity to combine all the elements that inspired her most during her five years in Italy: the landscape and in particular the mountains, the peasants' ritualistic way of life symbolised by the Vallepietra Festival, the traditional way of life represented by the harvest and the women of Lazio.

Among the peasants in Anticoli Corrado in 1921, Knights discovered an ideal community

whose traditions and culture revealed a fresh mode of consciousness. Living in cyclical unison with nature, the peasants appeared to have retained the 'old world', pagan element that Ashby mourned the loss of in contemporary society.<sup>40</sup> 'You have no idea how primitive it is,' she wrote in awe to her mother.<sup>41</sup> She drew a parallel between the peasantry and the landscape in which they lived, describing the Apennines as 'so fierce and splendid, so are the people'.<sup>42</sup>

Whereas in her previous compositions Knights typically portrayed men and women co-existing harmoniously, in *The Santissima Trinita* she depicts women only. She revered Italian peasant women – 'beautiful things, so brown & tall' – from whom, she felt, she 'ought to get some good ideas'.<sup>43</sup> Contemporary photographic evidence suggests that both agricultural workers and pilgrims rested in separate groups, according to the clear sexual divisions that formed part of Italian peasant culture.<sup>44</sup> In 1928, during the final year of his scholarship, Edward Halliday (1902–84) painted *Hypnos* (private collection); clearly inspired by Knights' composition, his painting contains an almost identical number of men resting in the Campagna Romana.

By including herself amongst the peasants, clutching a pillow and sleeping peacefully beneath a puce-coloured blanket, Knights asserts her natural place within this unspoilt community. By depicting the peasants in the simple dress of plain cloth that she herself had adopted in Italy, instead of traditional costume, she avoided the temptations of a picturesque genre scene. The women, whose activities are divided between washing, contemplation and quiet repose, are placed in perfect harmony with their environment, wherein they find protection, even preservation. The almost ceremonial placing of the figures across the canvas, each in her own communion with nature, conveys a sense of mystery – an intended conceit, according to Knights: 'Hidden beauty is best (half seen), faces turned away and figures hidden.'<sup>45</sup> The feet and hands, softly elongated and set at angles, as well as the falling draperies of

139 *The Santissima Trinita*,  
1924–30  
Oil on canvas  
102 × 112 cm  
(40 1/8 × 44 1/8 in)  
Private Collection



dress and blankets, create framing elements to the perfect curvilinear forms of the bodies.

The parasol under which Knights lies was carefully observed from one she purchased soon after her arrival in Italy, and used all of her life when sketching out of doors (ill.140). Much larger than an ordinary umbrella, it had a long straight handle with a framework of split bamboo, covered with pale purple silk. Such parasols were traditionally used to keep off the sun; Ashby, however, described peasants outside the Vallepiera sanctuary 'sheltering themselves under umbrellas and rugs for at that altitude the night is cold'.<sup>46</sup>

To the right of the canvas, four women wash themselves in the River Aniene. Knights was deeply impressed by the cleanliness of Italian peasant women; at Orvieto she described female peasants as 'very clean and well dressed' and compared an Anticoli dwelling to her cousins' farmhouse in Lineholt, 'only much cleaner'.<sup>47</sup> Her letters also reveal her fascination with the time-honoured ritual of washing clothes; at Anticoli, she described 'a lusty woman banging [clothes] on the rocks by a river'.<sup>48</sup> With their straight and intersecting courses, the waterways depicted are possibly based on man-made irrigation systems,

sections of which were sometimes constructed with slanted stone edges to provide a surface that women could scrub and wash clothes on.

The action of washing was yet more significant in the context of the pilgrimage; Knights described how the peasants participated 'to wash their sins away'.<sup>49</sup> While this metaphor held currency with the Christian practice of baptism, like so many aspects of the pilgrimage its pagan origins were still equally relevant; originally dedicated to an ancient deity of the river Simbrivio, the Vallepiera sanctuary was believed to have served as a sacred site of pagan purificatory rituals.

To resolve her composition, Knights again turned to Quattrocento painting for inspiration. For the resting figures, she called on representations of Christ's Agony at Gethsemane; parallels can be drawn between her figures and the sleeping disciples in versions of the narrative by Giovanni Bellini (c.1465, National Gallery) and Fra Angelico (1438-45, Museo di San Marco), black-and-white postcards of which featured in her collection. When *The Santissima Trinita* was exhibited at the Imperial Galleries, London, in the spring of 1927, the *Manchester Guardian* noted that 'many are comparing it in its sweetness and ecstasy to Piero della Francesca'.<sup>50</sup> The treatment of the setting has much in common with Piero della Francesca's highly naturalistic landscapes, apparent, for example, in the Montefeltro portraits (1465-72, Uffizi). Alongside a description of the 'exquisite, indescribable delicacy' of the river with 'shadows gold-grey-green (milky)', Knights wrote in her notebook, 'Francesca!!!', an indication that she additionally sought to reproduce the reflective qualities and mood of stillness and tranquillity that characterised his rendering of water.<sup>51</sup>

In the foreground, the land is reduced to geometric parcels (rivers, hayfield, bridges, fences), providing a contrast to the concave forms of the haystacks and parasols. On the other side of the river, a row of uncut hay, which Knights described as 'Indian Corn', divides the foreground

140 Study of a parasol for *The Santissima Trinita*, c.1924  
Pencil on paper  
16.4 x 14.4 cm  
(6 1/2 x 5 5/8 in)  
Collection of Catherine Monnington



141 Landscape study for *The Santissima Trinita*, c.1924  
Thinned oil on tracing  
paper  
15 × 43 cm  
(6 × 17 in)  
Private Collection

142 Study of a female head  
for *The Santissima Trinita*,  
c.1924  
Oil on canvas  
5.5 × 12.5 cm  
(2 ¼ × 4 7/8 in)  
Private Collection



143 Study of a sleeping woman  
for *The Santissima Trinita*,  
c.1925  
Pencil on paper  
19.7 × 25.7 cm  
(7 ¾ × 10 ¼ in)  
British Museum

from the undulating surface of the plain behind. Through subtle gradations of form and colour the homogeneous effect, which provides the natural equilibrium between the peasants and their surroundings, is extended to all elements within the picture plane. Knights built up her composition with an accumulation of thin, more or less transparent layers of oil paint. A harmonious use of pure golds, browns, greys and greens, interspersed with blues and turquoises, unifies the composition. Notes made by Knights attest to the care that she took with colour harmonies, which were all precisely observed from nature: 'After sunset the pointed hill gets lighter greens on the far side of its shadows which give it

a velvety look ... the haystacks in the middle of the plain are bright gold, the ones behind ... slightly lower in tone. The bushes & shrubs ... are all dark grey-green ... I have made the rear bank too pink, it is more warm grey'.<sup>52</sup>

Extant studies in pencil, watercolour and oil are evidence of the meticulous methods that Knights continued to adhere to (ills 141 and 142). A surviving fragment of a cartoon (UCL Art Museum) shows that she transferred her composition to canvas by using the traditional system of squaring up to create a precise outline.<sup>53</sup> Numerous exquisite studies from life (ills 143 and 144) reveal Knights' use of rigorous draughtsmanship with delicate shading to explore





a pictorial illusion of volumetric form; in the finished painting these figures were transposed on to the canvas, after the landscape had been completed, with remarkable lucidity (see p.148).

## DEPARTURE FROM ROME

Knights progressed very slowly with her picture and it remained unfinished when the time came for her to leave Italy in December 1925. 'She is getting on fairly well but like me is slow,' Monnington wrote. 'She is at any rate sure, which is more than I am.'<sup>54</sup> Monnington's two principal works from the tenure of his scholarship, *The Visitation* and *Allegory*, also remained unfinished at their departure, as did Knights' *The Marriage at Cana*. Rodney Burn (1899–1984), whom both Knights and Monnington had known at the Slade, blamed Henry Tonks' fastidious teaching methods: 'There are many draughtsmen who have more ability than you or I or [Knights]', he wrote to Monnington, 'but I doubt if there are many who look at things so

intently ... we owe this quality to Tonks and on his account we must curse & bless him ... the completion of a picture is almost impossible, my meaning is that the standard of study was too high for our abilities as designers and painters.'<sup>55</sup>

When the time came for Knights and Monnington to leave Italy in December 1925, they felt ready to return to England. Mussolini's declaration of totalitarian rule in January of that year was a cause for concern: 'Italy seems to be in a restless state,' Monnington wrote to his brother Meredith. 'We do not feel as much confidence in the people as when we first came out.'<sup>56</sup> With the abrupt joint dismissal of Thomas Ashby and Eugénie Strong by the BSR's Executive Committee in June 1924 (partly as a result of persistent quarrelling between Ashby's wife and Strong), the school was also in an unsettled state.<sup>57</sup> Knights felt that 'it was rather sad at the last to see them go', even if the new director, Bernard Ashmole (1894–1988), 'had already made things fly a bit'.<sup>58</sup> She informed her mother, 'I think we are coming home soon now, it is quite time.'<sup>59</sup>

144 Study of a kneeling woman washing for *The Santissima Trinita*, c.1925  
Pencil on paper  
20.5 × 29.2 cm  
(8 × 11 ½ in)  
British Museum



## CHAPTER TEN

## ENGLAND, PART I: 1926–1933

‘THE POWER TO CONVEY  
VISIONS AND IDEALS’<sup>1</sup>

145 Detail from *Scenes from the Life of Saint Martin of Tours*, c.1928–33

Oil (or possibly tempera) on canvas, with glazing  
73 × 159.5 cm  
(28 ¾ × 62 ¾ in)  
Milner Memorial Chapel,  
Canterbury Cathedral

146 *Scenes from the Life of Saint Martin of Tours* in situ,  
Milner Memorial Chapel,  
Canterbury Cathedral,  
c.1950

Photograph  
Private Collection

In January 1926, Knights and Monnington settled into a small studio at 33a Oxford Road in southwest London. In order to provide a regular income, Monnington procured a part-time teaching job at the Royal College of Art, but felt ‘as near to being penniless as I hope I shall ever be.’<sup>2</sup> Knights regretted his decision, writing, ‘I wish he did not have to [teach], he tires himself out at it.’<sup>3</sup> She enrolled at the Slade for one day a week, which Monnington felt ‘would be good for her as I am afraid she has a very lonely time.’<sup>4</sup> Under pressure from her patron, Jack Addinsell, she continued to work on *The Santissima Trinita*, whose landscape and the life it depicted now appeared as a distant dream. ‘Our wonderful time is over,’ she wrote to her brother-in-law Meredith. ‘We find it rather hard growing up properly and having a house of our own.’<sup>5</sup>

Soon after their return to England, Monnington received a commission to produce a mural on the subject of ‘the Union of England and Scotland’ for a major Decorative cycle, ‘The Building of Britain’, at St Stephen’s Hall in the Palace of Westminster. The creation of the scheme, which was promoted by the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres (1871–1940), Lord Balniel’s father and a member of the Council of the British School at Rome, was in part a response to the continued advocacy for a revival of an English School of Mural Decoration.<sup>6</sup> In an article titled ‘The Plight of the Mural Decorator’, the *Manchester*

*Guardian* made an appeal on behalf of ‘the new school of artists ... with Prix de Rome experience who are growing up with the desire and capacity to decorate our public buildings. Has the time not come for the community to avail themselves of this supply?’<sup>7</sup> D. Y. Cameron, the Chairman of the BSR Faculty of Painting, was appointed Master Painter of the scheme. With the exception of Vivian Forbes, all the artists he chose were Rome Scholars (Colin Gill, A. K. Lawrence and Tom Monnington) or members of his faculty (Glyn Philpot, Charles Sims, George Clausen and William Rothenstein).<sup>8</sup>

Comparing Knights’ artistic ability to that of ‘Gill, Lawrence and Monnington’, Cameron considered her ‘the best of them all’.<sup>9</sup> As she was senior to two of the three Rome Scholars selected, her exclusion from this prestigious scheme is surprising. Was Cameron’s selection determined by the patriarchal values of the commissioning body and the eight noble lords who financed it?<sup>10</sup> Or, perhaps, awareness of Knights’ slowness in completing commissions influenced his decision – the scheme was to be concluded by June 1927.<sup>11</sup> Certainly Knights may have sensed a degree of prejudice in play when Monnington, like Gill before him, was elected to the all-male BSR Faculty of Painting on the completion of his scholarship, such responsibility considered inappropriate for a woman.<sup>12</sup> ‘Tom is the wonder child now, he is

getting to be a very famous young man. Everyone is pleased with his decoration,' she wrote to Meredith, who later annotated the letter with a comment that Knights 'sounds a little jealous, perhaps'.<sup>13</sup>

At first, Knights assisted Monnington with his commission, modelling for the portrait of Queen Anne and 'reading up the year 1706–7 in the British [Library]'.<sup>14</sup> According to her sister Eileen, 'the woman's blue dress on the right hand-side was painted by Winifred'.<sup>15</sup> Acting as her husband's studio assistant and model, however, soon led to feelings of discontent. 'It was not as one of a couple that [she] saw herself,' Meredith observed.<sup>16</sup>

## CRITICAL SUCCESS

In February 1926, Knights received news that *The Marriage at Cana* (ill.118), which had been exhibited at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Art, in Paris, had been awarded a silver medal by the French government.<sup>17</sup> Further recognition came in April 1927 when *The Santissima Trinita* (ill.139) was exhibited, alongside works by other Rome Scholars and artists including Augustus John, Stanley Spencer, Gilbert Spencer, Ethelbert White (1891–1972) and Paul Nash (1889–1946), in the British section of the 'Art of the Empire Exhibition' at the newly-established Imperial Gallery in South Kensington. These works were seen to provide evidence of a new, specifically English art revival, which had its roots planted firmly in the traditions of the Old Masters and their most recent successors, the Pre-Raphaelites. *The Times* reported:

Though it might be too much to say that pre-Raphaelitism is the last word in English painting, it seems evident from this exhibition that the earlier rather than the later Italians provide the convention which best suits the native pictorial instincts of the majority: flat designing ... the realisation rather than the composition

of relief – love of detail, decorative colour, interest of line and the conveyance of information about Nature.<sup>18</sup>

For the *Observer's* critic, by no means a sole voice, *The Santissima Trinita* was the best example of this stylistic convention and 'the greatest attraction of the whole exhibition':

The extraordinary charm of her *SS Trinita* is not easy to explain. Not only is the picture unfinished, the figures which are intended to play an important part in it being as yet only indicated in faint pencil-lines, but it is particularly striking as a design. But to the painting of this Italian landscape, with its sparsely timbered pale green range of hills beyond a meadow, with tufts of vegetation under a pale blue sky, she has brought a degree of sincerity, loving patience, and exquisite taste, that is altogether irresistible. Minuteness and preciousness of detail are not in themselves a commendation, but when these qualities are made compatible with complete unity of conception and tone, the balance of variety and unity adds enormously to the aesthetic appeal of the picture.<sup>19</sup>

Having already promised the picture to Addinsell, Knights declined an offer of £3,000 from Cameron.<sup>20</sup> He regretted all his life not acquiring the picture, writing 17 years later, 'I so often wish I had [her] Pilgrimage to feast upon, and carry me on its delicate wings to the spiritual world in which it was conceived.'<sup>21</sup> Lord Balmiel wrote to Knights that he 'had been over and over again to the Imperial Institute and your picture seems livelier every time I look at it ... is it too much to hope that, in the dim future, it might perhaps be possible for me to look forward to having a picture of yours?'<sup>22</sup>

The unequivocally positive reception to the two major works from her Italian sojourn gave Knights a burst of confidence. She reported to Millicent Murby



that 'D. Y. Cameron wants me to do a religious picture for him and my beautiful David, Lord Balniel wants anything I like to do, so I am very happy as far as my work is concerned if only I weren't so horribly slow.'<sup>23</sup>

### DEMETER IN WORCESTERSHIRE

Before beginning work on these commissions, however, Knights felt a desire to paint a composition that she had first conceived in 1922 while staying with her father's cousins at Lineholt: 'a really lovely and enormous Decoration ... about Demeter in Worcestershire'.<sup>24</sup> For Knights, Lineholt (ill.30, p.40)

represented an ideal of aesthetic harmony, a place of timelessness and tradition to which she instinctively returned to rekindle her creative spirit, much as she had done during 1917–18, when the trauma of the First World War had had such a negative impact on her mental health: 'It's the only life there is,' she remarked to Lord Balniel. 'One feels so well and content at the end of the day.'<sup>25</sup>

Accompanied by her father, Knights spent six weeks at Lineholt during the spring of 1927. Three sketchbooks resulting from this sojourn are filled with highly detailed studies of the farmhouse and garden (ill.149), providing the setting for a scene based around the ancient Greek goddess of the harvest.<sup>26</sup> Knights

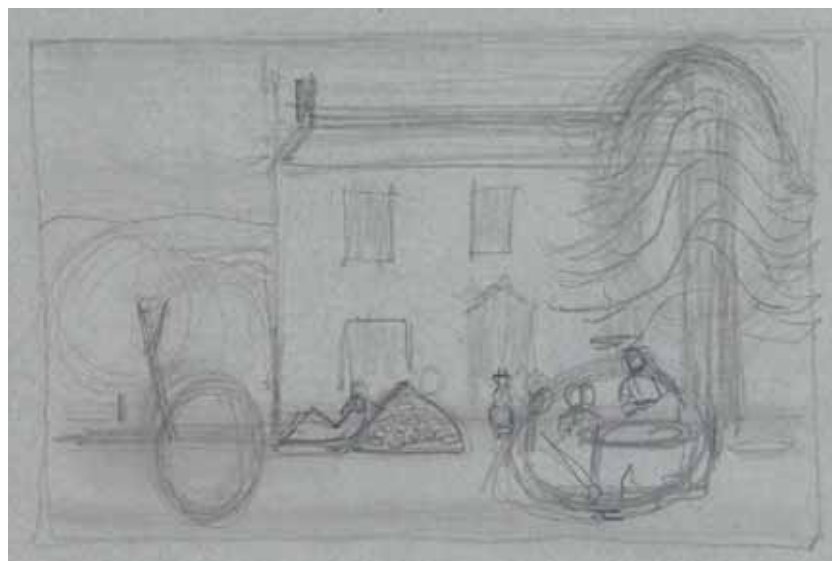
147 Study of the facade of  
Lineholt Farmhouse, c.1927  
Pencil on paper  
29 x 45.7 cm (11 3/8 x 18 in)  
Private Collection



148 Scale model, ladder  
 Cherry wood  
 60 x 12 cm (23 5/8 x 4 3/4 in)  
 Collection of Catherine  
 Monnington

149 Study for *Demeter in  
 Worcestershire*, 1927  
 Pencil on paper  
 20.5 x 25.7 cm  
 (8 1/8 x 10 1/8 in)  
 UCL Art Museum,  
 University College London

150 Study for *Demeter in  
 Worcestershire*, 1927  
 Pencil and watercolour on  
 tracing paper  
 16 x 18 cm (6 1/4 x 7 in)  
 Private Collection



envisaged the composition with the farmhouse in the background, a monkey-puzzle tree in the middle ground and a group of figures eating at a table in the foreground. A ladder leaning against an apple tree, a scale model of which was made for Knights out of cherry wood by her cousin Joe Williams (ill.148), would provide the focus to the left of the picture. On the basis of extant work, which consists of partial studies in pencil and thinned oil (ills 147 and 150), it seems unlikely that the painting was ever completed. On her return to London, Knights discovered she was pregnant, a distraction she described as 'so extraordinarily absorbing that I cannot think of anything else'.<sup>27</sup>

## A STILLBORN SON

In November 1927, for a rent of £170 a month, Knights and Monnington moved into the lower portion of Henry Tonks' house at 1a Vale Avenue, Chelsea. 'It is a great load off our minds that we can look forward to taking the new arrival to a proper home ... I look forward to being near Tonks, whom Tom likes, I think, nearly as much as I do and I believe he will be good for us both,' Knights wrote to her brother-in-law.<sup>28</sup> She described the apartment as consisting of 'two big studios, one enormous and lovely bathroom & geysers, scullery yard, conservatory and the use of Tonks' garden which is a lovely one'. She added affectionately that 'the old darling is putting in a bow window especially for my benefit & he is very pleased to have a baby'.<sup>29</sup>

Knights' desire for domestic harmony was soon thwarted: on 4 January 1928, while staying with her family at Caterham, she gave birth to a stillborn son. In a letter to Millicent Murby, she described her subsequent depression: 'Spring seems almost gone already. I haven't felt it this year at all, I can't somehow and the thought of the first cuckoo makes me retch ... it is beastly, somehow, not having a baby'.<sup>30</sup> Monnington was also deeply traumatised, writing, 'I fancy that seldom will I have to live in such absolute hell'.<sup>31</sup>

By April, Knights' spirits had slowly begun to improve, and she moved back to 1a Vale Avenue, considering that with 'all this failure to produce a family, painting is indicated!!'<sup>32</sup> She exhibited some figure drawings at the 'Second Exhibition of Contemporary Art of the British Empire' at the Imperial Gallery, the delicacy alone of which, according to *The Times*, 'made a visit to the exhibition worthwhile'.<sup>33</sup>

Monnington now received another prestigious commission for three panels to form part of a Decorative scheme, 'The Bank in Being', to celebrate the rebuilding of the Bank of England by Sir Herbert Baker (1862–1946), a leading member of the BSR Faculty of Architecture who held a distinguished record in the service of empire.<sup>34</sup> Although the team of artists, co-ordinated by D. Y. Cameron, also included Gill and Lawrence, Knights was again omitted. 'The reputation of the family depends on you now', she conceded to her sister Eileen, whose music career was beginning to flourish.<sup>35</sup>

## SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF SAINT MARTIN OF TOURS

In August 1928, D. Y. Cameron commissioned Monnington to paint an altarpiece for his local parish church at Kippen, West Stirlingshire. For Knights, however, he had a more prestigious project to propose – a reredos for the Saint Martin Chapel in the North Transept of Canterbury Cathedral. The chapel, which had lain empty since the Reformation, had recently been restored by Sir Herbert Baker as a Chapel of Service in memory of Alfred, 1st Viscount Milner (1854–1925). By the time the dedication ceremony took place, on 3 November 1928, an altar 'in the nature of a cenotaph' had been installed and coloured escutcheons and an inscription had been added to the chapel walls with the purpose of 'linking the Milner spirit to the Saint Martin tradition'.<sup>36</sup>

Lord Milner had enjoyed a successful career as a statesman, imperialist and colonial administrator

before achieving prominence as part of David Lloyd George's five-man War Cabinet. His advocacy for the creation of an inter-Allied command under the leadership of General Foch was described as 'his greatest contribution to the final issue of the war'.<sup>37</sup> The creation of a memorial to Milner within a chapel dedicated to the fourth-century soldier saint Martin of Tours therefore seemed a fitting choice; the cult of St Martin had found an expressive outlet during the First World War, the apogee of which was the large-scale celebration of military mass in the Basilica of St Martin, Tours, on 17 November 1918, when his shrine was decorated with Allied flags. The coincidence that Armistice Day fell on Martinmas Day further strengthened the association, with church-goers typically reminded on 11 November to 'remember those who fought and suffered for us in the Great War, and to recall the far-off figure of the splendid Knight of God, who, for more than fifteen hundred years, has given his name to this day'.<sup>38</sup>

The reredos was to be placed within the recess behind the altar with a related side panel to cover the corbel to the left. To harmonise with the newly restored chapel, Baker sought 'a beautiful picture rich in imagery, design and colour', which would sit in unity with the Norman stained-glass roundel (set amidst nineteenth-century roundels) above the recess, depicting St Martin's most celebrated act of charity, when, as a young soldier serving in the Roman army, he gave half his cloak to a freezing beggar outside the city gate of Amiens.<sup>39</sup> The Dean of Canterbury Cathedral, the Rt Revd George Bell (1883–1958) had originally suggested Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale (1872–1945), a second-generation Pre-Raphaelite, to undertake the commission, 'for she has a gift of grouping historical subjects in brilliant colour'.<sup>40</sup> The Milner Memorial Committee,<sup>41</sup> however, had other ideas and in December 1926, counselled by Henry Tonks, awarded the commission to Glyn Jones (1906–84), the Rome Scholar for that year, on the basis that 'he would paint in a manner more suited to the chapel'.<sup>42</sup> Thus honoured, Jones worked on little else during the first

two years of his scholarship, even relinquishing the third year to complete the reredos. From the outset the Committee disagreed about elements of his composition and he received numerous letters with conflicting instructions: 'You will see that your two expert advisers differ, but as the Committee throws its opinion on the side of the original sketch you will naturally follow the original design, unless you are strongly in favour of the second.'<sup>43</sup>

In June 1928, the Committee rejected Jones' submission (ill.151) outright, deeming it 'to be much more suitable for fresco work than for an altarpiece'. 'I told him that for a chapel in Canterbury Cathedral the standard must be very high,' Baker related to Dean Bell.<sup>44</sup> Jones never recovered from this rejection and as late as 1950 was still desperately trying to persuade the cathedral authorities to install his painting, anxious to make it known that 'in everything to do with this picture, I have been grappling with something bigger than myself'.<sup>45</sup>

When the Milner Memorial Committee deferred to D. Y. Cameron for advice, his response was unequivocal: 'Mrs Monnington is the very one to undertake it, if she will, and has that noble, primitive outlook so consistent with work for a Christian shrine. I know no one so likely to give what you desire,' adding that she possessed the 'heart and fire and imagining, and the power to convey visions and ideals which we are in search of'.<sup>46</sup> As her first public commission, Knights was 'overjoyed with the prospect of doing it' and immediately began work: 'I am making Tom's money fly extremely fast by employing vast armies of models,' she wrote with excitement to Millicent Murby. 'Italians, English and today a strange female half-Jew, half-Ethiopian.'<sup>47</sup>

Knights had a trusty adviser in the form of Bell, whom Baker asked to 'help her get all the facts and the inspiration for the subject'.<sup>48</sup> On 6 October, he wrote to suggest how she might conceive her composition: 'How would it be to make the Crucifix the centre of your picture ... the point of my idea ... would be that you have Christ on the





Cross as the focus and centre to which St. Martin and his various works, interest and acts of mercy are wrought as it were in gratitude and adoration?’<sup>49</sup> Knights, clearly uninspired, replied with tact: ‘I feel at present that a Crucifix would have to be so very small to get into the picture and then the figures would have to be small in relation.’<sup>50</sup>

This response provides a valuable insight into Knights’ attitude towards conventional Christian iconography. Her own vision looked beyond Christianity to the spiritual in art as expressed through a form of pantheism, in which the figures were emanations of the creative power of nature rather than personifications of divine presence. Having carefully studied Mary Caroline Watt’s recent translation (1928) of Sulpicius Severus’ fourth-century *Vita Martini*, she explained to Bell that she had decided to evolve her composition around St Martin’s vision of Christ:

Before your letter came I had been doing a design of Christ appearing to St. Martin wearing the beggar’s half of the cloak, and ... I thought that Christ would be in the centre with the angels and on the right St. Martin asleep having his vision and outside a dark wintry landscape with a frosty sky. I was going to put St. Martin covering the beggar thus to the left of the

picture, then in the little narrow panel I would put the cloak being cut in two by the sword on a flowery ground. So you would have the cloak coming in four times, the fourth being the half cloak which Martin reserved for himself and which would be lying on a stool by his bed with his armour and I think it would join the incidents together and make a story of the picture more simple.<sup>51</sup>

Anxious to encourage Knights by indicating historic precedents from which she might take inspiration, Bell sent her ‘a set of postcards of the frescoes by Simone Martini of the life of St. Martin’ (ill.152).<sup>52</sup> Knights, who had seen Martini’s fresco cycle during a visit to Assisi in March 1921, responded enthusiastically, explaining that she already possessed ‘a reproduction of the Vision of St. Martin ... and I was very much influenced by it, I am glad that you have sent me them all for I think they’re very beautiful.’<sup>53</sup>

Taking inspiration from Martini, Knights’ interest lay in representing ‘a multitude of attendant angels’ around Christ, whose spiritual and empyrean omnipresence provided the poetic inspiration she sought: ‘My husband thought you might not like angels to be in the picture,’ she wrote hesitatingly to Bell. ‘But I would do a very few and they are such beautiful things.’<sup>54</sup> Like Martini, Knights set

- 151 Glyn Jones  
*St Martin's Altarpiece*,  
1926–50  
Oil on canvas  
74.5 × 161.5 cm  
(29 ¼ × 63 ½ in)  
Private Collection

- 152 Simone Martini  
*S. Martino vede in sogno  
Gesù Cristo*, 1313–18  
Postcard sent from Dean  
George Bell to Winifred  
Knights, April 1929  
Private Collection



153 First compositional study  
for *Scenes from the Life of  
Saint Martin of Tours*, 1928  
Thinned oil on tracing  
paper  
18.5 × 41 cm  
(7 ¼ × 16 ⅛ in)  
Collection of  
Charlotte Raphael

her narrative within an Italian rather than a French landscape, based on studies she had made at Lake Piediluco in 1924 (see ills 134, 135 and 136).

Bell, an astute patron, endorsed Knights' conception for the painting, and she developed an initial design of great power and beauty, known through a study in pencil and two studies in oil (ill.153). With its lucid palette, mimetic clarity and elongated, flattened figures, the design, which successfully combines the modernism of *The Deluge* with the quiet lyricism of *The Santissima Trinita*, offers a highly original and engaging response to the difficult demands of the commission.

Knights' design has much in common with the intensely coloured preparatory sketches which Stanley Spencer produced in oil on paper when working towards his final compositions.<sup>55</sup> Familiar with his work from her student years, she seized the opportunity to meet her 'beloved Stanley Spencer for the first time in the flesh' in 1926, while visiting George Clausen at his house in Hampstead. 'I think he is the most wonderful painter in England now,' she told Murby.<sup>56</sup> She

described in detail the painting on which he was working, *The Resurrection*, Cookham (1924–7, Tate), which formed the centrepiece for his first one-man show at the Goupil Gallery, visited by Knights in February 1927. In a review for *The Times*, Charles Marriott described Spencer's *Resurrection* as a 'combination ... of careful detail with modern freedom in the treatment of form', a stylistic fusion equally evident in Knights' first design.<sup>57</sup>

The year 1929 marked a turning point in the evolution of the St Martin altarpiece commission, prompted in part by Bell's departure from Canterbury to become Bishop of Chichester. 'My chief regret now is that the Dean of Canterbury, who has been so much our inspiration behind the scenes, is leaving,' Baker informed Knights.<sup>58</sup> Bell deeply regretted that he would 'not be there when the picture is presented for I have great confidence in Mrs Monnington'.<sup>59</sup> At his enthronement address at Chichester on 27 June, Bell set out his belief in the vital link between the Church and contemporary art in all media: 'I earnestly hope that in this diocese (and in others) we may seek ways and means of a re-association of

the Artist and the Church: learning from him as well as giving to him.’<sup>60</sup> Establishing a liberal reputation by allowing artists to set their own standards of excellence and acceptability, he went on to stimulate Church patronage of the arts through membership of the Central Institute of Art and Design (CIAD) and the formation of the Sussex Churches Arts Council.<sup>61</sup>

Unfortunately, Bell’s self-confessed ‘deep admiration for the artist’ was not entirely shared by his successor as dean, Hugh Richard Lawrie ‘Dick’ Sheppard (1880–1937), nor by his replacement from 1931, Hewlett Johnson (1874–1966) – later known as the ‘Red Dean’ for his defence of Soviet policy – who, Knights had heard, was ‘averse to having a picture at all’.<sup>62</sup>

By May 1929, Knights’ picture was, despite the disquiet caused by Bell’s departure, sufficiently advanced to justify a visit from Baker to see the full-sized canvas in progress in the studio. Lord Balniel recorded this event with consternation: Knights ‘was thrilled with the subject and had made a design of great beauty [which] was getting on well when Baker insisted on it being scrapped ... he even tried to impose on her someone else’s design’.<sup>63</sup> In response to an indignant letter from Bell, Baker justified his intervention: ‘She was shy and the sketches were shy ... the figures were small in relation to the landscape, cutting the picture in two halves ... it is generally considered bad composition in Decoration.’<sup>64</sup>

With Bell departed, the degree to which Baker now interfered (as indeed he had with Jones before) caused utter dismay. In Balniel’s view:

[Knights] would have been wise to have given up the whole commission, as for about a year she did no work at all: feeling unable to work on a commission she disliked, and without any desire to do any new work. All this time, Baker has never left her alone: &, unable to take his advice, she became utterly miserable, nervous and unable either to stand up against him, or to do what she wanted.<sup>65</sup>

By 1931, Knights had conceded to Baker’s dogmatic instructions and reworked her original design with ‘a new picture, with three scenes in one being substituted’.<sup>66</sup> Although her original desire had been to portray ‘a Vision as that perhaps is better than painting a Miracle’, to her narrative she now added a new central scene, ‘St. Martin Restores a Child to Life’ (a subject similarly represented in Martini’s cycle).<sup>67</sup>

A number of compositional studies (ills 154 and 155) attest to the fact that Knights struggled to find a convincing means to unify the three episodes from St Martin’s life. While the same compositional arrangement was retained for the central group, the scenes to either side underwent continuous modification. When she eventually resolved upon a solution that was to give the painting its final form (ill.158), three notable changes had taken place. Firstly, the Division of the Cloak, which in the early designs featured prominently in the foreground, is moved further back within the picture plane to achieve a greater sense of pictorial depth, with St Martin now seated on the horse with his back to the viewer. Secondly, the prominent figure who hovers at the door of the loggia (acting as a vital visual intermediary between the central scene and the Vision) disappears altogether. Finally, in the side panel (which, unfortunately, was lost when the picture was restored in 1990; see ill.146), an angel replaced the motif of a cloak being cut in two on a flowery background.

In making these changes, Knights removed the essentially modernist elements that had thus far characterised her designs. It is tempting to associate this devolution with Baker’s ever-present demands for conformity. In commissioning the reredos, he sought to recreate ‘the refinement and beauty of an early Italian altarpiece’, believing that artists engaged in Decorative Painting should rise above the ‘Revolutionary Modernist’ tendency, which he defined as ‘deliberate distortion ... too often productive of mere ugliness’.<sup>68</sup> The same reactionary quality can be seen in the Bank of England murals, on which scheme Baker worked in ‘an advisory capacity’. These

- 154 Compositional study for  
*Scenes from the Life of Saint  
Martin of Tours*, c.1929  
Thinned oil and pencil on  
tracing paper  
14 × 31 cm (5 ½ × 12 ¼ in)  
Collection of Catherine  
Monnington



- 155 Compositional study for  
*Scenes from the Life of Saint  
Martin of Tours*, c.1930  
Oil over pencil on tracing  
paper  
18 × 46 cm (7 ⅛ × 18 ⅞ in)  
The Fitzwilliam Museum,  
University of Cambridge



- 156 Compositional study for  
*Scenes from the Life of Saint  
Martin of Tours*, c.1930  
Oil over pencil on tracing  
paper  
15 × 30 cm (6 × 11 ⅞ in)  
Private Collection





were greatly criticised when they were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1932: 'they do not suggest that English art has hit upon any new decorative formula or quickened the old towards new beauty'.<sup>69</sup>

For her final design (ill.158), Knights turned to Piero della Francesca's *The Queen of Sheba in Adoration of the Wood* and *The Reception in Solomon's Palace* (c.1452–c.1460, ill.157), a composition that had already provided inspiration for *The Marriage at Cana*. Indeed, in 1930, Lord Balniel had sent her a postcard of the combined scenes, inscribing it: 'I found this postcard today & thought you might like it.'<sup>70</sup> Similarities are discernible in the division of space between exterior and interior scenes, the continuous backdrop of the landscape and the ceremonial grouping of figures in static spatiality. Knights' painting shares Piero della Francesca's restricted palette of flat colours in blues, greens and browns punctuated by whites and reds, colours which are at their most intense in the acutely observed draperies which softly envelop the bodies. Additionally, Knights borrowed the motifs of the white horse seen in rear elevation and the prominently placed tree in the middle ground.

Although Knights struggled to resolve the composition according to Baker's many demands, the landscape, which shows Lake Piediluco and surrounding mountains, remained unaffected by

the composition's laborious evolution. To the left, Knights depicted the hilltop town of Labro, which she visited in 1924 when staying at Piediluco. A series of thin water channels, a device also used in *The Marriage at Cana* and *The Santissima Trinita*, bridges the foreground with the landscape, the placement of these vertical features setting up a rhythm of intervals and a greater sense of spatial recession. Providing a continuous, unifying backdrop to the narrative, this landscape was indispensable to Knights' vision of sacred imagery, a natural visualisation of God's beneficent presence. On this one point, she and Baker found a common ground, Baker writing that 'artists who can see in nature those most exalted moments may express that beauty which is one aspect of religion more than he who paints a fanciful Christ against a gold background'.<sup>71</sup>

Baker was well known for his use of symbolism in architecture.<sup>72</sup> In his autobiography, he recalled how he enjoyed 'researching Church history to find authentic arms or emblems of Saints, or, if there had been none assigned to them by medieval heralds, historical facts of their lives for the invention of appropriate symbols'.<sup>73</sup> In commissioning the reredos, he desired a picture 'rich in imagery' and insisted on the inclusion of certain motifs to symbolise St Martin's identity as 'Soldier of Christ'. In early spring 1932, he

- 157 Piero della Francesca  
*The Queen of Sheba in Adoration of the Wood and The Reception in Solomon's Palace*, from the *Legend of the True Cross* cycle, c.1452–c.1460  
Basilica of San Francesco, Arezzo

Overleaf:

- 158 *Scenes from the Life of Saint Martin of Tours*, c.1928–33  
Oil (or possibly tempera) on canvas with glazing  
73 x 159.5 cm  
(28 ¾ x 62 ¾ in)  
Milner Memorial Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral





summoned Knights to Owletts, his house in Cobham, Kent, 'with the purpose that she should draw an enormous mass of snowdrops which he thinks she should put into her picture'.<sup>74</sup> As the first flowers to appear after winter, the snowdrops, a symbol of the Virgin Mary's purity, were scattered beneath the central group in the final composition to express renewal and rebirth.<sup>75</sup> The Virgin Mary also appears holding snowdrops, as she witnesses St Martin's vision within the Ilogia. Researching the symbolic association of individual plants with spiritually significant meanings, Knights' initial idea was also to include some reeds, emblematic of Christ's Passion.<sup>76</sup> In the final painting, these were replaced by a sow thistle placed prominently at the side of the loggia; sharing many common properties with the dandelion, the sow thistle was one of the 'bitter herbs' also evoking the Passion. Like many weeds that thrive along roads and pathways, its wider significance was to denote 'the well-trodden path' of those seeking Christ.

Baker may have suggested the inclusion of the walnut tree (ill.159); in Christian theology the walnut, in its three substances, symbolises the redemptive work of Christ.<sup>77</sup> The tree's bare branches locate the scene 'during the more than usually severe winter' when St Martin shared his cloak with the beggar, thus allowing the viewer a comparison between the cycle of nature and the Christian narrative: 'I am doing some sketches of trees before they burst their buds. It is a race against Spring for all the trees are rapidly changing but happily I have chosen a walnut tree which is slower than the rest.'<sup>78</sup>

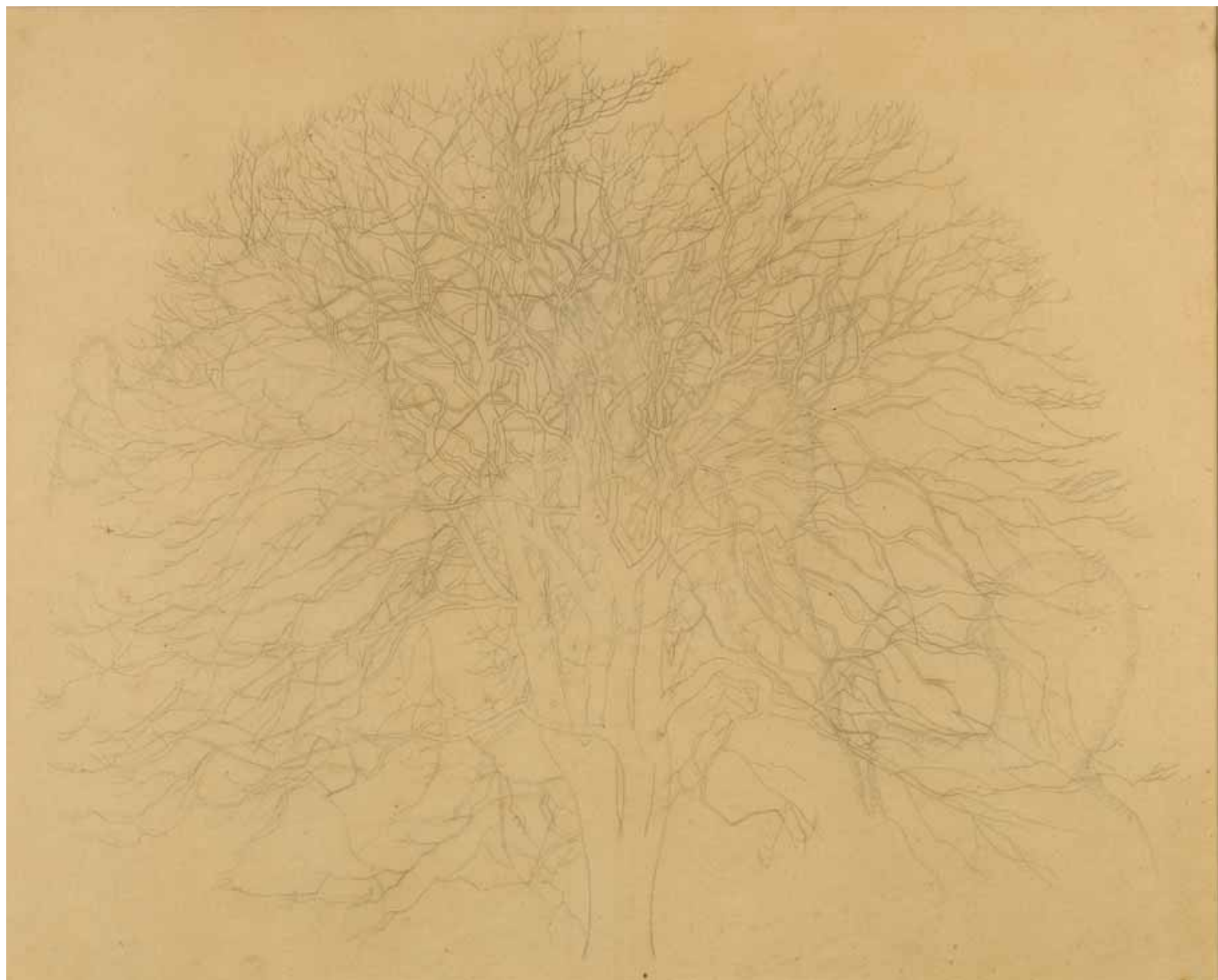
The shepherd's staff symbolises 'Christ, the Good Shepherd' (John 10:11), its curved top alluding to the crozier that St Martin bore as Bishop of Tours. Other symbolic objects may include the bundle – 'the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God' (1 Samuel 25:29) – and the small wooden plank to emblematised the wood from the Garden of Eden that became the Cross on which Christ was crucified.<sup>79</sup> A single modern reference, the First World War helmet worn by St Martin (mounted

on the horse), associates the soldier saint with Lord Milner's distinguished wartime record.

In common with her previous paintings, Knights continued a personal narrative within the picture by including models from her own family, as well as her own likeness. It is not known whether the central scene, 'St. Martin Restores a Child to Life', was imposed on Knights by Baker, but it clearly had a deep association for her with the recent birth of her stillborn son (see p.151). Eileen modelled for the central kneeling mother, her blue robe calling on the traditional iconography of the Virgin Mary. With an expression of contemplative love for her child, this sisterly homage reads as a poignant endorsement of the psychological experiences of motherhood which Knights had been so cruelly denied; Eileen's son Martin, born on 1 May 1933, provided the model for the baby when just a few hours old.<sup>80</sup> Included among the onlookers is a posthumous portrait of Knights' mother, Mabel, who had died in 1930 after a long illness. Knights herself stands to the left of St Martin, her smooth, centrally parted hair partially hidden by the intricate folds of the white headdress (ill.161). The fixed and melancholic gaze of Knights and her mother records their shared sense of loss for a baby son; David's death in 1915, aged five months, had remained a trauma for the Knights family. Knights regretted not seeing her stillborn child, who was buried in unconsecrated ground behind the doctor's surgery in Caterham, but '[Tom's] only wish was that it be removed as soon as possible, so that we could begin with a clean start and turn it all into an illness that was over'.<sup>81</sup> In spite of this, she adhered to the memory that 'he was a lovely one, Nurse said, he was perfect, like Tom'.<sup>82</sup> It is, perhaps, significant that she chose to depict the moment before the miraculous Resurrection took place, an imagined instant of bereavement that she herself had been refused.

Amongst the other models is Robin Guthrie (1902–1971), Monnington's friend from the Slade, who appears as the younger St Martin in bed. A striking resemblance between the older St Martin





159 Study of a tree in winter  
for *Scenes from the Life of  
Saint Martin of Tours*, 1929  
Pencil on tracing paper  
43.8 x 49.4 cm  
(17 ¼ x 19 ½ in)  
Private Collection



160 Cartoon for *Scenes from the Life of Saint Martin of Tours*, c.1932  
Pencil on paper  
76 × 188 cm (30 × 74 in)  
Private Collection

wearing his bishop's cloak and the 70-year-old Baker might have resulted from Knights' deference for the Renaissance tradition of including a patron's portrait within an altarpiece.<sup>83</sup> Baker, however, was not beyond suggesting this idea himself; his portrait appears prominently in A. K. Lawrence's panels for the Bank of England, *Demolition and Rebuilding and Builders* (c.1928–37), and, for posterity, a full-size portrait by Lawrence was commissioned for one of the bank's offices.<sup>84</sup>

Knights' initial conception favoured sombre greens, aubergine and blues which would not conflict with the jewel-like colours of the chapel's windows and the strong light that they projected (ill.156). Baker, however, insisted on a palette of 'brilliant colour' believing this would harmonise better with the 'flaming window'.<sup>85</sup> Two studies in pastel (private collection), a medium Knights had rarely employed, reveal her exploration of bright sharp hues in response to Baker's directive.



The meticulous planning of every detail of the composition is recorded in a large number of preparatory studies (ills 161–164).<sup>86</sup> Lord Balmiel recalled:

She showed me her drawings for the picture & some earlier ones – every detail carried out in pencil to the last degree of finish and refinement; perhaps even to a fault ... one of the loveliest drawings was a study of a snipe's

wing, to be fitted without any alteration to the shoulders of an angel! Another was of her mother who died a year or two ago – for the standing figure ... in the background. A third was a complete tree, every leafless twig drawn in the finest and most tender and sensitive way imaginable.<sup>87</sup>

Knights created a full-sized drawing to finalise the correct position of the figures in relation to the



161 Self-portrait study for  
*Scenes from the Life of Saint  
Martin of Tours*, c.1932  
Pencil on paper  
27.3 x 22.4 cm  
(10  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 8  $\frac{7}{8}$  in)  
UCL Art Museum,  
University College London

162 Study of an angel for *Scenes  
from the Life of Saint Martin  
of Tours*, c.1933  
Pencil on paper  
39.5 x 29.3 cm  
(15  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 11  $\frac{1}{2}$  in)  
Private Collection





Sketch for "SP Knight"

W. A. Morrison 1933



landscape setting (ill.160). The study of the curtain on the far right and the hilltop village on the far left are rendered in detail, but most areas are left blank, having been meticulously worked up in separate studies on tracing paper. The most striking feature of this drawing is the inclusion of precisely measured perspective lines which create a dramatic raking perspective. Their vanishing point lies in the distant landscape, notably leading the eye beyond the Resurrection scene itself.

Although Knights refused to let anyone see her composition, in August 1933 Tonks came across it by chance and wrote an encouraging letter:

I saw your picture, and it may console you, knowing that you were not happy about it, to hear that I think you have much improved it, also, in justice to Baker, whom I have somewhat abused, he seems to have been right in keeping you at it ... it has been a great struggle for you but ... go ahead, keep as cheerful as you can and I can, from what I know of your personality generally speaking, advise you to paint what you want to, and not what [Baker] wants you to do.<sup>88</sup>

By October, the painting was finished, Lord Balmiel recording that 'during the last three months Baker has left her alone – chiefly through the efforts of D. Y. [Cameron] and at last she has begun to make some progress'.<sup>89</sup>

In early November, Knights and Monnington travelled to Canterbury to install the painting in time for Martinmas Day (ill.146), 'a matter of some difficulty because it had to go into a recess and we were obliged to take the frame to pieces in order to get the picture in'.<sup>90</sup> In a rare moment of appreciation, Baker wrote to Knights that Canterbury 'ought to have received you and your picture with white oxen with blue necklaces and named a new street for the event, as in Florence of old!'<sup>91</sup> After his many ill-judged interventions, it is unlikely that this compliment would have done much to appease her down-heartedness; the complex issues of patronal

requirements that had plagued the commission from the outset continued beyond its installation. Dean Johnson, although he admired the painting, considered that it 'clashed violently with the window above it' and that 'unless one went right up to the altar and bent across it the figures could not be seen to any advantage'.<sup>92</sup> Bell, clearly aware of the continued controversy, wrote Knights a gracious and heartfelt appreciation:

I was in Canterbury the other day and saw it with my own eyes. It is a beautiful painting – lovely, delicate and full of religious feeling. Fortunate indeed are the Cathedral and the chapel that contain it. I know that the Chapter does not at present take the view that it is perfect in its position on the altar: but time and beauty are on your side. So, with a little patience I am sure all will work out well.<sup>93</sup>

The dean, however, was unmovable and in June 1935, 'having taken the highest artistic advice it was possible to get', removed the painting to the Lady Chapel in the crypt.<sup>94</sup> Knights was inconsolable, writing, 'It seems to be in a hard unsympathetic light and shows up all the fearful things I hoped would take their place at the right height from the ground and I long to put some more work into the foreground. But there! It is lovely to have been allowed to have a painting in that perfect Cathedral.'<sup>95</sup>

This unhappy conclusion was the last in a series of unfortunate episodes which ultimately compromised what might have been one of Knights' most engaging paintings. From the moment that Bell departed and the lyric modernism of the first design was rejected, the relentless interference of Baker ensured that the early promise of the commission was never fulfilled. As James Wilkie wrote, commiserating with Knights, 'Architects are so often ½ artists & feel decidedly above them. It's a rather explosive mixture for they can't do what they want by themselves and are far too proud to accept what anybody else wants to give them.'<sup>96</sup>

163 Study of angel's hands for  
*Scenes from the Life of Saint  
Martin of Tours*, 1933  
Pencil on paper  
28 x 20 (11 x 7 7/8 in)  
Private Collection

164 Study of male figure for  
*Scenes from the Life of Saint  
Martin of Tours*, 1933  
Pencil on paper  
29.5 x 23 cm (11 ½ x 9 in)  
Private Collection





## POSTSCRIPT

## ENGLAND, PART 2: 1934–1947

‘SHE HAD BEEN CREATED TO SING THAT SONG AND THEN VANISH AWAY’<sup>1</sup>

The birth of a baby son, John Pardoe Monnington, on 2 June 1934, was celebrated as a wonderful gift: ‘The Monningtons who live below me have produced a lovely boy of such promise that I suggest they add Gargantua to his list of names,’ Henry Tonks wrote admiringly.<sup>2</sup> Knights, however, proved to be an over-anxious mother: ‘I fear she has very little faith,’ Monnington lamented two months after the event, ‘which is bad for us all’.<sup>3</sup> The two began to lead very separate lives; Monnington in London fully occupied with his commissions and the administration of various artistic schools and committees, and Knights at her mother-in-law’s house at Crawley Down, Sussex, where she looked after John: ‘From the moment of my birth my Mother devoted herself to my sustenance and comfort to the exclusion of nearly all her work as an artist,’ he later recalled.<sup>4</sup> Monnington tried to encourage her to get back to painting, suggesting that ‘you will be better in yourself and it is also possible to be a better mother ... please forgive this “lecture”, I only say it because I love you so much and hate to see you not in proper flower, for you flower more beautifully than anyone.’<sup>5</sup>

Tonks, who believed that ‘women particularly cannot serve two masters, the baby and their soul’, wrote in frustration to Knights soon after John’s first birthday: ‘I assume you who would be counted

as a free man are always finding interruptions. You get to work! John must really begin to look after himself.’<sup>6</sup> Encouraged by Monnington, Mary Potter (née Attenborough), Knights’ friend from the Slade, proposed a holiday, ‘somewhere where we can do nothing but work uninterrupted from families and responsibilities’.<sup>7</sup> But Knights would barely, if ever, let John out of her sight.

With the requirement to vacate 1a Vale Avenue after Tonks’ death in January 1937, Monnington acquired the lease for a cottage on the Leyswood Estate near Groombridge, a small village straddling the Kent and East Sussex borders. He wrote to Knights that ‘a nice new house and a real studio handy for you is worth a great deal ... time goes by and apart from John whom we must look after as well as we can, both you and I must do our work as well ... because we both are worth something if we settle down to it.’<sup>8</sup>

On her father’s death in 1935, Knights had been left a sizeable inheritance, and at Leyswood a housekeeper, cook and gardener were employed to make up the household staff.<sup>9</sup> In a further attempt to encourage Knights back to work, Monnington hired a nanny, an arrangement which failed to liberate her from the belief that she alone could ensure John’s well-being.

She and John spent their days at Leyswood wandering through its walled garden, orchard and two-acre meadow (ill.166). Very occasionally,

165 Springtime wild flowers,  
1936  
Pencil on paper  
29 × 23 cm (11 3/8 × 9 in)  
Private Collection



Knights would sit besides a plant 'with her pad on her knees and two or three pencils held in her hand, and draw one of her precisely detailed drawings'.<sup>10</sup> During a visit to Leyswood in 1936, D. Y. Cameron acquired a drawing of springtime wild flowers including bluebells, primrose blossom and cowslip spray (ill.165), which he presented in 1944 to the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres (formerly Lord Balniel), writing, 'one to cherish and sustain, one rarely if ever equalled in some ways in the History of Art'.<sup>11</sup> Summer holidays were spent at her cousins' farmhouse in Worcestershire and at a seaside coastguard's cottage in Horsey, Norfolk, belonging to Evelyn Shaw, the Honorary General Secretary of the BSR. In 1938, Knights joined her sister Eileen for a holiday at Hope Cove, an idyllic fishing village in South Devon, where she made a detailed drawing of the coastline with its ragged rock formations (ill.167).

Harmonious as this pre-war period might have been from a domestic perspective, it was disappointing in terms of creative output. This, however, was not due to lack of commissions, encouragement or a ready audience. Shortly before John's birth, Sir Augustus Moore Daniel, the Director

of the National Gallery, asked Knights if she had an available picture to sell, 'something private, confidential and interesting', or if indeed she could 'produce such a thing ... I would keep some money in hand.'<sup>12</sup> D. Y. Cameron, meanwhile ever hopeful, revised his previously ambitious scheme to acquire a major work by suggesting instead that she produce 'a small picture for an Italian frame I have 14x10, perhaps an Annunciation?'<sup>13</sup> In 1938, she received a request from the Department of Fine Arts of the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: 'We know that paintings by you are rare and precious objects but ... may we be so fortunate as to have a canvas from you in our 1938 International Exhibition in Pittsburgh ... we will leave no stone unturned to obtain our end.'<sup>14</sup> Knights, however, declined all of these requests and similarly, in spite of being elected to the NEAC in 1929, she never exhibited a work there.

## ELTHAM PALACE TAPESTRIES

When Stephen Courtauld, a scion of the wealthy Courtauld textile family, and his wife Virginia approached Knights and Monnington about designing eight tapestries for the Great Hall at Eltham Palace, Monnington believed that the commission would provide the impetus that Knights needed for a return to work. Between 1933 and 1936, on the site of Eltham Palace, the architects John Seely and Paul Edward Paget had created an elaborate new mansion incorporating as a music room the fifteenth-century Great Hall originally built for Edward IV. The Courtaulds were active promoters of young artists and, encouraged by Evelyn Shaw, commissioned numerous works for their new home from Rome Scholars, including Alfred Hardiman and Charles Sargeant Jagger (1885-1934).<sup>\*</sup> They already owned Knights' *Edge of Abruzzi*; *Boat with Three People on a Lake*, which they had purchased in 1931 at 'An Exhibition

<sup>\*</sup> In 1921, the Courtaulds had set up and financed an annual scholarship in Engraving at the BSR.

166 Winifred Knights and her son, John Monnington, in the garden of Professor A. H. Gerrard, Leyswood, Groombridge, 1938  
Photograph  
Private Collection



of English Painting 1900–1931 Selected by Mr Gerald Kelly' at the French Gallery, and which now hung in the Boudoir at Eltham Palace (ill.128, p.132).<sup>15</sup> In a letter to his brother Meredith, Monnington set out the terms of the commission:

Each tapestry will be about 15 square ft. ... today [Knights] and I went to the works of W[illiam] Morris at Merton Abbey where we went thoroughly into the question of designing the tapestries ... it would only be necessary to work out designs to ¼ scale ... the firm would not be able to make more than one tapestry a year ... as I gather the actual weaving will cost something in the region of £2,000 for each piece I do not see that the C's could fail to give us a reasonable sum for our part of the work.<sup>16</sup>

In the event, Monnington withdrew from the project, writing, 'I do not feel inclined to take

eight years or so doing designs ... I will not have anything to do with it.'<sup>17</sup> He reported, however, that Knights 'was most interested and might get on with one straight away'.<sup>18</sup> Little survives to indicate how far this commission progressed, though a letter from the painter Mary Sargent Florence suggests that early in the scheme Knights was looking to make studies of 'a bat (flutter-mouse)' for the tapestry borders.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, extant drawings in a sketchbook outline several recurrent compositions on the theme of the Birth of the Virgin, presenting the scene in a medieval-inspired interior, together with a note about the tapestry dimensions.<sup>20</sup> The absence of further studies suggests that progress stalled; the Courtaulds, however, clearly anticipated that Knights would complete the commission and in 1936 inscribed her initials on the screen at the back of the raised dais in the Great Hall to indicate her involvement in its decoration. Around this time, Virginia Courtauld additionally commissioned her to design a brooch accommodating several cut stones and a very large opal.<sup>21</sup>

167 Hope Cove, Devon, 1938  
Crayon and pencil on  
paper  
16.5 × 22 cm  
(6 ½ × 8 ⅝ in)  
Private Collection

## THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

In 1937, Lord Balniel tentatively sent Knights ‘an expensive large canvas, almost a sailcloth’, measuring six by ten feet, with the hope that the painting he had first commissioned ten years previously for Balcarres Castle ‘will one day be painted: something to live for’.<sup>22</sup> Knights felt encouraged by this display of determination, and it proved to be the catalyst she needed for a return to the studio. Balniel suggested she select the subject herself, feeling ‘certain that she would be happiest working on a subject that was her own choice’.<sup>23</sup> The only instruction he gave was for ‘a great landscape with small figures in the foreground, something with the same sort of proportions and relation of the figures to the landscape in [*The Santissima*] Trinita which seems to me to be more completely successful and lovely than the large figures in the smaller setting of [*The Marriage at Cana*], if possible’.<sup>24</sup>

Knights resolved upon the biblical narrative of the Flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13–23), a subject she had already explored in *Italian Landscape* conceived in Italy in 1921 (ill.96, p.104). A squared drawing in pencil, pen and ink on tracing paper provides a clear record of the landscape in which the narrative was to be set (ill.171). According to John, his mother envisaged the composition with Joseph leading Mary (modelled by Eileen) on a donkey (provided by a Leyswood neighbour, the sculptor A. H. Gerrard), descending from the high ground on the right-hand side (under the arc of a rainbow) to a spring coppice with a stream running through.

Balniel presented Knights with 12 early prints of wild flowers from Balcarres Castle library to provide inspiration. Extant drawings in pencil indicate the landscape detail which was to feature in the foreground of the painting (ills 168–170).<sup>25</sup> With their beauty of form and subtle use of light and shade, these studies display an intensity of observation that few British artists of the twentieth century ever achieved. D. Y. Cameron compared their quality of draughtsmanship to that

of Leonardo da Vinci: ‘the artist of today might laugh at my love and admiration of her work, so far removed from the spirit of our times. But it is timeless and of another world.’<sup>26</sup>

John recalls seeing the canvas hanging on the end wall of his mother’s Leyswood studio, where he ‘used to watch her drawing while I curled up on her four poster bed’.<sup>27</sup> By the time war was declared on 3 September 1939, Knights had set out the construction lines on the canvas, with the figures of Joseph and Mary drawn in pencil outline and the spring flowers and foliage of the riverbank rendered with elaborate and minute detail.

## THE SECOND WORLD WAR

When, after only 21 years of increasingly uneasy peace war was once again declared, Knights became distraught and her thoughts were monopolised by concerns for the safety and well-being of her son John, now aged five. While, for Monnington, the war was ultimately to reinvigorate his artistic output, for Knights its onset brought her already intermittent productivity to a standstill. Finding Leyswood too lonely and exposed to enemy action (Monnington having been posted to the Ministry of Camouflage in Leamington Spa), she and John fled, and for the next four years led a peripatetic life moving between Wales, the Cotswolds, Wiltshire, Shropshire and Scotland, staying with relatives, friends and acquaintances who were called upon for shelter, or otherwise in guesthouses and hotels. John recalled:

We became an almost inseparable unit against the adversities that my mother could see ahead. We travelled by train or taxi with two big suitcases, her painting kit, and shoulder bag from pillar to post for nearly four years. During this time she did no drawing or painting whatever apart from a few flower drawings and little sketches to amuse me.<sup>28</sup>



168 Study of foliage on the  
banks of a stream for *The  
Flight into Egypt*, c.1938  
Pencil on paper  
20.9 x 28 cm (8 ¼ x 11 in)  
Private Collection





169 Study of elm and alder  
saplings for *The Flight into  
Egypt*, c.1938  
Pencil on paper  
28 x 20.9 cm  
(11 x 8 ¼ in)  
Private Collection

170 Study of bluebells on the  
banks of a stream for *The  
Flight into Egypt*, c.1938  
Pencil on paper  
20.8 x 28 cm  
(8 ¼ x 11 in)  
Private Collection

*Overleaf:*  
171 Compositional study for  
*The Flight into Egypt*, c.1938  
Pencil, pen and ink on  
tracing paper  
48.3 x 88.9 cm  
(19 x 35 in)  
Private Collection









172 *The River Nant, Taynuilt, Argyll, 1946*  
Pencil and watercolour on paper  
29.6 × 40.6 cm  
(11 5/8 × 16 in)  
British Museum

Towards the end of the war, Robert Lyon, Principal of the Edinburgh College of Art, tried to help Knights by inviting her to become his Assistant in Drawing, 'but with Tom going to France, he would not let me go to Edinburgh'.<sup>29</sup>

During this unsettled period, Knights began to sense her growing isolation as an artist, expressing her disdain for what she perceived as the willing embrace of modernity, with its valueless striving for novelty and contempt for tradition, in miscellaneous writings: '[Philip Wilson] Steer died last Saturday. I feel unhappy about it and bad-tempered about painting. They like the modern stuff, however bad it is. I seem to live in the past these days.'<sup>30</sup> The meticulous working methods

that she had learnt at the Slade and put into the service of Decorative Painting appeared increasingly irrelevant. 'The students nowadays are all so cracked on Picasso, who is not such a great one at drawing as they all make out.'<sup>31</sup>

In December 1940, D. Y. Cameron wrote her a heartfelt letter from 'one artist to another': 'I quite understand all you write and all your feelings. When one has been drawn into a life where beauty is the chief desire and peace essential for the accomplishment of any work, a time like this is quite fatal. To one like you – so sensitive and so gifted – I well realize your sadness and unrest.'<sup>32</sup>

Knights took solace in her memories of Italy and the harmonious life that she had lived there. Writing



to Colin Gill's sister Marjory, now Lady Allen of Hurtwood, she recalled with nostalgia the walk they had undertaken together from Rome to Florence in the spring of 1921: 'I often go over every detail of it in my mind and it all stands out so clearly – it was a perfect adventure.'<sup>33</sup> She brought on her travels her old copy of *Baedeker* and would spend hours with John retracing the travels she had made by train and foot through pre-war Italy (ill.173).

According to John, when the war finally came to an end, his father felt deeply depressed and his parents' relationship rapidly began to deteriorate: 'The thought of having to start again from scratch to find work was too much to contemplate and Tom found that his love for Winifred had completely evaporated. She, also, could not find the man in him that she had married only twenty years previously.'<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, when Monnington proposed in 1946 that they live apart, Knights felt 'hurt to the heart'.<sup>35</sup> She rented a studio from Arnold Mason at his house at 38 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, where, as her former fiancé and now her landlord, he hoped that 'the right environment be afforded you to carry out your ambition to restart the work you so much love'.<sup>36</sup>

In the summer of 1946, Knights and John received an invitation from the Courtaulds to spend

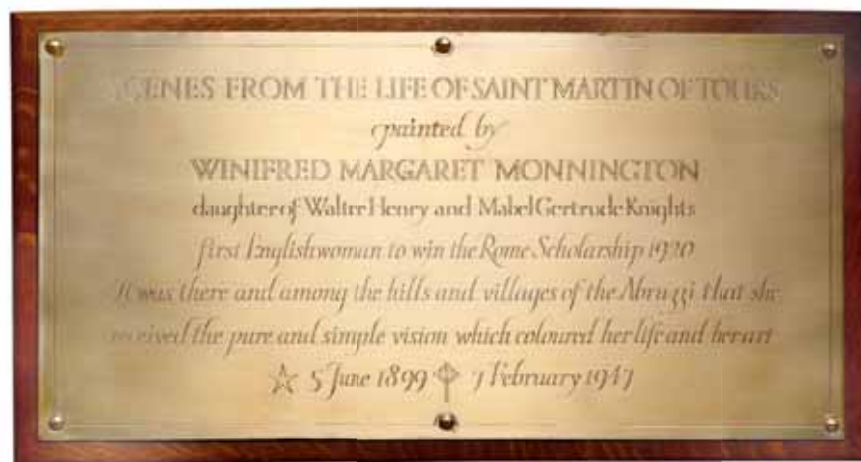
six weeks at their house near Taynuilt in Argyll. Here the peace and tranquility of the surroundings inspired her to produce a series of drawings (ill.172): 'It is like paradise with its mountains and blue loch and honeysuckle, foxgloves and scented orchids and yellow iris growing down on the beach and its red deer, waterfalls and seals that play in the loch just below the window where I am writing now.'<sup>37</sup> She wanted 'these drawings to be as good as I can do' and, although she 'found it hard getting back to good work again after so long a lapse', their level of draughtsmanship shows that her desire to complete *The Flight into Egypt*, which was still languishing in her Leyswood studio, was easily within the realm of her genius.<sup>38</sup>

## DEATH

On 7 February 1947, during one of the most bitter winters on record, Knights died at St Stephen's Hospital, London, having collapsed two days earlier in her Chelsea studio as the result of a brain tumour. This undiagnosed illness may in part explain the uneasiness of mind that so frustrated her creative output in later years. Deeply shocked by her death, Monnington wrote a heartfelt letter to Lady Allen of Hurtwood ('I want to tell you something of the end because you knew the beginning') in which he described Knights' final hours:

During the 48 hours that she lay unconscious she became again the person I knew and loved so deeply, a great load seemed to have been lifted. She was restless, but with a light restlessness – her movements of hands and arms and her expression were very beautiful and familiar – associated with the happiest times, and in a strange way I felt utterly consoled. I knew that although I was losing her, I had found her. This may seem strange to you – she died in my arms ... For all the sadness that may have been during the last few years – there was much

- 173 Anticoli Corrado from memory, c.1942  
Crayon and pencil on paper  
28 x 22.2 cm  
(11 x 8 3/8 in)  
Collection of Catherine Monnington



sadness, and for all my blindness – & I was blind, I think that perhaps it was better so that neither of us suspected that there was any trouble. I was blind and I went astray but not so far away as she thought & I could not find her again except for moments or at most a few days, until at last I found her utterly again and then it was too late.<sup>39</sup>

## SEQUEL

After Winifred Knights' death, no obituary appeared. In the *Dictionary of National Biography*, she is only mentioned as Sir Thomas Monnington's first wife.

Randolph Schwabe recorded attending Knights' funeral at St Luke's Church, Chelsea, on 13 February 1947: 'Saw [A. H.] Gerrard, a neighbour at Groombridge, Arnold Mason, an old admirer ... Rodney Burn & his wife, [Gilbert] Ledward and others. On to Whitechapel for a trustees meeting.'<sup>40</sup>

Feeling that the welfare of his son now overshadowed everything else, Monnington did not attend the funeral, but rushed instead to Balcarres Castle. As the result of an ultimatum from the

School Attendance Officer, John had just begun his formal education at the nearby Lathallan Boys Preparatory School, and every afternoon for a month Monnington rode over the nine-foot snow with the Earl of Crawford's groom to take him out for tea.

The Earl of Crawford, whose numerous public appointments in the arts included Trustee of the British Museum and the Royal Fine Arts Commission, used his influence to force Dean Hewlett Johnson to restore Knights' altarpiece to the St Martin's Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral with a memorial tablet (ill.174) placed alongside. At the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition of 1947, Arnold Mason exhibited the last of three portraits of Knights under the poignant title 'The Late Miss Winifred Knights'.<sup>41</sup>

*The Flight into Egypt*, like so many of Knights' pictures, started but unfinished, was eventually taken off its stretcher around 1955, its canvas to be reused by Monnington; his own career, far from being over, would continue for another three decades; in 1966, he was elected President of the Royal Academy, a position he held until his death in 1976.

In the early 1950s, the British School at Rome tried to persuade the Tate and the Fitzwilliam Museum to accept *The Marriage at Cana* as a gift, an offer they both declined. In 1957, Mr E. Heber Thomson, the London representative of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, in Wellington, who had always admired the painting, seized the opportunity for the museum to acquire it.

Knights' oeuvre would be rediscovered a full generation later in the late 1980s when the BSR closed its London office and consigned to auction its collection of paintings by the early Rome Scholars.<sup>42</sup> The acquisition of *The Deluge* by the Tate in 1989 marked the beginning of the process through which Knights' art, 'with its strange and unworldly beauty', is gradually being reassessed.<sup>43</sup>

174 Memorial Plaque, Milner Memorial Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral, 1951

175 Paul Laib  
Photographic portrait of Winifred Knights taken on the occasion of her winning the Rome Scholarship in Decorative Painting, 1920



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Evelyn Shaw Correspondence  
Faculty of Painting, Book of Minutes

### PRIVATE COLLECTIONS (ENGLAND)

Winifred Knights Correspondence  
Mabel Gertrude Knights Papers  
John Monnington, Typescript of  
'Miscellaneous Reminiscences', 2012  
Thomas Monnington Correspondence  
Meredith Monnington, Typescript of  
Correspondence with Annotations  
Eileen Palmer (née Knights) Correspondence

### SLADE ARCHIVE, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON LIBRARY SERVICES, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Winifred Knights Correspondence  
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### NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND, MANUSCRIPT AND ARCHIVE COLLECTIONS (EDINBURGH)

Papers of the Earls of Crawford and Balcarres

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- Daily Express*
- Daily Graphic*
- Daily Mail*
- Devon and Exeter Gazette*
- Evening Post*
- Evening Standard*
- Liverpool Courier*
- Manchester Guardian*
- Observer*
- Streatham News*
- The Times*

# NOTES

## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE NOTES

- BSR HA: British School at Rome Historic Archive
- CCA: Canterbury Cathedral Archives, Milner Memorial File
- JAGS Archive: James Allen's Girls' School Archive, Dulwich, London
- NLS ECB: National Library of Scotland, Papers of the Earls of Crawford and Balcarres
- PC: Private Collection
- UCL SC: University College London Library Services, Special Collections

## INTRODUCTION

1. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 21 February 1921, UCL SC
2. Letter from Henry Tonks to Knights, 7 August 1933, PC
3. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 6 November 1920 UCL SC
4. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 1921, UCL SC
5. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 5 May 1921, UCL SC
6. D.H. Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, Inc., 1921), p.215
7. Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams; Being Autobiographical Notes* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1916), p.145
8. Letter from Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 30 March 1921, BSR HA
9. A. K. Lawrence, undated notes on

- Decorative Painting, RIBA Library Archives Collection
10. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 1921, UCL SC
  11. Letter from D. Y. Cameron to the 28th Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, 18 August 1943, NLS ECB
  12. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 24 August 1922, UCL SC
  13. *The Morning Post*, 5 April 1929
  14. Thomas Monnington, loose sheet of writing, 1924, PC

## I: THE EARLY YEARS

1. Letter from Walter Knights to Knights, 4 June 1918, PC
2. Charles F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen & Co., 1909), p.70
3. Letter from Walter Knights to Knights, 4 June 1902, PC
4. B. L. Hutchins, *Conflicting Ideals: Two Sides of the Woman's Question* (London: Thomas Murby & Co., 1913)
5. The School of Art Needlework was established in 1872 with a twofold purpose: to revive fine embroidery and to provide employment for educated gentlewomen. Kathryn Ledbetter, *Victorian Needlework* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012), p.22
6. The phrase 'New Woman' was first coined in 1894 in a pair of articles by Sarah Grand and Ouida: Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman

- Question', *North American Review*, vol.158, no.448 (1894), pp.270-76; Ouida, 'The New Woman', *North American Review*, vol.158, no.450 (1894), pp.610-19
7. For a discussion of the dress worn by the 'New Woman', see Meaghan Clarke, 'Sex and the City: The Metropolitan New Woman' in Helena Bonett, Ysanne Holt and Jennifer Mundy (eds), *The Camden Town Group in Context* (London: Tate Research Publication, May 2012)
  8. All of Knights' maternal aunts had independent careers: for example, Dora was music mistress at Streatham High School, Janet a secretary for the Evening News Associated Newspapers, Grace a secretary to an accountant, and Millicent a civil servant. As soon as they were financially independent, they moved to rooms in Grosvenor Road, central London.
  9. Letter from George Bernard Shaw to Florence Farr, quoted in Michael Holroyd, 'Women and the Body Politic', *Critical Inquiry*, vol.6, no.1 (Autumn 1979), p.29. For Millicent Murby's articles, see, for example, 'The True Gospel of Feminism,' *New Age*, vol.3, no.6 (1908), pp.108-10; 'Undiluted Masculinism', *New Age*, vol.3, no.8 (1908), p.149; 'A Socialized Feminism', *Freewoman*, vol.1, no.19 (1912), pp.374-5
  10. Tract sent from the Fabian Women's Group to the Members of the Society, 4 April 1908, quoted in Sally Alexander (ed.), *Women's Fabian Tracts*, Women's Source Library Volume VII (London: Routledge, 1988), p.146

11. For Carpenter's defence of and writings about women's emancipation, see Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London: Verso, 2009), pp.321-3, 326-9
12. Graham Gower, *A History of Suburban Streatham* (Streatham: Local History Publications, 1996), p.26
13. Percy Fitzgerald, *London City Suburbs as They Are To-day* (London: Leadenhall Press, 1893), p.194
14. Henry Benjamin Wheatley, *London Past and Present* (1891; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press reprint, 2011), p.546
15. Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* (Manchester: Labour Press, 1883), p.31
16. Gower, *History of Suburban Streatham*, p.27
17. Between 1907 and 1910 12 JAGS pupils won open scholarships to universities. Board of Education Report of Inspection, May 1915, p.4, JAGS Archive
18. Brian Green, *To Read and Sew, James Allen's Girls' School, 1741-1991*, (London: Governors of James Allen's Girls' School, 1991), p.56
19. Board of Education Report of Inspection, May 1915, p.11, JAGS Archive
20. For Clarke's teaching methods, see Lillian Clarke, 'Direct Methods of Studying Nature', *Windsor Magazine*, 1905, pp.587-98
21. Board of Education Report of Inspection, May 1915, p.11, JAGS Archive
22. John Monnington, typescript of 'Miscellaneous Reminiscences', 2012, PC
23. Letter from Knights to Florence Murby, 20 March 1915, PC
24. Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* (1887); *England's Ideal: And Other Papers on Social Subjects* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1887); *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1889). Carpenter's articles in the *New Age*, read by the Knights family, include his review of R. Gardner's *In the Heart of Democracy*, 9 September 1909, vol. 5, no.20, pp.367-8, and 'A Book of the Mountains: Review of *On Cambrian and Cumbrian Hills* by Henry S. Salt' vol. 3, no.8 20 June 1908, p.150
25. For a description of the rural areas of Streatham in the early twentieth century, see A. R. Roach, *I Am a Victorian - Just* (Streatham: Streatham Society Publications, 1992), pp.13-15
26. *Black's Guide to London and its Environs* (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1875), p.21
27. Tony Castle, *Streatham Common and the Rookery* (London: London County Council Tramways, 1927; London Transport Museum, 1990/47)
28. Letter from Allan Gwynne-Jones to Knights, July 1920, PC
29. Masterman, *The Condition of England*, p.71
30. For a discussion of the evolving literature about the medical benefits of the seaside, see F. Gray, *Designing the Seaside: Architecture, Society and Nature* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), pp.27-8
31. Knights, 'The Primrose', Botany Textbook, St Helen's school, c.1911, PC
32. Carpenter, 'A Book of the Mountains', p.150
33. Stephen Reynolds, *A Poor Man's House* (London: John Lane, 1908)
34. John Monnington, 'Miscellaneous Reminiscences'
35. *Streatham News*, 11 February 1921
36. For the development of coloured illustration in books, see Rodney Engen, *The Age of Enchantment: Beardsley, Dulac and their Contemporaries, 1890-1930* (London: Scala Publishers and Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2007)
37. I am grateful to Rodney Engen for helping me to evaluate Knights' early illustrative work.
38. Letter from Knights to Florence Murby, 20 March 1915, PC
39. Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market*, illustrated by Laurence Housman (London: Macmillan & Co., 1893)
40. The illustration to *Goblin Market* (1916) achieved a Royal Drawing Society Award, 'Honours', Division 6 - Painting in Watercolour/Figure Drawing/Design. There are three illustrations to *Goblin Market* in UCL Art Museum and two in a private collection.
41. See Christopher Wood, *Fairies in Victorian Art* (Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club Limited, 2008), p.147
42. Algernon Blackwood, *The Centaur* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1911)
43. Letter from Knights to Florence Murby, 20 March 1915, PC
44. Blackwood, *Centaur*, p.271
45. See, for example, Dulac's illustrations to *The Bells and Other Poems by Edgar Allan Poe* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1912). For a discussion of Dulac's *Nocturnes*, see Engen, *Age of Enchantment*, p.38
46. Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement* (London: Virago Press, 1989), pp.118-20
47. Quoted in C. White, *The Enchanted World of Jessie M. King* (London: Canongate, 1989), p.9
48. Mara Witzling, 'Preface' in Delia Gaze (ed.), *Concise Dictionary of Women Artists* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.xxiv
49. Joseph Pennell, *The Illustration of Books; a Manual for the use of students: notes for a course of lectures at the Slade School, University College* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), p.13
50. Letter from Knights to Florence Murby, 20 March 1915, PC; David died on 14 March 1915
51. Knights to Florence Murby, 20 March 1915, PC
52. John Monnington, 'Miscellaneous Reminiscences'

## 2: THE SLADE, PART I

1. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, early 1916, UCL SC

2. For a detailed account of the founding of the School, see Martin Postle, 'The Foundation of the Slade School of Fine Art', *Walpole Society*, vol.58 (1995/6), pp.127-230; see also Emma Chambers (ed.), *UCL Art Collections: An Introduction and Collections Guide* (London: UCL Art Collections, 2008)
3. For Poynter's theories on art education, see Edward J. Poynter, *Ten Lectures on Art* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1879)
4. *Daily Mail*, 8 May 1920.
5. Gladys Beattie Crozier, 'The Slade School of Art' in *Every Woman's Encyclopaedia*, vol.1 (London: 1912), p.566
6. Poynter had a distinguished career; in 1875 he retired from the Slade and became Principal of the National Art Training School, a position he held until 1891. Between 1894 and 1904 he was Director of the National Gallery and, in 1896, was elected President of the Royal Academy, London. He received a knighthood in the same year.
7. Mabel Knights, 'Interesting Events in My Life 1874-1930', entry for 4 October 1915, PC
8. Crozier, 'The Slade School', p.565
9. Charlotte Weeks, 'Women at Work: the Slade Girls', *Magazine of Art*, vol.6 (1883), p.325
10. University College London had admitted women to its degree courses as early as 1878.
11. University College Department of the Fine Arts, Prospectus, Session 1915-16, (London: University of London, 1915) p.3, UCL SC
12. University College London Calendar, session 1871-2, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1871), p.45
13. Letter from Mabel Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 4 June 1923, BSR HA
14. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, 1915, UCL SC
15. The group of female students known as the 'Slade Cropheads' included Dora Carrington, Barbara Hiles and Dorothy Brett and is described in David Boyd Haycock, *A Crisis of Brilliance* (London: Old Street Publishing, 2009), p.95
16. Gilbert Spencer, *Memoirs of a Painter* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), p.35
17. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, early 1916, UCL SC. When Knights enrolled at the Slade in 1915, there were 26 men and 123 women; at the end of the academic year 1918-19 the numbers had risen to 80 men and 212 women.
18. Robert Gathorne-Hardy (ed.), *Ottoline at Garsington: Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell 1915-1918* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p.31
19. For a full chronology of the modern art exhibitions that took place in London during this period, see A. G. Robins, *Modern Art in Britain, 1910-1914*, exh. cat. (London: Merrell Holberton in association with Barbican Art Gallery, 1997), pp.181-5
20. Charles Lewis Hind, *Landscape Painting from Giotto to the Present Day*, vol.2 (New York and London: C. Scribner's Sons, 1924), p.272
21. Henry Tonks, 'Fifty Years, The Vicissitudes of Art', *The Times*, 2 March 1932
22. See Keith Bell, *Stanley Spencer* (New York and London: Phaidon Press, 2002), p.26
23. Percy Wyndham Lewis et al., *Blast no. 2: The War Number* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, July 1915), p.23
24. For the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism at the Slade, see Andrew Causey, 'Stanley Spencer and the Art of His Time' in *Stanley Spencer RA*, exh. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1980), p.20
25. 'Exhibition of Works by English Pre-Raphaelite Painters', December 1911-March 1912, Tate Gallery, London; 'Pre-Raphaelite Painters from Collections in Lancashire', July-September 1913, Tate Gallery, London
26. The collection of paintings by Rossetti and Brown was acquired from the Rae family in 1916 through the National Art Collections Fund, and *The Triumph of the Innocents* (1883-4) by Holman Hunt and *Thoughts of the Past* (1859) by Spencer Stanhope were acquired in 1918.
27. Ernest Rhys (ed.), *John Ruskin, Pre-Raphaelitism: Lectures on Architecture and Painting* (London: Everyman's Library, 1906); Percy Bate, *The English Pre-Raphaelite Painters, Their Associates and Successors* (London: Bell, 1910)
28. *The Times*, 14 March 1938
29. For a history of the NEAC, see Kenneth McConkey, *The New English* (London: Royal Academy Publications, 2006)
30. 'A Modern Painter', 'The Case for Modern Painting. IV - The Royal Academy and the New English Art Club', *Burlington Magazine*, vol.11, no.52 (July 1907), p.206
31. Mary Chamot, *Modern Painting in England* (London: Country Life, 1937), p.64
32. McConkey, *New English*, p.59
33. D. S. MacColl, 'Professor Henry Tonks', *Burlington Magazine*, vol.56, no.325 (April 1930), p.215
34. For a succinct account of Tonks' teaching methods and theories on art, see Emma Chambers, *Henry Tonks: Art and Surgery*, exh. cat. (London: College Art Collections, 2002); *Student Stars at the Slade 1894-1899, Augustus John and William Orpen*, exh. cat. (London: College Art Collections, 2004); Lynda Morris (ed.), *Henry Tonks and the 'Art of Pure Drawing'*, exh. cat. (Norwich: Norwich School of Art Gallery, 1985)
35. *Observer*, 19 June 1927
36. *ibid.*; George Moore, *Conversations in Ebury Street* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924) p.165
37. Henry Tonks, 'Introduction', *Catalogue of Drawings by Deceased Masters*, exh. cat. (London: Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1917), p.8

38. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 1918, UCL SC
39. P. G. Konody, 'The Slade School', *Observer*, 4 July 1909
40. Quoted in Sybil Vincent, 'In the Studio of Professor Henry Tonks', *The Studio*, February 1937, p.84
41. *The Times*, 14 March 1938
42. See, for example, David Boyd Haycock, "'A Crisis of Brilliance": C. R. W. Nevinson, Henry Tonks, and the Slade School of Art, 1909-12' in M. J. K. Walsh (ed.), *A Dilemma of English Modernism: Visual and Verbal Politics in the Life of C. R. W. Nevinson* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2007), p.38; Katy Deepwell, *Women Artists Between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.53
43. Joseph Hone, *The Life of Henry Tonks* (London: W. Heinemann, 1939), p.44
44. For example, in 1911, Tonks worked alongside Dora Carrington and Elsie MacNaught on a Decorative scheme for Bishop Creighton House, Fulham. In 1924, he arranged Mary Adshead's first mural project for the Highways Club, Shadwell.
45. Quoted in Deepwell, *Women Artists*, p.53
46. Quoted in Julian Potter, *Mary Potter: A Life of Painting* (London: Lund Humphries, 2004), p.18
47. Letter from Mabel Knights to Florence Murby, 2 November 1915, PC
48. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, c.1916, UCL SC
49. Crozier, 'The Slade School', p.565
50. Poynter, *Lectures*, p.132
51. *ibid.*, p.132. For information about the influence of antique sculpture on artistic taste since the Italian Renaissance, see Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981)
52. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, 1915, UCL SC
53. For the evolution of the nude from an undervalued genre to one of the most noted categories within high art during the nineteenth century, see Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996)
54. For a discussion of the debates surrounding notions of propriety in keeping women and men separate in life classes, see Sara M. Dodd, 'Art Education for Women in the 1860s: a Decade of Debate' in Clarissa Campbell Orr (ed.), *Women in the Victorian Art World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp.181-91
55. Tonks, 'Introduction', p.8
56. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, 1915, UCL SC
57. Tonks, 'Introduction', p.8
58. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, 26 January 1916, UCL SC
59. Crozier, 'The Slade School', p.566
60. University College, Department of the Fine Arts, Prospectus, Session 1919-20 (London: University of London, 1919), p.4
61. Chambers, *Henry Tonks*, pp. 4-5
62. This account is from Mabel Culley, Slade student in 1898, quoted in Michael Reynolds, 'The Story of an Art School 1871-1971', unpublished typescript, 1974, UCL SC, p.116
63. Winifred M. Knights, 'Anatomy', c.1915, PC
64. Henry Tonks, 'A Centenary Tribute to Whistler', *The Times*, 10 July 1934; Emma Chambers defines the term 'sight size' as the size at which the artist drew the model on the sheet, in proportion to the point at which the drawing board intersected two imaginary lines drawn from the eye to the top and bottom of the model. Chambers, *Henry Tonks*, p.25
65. Letter from Tonks to Rodney Burn, 23 February 1932, Tate Archive 783.1.6 (i)
66. Letter from Tonks to Rodney Burn, 1932, Tate Archive 1932 783.1.7
67. Letter from Tonks to Sydney Mawson, 23 January 1919, UCL SC
68. For more on Sydney Mawson's career, see Lesley Jackson, *Twentieth Century Pattern Design* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011), p.16
69. 'Winifred Knights, Her Book', Slade ornamental design textbook, 1915, PC
70. Letter from Tonks to Rodney Burn, 1932, Tate Archive 1932 783.1 8(i)
71. The Prints and Drawings Department was located on the upper floor of the King Edward VII Galleries, which had been opened on 7 May 1914. The British Museum purchased Arthur Morrison's collection of Japanese prints in 1906.
72. 'The Value of Prizes', address delivered at the opening of the Slade School of Fine Art in University College, London, 2 October 1871, in Poynter, *Lectures*, p.173
73. Crozier, 'The Slade School', p.564
74. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, early 1916, UCL SC
75. Letter from Knights to Grace Murby, 24 June 1917, UCL SC
76. Mabel Knights, 'Interesting Events in My Life', entry for July 1917, PC
77. Letter from Tonks to D. S. MacColl, 16 July 1932, quoted in Chambers, *Henry Tonks*, p.8
78. In addition to monthly prizes, the Melville Nettleship Prize for Figure Composition was awarded to the student who 'submits the best set of three sketches which have been executed, and have received marks during the year'. Crozier, 'The Slade School', p.565
79. Helen Lessore in Morris (ed.), *Henry Tonks*, p.10
80. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, undated, UCL SC
81. *ibid.*
82. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, 26 January 1916, UCL SC

83. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, c. early 1916, UCL SC
84. Letter from Frederick Brown to Walter Knights, 16 February 1917, PC
85. For the air raids over Streatham during the First World War, see Michael and Janet Fitzgerald, *The Making of Modern Streatham* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2009), pp.88–95
86. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, 1 February 1918, UCL SC
87. A. S. Hartrick, *A Painter's Pilgrimage through Fifty Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), p.230
88. *Stratford Express*, 27 January 1917, quoted in G. Hill and H. Bloch, *The Silvertown Explosion* (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2003), p.7
89. Mabel Knights, 'Diary', PC
90. Letter from Walter Knights to Knights, 1918, PC
8. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, 1 February 1918, UCL SC
9. Letter from Edward Carpenter to Millicent Murby, 15 September 1917, PC
10. The two lectures were delivered by Edward Carpenter for the Union of Democratic Control on 23 and 24 September 1917
11. Edward Carpenter, *Towards Industrial Freedom* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1917), p.63
12. *ibid.*, p.61
13. Sketchbook, UCL Art Museum, 9410-9645V
14. Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p.145
15. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 18 November 1918, UCL SC
16. Edward Carpenter, *England's Ideal and Other Papers on Social Subjects* (London: Swan, Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1887), p.94
17. Sylvia Pankhurst, 'The Potato Pickers' in *Votes for Women*, 28 January 1909, p.294, reprinted in K. Dodd (ed.), *A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp.34–6
18. Patricia Pugh, *Educate, Agitate, Organize: 100 Years of Fabian Socialism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p.108
19. Murby, 'Undiluted Masculinism', p.149
20. The number of women employed increased from 3,224,600 in July 1914 to 4,814,600 in January 1918. Ian J. Cawood, *Britain in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.76
21. Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p.105
22. Carpenter, *England's Ideal and Other Papers*, p.93
23. Murby, 'A Socialized Feminism', p.374
24. Arnold Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1908)
25. 'War and the Fashions', *Manchester Guardian*, 12 July 1915
26. *The Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm. Illustrated by Arthur Rackham* (London: Constable & Company, 1909)
27. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 18 November 1918, UCL SC
28. *ibid.*
29. Letter from Walter Knights to Knights, 4 June 1918, PC
30. *ibid.*
31. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, summer 1918, PC
32. Letter from Walter Knights to Knights, 4 June 1918, PC. For a discussion of the father's study as symbol, see Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p.8

### 3: WORCESTERSHIRE

1. Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p.145
2. *Birmingham Gazette*, 19 June 1915
3. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 18 November 1918, UCL SC
4. Letter from May Tennant, Director of Women's Section, National Service Department, 27 March 1917, quoted in Gill Clarke, *The Women's Land Army* (Bristol: Sansom & Co., 2008), pp.20, 35. The WLA superseded the work of the Women's National Land Service Corps. Aside from the WLA, an estimated further 300,000 women were working on the land by 1918.
5. Quoted in Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.58
6. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, 1 February 1918, UCL SC
7. Letter from Ted Murby to Knights, September 1917, PC
- 4: THE SLADE, PART 2
1. Tonks, 'Introduction', p.8
2. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 18 November 1918, UCL SC. In December 1917, Tonks had succeeded Brown as Slade Professor, although Brown stayed on as Assistant during Tonks' frequent absences.
3. *ibid.*
4. Slade Signing-in books, 1918–20, University College London. I am grateful to Grace Hailstone for this information.
5. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 18 November 1918, UCL SC
6. Quoted in P. Athill and A. Goodchild, *William Strang RA: 1859–1921* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1981), p.22
7. Letter from George Charlton to Knights, 30 August 1919, PC
8. Letter from Knights to Florence Murby, 1919, UCL SC
9. *Ibid.*
10. Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (London: Tauris Park Paperbacks, 2002), p.168
11. Letter from Knights to unidentified recipient, 1919, UCL Art Museum
12. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 18 November 1918, UCL SC
13. MacColl, 'Professor Henry Tonks', p.137

14. Randolph Schwabe, 'Three Teachers: Brown, Tonks and Steer', *Burlington Magazine*, vol.82, no.483 (June 1943), p.146
  15. Tonks sets out the advantages of 'painting thin' in a letter to Rodney Burn, 23 February 1932, Tate Archive 783.1.6 (i)
  16. MacColl, 'Professor Henry Tonks', p.138
  17. Helen Lessore quoted in Morris (ed.), *Henry Tonks*, p.9
  18. William Coldstream, quoted in *ibid.*, p.12
  19. Letter from Allan Gwynne-Jones to Knights, April 7, 1920, PC
  20. John Monnington, 'Miscellaneous Reminiscences', 2012
  21. Letter from Knights to Florence Murby, 1919, UCL SC
  22. In a letter to Millicent dated November 1918, Knights writes that a fellow student suggested she work on illustrations to J. E. Flecker's *The Golden Journey to Samarkand* (1913) and James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* (1870-73) for the Slade Sketch Club.
  23. Pamphlet: Ye Slade Sketch Club, no. 157, Academic year 1918-1919
  24. For further pictures undertaken at Hayling Island, see UCL Art Collection, 6648 and 4974.
  25. *Portsmouth Evening News*, 13 November 1922
  26. Peter Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), p.193
  27. This picture was incorrectly titled *Ludlow Fair and Cattle Market* by Eileen Palmer. Knights did not visit Ludlow until the summer of 1920.
  28. *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 10 June 1919
  29. Knights had seen the gasholders of the Hayling Island Gas Company, who were increasing their presence on the island during this period. *London Gazette*, 26 April 1921. Gasholders were also much in evidence at Kilmington, seven miles from Seaton.
  30. For a discussion of the growing interest in gypsies during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the activities of the Gypsy Lore Society, see D. Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp.125-57. John Monnington recalled (in conversation with the author, 2015) that his mother greatly admired gypsies, even encouraging him to play with children in gypsy encampments when he was a child.
  31. Arthur Symons, 'In Praise of Gypsies', *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, vol.1, no.4 (1908), p.296
  32. Adrian Gregson, Maggie Andrews and John Peters, *Worcestershire's War: Voices of the First World War* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014)
  33. Neil Storey and Molly Housego, *Women in the First World War* (London: Shire Publications, 2010), p.35
  34. I am grateful to David Cohen Fine Art for this information.
  35. Tonks, 'Introduction', p.8
  36. Murby, 'A Socialized Feminism', p.374
  37. Kathleen Palmer, *Women War Artists* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), p.47
  38. 'A Student', 'The Slade at War', *Union Magazine*, 1918, p.270, UCL SC
  39. M. Salaman and G. Holme, *Londoners Then and Now: as Pictured by Their Contemporaries* (London: The Studio, 1920), p.40
  40. Letter from Allan Gwynne-Jones to Knights, summer term 1920, PC
- 5: THE SLADE, PART 3**
1. A. K. Lawrence, undated notes on Decorative Painting, RIBA Library Archives Collection
  2. *ibid.*
  3. *ibid.*
  4. Herbert Baker, 'Wall Decoration', paper read to the Art Workers Guild, (London: Art Workers Guild, 4 November 1927)
  5. Morna O'Neill, 'A Political Theory of Decoration, 1901-1910' in Morna O'Neill and Michael Hatt (eds), *The Edwardian Sense: Art, Design, and Performance in Britain, 1901-1910* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), p.300
  6. Ian Britain, *Fabianism and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.710
  7. Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, p.256
  8. Clare A. P. Willsdon, *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940: Image and Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.15, 186
  9. The Slade Reports, 1920-21, UCL SC
  10. *The Times*, 24 September 1924
  11. Letter from Henry Tonks to Sydney Mawson, 23 January 1919, UCL SC
  12. In 1911, he worked alongside Dora Carrington, William Roberts, Colin Gill and Elsie MacNaught on a series of six wall panels for Bishop Creighton House in Fulham and, in the 1920s, he instigated mural commissions for numerous students, including Robin Guthrie, Mary Adshead and Rex Whistler.
  13. 'Winifred Knights, Her Book', ornamental design sketchbook (1915) PC
  14. Ralph E. Moreland, 'The Art of Walter Crane', *Brush and Pencil*, vol.10, no.5 (1902), p.257
  15. Walter Crane, 'The Relation of the Easel Picture to Decorative Art' in Walter Crane, *Ideals in Art* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905), p.267
  16. Hubert Wellington, 'The Slade School Summer Compositions Since 1893' in John Fothergill (ed.), *The Slade: A Collection of Drawings and Some Pictures Done by Past and Present Students of the London Slade School of Art 1893-1907* (London: Slade School of Fine Art, 1907), p.22
  17. Letter from Henry Tonks to Collins Baker, 31 August 1935, quoted in Chambers, *Henry Tonks*, p.9

18. Letter from Knights to Awdry Clarke, 22 December 1917, UCL SC
19. Letter from Robin Guthrie to Knights, 13 April 1932, PC
20. Hind, *Landscape Painting*, p.302
21. Walter Crane, *Line and Form* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1900), pp.262-3
22. Sketchbook EDC 9563-9596, UCL Art Museum
23. Although the set subject of the 1919 competition is not recorded, Knights and James Wilkie's joint winning compositions suggest that the theme may have been 'Work'. Emma Chambers, 'Redefining History Painting in the Academy: The Summer Composition Competition at the Slade School of Fine Art, 1898-1922', *Visual Culture in Britain*, vol. 6, no. 1, (2005), p.94
24. For a history of the Slade Summer compositions, see *ibid.*, pp.79-100. The prescribed size for the 1919 Summer Composition was 91.5 x 122 cm.
25. Wellington, 'The Slade School Summer Compositions', p.22
26. *Evening Standard*, 17 February 1920
27. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'evangelist'
28. Helen Lessore, in Morris (ed.), *Henry Tonks*, p.10; B. Laughton, *The Slade 1871-1971*, centenary exhibition catalogue (London: Royal Academy, 1971), p.16. It is unclear when the picture received its more familiar title of *A Scene in a village street with Mill-hands conversing*. This is the title used in the 1966 list of Summer Composition Prizes (preserved in UCL Art Museum) and also by the Slade Secretary in 1996. I am grateful to Andrea Fredericksen for this information.
29. In 1919, 2.5 million British workers went on strike. Gerard De Groot, *Back in Blighty: The British at Home in World War I* (London: Vintage Books, 2014) p.189
30. During the war, with an increasing number of women employed in the workplace, female membership of unions had expanded significantly, from 437,000 members in 1914 to a peak of 1,342,000 in 1920. D. Doughan and P. Gordon, *Dictionary of British Women's Organizations, 1825-1960*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2013) p.50
31. Millicent Murby, 'The True Gospel of Feminism, a reply to Mr Belfort Bax', *New Age*, vol.3, no.8, 1908 p.109. For Murby's attendance at meetings of the Women's Trade Unions, see *Sussex Express*, 22 October 1909.
32. For Murby's writings on pay parity, see Murby, 'A Socialised Feminism', p.374
33. Beatrice Webb, *The Wages of Men & Women: Should They Be Equal?* (London: Fabian Society, 1919), p.7
34. See Mabel Knights, *Diary entry*, July 1919
35. For the dress of mill workers, see A. Andrews, *The Life of L. S. Lowry, 1887-1976*, (London: Jupiter Books 1977), p. 75
36. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 16 March 1921, UCL SC
37. Charles R. B. Barrett, *Essex: Highways, Byways and Waterways* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893), p.213
38. P. G. Konody, 'The British School at Rome', *Observer*, 22 February 1920
39. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 29 September 1920, UCL SC
40. Crane, *Line and Form*, pp.225-6
41. *ibid.*
42. For a list of the exhibitions of Italian painting held in London during this period, see Carolyn Leder, *Stanley Spencer: the Astor Collection* (London: Thomas Gibson, 1976), pp.16-17. For more on the Neo-Primitives, see Bell, *Stanley Spencer*, pp.22-7
43. Charles Aitken, 'The Slade School of Fine Arts', *Apollo*, vol.3 (1926), p.2
44. C. Tancred Borenius, lecture notes, undated, UCL SC
45. Letter from Allan Gwynne-Jones to Knights, 1920, PC
46. Slade students who shared a common interest in the contemporary revival of tempera included Augustus John, C. R. W. Nevinson, Adrian Allinson, Dora Carrington and Mark Gertler.
47. Christina J. Herringham (ed.), *Papers of the Society of Painters in Tempera*, vol.1 (1901-1907), 2nd edition, revised and brought up to date, (London 1928), p.6
48. Roger Fry, 'Tempera Painting', *Burlington Magazine*, vol.7, no.27 (June 1905), p.175
49. Haycock, *Crisis of Brilliance*, p.150
50. Letter from Allan Gwynne-Jones to Knights, 20 September 1919, PC
51. Letter from Henry Tonks to Ronald Grey, 6 July 1911, PC
52. For the use of the term 'Reconstruction' in the post-war era, see Constant Smith, 'Women as Administrators', in *The Development of the Civil Service* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1922), p.169
53. *Observer*, 22 February 1920
54. Helen Lessore in Morris (ed.), *Henry Tonks*, p.10
55. Wellington, 'The Slade School Summer Compositions', p.21
56. Letter from Allan Gwynne-Jones to Knights, 20 September 1919, PC
57. University College London Calendar, session 1915-16, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1871), p.296
58. Gilbert Spencer, *New Arrivals: F4 Ward, No.36 Stationary Hospital, Mahemdia, Sinai (c.1918)*, Imperial War Museum Collections

## 6: THE ROME SCHOLARSHIP IN DECORATIVE PAINTING

1. James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night* (1870-7), ch. 14, stanza 5, line 2. First published serially in the *National Reformer* (22 March-17 May 1874) and in *The City of Dreadful Night and Other Poems* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1880)



2. Mabel Knights, 'Interesting Events in My Life', entry for 31 January 1920, PC
3. Press Communication to the *Daily Mail*, 21 September 1920, BSR HA. For a list of students who entered the competition, see *The British School at Rome, Exhibition of Works Submitted in the Open Examinations for the Rome Scholarships*, exh. cat. (London: Grafton Galleries, February 1920)
4. The age limit was raised from 30 to 35 for 1920 only, to account for the delay to their studies for those candidates who had actively participated in the war.
5. For a history of the British School at Rome, see T. P. Wiseman, *A Short History of the British School at Rome* (London: British School at Rome, 1990)
6. 'Sir Rennell Rodd on the British School at Rome', *RIBA Journal* (26 November 1910), p.61
7. Report of the Sub-committee, 5 November 1920, BSR HA
8. Evelyn Shaw, *The British School at Rome, a Note on the School and its Scholarships* (London: British School at Rome, 1931), p.5
9. Rome Scholarship in *Decorative Painting offered by the Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851* (London: British School at Rome, 1920)
10. Sir Evelyn Shaw, *The British School at Rome*, May 1964, The Archive of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, Imperial College, London
11. *Athenaeum*, 17 February 1920; *Evening Standard*, 17 February 1920; *Observer*, 22 February 1920; *The Times*, 25 February 1920
12. *Observer*, 22 February 1920; *The Times*, 25 February 1920
13. *Evening Standard*, 17 February 1920
14. Letter from Eileen Palmer to the author, 25 November 1993, PC
15. *ibid.*
16. Letter from Eileen Palmer to the author, 5 November 1993, PC
17. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, c.1926, UCL SC
18. Anna Matilda Fryer was the daughter of Edward George Barr (d.1904), a member of the Supreme Legislature of British Guiana. Her mother, Kate Barr, is listed in the 1871 census as American by birth. Anna Matilda married George Edmund Septimus Fryer (1850-1910), a barrister at law, in London in 1881. I am grateful to Beverly Hallam (FIBIS) for this information.
19. Letter from Knights to Walter Knights, 14 December 1920, UCL SC
20. Quoted in Jeffrey Meyers, *Modigliani: A Life* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2007), p.219. With 59 pictures in the exhibition, Modigliani had more works on display than any other artist.
21. See for example *L'Etudiant* (1919, private collection); *The Servant Girl* (1918, private collection), both of which were included in the Heal's Exhibition.
22. See M. S. P., 'Modern French Art', *Burlington Magazine*, vol.35, no.198 (September 1919), p.125; Jan Gordon, 'Modern Parisian Artists', *Observer*, 10 August 1919
23. Letter from George Charlton to Knights, 19 August 1919, PC
24. Jan Gordon, 'Modern Parisian Artists', *Observer*, 10 August 1919
25. Letter from George Charlton to Knights, February 1920, PC
26. UCL Art Museum, accession number 5091
27. Letter from Eileen Palmer to the author, 21 November 1993, PC
28. Mason married Norah Settle on 25 September 1918. They divorced on 29 January 1921. I am grateful to Antony Cox for this information. According to Eileen Palmer (letter to the author, 1993), Mason had married Norah, who was expecting a child (not his), so that in the event of his being killed she would receive a widow's pension.
29. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 29 September 1920, UCL SC
30. Quoted in James Wilkes, *A Fractured Landscape of Modernity: Culture and Conflict in the Isle of Purbeck* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.30
31. Letter from Allan Gwynne-Jones to Knights, June 1920, PC
32. Faculty of Painting, minute book, 'Subjects and Conditions for the Final Competition 1920', BSR HA
33. See for example, Freda Derrick, *The Ark Book* (London: Blackie & Son, c.1920); M. Lavington, *Noah's Ark Book* (London: John Lane, 1918)
34. This was reprinted in 1890 as *Absurd Alphabet, Baby's Own Alphabet and Noah's Ark Alphabet* (London: George Routledge & sons).
35. Letter from Allan Gwynne-Jones to Knights, 20 July 1920, PC
36. Faculty of Painting, minute book, 14 February 1923, BSR HA
37. 'The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered' (Genesis 7:19)
38. *Manchester Guardian*, 11 February 1921
39. Carl Tancred Borenius, '16th and 17th century French art', lecture notes, UCL SC
40. *Observer*, 13 February 1921
41. Glyn Jones file, BSR HA
42. Carl Tancred Borenius, 'Professor Venturi on Quattrocento Painting', *Burlington Magazine*, vol.29 (July 1916), p.161. The British Museum Print Room, which was used by Slade students to study old master drawings, was closed until August 1920.
43. Letter from George Charlton to Knights, 1920, PC
44. P. Molmenti and G. Ludwig, *The Life and Works of Vittorio Carpaccio* (London: John Murray, 1907), p.129
45. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 16 March 1920, UCL SC
46. *Daily Graphic*, 8 February 1921
47. *Daily Graphic*, 9 February 1921

48. *Manchester Guardian*, 12 December 1919
49. *ibid.*
50. Letter from Knights to Meredith Monnington, March 1926, PC
51. *Liverpool Courier*, 9 February 1921
52. *Daily Record*, 27 December 1915
53. *The Times*, 25 June 1917
54. William Wordsworth, *The Excursion: Being a portion of The Recluse, a Poem* (1814)
55. Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, vol.2 (1845–7), quoted in George Landow, *Images of Crisis: Literary Iconography 1750 to the Present* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), p.135
56. Quoted in Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014), p.265
57. Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Virago Press, 2004), p.106
58. Robert Bridges, 'Wake Up, England', *The Times*, 8 August 1914
59. Mildred Burton, 'Mosioa-Tunya: Smoke that Sounds' (1917), quoted in Nosheen Khan, *Women's Poetry of the First World War* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), p.41
60. Quoted in Khan, *Women's Poetry*, p.53
61. The justness and morality of the story had already been questioned during the mid-nineteenth century 'crisis of belief'. The translation of the story of the flood from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in 1872 led many to further doubt the Genesis narrative, which appeared to have been inspired by a non-biblical source. See Landow, *Images of Crisis*, p.13
62. *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 26 May 1916; *Express & Advertiser*, 19 March 1919
63. George Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*, first published 1921 (Auckland: Floating Press, 2010), p.97
64. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, English edition trans. by A. Mitchell and revised by M. Murby (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911)
65. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 18 November 1918
66. Thomson, *City of Dreadful Night*, ch. 14, stanza 7, line 4
67. *Evening Post*, 11 November 1919
68. Thomson, *City of Dreadful Night*, ch. 14, stanza 5, lines 1–2
69. Letters from Knights to Awdry Clarke, 22 December 1917
70. *Jewish Guardian*, 18 February 1921; Evelyn Waugh, quoted in Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900–1939* (London: Penguin, 2003), p.141
71. Carpenter, *Towards Industrial Freedom*, p.8
72. *Manchester Guardian*, 11 February 1921
73. See for instance John Nash's *Over the Top* (1918) illustrated on the front cover of *The Nations War Paintings and Other Records* (ill. 86, p.93 in this book).
74. See, for example, William W. T. Wood's *Salonika Front: Battle of the Pips*, 24 April, 1917 (c.1918) and Ian Strang's *The Outskirts of Lens* (1919), both on show at the Royal Academy's *War Paintings* exhibition (1919–20).
75. Letter from Walter Knights to Knights, 1918, PC
76. Letter from Allan Gwynne-Jones to Knights, 1920 (undated), PC
77. Kathleen Palmer, *Women War Artists*, p.2
78. 'Slade Notes', *University College Magazine*, vol.1, no.3 (June 1920)
79. Letter from Allan Gwynne-Jones to Knights, 19 August 1920, PC
80. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 29 September 1920
81. *Architectural Review*, vol. xlix, January–June 1921, p.33
82. Professor Frederick Brown considered 'forcefulness ... a dangerous quality in the woman artist'. See Hilary Taylor, 'If a Young Painter Be not Fierce and Arrogant ... God Help Him: Some Women Art Students at the Slade, 1895–99', *Art History*, vol.9, no.2 (June 1986), p.236
83. *The Times*, 10 January 1924, quoted in Alicia Foster, *Tate Women Artists* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.150
84. Letter from Henry Tonks to Knights, 23 September 1920, PC
85. *Daily Graphic*, 9 February 1921
86. *Manchester Guardian*, 11 February 1921
87. Letter from Allan Gwynne-Jones to Knights, 'Tues night', 1920, PC
88. *Manchester Guardian*, 11 February 1921
89. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 29 September 1920
90. Quoted in Khan, *Women's Poetry*, p.136
91. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 29 September 1920, UCL SC
92. Letter from Mabel Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 23 September 1920, BSR HA
93. *The Daily Sketch*, 6 October 1920

## 7: ITALY, PART I

1. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 6 November 1920, UCL SC
2. Telegraph from Evelyn Shaw to Thomas Ashby, 25 October 1920, BSR HA
3. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 29 September 1920, UCL SC
4. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 5 November 1920, UCL SC
5. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 6 November 1920, UCL SC
6. *ibid.*
7. *ibid.*
8. For a detailed biography of Ashby, see Richard Hodges, *Visions of Rome: Thomas Ashby, Archaeologist* (London: British School at Rome, 2000)
9. Knights to Walter Knights, 7 January 1921, UCL Archives
10. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 July 1925
11. Letter from Eugénie Strong to Thomas Ashby, 1919, BSR HA
12. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 17 April 1921, UCL SC
13. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 6 November 1920, UCL SC
14. *ibid.*; letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, undated, UCL SC

15. Letter from Evelyn Shaw to Thomas Ashby, 26 January 1921, BSR HA
16. Letter from Eileen Palmer to the author, 1994, PC
17. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 1921, UCL SC
18. James T. Boulton (ed.), *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.544
19. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 13 October 1928, UCL SC
20. Letter from Mabel Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 21 July 1922, BSR HA
21. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, undated, UCL SC
22. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 3 April 1921, UCL SC
23. Letter from Colin Gill to Knights, 1921, PC
24. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 6 November 1920, UCL SC
25. Letter from D. Y. Cameron to Knights, 1923, PC
26. Letter from Evelyn Shaw to Knights, 29 April 1921, BSR HA
27. Letter from Millicent Murby to Mabel Knights, 12 November 1920, UCL SC
28. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 16 March 1921, UCL SC
29. Lionel Cust, 'The British School at Rome', *Burlington Magazine*, vol.21 (June 1912), p.148
30. Quoted in Rayner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980), p.124
31. Quoted in Haycock, *Crisis of Brilliance*, p.152
32. Evelyn Shaw, *The British School at Rome, a Note on the School and Its Scholarships* (London: British School at Rome, 1924)
33. Quoted in *The Times*, 3 May 1914
34. Quoted in Sam Smiles and Stephanie Pratt, *Two-way Traffic: British and Italian Art 1880-1980*, exh. cat. (Exeter: Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 1996), p.11
35. James Sully, *Italian Travel Sketches* (London: Constable & Co., 1912), p.65
36. Letter from Millicent Murby to Mabel Knights, 4 November 1920, UCL SC
37. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 1920, UCL SC
38. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 3 April 1921, UCL SC
39. Letter from Knights to Walter Knights, 14 December 1920, UCL SC
40. Robert Gardner, 'The Roman Campagna in Classical Times by Thomas Ashby', *Classical Review*, vol.42, no.1 (February 1928), p.36
41. Thomas Ashby, *Turner's Visions of Rome* (London: Halton & Truscott Smith, 1925), p.3
42. *ibid.*
43. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, December 1921, UCL SC
44. Thomas Ashby, *Turner's Visions of Rome*, p.3
45. Letter from Thomas Ashby to Evelyn Shaw, 25 July 1921, BSR HA
46. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Mary Chamot, 13 May 1958, Tate Archives. I am grateful to Emma Chambers for this information
47. Thomas Ashby, 'The Drawings of Claude Lorrain by Arthur Hind, Review', *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol.15 (January 1925), p.131. Versions of the Biblical narrative by Claude Lorrain are in the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana (*The Flight into Egypt*, 1635), the State Heritage Museum, St Petersburg (Landscape with the rest on the Flight into Egypt, Noon, 1661) and the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, (*Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, early 1640s).
48. For Italian peasants and breastfeeding, see Donna R. Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta, *Women, Gender and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p.116
49. Related by R. C. Waterston, *North American Review*, vol.54 (1842), p.488
50. For more information about Bracciante, see Roberto Almagia, 'The Repopulation of the Roman Campagna', *Geographical Review*, vol.19, no.4 (October 1929), pp.539-540
51. Ashby's photographic collection is housed at the BSR and consists of 18 albums containing 8,516 original prints, 7,647 original negatives and c.869 new negatives.
52. Letter from Knights to Evelyn Shaw, undated, BSR HA
53. Letter from James Wilkie to Knights, 1923, PC
54. Letter from Knights to Walter Knights, 14 December 1920, UCL SC
55. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 1921, UCL SC
56. Ashby, *Turner's Visions of Rome*, p.31
57. Letter from Augustus Daniel to Henry Tonks, 2 May 1921, The Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. I am grateful to Sabina French Blake for this information.
58. For a description of this tour, see M. Allen and M. Nicholson, *Memoirs of an Uneducated Lady: Lady Allen of Hurtwood* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), pp.62-6
59. Letter from Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 30 April 1921, BSR HA
60. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, undated, UCL SC
61. *ibid.*
62. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 16 March 1921, UCL SC
63. *ibid.*; Knights is referring to the unrest following the assassination of Spartaco Lavagnini, a local communist chief.
64. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 16 March 1921, UCL SC
65. *ibid.*
66. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 4 March 1921, UCL SC
67. Letter from Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 30 April 1921, BSR HA
68. For more about Fratelli Allinari see D. Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist*

- Italy (Philadelphia.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), pp.49-51
69. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 22 March 1921, UCL SC
  70. Letter from Knights to Joyce Knights, undated, UCL SC
  71. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, undated, UCL SC
  72. *ibid.*
  73. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 12 January 1921, UCL SC
  74. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, May 1921, UCL SC
  75. John Milton, 'L'Allegro', lines 95-8. For more information on Colin Gill's *Allegro*, see S. Llewellyn, 'Allegro', in Alan Powers (ed.), *British Murals and Decorative Painting, 1920-1960* (Bristol: Sansom & Co., 2013), pp.141-59
  76. Colin Gill, *Sonnet*, 1921, PC
  77. Postcard from Knights to Mabel Knights, April 1920, UCL SC
  78. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 22 January 1921, UCL SC
  79. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, March 1922, UCL SC
  80. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, July 1921, UCL SC
  81. *ibid.*
  82. Eugénie Strong, 'Preface', in Alessandro della Seta, *Religion and Art* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1914), p.11
  83. Ernest Newton and W. G. Newton, 'Chronicle and Comment', *Architectural Review*, vol.49 (January-June 1921), p.32
  84. Knights to Mabel Knights, 5 May 1921, UCL SC
  85. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 1921, UCL SC
  86. Allen and Nicholson, *Memoirs*, p.66
  87. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, July 1921, UCL SC
  88. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 5 May 1921, UCL SC
  89. Letter from Evelyn Shaw to Knights, 13 October 1921, BSR HA

## 8: ITALY, PART 2

1. Letter from Evelyn Shaw to Mabel Knights, 5 June 1923, BSR HA
2. Letter from Evelyn Shaw to Knights, 29 April 1921, BSR HA
3. Browning, *The Ring and the Book* (1868-9), book 7, lines 1769-70
4. Letter from Millicent Murby to Knights, 23 May 1923; letter from Lilian Whitehead to Knights, 1923, PC
5. Letter from Thomas Ashby to Evelyn Shaw, 14 June 1922, BSR HA
6. Letter from Mabel Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 4 June 1923, BSR HA
7. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 23 May 1923, UCL SC
8. Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, book 7 lines 445-9
9. Giotto, *The Marriage at Cana* (Arena Chapel, Padua, 1304-6); Alesso Baldovinetti, *Wedding at Cana* (Museo di San Marco, Florence, c.1450s), then thought to be by Fra Angelico
10. Letter from Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 22 June 1922, BSR HA
11. 'Tuscan and Umbrian Art of the Renaissance', lecture notes, Borenus file, UCL SC
12. *ibid.*
13. Letter from Roger Fry to Vanessa Bell, 25 July 1924, quoted in D. Sutton (ed.), *Letters of Roger Fry* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972), p.507
14. Newspaper cutting (paper unknown), 26 February 1924, UCL SC
15. *Morning Post*, 5 April 1929
16. Letter from Eugénie Strong to Evelyn Shaw, 25 October 1922, BSR HA
17. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 24 August 1922, UCL SC
18. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 5 May 1921, UCL SC
19. Letter from Lilian Whitehead to Knights, 1923, PC
20. Letter from Knights to Joyce Knights, May 1921, UCL SC
21. *The Times*, 5 April 1929
22. Lina Duff Gordon, *Homelife in Italy, Letters from the Apennines* (London: Methuen & Co., 1908), p.352
23. *ibid.*
24. See for example, Caravaggio, *Still Life with Fruit on a Stone Ledge* (1601-5, private collection, on loan to the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne); Janet Ross, *The Fourth Generation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p.332; Axel Munthe, *The Story of San Michele* (London: John Murray, 1929), p.167
25. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 21 February 1921, UCL SC
26. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 12 January 1921, UCL SC
27. *ibid.*
28. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, undated, UCL SC
29. Eugénie Strong, 'Dress and Undress', *The Times*, 23 July 1913
30. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 28 May 1921, UCL SC
31. Letter from Lilian Whitehead to Knights, 1923, PC
32. Carpenter, *England's Ideal and Other Papers*, p.94
33. Colin Gill, *Sonnet*, 1921, PC
34. Estella Canziani, *Through the Apennines and the Lands of the Abruzzi: Landscape and Peasant Life* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1928), p.8
35. For the development of the iconography of the Madonna of Humility, see Millard Meiss, 'The Madonna of Humility', *Art Bulletin*, vol.18, no.4 (December 1936), pp.435-65
36. *Morning Post*, 5 April 1929
37. Letter from Evelyn Shaw to Stanley Quick, 16 February 1923, BSR HA
38. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 4 March 1921 UCL SC
39. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 23 August 1925, PC
40. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 3 April 1921, UCL SC

41. Duff Gordon, *Homelife in Italy*, p.193
42. In a letter dated 11 December 1922 (BSR HA), Shaw asked Knights to produce two panels on the theme of 'Art and Archaeology' for the school hall in collaboration with an architect.
43. Letter from Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 27 September 1923, BSR HA
44. Letter from Evelyn Shaw to Mabel Knights, 5 June 1923, BSR HA
45. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 1923, UCL SC
46. *ibid.*
- 9: ITALY, PART 3**
1. Letter from Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 2 August 1924, BSR HA
2. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 20 May 1925, PC
3. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Walter Knights, 21 April 1924, PC
4. Letter from Eugenie Strong to Knights, Easter Monday 1924, PC
5. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 1924, UCL SC
6. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, July 1925, UCL SC
7. For a photograph of this bust, see Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *The British School at Rome: One Hundred Years* (London: British School at Rome, 2001), p.69
8. Letter from Knights to Joyce Knights, October 1924, UCL SC
9. Letter from Knights to Meredith Monnington, 27 August 1924, PC
10. *ibid.*
11. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 14 January 1925, UCL SC
12. Letter from Knights to Meredith Monnington, August 1924, PC
13. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 14 January 1925, UCL SC
14. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 16 September 1924, UCL SC
15. See *Lago di Piediluco, Umbria* (1826, Ashmolean Museum); *Italian Landscape with Morning Sun* (c.1835, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles); *Souvenir of Italy* (c.1860, Corcoran Gallery, Washington)
16. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 28 July 1924, UCL SC
17. Notebook, 1924, PC
18. *ibid.*
19. *ibid.*
20. Letter from Knights to Meredith Monnington, August 1924, PC
21. Notebook, 1924, PC
22. Letter from Knights to Meredith Monnington, August 1924, PC
23. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 20 July 1924, PC
24. Notebook, 1924, PC
25. For the earliest written version of the Melusina myth, see Jean d'Arras, *La Noble Historie de Lusignan* (c.1393)
26. Notebook, 1924, PC; see also sketchbook, UCL Art Museum EDC 9741-9762
27. Letter from Evelyn Shaw to Charles Ricketts, 18 December 1924, BSR HA
28. Letter from Thomas Monnington to the Tate Gallery, 2 April 1957, Tate Gallery Archive. For more information on *Allegory*, see Sam Smiles, 'Allegory 1925', in A. Powers et al, *British Murals*, pp.164-169
29. Letter from Knights to Grace Murby, 4 January 1925, UCL SC
30. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, July 1921, UCL SC
31. Notebook, 1924, PC; H. F. Cary (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1867), pp.15-18
32. See, for example, *Ceifaem Anticoli Corrado* (1903, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo)
33. Thomas Monnington, 'Winifred Knights', loose paper, BSR HA
34. Thomas Ashby, *Some Italian Scenes and Festivals* (London: Methuen & Co., 1929), p.74
35. Letter from Knights to Eileen Knights, 1 June 1923, UCL SC
36. *ibid.*
37. Ashby, *Some Italian Scenes and Festivals*, p.122. For Ashby's scholarship on the Abruzzo region and the customs of its inhabitants, see Vienna Tordone (ed.), *Thomas Ashby: Viaggi in Abruzzo, 1901/1923* (Italy: Silvana Editoriale, 2011)
38. For Ashby's interest in the pagan origins of the festival, see J. A. Spranger, 'Some Italian Scenes and Festivals by Thomas Ashby', *Man*, vol.29 (October 1929), p.177; for more about the history of the festival, see P. E. Simeoni, 'Introduzione', in *Fede e Tradizione alla Santissima Trinita di Vallepia 1881-2006*, exh. cat. (Rome: Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, 2006-7), pp.13-16
39. Thomas Monnington, 'Winifred Knights', loose paper, BSR HA
40. Tordone, *Thomas Ashby*, pp.29, 51
41. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 22 March 1921, UCL SC
42. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 1921, UCL SC
43. *ibid.*
44. See, for example, Frank Hyde, *A Midday Rest in the Fields outside Anticoli Corrado* (photograph), published in Frank Hyde, 'Anticoli Corrado', *International Studio*, vol.47 (1912), p.185
45. Notebook, 1924, PC
46. Ashby, *Some Italian Scenes and Festivals*, p.80
47. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 22 January 1924, UCL SC
48. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, 28 May 1921, UCL SC
49. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 23 May 1923, UCL SC
50. *Manchester Guardian*, 13 April 1927
51. Notebook, 1924, PC
52. *ibid.*
53. In the collection of UCL Art Museum, no.9382
54. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 26 January 1925, PC

55. Letter from Rodney Burn to Thomas Monnington, 7 May 1932, PC
56. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 27 April 1925, PC
57. For more about Ashby's and Strong's dismissal, see Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *British School at Rome*, pp.64-9
58. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, July 1925, UCL SC
59. Letter from Knights to Mabel Knights, August 1925, UCL SC

## 10: ENGLAND

1. Letter from D. Y. Cameron to Herbert Baker, 16 July 1928, CCA
2. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 12 February 1930, PC
3. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 1926, UCL SC
4. Thomas Monnington, diary entry, 7 January 1926, PC
5. Letter from Knights to Meredith Monnington, March 1926, PC
6. For more information about this scheme, see Judy Egerton, 'Monnington: A Sketch of His Life and Work' in *Drawings and Paintings by Sir Thomas Monnington PRA, 1902-1976*, exh. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1977), p.8
7. *Manchester Guardian*, 19 June 1922
8. Monnington's panel was to occupy a space originally allotted to Sir William Orpen, who had resigned from the commission owing to pressure of other work.
9. Letter from Herbert Baker to Dean Bell, 17 July 1928, CCA
10. The scheme was financed by the Dukes of Devonshire, Portland and Bedford, and Lords Derby, Burnham, Devonport, FitzAlan of Derwent and Younger of Lockie.
11. When the scheme was inaugurated by the prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, on 27 June 1927, Monnington's painting was still unfinished.
12. In this period, women were absent from the world of public fine arts patronage and were not appointed as trustees of public fine arts institutions. See A. Geddes Poole, *Stewards of the Nation's Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp.106-7
13. Meredith Monnington, typescript of correspondence with annotations, PC
14. Letter from Knights to Meredith Monnington, March 1926, PC
15. Letter from Eileen Palmer to the author, 22 October 1993
16. Meredith Monnington, typescript of correspondence with annotations, PC
17. Letter from Evelyn Shaw to Knights, 4 February 1926, PC
18. *The Times*, 11 April 1927
19. *Observer*, 17 April 1927. For other reviews, see *Morning Post*, 16 April 1927; *Daily Express*, 11 April 1927; *Daily Mail*, 11 April 1927
20. This anecdote is recorded in the *Daily Mail*, 11 April 1927
21. Letter from D. Y. Cameron to David Lindsay, 28th Earl of Crawford (formerly Lord Balniel), 20 February 1944, NLS ECB
22. Letter from Lord Balniel to Knights, 12 June 1927, PC
23. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 29 September 1927, UCL SC
24. *ibid.*
25. Letter from Knights to David Lindsay, 28 Earl of Crawford (formerly Lord Balniel), 1946, NLS ECB
26. These sketchbooks are in the collection of UCL Art Museum, EDC 9773-9837V, EDC 9410-9645V, EDC 9773-9837V
27. Letter from Knights to Meredith Monnington, 30 November 1927, PC
28. Letter from Knights to Meredith Monnington, 17 October 1927, PC
29. Letter from Knights to unknown recipient, December 1927, UCL SC
30. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, March 1928, UCL SC
31. Loose sheet of writing, dated February 1928, PC
32. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, March 1928, UCL SC
33. *The Times*, 30 March 1928
34. For Baker's architectural career, see Herbert Baker, *Architecture and Personalities* (London: Country Life, 1944)
35. Letter from Knights to Eileen Palmer, 1928, PC
36. Letter from Herbert Baker to George Bell, 26 July 1926, CCA
37. *The Times*, 16 May 1925
38. *Sussex Agricultural Express*, 3 November 1922
39. Letter from Herbert Baker to Glyn Jones, 17 November 1927, PC
40. Letter from George Bell to Herbert Baker, 24 August 1926, CCA
41. The Milner Memorial Committee, which was created to oversee the restoration of the chapel, was made up of Milner's personal friends, including Rudyard Kipling and Sir John Birchenough, all of whom contributed funds to the restoration. Sir Arthur Steel Maitland, the Minister of Labour, acted as General Secretary to the committee.
42. Letter from George Bell to Herbert Baker, 1 December 1926, CCA
43. Letter from Herbert Baker to Glyn Jones, 21 June 1927. I am grateful to Tessa Bradley for making available copies of her father's correspondence.
44. Letter from Herbert Baker to George Bell, 30 June 1928, CCA
45. Letter from Glyn Jones to Sir Henry Rushby, 8 April 1950, Collection of Tessa Bradley
46. Letter from D. Y. Cameron to Herbert Baker, 16 July 1928, CCA
47. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, 1928, UCL SC

48. Letter from Herbert Baker to George Bell, 1 August 1928, CCA
49. Letter from George Bell to Knights, 6 October 1928, CCA
50. Letter from Knights to George Bell, 12 October 1928, CCA
51. *ibid.* See Mary Caroline Watt, *The Chronicles of Sulpicius Severus done into English from the French of Paul Monceaux* (London: Sands & Co., 1928), St. Martin's vision is described on p.99
52. Letter from George Bell to Knights, April 1929, PC
53. Letter from Knights to George Bell, 25 April 1929, CCA
54. Letter from Knights to George Bell, 12 October 1928, CCA
55. See, for example, *Study for the Last Supper* (c.1919, private collection, London); *The Crucifixion* (1921: Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums); *Study for the Resurrection of the Soldiers*, Burghclere Chapel (c.1928, private collection)
56. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, March 1926, UCL SC
57. *The Times*, 28 February 1927
58. Letter from Herbert Baker to Knights, 10 April 1929, CCA
59. Letter from Dean Bell to Herbert Baker, 1929, PC
60. Quoted in R. C. D. Jasper, *George Bell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.121
61. See Peter Webster, 'The "Revival" in the Visual Arts in the Church of England, c.1935-c.1956', in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (eds), *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History, Studies in Church History*, vol.44 (Woodbridge: Ecclesiastical History Society, 2008), pp.297-306
62. Recounted in a letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 10 November 1933, PC
63. Lord Balniel, diary entry, 23 December 1932, PC
64. Letter from Herbert Baker to George Bell, 6 May 1929, CCA
65. Lord Balniel, diary entry, 23 December 1932, PC
66. *ibid.*
67. This narrative is related in Watt, *Chronicles of Sulpicius Severus*, p.210-12
68. Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, pp.102, 171
69. *Manchester Guardian*, 30 April 1932
70. Letter from Lord Balniel to Knights, 1930, PC
71. Letter from Herbert Baker to Thomas Monnington, 3 June 1928, PC
72. For Baker's use of symbolism, see Herbert Baker, 'Symbolism in art', paper read to the Royal Institution of Great Britain (London: Royal Institution of Great Britain, 1933)
73. Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, p.156
74. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 2 February 1932, PC
75. James Cornwell, *Saints, Signs and Symbols: The Symbolic Language of Christian Art* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2009), p.137
76. Letter from Knights to George Bell, 25 April 1929, CCA. For a study of these reeds, see UCL Art Museum no. 9480
77. Saint Augustine (AD 354-430) compared the walnut in its three substances to the redemptive work of Christ; the shell as the wood of the cross, the fruit surrounding the nut as the flesh of Christ and the nut the sweet interior of Divine revelation. See A. W. Steffler, *Symbols of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), p.127
78. Watt, *Chronicles of Sulpicius Severus*, p.98; letter from Knights to George Bell, 25 April 1929, CCA
79. For the detail of the plank and its significance to her narrative, Knights is likely to have drawn inspiration from Piero della Francesca's fresco cycle *The Legend of the True Cross* (c.1452-66), which was based on Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*, compiled around 1260 with text added over the following centuries.
80. Letter from Eileen Palmer to Frances Carey, 29 January 1989, British Museum Prints and Drawings Department. Numerous studies of Martin Palmer as a baby are in the collection of the British Museum.
81. Loose sheet of writing, dated 4 February 1928
82. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, March 1928, UCL SC
83. For the resemblance between Baker and the elderly St Martin, see Charles Wheeler, *Sir Herbert Baker*, marble bust (c.1930) illustrated in Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, p.xi
84. This portrait is now situated in the Rotunda section of the Bank of England Museum.
85. Letter from Herbert Baker to George Bell, 6 May 1929, CCA
86. See also UCL sketchbooks 9477-9713, 9773-9837
87. Lord Balniel, Diary entry, 23 December 1932, PC
88. Letter from Henry Tonks to Knights, 7 August 1933, PC
89. Lord Balniel, diary entry, 23 December 1932, PC
90. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 10 November 1933, PC
91. Letter from Herbert Baker to Knights, 3 November 1933, PC
92. Letter from Dean Johnson to H. C. Thornton, 5 November 1937, University of Kent, Special Collections
93. Letter from George Bell to Knights, 25 May 1934, PC
94. Letter from Dean Johnson to H. C. Thornton, 19 June 1936, University of Kent, Special Collections
95. Letter from Knights to Herbert Baker, undated, RIBA Library, Archives Collection
96. Letter from James Wilkie to Knights, 1933, PC

## POSTSCRIPT

1. Letter from D. Y. Cameron to the 28th Earl of Crawford (formerly Lord Balniel), 19 July 1943, NLS ECB
2. Letter from Tonks to Mrs. Stubbs, 30 December 1934, quoted in Hone, *Life of Henry Tonks*, p.298
3. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 8 August 1935, PC
4. John Monnington, 'Miscellaneous Reminiscences' (2012), PC
5. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Knights, 24 February 1935, PC
6. Hone, *Life of Henry Tonks*, p.298; letter from Henry Tonks to Knights, 18 July 1935, PC
7. Letter from Mary Potter to Knights, 22 July 1935, PC
8. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Knights, 2 December 1935, PC
9. According to John Monnington, Walter Knights left just over £100,000 to be divided between Knights and her two sisters. Since her mother's death in 1930, Knights received an additional income of £25 a month for the duration of her life.
10. John Monnington, 'Miscellaneous Reminiscences' (2012)
11. Letter from D. Y. Cameron to the 28th Earl of Crawford (formerly Lord Balniel), 5 September 1944, NLS ECB
12. Letter from Augustus Daniel to Thomas Monnington, 31 May 1932, PC
13. Recounted in a letter from letter from D. Y. Cameron to the 28th Earl of Crawford (formerly Lord Balniel), 28 September 1943, NLS ECB
14. Letter from the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA, to Knights, 7 January 1938, PC
15. See 1939 Inventory for Eltham Palace. I am grateful to Treve Rosoman for this information.
16. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 17 January 1934, PC
17. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 13 December 1934, PC
18. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 17 January 1934, PC
19. Letter from Mary Sargent Florence to Knights, 11 October 1935, PC
20. See sketchbook, UCL Art Museum, EDC 91838-9858V. The sketchbook specifies the size of the tapestries: '10 ft x 14 ft, border to be 6 ft overall size 11 x 15 ft. ¼ size sketch'
21. John Monnington, 'Miscellaneous Reminiscences' (2012), PC
22. *ibid.*; letter from the 28th Earl of Crawford (formerly Lord Balniel) to Knights, 5 July 1940, PC
23. Letter from Lord Balniel to Knights, 4 August 1927, PC
24. *ibid.*
25. Two further pen-and-ink drawings on tracing paper of the landscape detail are in a private collection.
26. Letter from D. Y. Cameron to the 28th Earl of Crawford (formerly Lord Balniel), 19 July 1943, NLS ECB
27. John Monnington, 'Miscellaneous Reminiscences' (2012), PC
28. *ibid.*
29. Letter from Knights to the 28th Earl of Crawford (formerly Lord Balniel), 25 October 1944, NLS ECB
30. Handwritten note, 1942, PC
31. Letter from Knights to Millicent Murby, undated, UCL SC
32. Letter from D. Y. Cameron to Knights, 12 December 1940, PC
33. Letter from Knights to Lady Allen of Hurtwood (nee Gill), 1932, University of Warwick, Modern Records Office
34. John Monnington, 'Miscellaneous Reminiscences' (2012), PC
35. Handwritten note, c.1946, PC
36. Recounted in a letter from 'Jane' to Knights, 1946, PC
37. Letter from Knights to Florence Murby, 1946, UCL SC
38. *ibid.*
39. Letter from Thomas Monnington to Lady Allen of Hurtwood (nee Gill), 1947, University of Warwick, Modern Records Office
40. Randolph Schwabe, diary entry, 13 February 1934. I am grateful to Gill Clarke for this information.
41. Exhibited 1947 under RA no.350
42. 'British and Irish Traditionalist and Modernist Pictures and Sculpture', Christie's, London, 9 June 1988, lot no.265
43. Letter from D. Y. Cameron to the 28th Earl of Crawford (formerly Lord Balniel), 11 February 1944, NLS ECB



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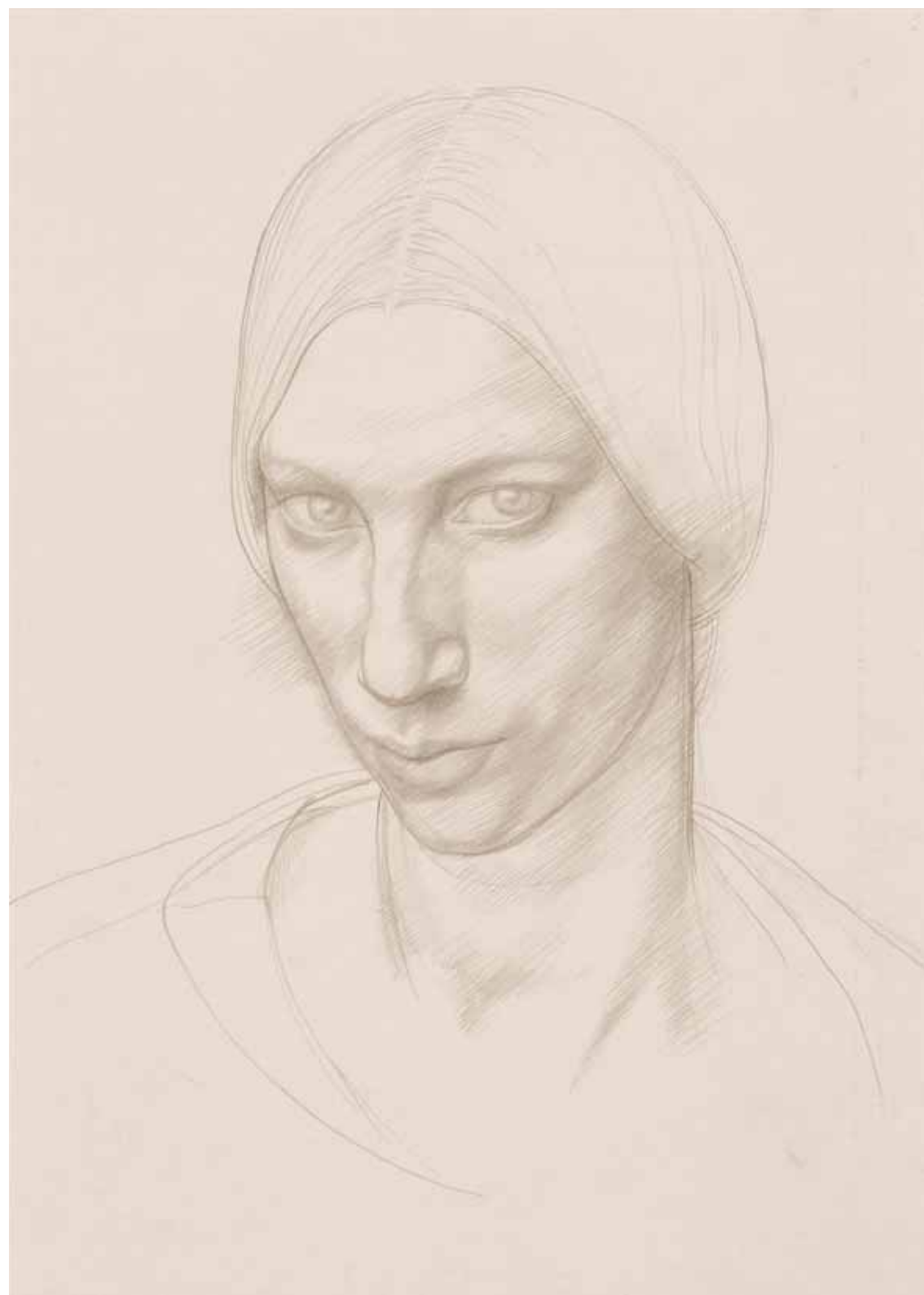
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176 Self-Portrait, c.1920  
Silverpoint on paper  
23.4 x 16.5 cm  
(9 ¼ x 6 ½ in)  
Collection of Catherine  
Monnington

