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# ‘Spaces of Femininity’: Making Art and Craft in the English Country House, c.1750-1900

## **Birkbeck, University of London (School of Arts) and English Heritage**

Country houses are full of ‘amateur’ art work – particularly the work of the wives and daughters who lived in them, and particularly from the later Georgian and Victorian periods when such practice flourished, and the commercial sector developed to support it (providing instruction manuals, materials, tutors etc). This ranges from drawings, etchings and watercolours through to objects such as containers crafted from shell work, panelled folding screens showcasing petit-point needlework and hand painted ceramics.

The houses managed by English Heritage are no exception. The student will select case studies from amongst properties such as Audley End, Wrest Park and Brodsworth, considering objects and interiors still at the houses, as well as material now in other public or private collections.

The student has the scope to develop both the topic and approach, in conjunction with the supervisors, but proposed research questions include:

1. What kinds of work did these women produce? In which genres and media did they work?
2. Why did they produce such work? A popular contemporary stereotype presented this as a genteel accomplishment, of particular value in the marriage market: does this hold up?
3. What did these women do with such work? Was it intended for display, whether in their own home or elsewhere? To what extent did this creative practice support familial and social networks through exchange of these objects?
4. What relationship did these women have with the 'professional' art world? What instruction manuals and other pedagogic literature did they consult? What commercially produced materials did they use? Who taught them, and how did tutoring work in practice? How did they engage with the organisations that provided training, prizes and opportunities for exhibiting work?
5. What can this work tell us about women's historical experience? What can it tell us about their daily lives and personal relationships? What can it tell us about their relationships with their houses and landscapes?
6. What can this work tell us about the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century domestic interior? How did these objects relate to the décor and furnishings designed and created by professionals?

This studentship will provide the student with both invaluable academic skills and experience of working in the heritage sector. It will involve the student in a range of interdisciplinary research activities, drawing on archival and primary textual material and working closely with collections and interiors. In addition to preparing the PhD thesis, it is envisaged that the student will also be engaged in a range of related activities such as cataloguing and interpretation work, and to take the lead on a temporary display at Audley End. They will also be expected to play a full role in the research cultures of both institutions.