

## RESEARCH

# Grant Park and the Globe: Lucy Mitchell, Bessie Bennett, and the Art Institute of Chicago

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At the turn of the twentieth century the Art Institute of Chicago, like the city it established itself in, sought a global reputation. Its early leaders wanted to acquire art from all over the world while promoting its collections to a global audience. The progress the museum made during this time has often been attributed to the famous men of Chicago, including Charles Hutchinson, Martin Ryerson, and Marshall Field. Indeed, much public and scholarly attention has been devoted to the infrastructural, financial, and administrative developments that these men oversaw as trustees, directors, treasurers, and philanthropists. However, this view neglects the lesser-known contributors, male or female, who played other roles in seeking a global reputation for the Art Institute. Using the annual reports and catalogues of the museum as primary sources and referencing the historiography on the Art Institute and the city of Chicago, this article explores the stories of two such contributors—Lucy Mitchell and Bessie Bennett. Mitchell, a classical archaeologist and adviser to the Elbridge G. Hall cast collection, and Bennett, one of the first woman curators of a major American museum, illustrate how women helped to lead the museum to become one of the most prestigious institutions in the world. They did so despite long-time financial constraints on their work and their exclusion from the ranks of the museum's leadership. This work thus shows how unhelpful it is to view the development of a museum, or an entire city, as the product of the efforts of one "great" man. Rather, the globalizing history of the Art Institute was the accumulation of the labor of many individuals.



Art Institute, Chicago, circa 1907, postcard. Davidson Bros' Real Photographic Series, London and New York. Image is in public domain. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Art\\_Institute,\\_Chicago\\_circa\\_1907\\_postcard\\_\(front\).tiff](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Art_Institute,_Chicago_circa_1907_postcard_(front).tiff).

*So forget, indeed, your revolutions, your turning-points, your grand metamorphoses of history. Consider, instead, the slow and arduous process, the interminable and ambiguous process—the process of human siltation—of land reclamation.*

– Graham Swift, *Waterland*

Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Art Institute of Chicago emerged as one of the leading fine arts institutions in the United States. Embodying the thriving cosmopolitanism of the city, the museum and its school aspired to bring the world to Chicago and to bring Chicago to the world, acquisition by acquisition, exhibition

by exhibition. The Chicagoans who made these dreams come true, or so the historical record and historiography suggest, are the same famous names associated with the industrial and commercial progress of the city: Charles L. Hutchinson, Martin A. Ryerson, Marshall Field, and the like. These men, who held firm control of important and lucrative corporate positions as director, treasurer, or trustee and were able to donate large sums of money to the Art Institute, may be credited as prime movers behind the progress of the museum—that is, if one were to measure success by the increasing square footage of exhibition space and the monetary value of acquisitions.

But “great men” were never the only ones to lay down these milestones. When scholars focus only on great men, they fail to capture the range of participants in the museum’s history. A focus on corporate leaders as “great men” advances mostly a narrative of American exceptionalism, liberal capitalism, and the construction of “great cities.” Unfortunately, little is known about the myriad less prominent men and women whose names fill the school rosters, membership rolls, and lists of donors in the annual reports, not to mention the unnamed administrators who brought cultural visions to life (or something to get from donors to workers). In particular, the role that women played has been long eclipsed by the massive financial donations made by their male counterparts and the infrastructural and artistic acquisitions made possible by these donations. This essay seeks to highlight the role that two women played at the turn of the twentieth century in the progress of the Art Institute. The case studies of Lucy Myers Wright Mitchell, a classical archaeologist and contributor to the Elbridge G. Hall cast collection, and Bessie Bennett, the first woman curator in a major American museum, illustrate how women imported art from all over the world into Chicago and how they exported Chicagoan art to the world. Their contributions of curatorial advice, as well as artwork and sums of money, were similarly important to the museum’s success. Women, particularly white upper-middle-class women, could do so even if they lacked the positions and finances that the most influential of men could access. By examining these two case studies, one may see how women exercised their agency to shape the social and cultural landscapes of their city, an achievement normally attributed only to men. The collective effort of women to shape these landscapes should be recognized. It does no justice to the historical record to conceive of museums and cities as only the legacy of particular men. To conceive of museums and cities only as the legacy of particular privileged men is to risk overlooking how women overcame the gendered constraints of their time to participate actively in civil society.

### **World City, Global Museum**

Numerous histories of Chicago attest to the many connections the city had cultivated since its founding to the surrounding Midwest, the greater United States, and the world. The completion of the Illinois and Michigan Canal in

1848 linked the Mississippi River system to the East Coast and overseas markets beyond. That same year marked the construction of the first railroads linking the Midwest to the Great Plains.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary observers marveled at how trade flowed from the Great Lakes, along the Saint Lawrence River, and onwards through the Atlantic to Liverpool and how railroads connected New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore with Chicago and the West.<sup>2</sup> City leaders celebrated the expansionary and globalizing spirit of the city, first establishing and then expanding a commemorative park situated a stone’s throw from the waterfront. Lake Park was meant to demonstrate to the world that Chicago had risen from the flames of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and local business leaders sought the construction of a large exhibition building to amplify this message.<sup>3</sup> This became the site of the Inter-State Industrial Exposition of 1873. City planners became even more ambitious. They decided that the land itself had to expand in line with the vision of the city. In 1897 Lake Front Park had been a mere twenty-five acres, but by 1906 the new Grant Park land-reclamation project had nearly reached its goal of filling an area of 202 acres.<sup>4</sup>

The Art Institute of Chicago established itself in the thriving locality of Lake Park, renamed Grant Park in 1901. Like the city that grew up around it, from the start the Art Institute envisioned itself as a cosmopolitan museum. Those who have authored the history of the museum have rightly discerned the global outlook of the Art Institute. Situated in the second-largest city in America and, for a time, the fourth-largest city in the world, the leaders of the Art Institute of Chicago took upon themselves the responsibility of acquiring art from Europe, the Middle East, the Far East, and the Americas.<sup>5</sup> The objective of putting together “the finest collections in the country,” or some variant of this goal, is a common refrain in the earliest reports published by the trustees.<sup>6</sup> These early visionaries believed that it was necessary to raise the general standard of taste in art because doing so was a form of good service not only to their city but also to their country.<sup>7</sup> The earliest benefactors, too, invested heavily in the idea that an emerging world-class city, placed strategically amidst modern transportation systems at the crossroads of a burgeoning and united nation, logically needed a world-class museum.<sup>8</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, the largest and most cosmopolitan cities in the world took great pride in their museums, galleries, and exhibitions. These were considered to be powerful displays of collective national achievement and, most obviously in the case of expositions which displayed the latest machinery and industrial processes, the capital which made such exhibitions possible.<sup>9</sup> Older European cities had developed such establishments as the British Museum and the Louvre. Established United States cities were investing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and other museums. Chicagoans were willing to donate to help their museums “catch up” and gain a global reputation, whether or not these were specifically art museums. The effort to lead Chicago

onto the world stage was highly gendered. This much is clear from an assessment of the historiography of the city.

### **Man, Metropolis, and Museum**

The notion of progress described above has to a large extent been synonymous with a masculine view of progress. The early twentieth century might conceivably be considered the apogee of, to borrow Donna Haraway's words, "white and male supremacist monopoly capitalism" in the urban United States.<sup>10</sup> Popular lore and scholarly work celebrated the "City of the Century" and the "City of Big Shoulders" as the "real" Chicago.<sup>11</sup> The city was economic activity, technological ingenuity, and muscular enterprise writ large for the world to see.

Unsurprisingly, contemporary observers have applied these standards of progress to the Art Institute of Chicago. The primarily male leadership of the Art Institute did this uniformly from the 1880s through the 1930s by drawing attention in their annual reports to the areas of museum and school operations which were in their firm control as directors, treasurers, and trustees (finances, infrastructure, and governance); they also glossed over those operations which were peripheral to such activities and which were open to women (attending or teaching classes and performing clerical work). The documents authored by these men exemplify the museum's highly male-centric narrative. Profit-making and efficiency, which were part of the male sphere of control, seemed to weigh on the minds of the early leaders of the museum. One report on the School of the Art Institute is not dotted with statements of pedagogical goals and outcomes—as one might expect of an educational institution—but with such statements as "The School has never been larger and more prosperous and efficient than ever before" and "Financially it is a profitable class also."<sup>12</sup> Infrastructural expansion is also a recurring theme in the early reports; one report lavished praise on the new library, a valuable sign of the growing institutionalization of the museum: "This beautiful library building is one of the most important and valuable gifts ever received by the institution."<sup>13</sup> Financial difficulties in the museum's early years may help explain why the leaders were enthusiastic about profits and buildings. However, regardless of the cause of the leadership's interest in these domains, the important consequence was that already masculinized yardsticks of progress became more prominent in subsequent decades. In the 1870s the Academy of Design went bankrupt after amassing debts of between \$10,000 and \$12,000.<sup>14</sup> In 1889 the trustees reported sadly that it must "be borne in mind that the Art Institute not only is destitute of endowment, but is still burdened with a debt amount to \$100,000 of bonded indebtedness, and \$45,000 of floating indebtedness."<sup>15</sup> This debt represented more than a year's income for the museum. The leaders of the Art Institute must have been eager to distance themselves from the looming threat of insolvency, possibly because the threat, if realized, would cast doubt on their abilities as captains of the city's

progress. Thus the main metric of progress at the turn of the century, as assessed almost every year by the Art Institute, came to be the material prosperity and financial health of the institution.

Profitability was admittedly necessary to the museum's continued upkeep and preservation. Money matters were paramount given that the museum defined its mission in terms of collection and preservation, as opposed to education and edification. Yet it does not seem to have occurred to the men of the Art Institute that this metric was highly exclusionary and gendered. Although a new generation of feminine stewards emerged in the 1870s and 1880s to demand an increased measure of civic and social responsibility, men dominated key leadership positions that would allow them to act as trustees and exercise a masculine responsibility for culture.<sup>16</sup> The first officers of the Chicago Academy of Design, an early predecessor to the Art Institute, were all male, as were the committee members that decided to erect a permanent building for an art gallery and museum.<sup>17</sup> The only discernible sphere of influence that women had was the School of the Art Institute, which the city perceived to be "chiefly a school for women"—that is, until the school began offering evening classes in 1895 (in marble cutting, metal cutting, and photography) that catered to male tradesmen.<sup>18</sup> As such, the few domains of female participation were also open to men, but women remained excluded from male spaces. In this predominantly male environment, the leaders of the museum perpetuated a correspondingly male-centric narrative. Focusing their annual reports and other publications on these milestones, the male leadership of the Art Institute earned themselves such sobriquets as Charles Hutchinson's "Father of the Art Institute."<sup>19</sup>

This is not to say that the accomplishments of women were completely neglected during this time. The problem was that both men and women rarely allowed female achievements to stand for themselves. Though the records of the Art Institute did not state this explicitly, contemporary etiquette meant presenting a woman's contribution never entirely as her own. Both men and women alike deferred to the husband as the preferred choice to accompany descriptions of women's contributions. In 1917 Mrs. Bryan Lanthrop donated \$20,000 for establishing and maintaining a scholarship at the School of the Art Institute, one which was not named after herself, but her husband.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, it was in her husband's memory that Mrs. Henry Field commissioned the famous guard lions displayed outside the Art Institute.<sup>21</sup> In these cases, women made major contributions to the institution, yet those contributions remember their husbands for posterity.

It seems that there were only two major exceptions to the erasure of women's contributions. A woman could make a name for herself by amassing a substantial collection of her own, which required her to have access to considerable financial resources. Mrs. Evaline M. Kimball, for one, spent a lifetime building up a \$2,000,000 collection that included a Rembrandt, which was subsequently installed at the Art

Institute.<sup>22</sup> Alternatively, a woman could donate such a significant amount of money as to make a substantial acquisition possible. Examples of this may be found in Mrs. D. K. Pearsons, whose gift to the Art Institute culminated in the Mrs. D. K. Pearsons Collection of Carbon Photographs, and in Mrs. A. M. H. Ellis, who suggested that until her gift to the Art Institute was expended on sculpture, it should be directed to the purchase of books for the library.<sup>23</sup> Extant archival materials do not specify how much a woman had to contribute for the Art Institute to recognize her as a patron in her own right. That the museum honored some women by their married names and others by their initials reveals the curious extent to which the Art Institute and the society of Chicago elided the identities of the women. Nonetheless, it is apparent that celebrated women patrons were of significant financial means.

The second major exception was when a woman's expertise in art qualified her to decide upon the affairs of the museum. Such a woman did not have to be as wealthy as the former group of women, but she still needed to be able to afford an education in art. It is among the ranks of these women that we find Lucy Mitchell and Bessie Bennett. Mitchell and Bennett are among the exemplary women whose stories survive two erasures: the first by the male leaders of the Art Institute who documented the developments of the museum and the second by the historians who have presented such developments as histories of the museum. Mitchell and Bennett demonstrate how, despite being excluded from holding the most important offices, and despite being of more limited means than the wealthiest men in Chicago, women could still work within their constraints to transform the museum into an international institution.

### Lucy Mitchell and Bessie Bennett

Lucy Myers Wright Mitchell (1845–1888) fell into an undeserved obscurity over the course of the twentieth century. This neglect is especially unjust because she was one of the first women to study classical archaeology, and she wrote the first book on classical archaeology published by an American.<sup>24</sup> The information that has survived from the nineteenth century does not offer much insight into her life. There are several advertisements or listings of her monograph *A History of Ancient Sculpture* (1883).<sup>25</sup> There are also some reviews of the book, one of which applauded Mitchell for “giv[ing] us here so important and valuable a contribution to the history of sculpture that we must regret that we are not able to give more than a summary of its many excellent features.”<sup>26</sup> Another declared *Ancient Sculpture* to be “the most important contribution to the history of art ever made by an American.”<sup>27</sup> One writer even criticized the author of a book titled *Some “Women of the Day”* for making the “serious omissions” of such women as Lucy Mitchell.<sup>28</sup> These aside, there are some obituaries of her and an encyclopedia article which may have been adapted from one of these obituaries.<sup>29</sup> These drew attention

not only to Mitchell's literary career but also to her personal life—her birth into a missionary family, her marriage to an emerging artist, and her death in Switzerland from illness.

Today, little would be known about Lucy Mitchell if not for the scholarship of Stephen L. Dyson. In *Ancient Marbles* (1998), Dyson declared *Ancient Sculpture* to be the first general American text on ancient art.<sup>30</sup> But for the purposes of this article, it is most relevant to note that Dyson, who happens to be male, is likely the only scholar to connect Lucy Mitchell to the Art Institute of Chicago. Drawn to Mitchell more by an interest in archaeology than in gender history, Dyson notes in “Cast Collecting in the United States” that Mitchell prepared the initial lists for cast purchases for the Elbridge G. Hall Collection, which was funded by Addie M. Hall Ellis in honor of her former husband.<sup>31</sup> Mitchell's involvement in the collection was recorded in the June 1887 report of the Director of the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as to the January 1891 *Preliminary Catalogue of the Elbridge G. Hall Collection*:

By the vote of the Trustees the sum of \$7000, of the gift of Mrs. A. M. Hall Ellis, has been appropriated to the purchase of casts of sculpture. Orders have been sent to Europe for a comprehensive collection, carefully prepared in consultation with Mrs. Lucy M. Mitchell, author of the valuable “History of Ancient Sculpture”, which we hope to have in place at the opening of the Museum in October.<sup>32</sup>

The present Catalogue, intended rather for popular than for scientific use, is derived in great part from easily accessible sources, such as Mrs. Lucy M. Mitchell's “History of Ancient Sculpture,” Perry's “Greek and Roman Sculpture,” and the catalogues of sister institutions. ... Mrs. Mitchell's “History of Ancient Sculpture” is kept always in the galleries, accessible to the visitors.<sup>33</sup>

However, there does not appear to be any information as to how Lucy Mitchell came to be involved in the Art Institute in the first place, especially if she was in Europe when the Art Institute was acquiring the collection. Regardless, it is clear that this world-renowned scholar was a perfect match for the global ambitions of the Art Institute, for its leaders were fond of welcoming European scholars to research, lecture, and share their expertise at the museum.

On the other hand, there is much more information on how Bessie Bennett (1870–1939) contributed to the Art Institute of Chicago. Her obituary in the *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* noted that she was “personally responsible for the introduction of the decorative arts into the calendar of exhibitions as well as encouraging collectors in the Oriental field.”<sup>34</sup> Having graduated from the Art Institute of School in 1898, Bennett was soon enrolled as a teacher on the school's staff, where she taught design, before she was made curator of decorative arts in 1914.<sup>35</sup> It was in her

capacity as curator that Bennett, a prolific writer, produced at least two dozen articles for the *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*.

Bennett was also heavily involved in the Chicago Society of Decorative Art (formed in the late 1870s), later known as the Antiquarians of the Art Institute. The Chicago Society of Decorative Art, drawing its inspiration from the Society of Decorative Art in New York City, held drawing, painting, and needlework classes for impoverished women and taught them to make handicrafts.<sup>36</sup> These activities were funded by the five-dollar memberships paid for by the acquaintances of the board of directors, with the city's wealthiest citizens contributing larger sums of money and goods as well.<sup>37</sup> In 1891 the society turned to purchasing pottery, china, tapestries, and embroideries on behalf of the Art Institute in exchange for credit to finance its activities.<sup>38</sup> By 1894 the society decided that it would collect only antiquities and changed its name to reflect this shift. Two decades later, Bessie Bennett would come to exercise firm control over the acquisitions and exhibitions of the Antiquarians.<sup>39</sup> Bennett, for one, wrote and spoke eloquently about the Antiquarian acquisitions and relished every opportunity to vet purchases and drive hard bargains with dealers.<sup>40</sup> The picture of Bessie Bennett that can be gleaned from the secondary literature evinces an artist and administrator who embodied the city's spirit of infinite energy and enthusiasm for progress and betterment.

Thus, Mitchell and Bennett were similar in many important respects. Even as they were separated by a generation, and even as it is unlikely that they ever crossed paths, both were esteemed as scholars and subject matter experts who were called upon to take the Art Institute to new heights in its quest for global recognition and world renown. How exactly Mitchell and Bennett did so will be the subject of the following sub-sections. As will be shown, high socioeconomic status and consequent access to artistic, cultural, and scholarly opportunities were crucial.

### From the World to Chicago

As suggested earlier in this essay, the institute aimed to be as wide-ranging in its collections as possible. Importantly, the male leadership of the institute did not appear to have any problems with women, or at least affluent women and wealthy patronesses, helping to install the collections that their donations financed. Consider the following excerpt from the 1888 "Annual Report of the Director," which concerns the same Mrs. Ellis mentioned above: "During the summer and fall a large proportion of the collection of casts of antique sculpture belonging to the Elbridge G. Hall Collection, the gift of Mrs. A. M. H. Ellis, arrived and was put in place. Other consignments from London, Paris, Athens, Berlin, and Munich have since been received. ... Mrs. Ellis herself prepared the descriptive tablets which are attached to the works."<sup>41</sup> Clearly, there was no significant opposition to women being in charge of how collections were presented to visitors. In other words, there were opportunities for

women to mediate the relationship between the museum's artifacts and its guests.

It is conceivable that the trustees were also willing to allow women to mediate the relationship between the museum and its counterparts all over the world, particularly those in Europe and the Mediterranean. Lucy Mitchell would have been a valuable intermediary, given that in 1884 she was elected a member of the Imperial Archaeological Institute of Germany and that she subsequently received from important museums and libraries unusual privileges and opportunities for investigations.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Mitchell had traveled all over Europe and the Near East, spending time in Persia, Syria, Germany, Italy, and England, among other places, and could speak more than half a dozen languages. Given her impeccable credentials and the success of *Ancient Sculptures*, the Art Institute had much to gain by enlisting her expertise to introduce the representative art of Egypt, Chaldea, Assyria, Persia, Phoenicia, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy to Chicago, just as her book had done.<sup>43</sup> This is not to say that Mitchell single-handedly elevated the Art Institute to global prominence by simply drawing up a list of casts for the Elbridge G. Hall Collection. This appears especially unlikely since there does not seem to be any evidence that she was actually in the city of Chicago when the Hall cast collection was organized. Moreover, her health deteriorated rapidly over the course of 1886, soon after the list had been compiled. Given that she passed away in Lausanne in 1888, one has to rule out the possibility that she could have served as a long-term European ambassador for the Art Institute and that she could have promoted the casts and other collections on behalf of Chicago. Still, that she served as such an extraordinary representative of Chicago's art and artists for a brief time testifies to the role women could play in the city if they had the required cultural capital.

However, women did not have to travel the world extensively to be recognized for their expertise, and shape the cultural life of this emerging world-class city. Born in Cincinnati, Bessie Bennett spent most of her life in Chicago, leaving only for occasional trips to Europe. Bessie Bennett's contributions to the Art Institute of Chicago were never monumental donations of buildings or expensive artwork. These forms of endowment were more the preserve of wealthy men, including such famous names as Hutchinson and Ryerson, as well as their wives or widows. Bennett does not appear to have married into the upper echelons of Chicagoan society; in fact, she may not have married at all—her obituaries mention no marriage, and Bennett retained the use of her maiden name throughout her life. This may be why her contributions to the Art Institute of Chicago were consistently in small and gradual increments. The following table (**Table 1**) illustrates Bennett's donations, as recorded in the annual reports.

Bennett's donations of publications and decorative art pieces seem insignificant in comparison to the masterpieces within the collections of the Art Institute. This would seem

**Table 1:** Bessie Bennett's Donations to the Art Institute of Chicago.

Year	Recipient	Donation
1904–5	Library	W. C. Lethaby—Pamphlet on the study and practice of artistic crafts <sup>44</sup>
1907–8	Library	Saint Nicholas—6 vols. <sup>45</sup>
1909–10	Library	Jewelry designs <sup>46</sup> World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893. Royal Danish commission—World's Columbian Exposition, 1893. Denmark <sup>47</sup>
1913–14	Library	86 postcards <sup>48</sup>
1914–15	Library	6 postcards <sup>49</sup>
1916	Ryerson and Burnham Libraries	2 pamphlets <sup>50</sup>
1917	Art Institute of Chicago	“Donor of Object of Art” <sup>51</sup>
1919, 1923	Ryerson and Burnham Libraries	“Donor to the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries” <sup>52</sup>
1925	Decorative Arts	“Lender of Art Objects” <sup>53</sup>
1929	Ryerson and Burnham Libraries	“Donor to the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries” <sup>54</sup>
1932, 1933, 1934	Decorative Arts Department	“Lender” <sup>55</sup>
1935	Ryerson and Burnham Libraries	“Donor to the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries” <sup>56</sup>
1936	Decorative Arts Department	An American glass pitcher <sup>57</sup> “Donor” <sup>58</sup>
	Ryerson and Burnham Libraries	“Donor to the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries” <sup>59</sup>

to suggest that Bennett played only a minor role in putting the Art Institute on the world map.

Yet, Bennett, like Mitchell, had as much leeway as her male colleagues to define the place of Chicago in the world. She accomplished this in three ways. Firstly, Bennett delivered such lectures as “Textiles: A Study of Fabrics in Their Relation to Present Industrial Life” and “Interiors and Their Compositions.”<sup>60</sup> Her lectures, featured alongside those of men and women who lectured in Chicago on Greek, Swedish, Japanese, Chinese, and other global art forms, suggested ways in which “average” domestic artifacts and spaces represented the progress and cosmopolitanism of industrial modernity. Bennett not only lectured about art but also wrote about it. She was most at home writing about the Decorative Arts Department, producing pieces on the inception of the department under Ryerson and the Buckingham collections.<sup>61</sup> However, like Mitchell, she commented on a variety of genres and periods, introducing devotional objects from Germany, eighteenth-century furniture from England, and Anglo-American architecture to the readers of the *Bulletin*.<sup>62</sup> In fitting such contemporary artifacts into a traditional “canon,” Mitchell exemplified how a progressive and modern city and museum could act as interpreters and arbiters of art for the world. Thirdly, institute reports suggest that Bennett provided financial support to the museum. The Bessie Bennett fund of \$25,000, fielded between 1927 and 1936, contributed towards the museum’s ability to acquire or expand its collections, hold exhibits,

and create educational initiatives that brought art from all over the world to Chicago. Thus, both Mitchell’s reputation as a world-class scholar and Bennett’s work in the decorative arts burnished the institute’s reputation as a world-class collector of antiquities.

While both women contributed in different ways, it is worth concluding this section by underscoring two similarities between them. As members of Chicago’s upper-middle and upper classes—Mitchell was briefly educated at Mount Holyoke College, and Bennett was raised in wealthy surroundings—both women had sufficient resources to pursue artistic, cultural, and scholarly opportunities.<sup>63</sup> In so doing, they were able to accumulate the professional experience that would have made them valuable experts to the Art Institute of Chicago. Mitchell’s writing of *Ancient Sculpture* was in part informed by her experiences exploring archaeological sites in Lebanon and attending a series of lectures on ancient art delivered by Professor Johannes Overbeck in Leipzig from 1872 to 1873.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, the breadth and depth of Bennett’s knowledge in art was likely a result of her brief travels abroad and of her experiences working with European experts who were visiting Chicago. In the 1910s the trustees of the Art Institute sent Bennett to Europe to study the subjects of her department, particularly decorative arts, and she was also to study with Professor Paul Schulze, director of the Royal Textile Museum in Krefeld, Germany.<sup>65</sup> She had previously cooperated with Schulze while he was in Chicago to classify, rearrange, and re-mount the textile art

in the institute.<sup>66</sup> Bennett also spent a summer in France gathering data on Normandy, Brittany, Finistère, and the Châteaux country.<sup>67</sup> These travels allowed the women to accumulate the cultural capital so necessary to American progressivism at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, their experiences abroad helped both women to assert themselves as leading figures of authority in their respective fields and to decide what forms of art should be brought into Chicago. Be that as it may, it is important to note first that these experiences were made equally, if not more, available to men and that, secondly, these opportunities could only be enjoyed by those who could access more than a basic level of education.

Indeed, the answer might be to avoid thinking of the globalizing history of the Art Institute of Chicago as a linear narrative with individual men (or women) dictating the construction of majestic Greco-Roman buildings or the drafting and disbursement of budgets with dollar-and-cents precision, the annual reports notwithstanding. Instead, one might take inspiration from the siltation of the Chicago River itself. Lucy Mitchell and Bessie Bennett were empowered individuals in their own right, such that many of their deeds have survived in writing to this day. It is difficult to say the same of so many of their counterparts. Nonetheless, it may be more important to view Mitchell and Bennett as two women whose individual labors constituted part of a collective effort, an effort in which so many Chicagoans and Art Institute stakeholders who are now long deceased and anonymous to us also participated. Even as the Art Institute lost a valuable European contact with the untimely demise of Lucy Mitchell, it more than made up for this by sending its students and staff (including Bessie Bennett) overseas regardless of their gender. One report on the School of the Art Institute was pleased to note that “this constant interchange with the schools and institutions of Europe is most wholesome for the School.”<sup>68</sup> Bennett’s donations of art and money may pale in comparison to those made by the prominent industrialists and businessmen of the city, some of whom gave hundreds of thousands to the Art Institute. However, Bennett’s personal philanthropy combined with the donations of scores of other women as well as men to keep the Art Institute in a state of solvency. Those women who were in a position to give their time and money, as Mitchell and Bennett were, should rightly be celebrated, or at least acknowledged in writings on the Art Institute, for the role they and their male counterparts played in leading Grant Park into the world and vice versa.

### Conclusion

The object of this paper is not to deny the validity or value of the contributions that men made to the Art Institute of Chicago. Neither does the essay seek to contest the idea that in absolute terms, men were able to hold more leadership positions, provide more financial support, or donate artwork of much higher value than women could. Rather, it strives to demonstrate that it is unhelpful to think and write

of the development of a museum, or of an entire city for that matter, as a product of the efforts of individual men. The “galaxy of brilliant names” (in which one historian included Hutchinson) can only exist if one allows all the other luminaries in the history of the Art Institute of Chicago to fade into the darkness.<sup>69</sup>

Thus it is timely to conclude this essay with a concession. A purely gendered perspective of the Art Institute may be just as restrictive as thinking of the museum only in terms of its male leaders. Given that women differ in their interests, ideas, and experiences, “woman” is a discursive category open to contestation.<sup>70</sup> With its influxes of migrants, the metropolis of Chicago was always more than the narrative of white upper-class women (and men) who had the material and social means to inscribe and memorialize their own legacies. The reputation and collections of the Art Institute are now global. Let the history of the museum be global too.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> John B. Jentz and Richard Schneirov, *Chicago in the Age of Capital: Class, Politics, and Democracy During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 15–16.
- <sup>2</sup> Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 38.
- <sup>3</sup> Dennis H. Cremin, *Grant Park: The Evolution of Chicago's Front Yard* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 31.
- <sup>4</sup> Timothy Joseph Garvey, *Public Sculptor: Lorado Taft and the Beautification of Chicago* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 181.
- <sup>5</sup> Neil Harris, *Chicago's Dream, a World's Treasure: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1893–1993*, ed. Teri J. Edelstein (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1993), 11.
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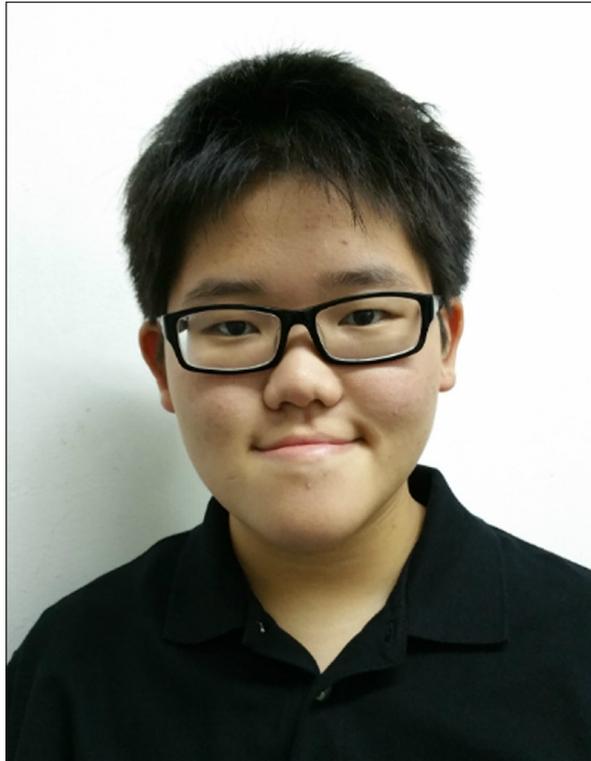
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