

ABSTRACT

“Palaces of Art:” Victorian Studio-Houses in the Museum Context

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The Aesthetic Period of the late Victorian era produced a profusion of unique architectural forms known as “purpose-built studio-houses.” These combination domestic and work spaces were intentionally built and designed by the most famous artists of the day in the United States and the United Kingdom. Each home was an intimate expression of the artist’s philosophies and tastes. These artists represented the pinnacle of popular culture for their time, and the abundance of periodical and literary material related to these artists, their works of art, and most importantly, their studio-houses, reflects the significant role these artists played in the late Victorian era. After these artists died, many of their homes were destroyed, completely remodeled, or turned into museums. This thesis explores the journeys of the properties that became museums while also investigating how these studio-house museums are being conserved and interpreted for the public today.

“Palaces of Art:” Victorian Studio-Houses in the Museum Context

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family—Dad, Mom, Alison, Justin, and Ethan. I would not have been able to complete this graduate school journey without your help and support. I would also like to dedicate this work to my grandparents—Grandmother Garner and Grandmother Sue and Papaw Tipton. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to reach for the stars. As I come to the end of this journey, I am thankful for the ways my dear family has encouraged me to always be “me,” even in the selection of this thesis topic. May you always embrace beauty.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Literature Review

A place of mystery and intrigue, the artist's studio has long been investigated by scholars and laymen alike. Sorcha Carey points out in an article in *Apollo*, "Centuries of images, from the ancient Greeks through to the 19th century have helped to mythologize the studio, creating a mysterious space where revelation is always promised yet never forthcoming."¹ Carey also observes that the root of the word "studio" comes from the Latin "studium," meaning "zeal, application, or study." The artist's studio is closely akin to the scholar's workroom in that it is both a space of artistry and intellect.

In the course of my research, Wanda Corn, professor emerita of art history at Stanford University, stands out as the only scholar who has formally written and published on the importance of preserving artist's studios in general. Corn has authored two particularly enlightening articles on this topic, "Artists' Homes and Studios, A Special Kind of Archive"² and "The Artists' Workplace, An Endangered Species."³ Corn asserts that the United States has a poor track record in the preservation of the artist's studio and that the artist's studio is one of America's most endangered historical building types. Corn states, "The challenge that faces all of us, then, is to inspire a greater

¹ Sorcha Carey, "Excavations in the Artist's Studio," *Apollo* 156 (2002): 41- 45.

² Wanda Corn, "Artists' Homes and Studios, A Special Kind of Archive," *American Art* 19 (Spring 2005): 2-11.

³ Wanda Corn, "The Artists' Workplace, An Endangered Species," *Historic Preservation Forum; the Journal of the National Trust for Historic Preservation* 12 (Winter 1998): 33-41 and "Introduction and Overview," *American Art* 19 (Spring 2005): 2-11.

understanding for the hard work of making art and to preserve and restore studios because they have so much to teach us.”⁴

After corresponding with several museum professionals at Elisabet Ney House, Olana, Chesterwood, and the Smithsonian, I have been informed that Corn’s writings are the only ones of this sort currently available in the general field of knowledge.⁵ Although perhaps not Corn’s original intention, she has now become the leading scholar of “artist studio studies.” In this thesis, I aim to agree and emphasize what Corn has previously stated in her writings. I concur that this is a field that is seriously lacking in representation in the museum and scholarly context, and I would like to alter that by offering my own views on the significance of the purpose-built artist’s studio-home, particularly those studio-houses of the Aesthetic Movement in Victorian art history. In doing so, perhaps I may encourage those currently in this field of work and provide insight to those individuals in the field of museum studies interested in curatorial work, conservation, preservation, and the historic house museum “genre” of the museum profession.

Since Corn’s most influential writings were published in 1998 and 2005, I aim to investigate where the museum profession currently stands in preserving this very specific type of studio, the studio-house of the late Victorian Era. I seek to understand how museum professionals can better preserve and interpret studio-houses for future generations by learning from past mistakes, heeding the writings of Corn as a “call to

⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁵ Curators at Elisabet Ney House, Olana, Chesterwood, and Smithsonian, e-mail messages to author, September and October 2011.

arms” for preservation and conservation. I also aim to investigate the unique challenges in interpretation and preservation that are presented by these Aesthetic Era studio-house museums.

At no other time in history has the artist’s studio held more cultural significance than in the Aesthetic period of the Victorian era. The movement predominated in Britain from 1860 to 1890, and it was also architecturally, decoratively, and historically significant in the United States circa 1870 to 1910. I have chosen to focus on the Aesthetic movement and its American equivalents because the primary evidence about artists and their studio-houses is the richest from this period. A profusion of articles in magazines, newspapers, and countless books and photographs of the time speak to the popularity of the artist and his studio during the late Victorian era. One of the most influential of these primary source books is *Artists at Home* by F.G. Stephens, with photographs by J.P. Mayall, published in 1884. This book chronicles these British artists at the high tide of their popularity. Each photograph is a treasure trove of primary source documentation of how these studios looked. Although the poses of the artists are contrived and formal, they also relate to the “trendy” factor of how much the public wanted to know about these individuals, similar to celebrity gossip magazines and television programs of our own time. As Stephens himself states, “In biographical and historical interest no pictures surpass views of the interiors of artists’ studios.”⁶

The Aesthetic Movement at its core held to this idea—that art existed for its own sake and did not need to have any sort of didactic or moral purpose in order to be significant. The pursuit of beauty became enough to justify the existence of art. The

Aesthetes believed that if one was surrounded with beauty, then he or she would become a beautiful person. This ideal was taken to its extreme in the creation of artists' studio-houses. Each artist believed that if he were living and working in a beautiful environment then he would be able to more aptly produce beautiful works.



Figure 1. Leighton in his studio, from *Artists at Home*.

Moreover, an idea was promulgated during this movement that art was no mere occupation, but an idealistic lifestyle to be attained. To live “artistically,” was to live in a

⁶ *Artists at Home*, 1.

well-balanced, healthy, educated, stylish, and morally ideal manner. In turn, the figure leading the way in this trend was the artist himself.

The desire to live as a well-to-do “bohemian” became the aspiration for many in late Victorian society as they beheld artists coming to new found levels of esteem and prominence within artistic, political, and academic circles. During the Aesthetic period, the artist became a titan of popular culture with his studio-house being his self-made “palace of art.” Like no previous time in history, artists had come to a particular position of prominence and wealth in society, enabling them to intermingle with the highest echelons of the socio-economic realm, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Also, due to the growth of nations through exploration and colonization, the world was becoming a much smaller place. The design influences of other countries were becoming increasingly influential through impressive international fairs such as the Great Exhibition of 1851 held in London. During this era, exoticism and foreign influences rapidly made their way into decorative and design schemes, particularly of those of the “artistic” mindset. The studio-houses of the Aesthetic movement were an effort of the artists to create spaces where Victorians could express overt sensuality that did not compete with their simultaneously held ideals concerning prudence and morality.⁷ The members of the artists’ community also strove to preserve all that was unique and valuable in the fields of craftsmanship and design, by creating purpose built studio-

⁷ For an extremely helpful explanation of this phenomenon, see Sarah Burns’ essay “The Price of Beauty: Art, Commerce, and the late 19th century American Studio Interior” in the book *American Iconology* published in 1993. Another informative book on a similar topic is *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* by Miles Orville published in 1989.

houses. This phenomenon was another direct result of the rapid industrialization and mass “production-ization” of the Victorian period culminating in the Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic Movements led by William Morris and John Ruskin.

In this thesis, by using the phrase “studio-house,” I refer to a space created by artists who built combination work and domestic spaces, usually designed by the artist in partnership with an architect. In some cases, as with Olana, the artist acted as designer, architect, and interior decorator. The studio-house typified the artist’s style and ideology and was equally as important as any of his or her paintings, sculptures, or other artistic works. Potentially, the studio-house itself could stand alone as the artist’s greatest lifetime achievement. By studying these studio-houses, we may come to know the artist and the inner workings of his mind in a much more intimate way. The studio-houses that have been preserved as museums are not the typical “historic house museum”—i.e. a house preserved for its architectural merit, historical significance, or solely for famous or wealthy inhabitants who once resided there. While all of these descriptions could pertain to a studio-house in the museum context, these homes culminate as combination history museum, art museum, and community center for art and culture both at the time of their conception and in the present day. Studio-houses are highly expressive and distinctive creations of the artist himself, and they exhibit unique facets of the Aesthetic Movement, a truly one-of-a kind period of exoticism, eccentricity, and bohemianism in art history. One is able to better understand the macrocosm of late Victorian society and culture by examining the microcosm of the artist in his studio-house. Understanding the studio-house is vital to understanding the artist himself and the era in which he lived.

In comprehending the Aesthetic Movement in Victorian history, one must better understand historical and art historical trends that were influencing the majority of society in the United States and the United Kingdom. For the first time, trends of domestic decoration was made accessible to the masses, not just to the extremely wealthy, creating a proliferation of “self-help” and “how to” books designed to teach the public how to create their own “palaces of art.” Clarence Cook, Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, and Mary Eliza Haweis all authored practical manuals on how to live the proper “Aesthetic lifestyle” in design choice and house decoration particularly.⁸ Each individual was now given his or her own personal opportunity to create his or her own “House Beautiful,” in the words of Cook himself.⁹

Artists, the “cognoscenti” of the upper middle class and aristocracy, and those who aspired to attain the tenets set forth concerning the artistic lifestyle of the day in the manifold periodical publications available to the literate public, believed that to live “artistically” was to live a fulfilled, successful, and meaningful existence. In this thesis, I will be exploring the art-historical trends that influenced this movement in greater detail; however, many scholars have already contributed to this field of knowledge to great length, so this will not be my principal focus. As previously stated, this movement was led by artists themselves, particularly in the United States and Great Britain. In doing my research, I have discovered intriguing parallels between artists working and living simultaneously in these two countries during the Aesthetic period. In this sense, it is

⁸ For more information on these authors and their works, see the subsequent chapter on the history of the Aesthetic Movement in the United States and The United Kingdom.

⁹ Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful*, (New York: North River Press, Inc., 1980), re-print of the original 1878 publication by Scribner, Armstrong, New York.

obvious that stylistic movements do not exist in a vacuum—people are influenced by similar factors at certain points in history, no matter on which side of the Atlantic they may be residing. The Aesthetic movement first took hold in the United Kingdom, particularly in London, and was led by Frederic Lord Leighton, John Everett Millais, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, George Frederic Watts, Valentine Prinsep, and J.M. Whistler, among others.

In sum, I will be examining the rise of status and prominence of the artist in late Victorian society, the trend of the purpose-built studio-house, and the significance of the Aesthetic movement in the social milieu of the late Victorian period. I will also be investigating the parallels between artists working in this genre in the United States and the United Kingdom during this period. Most importantly, I plan to examine the continuing stories of these properties as museums and their relevance in the fields of conservation, interpretation, and preservation. I aim to discover how these studios are currently being maintained and interpreted and how they will be preserved for future generations. In addition, I will put forth the unique challenges presented to museum professionals when maintaining and interpreting these studio-houses for a modern audience.

Numerous scholars have studied and written about the British and American Aesthetic movement artists and their studio-homes. Among the best sources on the British artists as a collective group are *Artistic Circles* by Charlotte Gere, Joseph F. Lamb's 1987 University of California Santa Barbara Ph.D. dissertation *Lions in Their Dens: Lord Leighton and Late Victorian Studio Life*, and *The Holland Park Circle, Artists and Victorian Society*, by Caroline Dakers. These books provide biographical,

historical, architectural, and cultural information to put the lives and works of the artists into a collective framework.¹⁰ All of these works fall into the “art historical” or “socio-historical” genre. Lamb’s Ph.D. dissertation would be primarily engaging to an art historical or curatorial audience. In comparison, *Artistic Circles* and *The Holland Park Circle* are both geared towards more of a lay audience. Both the Gere and Dakers books could easily appeal to the newly interested Victorian art aficionado or the seasoned veteran of art history. They are detailed, but not overwhelmingly so, and are written in readable, relevant prose.

All of these sources seek to assess the importance of these British artists and their works, artistic and architectural, by examining 19th century London through the eyes of these artists and their friends. The authors explain the web of the relationships the British artists wove with one another, their properties, and the public at large. They also provide clear and thorough examples of the artistic philosophies and fashions of the time period in the decorative arts and architecture by drawing on the sources of 19th century correspondence, diaries, periodicals, books, and newspapers. More modern scholars cited by these authors include Mark Girouard, Charlotte Gere, Louise Campbell, Jeremy Maas, and Leonée and Richard Ormond, to name some of the most prominent figures. These authors have gone straight to the primary sources, the museum collections and archives themselves, to create fascinating portrayals of the British artists and their lives.

The sources concerning the American side of the Aesthetic movement prove to be equally engaging and fascinating. During the Philadelphia Exhibition in 1876, the first

¹⁰ I will also be examining these artists on a more individual basis in subsequent chapters.

official World's Fair held in the United States,¹¹ Americans were exposed to the works of William Morris and the ideology of John Ruskin. Many of the ideas of the Aesthetic Movement were transported from the United Kingdom into the American psyche, particularly in the world of art. Neil Harris's classic text, *The Artist in American Society*, sets the stage for American artists of the late Victorian era by tracking the rise of the artist to a new level of esteem in the years leading up to the American Civil War. Many of the famous "Aesthetic" artists in the United States had also travelled to the United Kingdom and abroad, and were greatly influenced by trends they had seen in other countries. Being cosmopolitan, well-traveled, and having a flair for the "exotic" became a requirement for being a true Aesthete in the United States or the United Kingdom.

In the United States, figures such as William Merritt Chase, Alice Pike Barney, Frederic Edwin Church, Elisabet Ney, and many other lesser-known artists helped to pioneer a similar Aesthetic movement on the American side of the Atlantic as they were influenced by their Aesthetic British counterparts. Many of the American artists also participated in the building of purpose built studio-homes that were used for creating, displaying, and selling art, as well as serving as cultural centers for entertaining and public education. In 1999, Karen Zukowski of the University of New York completed an excellent Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Creating Art and Artists: Late 19th Century American Artists' Studios," which covers in detail the process of the development of the studio in America and how it was influenced by artists already living and working in Britain. To my knowledge, Zukowski's dissertation is the only formal scholarly writing

¹¹ Doreen Bolger, *In Pursuit of Beauty, Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*, exhibition catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), introduction.

that exists which concerns the influence of European trends on American artists' studios in the 19th century. Unlike their British counterparts, no comprehensive book has been written about the American artists who built studio-houses during the late Victorian era, most likely because they were not in close proximity to one another geographically and their work was not limited to one city, such as London, in the United Kingdom. In this thesis, I search for parallels and trends of Aesthetic American artists by examining the scholarly literature on the individual artists. In addition, I directly consulted with the studio-houses that have become museums to see what information exists relating to the studio-houses in the museum context.

Another highly valuable source for my research on the American and British artists has been the periodical. Popular Victorian titles such as *Godey's Magazine*, *Boston Sunday Herald*, *The Decorator and Furnisher*, *Scribner's* and other such Victorian periodicals have been significant primary source documents. In a more modern sense, periodicals such as *Historic Preservation*, *Antiques*, *Apollo*, *Architectural Digest* and *Progressive Architecture* have all proven to be valuable resources in finding out more bits and pieces of information concerning the studio-houses that have become museums.

In the last thirty years, there has been resurgence in critical study of the late Victorian period, especially Victorian art, architecture, design, and culture. From the early 20th century and lingering until almost the late 1960s, a blatant scholarly bias existed against the study of Victorian art and culture. Modernists considered the Victorian period to be aesthetically derivative and full of sentimental nonsense with little or no real artistic or historical value. During this critical period, many Victorian

buildings were destroyed and the stories of their owners and residents were pushed back into the recesses of history, not to be revived until the last twenty to thirty years. Many of the stories of how the studio-houses I am studying in this thesis became museums are directly related to this critical time in preservation history.

Art historians and curators are once again seeing the value in studying and interpreting the Victorian masters and their works—including the houses they designed and lived in. Thus, while the contemporary critical literature concerning the late Victorian period does not extend back very far, a resurgence of research into the period is occurring. I aim to contribute to this building body of knowledge by investigating the creation, preservation, and interpretation of studio houses in the museum context.

In this thesis, I will be exploring the histories and parallels of these artists as well as giving some historical information on the artists and their studio-houses. However, just as in the case of providing the history of the Aesthetic Movement in the United Kingdom and the United States, giving historical information on the artists themselves will not be my chosen point of emphasis. I am primarily concerned with giving an account for these studio spaces in the museum context. Historically, the artists' *atelier*, or studio-home, became one of the first museum spaces available for public viewing and engagement, closely akin to the model of the "cabinet of curiosities," as in the case of Charles Wilson Peale. Peale's studio became the "first public museum in America."¹² Other figures such as Lord Leighton, Alice Pike Barney, and Elisabet Ney also provided examples of this sort of studio-house. These artists made their homes centers of cultural

¹² Annette Blaugrand, "The Evolution of American Artists' Studios," *The Magazine Antiques* (Jan 1992): 219.

learning and artistic showmanship. Many of them would open their homes to the public—especially to show off their collections from their travels abroad. Nicholas Cikovsky has written on the “studio museum concept,” focusing on one of the most famous American Aesthetes, William Merrit Chase.¹³ Cikovsky explains that in a studio such as Chase’s, “Visitors were provided a seemingly endless realm for exploration and delectation, one which ‘it would take days to explore,’ ‘room after room...full of all kinds of curios.’” For these reasons, museologically, the modern museum institution is indebted to the studio-house model as a predecessor to modern exhibits and museum design.

Cikovsky approaches Chase’s studio, long since destroyed, as indicating the cultural significance of the studio in late 19th century America. As Cikovsky explains:

Chase’s studio was, with his painted interpretations of its meaning, an open demonstration of his artistic convictions and intentions. And though it was the product of his own energy, taste, and money, and while it played no small part, by the attention it attracted, in advancing his career, it played an equally important role as the most accessible, impressive, and concrete symbol of the esthetic beliefs that Chase and his contemporaries brought to America.¹⁴

Unfortunately, on the whole, these studio-houses, such as Chase’s, have not been treated with the respect they deserve from a preservation standpoint. The trends set by the Aesthetic Movement were wildly popular during the height of their public appeal; however, almost immediately following the passing of these trends, the artists and their houses were looked upon with a high amount of disdain by the public and the art establishment at large. This adverse reaction caused many of the artists to be largely

¹³ Nicolai Cikovsky, “William Merrit Chase’s Tenth Street Studio,” *Archives of American Art Journal*, 16 (1976): 2-14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

forgotten by scholarship and the public in the years that followed. Only recently have these artists and their homes started coming back into favor with scholars and public interest.¹⁵ The majority of my data on if and how these studio-houses were preserved can be accessed in reports from the Historic American Buildings Survey on the Library of Congress website and The National Trust for Historic Preservation and National Park Service Historic Structure Reports. Again, periodical and newspaper articles written at the time when many of these houses were about to be sold or destroyed proved to be invaluable in my research efforts.

Due to this ambivalence and apathy towards these artists and their studios for so many years, many of the properties were destroyed or nearly destroyed. For this reason, I will devote a large portion of my thesis to exploring if, why, and how these properties became museums. Were they conserved and preserved? If they were saved, why and how were they preserved or conserved? Which properties did not “make the cut” to remain in the public trust and why? How were these properties lost?

Upon examination of the properties of artists’ houses currently being operated as museums in the United States and Great Britain, I have found the list to be surprisingly short.¹⁶ In the United Kingdom, the only purpose built “artist studio home” that has been open to the public and left in its original architectural design and decorative state is Leighton House Museum operated by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.¹⁷

¹⁵ Julia Findlater, “100 Years of Leighton House,” in *Lord Leighton, 1830-1896 and Leighton House, a Centenary Celebration* (London: Apollo, 1996), 8-9.

¹⁶ www.preservationnation.org/historic_artists gives a listing of all the National Trust for Historic Preservation Properties in the United States.

¹⁷ The sister museum of Leighton House is Linley Sambourne House, home of the Victorian *Punch* cartoonist, Linley Sambourne. While being a magnificently preserved upper-middle class Victorian

The *homes of artists from the Aesthetic Movement* preserved as public museums in the United Kingdom and the United States are even sparser in appearance than preserved artist's studios in general. It is as if we are missing a very significant chunk of art history, almost forty years' worth, in our museological spectrum of historic house museums of this genre. I find this to be particularly disheartening not only for the loss of historical and artistic elements, such as the homes and their furnishings, but also because during the Aesthetic movement, more than any other time in history, the studio stood at the pinnacle of public, scholarly, and artistic opinion. In this way, the losses are even more devastating.

I have found very little scholarship on the educational, preservation, and conservation aspects concerning the artists' studio and of the purpose built studio-house. In order to find the unique challenges presented by working in this distinct genre of house museum, I dealt mostly with periodicals and direct communication with the studio-houses that are being operated as museums. During the course of my research, I have happened upon some periodical articles concerning the significance of preserving artists' studios. One such example is also found in the previously cited 2002 *Apollo* article by Sorcha Carey. Carey explains:

It was only with the emergence in the 19th century of the artist as a figure working largely alone, that the studio became the space of individual creation which matched the connotations of its name. A space colonized solely by the artist, its conservation could provide material clues both to the artistic techniques and the intellectual life of the artist, perhaps even his very thoughts.¹⁸

"artistically decorated townhouse," it does not meet the qualifications for a "purpose built studio home." Leighton House still stands as the only studio home open to the public in Great Britain.

¹⁸ Sorcha Carey, "Excavations in the Artist's Studio," *Apollo* 156 (2002): 41-45.

While articles such as Carey's are helpful and enlightening, they are not in abundance. Therefore, I began to start piecing together bits of stories about all these houses from my own research and experience. In choosing what studios I would be surveying, I turned to my own past experience working as an intern at Leighton House Museum in 2006. While there, I had conversations with the head curator, Daniel Robbins, and the assistant curator, Reena Suleman, about the views of the Leighton House Staff on preservation and interpretation issues particular to this genre of historic house museum. I also drew upon my experience as a participant in the Victorian Society in America's London Summer School in 2011. During the course, we spent a portion of the time discussing the importance of the purpose built studio-house in the greater story of Victorian architecture and design. Our teachers, Liz Leckie, Gavin Stamp, and Ian Cox all provided me with guidance and direction on which artists' houses to study. I also had the chance to revisit this topic this summer with Reena Suleman, former assistant curator of Leighton House Museum, now project coordinator at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, who gave me specific direction in reading choices for this thesis.

During the course of this early research, it became apparent to me that these studio-houses of the Aesthetic Movement in the United States and the United Kingdom had not been studied in depth collectively, particularly in relation to the museum context. Therefore, I concluded that I would pursue this sort of exploration in my thesis. In order to better understand these studio-houses, one must first gain the proper historical contextualization and understanding of the time in which each artist was living.

CHAPTER TWO

The Cult of the Artist

The Artist's Rise to Prominence

Until the late 19th century, the figure of the artist was viewed as an outsider by the majority of people in society. He was largely ignored by the poorer working classes, who were too committed to a lifestyle of hard labor, subsistence farming, and childrearing to be concerned with his activities. In general, the pursuit of understanding art and making it a part of the common man's everyday life was ignored, largely for practical reasons. On the other extreme of the spectrum, the typical artist was considered too "avant-garde" and "bohemian" to intermingle with those of the upper crust, unless he was being patronized by them to produce work. Even then, the relationship would not have been that of peer to peer but a relationship that would exist between a master and his hired hand. Before the invention of the purpose built studio-house, many artists would be living hand to mouth in small garrets in rough parts of town that were hardly the definition of luxurious living. Most often, their meager incomes would not have provided them with the means to create or live in homes that would be equal to the palaces and mansions built by the typical wealthy merchant or aristocrat of the day. While these trends could be examined from a global perspective, this chapter will explicate the specific trends concerning the artist's place in society in the United States and the United Kingdom during the late Victorian era.

In the years leading up to the late Victorian period in the United Kingdom, the long held societal and cultural norms of propriety and etiquette, largely based on class structure, created an intricate social more in which the artist was present but not as a dominant or style-setting force. At that point in time, it was considered improper for aristocrats, royalty, and dignitaries to regularly socialize with those in the “common” artistic circles. In the United States, the situation differed slightly in that the artist’s position in society had less to do with class structure and more to do with the history of our country. During its youth, America was not particularly focused on culture and the arts on the whole. In the years prior to the Civil War, the common American citizen of the day was forced to spend the majority of his or her time working and toiling the land, hacking out a new life on the numerous frontiers of the burgeoning American nation. If a person did not live on the frontiers, he or she would have been found working in cities whose growth was fueled by emerging industry especially as the 19th century progressed into the American antebellum period. On the whole, art was not given a place of prominence in American society other than in the larger, older, and more European influenced cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Charleston.

By the mid-nineteenth century however, these trends were beginning to shift. Historically, those in the United Kingdom were experiencing the rapid changes produced by industrialization and immense reform in the political system of the day. In America, the culmination of the Civil War and the after effects of the Industrial Revolution provided an exciting new landscape for the artist to engage in, not merely as an observer, but as a participant. Due to increased leisure time, literacy rates, and public education, an audience was emerging in America. This emergence brought forth a whole new dynamic

between the artist and the public, one which would directly influence increased public fascination with the artist. In his book *The Artist and American Society*, Neil Harris clearly explains this phenomenon of American mid-Victorian culture:

[A]s the crusades for beauty gained momentum toward mid-century, their artist beneficiaries were ascribed romantic powers as magicians who could stimulate and satisfy cravings for visual delight. Until the 1830s artists' life patterns were neither publicized nor idealized. For most Americans the figure of the artist remained indistinct, or at least exotic and European; distance lent mystery and charm, but it also symbolized estrangement. In the next thirty years the attention of the community and the energy of the literary imagination created a clearly differentiated role and lifestyle for the artist in America. Novels, poems, short stories and obituaries all made contributions, as did new professional periodicals.¹

With the advent of modernity and the rapid increase in literacy rates, a new audience also emerged that would engage with the periodical, now being produced on a daily basis for the average person to read. The typical middle class person now had the capability and interest in keeping up with the latest trends and fashions by reading a magazine or newspaper. The artist himself became one of the most popular subjects described to the average mid-Victorian audience in these sorts of periodicals. In her book *Artistic Circles*, Charlotte Gere points out, "If anything is needed to confirm the importance of purpose built studio houses in defining the artists' position in society, it is the attention paid to them in their own time."² In examining the mass of periodical literature concerning artists and their homes produced during this era, one can observe how significant these figures truly were in a popular culture sense. Socio-cultural norms

¹ Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society, The Formative Years, 1790-1860* (New York: Clarion, 1966), 218. In addition to Harris's classic text, more recent discussions of artists' prominence in society can be found in Karen Zukowski's thesis "Creating Art and Artists: Late 19th Century American Artists Studios," and Charlotte Gere's *Artistic Circles*.

² Charlotte Gere, *Artistic Circles, Design and Decoration in the Aesthetic Movement*. (London: V&A Publishing, 2010), 24.

were transforming and the public was desperate to stay abreast of the action by reading the latest newspaper or magazine. Loyal readers of these periodicals would be invited to see the artist in person as many owners of studio-houses hosted “Show Sundays.” During these show days, fans of these artists would line up outside of the artist’s home and wait his/her turn to be able to sneak a peek at the artist and his home. In this experience, while viewing the artist’s work itself was seen as more of an afterthought, illustrating how these studio-homes can stand alone as distinct artistic expressions completely unique to the Aesthetic movement.³

Increased literacy rates and availability of daily and weekly periodicals were not the only ways the artist became a more prominent feature in the popular culture of the late Victorian era. Artists’ abilities to set trends in decoration and design became much more mainstream with the advent of mass production, photography, modern advertising campaigns, and the rise of “self-help” or “D.I.Y.” books which the average person now had access to. Ideas and images of ways in which to imitate the artist’s design choices in his or her own home were now available to the majority of the literate public. For the first time in history, access to great amounts of money was not an imperative for living a stylish, trendy lifestyle. Cheaper, mass produced copies of the most stylish items and furnishings could now be used in the average middle-class home through catalogues and department stores. One did not have to be exceedingly wealthy in order to be surrounded by beautiful things, or imitations of beautiful things. However, wealth did assure obtaining the highest quality in pursuit of the “artistic lifestyle.”

³ Jeremy Musson, “‘Has A Paint Pot Done All This?’ The Studio-House of Sir John Everett Millais, Bt.,” in *John Everett Millais Beyond the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 97.

By the 1870's, the world had become a much different place than it had been twenty to thirty years before. In general, socio-cultural and socio-economic trends shifted greatly with the rise of industry, the rapid growth of nations through wars and colonization, the spread of technological advances, and the creation of a middle class in both the United Kingdom and the United States. With all of these transformations came a newly created societal ranking system in which birth no longer guaranteed destiny or future occupation, particularly in America. With the arrival of modernization and the creation of machines and devices that eased the burdens of daily living for many in society, more middle class individuals had the leisure time and financial resources to devote to more cultural interests such as art, culture, decoration, and design. In this "Gilded Age," the rise of the self-made man became a commonality. Issues of rank, nobility, and class structure were radically altered. Birth no longer assured position in society and an aristocratic birth was no longer an inflexible command for the pursuit of an extremely strict and traditional lifestyle or image.⁴ The creation of a class of *nouveaux riches* called for a new market and audience for artists to patronize.

Many of the *nouveaux riches*, such as the family of Alice Pike Barney, were able to thrive in an affluent lifestyle that did not dictate any sort of previously held social norms or protocols of behavior. These individuals were rich enough to create beautiful, luxurious new homes and fill them with the latest works of art and furnishings, but not so mired down in class obligations to feel obliged to behave in traditionally acceptable ways. In this era, eccentricity and bohemianism became an aspiration instead of a

⁴ In an effort not to give the appearance of overly simplified or overly teleological historical contextualization, I do acknowledge that these historical trends are generalizations and were not an assured guarantee for success for any member of Victorian society.

shameful “family secret.” On the other hand, long established aristocratic families, such as that of Frederic Leighton in the United Kingdom, became more open to the idea of their sons pursuing artistic careers. The idea of the wealthy bohemian became an ideal for many in the upper crust of society to not only engage with but pursue in the United Kingdom and the United States.

For the first time, artists held equal social footing with royalty, dignitaries, and other cultural figures such as writers and musicians. The artist had become a cult celebrity figure. This newly found prestige stemmed from the artists themselves, their newly found admirers in the most stylish circles of the intelligentsia, and from those of the middle class who read about their “greatness” in the mass of periodicals available during the time period. The artists and their admirers participated in a cultural chess game in which the artists were the players and the public was their pawn. In their time, these artists became the equivalent of our modern day actors, musicians, and popular culture celebrities. With this newly found popularity, artists were able to achieve financial prosperity. With the arrival of material wealth, artists were able to rise to new levels of sophistication and prominence in society enabling them to live affluently, without any consideration of financial limitations. Many artists chose to embody this newly found popularity by being completely committed to the ideal “artistic” lifestyle which included designing, creating, and dwelling in a luxury purpose-built studio-house as a form of putting their prosperity on public display. The artist rose to a state of prominence through intense ambition, just as any other sort of industrial magnate or businessman of the day. Neil Harris extrapolates on the ambition of the artist in mid-Victorian American society:

By the 1850s the artist life was no longer merely a foil to materialism and economic selfishness; it had been captured to exemplify the virtues of industry and material success which dominated the business community. While the artist of calculation, narrow education, and crude background was scorned by earlier novelists and biographers, the artisan-artist was no mere clown to later writers. He was a figure of strength, a competitor who, by constant striving, had demonstrated the value of the work ethic, and carved a place for himself among the achievers of the day.⁵

To their patrons and to members of the public, these artists were not only a representation of art and culture but they were indeed THE art and culture of the day personified.⁶ In less than fifty years' time, the artist had gone from being an outsider on the fringes of society to becoming an example of the utmost in style, fashion, and material success. These beacons of style and art realized their ideals in the creation of studio-houses. The studio-house represented "not only a particular type of structure but a definite manner of social life centered around the artist's residence."⁷ In 1866, Albert Wolff, an influential art critic of the day, nicely summarized the artist's shift in society by stating, "In our epoch the painter is no longer the labouring artisan who locks himself away in his studio behind a closed door, living in a dream, he has thrust his head foremost into the bustle of the world...he had his day when his studio is transformed into a salon where he receives the elite of society."⁸

Because of this rise in social status and earned income, artists had the ability to express themselves in the fullest measures of luxury. With the onset of the Aesthetic

⁵ Harris, *The Artist in American Society*, 247.

⁶ Joseph Frank Lamb, "Lions in their Dens: Lord Leighton and late Victorian Studio Life" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1987), 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸ Jeremy Musson, "'Has A Paint Pot Done All This?' The Studio-House of Sir John Everett Millais, Bt.," 98.

movement, the ideals of the pursuit of beauty became fully manifested in the “artistic home”—the ultimate in proper taste and refined living. Out of this desire for beautiful surroundings, artists in the United Kingdom such as Frederic Leighton, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Valentine Prinsep, John Everett Millais, George Frederick Watts, and many other lesser known artists became trendsetters by being the first to design purpose built studio-houses to live and work in. In the United States, artists such as J.M. Whistler, Alice Pike Barney, Elisabet Ney, Frederic Edwin Church, William Merritt Chase, August St. Gaudens, Daniel Chester French, and Joseph Henry Sharp were quick to follow suit in the creation of similarly styled, Aesthetically driven, combination work and domestic spaces. Onto to this ever-changing horizon of public opinion and artistic style, the studio-house was born.

The Creation and Significance of the Studio-House

The publication of F.G. Stephens’ *Artists at Home* in 1884 marked the public validation of these late Victorian artists. Between his two covers rested the “Valhalla” of Victorian artistry and culture. The book contains mostly pictorial evidence of all the most famous British artists and their studios during the pinnacle of the “studio era.” A publication such as *Artists at Home* displayed in print that these artists had reached celebrity cult status and now had the means to produce work and domestic spaces that displayed this prominence. Stephens also opens his book by considering the studio as a cultural site:

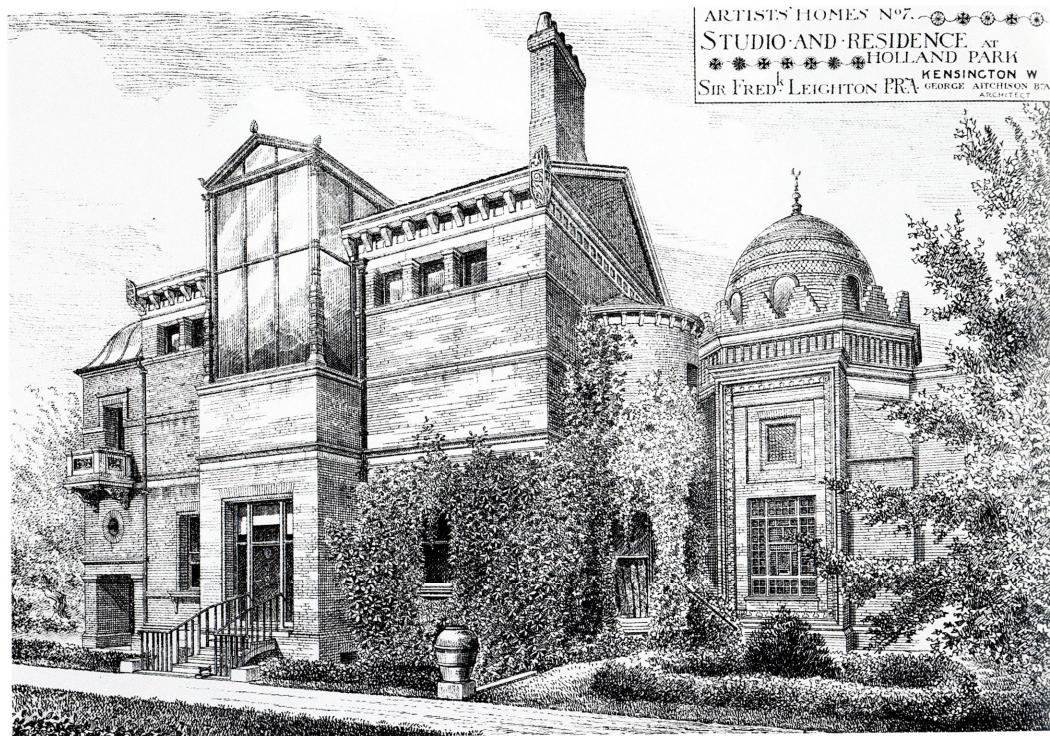


Figure 2. Engraving of Leighton House, 1876.

In biographical and historical interest no pictures surpass views of the interiors of artists' studios, the oldest of which are, so far as I know, sketches of Egyptian origin, showing how walls and mummy cases were decorated on the banks of the Nile many thousands of years ago.⁹

Stephens is correct in saying that there is no better way to understand an artist and his artwork than by fully looking into the interior of his studio, and at no other time in history has the studio been on display for public examination than in the late Victorian era.

⁹ F.G. Stephens, *Artists at Home* (New York: Appleton and Co., 1884).

Times had changed for artists, and the creation of studio-houses was evidence of that shift. In a 1901 article in *The Magazine of Art*, author Walter Goodman explains the transformation of the domestic dwelling of artists:

[F]rom the time of Reynolds to that of Turner the studio proper was usually an ordinary apartment of the first or top floor of a private house...artists since his [Turner's] day have invariably looked to their creature comforts...not a few have found it necessary to fit and furnish their homes in accordance with their taste or in harmony with the department in art they have taken up...What a complete contrast was, and happily still is, Leighton's painting room with that of Turner...¹⁰

The concept of the purpose-built studio-house had become so well-ingrained in Victorian society that poets such as Tennyson were composing allegorical poems in tandem with the creation of studio-houses. In Tennyson's poem "The Palace of Art," he describes the world of the Aesthetic artist in poignantly poetic language. In Tennyson's own words, "I built my soul a lordly pleasure house/Wherein at ease for aye to dwell./I said, 'Oh Soul, make merry and carouse,/Dear soul, for all is well.'"¹¹

Each of the artists I will be describing in this thesis took great pleasure and delight in constructing for themselves "a palace of art," or more specifically, a palace to his or her art and to his or her ideals about art and aesthetics in general. These houses, intentionally designed by artists and usually their architects of choice, served as models for the highest standard in artistic living. Charlotte Gere explains that "[w]ere it not for the architectural legacy of the artists' houses, very much less might be understood about

¹⁰ Walter Goodman, "Artists' Studios: As They Were and As They Are," *Magazine of Art* (June 1901): 397, 400.

¹¹ J.H. Buckley, *The Victorian Temper* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966), 45.



J.P. Mayall Photo.

London published by Sampson Low Marston Searle & Rivington 188 Fleet St.

Park Lane Studio - London

V. C. PRINSEP. A. R. A.

Figure 3. Val Prinsep in his studio, from *Artists at Home*.

the Victorian social revolution in relation to the arts.”¹² Each studio-house was a unique expression of the individual artists’ works and ambitions in the way that these places were used as venues to sell and display art.

In addition, by modern preservation and museum standards, the houses themselves are works of art with or without any other of the associated works or furnishings included. Because the houses are so unique and distinctive of each particular artist, they can stand as a complete explanation of that particular artist’s aesthetic philosophy. For Victorians and modern viewers alike, “peeping” into an artist’s studio-house, either in person or in print, gives the viewer a glimpse into the artist’s worldview.

Caroline Dakers explains this phenomenon in her book *The Holland Park Circle*:

Readers were provided with glimpses or “peeps” into the lives and homes of the household names of art. Everything was touched on: the original design of the building; the architect’s ability to provide for the specific requirements of an artist; the new technology apparent in the studio fittings; the choice of internal decorations; the artist as collector and connoisseur; his appearance and personality; snippets from his life-story; the listing of patrons or famous models; hints regarding the large prices paid for works and for reproduction rights. Most “peeps” were lavishly illustrated with photographs...¹³

These studio-houses were not and are not typical houses or house museums. In the current museum context, modern museum professionals may look to these homes as precedents for public galleries, exhibitions, and examples of good “public relations” or networking. From an art-historical perspective, these studio-houses were also places of intense innovation in design and creativity. For the first time, artists had the funds to work in cooperation with architects to create homes that were just as elaborate as any

¹² Charlotte Gere, *Artistic Circles*, 30.

¹³ Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle*, 2.

well-to-do member of society would be able to produce. The inhabitants of these studio-houses broke all previously held societal rules by incorporating members of the aristocracy and the middle-class as equal participants in their artistic lifestyles. In any given weekend during the height of the “studio age,” one could observe visitors ranging from a common middle-class housewife to Queen Victoria or the Prime Minister entering a studio-house in London. These studio-houses set a precedent for some sense of egalitarianism for visitors in the museum or gallery setting that is still affecting the museum profession today.

The studio was also expressive of the reality of Victorian morality and daily living. In her essay “The Studio and Commerce,” author Sarah Burns explains how artists’ studios became comparable to the department store window of the late Victorian era, offering up visual delights to entrance and distract the viewer from the monotonies of modern existence. Burns explains:

The advertising mechanism of the decorated studio was somewhat more subtle, veiled as it was by layers of rhetoric that styled the place as a temple of art, crucible of inspiration, haunt of genius, and the like. Yet, paradoxically these veils were projections of the very function they seemed to obscure; they were attractive, seductive wrappings of the artistic “package” the painter had devised. Magazine and newspaper articles about the fabulous decorated studios provided free publicity and were instrumental in helping to construct the image of the well-traveled, highly cultivated artist in his “natural” habitat of exotic accoutrements.¹⁴

In constructing studios, artists created spaces that were simultaneously public and private. These spaces became part of the artist’s effort to brand, network, and market himself or herself. The creation of studio-houses was a concrete, three dimensional way of cementing an artist’s reputation to an ever-growing and adoring public. These studios

¹⁴ Sarah Burns, “The Price of Beauty: Art, Commerce, and the Late 19th Century American Studio Interior.” in *American Iconology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 218.

were a way of promoting an artistic career and preserving each artist's own artistic ideals and beliefs for those of their time and for those of the future. Subsequent generations of family members, curators, and those who would live in these homes as residents would interpret and preserve these "palaces of art." To better understand the mindset of each individual artist as he constructed his studio-house, one must first examine the social milieu of the Aesthetic movement and the late Victorian period.



Figure 4. G.F. Watts in his studio, from *Artists at Home*.

CHAPTER THREE

The Aesthetic Movement: A Brief History

To better understand the artists and the properties they built, one must first understand the art historical trends that were influencing them. All of the artists and their homes that will be studied in this thesis were either directly influential in or influenced by the Aesthetic Movement. The Aesthetic Movement stands out in art history as one of the most well-documented and recognizable periods of style and design, even though the movement itself was made up of so many different stylistic influences. Following the advent of mass production and the projected fear of loss of individual artistic craftsmanship, many artists of the late Victorian era banded together against the forces of homogeny and the mass produced items being presented for sale to the public, particularly in the field of the decorative arts. In addition, colonization and the opening up of countries, such as Japan, to the west brought in new inspirations in the fields of art, architecture, decoration, and design. The Aesthetic Movement finds its origins in the United Kingdom but it quickly gained popularity in the United States. The Victoria and Albert Museum put on an exhibition, “The Cult of Beauty,” in the summer of 2011 which proved to be one of the greatest assemblages of Aesthetic Movement objects, works of art, and historical data concerning the period ever created by a museum. The exhibition catalog gives an excellent summary of the Aesthetic period by explaining:

In the 1860s a group of bohemian artists and avant-garde designers initiated a quiet revolution that would change the face of art and design in late Victorian Britain. The Aesthetes proclaimed the crucial importance of beauty in both art and life, deploring the ugliness, vulgarity and increasing commercialism of the

age, the reductive utilitarianism of Prince Albert and Sir Henry Cole, and the art officialdom of the day. Their conviction that art should exist for no other reason than to be beautiful was succinctly expressed in the phrase “Art for Art’s sake.” And, their ideal of the “The House Beautiful,” embodying elegance of form, harmony of colour and subtlety of arrangement, was seen as an expression of both refinement and individuality.¹

The movement did not gain hold in the United States until the 1880s, mostly due to the upheaval caused by the Civil War and by the lack of urbanization in America until the post-Civil War period. However, in 1882 after Oscar Wilde completed his tour of lectures around America “proclaiming the Aesthetic gospel,”² the movement really began to take root on American soil. During this set of highly evocative and influential lectures, Wilde explained to American audiences that good taste did not have to equal great sums of money. In Wilde’s famed “The House Beautiful” lecture that he made over 15 times in his tour across North America, he gave an interesting proposition:

I do not ask you to spend large sums, as art does not depend in the slightest degree upon extravagance or luxury, but rather the procuring of articles which, however cheaply purchased and unpretending, are beautiful and fitted to impart pleasure to the observer as they did to the maker...Nothing that is made is too trivial or too poor for art to ennoble.³

Wilde goes on to describe in detail ways in which Americans could achieve aesthetic harmony in their own homes by choosing all the proper Aesthetically inspired decorative forms and style inspirations in furniture, ceramics, fashion, etc. Wilde even gives a critique and plea to museums to become places of Aesthetic influence in their local communities. He implores that museums should become storehouses of all sorts of

¹ Sir Mark Jones and John E. Buchanan, Jr., *The Cult of Beauty, The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 9.

² Ibid.

decorative works where “local artisans and handicraftsmen could go and study the styles and patterns of the noble designers and artisans who worked before them”⁴ as in the style of the South Kensington Museum in London. Wilde also explained that, “A good museum would teach your artisans more in one year than they would learn by means of books or lectures in ten years.”⁵ Just as with the other Aesthetes, Wilde aimed to bring craftsmanship back to the local level, refuting the homogenizing effects of mass production that were occurring on national and global levels. Wilde’s North American lecture tour marks one of the starting points of Aesthetic influence in America. Surely artists living in America such as Church, Pike Barney, and Ney would have been knowledgeable of all the latest philosophies and trends in artistic circles while also possessing an awareness of the influence and content of Wilde’s lectures as they made their own stylistic choices in building and designing their studio-houses.

While the United Kingdom had already experienced the influence of international exhibitions such as Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in the 1851, the United States was to experience its own version of a great international fair in the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876. For the first time, Americans as a nation were exposed to design inspiration from around the world, including the ideas of many influential Aesthetes of the United Kingdom such as John Ruskin and William Morris. In his book, *The Quest for Unity: American Art Between the World’s Fairs, 1876-1893* art historian

³ Kevin H.F. O’Brien, “A Reconstruction of Oscar Wilde’s American Lecture,” *Victorian Studies* 17 (June 1974): 401-402.

⁴ Ibid., 410.

⁵ Ibid., 411.

David Huntington explains how the Centennial Exposition became highly significant in America:

The years immediately following the Centennial were marked by a degree of aesthetic ferment never before known in the United States...Aestheticism had seemingly captured the imagination of the whole community of art-conscious American designers. In furniture, in ceramics, in silverware and glassware, in textiles, and process inspired by competition, prosperity, and the desire for personal expression were explored with relish. The new spirit, “art for art’s sake,” was generating the “Art” object.⁶

American and British Aesthetes believed that this awakening in the arts would elevate the public standards of taste and morality. They envisioned “a new vernacular that would at once discipline the arts, [and] elevate popular taste” while also providing a more “educated public, dissatisfied with the confusion and superficiality that subverted good design...”⁷ Under the influence of innovative Aesthetic thinkers and of international artistic trends, in addition to newly found financial prosperity, artists in the United Kingdom and the United States could not resist creating “show houses” of all their Aesthetically inspired works and designs. The artist’s home and studio now became a public space, dedicated to showing the world how to live aesthetically and artistically. Even more importantly, the Aesthetes believed that if one was to live in the way they prescribed, than he or she would be a more moral, fulfilled person. In an 1882 article from the American magazine *The Manufacturer and Builder*, it was explained that, “Every improvement in the house is an improvement in morality.”⁸ The practitioners of

⁶ David Huntington, *The Quest for Unity: American Art Between the World’s Fairs, 1876-1893* (Chicago: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1983), 18.

⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁸ Karen Zukowski, *Creating the Artful Home, The Aesthetic Movement* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2006). 21.

Aestheticism believed that beautiful surroundings would make one beautiful, and the artists who built studio homes were the “poster children” for this trend.

One might ask, what would make an interior decidedly “Aesthetic” if the movement is made up of so many varying influences? Although there are many stylistic trends in the period, there are some elements that mark an interior as decidedly “Aesthetic” in character. Two of the most basic features in almost every Aesthetic interior of the time were “horror vacui or aversion to blank surfaces, and a rigid compartmentalization of decorated areas...”⁹ Many artists also seemed to arrange their studios and houses in the manner of a “still life.”¹⁰ On a more specific level, other dominant forms such as blue and white china, oriental carpets, use of sunflower or lily motifs, peacock feathers, “ebonized” furniture, and a blending of furniture forms from different time periods would usually be present in an “artistic interior.” *Punch* magazine, a popular satirical British periodical, features a sarcastic little poem from 1880 poking fun at the Aesthetes. Through the blatant sarcasm, one is able to glean what would be considered an “Aesthetic” interior by people of the time period. The poem, entitled “A Philistine,” says:

Buy me what grinning stage rustics call “furniture,”
Such as was used by our fathers of old:
Take away your nonsensical garniture,
Tapestry curtains and borders of gold.
Give me the ancient and solid mahogany,
Mine be the board what will need no repairs;
Don’t let me see, as I sit at my grog, any

⁹ Marilyn Johnson, “The Artful Interior,” in *In Pursuit of Beauty, Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 128.

¹⁰ Karen Zukowski, “Creating Art and Artists: Late 19th Century American Artists’ Studios” (PhD diss., University of New York, 1999), 122.

Chippendale tables or spindle legged chairs.
 Hang up a vivid vermillion wall-paper,
 Covered with roses of gorgeous hue,

Matching a varnished and beautiful hall-paper,
 Looking like marble so polished and new.
 Carpets should all show a floral variety,
 Wreaths intermingling of yellow and red
 So when it enters my home, will Society
 Say, "here's a house whence aesthetics have fled."¹¹

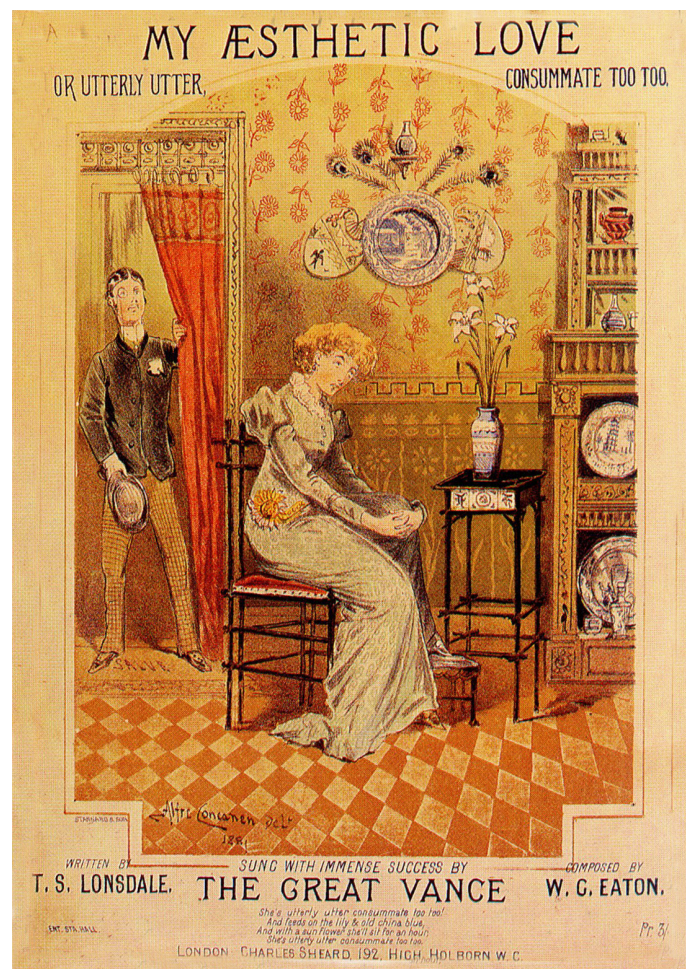


Figure 5. 1881 sheet music cover displaying Aesthetic interior.

¹¹ Frances Lichten, *Decorative Art in Victoria's Era* (New York: Charles Scribener's Sons, 1950), 238.

These fads became so popular, that not only the rich, famous, and artistic were buying into them. Average middle-class individuals in the United States and Great Britain had the access to creating their own “artistic home” through the myriad of self-help titles of the period. Countless books and periodical articles were published to inform the public on making the best decorative and design choices.

One of the most famous of these “self-help” authors was Clarence Cook, author of the famed *The House Beautiful*. Cook authored articles as well as books, and one such article was “Studio-Suggestions for Decoration,” published in 1895 in *The Monthly Illustrator*. Cook explains his views on how the interiors of these Aesthetic buildings came about—an interesting phenomenon seeing as how he was living in the midst of the period himself. Cook states:

What has made this crowding of our rooms so common, of late years, is the greater ease with which things of all sorts, decorative and useful, are to be had now-a-days—the shops offering so many temptations to people of rudimentary taste and moderate means, that they are unable or unwilling to resist the opportunity of making their houses beautiful...¹²

Other authors of this genre such as M.H. Baillie Scott of *The Decorator and Furnisher*, explain that “average” people should always look to artists, such as the ones who would construct the grand “palaces of art,” for instruction on style and the importance of a “harmonious environment.” Scott explains that an average person should, “meet his brother artist, the architect, on his own ground.” Because it is only through the artist that he can achieve his own “quest for the beautiful and true.”¹³ In any of these sorts of books

¹² Clarence Cook, “Studio-Suggestions for Decoration,” *The Monthly Illustrator* 4 (May 1895): 234.

¹³ M.H. Baillie Scott, “An Artist’s Home,” *The Decorator and Furnisher* 30 (August 1897): 136.

or articles, seeking members of the public were informed on how to create their own palaces of art and pursue a lofty and idealistic Aesthetic lifestyle.

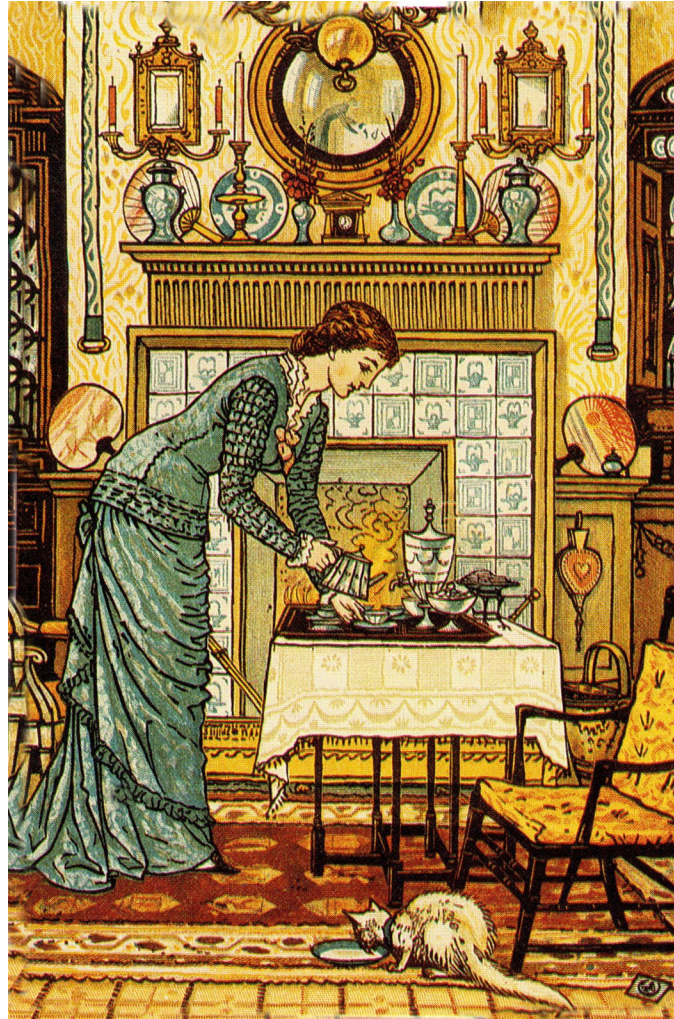


Figure 6. Walter's Cook's 1878 frontis-piece to Clarence Cook's *The House Beautiful*.

For the first time, the middle class was invited to join in on the same trends as the most wealthy artisan or aristocrat of the day. The mass of society would look to the artist as their “teacher” in the grand endeavor of pursuing beauty, truth, and morality. Another one of the “cornerstone” authors of the Aesthetic “self-help” genre, Christopher Dresser,

explains this phenomenon in his classic book *Principles of Decorative Design* published in 1880. Dresser explains:

The true artist is a noble teacher...that decorative art does not consist merely in the placing together of forms, however beautiful they may be individually or collectively, nor in rendering objects simply what is called pretty; but that it is a power for good or evil; that it is what will elevate or debase—that which cannot be neutral in its tendency.¹⁴

Another one of the most influential late Victorian ideals to which the Aesthetic builders of studio houses would have subscribed to was the concept of the sanctity of home. The home was the center of the late Victorian world, which would explain why these artists were so intent on building a home and work space that was the pinnacle of his or her creative efforts and financial resources. Domesticity was the center of Victorian fascination. For this reason, the dwelling place of someone as mysterious as an artist truly intrigued the public. At no other time in history has a space directly associated with an artist held more significance than during the Aesthetic movement. In *The Cult of Beauty*, Stephen Calloway explains that the public began to believe that “artists’ studios were in some way sacred spaces consecrated to introspective rites practised by the votaries of a new cult of beauty.”¹⁵ In both the United States and the United Kingdom, artists who subscribed to the “Cult of Beauty,” would create temples of their devotion to the “religion” of Aestheticism with their studio-houses. These artists came to be defined by the conventions and ideals of their time. They ascribed to Aestheticism in the truest sense. While it is difficult to describe the Aesthetic movement

¹⁴ Christopher Dresser, *Principles of Decorative Design* (London: Cassel, Petter, and Galpin, 1880), 15-16.

¹⁵ Stephen Calloway, *The Cult of Beauty*, 90.

in a black and white definition, one must remember that above all, it was most importantly a *movement* in the loosest sense of the word--just as it was first described by Walter Hamilton in his publication *The Aesthetic Movement in England*, which was completed the same year that Oscar Wilde came to the forefront of the Aesthetic movement during his North American lecture tour. In the V&A exhibit catalogue, the authors give an excellent synopsis of Hamilton's work:

Hamilton elucidated both Aestheticism's intellectual underpinnings and its more immediate artistic manifestations as he saw them, making a creditable attempt to show art, poetry, architecture, and interior decoration as related aspects of a larger whole. He was however careful to establish, as indeed others noticed at the time, and as much recent scholarship has taken pains to affirm, that Aestheticism was not in reality a 'movement' -in the modern sense of the term-with a cohesive agenda, a programmatic set of aims or even any consistent membership. Rather, it consisted...of a loose association of the sometimes shared aims, enthusiasms, and ideals of a shifting cast of characters united for the most part by ties of comradely friendship, but also animated by occasional rivalries and even at times instances of carefully honed enmity.¹⁶

Therefore, the Aesthetic "movement" was more of an association of people and communities rather than an actual institution or place of membership. The ideals presented by the Aesthetes were highly influential to Aesthetically inspired artists on both sides of the Atlantic. The best way to understand how the loosely based tenets of Aestheticism affected British and American artists is to examine primary source descriptions of the homes from the period. These descriptions give literal explanations of what an Aesthetic interior would be like while simultaneously portraying the personal expressiveness of these Aesthetic interiors and how they relate back to the artist himself.

¹⁶ Stephen Calloway and Lynn Federle Orr, eds. *The Cult of Beauty, the Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011). 13-14.

The first example comes from Moncure Conway's book *Travels in South Kensington*, published in 1882. Conway was an American from the east coast who was travelling abroad in the U.K. for an extended period. He wrote of his visit to Leighton House, "It is rare, indeed that any house built in England in recent times has about it as much elegance and simplicity as this. Entering the house, the impression conveyed at once is that it is the residence of an ARTIST!"¹⁷ Conway goes on to describe the lavish interior:

[T]he doors are of deal, painted with a rich black paint; on each jamb there is at the bottom a spreading golden root, from which runs a stem then passes up, ending in the full face of a sunflower [one of the classic Aesthetic symbols] in gold...One thing in the hall struck me as especially ingenious, and at the same time beautiful. Just opposite to the entrance from the vestibule into the hall the stair begins to ascend beyond large white pillars. Now, between the first and second of these pillars there is a little balcony, about as high about the floor as one's head. On examination it is found that this balcony is made out of an inlaid cabinet chest, the top and farther side of which have been removed to make way for cushions...embroidered with various delicate tints upon a lustrous olive satin.

Conway continues to describe each room in Leighton House with this great amount of sensuous detail, including the famed Arabian Hall of Leighton House, so that his readers back home may fully grasp the exotic opulence of Leighton's "palace of art." Americans were just as avid concerning their interest in reading about the Aesthetic interior. Many writers chronicled the interiors of American Aesthetes as well, such as a 1904 article in *Town and Country* describing the interior of the Alice Pike Barney House in Washington D.C. Author Anna P. Thomas explains:

Interesting and artistically beautiful as are all the rooms, the real attractiveness lies in the magnificent studio which occupies the entire second floor; for here, Mrs. Barney's personal taste in selection, some of the wealth of Europe has been

¹⁷ Moncure D. Conway, *Travels in South Kensington*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882). 195-197.

gathered...Throughout, the woodwork is subordinated for the better showing of many rare and valuable carvings and embroideries that give the room an Oriental effect...On every side, treasures which only the eye of a connoisseur could have discovered, including heavily bound oaken chests pregnant with history of the early ages, costly Oriental hangings, rich gold embroidered cloth once the pride and of Egyptian princes, and paintings, finished and unfinished, some fresh from the brush of the owner, confuse and fascinate one with their variety of color and design.¹⁸

One can see how curious the public was to gain an understanding of the interiors of these artists' studios by reading the many other countless writings of the time that parallel these two examples in rich detail and level of description. Now that the historical and art historical contexts have been established for these artists and their studio-houses, I will go on to describe the history of each individual studio-house.

¹⁸ Anna P. Thomas, "An Artistic Home in Washington," *Town and Country* 58 (January 1904): 10-12.



Figure 7. Alice Pike Barney House, photo courtesy of Dr. Kenneth Hafertepe.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Object Biographies” of Artists’ Studio-House Museums, United Kingdom¹

In order to fully understand these artists and their respective studio houses, one must fully grasp the importance of “object biography.” In material culture studies, the significance of the object or architectural form does not lie solely in the past, or how the form or object was used at the time of its creation or construction. To better comprehend the object’s significance, value, and the overall implications it brings to the historical and socio-cultural table, one must look at the object in a comprehensive sense, how it has changed and been used over the course of time, not only in the past. American Material Culture scholar Margareta Lovell explains that, “Material culture has no inherent hierarchy of value except its value to tell us about its makers, because the questions material culture studies seek to answer are about people, not things, about what the community knew, what it valued, how it went about its business of daily life.”² This aspect of material culture studies, as described by Lovell, is particularly validated with these studio-house properties. The principle of object biography equally applies to the artists’ studio houses that have become museums. This chapter will examine how certain studio houses went from being the most intimate expression of an artist’s personal tastes and preferences to transforming into a public institution caring for objects and

¹ Margareta M. Lovell, “American Material Culture: Artisans, Scholars, and a World of Things,” *American Material Culture and the Texas Experience, The David B. Warren Symposium*, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

² Ibid., 51.

architectural forms held in the public trust. More importantly, what do these homes teach us about “the business of daily life” in the late Victorian era? How has this question been more appropriately answered by those studio houses that have become museums?

Frederic Leighton and Leighton House

Leighton House stands out as one of the first, and most famous, examples of an artist’s studio house that is now a museum. Currently, it is the only artists’ purpose-built studio house from the Victorian period being operated as a museum in the United Kingdom.³ Along with the home built by Leighton’s neighbor and fellow artist, Valentine Prinsep, Leighton House was “the first studio-house to be built in an area of London [Holland Park] subsequently filled with them”⁴ in 1865. The story of Leighton House is one that covers a span of many years. The house was treated as the lifelong project of famed Victorian painter Frederic, Lord Leighton until the time of his death in 1896. Although he was not the first artist to ever build a studio-house, Leighton was the first artist to fully utilize the space of the studio house as one that was equally public and private, dually used for entertaining, networking, and professional endeavors. The home was also an intensely personal space to be used for the display of Leighton’s magnificent collection of artistic objects and furnishings, a true “palace of art.” In addition, Leighton’s home stands out as the most ornate and stylistically significant studio-house of the time. Following his death, Leighton’s own sisters remarked in a letter to *The Times* in 1899, “He built his house as it now stands for his own artistic delight. Every

³ Julia Findlater, “‘100 Years of Leighton House,’” *Lord Leighton and Leighton House: A Centenary Celebration* (London: Apollo Magazine, 1996), 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

stone of it had been the object of his loving care. It was a joy to him until the moment when he lay down to die.”⁵ Their remarks reflect upon the influence of John Ruskin and his books such as *The Stones of Venice*. Ruskinian ideals were revealed in the life of Leighton and his studio-house. Leighton House stands out as an architectural masterpiece of the highest standard in this type of architectural genre. Many other artists would later imitate Leighton’s example of using their studio houses as places to develop the “furtherance of a reputation and career.”⁶ Leighton would also use the house as a personal sanctuary for maintaining a private life and completing his own works of art.

Leighton was born to an affluent family in England in 1830. His father, Dr. Frederic Septimus Leighton, was a physician; just as his grandfather had been to the Czar of Russia. Grandfather Leighton had endowed his son with a small fortune amassed from his employment as “court physician” to the Czar. With this inheritance, Leighton’s father had been able to provide a very comfortable lifestyle for his wife and three children. Leighton had spent most of his childhood and adolescence in Europe, causing him to develop an extremely cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and elegant personality. During his extensive travels abroad, Leighton was able to develop an interest in art and study at the academies of Berlin and Florence. By 1846, the Leightons had set up a home in Frankfurt, where Frederic would complete his formal art training. By 1852, the family would once again return to England leaving Frederic behind in Germany to continue his art education. Early on in his career, Leighton became somewhat of a wunderkind by

⁵ Daniel Robbins and Reena Suleman., *Leighton House Museum* (London: The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Museums and Arts Service, 2005), 13-14.

⁶ Ibid.

exhibiting a painting, *Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna is Carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence*, at the Royal Academy in 1855, which was immediately purchased by Queen Victoria. This event would serve the purpose of getting Leighton's name exposed to the British Art establishment; however, Leighton would not immediately find complete success in the British art world. He would instead spend several more years travelling and enjoying life on the Continent before returning to England to formally become a part of the Royal Academy of Art in 1864, the same year he would begin construction on his studio house in Holland Park Road in London.

Although Leighton painted and sculpted many beautiful and highly skilled works throughout the course of his life, his house in Holland Park may well be considered his greatest artistic achievement. Leighton was a true Renaissance man and held a deep interest in architecture, among many other various passions and fascinations. By the time he was in the process of designing and building his studio-house, he had already travelled extensively in Europe and North Africa where he gathered many ideas for his future home. During his travels, he made a series of architectural sketches for future reference. His time in France had also exposed him to studio houses built by other artists such as Delacroix.⁷

Leighton's reputation would continue to grow in London along with his financial and professional standing, insuring him the ability to construct the studio house of his dreams. After the sale of several paintings in the early 1860s, Leighton had the means to design and construct the house with his close friend, architect George Aitchison. Leighton settled on the Holland Park neighborhood, then on the rural outskirts of

London, as his desired real estate of choice due to the fact that a small artistic community was already thriving there with residents such as G.F. Watts and Edward Burne-Jones. Leighton would work in tandem with Aitchison for the next thirty years building the house in sections. Aitchison is quoted as saying that, “every stone, every brick—even mortar and the cement—no less than all the wood and metal work passed directly under his [Leighton’s] personal observation.”⁸ When construction began in 1865 the house was a relatively modest looking townhouse, inspired by an Italianate villa. By 1869, Leighton was already prepared to add on the first extension which would enlarge his studio space and create an access area for models. No further work was done on the house until 1877 when Leighton was inspired to construct what is considered to be the house’s most distinctive feature, the Arab Hall.

During extensive travels to North Africa and the Middle East, Leighton was inspired to amass his own collection of Arabian inspired tiles, textiles, and *objets d’art*. He collected so many Islamic tiles that he realized he would have to create some sort of space to store them in his home in London. Leighton underplayed the magnificence of his collection and the construction of the Arab hall by describing the highly aesthetic and expensive creation as, “a little addition for the sake of something beautiful to look at once in a while.”⁹ Although Leighton would continue tweaking, rearranging, and enlarging his home, the house still only contained one bedroom, displaying Leighton’s intense desire for privacy. Leighton would go on to add a winter studio in 1889 and a “silk room” in

⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸ Ibid., 19-20.

⁹ Ibid., 25.

1894-5 to be used as additional display space for hanging works of art. This would be his final addition to the house, as he died in 1896. In her essay, “The Design of Leighton House, The Artist’s Palace of Art,” Louise Campbell explains the long-term significance of Leighton House and its architect, Aitchison:

Leighton’s architect was George Aitchison and Leighton’s house, one of Aitchison’s few surviving works, has been recognized as evidence of the late 1870s for exquisite color harmonies and for creating a synthesis of modern and historic ornament. Equally interesting, however, are the traces of original, strikingly simple ornament of the 1860s, which was almost effaced by subsequent additions. Even before the construction of the Arab Hall, therefore, for which the house is best known, Leighton’s house was an example of advanced design.¹⁰

Following his death, Leighton, left the entire estate to his two sisters. Before he had died, it had been rumored that the house would be given to the Royal Academy, however no such thing happened when the house was given to Leighton’s sisters who did not have the funds to keep the house completely intact. After a failed attempt to sell the house, they focused on selling the furnishings, decorations, and most of Leighton’s own works instead. With enough money raised from the sale of the contents, which was performed by Christie’s auction house, the sisters had originally hoped that the house itself could be preserved. According to an 1896 newspaper article published in *The Critic*, the sales of the contents of the house raised over 34,000 pounds.¹¹ Even by raising this large sum of money, the two sisters still found it difficult to lead the preservation campaign for the house, and they concluded that in the end, it would be

¹⁰ Louise Campbell, “The Design of Leighton House, The Artist’s Palace of Art,” in *Lord Leighton, 1830-1896 and Leighton House: A Centenary Celebration* (London: Apollo Magazine, 1996), 10.

¹¹ “The Leighton Sale,” *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 26 (August 1, 1896): 76.

futile to attempt preserving the “empty casket without the jewels.” In their place, Mrs. Russell Barrington, a neighbor and friend of Leighton’s who also wrote his first biography, led a campaign to save the house itself. In 1897, a committee was formed “with the object of saving the house for the nation.”¹² The borough of Kensington had been approached early on about taking the house, but after the borough initially declined, a committee was formed to determine how to keep the house running.

Even though Leighton’s sisters found difficulty in leading the preservation campaign for the house, they decided to open the house to the public, setting up educational programs, and establishing a permanent collection and an endowment to keep the house running as a museum by as early as 1898. In 1899, Mr. Herbert Oakes Jones was appointed as the first curator of the house and by April, the house had been opened to the public. By 1901, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea had acquired the home and still run it to this day. A committee was then formed to raise the 15,000 pounds necessary to enlarge the endowment fund to secure the future of the house. Members of this committee included George Aitchison and G.F. Watts.¹³

Leighton became equally famous for his skill as a painter and sculptor as well as for his extravagant studio house. The recently published museum guidebook created by the curators of Leighton House states, “Leighton’s increasing prominence was recognised by a private visit from Queen Victoria on 12 March 1869, after which she noted in her Journal, ““He is most agreeable & gentlemanlike, & his house & studio charmingly

¹² Daniel Robbins and Reena Suleman., *Leighton House Museum*, 31.

¹³ An extremely helpful summary of the history of Leighton House may be found in Julia Findlater’s essay “100 Years of Leighton House.”(London: Apollo Magazine, 1996): 4-7.

arranged' ...”¹⁴ For a man who entertained the most distinguished and famed individuals of his day, little respect was shown to the estate in the years following Leighton’s passing and the passing of his family and friends in the early 20th century. The house would undergo many changes and experience an uncertain future until the 1980s. During the 1930s, the house was redecorated and used as “a venue for general cultural activities;” however, little attention was paid to retaining the original architectural and decorative integrity of the house.¹⁵ The house was also highly damaged by bombs that dropped over London in World War Two. Luckily, the bomb damage did not affect the Arab Hall. Due to shortage of funds following the war, the house was closed to the public for 11 years and left in a significant state of disrepair.

The period of the 1950s and 1960s was a time when public opinion of Victorian art was at its all-time lowest. Although during this time Leighton House was used as the Kensington borough’s junior library and as a venue for civic activities, it was repeatedly remodeled and redecorated without any care of the house’s original appearance or in regard to the integrity of the original features and foundation. Although educational programs were held for the public in the house during this era, they had little to do with Leighton and his contemporaries.¹⁶ In 1961, an ultimate low was reached when the nearby studio-house of G.F. Watts was demolished. The future of Leighton House would hang in the balance until 1969 when “The Friends of Leighton House” group was formed. This group worked tirelessly to “promote the house and bring influential people to

¹⁴ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵ Daniel Robbins and Reena Suleman. *Leighton House Museum*, 34.

¹⁶ Ibid.

support its restoration and the development of the permanent collections.”¹⁷ The house has since undergone two extensive restorations, one in the 1980s, led by curator Stephen Jones and financed by the Friends of Leighton House and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and again in 2010 when the house was taken even more closely back to its original appearance. During this highly expensive and meticulous restoration process, special attention was given to the reinterpretation of areas such as the servant’s quarters that had previously been used as offices for the museum staff. The museum has gone from much less of a municipal or civic structure to being an institution dedicated to the life and works of Leighton himself. Leighton House is a prime example of a property that has witnessed the extreme ebb and flow of public, and scholarly, opinions and tastes over the course of its history. Currently, the future of the house is stronger than it has ever been; however, maintaining the work that has been put into bringing the house closer to its original intent and appearance will require constant maintenance and care.

*Other Noteworthy Artists’ Studio-Houses from
the Victorian Era in the United Kingdom*

There are several other noteworthy British studio-houses that are significant not only because they were a part of the great “studio-house” trend in late Victorian London, but because they have either been destroyed or completely changed from their original appearance or intent and are now used for other purposes besides that of museum. Many of the homes are now being lived in by the wealthy or famous, while others, such as the residence of John Everett Millais, is being used as an embassy in affluent West London. While it would be unrealistic to assume that all of these properties could have become

¹⁷ Ibid., 35.

museums, it is disheartening to realize that out of all of them, only one, Leighton House, is actually being kept in the public trust as an example of Aesthetic Movement architecture and history. How much more could we learn from this period of art history if more of the houses had been preserved and conserved? Much more knowledge concerning this aspect of Victorian history could also have been saved if these houses and their contents had been more carefully maintained.

Holland Park Artists' Colony

Many studio-houses existed around the Holland Park neighborhood of London, but during the height of the “studio-house fad,” studio-houses were cropping up all around the city. J. Frank Lamb points out in “Lions and Their Dens...:”

Not until the mid-1870s would the custom designed studio house with its oversized studio become popular, spreading throughout the rapidly growing suburbs of Kensington, Chelsea, St. John's Wood and Hampstead. From the 1860s on, St. John's Wood was Kensington's chief rival regarding sheer numbers of well-known studio houses. Along with Kensington, it was the principal region where the concept of the carefully appointed studio was developed.¹⁸

In Holland Park itself, which is a neighborhood in the borough of Kensington, artists such as G.F. Watts, Val Prinsep, Marcus Stone, Luke Fildes, and Lord Leighton all lived in artistic community. The Kensington area had already established itself as a center for the arts in the years following the Crystal Palace Exhibition and the founding of the South Kensington School of Design (now the Victoria and Albert Museum of decorative arts), giving the area a particularly bohemian and cultural tone. The origins of the Holland Park artists' colony may be traced back to the 1850s when George Frederic Watts moved

¹⁸ Joseph Frank Lamb, “Lions in their Dens, Lord Leighton and late Victorian Studio Life” (PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 1987), 60.

onto the country estate of Lord and Lady Holland known as Holland Park. Watts was visiting as a guest but ended up living at the property for over thirty years as a sort of “artist in residence” for the aristocratic Holland family.¹⁹ As the years passed, and the Holland family was unable to pay the lease for their country estate, wealthy artistic types, such as Leighton and Valentine Prinsep, were drawn to the then rural neighborhood where property was going up for sale. They chose to purchase property and construct their new studio-houses there. Thus, an artists’ colony was born. Many other artists would join Leighton, Prinsep, and Watts in this newly fashionable neighborhood. In an 1893 edition of *The Strand Magazine*, author Harry How remarks:

Melbury Road, Kensington, has for some years past been completely converted into a colony of eminent artists and sculptors in general, and R.A.’s [Royal Academicians] in particular. Pedestrians seldom pass by that way. It is a corner of London which the birds seem to have singled out as a fitting place for early and impromptu concerts—a Kensington nook, where the flowers bloom and the trees are positively patriotic towards our sister isle in a constant “wearing of the green.” It is altogether the ideal spot for the artist.²⁰

In this once thriving artists’ colony, the only home to remain completely originally intact is Leighton’s. Today in many of the former studio houses, pop music stars, such as Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, celebrities, and film producers now reside in the magnificent studio houses of Holland Park that remain. The houses are now prime real estate for some of the wealthiest members of society in modern London. In 1999, a one-bedroom apartment made from Marcus Stone’s former studio-house sold for over one

¹⁹ Charlotte Gere. *Artistic Circles*, 135.

²⁰ Harry How, “Illustrated Interviews. XXV—Mr. Luke Fildes, R.A.” *Strand Magazine* 6 (1893): 110.

million pounds.²¹ The Holland Park artists' colony became the epicenter of the studio-house movement in the late Victorian era and is still a bastion of artistic living to this day.

Whistler's "White House" in Chelsea

In other nearby suburbs of London, such as Chelsea, artists such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and J.A.M. Whistler created remarkable studio-houses to live and work in. Whistler's loss of his home, "White House," is particularly saddening due to the fact that while not being 100 percent "Aesthetic" in appearance, particularly on the exterior, it was one of the first examples of a "modernist" style of building in London. On the inside and the outside, the house abounded in clean lines and beautifully subtle color choices. Whistler had moved from Paris to London and had established himself in Chelsea by the early 1860s. Whistler's style of decoration for his new house would prove to be highly unique and innovative due to his personality which exhibited "a certain inherent ascetic trait, together with the hint also of inherited New England puritanism, [which was] combined with the most highly developed appreciation of colour and decorative effect and the subtlest sensibility to atmosphere..."²² Whistler's great interest in Asian Art, particularly that of Japan, also proved to be highly influential in design circles, leading to many imitations of his simple and elegant aesthetic choices in the homes of the wealthy and middle-class alike. Unfortunately, Whistler was not as adept with finances and his public image as he was with art and design. He was forced to sell "White House" after

²¹ Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 5.

²² Stephen Calloway, "The Palace of Art: Artists, Collectors, and Their Houses." In *The Cult of Beauty* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 97.

he went bankrupt due to his libel court case against John Ruskin.²³ Later tenants would destroy Whistler's decorative work, and the artist was never able to afford to move back in. The house would later be demolished. His biographers, Charles and Elizabeth Pennell, would remark in 1912 that after the demolition of his home, Whistler remarked that, "History was wiped from the face of Chelsea."²⁴

The Studio-Homes of Lawrence Alma-Tadema

During its day, the studio-house of painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema was considered to be just as ornate and impressive as Leighton's. The Dutch-born painter constructed two studio houses, one in the Regent's Park area of London and the other in the St. John's Wood neighborhood. Both of his homes were highly embellished, full of classically inspired works of art, and furnished with an eccentric mix of antiques, masterworks, and artistic decorative objects. Alma-Tadema was very fond of the use of rich colors of painted decoration in his homes. In one gilded doorway of one of the houses, Alma-Tadema's favorite motto, "As the sun colours flowers, so art colours life,"²⁵ was carved into the door frame. Sadly, these properties have also been neglected by preservationists and museum professionals. The Regent's Park house is beautifully described in an 1882 article from *The Magazine of Art*. The author explains that "Townshend House is the entire scene of Mr. Alma-Tadema's toil, happiness, and triumph, and is, therefore, in some sense an epitome of his history; for if the books on a

²³ Ibid., 101.

²⁴ Charles and Elizabeth Pennell, "Whistler as Decorator," *Century Magazine* (February 1912): 500-513.

man's shelves be an indication of his character far more so in the world of art are the papers on his walls, the cloths on his table, and the carpets on his floor."²⁶ The homes and furnishings of Alma-Tadema could have been highly informative on how a Neoclassical and Pre-Raphaelite painter lived and worked, in addition to being magnificent examples of Aesthetic architecture and decorative art, as are shown by the many watercolors of the interior of the house and the many references made to the home in periodicals and books of the time.²⁷ The homes of Alma-Tadema's are some of the most grandiose examples of the forgotten architectural and decorative treasures of Aesthetic period Victorian London.

Summary

The three examples of the homes in the Holland Park artists' colony, Whistler's "White House," and Alma-Tadema's two famed studio homes are only a small fraction of the great loss of architectural, design, and art history elements that have occurred in these properties over the course of time. On the one hand, it is saddening that more studio-houses have not been preserved or turned into museums or galleries. On the other hand, the forms that have not been demolished live on by being relevant to whichever cultural milieu they might be a part of. In that way, their "object biographies" are rich—chronicling the passage of time and the ebb and flow of popular culture. Perhaps as more

²⁵ Frederick Dolman, "Illustrated Interviews. LXVIII—Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, R.A." *The Strand Magazine* (December 1899): 602-614.

²⁶ W. Meynell, "Artists' Homes. Mr. Alma-Tadema's at North Gate, Regent's Park," *The Magazine of Art* (January 1882): 184-188.

²⁷ For a more detailed look into the studio-houses of Lawrence Alma-Tadema, see Charlotte Gere's *Artistic Circles*.

time passes and the study of the Victorian period continues to gain credibility in popular and academic circles, more will be done by academics, museum specialists, and aficionados alike to conserve the Aesthetic era homes and studio-houses that still remain in London today.

The stories of the studio-houses in London can teach museum professionals and historians many lessons about conservation and preservation of fashionable architectural forms. Perhaps one day society will learn that just because a form was highly fashionable and stylistic during its day that does not mean that it will lack relevance for future appreciation and study. In looking at which studio-houses were maintained in the United States and the United Kingdom, one may observe how the buildings we preserve speak to what we as a modern society value at the time of conservation and preservation. This fact will be discussed further in later chapters of this thesis. After examining these British studio-houses, one must also examine the studio-house trends that were occurring across the Atlantic in America.



Figure 8. Lawrence Alma-Tadema, from *Artists at Home*.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Object Biographies” of Artists’ Studio-Houses in the United States

Frederic Edwin Church and Olana, Hudson, New York

Frederic Edwin Church’s architectural masterpiece, Olana, located in Hudson, New York, stands out as the foremost and most grandiose example of a truly “Aesthetic” studio-house in the United States. Church, one of the most successful painters of his day and part of the Hudson River School of painting, was similar to Lord Leighton in that he was born into an affluent family in 1826. After studying under Englishman Thomas Cole and finding material wealth through his own artistic success, Church was able to build a significant personal fortune through the sale of his famed paintings, which were mostly landscape in nature. After finding financial success of his own and through the funding of his inheritance, “Church decided to build a home that would reflect his world-encompassing view of art.”¹ Olana was Church’s life work. He continued to call the estate “unfinished” until he died in 1900. Church was even quoted as saying, “About an hour this side of Albany is the centre of the world-and I own it” in reference to his beloved Olana.²

Church, in conjunction with one of the leading architects of the era, Calvert Vaux, designed and constructed his high Victorian masterpiece of architecture on the banks of

¹ Michael Gotkin, *Artists’ Handmade Houses* (New York: Abrams, 2011), 154.

² Joan Patterson Kerr, “Olana,” *American Heritage* 26 (August 1975): 42.

the Hudson in the early 1870s.³ Church also employed the famed Frederic Law Olmstead to design the vast gardens he had envisioned for Olana. The home is a beautiful blend of Eastern and Western influences, and was inspired by Church's travels to the Middle East, just as Leighton's own Arabian Hall.⁴ During Church's travels, he made sketches for his dream home. Church even chose an Arabic name for his estate, "Olana," which means "our place on high."⁵ Peter Goss explains the eclectic exterior style of Olana in his dissertation:

Stylistically the house may be difficult to identify, except that, considered in its entirety, it contains more discernible eastern motifs than any other. It has been defined as having, besides "Moorish" and "Persian" qualities, aspects of the Italian villa, Gothic Revival, French Mansard and "Ruskinian Venetian stylistic idioms"...It is undoubtedly eclectic, and this is reflected in the evolution of the villa's facades.⁶

Church was constantly tweaking and rethinking his ideas for the interior and exterior of the home. However, he consistently chose to blend eastern and western motifs into his stylistic design choices. He went on to add a studio wing to the right side of the original structure of the house in 1888-89⁷ making it a true "studio-house" just as built by artists in the United Kingdom. Michael Gotkin goes so far as to say, "This home would become

³ Historic American Buildings Survey, "Olana," Library of Congress American Memory website, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?hh:7:/temp/~ammem_KW3S.html (accessed January 12, 2012).

⁴ For a detailed, comprehensive, and highly informative work on Church and Olana, see Peter Goss's 1973 PhD dissertation from the Ohio University of Fine Arts, "An Investigation of Olana, the Home of Frederic Edwin Church, Painter."

⁵ Herbert Morris, "Olana, Summer 1872," *The Massachusetts Review* 30 (Summer 1989): 226-237.

⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁷ Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress American Memory website, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?hh:7:/temp/~ammem_KW3S.html. (information found in data pages).

the standard by which other artists built their homes at the end of the 19th century” in the United States.⁸

Church would treat the interior of the home with just as much care as the exterior. Always the lavish entertainer, he wanted to create a space that he could use as an artistic sanctuary and a showplace. Michael Gotkin explains:

When the house was completed in 1872, Church combined antiquities from different countries to create interior dioramas of scenography evoking the mystery of foreign lands. He devised specific color schemes for the interiors, sometimes by filtering light from an outside window with colored paper sandwiched between two panes of glass. He also created much of the furniture in the house in conjunction with his friend Lockwood de Forest, a painter who would later create his own artist-built homes...⁹

Church’s design choices would also be inspired by Aesthetic trends coming from Europe and the United Kingdom, particularly the ideology of John Ruskin, “from whom an entire generation of Americans learned that meticulous fidelity to specific natural forms could be not only a kind of national expression and a spiritual act but also a pictorial guide for artist and audience. The special dialect of Olana was a variant of an essentially British aesthetic language of the preceding decades.”¹⁰ Just as Leighton and the other British artists had done, Church had created a studio-house exemplifying Ruskinian thought of polychromy, eclecticism, and truth to materials in the form of Olana.

⁸ Michael Gotkin, *Artists’ Handmade Houses*, 154.

⁹ Ibid., 155.

¹⁰ Roger B. Stein, “Artifact as Ideology: The Aesthetic Movement in its American Cultural Context,” in *In Pursuit of Beauty, Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 25.



Figure 9. H.A.B.S. photo, interior of Olana.

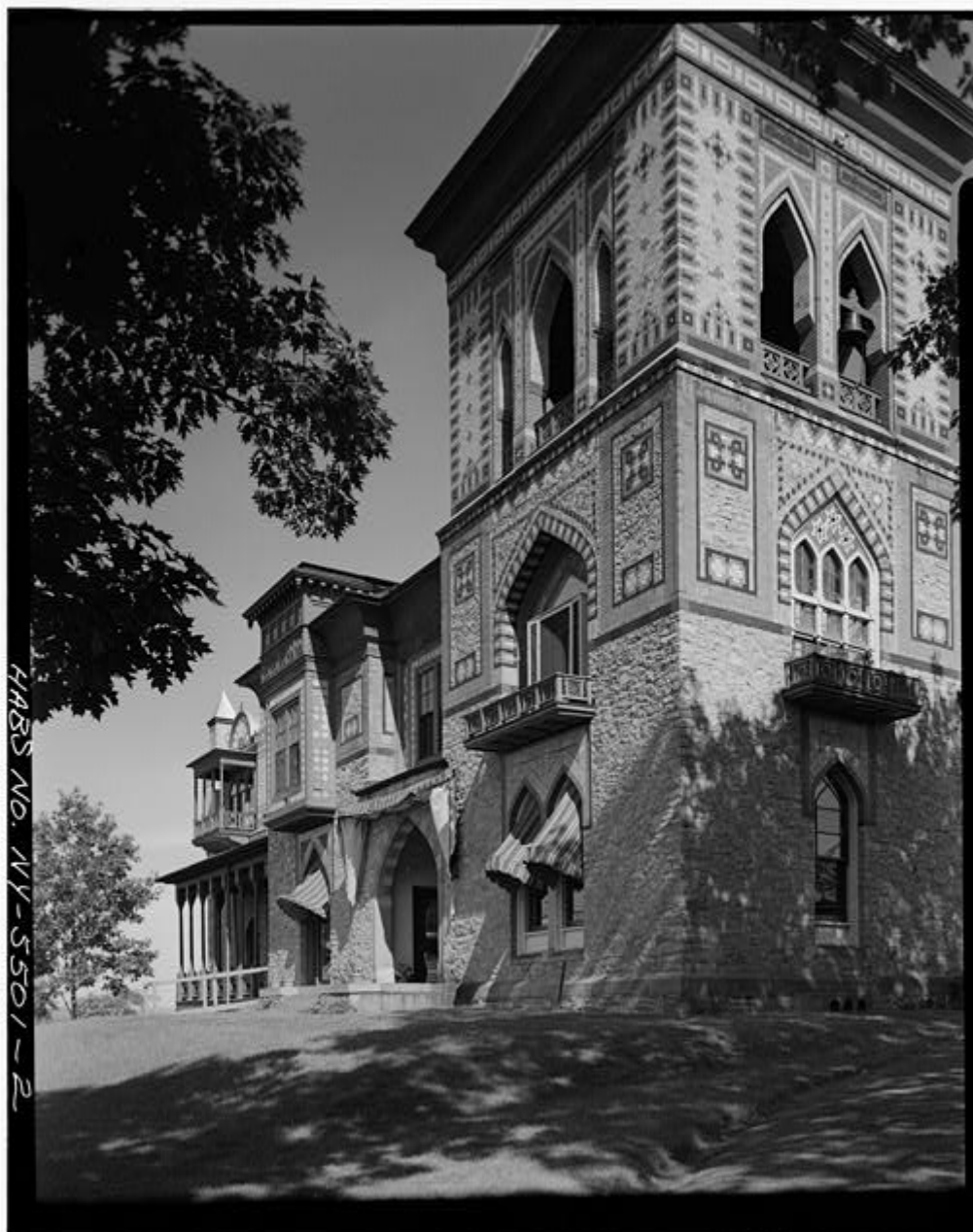


Figure 10. H.A.B.S. photo, exterior of Olana.

After Church's death in 1900, his son Louis inherited the house. Louis would reside at Olana until his death in 1943. Louis's wife, Sally, would reside in the home until her death in 1964. The family had carefully preserved the house and "commissioned numerous repairs that preserved the studio's appearance."¹¹ The house remained in the family until the early sixties when a relative of Church's inherited the home. Olana was listed on the National Historic Landmarks registry in 1965.¹² The following years would be full of upheaval for the Olana estate as it encountered some of the same Victorian bias as many other studio-houses did in the 1960s.

The battle over Olana proves to be a highly interesting one that is illustrative of the kind of troubles many Victorian era house museums encountered during the 1960s. Although the state of New York ended up buying the property in 1967 and turning it into a state historic site, the journey of getting Olana to that point was arduous. In his master's thesis, James Ryan explains in great detail the process the house underwent to become a museum.¹³ After Mrs. Church died, the estate went to her nephew, Charles T. Lark. Lark wanted to hold an auction to get rid of the house and all of its contents. He set the purchase price for the entire estate, including the gardens, outbuildings, big house, and countless works of art and antiques, not to mention the Church archival and drawings collection, at a mere \$470,000 total. Lark had no personal vested interest in the estate

¹¹ Thomas O'Sullivan, "The Studio Wing of Olana" (Master's thesis, State University of New York College at Oneonta at its Cooperstown Graduate Programs, 1980), 94.

¹² Historic American Buildings Survey website, data pages.

¹³ James A. Ryan, "The Master Plan for Olana State Historic Site" (Master's thesis, State University of New York College of Oneonta at its Cooperstown Graduate Programs, 1984), 39-40.

and wanted free of the entanglements of maintenance. Fortunately, in the end, Lark was persuaded not to go through with the sale.

By November of 1964, art history professor and Church expert, David C. Huntington, founded Olana Preservation Inc., a grass-roots preservation and fundraising group-and the fundraiser to save Olana was announced. Huntington was aided by James Biddle, then curator of the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one of the few Victorian art scholars in America at the time. Biddle was quoted as saying, “We’ve suffered under the fallacy which until recently insisted that there was nothing of esthetic merit created after 1815...utter rot.”¹⁴ Thankfully, individuals such as Biddle and Huntington worked tirelessly to preserve Olana. Without their efforts, America would have lost its finest example of a house in this architectural genre, not to mention the entire collections contained within the house being sold at auction, just as had happened with Leighton.

The group had to raise almost \$500,000 to purchase the estate. Knowing this was virtually impossible, the trustees of Olana Preservation Inc., which included David C. Huntington and Henry DuPont among other famous members, turned to the state of New York for assistance. The group had raised part of the money, but could not manage to raise the rest of the sum to buy Olana from the Church heirs. For over a year, the committee had worked to save Olana, and with the deadline less than 2 months away, the group had no choice but to turn to the state of New York for the required sum.¹⁵ On June

¹⁴ Mary Jean Kempner, “Houses in Jeopardy and What to do to Save Them,” *House Beautiful* 108 (February 1966): 135.

¹⁵ Ibid.

6, 1966, an act to appropriate the sum of money to purchase plan was signed by the then governor of New York, Nelson Rockefeller. A June 10, 1966 article in *The New York Times* stated that “We Americans are quite capable of destroying the most valuable repositories of our heritage. This country’s vaunted cultural explosion is a very small bang indeed if it cannot secure the preservation of one of America’s great cultural monuments.”¹⁶ After the state purchased Olana, the preservation group disbanded.

By 1968, the site was open to the public as a museum.¹⁷ In a 1989 book written by Gerald L. Carr entitled *Olana Landscapes The World of Frederic E. Church* he explains:

Today, more than 20 years after it was designated a historic site of the state of New York, Olana is nationally renowned as a comprehensive museum of Church’s art; a major specimen of American Victorian taste in architecture, decoration, and garden design...a splendid scenic environment stretching along the horizon as far as the eye can see. Tens of thousands of visitors annually take advantage of this unique opportunity to enter Church’s world and to enjoy the beauty of the estate and its surroundings.¹⁸

Hopefully, thousands more visitors will continue to enjoy the beauty of Olana in the years to come thanks to the work of a few dedicated Victorian art scholars of the 1960s. The example of Olana yet again shows the power of a few influential people uniting together in a common cause of preservation. With their passion and leadership, others were inspired to join in the efforts to save Olana, one of America’s “castles.”

¹⁶ “Olana,” *New York Times*, June 10, 1966.

¹⁷ James A. Ryan, “Master Plan for Olana,” 12.

¹⁸ Gerald L. Carr, *The World of Frederic E. Church* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 1.

Alice Pike Barney and Alice Pike Barney House, Washington D.C.

Moving south along the American east coast, the next studio-house of merit to be discovered is that of Alice Pike Barney in Washington D.C. Barney was born to a wealthy family in Cincinnati, the daughter of a successful businessman. During her youth in Ohio, Barney attended art school, where she particularly focused on the study of decorative arts. Her curriculum at McMicken School of Design in Ohio was based on the aesthetic theory of John Ruskin.¹⁹ She spent her adolescence traveling to New York City, London, and Paris. From the time she was very young, Barney was a free-spirited, eccentric, and highly artistic individual. She was interested in all aspects of the arts—drama, painting, opera, writing, and fashion design. She befriended other artistic figures during her time in Europe such as Oscar Wilde and James Whistler. After spending extensive time in the bohemian art scene of Europe, Barney married and moved back to America. After her first husband's death, she engaged in an almost crusade like endeavor to bring "culture" to the rustic American capital city of Washington D.C. Barney decided to build her own studio-house there as a place to entertain and enlighten those living in the highest social circles of late Victorian era Washington.²⁰

In 1902, Barney chose to work with architect Waddy Wood and builder Charles Langley to build the first house on Sheridan Circle, a Spanish-mission inspired mansion that was just as eclectic as Olana and Leighton House in its design influences. At the time of its construction, the house cost around \$18,000. While the outside of the home

¹⁹Jean L. Kling, *Alice Pike Barney: Her Life and Her Art* (Washington National Museum of Art, 1994), 82.

²⁰ Benjamin Forgey, "Alice Pike Barney, You Were Almost Too Much for Us; an Exhibit Tells Why," *The Washington Star*, February 12, 1978.

was simplistic, in contrast to the many Victorian mansions in northwest Washington, Barney created a luxurious interior space in which to engage in her artistic pursuits and entertain the most affluent and artistic members of Washington society with soirees, tableaux, and other dramatic performances. Just as the other Aesthetes had done, Barney filled her home with antiques and exotic *objets d'art* from all corners of the globe. To her peers, her studio appeared to be most impressive. In a 1904 article in *Town and Country* magazine Anna P. Thomas stated, "Interesting and artistically beautiful as are all the rooms, the real attractiveness lies in the magnificent studio which occupies the entire second floor."²¹ The uniqueness of this home surely must have impressed those who lived in Washington at the time.

Barney lived in the home until she died in 1931.²² She had lived a life completely dedicated to the arts and even passed away while on her way to a musical.²³ In her will, she left the home to her two highly progressive and equally artistic daughters, Natalie and Laura. Barney's ultimate desire was for the house to be used as "a museum or art center for the people of Washington D.C."²⁴ Barney desired that her house would be left completely intact including all the artwork and furniture. She, like Leighton, Church, and all the other Aesthetes, believed in cohesion of presentation. Barney felt that the entire studio-house represented all of her ideology about art and design. Removing any one

²¹ Anna P. Thomas, "An Artistic Home in Washington," *Town and Country* 58(January 1904): 10-12.

²² Historic American Buildings Survey, "Alice Pike Barney House," Library of Congress American Memory, <http://www.memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query.html>. (accessed January 14, 2012).

²³ Special to the *New York Times*, "Mrs. Alice Pike Barney, Playwright, Dies," October 14, 1931.

²⁴ Wanda Corn, "Art Matronage in Post-Victorian America," *Fenway Court* 27 (1997): 22.

element would take away from the entire presentation of the studio-house as a whole. Barney's studio represents another example of an Aesthetic artist "retreat[ing] from the outside world to live totally within the magic of [his/her] own creative environments."²⁵ Wanda Corn beautifully explains this philosophy by saying, "She [Barney] imagined creating a totally aestheticized environment, one in which the decorations, the furniture, and the art on the wall together formed a spiritualized space."²⁶ These studio-houses were created as almost religious like spaces for devotion to the "cult of beauty." Even today, for the homes that remain open as museums, one can sense a spiritualized sacredness in these Aesthetic "temples" to art. After her passing, Barney's hopes of keeping her "spiritualized space" completely intact would not come true.

In the years following Barney's death, her house would undergo many transitions and change hands many times. For thirty years, Barney's daughters, Natalie and Laura, rented the house out to different tenants. By 1960, they gave the house over to the Smithsonian as a museum of art and culture.²⁷ The Smithsonian never fully utilized the home as a historic house museum but instead mostly used it for office space and as a place to lodge visiting dignitaries and scholars. In 1980, the first two floors of the home were restored and opened to the public. But by 1993, the museum was experiencing budget troubles due to lack of funds and low visitor attendance. The Smithsonian had

²⁵ Wanda Corn, "The Artists' Workplace, An Endangered Species," *Historic Preservation Forum* 12 (Winter 1998): 36.

²⁶ Wanda Corn, "Art Matronage in Post-Victorian America," 21.

²⁷ Stephen May, "The House that Alice Built," *Historic Preservation* (September-October 1994): 62-3.

consistently struggled with how to utilize this unique structure.²⁸ Previously noted art historian and studio-house advocate Wanda Corn attempted to form a group similar to Olana Preservation Inc. called “Friends of the Alice Pike Barney House.” The group attempted to raise funds to insure continued public access to the unique structure. Unfortunately, they were not as successful as Olana Preservation Inc. had been and the Smithsonian decided to sell the house in 1995.

The decision to sell the house stirred up much controversy in museum and preservation circles. Benjamin Forgey, wrote an article in the *Washington Post* entitled “A Real Fixer Upper” in March 1995. He bluntly inquired how it had “happened that a guardian of cultural values such as the Smithsonian would even think of unloading such a jewel is a cautionary tale of the downsizing age.” However, the Smithsonian argued that they did not have the \$3.5 million dollars necessary to restore and repair the house, and that it would be more economically prudent for their institution as a whole if they sold the home. Thus, one of the greatest Aesthetic era architectural jewels was removed from the public trust. Issues of funding would plague all of these studio-house museums because maintaining such personal and detailed artistic expressions are not cheap, especially as the properties age. Currently, Alice Pike Barney House is being used by the country of Latvia as an embassy.²⁹ To this day, scholars and preservationists alike are debating the sale of the Barney house. Although the possibility is slim, perhaps one day the home

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The Latvian embassy’s website, www.latvia-usa.org, does feature historical background information about the home and gives information for a phone tour.

may be turned back into a museum and a center for the arts as Barney had originally hoped.

Elisabet Ney and Formosa, Austin, Texas

The last stop on the tour of the most famous American studio-houses falls further west in Austin, Texas, where sculptor Elisabet Ney chose to build her studio-house in 1892, which would eventually become the first official art museum in the state of Texas. Ney was a classically trained artist who was born and raised in Germany. She married a Scottish philosopher, Edmund Montgomery, and moved to the United States in 1871, first to Georgia and later to Texas for the drier climate. Ney was another extremely eccentric, progressive, and Continental figure who had been known for sculpting the most famous political and artistic figures in Germany. She was also known for wearing pants and riding horses astride, like a man. After residing in the Texan countryside for a time, Ney and Montgomery decided to move to Austin to be in contact with more artistic members of society. Ney's devotion to her work as a sculptor had been interrupted by her move to America and different family problems such as the death of one child and the repeated troublesome behavior caused by her son, Lorne.

After her move to Austin, Ney settled on the then "frontier" neighborhood of Hyde Park to build her home. Ney's home would also become synonymous with eclectic design choices. In architectural style, she was known for her combination and use of "grand conception with everyday materials." Ney proceeded to build a home which shares some affinities with a Greek temple. But she was adamant that it be made of rough-hewn, all-natural Texas limestone and that the natural landscape of the prairie



Figure 11. Alice Pike Barney House plaque, photo courtesy of Dr. Kenneth Hafertepe.

around the house should be left untouched. She also used mass-produced items in the decoration of the home, such as millwork and furniture, setting her slightly apart from some of the more tried and true Ruskinian devotees to the Arts and Crafts Movement. Ney's home did include a large studio that was based on some of her other previous studio homes in Europe. She named the home "Formosa," Portuguese for "beautiful," based on the similar studio-house her husband had built for her in Portugal in 1863.

Ney was similar to Barney, Church, and Leighton in that she became famous in Austin for hosting European style “salons” with the most famous artistic, philosophical, and literary figures of Austin society. In some ways, Ney lived a lifestyle that was less indulgent than the other Aesthetes. However, her personal philosophies on the power of an aestheticized environment mark her as decidedly “Aesthetic” in ideology. At a lecture entitled “Art for Humanity’s Sake” delivered to the Annual Meeting of Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1895, Ney stated:

Shall not our surroundings thereby become transformed into scenes beautiful to behold and ennobling to move among? Shall not our dwellings, our public buildings, our factories, our gardens, our parks, reflect in reality the loveliness of our artist dreams? It remains with us to bring about this higher this truly vital renaissance...The more our sensibility for the loveliness of things is nurtured and the more lovely our surroundings are made the more lovely and joyful our souls will grow.³⁰

Though Ney shared the radical individualism of other Aesthetic artists, she hoped that Aesthetic dreams might move from the individual to the communal.³¹

During her time in her studio-house, Ney would continue to resurrect her sculpting career by constructing statues of Sam Houston and Stephen F. Austin for the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893 to represent the state of Texas. She continued to enjoy living and working in the home she had created until she died in 1907. Before she died, she, like Barney, expressed the desire that her studio continue to function as a center for the arts.³² For future generations to maintain such a personal home as Formosa after the

³⁰ Elisabet Ney Museum Special Exhibit, “Elisabet Ney’s Homes and Studios in Europe and America,” October, 2011.

³¹ For the most complete look at the life of Ney, see Emily Fourmy Cutrer, *The Art of the Woman, The Life and Work of Elisabet Ney*. (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

³² Alice Kucera Scharfe, “Studio on the Frontier,” *Americana* (1983): 50.

original designer and occupant was gone was no easy task, a challenge unique to all studio-house museums. Ney's home did not undergo as much upheaval as some of the other Aesthetic era properties, but it did encounter some hardships, mainly in the 1970s.³³ After she passed away, Ney's friends joined together in an effort to preserve Formosa. One of Ney's closest friends, Ella Dancy Derrell, led the effort to turn Ney's studio-house into a museum. By 1911, the Texas Fine Arts Association appointed the building as its headquarters. By 1928, the Texas Fine Arts Association was operating the home as a museum open to the public.³⁴ In 1938, the museum was given over to the City of Austin with the legal conditions that no sculpture could ever leave the building and that the home would be left intact. The City of Austin still provides governance to the museum today.

Until the 1970s, various civil groups squabbled over the future of the deteriorating building. By 1977, the future of the museum was at risk and its survival was in question. The City of Austin acted to form a committee, just as in the cases with the two other American studio-house museums, made up of individuals from diverse fields. They also hired a museum supervisor, Jim Fisher, to "strike the right balance between offering museum programs which involve wear and tear and reclaiming a fragile historic site for preservation."³⁵ To take care of the museum's financial challenges, the City appointed an advisory board to launch the "Elisabet Ney Association," which would be responsible for

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Vernon Loggins, *Two Romantics and Their Ideal Life* (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1946), 349.

³⁵ Ibid.

a membership program, fundraising, and writing grants. By July of 1980, restoration for the house had begun with a new roof, new floors, electrical and HVAC updates. By 1982, the museum was reopened to the public with a fresh appearance and renewed purpose.³⁶

Currently, Elisabet Ney house is a part of the National Trust's "Historic Artists' Home and Studios Program" and in 2003 became an official project of the "Save America's Treasures" Program from the office of the U.S. President. Although a property such as Formosa is expensive to maintain, the staff of the Elisabet Ney Museum are currently in the process of trying to bring the museum as closely back to its original appearance as possible. Currently, the museum is undertaking an extensive program to bring the grounds back to their original prairie appearance. The grounds had undergone extensive "beautification" campaigns in the 1930s which completely changed the exterior aesthetic of the house. The museum still functions as a highly relevant and significant part of Austin and Texas history, and more importantly in the vein of this thesis, as a representation of a late Victorian studio house on the frontiers of the American southwest.³⁷

Other Noteworthy Artists' Studio-Houses from the Victorian Era in the United States

Although I have chosen to focus primarily on the three homes of Frederic E. Church, Alice Pike Barney, and Elisabet Ney as my primary examples of Victorian

³⁶ Ibid., 51

³⁷ In addition to Cutrer's biography of Ney, most of the information I have about her life and studio-house came from a visit I made to the Elisabet Ney House Museum in October 2011 where I interviewed education officer Colin Haymes. I also conducted an email interview with the museum curator, Mary Blackmon, in which she answered more questions for me about the museum.

studio-house museums in America, there are several other noteworthy studios/domestic spaces that existed in Victorian era America. Some have become museums, others have not. On the whole, it is interesting to see that the United States, sometimes looked down upon in international circles for its preservation standards as a whole, has preserved many more of these Aesthetic movement buildings and studio-houses than in Britain, where the movement began. Britain, the mecca of all things Victorian, has chosen to preserve many great Victorian era buildings, many of which are museums. However, out of all these



Figure 12. Elisabet Ney House, photo courtesy of Dr. Kenneth Hafertepe.

buildings, only Leighton House remains as the only true Aesthetic studio-house held in the public trust.

The one example of a truly Aesthetically styled and highly influential studio in America that has long since been destroyed is that of William Merritt Chase in New York City. He became famous for having “the finest studio in this city, if not in the whole country” that was “profoundly impressive” with its range of antiques, eclectic furnishings, and artworks.³⁸ Even after Chase’s passing, “Long Mr. Chase’s studio in West Tenth Street stood as the acme of all that was spacious and imposing in studio construction...”³⁹ Chase, along with many other famous artists of the time, worked in artistic community in the Tenth Street area, just as the artists had done in the Holland Park community in London. However, Chase’s studio was the most ornate and famous of them all. Chase considered his studio to be “completed” in 1879, and he continued to fill it with “almost every conceivable kind of art and artifact” until the studio was dismantled in 1896. Just as with its British counterparts, the studio was presented repeatedly in the trendiest magazines of the day as the ideal “show studio.” It was described in 1896 as “one of the most celebrated and bewildering museum-studios” in New York and Chase regularly allowed visitors in for show times.⁴⁰

Chase, like the other British and American Aesthetes, believed in the importance of “atmosphere.” He was quoted as saying, “What I want is to have the atmosphere of art about me, all the time.” Author Nicolai Cikovsky describes Chase as having “an almost psychological need to be nourished by beauty and to inhale the atmosphere of art,”⁴¹ just

³⁸ Nicolai Cikovsky, “William Merritt Chase’s Tenth Street Studio,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 16 (1976): 2-14.

³⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

as Leighton, Church, Barney, and the other Aesthetes had done. By the turn of the 20th century, when the studio-house fad was already falling out of fashion, many studios, including Chase's, were dismantled. According to Cikovsky, "Artistic concern became more inward, less visual, and no longer needed the stimulation of rich surroundings."⁴² Thus, many great historical spaces such as Chase's studio were lost and no one thought a thing of it at the time or for many years afterwards.

Those Victorian era studios that remain in the public trust in America but are not as "Aesthetically" driven in influence and design are those of Frederick Remington, August Saint-Gaudens, Daniel Chester French, and Joseph Henry Sharp which are scattered all over the United States. These homes are from the Victorian period and do feature a studio and some sort of domestic living space; however they are not of the grand "studio-house" trend *per se*. They are worth mentioning for the sake of general knowledge. For a general description of several of these properties, the best place to start is with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Historic Artists' Homes and Studios.⁴³

Of the studios previously mentioned, Olana, Elisabet Ney House, Daniel Chester French's Chesterwood, and C.M. Russell's log studio all participate as members of this National Trust for Historic Preservation program. The Joseph Henry Sharp studio-house, featured in a 1906 article in *The Craftsman*, the famous periodical produced by American

⁴² Ibid., 13.

⁴³ A comprehensive list may be found at www.preservationnation.org/historic_artists, or by telephoning (413) 298-3579 to request a brochure which organizes the properties by geographic region. The artists' studios in this list are from all different time periods, but several of the Victorian properties listed above are featured.

Arts and Crafts furniture maker Gustav Stickley, is maintained by the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody Wyoming.⁴⁴ The studio-cabin is open to the public for viewing. Frederic Remington's studio has also been recreated for the public at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center/Whitney Gallery of Western Art. The museum exhibit was created from objects taken from Remington's actual studio in New York City.⁴⁵ The National Park Service operates the studio-house museum of August Saint-Gaudens in Cornish, New Hampshire. Both Chesterwood and the home of Saint-Gaudens reflect more a beaux-arts or classical influence than the more Aesthetically derivative properties explored in detail in this thesis. Out of this brief review of museum studio-houses in America, it becomes obvious how rare truly Aesthetic era studio-houses are in the museum world and the historic house museum genre. The homes of Leighton, Church, Barney, and Ney are true historical treasures because they are the only studio-houses of their generation that are still extant and preserved in the public trust.

⁴⁴ Anon., "Our Home Department: A Real Lesson in House Building," *The Craftsman* 10 (June 1906): 408-412

⁴⁵ Buffalo Bill Historical Center website, <http://www.bbhc.org/visit/> (accessed February 9, 2012).

CHAPTER SIX

The End of the Studio-House Trend and the Horizons for its Future

In the final decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th, the artist's studio quickly faded into the past as a trend particular to the Victorian age. Studios, such as Chase's, were dismantled and the always fickle public moved on to glorifying new styles of art and design. As "modernity" emerged in the years leading up to World War I, the public no longer related to the excessive pomp, ornament, and artifice that the studio-house represented. J. Frank Lamb contends that the passing of all the artists of the Holland Park community in London was symbolic of the status of the Victorian art world as a whole. Lamb explains the fate of the "princes of bohemia," those who had constructed their "palaces of art":

The end of great popularity and large financial rewards seemingly came quickly—Victorian artists' memoirs are full of such remarks by the 1890s...After the trade recession of 1884-87, many established contemporary artists continued to earn large sums but the climate concerning art was more cautious than in the past...Younger artists, many no doubt with dreams of their own studio houses, were finding they could rarely command prices their elders had routinely expected.¹

Lamb also observed that the Royal Academy, the center of the British art establishment, an institution with which all the greats of the studio-house era had been associated with was suffering from increased criticism from the 1880s onwards. The novelty of these personalities and their homes wore thin after it had been imitated so many times. As

¹ J. Frank Lamb, "Lions in their Dens, Lord Leighton and late Victorian Studio Life," PhD dissertation (University of California Santa Barbara, 1987), 291-94.

Lamb comments, “How many times could one visit Leighton’s studio and remain impressed?”² Lamb’s observation could just as easily speak to a modern audience. Many members of the public, and scholars alike, do not see the value in visiting a historic house museum multiple times. Just like their late Victorian counterparts, many modern museum visitors view the studio-house/historic house museum genre as a tired form of interpretation and lacking in relevance and accessibility to the majority of the public. In direct relation to the beginning of the 20th century, the studio-houses and their respective artist creators seemed like a “hollow sham that in turn revealed the artist as fraud and poseur.”³

In America, similar events as to what happened in the United Kingdom transpired to bring about the death of the studio-house trend; however, another interesting component of the fall was the rise of significance of masculine values that came with the presidency of Teddy Roosevelt on which Sarah Burns elaborates in her essay in the volume *American Iconology*. After Roosevelt took office, many cultural leaders came to blame “the decline of virility on the refinements of peaceful civilization.”⁴ The environment of the artist’s studio became viewed as completely effeminate on account of the “abundant luxuries of artificial taste” and many people associated the studio as a space for females only. The studio-house transitioned from being viewed as a “sanctuary of art” to a “calculated showpiece of social and aesthetic commodities.” At the turn of

² Ibid.

³ Sarah Burns, “The Price of Beauty: Art, Commerce, and the Late 19th Century American Studio Interior,” in *American Iconology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 225.

⁴ Ibid., 227.

the century, artists who had been seduced by this artificial environment were now viewed as effeminate “sell-outs” instead of novel Bohemian geniuses.⁵

As in all historical periods, particularly in the world of art and fashion, each successive trend starts as a reaction to the previous one. Thus, after the height of the studio-house fad passed, it almost immediately became “faux pas” in the eyes of the art establishment. The Victorian style of art, design, and architecture as a whole was quickly seen as “old-fashioned” by those in artistic circles. Members of the public, in general, preferred modern styles of decoration, so different from what they viewed as the antiquated, stuffy, and overly ornate Victorian style. Artists determined that to be more authentic in the modern era would require a “stripping” down of the studio and all unnecessary ornament. Sarah Burns explains that, “Taste for materialistic splendor had now become the badge of an ‘American Philistine,’”⁶ or one who was completely tasteless and out of touch. The new “thing” for artists was working in a space that was completely “Spartan, bare, and not heaped full of ‘plunder.’”⁷ For an artist to be true and sincere in the modern age, he would have to live in a more austere and unembellished environment. In the coming years, America would enter into the phase of modernism and oddly enough, a simultaneous, “Colonial Revival” in an effort to stylistically return to a “simpler, older America.”⁸ During the next 50 years, Victorian preservationists in

⁵ Ibid., 236.

⁶ Ibid., 237.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

America would face a critical time in which many of these studio-houses would face the danger of destruction.

When many of the artists themselves died, their families struggled in maintaining their intensely personal and expensive properties after they were gone. In Britain, a large majority of young craftsmen who ascribed to the tenets of the Arts and Crafts Movement, that would have most likely been intent on upholding Aesthetic ideals, were shipped away to fight in the trenches of Europe in the Great War. In America, modernity swept through society like a wildfire and mass production became the way of life for most people, on a most basic level because factory-made goods were more affordable, especially compared to a “one of a kind” Aesthetic or Arts and Crafts style home and its interior furnishings.⁹ In London particularly, “neglect, commercial greed and failure both to acknowledge and admire these artists’ homes for the cultural monuments they are, [did] more to damage than any war.”¹⁰ As mentioned in the previous chapter, surprisingly, American preservationists seem to have been more concerned with keeping these studio-homes for future generations than their British counterparts, perhaps because our country is so much younger and these studio-homes are some of our versions of “castles.” Britain has so many more years of history that the Victorian era homes that reeked of opulence and “overkill” in the early 20th century must have seemed much more dispensable to them at the time showing again how subjective and fickle our society can

⁹ Giles Walkley, *Artists’ Houses in London 1764-1914* (Aldershot: Giles Walkley Press, 1994), 220-22.

¹⁰ Ibid.

be in yet another instance of thinking of preservation in terms of what the current society values at the time.

In the previous chapter, I have already described the fate of each individual studio-house examined in this thesis. However, in thinking of the future of these house museums as a whole, it is important to consider how each may stay relevant to our current cultural milieu. If the museums that exist currently attempt to merely “rest on their laurels” as beacons of great architecture, that will not be enough to secure their position of the future. While the study of Victorian era art and architecture is currently gaining credibility in academic and popular circles, it is certain that it will become “faux pas” again at some point in the future. For that reason, many museum professionals of my generation are looking for new ways to reinvent their studio-house museums in the preservation and conservation context. In the following section, I will give three such examples of museums who are currently adapting their concepts of preservation and interpretation in order to remain as relevant as possible in an ever-changing society. While many house museums are currently working towards similar goals, the following three museums prove to be exemplary in their efforts.

Interpretation and Conservation of Existing Studio-House Museums

Leighton House exists as a prime example for a studio-house museum, not only because it is the prime example of what a studio-house is, but also because it is an exemplary historic house museum that is making wise choices for the future. As mentioned previously, the house underwent extensive refurbishment in the 1980s and as

recently as 2009-2010.¹¹ In the most recent refurbishment, the house has been interpreted to appear how it actually looked when Lord Leighton lived in it. During a conversation this summer with the former assistant curator of the museum, Reena Suleman, she explained to me that the staff of the museum realized that the public wanted to see a museum that looked like a home. Visitors had expressed that they wanted to see how Leighton actually lived, seeing more than just a municipal looking gallery space. This summer I also visited “Red House,” the home of William Morris, located just outside of London. Red House is run by the National Trust, as an Aesthetic Era house museum, but it is not a “studio-house” by the strictest definition of the term on account of the fact that Morris did not consistently live and work in the home. However, because Leighton House and Red House were from the same art-historical movement, I wanted to explore how they differed in interpretation styles.

In comparison to Leighton House, a museum that is trying to greatly increase the aura of domesticity of the home through a series of refurbishments, Red House remains more of an empty shell. While it is admirable and contains many beautiful architectural elements, on account of William Morris being its creator, it does not have the “lived in” feel that Leighton House has achieved. Red House does contain a studio room, but it is being used as a temporary gallery space and is not interpreted to reflect Morris’s artistic process or its original appearance. Red House has the feel that Leighton House exuded pre-refurbishment. Although many visitors will come to Red House on account of its association with Morris, I surmise that more visitors would come if they could see the

¹¹ For the most detailed look at the story of the recent Leighton House refurbishment please see the book put out by the museum, *Closer to Home, The Restoration of Leighton House and Catalogue of Reopening Displays* (London: Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 2010).

story of the house played out by seeing a domestic looking home. The two differing approaches of Leighton House and Red House are very common challenges to those working in the historic house museum profession—to furnish or not to furnish, that is the question. Either approach has its pros and cons; however, I believe that the more domestic appearance is given to a home, the more visitors will be pulled into engaging the story of the inhabitants.

During the interview with Suleman, she also pointed out that although the refurbishment at Leighton House was highly desirable, it did not come without challenges. As was also previously described in chapter three, the majority of the original contents of the house had been dispersed at the time of Leighton’s death, so the staff faced the decision of how to furnish the house—with the debate of using reproductions versus period appropriate items to furnish the refurbished interior. The main issue with this conundrum was the fact that everything that had been in Leighton’s house when he was an occupant had been custom made and designed by himself or his architect friend, Aitchison. In refurbishment, some members of staff wanted to bring in antique furnishings that would have been similar to what Leighton might have actually owned. Other members of staff wanted to completely abstain from using any furnishings that could not be located in the new interpretation of the house for the sake of complete historical accuracy, such as Leighton’s custom built Aitchison desk. Other members of staff wanted to fill the house with a combination of period appropriate antiques and reproductions in order to give the house the most “domestic” appearance possible.¹²

¹² Reena Suleman, interview by author, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, U.K., June 2011.

This indication that Aesthetic movement like debates are still informing curatorial interpretation decisions in museums such as Leighton House shows that the theories of Aesthetic movement greats John Ruskin and William Morris are still alive today. Many historic house museums grapple with the “reproduction vs. original” debate when discussing how to re-furnish and interpret a historic house museum. This conundrum is particularly challenging when dealing with studio-house museums of the Aesthetic era because so many pieces were one-of-a kind, custom-made originals and the original intent of the artist creators and their architects was to hold true to the ideas of the Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic Movements in searching for the highest quality workmanship and materials to supply the production of the furnishing of their homes.

After a period of debate and research, the staff of Leighton House decided to keep with the idea of “closer to home” and embarked on refurnishing the house with a combination of reproductions and period appropriate antiques. Through their tireless efforts, many original pieces of the house were tracked down, largely by doing research on the sale catalogues from Christie’s auction house, who had performed the original Leighton sale. For pieces that could not be acquired, reproductions were created based on photos, museum archives, and Christie’s catalogue descriptions, such as the Aitchison desk and some of Leighton’s decorative Corot paintings which could not be brought back to the house because they were now in the possession of the National Gallery. Each room in the house, particularly the studio, was completely reimagined, refurbished and decorated based on photographs and drawings from the time of Leighton. In addition, the basement of the house was completely transformed from staff offices into the servant’s quarters, as it originally had been in Leighton’s day. In so doing, Leighton House was

conforming to the best practices of other historic house museums by trying to incorporate servants into a more inclusive interpretation narrative of the house.

I worked at the museum in 2006, but I went back to visit during the summer of 2011, and the difference in the house was astounding. The entire aura and purpose of the museum had shifted from gallery or cultural center to a true historic house museum. The persona of Leighton was truly able to come to life in such a rich and authentic setting. The museum may also be applauded for the variety of educational and cultural programming it provides for the community. Leighton House utilizes a vast array of programming options ranging from life drawing classes, concerts, tours led by actors in period dress, to avant-garde art exhibitions relating back to the house's connection with Islamic art and the Middle East, giving the museum a special relevance to the largely growing Middle Eastern population living in London today. Now, more than ever, the house is celebrating the life of the man who started it all, Lord Leighton, by devoting more effort to interpreting his life and his artistic accomplishments. Preservation and interpretation are ongoing events in studio-house museums, and Leighton House stands out as an extremely relevant and current museum that continues to intentionally reassess and engage with issues of interpretation and conservation.

Olana, Hudson, New York

Another example of a studio-house museum that is making significant efforts to remain relevant in modern culture is Olana, the home of Frederic E. Church in Hudson, New York. Like Leighton House, Olana is insistent on providing a variety of current and

relevant programming for the public to enjoy on the grounds of the massive estate.¹³ Being associated with the National Trust, they also uphold a certain reputation for excellence in preservation. However, one of the most interesting things about Olana is the fact that after the museum had only existed for four years, they had already fashioned a preservation policy by 1970. At that time, it was decided by the board of the museum that the house should only represent the period of Church's occupancy.¹⁴ This interpretive plan ensured that the museum would always be dedicated to showcasing the life and works of Church and the period to which the house was restored. At the same time, the curator, Richard Slavin III, was dedicated to "return[ing] the house and grounds to their appearance during Church's lifetime."¹⁵ The staff of Olana also used photographic evidence as a way to set up the house. Olana stands out as a museum that took initiative early in its history to be faithful to Church and the domestic setting he had created at Olana. Other house museums should look to that example so future confusion and conflict may be prevented. James A. Ryan, author of "A Master Plan for Olana," sums up the collections issue:

Olana State Historic Site's collections are an integral part of a single artistic vision unifying each aspect of the estate. The house and its grounds...are collection artifacts equal in importance to the more traditionally conceived collections at Olana of the artist/owner's works, works by other artists, decorative objects, books and manuscripts, and farm implements. The entire estate is a unified work of art.¹⁶

¹³ A visit to the museum's website, http://www.olana.org/news_events.php, gives a strong example of the type of events Olana is providing for the public (accessed January 22, 2012).

¹⁴ James A. Ryan, "Master Plan for Olana," 41.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 86.

As with Leighton House, the staff of Olana have been diligent in giving the home a domestic, lived-in appearance to insure that the public is seeing the most humanizing interpretation of Church possible. In his thesis, Thomas O’Sullivan explains that, “interpretation of the house requires continuing maintenance...with emphasis on Church’s last decades.” The staff of Olana wanted to present Church not as an eccentric hermit-like recluse “but as an artist whose seclusion resulted in the creation of a complex architectural identity.”¹⁷ The recreation of the studio was based on photographs from the time period, just as with Leighton House. While the museum started as being operated by the State of New York, it is now working in cooperation with the National Trust Historic Artists’ homes and studios program, and the staff of Olana present a comprehensive interpretation of the life and works of Church and the importance of his studio-house in that narrative. The museum now showcases:

[A]pproximately 800 of Frederic Church’s own finished canvases, pencil drawings, and oil sketches, which constitute the heart of the collections...around it are the collections of 1) sketches, drawings, paintings, and art objects created by other artists 2) furniture and furnishings of the period 3) books and other documents, including period photos, correspondence, bills, and architectural drawings 4) the collection of 19th century farm implements and vehicles. In all, Olana has more than 10,000 objects in its collections...¹⁸

Olana is a museum clearly committed to excellence in interpretation and historical accuracy. Olana also has an excellent website showcasing all they offer in educational

¹⁷ Thomas O’Sullivan, “The Studio Wing of Olana,” M.A. (State University of New York College at Oneonta at its Cooperstown Graduate Programs, 1980), 107.

¹⁸ James A. Ryan, “Master Plan for Olana,” 86.

programming and in their collection contained in the “integrated environment” of Church’s amazing studio-house and landscaped grounds.¹⁹

Elisabet Ney House, Austin, Texas

The last museum I would like to point out regarding relevance in interpretation and preservation is the Elisabet Ney House Museum in Austin, Texas. For many years, the museum existed as a gallery space for the Austin community of Hyde Park, showcasing the life and works of Ney. In this way, Elisabet Ney House was similar to Leighton House in their shared origins of municipality. However, in the last several years, Elisabet Ney House has chosen to move into a new direction of community involvement and a return to originality of architectural form and grounds. Although the way the home is interpreted has not changed since the time of the museum’s founding (i.e. the way the studio is furnished is set up based on a photo the friends of Ney took shortly after she died), the museum is seeking to reinvigorate itself by implementing a new strategic master plan last updated in 2011.²⁰

During my visit to Elisabet Ney House in October 2011, the education officer, Colin Haymes, showed me a copy of this new master plan which included everything from installing a new electrical system, to community involvement, to restoring the grounds of the museum to their original appearance. The curator of the museum, Mary Blackmon, also explained to me via an email interview that the museum is committed to upholding the principles of the Historic Artists’ Homes and Studios Program of the

¹⁹ Olana website <http://www.olana.org/> (accessed February 9, 2012).

²⁰ The goals of this master plan are available online at <http://www.austintexas.gov/department/parks-capital-improvement-projects> (accessed February 9, 2012).

National Trust, which was referenced in chapter four.²¹ On the website for the National Trust's Historic Artists' Homes and Studios Program, it states:

Historic Artists' Homes and Studios is a consortium of 30 of America's most significant artists' spaces that are open to the public and serve over 600,000 visitors each year. These extraordinary sites are the intimate living and work spaces of painters, sculptors, ceramicists, photographers, and furniture designers. They include superb collections and intact studios, landscapes, and homes dating as far back as the 17th century. Here, visitors may see original palettes and brushes, study plaster casts and tools, and look out of the artists' windows to partake of the views that inspired them.²²

Elisabet Ney Museum is certainly presenting the opportunity for visitors to be inspired by the views that would have inspired Ney herself. The museum also capitalizes on the intimacy of this studio-house. While not as grandiose or ornate as Olana or Leighton House, Ney's home is interpreted to reflect her earthy bohemian nature, truly channeling her artistic philosophy. In the email interview, curator Mary Blackmon also emphasized the value the museum places on "comprehensive restoration of the museum, comprehensive conservation treatment of the collection, and re-interpretation of the collection to provide a fuller, more complete understanding of Ney, her life, and her work."²³ To my knowledge, the collection at Elizabeth Ney Museum will remain as it is for the time being. Elisabet Ney Museum is not actively collecting but are actively reinterpreting and conserving their building and grounds. Their interpretive approach does differ slightly from Olana and Leighton House in that while the museum has extensive text panels and images on the life of Ney, they focus little on the furnishings of

²¹ Mary Blackmon, email message to author, November 2011.

²² Historic Artists' Home and Studios website, National Trust for Historic Preservation <http://www.preservationnation.org/travel-and-sites/sites/artists-homes.html> (accessed February 9, 2012).

²³ Mary Blackmon, email message to author, November 2011.

the original studio-house. Instead, more preference is given to Ney's works and the cultural setting she would have experienced while living in Austin. In this way, Elisabet Ney Museum is still more of a gallery space than a recreated domestic setting.

Unique Strengths and Challenges of Aesthetic Era Studio-House Museums

In examining this survey of Aesthetic era studio-house museums in the United Kingdom and the United States, I have concluded on some of the unique strengths and challenges of working in this particular niche of the historic house museum world. I will first address the challenges, some of which have been touched on briefly throughout this thesis, but will be summarized again here. The first challenge facing museum professionals working in a studio-house museum is choosing what style museum the studio-house should be. Should the studio-house museum be interpreted for the public as a traditional historic house museum? A fully furnished domesticized space? An art gallery? A municipal library or cultural events space? Or perhaps as an empty shell with no furnishings to appeal to architecture enthusiasts? These decisions will all depend on each institution's board of directors, staff, and visiting public. However, because these studio-house museums could be all or any of these sorts of institutions, creating mission and programming decisions could be a challenge. Because the stories of studio-houses span many varying topics and narratives, creating programming which remains relevant to the museum's mission and accessible to each studio-house museum's surrounding community could also be a challenge for museum professionals working in these environments.

Studio-house museums also face unique interpretive challenges. When museum professionals attempt to interpret such a personalized and creative space as the studio-

house, understanding the creator's original intents and purposes can become muddled, especially since hundreds of years have passed since these homes were designed and constructed. Museum staff must depend on primary source documentation and any kind of link to the original creator, such as living family members, to continue to interpret the house and its accompanying story, with the most accuracy possible.

In looking at homes that have their furnishings, such as Olana, museum staff must face the challenge of dealing with countless items to care for and maintain in their collections. Victorians in general were greatly interested in amassing large amounts of material objects. The Aesthetes took this concept to an extreme by obtaining magnificent, costly collections, including their studio-houses filled with numerous works of art, furnishings, and decorations. For those studio-houses that became museums, they must now constantly reevaluate how to care for and maintain these vast and varied collections.

The main challenge facing studio-house museums is funding, just as is the case with most non-profits and museums in general. Studio-houses require extremely large amounts of money just to stay financially secure. Many of the homes would be more financially stable if they had endowments to draw from; however, this has not been the case in many studio-house scenarios. The most minimal levels of maintenance and conservation become extremely expensive when dealing on the grand scale of a studio-house and its furnishings. Some studio-houses depend on earned income from events or facility rentals to keep afloat financially. A relatively small visiting public does not ensure enough income to care for and maintain these "palaces of art." Any refurbishment will cost thousands, if not millions of dollars, and studio-house museums must look

increasingly to government money or grants to fund these highly expensive, but imperative, projects.

On a more positive note, studio-house museums also present some very unique strengths. The museum profession is indebted to these studio-houses and their creators for providing the modern museum profession with some important precedents. The creators of studio-houses were some of the first individuals to set real standards in connoisseurship and collecting practices. In regard to exhibit design, studio-house artists were some of the first to use a sort of “diorama” of exoticism, a still-life of *objets d’art*, to present to the visiting public a “real life” cabinet of curiosity to explore while visiting their homes. From a visitor relations and education standpoint, these artists were some of the first to really use the public to their advantage. They allowed the public to “peep” into their lives and artistic processes in order to better educate and network with them about their art, using their studio-houses as the venue and showcase point.

The most important aspect of a studio-house museum is that it is the “whole package” of the museum experience. It has all elements of many types of historic house museums. While most historic house museums are only able to bank on a specific type of identifying characteristic, such as a famous historical event or figure associated with the property, studio-house museums can bank on multiple identifying museological characteristics--such as how the homes speak to the historical and art historical context of the Victorian period or the fact that there were many famous and notable individuals who designed, lived in, entertained, and visited these studio-houses. Studio-houses are much more expressive of their creator than the typical historic house and this fact speaking to the unique significance these properties possess.

These studio-homes are architecturally and aesthetically outstanding creations that are the epitome of all the Aesthetic era represents. They are combination gallery, historic house museum, cultural center, and spiritualized space designed to capture the imagination and fancy of all who visit. In these ways, the environment of the studio-house is irreplaceable. Never before or since the Aesthetic era has society been able to engage with this sort of space. It is my hope that the studio-houses which remain as museums will be preserved and maintained so that future generations will be able to interact with the inimitable environment of the Aesthetic era studio-house.

Summaries and Conclusions

In this thesis, I have attempted to explore the implications these studio-houses provide for historic house museums in general. Charlotte Gere, in *Artistic Circles* explains, “Rooms as autobiography reinforce the idea of a cultivated and socially sophisticated character as well as commitment to work. Such images appear not to be merely documentary, snapshots of the creative process, but convey complex messages about fame versus integrity.”²⁴ The rooms of these houses tell us more than just about the artist himself. They speak to the artistic process, the inner workings of the minds of artistic geniuses, and the power of fashion and trend over the mass of society as well as to the functioning of everyday life in the Victorian era. They also have much to speak to on the power of conservation and preservation.

From studying these homes, we may learn that just because a style or form becomes unfashionable in one generation that does not mean it is not worth preserving or

²⁴ Charlotte Gere, *Artistic Circles*, 81.

studying in the next. Any one of these homes studied in this thesis would certainly be praiseworthy on account of its architectural, historical, and design significance. In looking back on all the homes that were lost, perhaps we may see the importance of advocating preservation in the future. These rooms can be the best form of biography we may ever have of these artists, and once they are gone, they are lost—never to be accessible again.

In an article written about Chesterwood, the studio-house of sculptor Daniel Chester French, author William Gerdtz explains the unique power of studio-house museums in general. He states:

In a studio museum one has the opportunity to study an individual artist in depth, to relate his artistic output to his life and to judge their interaction...the preserved home-studio is least susceptible to the pressures of commercial museology...The greatest pleasure often comes from the studio-homes of artists whose lives and art may not be especially well known, and where real revelations can, and do, take place.²⁵

Gerdtz accurately explains the importance of understanding the artist in totality—which is impossible just by examining one or two of his or her works in an ordinary museum or gallery visit, and this more holistic understanding may only be fully accomplished by visiting the unique environment of the studio-house museum. In a studio-house museum, one can see how the artist lived and worked while also being exposed to the artworks that would be museum or gallery worthy—all in one place. In comparison to the previously quoted Frank Lamb, who observes that one visit to an artist's studio is sufficient for many people, Gerdtz stands at the opposite end of the spectrum to Lamb insisting that the studio space is a place for deep revelations, most likely coming from repeated visits.

²⁵ William H. Gerdtz, "Daniel Chester French and Chesterwood," *Historic Preservation, quarterly of the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings* 22 (January-March 1970): 27.

Attendance at studio-house museums can also ebb and flow with the tide of popular opinion concerning the artist's works. For example, a new generation has been exposed to these artists with the rising popularity and reemergence of exhibits concerning works like Church's *The Icebergs* or Leighton's *Flaming June*. With this sort of rising popularity, the future looks hopeful for the study of Victorian artists and the continued preservation of their homes.

Wanda Corn explains that for so many years, artists' studios were seen as "culturally disposable" because on the whole, art historians, museum professionals, and curators have valued the objects-the paintings, sculptures and other artistic works themselves-over "artistic labor"²⁶ or the artistic process represented by the studio. I agree with Corn, that in making the conclusion of my own thesis journey, that, "The challenge faces all of us, then...to inspire a greater understanding for the hard work of making art and to preserve and restore studios because they have so much to teach us."²⁷ Corn describes the "sacredness" and "awe" which only these unique spaces can provide for the students of art and history alike. Perhaps some sort of centralized agency should be created to account for the well-being of endangered artists' properties and the communities which they are a part of.²⁸ In so doing, we might enable generations after us to enjoy and appreciate not only the artist's works and the objects associated with them, but the full persona of the artist and all that he represents and speaks to in the realm of

²⁶ Wanda Corn, "The Artist's Workplace, An Endangered Species," 38.

²⁷ Ibid., 41.

²⁸ Ibid.

material culture and museology celebrating the “spirit of vigorous experimentation”²⁹ of these Victorian studio-houses and their artists.



Figure 13. Leighton's studio, 1895.

²⁹ Thomas O'Sullivan, "The Studio Wing of Olana," 75.

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