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Original Articles

"I could Paint Still Life as well as any one on Earth": Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the World of Art

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Perkins. Perkins was himself a gifted artist, and several of his sketches and drawings of cottages, landscapes, wildlife, and human figures survive in the collection of Gilman Papers at the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe Institute.

³One of the experiences that emerged as a result of her attendance at the Rhode Island School of Design was a 2-week stint in late 1878, when Gilman was employed by a marble works company to assist in the design of marble monuments. She also taught drawing in a small private school and provided private art lessons, which became a way to generate revenue over the course of many years.

⁴Caroline Hazard (1856–1945), was a philanthropist, educator, and author. Educated by private tutors at Mary A. Shaw's School in Providence, and later, through private study in Europe, Hazard assumed the presidency of Wellesley College in 1899.

⁵The exaggerated racial features in the Columbia and Universal Family and in the two Black Princess in French Crate cards are also consistent with the artistic patterns found in the original sketches at Radcliffe Institute of the Lady and the Clothesline. For additional information on Gilman's racism, see my article, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Shadow of Racism." See also Susan Lanser's article, "Feminist Criticism, 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' and the Politics of Color in America."

⁶While we have virtually conclusive evidence that Gilman designed at least three of the cards—the Archer Hits Dirt, the Wizard, and the Maid—others, such as the Black Princess, contain a strong similarity to her work and identify as Gilman's. The Archer Hits Dirt, the Wizard, and the Maid are short stories of hers. The Archer Hits Dirt, the Wizard, and the Maid are also contained in the Gilman Papers. The Archer Hits Dirt, the Wizard, and the Maid are identified by Cheadle as being of May 27, 1881. It is likely that the Archer Hits Dirt, the Wizard, and the Maid are pages 16–18 of Ch...



once again featured. These cards include Fisherman at Dew Drop Inn, Stump Flirtations, Farmers' Picnic on French Crate, Yellow Arch—Wash Girl Holds Box, Animated Soap Bars—Clothesline, Man in Pillory—Spider, Black Princess in French Crate, Kids Play Telephone on French Crates, Ironing Day—Kids on French Crate, Watering Plants in Soap Boxes, Sponge Battle—Wash Tubs—Home Soap Crate, Splashing Rain Barrel, Soapine Ship Flag, and Soapine Telegraph. Many of the cards also contain subtle humor—a trademark in many of the non-Soapine drawings that remain in the collection of Gilman papers. Indeed, a number of humorous or whimsical figures that Gilman drew survive in the archives. As Cheadle and Lee point out, other “common threads seem to tie these designs into a single grouping,” such as the appearance of soap crates in the cards.

⁷For example, the word “Soapine” is spelled out by swallows in the Soapine “telegraph” card, by stars in the wizard card, by clothing in the “clothesline,” and by mantel objects in the “dusting knick-knack” cards.

⁸One of Gilman's favorite pasttimes, for example, was producing what she referred to as “double drawings,” an amusing exercise that yielded some surprising results. As she described in her autobiography, the activity required two people and a sheet of paper, which was folded in half horizontally. The first person would draw a head and a body down to the waist on the top half of the paper, “leaving the sides indicated; and then the other [person] finished the legs, not knowing in the least what the [top half] was like” (Liv



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Stetson married Charlotte Anna Perkins [Gilman] on May 2, 1884, and Grace Ellery Channing in the spring of 1894, shortly after his divorce from Gilman. Grace Ellery Channing Stetson is sometimes erroneously credited as the author and editor of *Gems of Art*. To complicate matters further, the Library of Congress's on-line catalogue incorrectly identifies the Mrs. Stetson who edited *Gems of Art* as Grace Ellery Channing Stetson. Thus, the second Mrs. Stetson, herself an editor and author of stories and poems, is today credited with publishing a book that was actually edited and compiled by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. Letters to Katharine Beecher Stetson Chamberlin. 28 April 1921; 6 June 1933; 11 March 1934. Gilman Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge, MA

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*. Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1898. Reprint, with an introduction by Carl N. Degler. New York: Harper & Row, 1966

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