

June 2021



Dear Club Members,

Ninety five years ago, artist Mary Cassatt died.

Edgar Degas said of her work "I don't believe a woman could draw that well. Did you really do this?". That about sums up the attitudes towards female artists, professional art seems to be extraordinarily over-dominated by men. It's not that women didn't create art, just that the establishment never seems to have allowed them to access to the institutions where they could make names for themselves.

Mary Cassatt was born in 1844, and was an American printmaker and painter. She's one of the leading artists of the Impressionist movement. . . who I had never heard of. At school we studied many Impressionist painters, her name was never mentioned, and her paintings are glorious. As ever the extended reading section has some links, go and look at her work. This woman is as talented as any of the male names that we can all reel off with no second thought.

Cassatt was born in to an upper middle class family in Pennsylvania, her mother had been well educated, and by all accounts was also a very talented artist. She ensured her daughter also benefitted from an extensive education, and one where travel played a key role, she spent 5 years in Europe as a child.

She began studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1859, aged just 15. She was not alone in being a female student, around 20% of her classmates were also women, but for most it was a way to learn a skill that could be used socially. Few had aspirations to be a professional artist. Female students were not allowed to paint from live models, they learnt how to draw the human form working from casts.

She left the Academy without graduating, frustrated at the tuition she was receiving, and moved to Paris in 1866 with her mother as chaperone. She regularly submitted work to the Paris Salon, but had little success, only one painting was accepted during several years of submission.

She later returned to Paris, where her father paid her living expenses, but refused to buy art supplies. She was determined to earn her living as an artist, but had little luck selling her paintings. However in 1871 the Roman Catholic Bishop Michael Domenec of Pittsburgh, commissioned her to make two copies of Correggio paintings in Italy. This financed her return to Europe.

She lived in Europe for a number of years, vainly trying to attract the attention of the Parisian Salon jurors, to no avail. It's at this point in time that she becomes inspired by the work of the Impressionist painters, especially Edgar Degas. Under his guidance she began to learn the art of printmaking, especially dry point etching. Cassatt displayed 11 works at the 1879 Impressionist exhibition, and remained an active member of the Impressionist circle. She remained close to Degas throughout both their lives.

Her reputation grew, particularly in her home country, where she began to regularly exhibit and accept commissions. She was an outspoken supporter of the women's suffrage movements and exhibited 15 paintings in an exhibition organised by Louise Havemeyer in support of the suffrage movement. She continued to paint until 1914, when she was forced to stop due to increasing blindness.

She is renowned for her paintings of female life, particularly women and children. Cassatt was also one of the key drivers to the success of Impressionism in America, and is one of the main reasons why so many Impressionist paintings are now found in museums like MOMA. She used her family connections to encourage wealthy Americans to start collecting art, and acted as advisor to many collectors.

She is a woman whose name we should know, and whose art deserves the utmost admiration. Your fibre today is inspired by one her works called Summertime, painted in 1894. Two women are leaning out of a boat looking at some ducks and the water is a mass of beautiful shades of lilac with yellow orange highlights.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Further Reading/ Watching-

A summary of her life and work- <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/10-things-you-might-not-know-about-mary-cassatt/1wJSL2AtXwWjA>

Her complete works- <https://www.marycassatt.org/the-complete-works.html>

Biography- <https://www.marycassatt.org/biography.html>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/france-s-forgotten-impressionist-the-art-of-mary-cassatt-1.3512408>

<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/cassatt-mary/>

Paintings held at the National Gallery of Art-

[https://www.nga.gov/features/slideshows/mary-cassatt-selected-paintings.html#slide\\_4](https://www.nga.gov/features/slideshows/mary-cassatt-selected-paintings.html#slide_4)

A critique of the lack of recognition given to her-

<https://www.frieze.com/article/overlooked-radicalism-impressionist-mary-cassatt>

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label

75% Superwash Merino

25% Bamboo Viscose