

No Man's Land

a series of paintings by Kate Milsom



INTRODUCTION

The 'No Man's Land' Series by Kate Milsom

The idea behind this series is to celebrate remarkable people who have challenged gender stereotyping in order to live lives of adventure and professional discovery. The initial inspiration came from an article on Rose de Freycinet who joined her husband's round-the-world scientific voyage illegally, dressed as a man. Thinking she might make a good subject for a painting, I discovered I could find only one small likeness of her. This led me to wonder how many other unconventional historical figures had been similarly neglected and, ultimately, to start working on this alternative gallery of portraits.

Unsurprisingly, the series features many women who have dressed as men to be able to pursue education or careers that would have been denied to them otherwise. Throughout history there are scores of women who have assumed male identities simply in order to survive financially. There are also literary women, such as Amy Dillwyn and Florence Dixie, who have used their own experiences to champion women's rights.

The series includes portraits of both men and women for whom gender identity was at best irrelevant and at worst significantly limiting to their ideas of personal freedom and sexuality. All are united by their disregard for societal norms – for a variety of reasons and to a greater or lesser extent – and they dressed accordingly. For many of these advocates of freedom and equality, 'doing' was far more important than personal recognition or social acceptance, the antithesis to our current 'selfie' generation.

Christina and the Crown

Oil & mixed media on gesso board
51cm x 41cm (unframed size)

Christina, King of the Swedes, Goths and Vandals

1626 - 1689 (Reign: 1632 - 1654) Christina is celebrated as one of the most educated women of the 1600's. Intelligent yet also strident and moody, she rejected the stereotypical behaviours expected from a female of her time and position. She outraged many by her extraordinary manners and habit of dressing in men's clothing, and scandalised her court by first deciding not to marry and ultimately abdicating in 1654 in order to publicly worship as a Roman Catholic, at which point she moved to Rome.

Christina was the third daughter and only surviving child of her parents. Initially pronounced a boy at birth due to an abundance of dark hair and a strong, hoarse voice, her mother became deeply depressed when the mistake was corrected and would have little to do with her for the rest of her life.

Her father King Gustavus Adolfus however, with his well-earned reputation as a pragmatist, simply declared "She'll be clever, she has made fools of us all!". For her first 6 years until his untimely death at The Battle of Lützen, Christina and her father shared a close relationship, in which, officially recognised as his female heir, she was treated exactly the same as if she had been a son. She was thus educated as if she had been a Royal Male, learning at least 8 languages and being described by one tutor as having "a bright intelligence... She is not at all like a female".

Although called "Queen," the official title she held as of her coronation by the Riksdag in February 1633 was in fact King.

Christina and the Courtesan

Oil & mixed media on gesso board
51cm x 41cm (following pages left)

Ninon de Lenclos (1620 - 1705) was a French author, freethinker, and patron of the arts. She had a succession of notable and wealthy lovers including the Marquis de Villarceaux. On ending their affair he reportedly fell into such a fever that to console him Ninon cut off her hair and sent it to him, starting a vogue for bobbed hair. Her nonconformist views and lifestyle led to her imprisonment in the Madelonnettes Convent in 1656 at the behest of Anne of Austria. Not long after, however, she was visited by Christina, who was so impressed by both her beauty and mental capacity, that she wrote to Cardinal Mazarin and arranged for her release.

Christina and the Popes

Oil & mixed media on gesso board
51cm x 41cm (following pages right)

At the age of 28, the "Minerva of the North" having converted to Catholicism, relinquished her throne, and moved to Rome. The Pope described Christina as "a queen without a realm, a Christian without faith, and a woman without shame." She became a leader of theatrical and musical life in Rome and protected many artists, composers, and musicians. She petitioned Pope Clement X to prohibit the custom of chasing Jews through the streets at carnival and issued a declaration that Roman Jews were under her protection. Being the guest of 4 consecutive Popes, and a symbol of the Counter Reformation, she is one of only 4 women buried in the Vatican grotto.







François Timoléon de Choisy 1644 - 1724

Oil & mixed media on gesso board

34.5cm x 30cm

De Choisy was a French transvestite, abbé, and author. As was the usual practice from the mid 16th century until the early 20th century, young boys in the Western world were 'unbreeched' and wore gowns or dresses until an age that varied between two and eight. What was unusual however, and has been attributed to a whim of his mother's, was that the young François continued to be dressed in female attire throughout his adolescence.

Her reasons might have been political, as proffering the young François as a playmate for her friend Anne of Austria's son Philippe I Duc d'Orleans (known as little Monsieur) would no doubt further her own position at court. Queen Anne, referred to Philippe as "my little girl" and encouraged him also to dress in feminine costume, because it was seen to reduce any potential threat he may have posed to his older brother, King Louis XIV.

Extravagant 'play-dates' were arranged with Mme de Choisy using her son as a small instrument of courtly diplomacy. "I was dressed as a girl," recounts Choisy, "every time that little Monsieur came to our house, and he came twice or thrice a week. I had my ears pierced, and wore diamonds, patches, and all the little gewgaws to which one becomes easily used and which one parts with so hardly. Monsieur, who loved all that, showed me boundless friendship."

As an adult, De Choisy took up male dress briefly whilst pursuing his studies, but soon went back to his preferred female clothing. He enjoyed a brief acting career in which he

delighted in fooling a troop of male admirers. Many young women of the day would call on him for fashion advice, encouraged by their mothers. He enjoyed their company greatly, and at least one pregnancy was produced from these visits. Eventually however his increasingly extravagant toilettes and exhibitionist behaviour earned him a public rebuke and exile from Paris.

He visited Rome in 1676, and shortly afterwards a serious illness brought about a sudden conversion to religion. In 1685, in a rather ill-considered attempt to redeem his reputation, he accompanied the Chevalier de Chaumont on a mission to Siam to try to convert the King to Catholicism. He was ordained priest, and received various ecclesiastical preferments, but the mission itself was a dismal failure, both diplomatically and financially.

He wrote a number of historical and religious works, but is most remembered for his gossipy 'Memoires', in which he draws vivid portraits of his contemporaries and are filled with fascinating details of court life at the time. The accounts of his adventures as a woman are credited as the first transvestite diaries.



Julie d'Aubigny - La Maupin 1670 - 1707

Oil & mixed media on gesso board

44.5cm x 32.5cm

Julie d'Aubigny (1670/1673–1707), better known as Mademoiselle Maupin or La Maupin, was a 17th century swords woman and opera singer. Her tumultuous career and flamboyant life were the subject of gossip and colourful stories in her own time, and inspired numerous portrayals afterwards.

Her father, Gaston d'Aubigny, was a secretary to the Comte d'Armagnac, the Master of the Horse for King Louis XIV. An accomplished swordsman, he trained the court pages, and educated the young Julie alongside the boys. She dressed as a boy and excelled at fencing from an early age. The household moved to the court to Versailles in 1682, and from then on she spent much of her youth in the Great Stables (Grande Écurie).

By the age of 14 she had become d'Armagnac's mistress. In 1687 he arranged for her to marry the timid sieur de Maupin before promptly dispatching him to the provinces and a stimulating job in tax collection. Some accounts claim he was sent off the morning after the wedding.

At around the same time D'Aubigny became involved with an assistant fencing master named Sérannes. Shortly afterwards he was accused of killing a man in an illegal duel, and the couple fled to Marseille, making a living by giving fencing exhibitions and singing in taverns.

She began her singing career with the Marseille Opéra, and her early appearances on stage were admired, particularly by one young woman with whom she fell in love. The girl's family quickly packed her off to a convent in Avignon. Julie followed, entering as a postulate. One night after an elderly nun died, the pair stole the body, placed it in the girl's cell and set fire to the

convent, and escaped. They were on the run for three months and Julie was sentenced to death in absentia by the parliament in Provence under the name sieur de Maupin, as the judges couldn't quite admit the possibility of one woman abducting another – let alone from a convent.

The girl was returned to her family eventually, and Julie persuaded her old lover, d'Armagnac to arrange a pardon for her. There are a string of stories of her subsequent wild adventures and affairs with both men and women.

Through her liaison with Gabriel-Vincent Thévenard, himself an opera singer, Julie was hired by the Paris Opéra in 1690. She sang for the court at Versailles on a number of occasions, and again performed in many of the Opéra's major productions. She appeared for the last time in La Vénitienne by Michel de La Barre (1705).

In 1703 she fell in love with Madame la Marquise de Florensac, the "most beautiful woman in France". The two women lived, according to one account, in perfect harmony for two years, until de Florensac died of a fever.

Distraught by the death of her lover, La Maupin entered a convent where she died at the age of 33, in the words of one biographer, "destroyed by an inclination to do evil in the sight of her God and a fixed intention not to", after which, he claims, "her body was cast upon the rubbish heap" (Gilbert 1932).

see Kelly Gardiner <https://kellygardiner.com/fiction/books/goddess/the-real-life-of-julie-daubigny/>



Mary Read 1685 - 1721 (this page)

Ann Bonny 1702 - 1782(?) (facing page)

Oil & mixed media on gesso board

35.5cm x 30cm

Mary Read was born in London and was passed off as a boy by her mother in order to collect child support from her dead half-brother's grandparents. After a stint with the British military, she married a sailor and began living as a woman. Her husband died young, and the widow Read once again disguised herself as a man and joined the military. Upon leaving the service, she drifted into a pirate's life, joining "Calico" Jack Rackham's ship, where she later met Ann Bonny.

Irish-born Ann Bonny had married a brigand named James Bonny as a teenager and moved from her home in South Carolina to the Caribbean. Here she met and subsequently eloped with Rackham early in 1720 dressing as a man to enable her to join his crew.

In October 1720, when Anne was about eighteen years old, Rackham and his crew, including the two women, were attacked by a "King's ship". Most of Rackham's pirates put up little resistance as many of them were too drunk to fight. However, Read and Bonny fought fiercely and managed to hold off Barnett's troops for a short time.

Rackham and his crew were taken to Jamaica, where they were sentenced to be hanged. According to Johnson, Bonny's last words to the imprisoned Rackham were: "Had you fought like a man, you need not have been hang'd like a dog." Bonny and Read both won a stay of execution due to pregnancy (pleading their bellies).



Read died in prison, possibly from childbirth complications. Bonny disappeared from court records. It is believed that her parents may have bought her freedom, but there are no official documents on her fate.



Ladies who Circumnavigate

Oil & mixed media on gesso board

61.5cm x 33cm

Jeanne Baré (or Baret) 1740 - 1803

Jeanne Baré 1740 - 1803 was a member of Louis Antoine de Bougainville's expedition on the ships *La Boudeuse* and *Étoile* in 1766 - 1769. Recognized as the first woman to have completed a voyage of circumnavigation of the globe, she enlisted as valet and assistant to the expedition's naturalist, Philibert Commerçon, (she had formerly been his house keeper and was most likely his lover) disguised as a man. According to Bougainville's account, Baré was herself an expert botanist, and with his intervention, she became the first woman known to have received a state pension on account of her service to the advancement of knowledge, despite the illegality of her voyage. Bougainville justified her presence thus... "She will be the only one of her sex to do this and I admire her determination. The Court will, I think, forgive her for these infractions to the ordinances. Her example will hardly be contagious. She is neither ugly nor pretty and is not yet 25."

Rose de Freycinet 1794 - 1832

Some 50 years later, a newly wed Rose de Freycinet, too in love to bear the long separation of a three year scientific voyage around the world, created a scandal in Paris when she disguised herself as a sailor and snuck on board a French corvette, captained by her husband Louis. Abiding by protocol, Rose's name and image were erased from the voyage's official drawings and reports, however her letters and diaries detailing observations in the Pacific Islands and particularly of Sydney have since become the first written account by a woman of a circumnavigation of the globe.

*Jeanne Baré is represented (right) with various discoveries from the voyage; a flowering vine which they named *Bougainvillea* after the ship's commander Louis-Antoine, Comte de Bougainville, Commerson's dolphin - *Cephalorhynchus commersonii*, Commerson's leaf-nosed bat - *Hipposideros commersoni* and the extinct Mauritius owl (*Mascarenotus sauzieri*), also called Commerson's Owl. Commerçon did name a discovery for Baré - the genus *Baretia*. Unfortunately, Commerson's *Baretia* was never published, because it was found, on the specimen's return to Paris, that the genus had previously been identified under another name.*

*Rose de Freycinet represented (left) with compass and telescope sailed aboard the *Uranie*, In 1817, on a mission to obtain observations, not only in geography and ethnology, but in astronomy, terrestrial magnetism, and meteorology. During the return voyage the ship was lost and the entire crew were stranded on the Falkland Islands for three months. Supplies ran short and as they scavenged the desolate island for sustenance Rose noted in one diary entry "...seal flesh does not appeal to the crew. Not surprisingly, for it tastes quite unpleasant."*



James Barry 1789 - 1865

Oil & mixed media on gesso board
45.5cm x 37cm

Dr. James Miranda Steuart Barry (November 9, 1795 – 25 July 1865, born Margaret Ann Bulkley) was a military surgeon in the British Army, born in Ireland. Although Barry's entire adult life was lived as a man, Barry was named Margaret Ann Bulkley, at birth and was known as female in childhood. Barry lived as a man in both public and private life, with Barry's birth sex only becoming known to the public and to military colleagues after death through autopsy.

Barry was born to Jeremiah and Mary-Ann Bulkley, and christened Margaret Anne. His uncle James Barry, was the celebrated Irish artist and professor of painting at London's Royal Academy. The family was educated and well-connected, but financially hard up. Barry's interest in medicine was encouraged by the liberal-minded friends of the late James Barry RA, and before travelling to Edinburgh to enroll as a medical student in 1809, Barry assumed a male identity, James Barry, and remained known thus for the next 56 years.

On 2 July 1813, Barry successfully passed the examination of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. He was commissioned as a Hospital Assistant in the British Army on 6 July 1813, achieving a promotion to Assistant Surgeon to the Forces, by December 1815.

He was subsequently posted to Cape Town, South Africa in 1816. Among other achievements Barry performed one of the first known successful Caesarean sections in which both mother and child survived. By 1851, he had made the rank of Deputy Inspector-General of Hospitals. On a visit to the Scutari Hospital, Crimea, an argument took place between Barry and

Florence Nightingale. After Barry's death Nightingale wrote that: "I never had such a blackguard rating in all my life...I should say that (Barry) was the most hardened creature I ever met."

Barry was outraged by unnecessary suffering, and his heavy-handed approach often incited anger from officials; on several occasions Barry was both arrested and demoted for the extremity of this behaviour. He held strict views about nutrition, being completely vegetarian and teetotal, and, while keeping most personal relationships distant, was very fond of pets, particularly a beloved poodle named Psyche.

Barry never allowed anyone into the room while undressing, and instructed that in the event of his death, strict precautions be adopted to prevent any examination of his person. However the maid who laid the body out, disgruntled for not being paid, took her discovery that Barry was in her opinion biologically female to the press.

After the matter was made public, many people claimed to have "known it all along". The British Army, seeking to suppress the story, sealed all records of Barry for the next 100 years.



Amy Dillwyn 1845 - 1935

Oil & mixed media on gesso board
33cm x 30.5cm

Elizabeth Amy Dillwyn, born into a family of liberal and Quaker values, was a Welsh novelist, businesswoman, and social benefactor. She was one of the first female industrialists in Britain.

By her early 40's she had already published five novels, where feminist concerns predominated through nonconformist female protagonists, and themes of crusading social reform, unrequited love, and criticism of the upper classes. Dillwyn also contributed anonymously to the Spectator during the 1880's.

However, in 1892, her father, a Liberal MP, and the owner of the Dillwyn Spelter Works at Swansea, died, leaving the family estate entailed away and enormous personal debts. Undaunted by her sudden poverty and conventional views as to women in business, she took it upon herself to save the Spelter Works, safeguarding the livelihoods of over 200 employees, paying off all her father's debts and turning the company into profit in less than ten years. She reluctantly sold her shares in 1905 knowing that it would ensure more security for the business than she alone could guarantee.

When the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies was formed at the turn of the century, Dillwyn joined as one of the earliest supporters in Wales. She commanded enormous respect during her lifetime through her determination to work for social justice and the public good. Her unorthodox appearance in trilby hat and stout boots, her habitual smoking of cigars and her lifestyle in general drew the attention of the press throughout her life, with the Pall Mall Gazette naming her "one of the most remarkable women in Great Britain".

Amy Dillwyn represented (right) in 1892, dressed in a bright purple skirt, sporting a yellow rose in her belt and flowers in her hat to attend the public funeral of her father, the eminent Liberal MP, Lewis Llewellyn Dillwyn. This was a bold and purposeful statement on her part where strict black mourning was the norm, and created a scandal in the national press. Dillwyn was protesting against the Victorian cult of death, whose conventions demanded elaborate funeral and mourning arrangements, and which plunged working-class families into debt as they struggled to purchase all the trappings a "respectable" send-off required. Much to her amusement, her nonconformity continued to be noted throughout her life, with newspaper headlines such as "Woman and the Cigar: A Literary Business Woman who Delights in the Weed". Unperturbed by public opinion as to 'lady-like' behaviour she led a trip to Algeria at the age of 59, visiting mines and riding astride a donkey into the Atlas Mountains to secure supplies of calamine for the Spelter Works.

Olive Talbot (1842 - 1894) represented (left) was a philanthropist who, among other good works, used her inheritance to support building and restoration projects at churches in Glamorgan. She was physically disabled and confined with a spinal condition for much of her life. She was also Dillwyn's neighbour and friend to whom Amy bore a long-term, but very probably unrequited, attachment. Dillwyn, who never married, her fiancé having died in 1864, referred to Olive in her diary entries as her "wife".

see research by Dr.Kirsti Bohata at swansea.ac.uk



Jane & Marcel Dieulafoy (1851 - 1916) & (1844 - 1920)

Marcel and Jane (right), Jane & Marcel (opposite)

Oil & mixed media on gesso board

60cm x 52cm each

Jane Dieulafoy (29 June 1851 – 25 May 1916) was a French archaeologist, explorer, novelist and journalist. She was the wife of Marcel-Auguste Dieulafoy. Together with her husband, she is known for her excavations at Susa.

She married Marcel Dieulafoy in May 1870. That same year, the Franco-Prussian War began. Marcel volunteered, and was sent to the front. Jane accompanied him, wearing a soldier's uniform and fighting by his side. The Dieulafoys first visited Persia in 1881, and would return twice after that. For her contributions to archaeology, the French government conferred upon her the title of Chevalier of the Legion of Honor in 1886.

During her travels abroad, Jane Dieulafoy preferred to dress in men's clothing and wear her hair short, because it was difficult for a woman to travel freely in a Muslim country. She kept dressing in men's clothing when she came back in France. This was against the law in France at the time, but when she returned from the Middle East she received special "permission de travestissement" from the prefect of police.

It is difficult to determine Jane's motives for preferring men's clothing. She wrote, "I only do this to save time. I buy ready-made suits and I can use the time saved this way to do more work" but, given that she includes many characters who cross-dress in her fiction her motives appear to be more complex.

Dieulafoy considered herself an equal to her husband, but was also fiercely loyal to him. She called herself Marcel's collaborateur, using the masculine form of the word



deliberately, saying "a [female] collaborator would have been an annoyance." She was opposed to the idea of divorce, believing it degraded women. During the First World War, she petitioned to allow women a greater role in the military. She was a founding member of the jury of the prix Femina literary prize from 1904 until her death.

At the outbreak of World War One, Dieulafoy wanted to return to military service, despite being 70. He was sent to Rabat as a lieutenant colonel in the Engineering corps, , and Jane accompanied him. While in Morocco, her health began to decline. She contracted amoebic dysentery and was forced to return to France where she died in Pompertuzat in 1916. The childless couple left their home at 12, rue Chardin in Paris to the French Red Cross who continue to operate an office from the building to this day.



Florence Dixie 1855 – 1905

Oil & mixed media on gesso board
33cm x 30.5cm

Lady Florence Dixie (née Douglas), was a Scottish traveller, war correspondent, writer and feminist. She wrote an account of travelling 'Across Patagonia', 'Land of Misfortune' covering the Zulu Wars, and many books which deal with feminist themes.

Florence was an unconventional child whose early years, shaped by her close relationship with her twin brother, were spent in a tumble of competitive physical activities. At only five foot tall and wearing her hair short, she was noted for being "fearless, dynamic and opinionated". As an adult she advocated equality for the sexes in marriage and divorce, and proposed women should be able to wear the same clothes as men.

In December 1878, Dixie and her husband led an expedition to Patagonia, chosen because supposedly few European men, and no European women, had ever set foot there. She played an active role in the party, hunting game (including ostriches) for food. In her subsequent writing 'Across Patagonia', Dixie never actually mentions her husband by name, presenting herself as the hero of the expedition. Generally considered to have had a happy marriage despite the reduced circumstances that ensued from her husband's drinking and gaming debts, the couple were reportedly referred to by contemporaries as "Sir Always and Lady Sometimes Tipsy".

In 1879 she gained a commission as war correspondent for The Morning Post to cover the Zulu Wars in South Africa, but arriving too late, she justified her visit by interviewing the defeated King Cetshwayo. Impressed by his dignity she returned home to successfully campaign for his reinstatement.

Scandal surrounded her in 1883 when an attack on her person (supposedly by two 'Fenian' men dressed as women) was brought into question. Beatrix Potter commented on it in her journals thus "Some of the papers, this being a sceptical age and the lady a Tory, have tried to make out that the affair never happened, but I think there are the strongest reasons and evidence that it did....she must be a lively and extraordinary person, much more like a man, strong headed, but brave and sound hearted." Queen Victoria at nearby Windsor Castle sent her ghillie John Brown to investigate. Sadly he caught a chill and died, causing the Queen to blame Florence for his demise.

In 1890, Dixie published a utopian novel, Gloriana, in which she rails against a patriarchal society "Nature has unmistakably given to woman a greater brain power... Yet man deliberately sets himself to stunt that...laying down the law that woman's education shall be on a lower level... this procedure is arbitrary and cruel....It has been the means of sending to their graves unknown, unknelt, and unnamed, thousands of women whose high intellects have been wasted, and whose powers for good have been paralysed and undeveloped."

A keen sports woman throughout her life, Dixie became President of the British Ladies' Football Club in 1895. Despite enjoying blood sports in her youth, she later wrote passionately against hunting and became a committed vegetarian.

Florence died of diphtheria aged 50. She is not totally uncelebrated however for her name still graces the (disappointingly remodelled) 'Hotel Lady Florence Dixie' in Puerto Natales, Southern Chile.



The Sworn Virgins

Oil & mixed media on gesso board

57cm x 39.5cm

the Sworn Virgins of Northern Albania

The Sworn Virgin is believed to be the only formal, socially defined trans-masculine, trans gender and cross-dressing role in Europe. While Sworn Virgins were common historically, currently there are probably around only forty in a small region of Northern Albania and surrounding areas where traditional patriarchies still survive.

The tradition developed from The Kanun, a set of codes and laws used mostly in northern Albania & Kosovo from the 15th to the 20th century dictating a patrilineal and patrilocal family structure by which women were treated as property and had none of the freedoms or rights extended to men. Often forced into arranged marriages, they were also prohibited from smoking, drinking, voting, and even wearing a watch.

Most significantly they could not inherit or buy land, so if a family found itself without a male presence (blood feuds often decimated the male line) the only way to salvage their honor was for a woman to become the patriarch of the clan. Becoming a “Sworn Virgin” by taking a vow of chastity for life elevated a woman to the status of a man, and saved the family from destitution and disgrace.

Typically a Sworn Virgin would cut her hair, adopt a male name and wear masculine clothing from this point onward. Now granted the full rights extended to men, the woman could take on male work, act as the head of a household, sit and talk socially with men and enjoy all the other freedoms the position of the patriarch afforded.



There were a number of reasons why a woman might have wanted to take the vow. Some women hoped to avoid an unwanted arranged marriage (it was the only way to refuse without dishonouring the Groom's family), and others hoped to avoid marriage in general. Many wanted to stay in their own homes with their female relatives and several were recorded as saying they always felt more male than female.

These depictions of women as “Sworn Virgins”, my own somewhat romanticised versions of the appearance of women electing to lead the lives of their male counterparts, where in part inspired by the wonderful work of photographer Jill Peters, www.jillpetersphotography.com/swornvirgins.html



The Delegates I

Oil & mixed media on gesso board
64cm x 61cm



The Delegates II

Oil & mixed media on gesso board
64cm x 61cm

Emily “Mickey” Hahn (1905 - 1997)

Oil & mixed media on gesso board
50cm x 40cm

Emily Hahn was an American journalist and author. Considered an early feminist and called “a forgotten American literary treasure” by The New Yorker magazine, she was the author of 54 books and more than 200 articles and short stories.

Initially enrolled in a general arts program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, she changed her course of study to mining engineering after being prevented from enrolling in a chemistry class as a female. In 1926 she was the first woman to receive a degree in Mining Engineering at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

In 1924, prior to graduating she traveled 2,400 miles across the United States in a Model T-Ford dressed as a man with her friend, Dorothy Raper. During her drive across New Mexico, she wrote about her travel experiences to her brother-in-law, who, unbeknownst to her, forwarded the letters to The New Yorker. This jump-started her early career as a writer. Hahn wrote for The New Yorker from 1929 to 1996.

Her novels in the 20th century played a significant role in opening up Asia and Africa to the west. Her extensive travels throughout her life and her love of animals influenced much of her writing. After living in Florence and London in the mid-1920s, she traveled to the Belgian Congo, where she worked for the Red Cross, and lived with a pygmy tribe for two years, before crossing Central Africa alone on foot.

In 1935 she traveled to China. Her years in Shanghai, (1935 to the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong in 1941) were the most tumultuous of her life. There she became involved with

prominent Shanghai figures, such as the wealthy Sir Victor Sassoon, the Soong Sisters and the Chinese poet, Sinmay Zau, and was in the habit of taking her pet gibbon, Mr. Mills, with her to dinner parties, dressed in a diaper and a small dinner jacket.

Zau introduced her to the practice of smoking opium, to which she became addicted. She later wrote, “Though I had always wanted to be an opium addict, I can’t claim that as the reason I went to China.”

After moving to Hong Kong, she began an affair with Charles Boxer, the local head of British army intelligence. According to a December 1944 Time article, Hahn “decided that she needed the steadying influence of a baby, but doubted if she could have one. ‘Nonsense!’ said the unhappily-married Major Charles Boxer, ‘I’ll let you have one!’ Carola Militia Boxer was born in Hong Kong on October 17, 1941”. When the Japanese marched into Hong Kong Boxer was imprisoned in a POW camp, and Hahn was brought in for questioning. “Why?” screamed the Japanese Chief of Gendarmes, “why ... you have baby with Major Boxer?” “Because I’m a bad girl,” she quipped.

In 1978 she published Look Who’s Talking, which dealt with the controversial subject of animal-human communication; this was her personal favorite among her non-fiction books. She wrote her last book, Eve and the Apes, in 1988 when she was in her eighties.



Yoshiko Kawashima 1907 - 1948

Oil & mixed media on gesso board

34.5cm x 30cm

Yoshiko Kawashima was a Chinese princess, the 14th daughter of Shanqi, a Manchu prince of the Qing dynasty. She was raised in Japan and served as a spy for the Japanese Kwantung Army and puppet state of Manchukuo during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

In 1911 the Xinhai Revolution overthrew the Qing dynasty and Yoshiko was given up for adoption at the age of eight to Kawashima Naniwa, a Japanese espionage agent and mercenary adventurer. She was raised and educated in the Kawashima family house in Matsumoto, Japan. As a teenage girl, she was raped by her stepfather's father and later had an affair with her stepfather himself. She was sent to school in Tokyo for an education that included judo and fencing and then lived a bohemian lifestyle for some years in Tokyo with a series of rich lovers, both men and women.

In 1927, Kawashima married Ganjuurjab, the son of Inner Mongolian Army general Jengjuurjab, but the marriage ended in divorce after only two years, and Kawashima moved to Shanghai. While there, she met Japanese military attaché and intelligence officer Tanaka Ryukichi, who utilised her contacts with the Manchu and Mongol nobility to expand his network.

After Tanaka was recalled to Japan, Kawashima continued to serve as a spy. She undertook undercover missions in Manchuria, often disguised as a man, and was considered strikingly attractive. She was said to have a dominating personality, half tom-boy and half heroine, coupled with a passion for cross-dressing.

Puyi, the last emperor of the Qing dynasty, regarded Yoshiko as a member of the imperial family and welcomed her into his household. After Puyi became Emperor of Manchukuo, Kawashima continued to play various roles and, for a time, was the mistress of Tada Hayao, the chief military advisor to Puyi. She formed an independent counter insurgency cavalry force in 1932 made up of 3,000-5,000 former bandits to hunt down anti-Japanese guerilla bands during the Pacification of Manchukuo, and was hailed in the Japanese newspapers as the Joan of Arc of Manchukuo.

However, as she became an increasingly well-known and popular figure in Manchukuo, making appearances on radio broadcasts and even issuing a record of her songs, her usefulness as an intelligence asset diminished. This created issues with the Kwantung Army, added to which her value as a propaganda symbol was compromised by her increasingly critical tone against the Japanese military's policies, and she gradually faded from public sight.

After the end of the war, on 11 November 1945, a news agency reported that "a long sought-for beauty in male costume was arrested in Beijing by Chinese counter-intelligence officers." She was held in prison for two and a half years, and was the subject of a lengthy trial. One defence was to plead that as a naturalised Japanese citizen she was not a traitor but rather a prisoner of war. This was not recognised, however, and she was sentenced to death as a traitor. Her last request, for a private execution, was not granted. Instead she was publicly executed by a gunshot to the back of the head on March 25, 1948.



Shi Pei Pu 1938 - 2009

Oil & mixed media on gesso board

34.5cm x 30cm

Shi Pei Pu was a Chinese opera singer from Beijing. He became a spy who obtained secrets during a 20-year-long sexual affair in which he convinced Bernard Boursicot, an employee in the French Embassy, that he was a woman.

Shi grew up in the southwestern province of Yunnan, where he learned French and attended the University of Kunming, graduating with a literature degree. By 17, Shi was an actor/singer who had achieved some recognition.

Bernard Boursicot, an accountant at the French Embassy in Beijing first met Shi, dressed as a man, at a Christmas party in December 1964. Shi told Boursicot that he was “a female Beijing opera singer who had been forced to live as a man to satisfy his father’s wish to have a son”. The two quickly developed a sexual relationship maintained in darkness in which Boursicot was convinced that he was with a woman. This deception was made plausible by the fact that Boursicot had only previously had sexual relations with fellow male students in school.

In 1965, Shi claimed to be pregnant by Boursicot, and that subsequently a baby boy called Shi Du Du (who had in fact been bought from a doctor in China) was their biological son. Over the next decade, they continued their on-again off-again affair as Bernard moved from posting to posting in Southeast Asia. According to Boursicot, he began passing documents to Shi when the Chinese Cultural Revolution made it difficult for him to see ‘her’ and a member of the Chinese secret service offered him access to Shi in exchange for government papers.

Eventually, in 1982, Boursicot managed to arrange visas so Shi and his adopted son could come to live in Paris. Almost immediately, however, agents of the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire discovered that Boursicot and Shi were living together, and in the summer of 1983 they questioned both men. Unimpressed by Shi’s insistence that he was in fact a woman, a French judge ordered a thorough medical examination. Upon hearing the results via the radio in his remand cell, Boursicot, finally disabused of the illusion Shi was female, attempted to cut his throat with a razor blade.

They were each sentenced to six years in prison in 1986, but were both pardoned in 1987 having served only a fraction of that time over what was described as a “very silly” and unimportant case.

After his pardon, Shi remained in Paris, performing as an opera singer. He and Boursicot spoke occasionally, but were no longer friends. Reluctant to talk of the relationship with Boursicot, he stated that he “used to fascinate both men and women” and that “What I was and what they were didn’t matter”... “I never told Bernard I was a woman,” Shi later claimed. “I only let it be understood that I could be a woman.”... “I thought France was a democratic country. Is it important if I am a man or a woman?”

Shi died in 2009, having maintained he still loved Boursicot to the end. Boursicot, on hearing the news was less moved however, saying only “He did so many things against me that he had no pity for, I think it is stupid to play another game now and say I am sad. The plate is clean now. I am free.”



About the Artist

Kate Milsom studied Fine Art at Oxford Brookes University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She worked as a designer at Raymond Loewy International and was a Course Tutor at Lambeth College before leaving London in the mid 1990's.

Spending the next ten years in a 'Gormenghast' of a castle on the Welsh borders, and lecturing for a time at The University of Worcester, she was encouraged to pursue her painting career by formidable gallery owner and art advocate the late Elizabeth Organ. A subsequent self-imposed period of exile in Venice to concentrate on her own work developed her now distinctive style of 'antique surrealism'.

Evident in Kate's paintings is her experience in both art restoration and book-binding which cultivated a reverence for authentic techniques and materials. These are employed in elaborate mixed media pieces where symbolic references abound, seamlessly blending painted and collaged elements into what she describes as "intricate scenes of social malfunction".

Represented by The Martin Tinney Gallery, Cardiff

