

EVELYN GLEESON AND THE DUN EMER GUILD: REDEFINING  
A WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE ARTS

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2020

ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore a myriad of topics not often analyzed within the art historical academic field. It adds to recent endeavors to understand the role of women as artists in the early twentieth century by highlighting the contributions of specific women who revolutionized Irish art. The thesis emphasizes aspects of art often omitted from art history, including "domestic" pieces such as weaving, embroidery, clothing, and fabrics.

During the late nineteenth century, the English Arts and Crafts Movement stimulated a revival of craft practices throughout Europe. In Ireland, this artistic movement was particularly significant as the nation was simultaneously trying to gain independence from England. One way to break from colonialist structures was to revive artistic practices upheld in western Ireland which was noted for preserving "true" Irish identity. The revival of Irish industries such as weaving and embroidery, composed from native materials, was thereby essential to nationalist discourse.

Guilds and societies were formed, each specializing in a form of Irish craft or industry. One woman and guild in particular form the subjects of my study: Evelyn Gleeson and the Dun Emer Guild. Gleeson was an advocate for three things: the revival

of decorative craft practices, Irish nationalism, and the suffragist movement. From these three subjects, I examine how Gleeson, and the Dun Emer Guild wove these themes into one another and utilized each one to promote the visual representation and agency for women in Irish society.

During a time in Ireland that was based on extremes, the Dun Emer Guild found a middle ground to ensure a lasting legacy for Irish handmade goods, still appreciated today. The Dun Emer Guild is surprisingly absent from modern discussions in the Arts and Crafts Movement. This thesis will provide an argument for Evelyn Gleeson and the Dun Emer Guild's artistic legacy to inspire a continued appreciation of women in the arts.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled Evelyn Gleeson and The Dun Emer Guild: Redefining a Woman's Place in the Arts, presented by Abigail Brightwell-Gray, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Here we stand on the verge of an immense question, the problem whether it is possible to revive Gaelic ideas in our material surroundings – our tables, our chairs, chiefly owing to the Language Movement. But infinitely more could be done. And of those Gaelic Leaguers I would ask: Cannot one nationalise through the eyes as well as the ears?<sup>1</sup>

— Evelyn Gleeson

The founder of the Dun Emer Guild, Evelyn Gleeson, states a central philosophy of the Irish Revival in this excerpt from her 1907 essay delivered to the Irish Literary Society. The Irish Revival was a complex reawakening of cultural identity through the lens of literary and visual restoration of the arts. Although the Revival was a national collective, a large portion was sustained by Anglo-Irish citizens who believed in Ireland's right to be an independent republic. Miss Gleeson's Anglo-Irish heritage melded with her English education and a connection to London's Arts and Crafts Society to establish a guild committed to reviving Irish decorative industries of weaving, embroidery, and print in Dublin.

The Dun Emer Guild was founded in 1902 by three women who defined a woman's place in the scope of the Irish Revival: Evelyn Gleeson, Elizabeth Yeats, and Lily Yeats (sisters of writer W.B. Yeats and artist Jack Yeats). The objective of the Guild was to

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<sup>1</sup> Gleeson, Evelyn. "Essay addressed to Literary Society." 1907 (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson* MS 10676/5/9), 2.

not only revive industry in a suburb of Dublin and train pupils to make beautiful handmade works, but to “provide employment to a number of respectable young girls.”<sup>2</sup> At its beginning in 1902, the Guild specialized in three craft practices: hand-tuft weaving, embroidery, and hand pressed books. The weaving and embroidery, directed by Gleeson and Lily Yeats respectively, were considered traditional forms of Irish craft, using native materials of Irish wool and linen. In 1903 the Guild split into two departments: Dun Emer Industries and Dun Emer Press.

The hand-press operation was established by Elizabeth Yeats, influenced by William Morris’s societal circle in London, and established the blending of English print production with the Irish literary movement. The Guild’s prospectus notes: “though many books are printed in Ireland, book printing as an art has been little practised here since the eighteenth century. The Dun Emer Press has been founded in the hope of reviving this beautiful craft.”<sup>3</sup> This appropriated the British model of press industry and used it as a visual aid to complement the Irish literary movement by incorporating poems by celebrated Literary Revival writers.

The Guild’s effort to revive decorative crafts coincided with their effort to emancipate women from stereotypical domestic expectations. Their effort to challenge patriarchal expectancies of women in Irish society was done so by means of training, education, and employment. Dun Emer’s final objective aimed to prepare the young pupils to be professionally trained in design and technique so that they would be able to continue their craft after moving on from the Guild and take a step towards societal and

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<sup>2</sup> Gleeson, Evelyn. *My object for founding Dun Emer*, Manuscript (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson* MS 10676/5/4), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Dun Emer Guild, *Dun Emer Prospectus*, Pamphlet, 1903 (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*, MS 10676/1/5), 6.

economic agency. The revival of industrious craft and nonmechanical labor intertwined with the fight for women's agency in a male-centric society and opened a threshold for Gleeson to provide representation of women in the visual arts by uniting Irish motifs with English industrial models to encourage a market for handmade goods.

The reclamation of labor and industry was essential to the Dun Emer Guild's prospectus. The Guild reclaimed the aesthetics and practices of traditional Irish craft while incorporating English models for marketing and producing work to blend English and Irish Arts and Crafts Movements into a combined trend. However, a rejuvenation of Irish labor and designs also meant a gradual shift from English styles and manufacturing for many of the Irish guilds, in order to establish a distinct identity apart England. The Dun Emer Guild managed to establish a middle ground between nationalist ideology and industrialist examples through a marriage of Irish rural culture and Anglo-Irish industrial models. This dynamic created a curious push and pull. The English Arts and Crafts Movement inspired the Guild in certain modes of operation, but the nature of patterns and use of native products defined the Dun Emer Guild apart from English counterparts.

A significant aspect of the artistic Revival was utilizing objectives of the English Arts and Crafts Movement to assist the guilds' reclamation of Irish cultural traditions. As mentioned before, the marriage of cultural practices with English industry ensued, and the Dun Emer Guild established a functioning workshop in the suburb of Dundrum, County Dublin. This location allowed western folk perspectives to become tangible to the more urban portion of eastern Ireland. The traditional artistic values of the west were revived by the Dun Emer Guild through training of decorative crafts, particularly embroidery and weaving. Hand-press was a more modern utilization not specifically

identified with western Ireland. The present study will mainly discuss the embroidery and weaving practices of Dun Emer Industries, as the Yeats' sisters broke from Dun Emer in 1908 to create Cuala Press. Dun Emer Industries continued until 1960.

William Morris founded the Arts and Crafts Movement in England, to contest the impact of Industrialization placed on the decorative arts. The Movement's objective was to encourage craft artists to cultivate handmade work for the public in order to make up for "the lack of beauty in modern life."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, public recognition aimed to rejuvenate decorative traditions and imprint the arts into the modern market. Morris argued that craft artists had a societal responsibility to preserve the tradition of decorative arts and public promotion. The Arts and Crafts Movement was a conscious cultivation of decorative crafts and public interest. It called "special attention to that really most important side of art, the decoration of utilities by furnishing them with genuine artistic finish in place of trade finish."<sup>5</sup>

The main principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement are noted in the Dun Emer Guild's mission statement:

The idea is to make beautiful things; this is of course, means materials honest and true and the application of them with deftness of hand, brightness of colour, and cleverness of design.

Everything, as far as possible, is Irish; the paper of the books, the linen of the embroidery and the wool of the tapestry or

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<sup>4</sup> Morris, William. "Preface Essay," in *Arts and Crafts essays/by members of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society; with a preface by William Morris.* (New York: Charles Schribner's Sons. 1893). Vi

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., xiii.

carpet. The designs are also in the spirit and tradition of the country.<sup>6</sup>

The mission statement displays an important attribute of the Arts and Crafts Movement – a wish to produce beautiful work in modern times focusing on the creative independence for the artist.

William Morris notes that the Arts and Crafts Movement's notion to create beautiful handmade objects was not instinctive but trained. This presented an opportunity for artistic guilds to turn to a “conscious desire to turn out a credible piece of work.”<sup>7</sup> The Dun Emer Guild appropriated this goal to emphasize Irish nationalist sentiments in reviving culturally significant traditions while using native materials and motifs in order to legitimize the work.

Evelyn Gleeson was inspired by William Morris's efforts to revive decorative arts, particularly in fibers. While studying the arts in London and Paris, she expanded her community interests and immersed herself in progressive social movements, particularly the Suffragist movement. She became aware of the Arts and Crafts Movement while attending the British School of Design in London. There she was surrounded by others within the Arts and Crafts Society and adopted Morris's model of reviving decorative crafts and traditional forms of industry. However, while Morris established the Movement with the focus on reviving English decorative arts, Gleeson, upon returning to Ireland at forty, organized the Dun Emer Guild to concentrate on conserving Irish decorative and industrious practices. Systematically, the Dun Emer Guild wove the

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<sup>6</sup> Dun Emer Guild, *Dun Emer Guild Prospectus*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Morris, “Preface Essay,” vii.

mission of the Arts and Crafts Movement into the basic ideology of the Irish Revival to resurrect artistic industry while simultaneously appropriating folk practices to promote visual representation of women in the arts.

Evelyn Gleeson was born in Cheshire England to an Irish father and English mother in 1855. Her father, a general practitioner, grew up in County Tipperary, Ireland. Persistent health complications occurring throughout Evelyn's youth persuaded Dr. Gleeson to move his family from Manchester, England to Athlone, Ireland.<sup>8</sup> The relocation inspired Dr. Gleeson to indulge his philanthropic endeavors to regenerate the Irish industries.<sup>9</sup> His time in Manchester inspired Dr. Gleeson to reflect on the flourishing industrious society juxtaposed with depressed industry in Athlone Ireland.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Gleeson's acknowledgement of the poverty in Ireland had a lasting impact on a young Evelyn and instilled an importance of philanthropic ventures. From her youth, Gleeson inherently felt the Anglo-Irish significance of her heritage and had an eye for artistic pursuits. An essay by Evelyn emphasizes how her childhood in Athlone inclined her to revive artistic industry by establishing Dun Emer: "I grew up in an atmosphere familiar with Irish industrial effort which had much influence on my own choice of artistic occupation."<sup>11</sup> The Dun Emer Guild's combination of Irish craft and motifs with English models of industry was a testament to the indelible mark her father's altruistic mission in the wool industry left on Evelyn's own dream.

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<sup>8</sup> Gleeson, Evelyn. *Particulars relating to the Foundation of The Athlone Woolen Mills* (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*, MS 10676/5/16), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Bowe, Nicola Gordon, *Irish Women Artists from the Eighteenth Century to Present* (Dublin: The Ormond Printing Co. Inc., 1987), 163.

<sup>10</sup> Gleeson, *Particulars relating to the Foundation of The Athlone Woolen Mills*, 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Gleeson, Evelyn, *Untitled Essay*, (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*, MS 10676/5/8), 3.

Evelyn Gleeson's dedication to reviving Irish art matured alongside her English education in artistic design. At the British School of Design in London, Gleeson was encouraged to pursue her natural eye for color and design. She mainly excelled in painting and weaving. Here, a collaborative appropriation between English training in the arts and craft industry percolated with Gleeson's personal interest in Irish culture and design. While studying in London, Gleeson was exposed to Irish nationalist ideologies and joined the Gaelic League, the Pioneer Club, and the Irish Literary Society.<sup>12</sup> The ideologies of the nationalist and revival organizations paved a way for Gleeson to incorporate visual aesthetics into the Irish Revival.

What would ultimately evolve into the Irish Revival during the 1880s began with the foundation of the Ossianic Society in 1853. The main goal of the society sought to preserve the Gaelic language as Ireland was the singular British colony which was consistently policed to assimilate to the anglicization of the English language.<sup>13</sup> By 1878 nationalist movements embraced the revival of Irish culture as a main objective to their cause. This mainly transpired in Dublin, which flourished as a hub for both nationalist and cultural activity during the 1880s and The Gaelic League Idea well into the turn of the century. Douglas Hyde's perseverance in establishing the Gaelic League propelled an equal importance of folk traditions alongside the general language movement.

While reviving the Gaelic language was important, recovering folk craft practices was equally essential to the revival. By the 1890s, a fascination with Celticism and the argument that rural portions of Ireland held a distinct place within the nationalist

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<sup>12</sup> Bowe, "Women and the Arts and Crafts Revival in Ireland, c. 1886-1930," 23.

<sup>13</sup> Greene, David, "The Founding of the Gaelic League," in *The Gaelic League Idea*, ed. Seán Ó Tuama (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1972), 9.

ideology was in full swing.<sup>14</sup> The formation of guilds proved to be a salient contribution to the Irish Revival. Artistic guilds embraced a recovery of industrious practices and made a point to utilize Irish-made materials and motifs. The one and only Constance Markiewicz even noted the nationalist influence of Irish materials, stating: “It is not enough just vaguely to buy Irish goods where you can do so without trouble, just in a sort of sentimental way. No, you must make Irish goods as necessary to your daily life as your bath or your breakfast.”<sup>15</sup> Western Ireland provided a tangible space for inspiration for the labor recovered from tradition included hand-weaving and embroidery from Irish spun wool and linen.

An amalgamation of industry and folk customs was not accidental. Ireland was one of England’s most profitable colonies, not only providing land for livestock and grain but also providing a series of rivers and channels to export goods to England. As a case in point, the British Parliament’s Land Improvement Act of 1730 altered the natural landscape particularly through construction of canals along rivers and railways to ensure exportation of livestock and grains. This act provided Anglo-Irish citizens with a clear route to the rural portions of Ireland through the rise of railway transportation. Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch observed the importance of railway transportation to the cultural movement. Revival writers and artists rejected the mundane urbane landscape, preferring the more distinctive “Irish landscape” in western Ireland.<sup>16</sup> This was the area that

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<sup>14</sup> Fallis, Richard, “The Years of the Celtic Twilight, the 1890s,” in *The Irish Renaissance: An Introduction to Anglo-Irish Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1977), 56.

<sup>15</sup> Markiewicz, Constance, “Women, Ideals and the Nation,” in *Handbook of the Irish Revival: An Anthology of Irish Cultural and Political Writings 1891-1922*, ed. Declan Kibard and P.J. Mathews (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2016), 76.

<sup>16</sup> Lynch, Síghle Bhreathnach. “Painting the West: The Role of Landscape in Irish Identity,” in *Ireland’s Art Ireland’ History, Representing Ireland, 1845 to Present* (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2007), 74.

preserved distinct Irish traditions and the Gaelic language. Indeed, the western location set this group geographically apart from England, but the modern use of railways still linked the rural parts of Ireland to the establishment and opened a threshold that amalgamated the east and west together.

Ireland's refreshed enthusiasm for the Celtic past was an important aspect for the Guild, as this reflected the "spirit of the nation" as mentioned in the prospectus. Cultural pride became ubiquitous with the Irish Revival in the 1890s, where the language movement reawakened Ireland's appreciation for folklore and poetry. As Richard Fallis mentioned, a wave of attaining the peasant perspective washed over Ireland and inspired Anglo-Irish writers such as W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory to revive the folk traditions through poems, testaments of rural folklore, and plays relating to the peasant perspective.<sup>17</sup> In 1904, the Abbey Theatre was founded in Dublin by Yeats and Gregory where Anglo-Irish admiration for the Celtic perspective and nationalist ideology came together. Plays like *Kathleen ni Houlihan* by Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats or J. M. Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen*, provided the urban people of Dublin with a perspective of national folklore or nationalist sentiments through the lens of theatre.

Furthermore, Ireland's art historical prominence was reawakened when two boys discovered the Ardagh Trove in 1868 while digging for potatoes in County Limerick. The trove included the Ardagh Chalice and Tara Brooch, both dating back to the Eighth century. Used for monastic purposes during the early establishment of Christianity in Ireland, the Ardagh Chalice (Figure 1) presents an extensive display of intricate metalwork, especially along the bronze strip of the cup. The interlacing motif along the

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<sup>17</sup> Fallis, "The Celtic Twilight," 56-57.

strip will be discussed in further detail and influence on Dun Emer's work in the second chapter. Discovery of such complex works affixed with the increasing nationalist ideology demonstrated that Ireland had been artistically and culturally distinct for centuries. Additionally, unearthing such momentous historical artifacts of cultural significance provided the Revivalists with palpable influence of Celtic art to incorporate in their own work.

Symbolology was also an integral part of the Revival. And often, the symbol associated with a guild or society was taken from Irish legends or myth. Symbols of mythic figures or creatures were regularly used as metaphor for the fledging nationalist cause. The Guild claimed the character Emer, the wife of Ireland's mythic hero Cú Chulainn. Emer's own lore emphasized her rich decorative skills, particularly in embroidery. The Guild reclaimed a mythical woman, whose story was staged in Dublin and idealized Ireland's epic past to promote visual recognition in the decorative arts. In other words, the Guild wasn't just looking to the west but also the heart of cultural revival – Dublin.

Dublin was the hub for the revival and nationalist cause, while western Ireland served as an emblem for the reclamation of Irish identity. The two areas often intersected, as I have previously discussed and while artistic societies emphasized the importance of artistic Irish identity during this time, nationalist driven organizations in Dublin propelled more active involvement on a wider scale. Gleeson belonged to a number of nationalist organizations, including the Ladies' National Land League (an organization which functioned to assist tenant farmers in western Ireland from zealous landlords). In a letter from the Ladies' National Land League which Gleeson conserved, the society

emphasized that “women of Ireland, you must do your duty whilst your countrymen do theirs,”<sup>18</sup> and Gleeson took this call to arms as a basic idea for what would become the Dun Emer Guild. By channeling her philanthropic upbringing alongside her time with the Arts and Crafts Society in London, Gleeson blended two of the most important attributes in herself to contribute to the nationalist cause and assist the young Irish women and revive truly Irish artistic mediums.

Native materials were fundamental to Dun Emer and this specific condition was influenced from Gleeson’s personal account with women in Donegal. Her trip to County Donegal applied precedent for Gleeson to expand how women were visually represented in Irish culture. In a handwritten untitled essay detailing the process of the Donegal women, the true inspiration of rural western Ireland was fully exposed to Gleeson. This portion of north-western Ireland preserved native creative culture, and the women were the main conservators of traditional crafts. In her essay, Gleeson describes how the young women explored the mountainsides, searching for native plants to derive their own homemade mordants and cultivate into dyes. The colorant would then be used to dye wool threads they had spun to weave something beautiful. Evelyn noted the artistic ingenuity of the women in Donegal. Not only did these young women cultivate plants used for mordant, they also expanded their craft. The essay details how the Donegal women experimented with creating their own original and “truly Irish” dyes by tracing the countryside in search of uncommon plants.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “The Ladies’ Irish National Land League,” Letter, 1881 (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*, MS 10676/8/1).

<sup>19</sup> Gleeson, Evelyn, “Essay,” (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*, MS 10676/5/13), 1-3.

The Donegal women displayed the true ideal of western Irish romanticism. As established throughout this chapter, western Ireland was viewed as the embodiment of Gaelic identity during the late Nineteenth century and into the Twentieth. This portion of Ireland preserved the traditions of language, crafts, and agricultural practices distinct to Irish culture.<sup>20</sup> Anglo-Irish revivalists idealized the rural portion of Ireland, as it was untainted from the smoky stacks of industrialization.

The connection between landscape and work ultimately inspired Gleeson to establish the Runnymead estate in Dundrum into the home for the Dun Emer Guild workshop. The large estate (Figure 2) in southern County Dublin provided a perfect location for the Guild to house, train, and inspire the young pupils. As a town just south of the Dublin metropolitan area, the distant foothills of the Wicklow Mountains and creeks nestled within the forestry surrounding the estate provided a faux version of Western Irish landscape in the eastern suburb. In essence, the estate melded the west with the east to help bring the romanticism of the Celtic peasant perspective to Dublin.

Influence from the western Irish cultural perspective was significant in contributing to the Guild's recognition of visual arts. Throughout this chapter, we established the viewpoint of the artist in Ireland through the lens of nationalist and cultural perspectives. Gleeson's upbringing with her empathetic father established her own drive to embrace "domestic practices" and utilize her artistic talent to help young women. Additionally, this initiated a revival of handmade industries that fit perfectly into the Gaelic League's efforts to reclaim Irish identity. Nationalist ideology and the

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<sup>20</sup> Lynch, "Painting the West: The Role of Landscape in Irish Identity," 74-75.

influence from truly Irish art practices as seen in Donegal helped establish a clear mission for Evelyn Gleeson and the Dun Emer Guild to bring the west Irish ideal to Dublin.

In chapter two, we will analyze the artistic elements of the Guilds weaving and embroidery work. As we examine specific pieces and discuss compositional influences, so too will we find how essential fashion and staged photography were utilized to promote the art. These ideas allowed Dun Emer to be visually represented in the Irish Arts and Crafts Societies and eventually America.

## CHAPTER 2

### SWEET DISORDER

Modern weaving, as handwork, must aim at originality in design; for ‘sweet disorder’ is impossible where the machine steps in, with its rigid and tiresome symmetry. Because we are human, and weak, and fallible it is perhaps a sort of comfort to see the faltering and irregularity which handwork must betray here and there – not, of course, the defects of want if thoroughness or slovenly execution, but just the little less than perfect in a curve or balance, that shows how the worker was forced to strive to attain...Nowadays we long to get something that has not been made by the thousand, and vulgarized in the making. We are learning to choose for ourselves, not run like sheep in a crowd.<sup>1</sup>

As we examined in chapter one, the rise in production of manufactured objects made handmade works to become outmoded in modern times. The new era deemed decorative arts to be considered obsolete, placing many true craftsmen and women out of work. By the mid-nineteenth century, the perspicuous craft tradition in Ireland had all but vanished from the mainstream consumers, only to be preserved in more rural regions of Ireland. Ms. Evelyn Gleeson’s observation published in the nationalist paper *Bean na h-Éireann* offers a sobering perspective of the value of handmade works in a society

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<sup>1</sup> Gleeson, Evelyn, “Hand-Weaving,” from *Bean na h-Éireann*, Newspaper (From: Trinity College Dublin. *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*, MS 10676/9/16).

dependent on highly reproduced manufactured wares. The true mission of Dun Emer was essentially to challenge the societal dependency on machine goods to reconcile client and artist relationships through handmade commissioned works.

Dun Emer provided an alternative from highly manufactured goods and demonstrated a rediscovered appreciation for Celtic motifs through handmade work. The effort to reestablish inherent value of work between laborer and consumer in an a highly manufactured community further connects the Guild to the Arts and Crafts Movement. The Dun Emer Guild utilized the Arts and Crafts Movement's model of conserving the pre-industrial mission in reviving the decorative craft industries. More importantly, the Guild mimicked the English movement's resistance to dull conformity that unfolded in England, to help reestablish the link between product and labor.

This chapter will examine the visual features of the Dun Emer Guild and how an established art historical presence in Ireland influenced the Guild to revive both medieval and antiquated designs in their work. Although, many of the designs influenced by Irish motifs were modified to fit into the modern era in order to still be considered relevant. Furthermore, cultivating western Irish practices, as Gleeson admired in Donegal, established the Guild as an essential part of the Irish Revival in Dublin.

The Ardagh Trove and the *Book of Kells* publicly displayed at the Kildare Street Museum and Trinity College Library respectively, provided a keyhole for Irish revivalists to peek into the past to draw inspiration for their own work. Thus, bringing the Dun Emer Guild utilized the revival of Irish culture while consecutively adopting the traits of the English-born Arts and Crafts Movement. Karen E. Brown noted this complex mixture of

“a conflation of the ideals and aesthetics of the English Arts and Crafts Movement with those of the Irish Cultural Revival.”<sup>2</sup>

The Dun Emer Guild created a visual parallel to the Language Movement by conserving the “peasant” traditions of western Ireland in the Dublin area. Yet, the Guild also reestablished the relationship between client and artist that was a significant intention of the English Arts and Crafts Movement. Hence, the Anglo-Irish perspective was visually blended into the Irish Revival and nationalist identity and used to promote a market for the women.

Mainly, Gleeson and the Guild worked to revive the value of “sweet disorder,” in an increasingly manufactured world. This was not only influenced by William Morris, but the ancient metalwork, the high-cross sculptures and illuminated manuscripts – all produced by hand. The importance of distinct styles made by hand rebelled against the industrial hegemonic English model. The Dun Emer Guild aimed to promote the significant importance of handmade goods over the standardized forms established by English industrialization. William Morris actively portrayed this ideology in the Arts and Crafts Movement as a collective choice to move away from the corporate manufacturing model of English development, void of any authentic value established in product.

The Dun Emer Guild separated themselves from the English Arts and Crafts Movement by rejuvenating authentic Gaelic patterns revived by the established Irish Renaissance. The Guild espoused antique Celtic designs from illuminated manuscripts and archeological metalworks and adapted these patterns to modern utilizations – such as fashion, photography and printing. Typical Hiberno-Gaelic patterns were heavily utilized

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<sup>2</sup> Brown, Karen E., “Evelyn Gleeson and the Irish Cultural Revival,” in *Irish Women Artists, 1800-2009, Familiar but Unknown*, ed. Éimear O’Connor (Dublin: Four Courts Press Ltd., 2010), 73.

including the use of interlacing knotwork and triskeles (a motif of triple spirals that presents a rotation of symmetry). While typical English Arts and Crafts patterns often displayed heavily decorated repeated motifs adorned with flowers and animals, the works of Dun Emer portrayed a keen appreciation of Celtic insular art. Like the Language Movement embraced the infamous use of folklore and poetry, the Irish Arts and Crafts Revival inherited the historical presence of ornament, as noted in the Ardagh Trove, monumental ruins, High Crosses, and illuminated manuscripts.

William Morris noted the art of weaving and tapestry is among the noblest of the weaving arts. But Morris also argued carpet weaving is a lesser form of industrial arts: “Carpet-weaving is somewhat of the nature of Tapestry: it also is wholly unmechanical, but its use as a floor-cloth somewhat degrades it, especially in our northern and western countries, where people come out of the muddy streets into rooms without taking off their shoes.”<sup>3</sup> Not only does Morris suggest a hierarchy of decorative arts in weaving, but he also suggests that carpet weaving is a lower form of tapestry and connects this form of art to the Irish and Scottish peoples. These colonized areas were obviously viewed as more “primitive” than their English counterparts.

Evelyn Gleeson refuted Morris’s argument that northern and eastern English neighbors were beneath English models of artistic expression. Specifically, she rejected this claim by embracing carpet weaving as a main form of Irish tradition. While the Dun Emer Guild did adopt the model of reviving nonmechanical crafts, they separated themselves from the English Arts and Crafts Movement by enclosing the legitimate forms of artistic tradition seen in Irish designs and practices.

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<sup>3</sup> Morris, William, “Textiles,” in *Essays by Members of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society* (New York: Charles Schribner’s Sons, 1893), 25.

In tapestry and rug weavings, the Guild interlacing knotwork and meanders are highly displayed. Meanders are typical compositional elements in carpet weavings and are defined as a decorative border formed from one continuous line creating a repeating motif. Gleeson kept a marvelous record in a scrapbook of examples of Dun Emer's work, from finished products to hand-drafted designs for future works.

Figure three displays the use of a meander motif along the border. One continuous geometric line, bold yet simple, creates a distinct border. While this figure is a black and white photo and we cannot know for certain the color patterns, it is easy to ascertain that the geometric composition is dark, placed on a white or lighter background to enhance the meander's definite form. This example of a Dun Emer carpet weaving lends credence to the idea that Gleeson was also taking inspiration from outside Ireland. While the central medallion represents a Hiberno-Saxon influence with display of intricate knotwork and interlace, the symmetrical border mimics ancient Greek and Roman designs rather than the interlacing knotwork seen in Irish high crosses or manuscripts.

A second example of a Dun Emer carpet from Gleeson's scrapbook (Figure 4) presents more traditional Insular interlacing motifs. The interior minor (or guard) border strip – though difficult to fully examine from the dated quality of the photograph and the use of dark threads for the interlace within the dark compositional field – exhibits highly decorative knotwork. Contrastingly, the main border presents simplified geometric pattern, though still depicting Celtic knotwork. The pattern's dark contours interweave in an effortless and organic way, recreating an aesthetic akin to the Hiberno-Saxon metal strip of repoussé exhibited on the gilt-bronze band on the bowl of the Ardagh Chalice. The field of the rug (the interior portion of negative space) complements the distinct

geometric design of the outer border. The medallion is strictly geometric and represents a simplified adaptation of interlacing knotwork.

This example is peculiar because the weaving demonstrates a blend of ornate Gaelic and Hiberno-Saxon inspiration. The guard boarder strip presents influence from the intricate metalwork detailed in the works from the Ardagh Trove. While the outer boarder strip reflects inspiration from carpet pages in the *Books of Kells*.

Photography was obviously utilized to document the Dun Emer Guild's progress and representation within the Irish Arts and Crafts societies to promote the work. The organization utilized the revolutionary invention of photography to formally stage pupils of the Guild complete with Dun Emer designed and manufactured ensembles. The use of these photographs, whether for postcards or promotion, aimed to demonstrate the authenticity of Dun Emer's handmade work.

Some pictures present a more theatrical display of the Guild's work complete with atmosphere and props, while others show more candid displays of pupils actively demonstrating how weavings are constructed or working in a booth at an Exhibition. These living displays were not unique during the turn of the century. Images from World Fairs during this time show us how live demonstrations were employed in "primitive" booths to exploit more under-developed nations. The Dun Emer Guild utilized this form of presentation as a means to exhibit the legitimacy of product to the consumer. In doing so, they also reclaimed the connection of labor to the artist.

Similar to how the Language Movement appropriated folklore and poetry to their cause, the Irish artistic revival inherited the established practice of ornamenting apparel. As Evelyn Gleeson notes: "a love of ornament remained in Ireland and is found in the

adornment of garments. We can trace this in the poems and illuminations which the Irish people loved and the needle followed the example of the pen.”<sup>4</sup> Certainly, the Guild blended the appreciation of language-based culture (i.e. illuminated manuscripts) with the strong adaptation of Irish artistic craft traditions. The use of nationalist-centric environments glamorized the delicately embroidered garments and highlighted Irish cultural manufacturing.

The Dun Emer Guild utilized staged photography through numerous examples conserved in Gleeson’s personal photographic portfolio. In Figure 5, an anonymous Dun Emer pupil stands in the foreground donning a variation of a surcoat gown inspired by medieval wardrobes. This influence of dress stemmed from medieval forms of dress adapted by the English Arts and Crafts Movement.<sup>5</sup> The model stands at a slight angle, her right hand resting on the comb of the weave, while the left hand clutches the side of her cape. Underneath the flowing cape, she displays the medieval inspired surcoat, directly linking the Arts and Crafts Movement appropriation of medieval inspired dress to the Celtic inspired embroidered adornment. The presence of English inspired fashion is important, as the Celtic motifs adorning the gown reinforces the marriage between the English movement and Irish Revival traditions.

Compositionally speaking, the design embroidered on the gown is minimal. Simple interlacing stitching runs vertically down the surcoat, complemented by small vegetal-like emblems and emphasize feminine features. The neckline presents an accompanying decorative composition. The slight shape with three subtle points along the neckline and a

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<sup>4</sup> Gleeson, Evelyn, “Letter to Miss Boyd,” Letter, January 1939 (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*, MS 10676/18/12), 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> Harris, Jennifer. “Medieval dress in Pre-Raphaelite painting,” in *William Morris and the Middle Ages*, ed. Joanna Banham and Jennifer Harris (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 50.

final dipping point reflects influence from audacious Hiberno-Saxon Insular motifs. Significantly, the form both those seen in illuminated manuscripts like the *Chi Rho Page* but also reflects the organic symmetrical representations found in Art Nouveau styles popular during the early twentieth century.

Her mantlé (or overcoat) displays a spiral motif fundamental to Celtic art works. This design flaunts La Tène style, developed during the Iron Age and heavily present in many European cultures. Furthermore, the motif reflects a spiral theme ubiquitous with Hiberno-Saxon Insular compositions, particularly utilization of triskeles. A triskelion, or triskele, is defined as three large spirals in rotational symmetry and is an inherent part of Celtic art. Figure 5 exhibits a modified triskele, with larger spirals forming traditional triskelion and the smaller spirals provide complementary decoration – all together creating a composite of Insular contours and themes. The embroidered design relies on the use of bold silhouettes to define the effortless symmetry of the Celtic spiral. Thus, creating a balanced and defined motif influenced from the traditional Celtic spiral.

More importantly, the staging of the model in front of a loom, with thread combs implying that a like work is in progress, establishes a tangible correlation between final product, artist and craft. As discussed previously, the significance of reestablishing the appreciative connection of laborer and product was a central credo to the Arts and Crafts Movement; this example extends the argument that Gleeson adapted the traits of the English movement in order to establish the Guild's presence in the Irish Revival. From the text of the Guild's prospectus, as discussed in chapter one, one can assume that the wool threads on the weft and the linen used in her garments are all native Irish materials.

In an even more theatrical display of Dun Emer's complex embroidered designs, postcards produced by the Guild exhibit the ornamentation and authenticity of works. A postcard conserved in Gleeson's scrapbook takes the idea of a staged photograph to an even more theatrical level. This example (Figure 6) of the Guild provides a much more intricate embroidered design with a more theatrical presentation.

The model sits in front of a stone barrier with a romanticized Irish landscape complete with a lake and foothills of distant mountains as a background. The scenery alone reaffirms the how the idealized Irish landscape was universally embraced by the revival movement. In the middle and foreground, two harps present as props in the portrait, referencing the Irish nationalist platform through the lens of the "peasant perspective." As the harp is the Irish national emblem, its use in staged decoration was essential. This demonstration was directed towards the Dublin market to promote the romanization of the western Irish point of view sprinkled with nationalist themes. The model fashions a much more elaborate embroidery motif on her surcoat and mantle than the previous photograph.

The neckline exhibits a symmetrical interlace pattern reflecting inspiration from both the English Arts and Crafts Movement and Hiberno-Saxon illuminated manuscripts. The symmetrical upper portion of the motif along the neckline presents a vegetal spiral with complementing geometric shapes to accentuate the motif. The "sweet symmetry," which Gleeson noted this chapter's epigraph, is indisputable as the spirals do not reflect the kind of exact symmetry seen in machine-made work. These insular spirals also echo the *Chi Rho Page* from the Book of Kells (Figure 7) depicted in the decoration on the

upper right of the page.<sup>6</sup> It's as if this detail was simplified in intricacy and turned forty-five degrees to sit horizontally on the hemline. The lower decoration intertwines with the central spirals and continues in an intricate compositional knotwork influenced from Celtic insular art. Like the intricate metalwork design examined on the Ardagh Chalice, there is a seamless flow from the spirals into the complex contours of the interlace pattern.

The cloak drapes over the model's shoulder and knee in a dramatic presentation offering an elaborate example of modern Insular knotwork and interlace displayed on the cloak's lower portion. This decoration is firm with the tradition of Celtic art since the interlace does not use straight contours or symmetry. This representation juxtaposes with the more concrete forms examined on the neckline motif. There is a strong use of curvilinear technique which defines both negative and positive space equally in a harmonious display. The ornament is particularly interesting as the embroidery displays a sense of modeling to enhance the composition of the motif. The juxtaposition of light contours with dark shaded forms within the knotwork present a more defined interlacing pattern and exhibits the complexity of Celtic stylized forms.

Turning away from the more dramatic photographs, a much more candid variation of staged representations presents two Dun Emer pupils at the 1908 Galway Exhibition (Figure 8). The two pupils are seated in front of a vertical haute-lisse loom backdropped by a display of Dun Emer's completed hand-tuft rugs. The pupils rest their hands on the loom bar, drawing the viewers eye to the weaving completed thus far. They pose as if

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<sup>6</sup> Columba, Saint, Henry Jones, "Chi Rho Page" in *Book of Kells*, Manuscript, C. 384 AD. (From: Trinity College Dublin, MS 58\_034r).

interrupted from a commissioned work, caught in a strange limbo of candidness and staged demonstration.

The weavings displayed in the background present a myriad of ornamental patterns which display a mixture of Celtic and English Arts and Crafts Movement influence. The carpet on the right presents symmetrical contours in the central medallion and upper pendant exhibits a true amalgamation between British and Celtic designs. The use of the spirals and curvilinear forms accentuate the positive space against the negative space field. The organic curves also demonstrate highly stylized forms representing vegetal or foliage motifs, prominent in the La Tène style discussed earlier in this chapter. However, the use of strong symmetry and straight contours hark back to the English Arts and Crafts society. You can see the use of strong repetitive motifs in William Morris's wallpaper designs. Animal formations are perfectly symmetrical and repeated throughout the composition in a mesmerizing fashion. This compositional element can also be seen in the medallion of the left background rug in figure eight.

Overall, the Dun Emer Guild aimed to reclaim the value of nonmechanical artistic value from highly repetitive manufactured products. This paralleled with William Morris's Arts and Crafts Movement and thus, the Dun Emer Guild melded the English movement with the ideology of the Irish Renaissance. However, the Dun Emer Guild established their own variation of decorative revival by adopting Celtic motifs and utilizing the art historical motifs to blend with original designs.

Furthermore, the combination of past and present motifs delegated the Dun Emer Guild to remain relevant at the turn of the century through exhibitions and staged photographs. While more histrionic photographs played into nationalist imagery, photos

with pupils demonstrating their practice backdropped by their own work reinforced authenticity to the consumer. The third chapter of this thesis will examine how Miss Gleeson aimed to create a market in America through Expositions to provide a legacy for handmade Irish crafts while simultaneously promoting the agency of women's work.

## CHAPTER 3

### REDEFINING WOMEN'S WORK & ESTABLISHING A LEGACY

As examined throughout the previous two chapters, the Dun Emer Guild proved that their main objective aimed to revive native decorative industries in Ireland and establish prominence within the Irish Revival movement. A mélange between the English Arts and Crafts Movement and the Irish Revival ensued, evident through the Dun Emer Guild's attribution to reclaiming labor and reestablishing value in nonmechanical decorative arts.

Chapter two analyzed the aesthetics influenced by Hiberno-Saxon art forms and William Morris's Arts and Crafts Movement, and how these modes of representation were appropriated into the Revival's principles. One central factor that defined the Guild's brand in the Revival was through staged photographs and exhibitions. These demonstrations highlighted the authenticity of products and the laborious effort taken to create such beautiful handmade works. In this final chapter, we will explore how Evelyn Gleeson and the Dun Emer Guild utilized nationalist sensationalism in Ireland to popularize handmade goods authenticate to institute a market in America. We will also discuss the overarching theme subtly repeated throughout this thesis: the visual representation of Irish women in the arts.

The Guild established a way for women (principally young women from lower economic classes in County Dublin's suburb of Dundrum) to break away from patriarchal social constructs. Societal expectations designed by a patristic community limited the woman populace to domestic spaces. Gender roles were heavily indoctrinated in Irish

society as the nation aimed to reclaim their Gaelic identity which presented men to be strong and virile. While women were urged to model their behaviors after the Virgin Mary and linked their feminization to the tangible land. This idealized the feminine form to be stoic but confined to the domestic scope to inculcate the next generation with nationalist sympathies.<sup>1</sup>

Regardless, the Guild took advantage of rejuvenating traditional handmade crafts in Ireland to promote the representation of women in the visual arts. In doing so, the Guild instituted a market for women to try to establish female autonomy in a male-centric society. Indeed, the Guild educated the young women in traditional artistic practices but also the Irish language which fit into the Irish nationalist movement's cause. Education was a fundamental element aimed to create a lasting legacy, with the hope that pupils would continue their practice and establish a sustainable tradition in the modern world. Thus, education encouraged women's societal agency during the postcolonial reconstruction of Irish identity.

The role of women in Ireland was constricted to the home through patriarchal and religious doctrines. In spite of that, Dun Emer would take advantage of the nationalist fervor and promote economic opportunities, arguing that a feminine touch in Irish handmade crafts had been appreciated for centuries, particularly in the west. In Gleeson's essay written for *Bean na h-Éireann*, she notes how weaving was considered a respected form of employment for Irish women: "a hundred years ago, every Irish household, the

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<sup>1</sup> Bhreathnach-Lynch, Síghe, "Landscape, Space, and Gender: Their Role in the Construction of Female Identity in Newly Independent Ireland," in *Ireland's Art Ireland's History: Representing Ireland: 1845 to Present* (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2007), 88-96.

women worked at spinning, dyeing, knitting and carding. There was always work for the poor spinster.”<sup>2</sup>

Irish decorative arts had been placed into the laps of women, and the Guild utilized this preordained advantage to appropriate the industrial sector within the nationalist scope. In the same article, Gleeson argued that women have a preconceived contribution in romanticizing Irish pride:

When we see the men of the Aran Islands or of Connemara well-clad in home-spun garments, we have a glimpse of the past; and when we compare their warm clothing, delightful to the eye in its fitness and rich colour, with the ragged, shoddy and dirty fustian of ordinary labourers, we could wish for a return to earlier ways – to the self-respecting industry that they involved.<sup>3</sup>

From this excerpt, Gleeson contends that women in Irish society have proved themselves as a significant component in the Irish art historical field. Particularly, as contributors in the garment and weaving fields. Along with their objective to revive nonmechanical industries, the Guild elevated the strong histrionic institution of women’s visual representation to promote women’s agency in an increasingly modernized world.

The idea of rejuvenating the domestic arts directly linked a feminine role to the nationalist cause. Essentially, Gleeson pushed women’s representation in a patriarchal

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<sup>2</sup> Gleeson, Evelyn, “Hand-Weaving,” from *Bean na h-Éireann*. (Dublin: Trinity College Dublin), *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*, MS 10676/9/16, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.: 2

society under the guise of nationalist interests. This was an opportunity for women to establish a legitimate place in the economic sphere mainly controlled from a male perspective and break away from the confined dimensions of the domestic sphere.

The Guild reclaimed the value of “women’s work” and effectively linked domestic work to the overall nationalist perspective. Particularly seen in Figure 6, as discussed in chapter two, we see the model posed in a highly staged environment. A sentimentalized background framed with a pure Irish landscape complete with a loch and mountains. Our model is positioned in the middle ground as she rests her right arm over a harp. A second harp is placed in the foreground—literally placed on a pedestal. The Irish national symbol, the harp, is paired with the idealized landscape behind the model adorning garments with Insular influenced embroidery motifs. Thus, an emphasis of women’s connection to the Revival is transformed and fits within the overall nationalist perspective. As Gleeson stated, “cannot one nationlise through the eyes as well as the ears.”

Ms. Gleeson appropriated the romanization of Ireland through a meniscus, promoting women’s agency to redefine their overall contribution in society. Although embroidery and weaving had limited women to domestic means of existence, the Dun Emer Guild refuted this limited stasis for women. The Guild felt that negating the artistic recognition of women did not align with the inclusive appreciation of reclaimed art works set as a precedent in the Irish Arts and Crafts Societies. Gleeson noted that “as long as the sense of pride and responsibility that was fostered by hand-made work remained, labour would not be deprived of dignity and pleasure.”<sup>4</sup> This point argues that societal recognition of goods is essentially a collective between the artist and audience. Therefore,

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<sup>4</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, “Irish Crafts, A Notable Exhibition at St. Louis,” 1904 (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*), MS 10676/9/1/8-9.

a woman who creates a work of art and feels a sense of pride in the craft has just as much worth her male counterpart.

A market to sell such beautiful hand-made goods is essential for any business to sustain, especially when competing with cheaper manufactured goods. The idea of challenging a capitalist establishment in favor for representation of women in decorative arts drove the Guild to be successful during this time. The most important aspect being (as chapter two's epigraph highlights), is the "sweet symmetry." The term signifies the main difference between the industrially manufactured products and legitimate handmade goods. While highly reproduced goods from industrialized machines were lauded for their cheap prices and accessibility, authentic hand-made products were (and still to this day) held to a higher standard. These are works that will never be the same. Not one work will look exactly like another and a personal touch is achieved between the buyer and artist creating a commodity that cannot be found anywhere else.

As Nicola Gordon Bowe notes, the standard of training and proper education for craft artists established them apart from dilettantes. This argument also separates the trained craft artist from the industrial worker. Gordon Bowe further argues that the Arts and Crafts Movement ideology permitted an opportunity for women to "seek artistic fulfilment"<sup>5</sup> during a time when women were not visually recognized in the arts. The Guild paved the way for young female Irish artists to redefine their fates and actively participate in formal art world. Thus, Irish nationalist and suffragist philosophies

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<sup>5</sup> Gordon Bowe, Nicola. "Women and the Arts and Crafts Revival in Ireland, c.1886-1930," in *Irish Women Artists from the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day*. (Dublin: The Ormond Printing Co. Ltd., 1987), 22-23.

intertwined, as the Dun Emer women fulfilled nationalist ideas aimed to revive Gaelic traditions.

Gleeson realized that by establishing a society that promoted the revival of traditional decorative arts was first envisioned while in London. While among members of the Arts and Crafts Society in London, Gleeson often discussed the poor economic conditions she had witnessed in Ireland. She mentions in a newspaper article from the *Pilot* how her role in the London's Arts and Crafts scene motivated Gleeson to "emulate her father's example."<sup>6</sup> Through the English Arts and Crafts Movement's model, Gleeson saw a way to provide opportunities for women to learn a distinguished trade that would prove to be economically tenable. However, in order to find support, the Dun Emer Guild turned to the bustling American market.

Indeed, the Dublin and London markets provided a basic income for the Guild. As we discussed in chapter two, the Guild were active in the Irish Arts and Crafts Societies and utilized live demonstrations of the women at work to link the products with the authenticity of labor. But these two audiences did not provide enough for monetary support. Gleeson even forgave her annual income for a year in order to provide the girls with payments. However, the American markets provided a financially lucrative opportunity for the Guild and opened a wider interest for Irish handmade goods. This niche demand for genuine Irish hand-made goods was first established at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition held in St. Louis, Missouri. The Irish Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction and the Royal Commission worked with Irish

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<sup>6</sup> *The Pilot*, "Miss Gleeson's Work at Dundrum, Ireland, Training Young Girls to Beautiful Handicrafts," (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*) MS 10676/9/1/22.

American organizers to specifically incorporate a “Special Irish Exhibit,”<sup>7</sup> to promote Ireland’s authenticity in the Art and Crafts movement.

The 1904 Exposition aimed to introduce the American audience to a comprehensive display of revived nonmechanical prowess of Irish industries to demonstrate that the nation was *more* than the “primitive” society depicted in British *Punch* cartoons. This “Special Irish Exhibit” essentially opened a door for the Irish Arts and Crafts Societies to supply authentic, hand-made Irish linen and wool (among other crafts like stained glass and woodworking) products to an affluent portion of the American public – specifically Irish Americans who empathized with Ireland’s cause to break from England’s colonialist grasp.

This alone is ironic, while the initial Arts and Crafts Movement was designed to revive traditional Anglo medieval artistic representations in England, Irish affiliates of the Movement utilized the English model to promote the Irish brand. Nevertheless, authenticity was the name of the game and the legitimacy of handmade goods was *the* key selling point for Irish exhibitions in America. Particularly, up to this point in the early twentieth-century, so-called Irish linen had been produced and purchased by Americans from Germany and Belgium.<sup>8</sup>

The Dun Emer Guild further instituted the appreciation for handmade Irish works in New York. The 1908 Irish Industrial Exposition at Madison Square Gardens propelled the Guild in specified affluent Irish American societies. While interviewed by the *Freeman’s Journal*, Gleeson noted “most of the goods we make...are rather too

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<sup>7</sup> “Irish Crafts, A Notable Exhibition At Saint Louis,” Papers of Evelyn Gleeson 10676/9/1/8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

expensive for the general run of purchasers in Ireland; but over here, there are so many rich people that there is a better market for our goods.”<sup>9</sup>

Gleeson seized the opportunity of a booming American economy to market the Guild’s authentic work in order to provide members of the Guild with legitimate income. I would argue that the more lucrative American markets extended Ms. Gleeson’s advocacy for women’s representation in the visual arts. By extending the Guild’s market to the United States, Gleeson was able to raise awareness to both the Irish Revival and the economic pressures forced upon young women in lower economic positions.

In 1908, Ms. Gleeson, with two promising pupils, travelled to New York and Boston to demonstrate their trade to the more affluent populace in America. An article in *The Boston Herald* from a February issue that same year emphasized Ms. Gleeson’s mission to employ young women in the Dublin area and educate pupils in traditional crafts, painting, and the Irish language. The article highlighted how the Guild provided young women an opportunity for a legitimate education otherwise not afforded to lower class girls. Furthermore, Gleeson noted that her “idea in coming to this country and telling of my school is to interest rich Irish-Americans in the industries carried on by Irish girls, and thus establish a market for their work, I have already done this in New York and hope by my exhibit in the Arts and Crafts Bureau here, to do so in in Boston.”<sup>10</sup>

This marketing strategy established a legacy aimed towards the Irish American population who longed for some sort of connection to their home nation. Cities such as New York and Boston had large populations of Irish immigrants and provided an ideal

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<sup>9</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 1908, (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*), MS 10676/9/1/11.

<sup>10</sup> *The Boston Herald*, “Evelyn Gleeson Aids the Girls of Ireland,” (From: Trinity College Dublin, *Papers of Evelyn Gleeson*), MS 10676/9/1/17.

market for Irish industries to carry on during the latter part of twentieth century. The connection Gleeson established during her time in America had a lasting effect.

Evelyn Gleeson's influence continues to inspire women art historians and artists in Ireland. While she and the Dun Emer Guild are not discussed in historical examinations of Ireland's past in America, they have been frequently written about in Ireland. For example, Nicola Gordon Bowe and Karen Brown have both written extensively about Gleeson's lasting impact on female representation in the arts. Gleeson was even featured in the Douglas Hyde Gallery's 1987 exhibit *Irish Women Artists, From the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day* at Trinity College Dublin. However, the Guild's legacy for female artists has often been neglected from American art historical research. This is somewhat surprising as the United States still celebrates the authentic nature of handmade goods and Irish culture to the present day. Indeed, art historians have begun to examine the cultural influence of American female artists. Now it is time for us to broaden the scope and begin to expand our analyzations to women like Evelyn Gleeson and the Dun Emer Guild.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, we have discussed an extensive amount of information pertaining to the Dun Emer's presence in Irish history during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The overall art historical analysis of female Irish Revival artists has been limited in the United States. This abstraction has argued that the Dun Emer Guild should be properly recognized for their significant contribution in the Irish Revival and instituted a legacy for Gaelic inspired designs into the present. Additionally, this analysis has argued that Evelyn Gleeson deserves to be highly recognized within the art historical field for her philanthropic doctrines aimed to elevate women's involvement in the visual arts and their own agency within a patriarchal society.

These writings analyzed the significant influence that the English Arts and Crafts Movement had on reviving an appreciation for homemade goods. An influence which the Dun Emer Guild molded within the sphere of the Irish Language Movement and the cultural Revival. Furthermore, Evelyn Gleeson promoted women's agency during a crucial era for the suffragist cause.

This essay presented an argument for the visual representation of Irish women and their authentic contribution to an established male dominated sphere. These artistic contributions assisted in redefining Irish identity and are often overlooked but are necessary modes of representation for the Irish nation during the precipice of a cultural revolution.

Through their adaptation of preserved Celtic motifs and the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Dun Emer Guild engraved a distinct space within the Irish Revival. Gleeson and the Dun Emer Guild provided an objective to redefine the visual representation of women in the arts through a reformulation of domestic crafts as a legitimate form of art. The artistic tradition that Ms. Evelyn Gleeson extended to the American market during the early twentieth century is significant when one considers the continued legacy of Irish made products in America.

Evelyn Gleeson and the Dun Emer Guild attempted to establish a place for women to explore their own artistic endeavors – void of patriarchal constructs and societal expectations – in order to inaugurate a space outside of the four walls of the domestic sphere. The work the Guild produced is still admired and studied in Ireland. However, the analysis of these women's work in the art historical field needs to be continued in order to truly realize their contribution to the artistic perspective.

## ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. Ardagh Chalice



Figure 2. Runnymead Estate, Dundrum County Dublin (location for Dun Emer Guild's workshop)



Figure 3. Photograph of Dun Emer Guild carpet weaving



Figure 4. Photograph of Dun Emer Guild carpet weaving

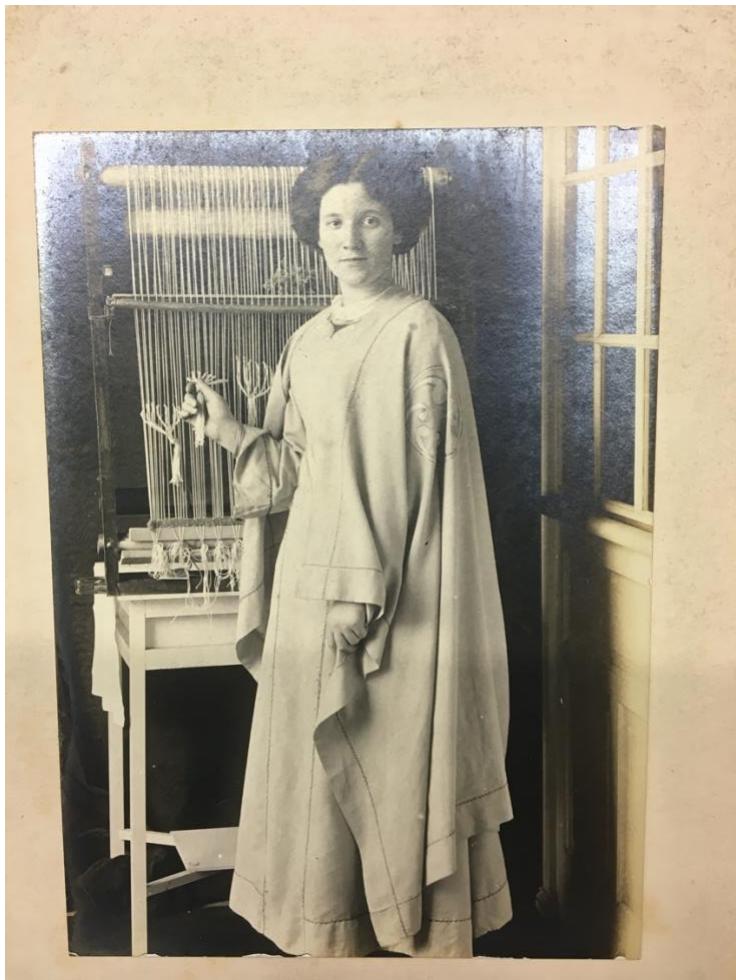


Figure 5. Example of staged photograph of Dun Emer pupil with Dun Emer Guild's embroidery



Figure 6. Staged photograph of Dun Emer's embroidered work with Irish landscape

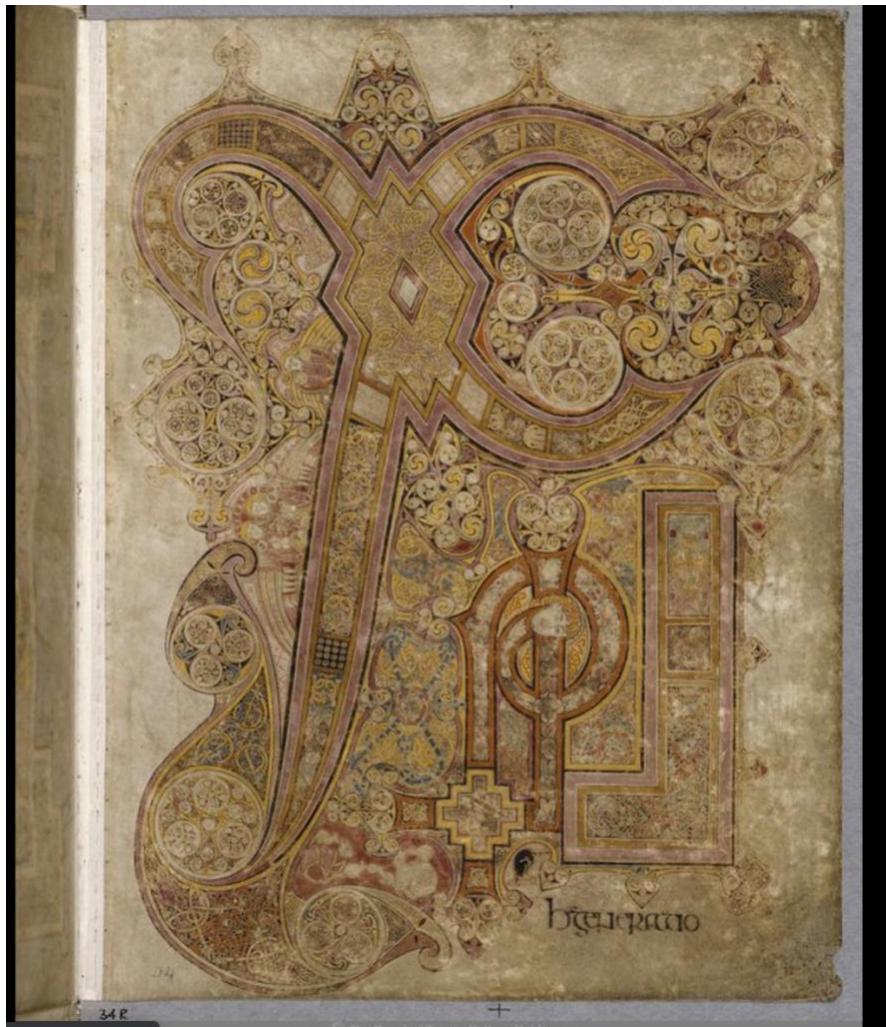


Figure 7. *Chi Rho Page* from Book of Kells



Figure 8. Photograph of Dun Emer Guild pupils demonstrating craft with handmade rugs in background

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## VITA

Abigail Brightwell-Gray received her Bachelor's in the Arts from the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2015 and went on to complete her Master's in Art History in 2020. She was awarded the UMKC Women's Grant in 2019 to travel to Dublin to study the collection of Evelyn Gleeson's papers at Trinity College Dublin, in order to write this thesis.