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Nancy Bell's *Elementary History of Art* and the British Origins of Popular Art History

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Abstract:

This study explores the British origins of a newly accessible art history through the lens of a little-known publication: Nancy Bell's *Elementary History of Art*, an illustrated general survey issued in six trans-Atlantic editions between 1874 and 1906. Though Bell's contributions as an author and educator of art history have been effectively erased by historiographers focused on developments within the academy, Bell's book uniquely embodies a number of key aspects of the history of art as a developing field, including its text-image hybridity, its national and international profiles, its overlapping scholarly and popular spheres, and its methodological shifts between historical cataloguing and critical aesthetics.

Nancy Bell's *Elementary History of Art* and the British Origins of Popular Art History

by Amy Von Lintel

In the early twentieth century, British art critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell proposed rigid distinctions between what they saw as the advanced aesthetics of French modern art and the retrograde, content-oriented art of Victorian Britain.^[1] Important recent scholarship has challenged such dismissals of nineteenth-century British art, arguing for the distinct advancements of Victorian artists and for broader definitions of the avant-garde.^[2] My study proposes a similar rethinking of British art-history writing and publishing between the 1870s and the 1910s. Alongside the dismissals of Victorian art production, scholars have generally ignored the art-historical developments of nineteenth-century Britain in light of continental advances. Between 1813 and 1900, German, French, Italian, Swiss, and Austrian universities founded disciplinary programs of art history as training grounds for professional scholars.^[3] Similar programs in Britain only appeared in the twentieth century, during the 1930s with the founding of the Courtauld Institute.^[4]

A longstanding bias among art historians toward the rise of their field as an academic discipline has overshadowed parallel trends beyond the academy. If we widen our lens to consider alternative versions of art history's history—especially those considered retrograde and narrative-focused, not unlike Victorian art—we discover that Britain became the birthplace of a popularly accessible art history with a distinctly modern profile. The plethora of widely read histories of art published in Victorian Britain propelled the field forward in crucial but still unrecognized ways. To explore the rise and significance of British popular art history, this essay focuses on an understudied publication issued in six editions between 1874 and 1906: Nancy Bell's *Elementary History of Art*.^[5] Because of its dates, as well as its status as an introductory survey for a general audience, Bell's book offers a revealing case study. While accounting for the work as an example of art-historical writing, I also draw attention to its hybrid text-image format that incorporated visual illustrations embedded within, and in dialogue with, its written texts (fig. 1). The plentiful black-and-white images in Bell's book made exemplary works of art visually available for readers. The book's format represents how accessible art histories in Britain were particularly visual in orientation and set lasting standards for the illustrated survey as a key genre in the field.^[6]

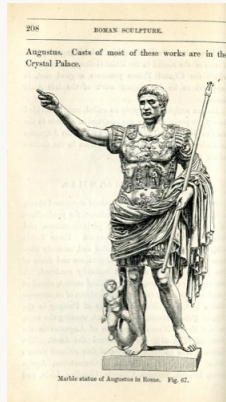


Fig. 1, Unknown artists, Illustration of *Augustus of Prima porta*, no. 67, n.d. N. D'Anvers [Nancy Bell], *Elementary History of Art: An Introduction to Ancient and Modern Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music* (New York: Scribner, Welford, and Armstrong, 1876): 208. Wood engraving. Photo by author. [\[larger image\]](#)

In the final decades of the 1800s, the foundational structures of art history were still being established in Europe and America. Publications such as Bell's *Elementary History of Art* helped to construct, reinforce, and circulate these new structures. However, as the field of art history matured into the twentieth century, began writing its own historiography from within the academy, and gained establishment as an international academic discipline, contributions such as Nancy Bell's were effectively erased. While the earlier editions of Bell's *Elementary History of Art* demonstrate the rise of popular art history in nineteenth-century Britain, Bell's later editions reflect the decline of this trend. When the Victorian era slowly blended into modernism, a neatly packaged "elementary history of art" became increasingly messy and complex. What was once comfortably graspable for readers, both mentally and physically, became unwieldy. The clear narratives of Bell's earlier editions dissolved into dense lists of artists' names, while the volume expanded to accommodate them, creating a squat and heavy object that no longer fit as comfortably in the hand. The thriving culture of populist art history that centered in Victorian Britain began to wane at the turn of the century, and it would not resurface with the same fervor until our own age of the Internet, when worldwide art is now virtually, if not physically, available for global audiences at the touch of a button.

Typical of its modernity when first released in 1874, Bell's *Elementary History of Art* blended high and low culture into a single tangible format. It provided readers with access to the epitome of high culture, presenting them with easily digestible knowledge about works of art as the ultimate achievements of human creation. Indeed, many of the art objects featured in Bell's book remain canonical and revered to this day: from the winged bulls of Assyria (fig. 2), the Parthenon sculptures, and the Spanish Alhambra to the Hagia Sophia, the Augustus of Prima porta (fig. 1), and the painted catacombs in Rome; from the Van Eyck brothers' *Ghent Altarpiece*, Ghiberti's *Gates of Paradise*, Michelangelo's *Sistine Chapel* frescoes, and Leonardo's *Last Supper*, to the prints of Albrecht Dürer and Rembrandt van Rijn. At the same time, Bell's book offered its high-culture information in a functional and affordable format for buyers well beyond elite scholars and wealthy book collectors. It was mass-produced on steam presses, while its plainly printed text-image pages were machine-sewn into a sturdy cloth binding that

presupposed frequent use rather than mere display (fig. 3). The book's various editions were continuously printed in compact, handbook formats for portability and convenient storage in a modest space, such as a travel bag. Its illustrations likewise employed the most functional and industrial medium at the time: wood engravings. This format predominated in widely circulating publications—such as the *Illustrated London News* established in 1842 and its many imitators—until its general replacement by the halftone photograph in the 1890s.^[7] As relief images, wood engravings could be printed simultaneously with relief type, keeping production costs low. Wood engravings could also be cheaply replicated through the technologies of stereotyping and electrotyping and thus reused again and again by publishers.^[8]

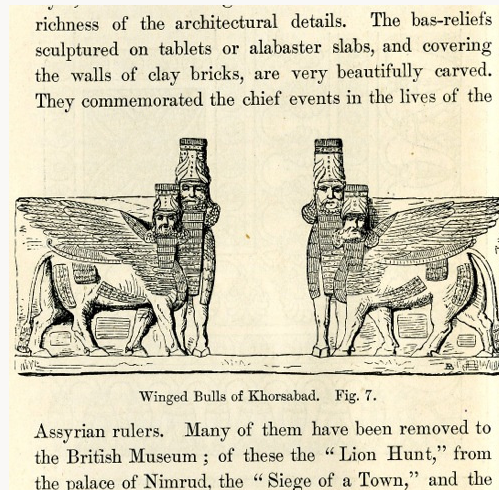


Fig. 2, Unknown artists, Illustration of Assyrian Winged Bulls from the Palace of Khorsabad, no. 7, n.d. N. D'Anvers [Nancy Bell], *Elementary History of Art: An Introduction to Ancient and Modern Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music* (New York: Scribner, Welford, and Armstrong, 1876): 18. Wood engraving. Photo by author. [\[larger image\]](#)

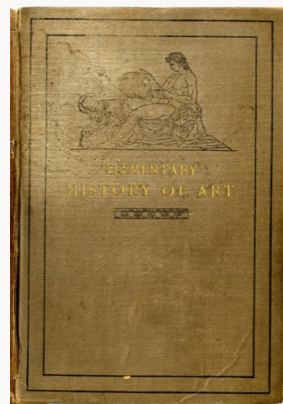


Fig. 3, Unknown artists, Cover, N. D'Anvers [Nancy Bell], *An Elementary History of Art: Architecture-Sculpture-Painting-Music* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1882). Cloth and board. Photo by author. [imperfections in original] [\[larger image\]](#)

Alongside the book's portable and low-cost format, Bell's straightforward narratives constructed memorable and manageable descriptions of historical change that avoided theoretical and scholarly argumentation. Bell was not an academic scholar with a university degree. As a woman, she received no formal training in the field, but gained her expertise through travel and first-hand studies of art and through her linguistic proficiency in several European languages that allowed her to draw from primary documents and continental scholarship.^[9] Bell's lack of a formal education, moreover, gave her a meaningful connection with her self-educating audience. This connection no doubt helped her many art-history writings sell well for decades. Between 1870 and 1910, Bell authored no less than eight full-length studies, including biographies on such artists as Gainsborough, Whistler, and Raphael; an art guide to Europe; and numerous journal articles on art and artists.^[10]

Bell issued her *Elementary History of Art* in 1874 under a gender-neutral and very French-sounding pseudonym: N. D'Anvers—N. for Nancy and Anvers for the Antwerp birthplace of her Belgian father, Pierre Meugens.^[11] Bell evidently sought to construct her authorial reputation under the guise of a continental and presumably male scholar. Reviewers in the press responded accordingly, describing with unhesitant praise the successful publication of "Mr. D'Anvers."^[12] However, Bell's pedagogical approach and her direct writing style unburdened by pedantry belied such a scholarly identity. In 1895, when she changed her author name to "Mrs. Arthur Bell," she had already established her reputation with publishers.^[13] With this change she perhaps wished to draw on her husband's relative fame as an artist and illustrator, but she also foregrounded her identity as a respectable Victorian wife and mother.^[14] The audience for Bell's art-history writings likely included many wives and mothers, who claimed some responsibility for the education of their families. Bell mentioned "young people" in particular as target readers for her book.^[15] Since art history was not a subject taught in British schools at the time, children would have received any art-historical education in their home directed by tutors or their parents.

As early as the 1830s, the history of art featured prominently in Britain as a subject for self-educational publishing. A pioneer in this trend was the *Penny Magazine*, an affordable pictorial weekly for the reading masses first published in London in 1832 by Charles Knight.^[16] The magazine provided short informational articles on a wide variety of subjects, the majority illustrated with large and detailed images. Among the most popular and recurring subjects in the *Penny Magazine* were features on art and artists. Bell's *Elementary History of Art* drew directly on conventions set by the *Penny Magazine*. Both employed the same mixing of narrative description with pictorial wood engravings, offering similar text-image dialogues to satisfy a public hungry for easy lessons in cultural knowledge. Though wood engravings based on line drawings were not ideal for studying art history from a stylistic point of view, given their efficiency and affordability they were featured internationally in popular art histories until the early 1900s.^[17] To be sure, the standards of illustrated art-history publishing were defined first through wood engravings and only later through photography, the medium that still predominates today. As one reviewer of Bell's *Elementary History of Art* noted, "Even when not artistically fine, [the book's illustrations] are useful as diagrams" (figs. 1, 2).^[18] Many of the images in Bell's survey were small with a drawn and colorless linearity that prohibited mimetic tonalities. Bell's 1897 monograph on Thomas Gainsborough described the different functions of photographs versus wood engravings in Victorian histories of art. The individual style of an artist, Bell's preface observed, can only be captured by direct or photographic reproductions,

and thus Bell's study of Gainsborough selected the more expensive medium of photogravure.^[19] In contrast, such focused connoisseurship of artistic styles was not the purpose of Bell's *Elementary History of Art*, which aimed instead to provide introductory learning about broad developments in an affordable format, and so wood engravings sufficed.

Bell's first edition, a single-volume handbook of several hundred pages and 122 wood engravings, claimed to offer an "elementary" and therefore both manageable and teachable art history. The *Penny Magazine* had given readers a disjointed smattering of art-historical knowledge: one issue, for example, featured a work from ancient Greece, and the next discussed a Hindu cave temple in India. Bell's book, by contrast, collected and organized such lessons into a comprehensive chronology, providing a single discrete history of art with a clear beginning and end. Bell and her publishers believed that a closed and largely unchanging system of art history could be defined for readers, and the book was marketed in this light.

The work to establish a stable and systematic art history had begun first in German-language scholarship, with the studies of Franz Kugler. An academically trained professor of art history in Berlin, Kugler issued his *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* in 1842, which still stands as the first unillustrated survey history of art.^[20] Other German surveys followed, including Wilhelm Lübke's illustrated *Grundriss der Kunstgeschichte* from 1860.^[21] Bell's *Elementary History of Art* drew closely upon Lübke's *Grundriss*, both in its organization and in its recycling of the same wood engravings for the majority of its images (fig. 2).^[22] Although Bell did not mention Lübke's book by name, she admitted that "the framework and the greater number of the illustrations are borrowed, with the permission of the publishers, from a small 'Guide to the History of Art' which has long been in use in German schools."^[23] Borrowing already-published illustrations, rather than commissioning new images to be produced, significantly lowered the production cost and thus the sales price of Bell's book. Also drawing on the models of Lübke's *Grundriss*, Bell divided her history of art into set categories, such as the "ancient" and "modern" eras; the ancient period covered global art up to the Middle Ages and the modern age incorporated everything post-Renaissance in Europe. The subtitle of Bell's book—"An Introduction to Ancient and Modern [Art]"—highlights this approach. Both Lübke and Bell initially hesitated to discuss living artists among their chapters, arguing that the reputations of contemporary artists had not yet been established and thus had no place in a *history* of art.^[24] The historical past and the contemporary present were apparently at odds in these early surveys.

Despite their shared organization, information, and images, however, Bell's book circulated among a different audience than Lübke's, especially in Britain. Whereas Lübke's original 1860 German edition was issued as a single compact volume, the publishers Smith, Elder and Co. in London—also the publishers of John Ruskin's books—expanded their English translation of Lübke's *Grundriss* into two larger volumes in 1868.^[25] The price of this translation, listed at 42 shillings, was significantly higher than that of Bell's book, which was listed at 10 shillings, 6 pence (10s 6d). Together with its lower price, Bell's book also appealed to its British audience through an extensive supplement on the art of Great Britain. One of the harshest critiques by English-speaking readers of Lübke's otherwise well-received book was its dismissal and neglect of British art.^[26] Bell's book drew heavily upon Lübke's content, but forged ahead independently in its coverage of British architecture, sculpture, and painting. T. Roger Smith wrote in his "preface" to Bell's first edition, that the "arrangement adheres pretty closely to that of the well-

known German manual on which it is based.”^[27] Smith noted, however, that the book broke from its model in important ways: “Having had an opportunity of comparing the two closely, I find this work to be so much varied and enlarged as to be virtually an entirely new book, and in my opinion a better one.”^[28] This positive review was likely based on Bell’s attention to the art of her own nation.

With her coverage of British art, Bell also drew the attention of her readers to the accomplishments of British art collectors. Bell’s first edition is filled with references to public and private collections in Britain where specific works of art could be found, including the British Museum, the South Kensington Museum, and the National Gallery, which was, according to Bell, “less likely to perplex the student” than the more extensive continental museums such as the Louvre.^[29] She also mentioned items to view at the Bodleian Library at Oxford, at Hampton Court, and in the holdings of individual private collectors that were presumably open to a select public at the time, such as the collections of the Earl of Spencer and Lord Dudley.^[30] Bell’s many references to accessible art resources for her readers highlighted the growing opportunities for the British public to find histories of art within their reach.

Bell’s book reveals how such accessible art histories in Britain were particularly visual in their orientation. Beyond offering her own survey as an illustrated resource, Bell also directed readers to visit nearby displays of art as both original works of art and reproductions, such as casts or painted copies after original objects. For instance, Bell frequently cited the Crystal Palace at Sydenham as a place for visitors to experience the history of art in reproduction as a popular visual spectacle (fig. 1).^[31] “Many hundreds of casts of sculpture of all countries and of all times,” she wrote, “may be seen to great advantage among shrubs and appropriate architecture.”^[32] When the original Crystal Palace from 1851 was purchased in 1854 by a private company of shareholders, disassembled, and moved from Hyde Park to the London suburb of Sydenham, galleries were added that displayed plaster and paint reproductions of art-historical periods, styles, and monuments, including those of ancient Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman origin, and objects from the Byzantine, Medieval, and Renaissance eras. Casts of sculpture from these periods and styles appeared within and around the respective galleries.^[33]

As an extensive collection representing the art-history canon in one publicly accessible place, the Sydenham Crystal Palace was unrivaled by any cast collection in Europe or the United States.^[34] Popularizers of art history in Britain and beyond recognized the uniqueness and utility of the Crystal Palace for self-educating visitors. René and Louis Ménéard, for example, expressed their praise and their desire for their native France to have a similar study collection:

How instructive for [the young people of France] would a gallery of casts be where they could compare the characters of all schools! In traveling to study the monuments of the arts, I have felt, I must say, a certain sentiment of national jealousy to see that England had surpassed us in this vein. . . . In this astonishing palace of Sydenham where one leaves the Egyptian colossi to traverse Greek and Renaissance art, to then arrive at the art of our days, one must admire these masterpieces located between a stuffed bear and a merchant of discount suspenders.^[35]

For the brothers Ménard, the commercialization of the Sydenham Crystal Palace, where merchants sold their wares near the art-history displays, was not at odds with its educational purpose and efficacy.

As with Bell's *Elementary History of Art*, the art-history displays at Sydenham brought elite culture into a popular visual format. And Bell informs us that such popularizations were specifically British innovations. She described how "these casts were collected at a very large cost by Mr. Owen Jones and Sir Digby Wyatt, who searched for and secured the best examples of sculpture in Egypt, Assyria, Greece, Italy, and France," helping her reader recognize that the concept, execution, and funding of the Sydenham Crystal Palace was the product of British educators.^[36] For readers who could not afford, or chose not to undertake, the trip to the Uffizi in Florence or the Louvre in Paris, Bell encouraged them to view the *Venus de Medici* or the *Huntress Diana* as high quality copies through a day-trip to Sydenham. In addition, she pointed them to the growing photographic archives at the National Art Library of the South Kensington Museum and to the Arundel Society's published chromolithographs after early Renaissance artists from Giotto to the Van Eycks. Reviewers applauded Bell's promotions of area resources in Britain. One mention in the *Art Journal*, for instance, claimed that even "more important" than the accuracy of the book's information were "the references to the noble collections of paintings and sculpture in our National Gallery, British Museum, South Kensington, and elsewhere, when they contain objects [mentioned] in the text."^[37] Such dialogues between written texts, visual illustrations, and material objects on display—or, in other words, between pictorial publications and art exhibitions—formed the basis of popular art history in nineteenth-century Britain.

Again parallel to the Sydenham art-history displays, Bell's book emphasized its purpose as an entertaining history for beginners, rather than a scholarly or theoretical text. Her work "does not claim to contain any original criticism, but is merely meant to serve as an introduction to more learned works by men who have given their lives to the study of one or another phase of art-development."^[38] This observation demonstrated Bell's avoidance of so-called "original criticism," which was seen as the highest level of aesthetic judgment and art-historical practice, while it also clarified the gendered aspects of early art history. Advanced critical judgment was the purview of scholarly men, while women could aspire to the lower status of educators and popularizers. Bell was one of dozens of British women aspiring to such roles, a subject I have addressed elsewhere.^[39] Bell wrote that she aimed only to relate "the fascinating story of the gradual growth" of artistic styles across chronological time and geographical space, and "has but extracted for the use of beginners the pith of those writings which have been accepted as standard works by the best critics of the nineteenth century."^[40] She identified herself as an extractor and cataloguer of the "pith" of other, more established scholars, but one who promised that her story would be "fascinating" rather than pedantic. Indeed, popular histories of art, in contrast to their academic counterparts, aimed to entertain while they educated and to appeal to readers in their leisure time rather than during professional labor.

One aspect that particularly distinguished Bell's approach from the emerging theoretical criticism of the time was her use of the term "modern." For Bell in 1874, "modern art" described a distinct era starting after the Renaissance and ending in the early 1800s. The designation of "modern" for Bell was chronological rather than critical, and she approached the modern

period as having equal significance to the other periods she discussed. For instance, Bell described how British artists were “in every sense modern” not because of their progressive aesthetics, but because the British school only emerged in the so-called modern era.^[41] She explained to her readers how British artists had “no past to look back upon, no great triumphs to recall, except within quite recent days” and that “until the eighteenth century, painting in England was mainly in the hands of foreigners.”^[42] She praised William Hogarth for breaking away from Italian art, a theme that she continued with her brief mention of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, whom she credits with throwing off the influence of Raphael. Yet, rather than praising the Pre-Raphaelites for challenging the academic conventions of Raphael and his followers, Bell lauded them for turning their back on a foreign influence and thus becoming more British.

When Bell was writing in 1874, the concept of modern art had only just begun a dramatic reformulation in the critical writings of John Ruskin in Britain and Charles Baudelaire in France. The “moderns” for Ruskin differed from the “ancients” not only by their chronological order, but also by their superiority and advancement over past artists.^[43] Ruskin championed British artists, from Turner to the Pre-Raphaelites, not simply for being true to their British heritage, but for overturning academic traditions and forging new aesthetic paths. For Baudelaire, the modern artist deserved the highest acclaim. Baudelaire’s modern artist was an interpreter of his own world, a “painter of modern life” who engaged with his contemporary surroundings to inspire an art fitting for the current moment.^[44] Like Bell in her balanced attention to a variety of eras and styles, Baudelaire believed that each era had its own significant modernity.^[45] But Baudelaire sought above all to define modernity specifically for his own historical era and thus advocate a new forward progression for art.

Ruskin and Baudelaire also privileged the medium of painting in their definitions of the modern, an approach that contrasted with Bell’s first edition, in which historical change was outlined across multiple media, including architecture, sculpture, and painting, as well as the decorative and print arts. Bell’s 1874 and 1882 editions further demonstrated the fluid boundaries of the “arts” at the time, since they included the history of music as their final chapter.^[46] Bell and her publishers initially aimed to provide readers with broad cultural knowledge that included, but was not restricted to, the visual arts. As opposed to the emerging modernist versions of critical art history that focused on the visual arts with growing disciplinary specificity and that privileged painting above all, popular art history presented an inclusive field with more porous boundaries.

Bell’s notions of modern art at first did not embrace the same value judgments as did the writings of Ruskin and Baudelaire, who lauded modern art as new, progressive, advanced, and revolutionary. Rather, Bell’s work constructed continuities with a longer, ongoing past in which modernity had been underway for centuries. At the time of Bell’s first edition in the 1870s, broad designations of “ancient” and “modern” were still relatively pervasive. The leading German-language studies, such as Lübke’s *Grundriss*, used these terms, ancient and modern, in ways that influenced Bell’s approach, just as they shaped the widely attended art-history exhibitions in Britain, including the Sydenham Crystal Palace and the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition held in 1857.^[47] The designers at Manchester, for example, divided the two wings of its newly constructed exhibition pavilion according to these same two categories of ancient and modern.^[48] Bell’s 1874 edition likewise positioned ancient art on an equal

footing with modern art. Ancient art was a broadly encompassing term, and Bell's book featured under this heading everything from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Buddhist and Hindu Asia, to the classical and medieval eras in Europe. Indeed, her coverage of the ancient world was far more global and diversified than that of the modern world, which remained confined to the West.

In later editions of her book, especially her 1895, 1900, and 1906 versions, Bell's definitions of the modern began to shift, as the critical views of Ruskin and Baudelaire infiltrated her approach as now-standard perspectives. No longer was modern art an umbrella term for centuries of art beginning in the Renaissance. Bell's survey began to characterize modern art as being in tune with a dynamic chronological present. For example, Bell described how nineteenth-century architects had adapted historicizing architecture "to the varying requirements of modern life."^[49] She highlighted the way they introduced "new ornaments, new forms, and new combinations," abandoning traditional principles of composition by which they had been "guided, possibly sometimes fettered."^[50] Bell celebrated the use of iron and steel as "thoroughly modern" materials that helped to create the "Street Architecture" of the London metropolis, thus using terms that reflected Baudelaire's definitions of modern art as responding to contemporary urban life.^[51] Regarding sculpture, Bell derided work made after Canova's death in 1822 for its "mere lifeless compliance with academic rules" and therefore its failure to be innovative and fittingly modern.^[52] This language characterizing the modern through its novelty, change, and deviation from academic traditions reflected newly critical distinctions that came to define modernist aesthetics in the twentieth century.^[53]

Bell's increasing repetition of the word "modern" in her 1895, 1900, and 1906 editions further reflects this semantic change. In the section on painting, Bell ended each discussion of national schools—namely, Spanish, Belgian, Dutch, German, British, and American—with a subsection on the "modern painting" of that school. Her descriptions of such schools in these later editions expanded into long lists of artists' names simply mentioned with little discussion provided, an expansion that, as described above, caused the volume to swell noticeably. Within such a dense mass of artists, however, the contemporary French schools rose to the surface in a new way. In her 1874 edition, Bell had hesitated to privilege French developments over any other, and her emphasis fell instead on her chapters concerning British art after Hogarth. Beginning in 1895, however, Bell carefully explained how the recent movement of French Impressionism formed a "new school of painting" and a "new phase of art development," her repetition of the notion of "newness" underscoring her conception of modern art in terms of novelty and innovation.^[54] Bell claimed that the chief characteristics of French Impressionism were its "progressive spirit, combined with an eagerness to break with all the traditions of the past" and its "broad telling touches" that defined a new style.^[55] She continued:

Their brush-work is slight, loose, and rapid, and occasionally pieces of pure pigment, instead of being mixed on the palette, are placed side by side on the canvas to portray some brilliant effect in nature, so that it is only when standing at a very considerable distance that the spectator is able to understand the aim of the picture.^[56]

She described both their stylistic techniques and their modern subjects as "daring and unconventional," again defining the modern in Baudelaire's terms as the new art of the present.^[57]

For Bell's coverage of British art, the modern era now began rather than ended in the nineteenth century with Constable, Turner, and the Pre-Raphaelites, whom Bell now positioned as influential upon the most praiseworthy French painters. She inserted British artists into her narratives, identifying Constable, for example, as the head of the "modern realistic landscape" genre, and argued that his showings in Paris in 1824 made an important impact on French landscape art.^[58] She celebrated Turner as "the greatest interpreter of nature of any time or country," an assertion accompanied by a full-page illustration of a landscape painting by Turner (fig. 4), again disclosing her desire to value modern artists over and above those of the past and to promote British art alongside the art of France, here clearly drawing on Ruskin's models.^[59] Bell even hedged her praise of the French Impressionists, criticizing how they made "little or no attempt at composition" and how their goals of capturing modern life with total truthfulness often resulted in "revolting aspects . . . positive ugliness and vulgarity."^[60] We can assume that these phrases, at least in part, reflected Bell's preference for the stronger compositions and softer subjects of nineteenth-century British painting (figs. 4, 5). She further specified her comparison: "In direct opposition to the Pre-Raphaelites, the Impressionists ignore the minor details of their subjects, sacrificing local colouring for the sake of broad general effects," a statement that points to the praiseworthy focus on detail that Bell found in British art.^[61] Even as she shifted her approach to view modern art in terms of progressive aesthetics, Bell maintained her commitment to position British artists at the forefront of modernity.



Fig. 4, Unknown artists, Illustration of J. M. W. Turner's *Lake Avernus*, no. 161, n.d. Mrs. Arthur Bell [Nancy Bell], *An Elementary History of Art: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co, 1895): 273. Wood engraving. Photo by author. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 5, Unknown artists, Illustration of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Regina Cordium*, no. 169, n.d., Mrs. Arthur Bell [Nancy Bell], *An Elementary History of Art: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, & Co., 1895): 294. Wood engraving. Photo by author. [\[larger image\]](#)

The illustrations that accompanied Bell's descriptions further underscored what Bell saw as the discrepancies between the French and British styles of modern art. The examples of French Barbizon paintings, for instance, were visually referenced by poor-quality reproductions using an unknown photomechanical method. They appear blotchy, blurred, and even, at times, indecipherable in their attempt to reproduce the "broad general effects" of the French styles (fig. 6). Affordable photography-based reproduction techniques were still in an experimental stage at the time, whereas wood-engraving techniques had reached their apex of quality. The very few photomechanical illustrations in Bell's final editions, which primarily featured French modern art, stand in stark contrast to the highly detailed, even virtuoso wood-engraved images of British modern art. To be sure, the dramatic evolution in the quality of wood-engraved art-history illustrations can be traced across the editions of Bell's *Elementary History of Art*. What began as humble, diagrammatic pictures (figs. 1, 2) evolved into impressive works of reproductive art (fig. 5).

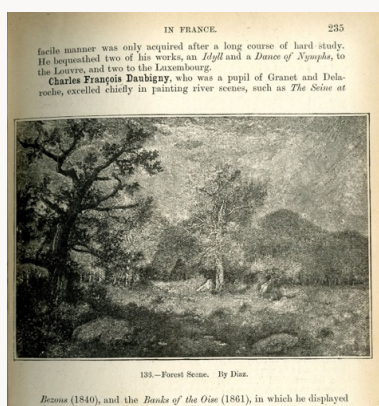


Fig. 6, Unknown artists, Illustration of Narcisse Diaz de la Pena's *Forest Scene*, no. 136. Mrs. Arthur Bell [Nancy Bell], *An Elementary History of Art: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, & Co., 1895): 235. Photomechanical reproduction. Photo by author. [imperfections in original] [\[larger image\]](#)

Bell never entirely shunned a content-based art history to embrace the formalism of Roger Fry and Clive Bell, just as she never entirely saw French painting as the epitome of modern art. Such a change to a style-driven art history would have been difficult given her continued use of affordable illustrations. Yet, Bell's survey in its later editions reflected the growing importance of criticality in art history and the new status of the introductory survey as a place to assess contemporary art and advocate the avant-garde. At the same time, Bell's *Elementary History of Art* remained resolutely historical in its approach. Whereas Ruskin, Baudelaire, and their fellow critics aimed to change public taste and influence future art, Bell sought to educate the public about already established tastes regarding historical art. Bell's book justified this focus on history as a popularizing technique. The author of her preface, Smith, argued that historical knowledge was the basic building block for more advanced learning, including an understanding of theory and the skills of critical judgment.^[62] Smith continued:

The best way of cultivating an appreciation of works of art, and of training the judgment to form sound opinions of their merits and defects, will be to begin by becoming familiar with their history through all time, and then to seek an intimate acquaintance with such of the best examples of each art as may be accessible.^[63]

One reviewer of Bell's book in the *London Quarterly Review* commended the work specifically for how "it engages the attention first in what is most material, and passes from stage to stage into regions more and more intimately connected with philosophic interests and spiritual beauty."^[64] This observation referred in large part to the book's focus on the material traces of history embodied within works of art. Bell applied this approach, for example, in her discussions of Egyptian and Asian art. She argued that Egyptian relief carvings "have a great historical value" because "they are pictorial annals of the lives of the deceased," whereas she connected East Asian art to its intriguing symbolism that reflected Asian religious beliefs, even while she mentioned the lack of "scientific knowledge of perspective" among Asian artists.^[65] Presumably, novice students desired information about a variety of artistic traditions, including those of non-Western cultures, rather than longwinded judgments about the technical flaws of certain works of art.

Bell advised readers to maintain an unbiased mind and an appreciation for all periods, a method that was positively reviewed in the press.^[66] A review in the *Observer* praised the book for being "so free from prejudice that it will form a suitable gift-book for the young."^[67] Bell explained her approach in the following terms:

In this little handbook, an attempt is made to give a broad and general outline of the *history* of painting, pointing out the peculiarities which may be looked for in the arts of different countries, and the various climatic, democratic and other causes which have influenced the direction of their aims, attention to which causes are essential for a just estimation of the works of painters. And no pretensions are put forth to invade the realms of aesthetic criticism.^[68]

Here again, this method separates Bell's popular survey from contemporary forms of scholarly art history and criticism.

However, the separation between the popular and academic realms of early art history was not always distinct. Lübke's publications saw translation into numerous European languages as well as ongoing international sales in England, America, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, France, and many German-speaking regions, thereby reflecting audiences beyond a strictly academic context.^[69] Moreover, Lübke's translators included Fanny Elizabeth Bunnètt in Britain, who, like Bell, was not formally trained in art history.^[70] Bell's early editions included the preface by Smith—a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and professor of architecture at the University of London—as well as a dedication to the Reverend R. Ernest Wallis, PhD, an academic theologian and translator of many early church writings. By Bell's third edition in 1889, the book had received some official accolades, being adopted by the Civil Service Commissioners of Britain as a textbook for candidate exams on questions of art, and added to the list of Prize Books given to art students by the Science and Art Department, the national body in charge of art education.^[71]

These intersections between the scholarly and popular spheres of art history register the porous boundaries of what was still a young field. Similar overlaps also occurred between art history's national and international contexts in these early years. By the end of the nineteenth century, art history had emerged as an internationally recognized field that accounted for global traditions and shared its methodologies across national boundaries. Yet, it simultaneously developed into a strongly nationalizing field that emphasized geographic differences, cross-cultural competition, and distinctly national styles of art. Bell's book particularly embodied these overlaps of popular and academic, national and international. Her coverage was transnational, reaching across Europe and Asia and into the Americas, while her approach drew upon continental methods of study, popularizing German academic models for a wide English-speaking audience that included both sides of the Atlantic. Her book was issued simultaneously in London and New York in all six editions.

At the same time, Bell's continuous emphasis on British art and British art collecting demonstrates a clear national bias. Bell defined art, "like language," as "an expression of national ideas and national peculiarities."^[72] The various arts, she argued, could illuminate national histories as well as aesthetic developments, especially for a broad public. Bell described how British history "might be to no inconsiderable extent illustrated by an examination of the buildings belonging to each period under consideration."^[73] In her fourth edition, from 1895, she expanded upon this idea: "The importance of Art is now fully recognized, not only for its own sake as the beautifier and ennobler of the surroundings of daily life, but as the exponent and reflex of the development of the nations to which great artists belonged."^[74] Again, she balanced aesthetics with historical context, viewing art through a specifically national lens.

In defining and circulating the new standards of art history to broad international audiences, popular books such as Bell's *Elementary History of Art* showed a distinct modernity in their approach, format, reach, and influence. But toward the close of the century and into the next, the projects of such popularizers had reached a breaking point. This can be seen in how Bell's book began to burst at its seams. Additional sections included not only more recent art, as the author "brought [her coverage] up to date," but also an even wider variety of artistic styles, contexts, and media—from the art of Portugal, to an extended discussion of Asian art, to new coverage of British miniature painting.^[75] A significant increase in the number of illustrations

paralleled these added discussions. What began as 122 images in the first edition, expanded to 373 in later editions.^[76]

With this proliferation of examples and references, Bell's survey became more encyclopedic than narrative. Linear clarity and readability were sacrificed for sheer coverage. The publishers diminished the size of the type and margins to fit ever more art and artists on each page, creating an overly dense layout, while they highlighted the artists' names to separate them from the rest of the packed text. This was a practical choice, but it also emphasized an increasing focus on artistic individuality—what Bell repeatedly referred to as “original genius”—at the expense of historical context, a development that reflects shifts toward modernist art history.^[77] Such an emphasis on individual artists paralleled a related focus on the medium of painting. In each new edition, Bell's sections on painting expanded until they encompassed more than half the volume, vividly illuminating how painting was gaining the lion's share of attention in the rise of modernism.

The materiality of Bell's book also reveals some continuities across its various editions. The publishers recycled many of the same images originally replicated from Lübke's *Grundriss*, even while they added new illustrations. The book also clung to the past with its ongoing use of wood engravings rather than halftone photographs. Bell explained this choice, justifying wood engravings as affordable and still efficient for their “educational value:”

Inexpensive forms of engraving have, owing to the low price of the work, been alone possible; but a mere inclination of a painting can go a long way towards training the eye and mind to discriminate between the particularities of the various schools.^[78]

Even so, the book looked toward the future with its attempts to negotiate the rapid changes afoot in the art world of a new century. The preface to the 1895, 1900, and 1906 volumes acknowledged how the British public was by then flooded with choices of art books, art exhibitions, and available reproductions of distant art, and how the “student now suffers rather from difficulty of selection than from the paucity of material at his command.”^[79] The introductory pages of these later editions made especial reference to the growing market for high quality photographic reproductions:

The Frontispiece, a Pylon of the Temple of Rameses at Karnak on the Nile, is from a photograph by M. Bonfils, who has produced a set of magnificent sun-pictures of the most important of the Egyptian Temples. They are of good size, and may be purchased at any regular dealers in foreign photographs.^[80]

Both an attractive lure into the volume and an advertisement for art photographs on sale for the public, this frontispiece points toward the future of an art history based on the photographic and increasingly mimetic copy.

With these changes and adaptations, Bell hoped her book would continue to have an audience, a hope that proved naïve and ultimately unattainable. She wrote: “That the *Elementary History* has been able to maintain its position in the midst of such a crowd of competitors may perhaps not unjustly be claimed as a proof of its vitality, and that it may go forth in its new and enlarged form on a fresh career of usefulness is the earnest desire of its author.”^[81] Such a fresh utility

never came to fruition, though, as the 1906 edition was her last. It was Bell's commitment to affordability and popularity that ultimately doomed her book to the dustbins of art history, a failure that embodied the very rise of modernist art history. The inability of Bell and her publishers to maintain the delicate balance between the popular and the elite is where the shift into modernism is perhaps best traced. In the pages of Bell's 1895, 1900, and 1906 editions, art history could no longer be contained within its earlier frameworks and thus lost its connections with the common reader.

An introductory survey, Bell's *Elementary History of Art* represents the most accepted standards of art history both in 1874 and in 1906, a view that can shed light on what the field meant for the largest numbers of people. The evolution of her editions coincides with the aesthetic shifts from the Victorian age to the modernist era. Art history was transitioning from a content-based, principally historical, and media-diverse field to a style-driven and painting-focused critical discipline. With the increase of art-historical professionalization and the writing of the field's historiography by academics, the role of popularizers like Bell was essentially written out of that history. At the turn of the century, however, the professional status of art historians had not yet been solidified within academia, especially in Britain, and there was still room for self-trained public educators, including such women as Nancy Bell. In retrieving the popular developments of art history, we discover not only Britain's crucial place in the early history of the field, but also how accessible forms of art history in Britain uniquely materialized the core tensions of modernity and aesthetic modernism. Bell's *Elementary History of Art* melded the high with the low, the national with the international, the fixed with the fluctuating, and the traditional with the progressive. In so doing, this small but significant book revealed art history's very entanglement with modern life.

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Notes

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[1] See especially Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1920), 58–72, 287–95; and Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1913), 177–214.

[2] See, for example, Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); and Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Prettejohn writes: “Biographical and historical accounts of Pre-Raphaelitism tend to treat it as a quaint or eccentric product of Victorian England, not to be compared with the great art of the European mainstream in the nineteenth century. . . . This book takes a different approach. . . . The contention will be that the finest works made by both women and men involved in the Pre-Raphaelite collaboration are among the great works of modern art.” Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 11.

[3] Heinrich Dilly, *Kunstgeschichte als Institution: Studien zur Geschichte einer Disziplin* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979); Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Dan Karlholm, *Art of Illusion: The Representation of Art History in Nineteenth-Century Germany and Beyond* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006); Lyne Therrien, *L'Histoire de l'art en France: Genèse d'un discipline universitaire* (Paris: Editions du CTHS, 1998); and Nikolaus Pevsner, “An Un-English Activity? Reflections on Not Teaching Art History,” *Listener*, October 30, 1952, 715–16.

[4] See Pevsner, “An Un-English Activity?” See also the editorial, “Teaching of Art History in British Universities,” *Burlington Magazine* 103, no. 698 (May 1961): 163; and Helen Rees Leahy, “For Connoisseurs: The Burlington Magazine, 1903–11,” in *Art History and Its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (New York: Routledge, 2002), 233. The Slade Professorships in Britain—which employed art historians at Oxford, Cambridge, and the University of London from the 1870s—were general lectureships for undergraduate students rather than professional programs of art-historical training.

[5] N. D'Anvers [Nancy Bell], *Elementary History of Art: An Introduction to Ancient and Modern Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music* (London: Asher, 1874). The titles varied slightly across editions of the book, with added descriptors such as “The Students’ Handbook of Art.” But “Elementary History of Art” is always featured in the book’s title, and therefore I have chosen to designate the publication under this phrase. I have noted all title variations in my citations. In 1875, Scribner and Co. issued this first edition of Bell’s book in New York and continued to publish the book until its final edition in 1906. In 1882, Sampson Low and Co. in London obtained the rights to publish the book in Britain, publishing the second through the sixth editions in conjunction with Scribner’s in the United States. In 1883, Sampson Low re-issued Bell’s book, still in its second edition, as four separate volumes on the history of architecture, sculpture, and painting (with two volumes covering old master and modern painters). Each of these individual volumes sold for 3s6d and as a collected single volume for 10s6d. Such reprints and re-issues of Bell’s book in these various formats show her publishers’ ongoing commitment to pushing the book among buyers, something they would not have done without the hope of strong sales.

[6] On the evolution of the genre of the art-history survey, see Karlholm, *Art of Illusion*; Bradford R. Collins, “Rethinking the Introductory Art History Survey,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 23; Mitchell Schwarzer, “Origins of the Art History Survey Text,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 24–29; Robert Nelson, “Living on the Byzantine Borders of Western Art,” *Gesta* 35, no. 1 (1996): 3–11; Hubert Locher, “Das ‘Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte’: Die Vermittlung kunsthistorischen Wissens als Anleitung zum ästhetischen Urteil,” in *Memory & Oblivion*, ed. Wessel Reinink and Jeroen Stumpel (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 69–87; María Ocón Fernández, “Handbook, Outline, or Textbook of Art History? The Emergence of German Art and Architecture and the Relationship Between Image and Text,” in *Imag(in)ing Architecture: Iconography in Nineteenth-Century Architectural Historical Publications*, ed. Zsuzsanna Borocz and Luc Verpoest (Leuven: Acco, 2008), 72–91; and Amy Von Lintel, “Surveying the Field: The Popular Origins of Art History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2010).

[7] Gerry Beegan, *The Mass Image: A Social History of Photomechanical Reproduction in Victorian London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[8] On stereotyping, see “Commercial History of a Penny Magazine, no. 3: Compositors’ Work and Stereotyping,” *Penny Magazine*, monthly supplement, October 31 to November 30, 1883, 470–71; Michael Twyman, *Printing 1770–1970: An Illustrated History of its Developments and Uses in England* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1970), 22; Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 201–5; Geoffrey Wakeman, *Victorian Book Illustration: The Technical Revolution* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), 21; Eric de Maré, *The Victorian Woodblock Illustrators* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1980), 48; Alexis Weedon, *Victorian Publishing: The Economics*

of *Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836–1916* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 16 and 73; and Rob Banham, “The Industrialization of the Book, 1800–1970,” in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 278–79. On electrotyping, see Jean Adeline, *Les Arts de reproduction vulgarisé* (Paris: Ancienne Maison Quantin, Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies, 1894), 134; Michel Melot, Antony Griffiths, Richard S. Field, and André Béguin, eds., *Prints: History of an Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), 104; Gaskell, *New Introduction to Bibliography*, 206; and Banham, “Industrialization of the Book,” 280.

[9] Bell's proficiency in French opened doors for her to translate Jules Verne's hugely popular novels for the London publisher Sampson Low, including *Fur Country* and *Around the World in Eighty Days* in 1873 and *The Blockade Runners* in 1874, which she also did under the pseudonym of N. D'Anvers.

[10] Nancy Bell, *Raphael*, Illustrated Biographies of the Great Artists (London: Sampson Low, 1879); *Thomas Gainsborough: A Record of His Life and Works* (London: George Bell, 1897); *Paolo Veronese* (London: George Newnes, 1904); *James McNeill Whistler* (London: George Bell, 1904); *Tintoretto* (London: George Newnes, 1905); *Mantegna* (London: Jack, 1911); *Masterpieces of the Great Artists AD 1400–1700* (London: George Bell, 1895); *Representative Painters of the XIXth Century* (London: Sampson Low, 1899); *The Art Guide to Europe* (London: George Philip and Son, 1894); and articles in the *Magazine of Art*, the *Studio*, the *Connoisseur*, and *Magazine of Christian Art*.

[11] Nancy Regina Emily Meugens was born in 1844 in Lambeth, Surrey, and died in 1933 in Southborne-on-Sea, Hampshire. Her biography remains thinly documented, but collections of her letters have been conserved in the Archives of George Bell and Sons at the University of Reading Library and in the correspondence of James McNeill Whistler at the University of Glasgow Library. Bell exchanged a few letters with Whistler in 1902 regarding the publication of her monograph on the artist. Bell's husband, Arthur, was the son of publisher George Bell, so the letters at Reading University are personal and familial as well as professional in nature.

[12] See the review in *London Quarterly Review* 43, no. 86 (1875): 510–12; and other reviews from the *Observer*, *Art*, and the *Daily News* quoted in the post-text material of Bell's 1906 edition.

[13] Mrs. Arthur Bell [Nancy Bell], *The Students' Handbook of Art, An Elementary History of Art: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting*, 4th rev. ed. (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co. Ltd; New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1895).

[14] She married Arthur George Bell in 1882.

[15] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1874), viii. For further discussion of the audiences of popular art history, but in the American context, see Amy Von Lintel, “Clara Waters and the Popular Audiences for Art History in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 75, no. 1 (Autumn 2013): 38–64.

[16] On the *Penny Magazine*, see Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790–1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 80; Scott Boyce Bennett, “The Editorial Character and Readership of the Penny Magazine: An Analysis,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 17, no. 4 (1984): 127–41; and Von Lintel, “Surveying the Field.”

[17] On the transnational exchange of wood engravings as art-history illustrations, see Amy Von Lintel, “Wood Engravings, the ‘Marvellous Spread of Illustrated Publications,’ and the History of Art,” *Modernism/modernity* 19, no. 3 (2012): 515–42.

[18] Review of Bell's *Elementary History of Art* in the *London Quarterly Review* 43, no. 86 (1875): 512.

[19] Mrs. Arthur Bell [Nancy Bell], preface to *Thomas Gainsborough*, n.p. The same choice was made for Bell's *Masterpieces of the Great Artists* from 1895 in which the publishers, George Bell and Sons, included a preface explanation on how their reproductions had been made directly from photographs using the latest “isochromatic” process, which gave “comparative values of color with considerable fidelity” when translating the color painting into the black-and-white reproduction. The point of this 1895 book, like the Gainsborough monograph, was to encourage close stylistic study of art.

[20] Franz Kugler, *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Ebner und Seubert, 1841–42). See also Karlholm, *Art of Illusion*.

[21] Wilhelm Lübke, *Grundriss der Kunstgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Ebner und Seubert, 1860). At the time of this publication, Lübke held a position as a professor at the Royal Academy of Architecture in Berlin.

[22] Although I have not been able to verify this, it is likely that Bell's original London publishers, Asher and Co., contracted to purchase electrotyped replicas of Lübke's wood-engraved illustrations from the German publishers Ebner und Seubert of Stuttgart. Such international exchanges of electrotypes were common in the second half of the 1800s. Records from the archives of Smith, Elder and Co. of London, for example, show that Ebner und Seubert sold electrotypes of Lübke's illustrations to Smith, Elder and Co. for their English translations of

Lübke's art histories, so it is presumable that a similar arrangement occurred for Bell's first edition. See Smith, Elder and Co. publication arrangements and copyright agreements, MS. 43194, 99 and 120, and contract signed November 11, 1864, MS. 43139, John Murray Archive (JMA), National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

[23] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1874), viii.

[24] Bell wrote that she would be "abstaining from criticising living artists." Ibid., 444. As Richard Meyer convincingly argues, such debates in the field about the role of contemporary artists in histories of art continued long into the twentieth century. See Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

[25] Wilhelm Lübke, *History of Art*, trans. Fanny Elizabeth Bunnètt, 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1868).

[26] See, for example, the review of Lübke's *History of Art* in the *Times* (London), February 8, 1868, 4: "Dr. Lübke also betrays some ignorance of English art, both medieval and modern, which is hardly compensated by an over partiality towards the artistic development of Germany." See also the review of Bell's *Elementary History of Art* in the *London Quarterly Review* 43, no. 86 (1875): 510–12.

[27] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1874), xiii. T. Roger Smith evidently worked often with Bell in her publications, and we might presume that they were friends. For instance, Smith assisted on her translation of Marquis de Nadaillac's *Pre-Historic America* published by the New York firm of G. P. Putnam in 1884.

[28] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1874), xiii.

[29] N. D'Anvers [Nancy Bell], *The Students' Hand-book of Art, An Elementary History of Art of All Ages: Architecture—Sculpture—Painting*, 3rd ed. (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington; New York: Scribner and Welford, 1889), preface to the section on painting, v. This section on painting was separately paginated but bound together with the sections on architecture and sculpture. The preface was signed "F. C." I have not been able to identify with certainty this preface author.

[30] Peter Mandler describes the peak in tourism to English country houses in the mid-nineteenth century: "Something like a hundred houses around England can be described as 'show-houses,' advertised in the guidebooks as open on specific days of the week or at any time in the absence of the family." Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 76–77.

[31] On the Crystal Palace as a spectacular version of art history, see Amy Von Lintel, "Art History as Spectacle: Blockbuster Exhibitions in 1850s England," in *Exhibiting Outside the Academy, Salon and Biennial, 1775–1999*, ed. Andrew Graciano (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 131–67.

[32] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1889), 172; and Mrs. Arthur Bell [Nancy Bell], *The Students' Hand-Book of Art, An Elementary History of Art: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting*, 6th ed. (London: Sampson Low, Marston, and Co; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 148.

[33] On the art-historical reconstructions at the Sydenham Crystal Palace, see Jan Piggott, *Palace of the People: The Crystal Palace at Sydenham, 1854–1936* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Stephanie Moser, *Designing Antiquity: Owen Jones, Ancient Egypt, and the Crystal Palace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); and Von Lintel, "Art History as Spectacle."

[34] On the history of art-historical cast collections, see Betsy Fahlman, "A Plaster of Paris Antiquity: Nineteenth-Century Cast Collections," *Southeastern College Art Conference Review* 12, no. 1 (1991): 1–9; Alan Wallach, "The American Cast Museum: An Episode in the History of the Institutional Definition of Art," in *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 38–56; and Rune Fredericksen and Eckart Marchand, eds., *Plaster Casts: Making, Collecting, and Displaying from Antiquity to the Present* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).

[35] "Combien serait instructive pour [la jeunesse française] une galerie de moulage où elle pourrait comparer les caractères de toutes les écoles! En voyageant pour étudier les monuments des arts, j'ai éprouvé, je dois le dire, un certain sentiment de jalousie nationale à voir que l'Angleterre nous avait devancés dans cette voie. . . . Dans cet étonnant palais de Sydenham où l'on part les colosses égyptiens pour traverser l'art grec et la renaissance, et arriver ainsi jusqu'à l'art de nos jours, il faut admirer ces chefs-d'oeuvre entre un ours empaillé et une marchande de bretelles au rabais." Louis and René Ménard, *De la sculpture antique et modern* (Paris: Librairie Académique, 1867), xxii–xxiii. My translation.

[36] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1889), 172.

[37] Review in the *Art Journal*, as quoted in the post-text pages of Bell's 1906 edition.

[38] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1889), v.

- [39] See Amy Von Lintel, "Excessive Industry': Female Art Historians, Popular Publishing, and Professional Access," in *Women, Femininity and Public Space in European Visual Culture, 1789–1914*, ed. Temma Balducci and Heather Belnap Jensen (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 115–29.
- [40] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1889), v.
- [41] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1874), 472.
- [42] Ibid.
- [43] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1840–63).
- [44] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. P. E. Charvet (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 390–435. Baudelaire's essay was originally published in 1863.
- [45] Ibid., 403.
- [46] In later editions, this section on music was removed and sold as a separate volume.
- [47] In addition to Lübke's survey, the widely circulating picture atlas *Denkmäler der Kunst* (Stuttgart: Ebner und Seubert, 1851), which was edited by Ernst Guhl and Joseph Caspar, instructors at the University of Berlin and the Academy of Art in Berlin, employed similar categories in its organization. Along with the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition, the Sydenham Crystal Palace also was divided according to ancient and modern sculpture, with modern sculpture comprising the 17th century to the present. See Anna Jameson, *A Handbook to the Courts of Modern Sculpture* (London: Crystal Palace Library and Bradbury and Evans, 1854).
- [48] On Manchester, see especially Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Elizabeth Pergam, *The Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857: Entrepreneurs, Connoisseurs, and the Public* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011); and Helen Rees Leahy, "Walking for Pleasure? Bodies of Display at the Manchester Art-Treasures Exhibition in 1857," *Art History* 30, no. 4 (September 2007): 545–65.
- [49] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1906), 212.
- [50] Ibid.
- [51] Ibid., 112, 145.
- [52] Ibid., 248.
- [53] Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?*, 38.
- [54] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1906), 237–38.
- [55] Ibid., 238.
- [56] Ibid.
- [57] Ibid.
- [58] Ibid., 280–81.
- [59] Ibid., 238.
- [60] Ibid.
- [61] Ibid.
- [62] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1874), viii.
- [63] Ibid., xii–xiii.
- [64] Review in the *London Quarterly Review*, 512 and the post-text pages of Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1906).
- [65] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1874), 167 and 519.
- [66] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1889), preface to the section on painting, iii. This freedom from prejudice only goes so far, as Bell also discloses racist theories pervasive in western culture at the time. She writes: "The ignorance of the Eastern nations of perspective has been accounted for by a peculiarity in the structure of the eye. It is a well-known fact that the eye of Eastern races is differently shaped from that of Europeans, and is never seen in profile as clearly as with us." Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1874), 167.
- [67] Review in the *Observer*, as quoted in the post-text pages of Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1906).
- [68] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1889), preface to the section on painting, iii. Italics in original.
- [69] Karlholm, *Art of Illusion*, 29–30, 99–100.
- [70] Lübke, *History of Art*.
- [71] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1889), introductory pages.

[72] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1874), 114.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1895), vii.

[75] Ibid., preface.

[76] The fifth edition (1900) and the sixth edition (1906) appear to be exact reprints of the fourth edition (1895).

[77] The terms “original” and “genius” appear frequently throughout the later editions of Bell’s book. See, for example, the beginning of the section on 16th-century painting in Italy, where the artists are described as “original,” “genius,” “original geniuses,” and “universal genius,” all on a single page. Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1906), 69.

[78] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1889), preface to the section on painting, vi.

[79] Bell, *Elementary History of Art* (1906), viii.

[80] Ibid., iv.

[81] Ibid., viii.

Illustrations

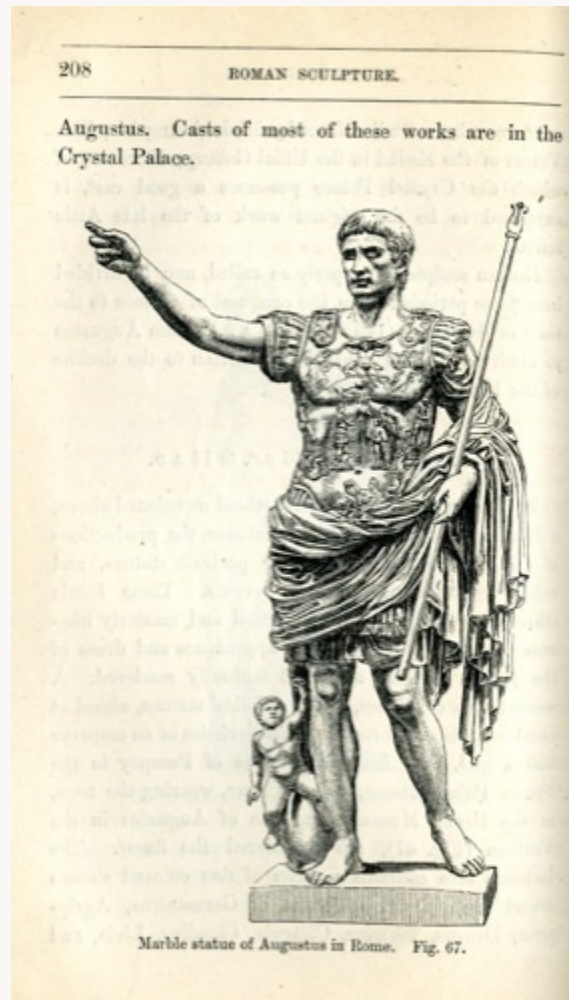
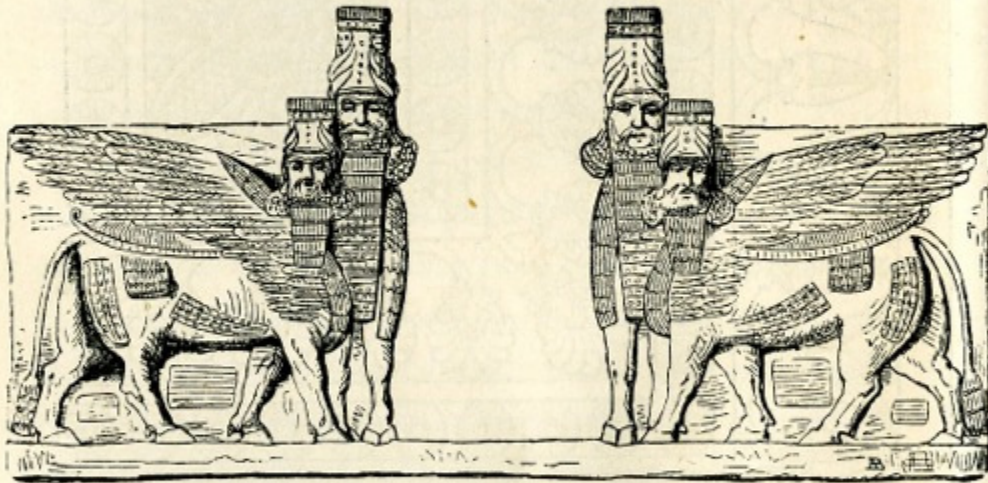


Fig. 1, Unknown artists, Illustration of *Augustus of Prima Porta*, no. 67, n.d. N. D'Anvers [Nancy Bell], *Elementary History of Art: An Introduction to Ancient and Modern Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music* (New York: Scribner, Welford, and Armstrong, 1876): 208. Wood engraving. Photo by author. [\[return to text\]](#)

richness of the architectural details. The bas-reliefs sculptured on tablets or alabaster slabs, and covering the walls of clay bricks, are very beautifully carved. They commemorated the chief events in the lives of the



Winged Bulls of Khorsabad. Fig. 7.

Assyrian rulers. Many of them have been removed to the British Museum ; of these the "Lion Hunt," from the palace of Nimrud, the "Siege of a Town," and the

Fig. 2, Unknown artists, Illustration of Assyrian Winged Bulls from the Palace of Khorsabad, no. 7, n.d. N. D'Anvers [Nancy Bell], *Elementary History of Art: An Introduction to Ancient and Modern Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music* (New York: Scribner, Welford, and Armstrong, 1876): 18. Wood engraving. Photo by author. [\[return to text\]](#)

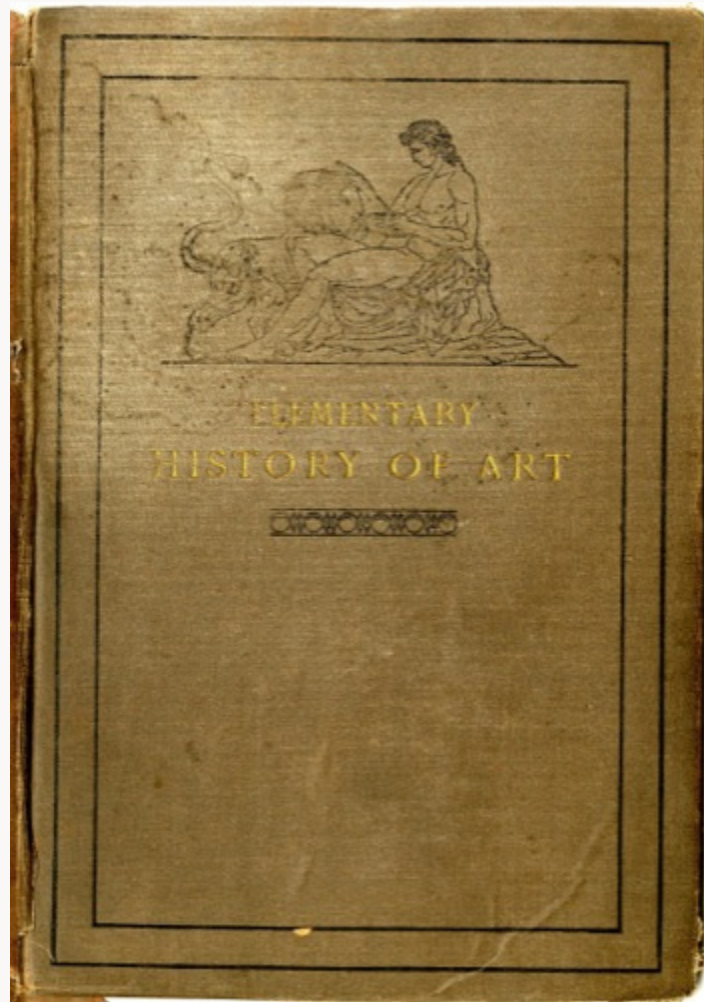


Fig. 3, Unknown artists, Cover, N. D'Anvers [Nancy Bell], *An Elementary History of Art: Architecture-Sculpture-Painting-Music* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1882). Cloth and board.
Photo by author. [imperfections in original] [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, Unknown artists, Illustration of J. M. W. Turner's *Lake Avernus*, no. 161, n.d. Mrs. Arthur Bell [Nancy Bell], *An Elementary History of Art: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co, 1895): 273. Wood engraving. Photo by author. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 5, Unknown artists, Illustration of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Regina Cordium*, no. 169, n.d., Mrs. Arthur Bell [Nancy Bell], *An Elementary History of Art: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, & Co., 1895): 294. Wood engraving. Photo by author. [\[return to text\]](#)

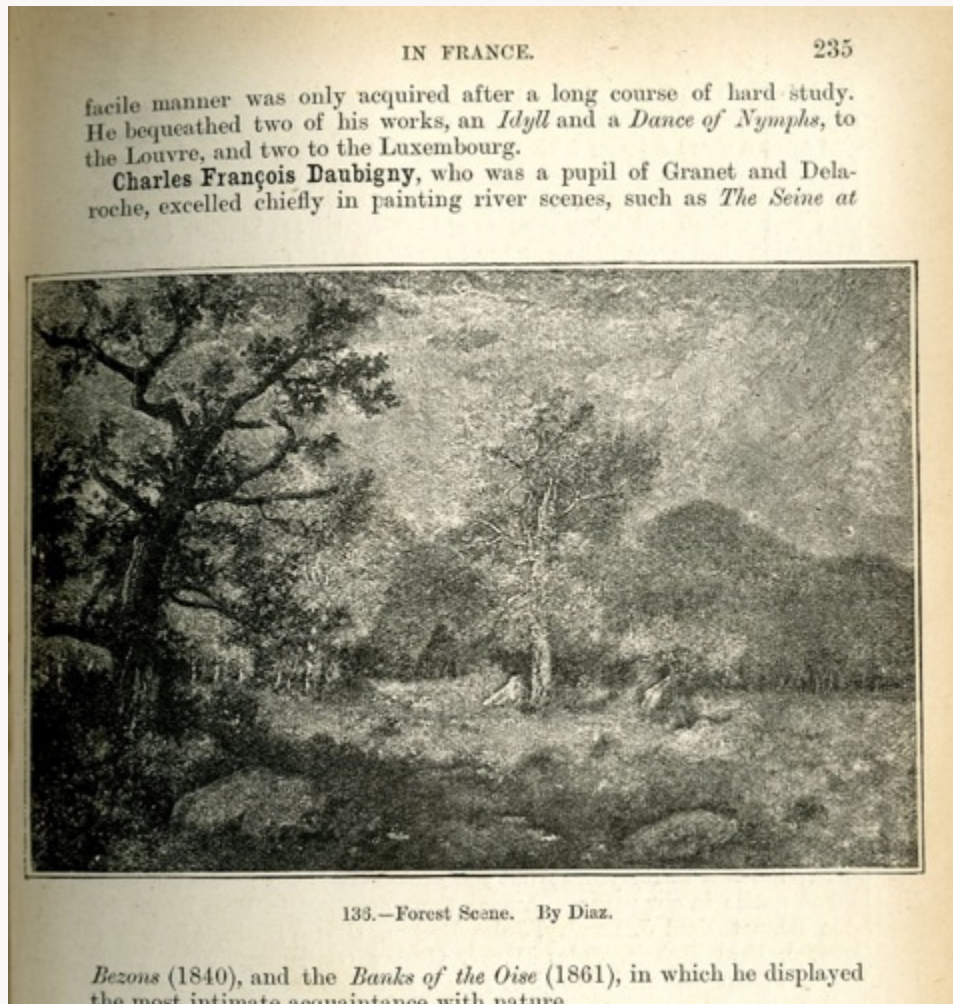


Fig. 6, Unknown artists, Illustration of Narcisse Diaz de la Pena's *Forest Scene*, no. 136. Mrs. Arthur Bell [Nancy Bell], *An Elementary History of Art: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, & Co., 1895): 235. Photomechanical reproduction. Photo by author. [imperfections in original]
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