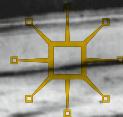# FEMALES IN THE FRAME
WOMEN, ART, AND CRIME

Penelope Jackson

Second Edition

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Women, Art, and Crime

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Penelope Jackson
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Cover image: Portrait of Queen Victoria (1887) by Stephen Catterson Smith RHA (the
younger) (1849–1912), oil on canvas, collection of the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland.
Destroyed in 1916
Cover design by eStudio Calamar

For David, and our children Lucy and Harry

Acknowledgments

Author Note

I have endeavoured to fairly represent the artists, dealers, galleries, museums, collectors, professionals, and others involved in matters written about in this book, and to seek permission where possible for use of sensitive content. In some cases, parties were invited to read a draft to confirm details. In other cases the person or organisation did not wish to engage in a dialogue or was deceased.

A Note About Currencies

Currencies have been given in the country where the crime/event took place or in the currency where the media report was filed.

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Introduction: Writing Alternative Art Histories

My earlier foray into the murky underbelly world of art crime, *Art Thieves, Fakers & Fraudsters: The New Zealand Story* (2016), surveyed historical and contemporary art crimes committed in New Zealand. Men committed all but one of the crimes presented in my book. The exception was an unnamed British tourist in her mid-seventies, visiting New Zealand in 2013, who brazenly helped herself to a piece of fibre art on exhibition at the Lakes District Museum and Gallery, in the small South Island town of Arrowtown. Captured by the gallery's security cameras, the culprit was picked up the next day by the police, but allegedly she had already disposed of the stolen artwork (or in my opinion, posted it home to Britain).[1] The crime was motivated by personal greed and carried out with aplomb. Other women featured in my book, but as victims or in the form of those who helped curb and mitigate crimes, or who restored damaged works after a crime had occurred—in other words, on the receiving end of art crimes. It was being confronted with my own research that made me question more closely the subject of women, art, and crime. Was the New Zealand situation representative of the Western art world or was it that women were actively involved in committing art crimes, but were never caught? Or was it simply that their stories had not been told?

In 2015 Dr. Noah Charney, an art historian and authority on art crime, threw down the gauntlet for me. He noted in his book, *The Art of Forgery: The Minds, Motives and Methods of Master Forgers*:

> There is a decided lack of female forgers in this book; there are female accomplices and con men, but I know of no notable female forgers in the history of forgery.[2]

I picked up on his comment, taking it as an invitation for further investigation and presentation of art crimes committed by women. Women are very much underrepresented in the texts about art crime to date. Charney's observation was a challenge (and his gendered use of *con men* raised my antennae). It made me think and want to cast the net wider than just art forgery, asking the question: is there a history of women and art crime and, if so, what is it? Certainly in the last few decades more women have been actively involved in researching, writing, and educating about art crime, but what *of* the actual committing of art crimes? If there is such a history, why haven't women made it into the literature? Could it be that Charney was right, that there aren't any female forgers out there (or ones that we know about)? Or perhaps it is that the female art forger has been too clever and escaped capture. Whatever the answers were, Charney's provocation set me on a journey, for which I am grateful. This book is not exhaustive—few books about art crime can be, given the suspected large numbers of art crimes that go unreported or have inconclusive back-stories—but rather a beginning point in trying to present a more well-rounded balanced history for us to look to in the future.

Art crime falls into three main categories: forgery, vandalism, and theft. These are broad areas and the study of art crime, including how and why it is carried out, are complex. This book presents case studies of those women who destroyed art (*The Lady Destroyers*), mothered art criminals (*The Mothers of All Art Crimes*), vandalised art (*She Vandals*), conned artists and clients (*The Art of the Con[wo]man*), stole art (*The Light Fingered*), forged art (*Naming Rights*), and those who used their professional positions to commit white-collar crimes in galleries, libraries, and museums (*The Professionals*). *Afterword: Making a Noise About the Silence* draws my conclusions together about gender and art crime as well as scoping how art crimes are written about and how there is room for opportunity to make change going forward. It also considers conditioning about how we perceive art crime, gendered language associated with how art crimes are documented, and how looking specifically at women—a first of its kind—provides for a greater balance to the ongoing discourse.

This study, as suggested by its title, takes a broad approach rather than just lining up hardened art criminals. Since the 1970s, female art historians have made significant inroads into the documentation of women's art history. The exhibition and accompanying standalone catalogue, *Women Artists: 1550–1950* (1977) by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, was trailblazing in terms of breaking the silence about the long history of unrecognised women artists.[3] Nochlin's 1988 *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* was both insightful and provocative. Whitney Chadwick's 1990 book *Women, Art, and Society*, provided a detailed survey of women artists from the Middle Ages up to the early 1980s. But it was the objective behind Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's 1981 text *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology's* thesis that inspired me:

> we are not concerned to prove that women have been great artists or to provide yet another indictment of art history's neglect of women artists. Instead we want to know how, and more significantly, why women's art has been misrepresented and what this treatment of women in art reveals about the ideological basis of the writing and teaching of art history.[4]

As a budding young art historian I found these texts a revelation, adding greatly to the 'story of art' as it had been taught to us according to the male-dominated discipline (both in content and those who delivered it). In many ways, my objective here is similar to those female art historians who went out on an exciting limb.

We know women have committed art crimes, just as there were always women artists at work. The problem is that their stories have been under-represented and silenced by men. Recently published, Dame Mary Beard's *Women & Power: A Manifesto* is one of the smallest yet most empowering books I have ever read. It strikes a chord, discussing female silence, though fortunately Beard is far from silent. Beard's sentiment encouraged me to tell the story of women, art, and crime. Feminist art historians and writers have provided exemplary role models; their commitment to telling under-appreciated art histories has been crucial in challenging the traditional male art history recorded and taught to generations. The 'new art history' as it was called in the 1980s was both refreshing and exciting, but we still have a long way to traverse. I maintain that where there is, and as long as there is, an art history there has been a history of art crime. Art crime is very much part of any art history and, as we know, up until the 1970s art history was not very welcoming of the inclusion of women

artists. We are still making up for lost time, and writing about women, art, and crime is hopefully part of redressing some of the imbalance, and providing the back-stories to our art histories.

Sourcing information about art crime is heavily reliant upon what the media feeds us. Many art crimes are reported in a way that prioritises entertainment value before specific details and due to the length in time cases take in the legal system we don't always receive the complete story. Not specific to gender is the difficulty in obtaining information about art crimes; so often stakeholders, and in particular institutions, avoid answering queries. This can be frustrating, preventing the writer from exploring and offering every possible angle to the reader but from their perspective the reopening of old wounds isn't good publicity. And sometimes the information just isn't available, having been lost over time. For instance, many times I tried unsuccessfully to obtain from the Louvre the title of the Nicolaes Berchem painting that was damaged by Valentine Contrel in 1907. Perhaps they just don't know or don't want to open up old cases. Historically, records kept by institutions aren't as accurate as they are in our digital age. For others, getting asked about art crimes comes as a complete surprise. When I enquired about a portrait of Winston Churchill that was disposed of by President Roosevelt (or by someone else at his request) in 1944, the collections manager of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library confirmed it had been disposed of, though she exclaimed surprise, having never heard the story before.

Art crimes have been committed for as long as art has existed, yet the study of art crime is relatively new. Early scholarship soon identified patterns, establishing that thieves and forgers, for instance, fitted a particular 'type'. But this type, criminal profiling, was based on a male construct. To achieve a better understanding of female art criminals we therefore have to look at them within the context of their male counterparts, as there is no model (yet) for the female art criminal. But there are definite characteristics and patterns that have clearly emerged that can be attributed to male art criminals—for they have been studied in more depth. This could be due in part because men have been caught committing crimes or that their art crime activities have involved the Old Masters, of which we are conditioned to believe are more valuable. Generally the art criminals that have been written about—and profiled—are male, of European ethnicity, middle-aged, could be a failed artist or have a modicum of technical artistic skills, and in some cases have experienced a trauma in their life whether it be a broken marriage or a rough upbringing. This could of course say

more about who reports crimes, the criminals that are caught, the priorities of police, and how their stories are told. The art criminals themselves and their biographers have endorsed the profile over time. And though this particular model does not fit the female art criminal, from the case studies presented in this book there are definite similarities when analysing the motivations, specifically for art thieves and art dealers.

Various scholars have tried to justify the 'gentleman thief'—the variety seen in the movies—but in reality they are just thieves with ulterior motives, taking what does not belong to them. Some live in a fantasy world believing that stealing art is a better class of crime, but as art crime expert and Hong Kong senior police inspector Toby Bull comments:

> A specialised fine art thief (if one such even exists) is an uncommon type and, like with the media's portrayal of a Mr Big, is also given something of a top billing in both film and fable. Somehow, these criminals are seen in a different and more empathetic light, loveable rogues or dandy foppish gentleman. The reality could not be further from the truth. Most art thieves are no different to those who partake in the most base and villainous crimes of society.[5]

As more people analyse and write about art crime, a clearer picture of the art criminal has evolved; romantic mythologising has begun to retreat. By adding the female art criminal into the mix, perhaps the myth will be further displaced.

In comparison with other areas of art crime, there is a host of non-fiction accounts about the male art forger. Many art forgers view themselves as clever and talented, delighting in telling of their own journey to the dark side of the art world. Such forgers who have come out and told their story include: Stéphane Breitwieser, Shaun Greenhalgh, Eric Hebborn, Tom Keating, Ken Perenyi, John Myatt, and Han van Meegeren to name but a few. They want to be recognised, trying to claim celebrity status, and make money from selling their stories and thus validating their crimes. The art forger has a common disdain for the cultural elite and art market. Often one of their objectives is to try to make fools out of art professionals. And once they have survived the ordeal of being charged, convicted, and sentenced they manage to resurrect their art fraud career. Shaun Greenhalgh still paints 'forgeries', but they're now made for charity. Wolfgang Beltracchi made a movie about his life as a forger and his

time in prison where he was allowed to continue to paint. Tom Keating and John Myatt have both had their own television series, showcasing their painting skills. And Karl Sim—New Zealand's first convicted art criminal—painted large-scale paintings (copies of New Zealand's very own old master, Charles Frederick Goldie) on the public toilets in his local town, fulfilling his community service sentence. He went on to co-write a book, with a journalist, to boast amongst many things that he had copied no less than fifty New Zealand artists and sold them as authentic works (though they vary hugely in standard).[6] These works still populate public and private collections today and Sim's story is mirrored by a host of others internationally.

Researching and writing about art crime has issues, particular to the type of content. Distinguishing fact from fiction is the ultimate goal especially with so much sensationalising around the reporting of art crimes. Other hurdles include not writing anything libellous and being stonewalled by those who don't want to talk or provide information. There is also the problem that so much art remains missing or its ownership under dispute, or generally just the many crimes that remain unsolved. But there is an added hurdle when researching women, art, and crime—their names. Not as common today as it once was, historically women took their husband's name when they married. This tradition has given many females who commit art crimes another option of name to use and effectively hide behind. Some have found that a return to their birth name works well, making them less traceable and not attached to another whose name is perhaps already known to the police and the art world. Examples found here include Olive Greenhalgh who conveniently reverted to Olive Roscoe, her birth name, to make her story more credible when trying to sell her son's (Shaun Greenhalgh) fraudulent works. Marielle Schwengel took her former husband's name back to become Marielle Breitweiser (mother of big time art thief Stéphane Breitwieser). Margaret D. H. Keane, of the 'Big Eyes' fame, was born Peggy Doris Hawkins. She has also gone by the names of Peggy Ulbrich and M. D. H. Keane. Today, she is Margaret McGuire. And Australian artist, Elizabeth Durack (born Elizabeth Durack Clancy) became Eddie Burrup. Perhaps Elizabeth Durack had a penchant for using a masculine name for in her 1984 essay, 'Australia's Third World', about life on Aboriginal desert settlements, she published under the name of Ted Zakrovsky.[7] Or perhaps she thought she might be taken more seriously by using a male 'voice'. On the rampage, and damaging works from prized collections, several

of the British Suffragettes went by completely different names. Maude Kate Smith became Mary Spencer and Freda Graham was officially Grace Marcon. Mary Richardson's alias was Polly Dick. In the media she was referred to as Slasher Mary, the Ripper, and the Slasher.[8] Historically, and especially for politically active women, going by an alias saved their families from embarrassment. For the female art criminal, using another name or alternative options assists in avoiding detection. Anonymity can make for convincing sounding back-stories to artworks and potentially greater sales opportunities. For the researcher though, the more names to deal with (and the different variations in spelling) can be a nightmare.

Unlike their female counterparts, many male art criminals take pride in telling their own story. Memoirs abound, and they proudly use their real names. Many have paid the price for committing art crimes, serving their time and yet, whether embarking on a new life or not, they keep their name. Shaun Greenhalgh and Ken Peryani are good examples, though we might question that purchasing and reading their memoirs, and others of a similar ilk, gives criminals positive reinforcement for their criminal past. Noah Charney also confirms this nuance in relationship to forgery and the media:

> If anything, the media fascination with forgers provides an active incentive for those considering forgery. If the media collectively sternly condemned forgers rather than applauding their exploits, it would be a step in the right direction.[9]

To date, the interdisciplinary study of crimes against art has been examined in a variety of ways: by genre (forgeries, vandalism, theft), by motive (greed, power, profit, politics), by geographical location (specific to countries or civilisations), by type of location (museum, gallery, archaeological site), by medium (paintings, sculptures, rare books, artefacts), by individuals and/or individual events, and by time period (various world wars being a popular one). As diverse as this list appears, for the most part they are male-dominated discourses. Prior to art crime becoming a subject area in its own right, such crimes were captured (or buried) within other genres. For instance, Suffragette Mary Richardson's art vandalism was explored within the history of the British Suffragettes as well as in her autobiography. Clementine Churchill's contribution to the catalogue of art crimes can be found, albeit perfunctory, in her biographies that posit her as the wife of statesman Sir Winston Churchill. And Elizabeth

Durack's confession was announced in the mainstream Australian art journal, *Art Monthly Australia*. And so the art crimes, carried out by women, were scattered and thus didn't offer a comprehensive picture. My aim is to make female-centric art crimes more easily accessible. The women have been organised into groupings that both call on earlier models such as vandalism and theft, and capture them under different umbrellas such as mothers and professionals. This allows for further insights into motives and outcomes, as well as new perspectives on former gendered tropes.

The women featured in this book are only part of what I suspect is a huge catalogue of women involved with art and crime. Those selected were done so for both their scale and diversity of crimes, as well as the motivations behind committing crimes against art. Like those feminist art historians who broke new ground in the 1970s, all new journeys have to have a beginning point. Therefore whether gender has a significant bearing on the types of art crimes committed, or the manner in which they are committed, is at least worthy of interrogation and consideration. For me this book brings together my art historical interests in women and art crime. I hope others enjoy my findings and perhaps can add to the catalogue of case studies presented here to complete an even bigger picture.

Notes

1. Penelope Jackson, *Art Thieves, Fakers & Fraudsters: The New Zealand Story*, Wellington: Awa Press, 2016, p. 162.
2. Noah Charney, *The Art of Forgery: The Minds, Motives and Methods of Master Forgers*, London: Phaidon, 2015, p. 14.
3. Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists 1550–1950*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1977.
4. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*, New York: Pantheon, 1981, p. xvii.
5. Toby Bull, 'Methods of Profit: Rewards, Ransoms and Buy-Backs–Knowing the Rules of Engagement', in *Art Crime and Its Prevention* (ed. Arthur Tompkins), London: Lund Humphries, 2016, pp. 48–49.
6. Karl Sim and Tim Wilson, *Good as Goldie: The Amazing Story of New Zealand's Most Famous Art Forger*, New Zealand: Ariel, 2003.
7. Ted Zakrovsky, 'Australia's Third World', *Quadrant*, April 1984, pp. 38–41.
8. Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism Since the French Revolution*, London: Reaktion, p. 96.

9. Noah Charney, *The Art of Forgery: The Minds, Motives and Methods of Master Forgers*, London: Phaidon, 2015, p. 250.

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CHAPTER 2

The Lady Destroyers

Lady Clementine Churchill went to great lengths to protect the image of her husband, Sir Winston Churchill. This included destroying images of him. She wasn't the first woman, and won't be the last, to completely destroy a work. Destroying an artwork is the final step; obliterating it rather than vandalising it. When a work is vandalised there is a glimmer of hope that it can be restored to something close to its former state. Furthermore, the intentional destruction of an artwork—as presented in this chapter—is carried out for a variety of known and unknown reasons. Destruction of art, in this context, does not include works destroyed over time by environmental factors or by accident such as a fire or people accidently damaging them. Some works are destroyed very publicly, no secrets barred; others more discreetly, all knowledge kept secret.

The objectives for people destroying art can include: anger, dislike of the artist and/or the image, getting rid of evidence if the art is 'hot' (see the following chapter *The Mothers of All Art Crimes* for extreme examples of this), social protest, warfare, reminders of relationships that have soured, to reduce supply of an artist's repertoire to increase value and therefore increase profit margins. And lastly, perhaps sometimes there is no obvious reason for the destruction of an artwork carried out by someone who has mental instability, or if there is a reason, it's not made public. Artists are also known to destroy their own work on occasion if they feel it is sub-standard or they've changed direction, but this is their prerogative as owners of the artwork. Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986) destroyed her own work in a bid for her reputation to remain strong. Allegedly O'Keeffe

also destroyed a large number of her former husband Alfred Stieglitz's (1864–1946), photographic negatives at his request, as he didn't want anyone else to print his images.[1] Again, such decisions made by the artist himself or herself are intentional and legitimate. As my research demonstrates, evidence shows that women who are closely linked, or related, to the artist or subject of the artwork are more likely to destroy it.

Jacqueline Bullmore

Researching New Zealand artist Edward Bullmore (1933–1978)—whose work coincidentally introduced me to art crime in New Zealand for 150 of his works are still unaccounted for—I discovered that a couple of his works had been destroyed by his widow, Jacqueline. This was intriguing to me because it seemed at odds with a great love story of two art school students who had married, had a family, only to be torn apart by Edward Bullmore's early death at the age of 45 years. Jacqueline dedicated over a year to cataloguing her husband's work; she was devoted to his memory and legacy, so then why did she destroy two of his works? The works were: a painting, *Man in the Sun* (1962)[2] and a ceramic life-size bust, *Gigliola* (*The Artist's Daughter*) (*c*.1974).[3] Having curated a major retrospective of Edward Bullmore's work in 2008, I have a reasonable knowledge of his oeuvre and would suggest that *Man in the Sun* was a very significant work (see Fig. 2.1). Importantly, it demonstrates the artist's adaptation and adoption of Surrealist stylistic traits to his work in the early 1960s. Painted in London, against the backdrop of the Cuban Missile Crisis, nuclear warfare was at the forefront of his mind. His fears come through in this work as seen in others from the series titled, *Cuba Crisis*. Equally, the ceramic bust was a rarity—though he had worked in ceramics off and on during his career, he only ever completed one other bust, which was of his elderly mother. The sitter of the now destroyed bust, Gigliola, was 15 years of age at the time the bust was moulded.

In 1990, Jacqueline Bullmore took the year off to catalogue Edward Bullmore's entire collection. She had found the responsibilities of caring for the collection onerous but during this time she made it her focus to document each and every work from those made in his early years at secondary school up to the works left unfinished in his studio when he died. Each work has a catalogue number, with details about size, media, and ownership. This information has been essential to understanding and