

New Museum School Podcast Transcript– 2019/2020

PODCAST TITLE: *Princess Louise – A Subversive Sculptor*

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NMS Placement Site: *Royal Collection Trust*

Section 1

Hello. My name is Jasmina Gharres and I'm a New Museum School Trainee, and I work within the Royal Collection Trust at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.

Welcome to my podcast. I will be examining Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, who was the 6th child of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. If you haven't heard of Princess Louise, then that is hardly surprising because her life was overshadowed by her mother, whose lengthy and successful reign made the Queen the most powerful figure in the world at the time.

Section 2

Born on the 18th of March 1848, Louise has been described as a naturally curious, yet pretty baby. Growing up in the centre of the Royal Court, Louise's formative years reveal attempts by Victoria and Albert to encourage independence through practical adeptness.

Victoria and Albert were both keen amateur artists and were eager to ensure that their children practised and refined their skills. So, in 1852, Edward Henry Corbould was employed as the children's drawing master. The influence of his teaching can be seen in the vast number of works by Louise alongside her siblings within the Royal Collection.

Carly Collier, Assistant Curator of Prints and Drawings, met me to tell me more.

INTERVIEW CLIP 1 | Introduction @ 0:00-1:28

Carly Collier, Assistant Curator of Prints and Drawings, Royal Collection

Jasmina Hi Carly. Thank you for having me!

Carly Hi Jasmina. It's lovely to see you and welcome to the Print Room!

Jasmina Thank you. We're currently in the Print Room in Windsor Castle which is a quiet room with a beautiful ornate ceiling. The walls are filled with portfolios and albums, some labelled with names such as Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo, only a smidge of what the Royal Collection has to offer. Carly, what can you tell me about the Print Room here in Windsor?

Carly This is the Print Room that was in fact created by particularly Prince Albert, the father of Princess Louise. Victoria and Albert were very assiduous and interested curators effectively of the Royal Collection broadly, but particularly here in the Print Room, the Old Master drawings and prints that form the works on paper holdings of the Royal Collection. So, Albert was very keen that these objects

be housed and looked after in a appropriate manner, so he developed this fabulous space, specifically to house the volumes and portfolios of drawings and prints. You can actually see Albert's head above the door there, a little medallion as such and then Queen Victoria is above him as part of the ceiling decoration. The room was completed before Prince Albert's death in 1861.

Jasmina *It's really, really lovely.*

INTERVIEW CLIP 2 | History of the Album @ 0:00-00:48 + 2:30-3:16

Carly Collier, Assistant Curator of Prints and Drawings, Royal Collection

Jasmina *In front of me is an, A, is it A2?*

Carly **To be honest, I don't know...just say large.**

(Laughter)

Jasmina *A very large leather-bound blue album with some gold tooling on the front that says Drawings of the Princes and Princesses. Carly, can you tell me a bit more about this and how it came into the Collection?*

Carly **Absolutely. As you say, this is an album which contains drawings by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's children. So they had nine children in total, of course. These are drawings that were mounted, we believe by Queen Victoria, into this album to keep as important mementos. And so it's an album that has been in the Royal Collection since the mid-19th century. And this album, and indeed its companion volume because there were two volumes in total of works by the Princes and the Princesses, was included on a list that was drafted, at Queen Victoria's instruction, of albums, volumes, sketchbooks of works by members of the Royal family that she**

wanted left to the Royal Collection as, [*Jasmina: Wow!*] in her words, 'heirlooms of the Crown'. It's a really wonderful album.

Jasmina We know that Victoria was artistic herself and her and Albert loved art. I mean you can tell from the vast collections in here as well. Did they implement that on their children quite a lot, the sort of, the practice?

Carly You're absolutely right that Victoria and Albert themselves were very artistic. They both had drawing lessons, painting lessons from their childhood onwards and they both practised as very good and accomplished amateur artists throughout their lives. We do have a wealth of material from Queen Victoria's own hand. Prince Albert, in particular, with of course Queen Victoria's support, very much was involved in the children's education and ensured that they had a very comprehensive education and drawing and painting were a really important part of that. So, absolutely, the children learned to draw and paint from an early age, as their parents did.

INTERVIEW CLIP 3 | Louise Presentation Works @ 0:00-4:38

Carly Collier, Assistant Curator of Prints and Drawings, Royal Collection

Jasmina So, Carly, do you think you could show me some of Louise's works that are housed in this lovely album?

Carly Of course, with great pleasure. As we said, it's a very large album so very large pages with oftentimes two works mounted on an album page.

Jasmina I also noticed that you're not wearing gloves. Is that quite common with works on paper?

Carly Because I am turning the pages of this album, it is more common not to use gloves now. To have direct contact with clean (of course) hands, it means that your sense of touch is much more present - gloves can obviously be a little bit of a barrier - so I'm making sure that I'm touching the very edges of the pages, but supporting the pages as I turn them. So here we have a couple of works by Prince Alfred, Princess Louise's brother.

Jasmina These are boats, right?

Carly Absolutely, particularly suitable! We've turned the page and we've reached the first work by Louise mounted in this album, which is signed by the Princess and dated 'Xmas (so Christmas) 1857'. So I think this is a perfect example of the sorts of works that the children were producing during their childhood under the tuition of a Royal drawing master. The finished works – the sorts of works that get mounted in this album - are things that they would present to their parents as gifts on special occasions - so Christmas, birthdays. This was very much a tradition that actually dates back to Queen Victoria's own childhood. So as a Princess she learned to draw from the age of eight with the history and watercolour painter

Richard Westall and she would often give her own mother, the Duchess of Kent, finished watercolours, finished drawings as gifts on the Duchess of Kent's birthday. So it's lovely that the tradition continued with Victoria's own children. So, there are plenty more examples of that sort of finished drawing.

There's a lovely one coming up that Louise made for her mother's birthday. So here we are, a lovely study of a head seen in profile, a classical head, again signed by Louise. And this, in fact, is mounted on a piece of thin card and written on the card is, '*For dearest Mama, May 24th, 1858.* May 24th was Queen Victoria's birthday.

Jasmina *Of course, yes.*

Carly **So, this is Princess Louise, at the age of 10, I think it would be?**

Jasmina *At 10!*

Carly **...presenting this for her mother.**

Jasmina *That's very, very detailed for a 10-year-old. It's quite incredible.*

Carly **It's a lovely drawing. It has the quality of something that's finished, so it is a presentation piece. And it's clearly something that the very young Princess presumably would have worked hard on to give to her mother as a gift. And it's also been, as you can see, nicely framed. There are two sets of ruled lines on the mount surrounding the drawing itself. So it's rather lovely. There's also a note at the bottom, written in ink, saying 'copy' so it was very much part of the process at an early stage of the drawing tuition of the children - and, indeed, again Queen Victoria herself as a Princess – that you would copy works by other artists whether that be copying specific**

compositions that had been made deliberately for that purpose. So, Queen Victoria as a Princess copied a number of inventions of her drawing master, Richard Westall's, or copying perhaps from prints or other works in the Royal Collection.

Jasmina *I mean they were quite lucky, being Royal children, of course, that they had an amazing assortment of paintings and marble sculptures wherever they went really.*

Carly **The children, and Victoria and Albert themselves, were obviously living with a wonderful collection and took inspiration from it. So we do know that they were copying works from the Collection and, of course, having the tuition of leading artists was of considerable assistance in their development as draughtsmen and women.**

Section 3

As an unconventional princess, Louise was no stranger to new-age liberal ideas and movements. It was perhaps her childhood collaborations with the family sculptor Mary Thornycroft who, in the mid-1840s, was employed by Victoria and Albert to create sculpture portraits of the children. Through sitting for her portraits, Louise would have observed and learnt the practical skills of a sculptor, taking measurements of proportions, ideal poses and the use of light and shadows.

The position of a royal teacher was a high honour to have held – so the dynamic of the lessons between Louise and Thornycroft would have been slightly different from a normal student and teacher. The roles would have been loosened and, in turn, would have been more of a collaborative effort, giving Louise a privileged access to learning.

As Louise got older, her passion for sculpture remained strong and after much debate she was eventually permitted to attend the National Art Training School and received lessons from the sculptor, Joseph Edgar Boehm.

INTERVIEW CLIP 4 | Louise as a sculptor @ 0:00 – 1:28

Carly Collier, Assistant Curator of Prints and Drawings, Royal Collection

Jasmina Can you tell me a bit more about Princess Louise as a sculptor?

Carly Yes, absolutely. It seems to be a medium that she became interested in as a teenager. There are references to her taking lessons with a female sculptor...

Jasmina A female sculptor?

Carly A female sculptor. Mary Thornycroft, who was working extensively for the Royal family, for Louise's mother. And clearly it is a medium that Louise particularly enjoyed working in and it was an interest that endured throughout her life. And she is very significant in that she exhibited her work publicly. She exhibited a number of portrait

busts at the Royal Academy, portrait busts of members of her family and also members of the household. She also executed some public pieces of sculpture, particularly notably a full sculpted portrait of her mother, Queen Victoria, which now is outside Kensington Palace - and I'm sure you know it! She also executed a public work that is in St Paul's Cathedral, which was a monument to the Boer War a bit later in life. So, she had a public career as a sculptor and her skills were quite significant.

Section 4

During the 19th century, the presence of professional female sculptors and artists was relatively small, and it is quite likely that Victoria had reservations about her daughter taking modelling lessons. Strong viewpoints were held believing that women should be denied the access to education, being that their productions would be less worthy in comparison to creations by their male counterparts.

In an article in *The Critic* in 1891, Molly Elliot Seewald referred to a generally held view at the time:

QUOTE 1 | On female artists

“If all that women have ever done were swept out of existence, the world would not lose a single masterpiece. (Indeed) no woman has ever risen to the front rank of painters.”

Section 5

Unfortunately, this was a particularly common view held towards women at the time. Despite being admitted into various art institutions, they were still living under patriarchal restraints and many female students were limited in their studies in comparison to their male equals. They were to work in separate sex art classes and from draped models, encouraging modesty and limiting fuller interpretations of the human body.

The art critic, John Ruskin, believed that:

QUOTE 2 | On art ability

“Academic studies do much for men, but it is doubtful if they were ever very useful to women of first rate (art) ability.”

Section 6

The rise of professional female sculptors became apparent in the world. The Royal Academy excluded women art students until 1862, but by 1879, one hundred and thirty women had gained admission. In 1903, the introduction of mixed sex classes meant that women were able to receive the same level of education and criticism as their male equivalents. This was also a very important cause to Louise. The alteration of her stance as a Royal Patron to public art school student was a very progressive role for the Princess.

Section 7

Louise continued to pursue art until her final years, still living a slightly unconventional life as a Princess and Duchess by marrying what, at the time, was known as a 'commoner'.

During her married years, her art took second place as she focused on her Royal duties while living abroad in Canada. But after her husband died, she began to pursue her artistic studies again.

Louise never had children of her own and lived to the impressive age of 91. She carried on undertaking charitable causes during her later life, opening schools and safe spaces for other like-minded young women to receive a well-rounded education and perfect their artistic crafts.

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