

THE REDISCOVERY OF THE VICTORIAN ARTIST MARION REID AND THE AESTHETICS OF HER PRE-RAPHAELITE INSPIRED “SORCERESS”

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Like many English women artists of the nineteenth century, Marion Reid disappeared into the historical records, and her art faded from view with the passing of time. Even though she showed frequently at the Society of Lady Artists and at the Royal Academy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,¹ none of her painted works were known to still survive. Reid’s career spanned a critical juncture in the history of women artists in Victorian England. In 1877, she was one of the “New Women,” living away from her family as she tried to become a professional painter. Such women helped to expand the boundaries of the feminine world as they tried to live and work in the same way as male artists.

Not from a family of artists and lacking a support system within the artistic community, Reid serves as an excellent example of what a Victorian woman experienced on the path to become an artist. She was fortunate to belong to a relatively well-off family, which permitted her the luxury to pursue her dream. She worked professionally as an artist in both oil and watercolour, won awards for her designs, and published some of her writings. Despite her multi-faceted career, her name and art had vanished. The fate of Miss Reid and knowledge of her art changed in 2008 upon my discovery of the painting entitled *Woman Holding an Apple, Man Seated on a Stair* (fig. 1). Bearing the inscription “M. Reid 1887,” the painting was identified as either American or Continental.² Relined at some later point, the back of the painting offered no further clues.

Portraying a woman dressed in a classicizing drapery and a man wearing a Renaissance costume within a flowering garden setting, the painting is clearly inspired by the art of the Pre-Raphaelites. Her name, however, is not found in