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### Framing identity : social practices of photography in Canada (1880-1920)

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## Conclusion

LET ME NOW RETURN ONCE MORE to the words of Lady Elizabeth Eastlake and the twenty-first century, revisionist, feminist art historian Griselda Pollock. Pollock argues that art is a form of social practice through which identity is constructed. Lady Eastlake commented on the democracy of the photographic image at the turn of the nineteenth century and confirmed that photography was a commonplace activity, a social practice accessible to most women.

Mattie Gunterman, Geraldine Moodie, Ruby Gordon Peterkin and Etta Sparks exemplify four women who used photography as a social practice at the turn of the nineteenth century in Canada. Informed by theory drawn from cultural analysis, evidence from textual readings of photographs and biographical details, this study has positioned these women as photographic practitioners and examined their use of the medium to establish and re-sign identity, despite the patriarchal discourse by which they were surrounded. As part of the analysis of change from amateur to professional photographic practice, the photograph albums of Mattie Gunterman were read as personal narrative, and the photographs of Geraldine Moodie were analyzed with regard to the positioning of self in relation to the other. An analysis of the albums of the Nursing Sisters Peterkin and Sparks as representational discourse showed how photography helped situate their professional identity as nurses as well as ground them while stationed overseas. This analysis concluded that the change from amateur to professional allowed women to move from the passive role of consumer and product of photographic images in the domestic sphere to the more active role of producer in both the private and public domain. Women were able to overcome their marginalization and played a significant role in the development of photography in Canada.

Despite the fact that only Moodie had made the transition to professional photographer, there are similarities between the four women and their photographic practices. None of the four used the then popular, romantic, pictorialist techniques when making their photographs, preferring instead to make more straightforward images. In all cases, these women used photography as an instrument to situate themselves. All four women used the concept of framing identity to construct photo albums, but for different reasons. These differences highlight the diversity of the representational discourse possible through the creation of the photo album. For Gunterman, the family album was a means by which she could re-sign herself and retell her narrative. It also served as a document of their pioneer lifestyle that she could pass on to her son. Moodie made photo albums of her Aboriginal subjects in order to position herself as professional. She sent copies of these albums to important cultural institutions such as the British Museum in London where the Canadian copyright collection was housed. Peterkin appears to have made her album for herself to chronicle her wartime memories and document her professional role. Sparks also collected images in her album as a wartime memoir but, sadly, her album took on a further role. It returned to Canada when she did not. Her album of photographs gave Sparks a voice, even after her own was silenced.

Women at the turn of the nineteenth century practiced photography with society's approval, provided they stayed within the domestic sphere. Gunterman, Moodie, Peterkin and Sparks all challenged these limitations by going outside to photograph in the public domain. Gunterman used the landscape as a metaphoric background in many of her self-portraits and family narratives. Moodie, although an established professional with a commercial studio, went into the North to document the Inuit. Peterkin and Sparks travelled across an ocean and chronicled their wartime experiences. Photography also allowed both Gunterman and Moodie to establish inroads into their respective communities and provided an outlet from their domestic responsibilities when they were also called upon to record significant community social events.

The primary difference in their imagery is their subject matter and the way in which they approached photography. Gunterman, influenced by theatre and the symbolic props and backdrops of professional photographers, carefully staged all her photographs to create a family narrative. These images were intended for a private audience of family and friends. The elegant family portrait staged in a formal Japanese garden in San Francisco (Fig. 1.5) shows the level of visual sophistication that Gunterman achieved with her imagery. Moodie took full advantage of her privileged access to the Canadian Arctic to create compelling portraits of the Inuit. Her images extended the boundaries of the photographic canon that deals with "Native-ness" beyond the pictorialist approach of Curtis or the overtly commercial renditions of Ross. My study focused on the analysis of her images of Aboriginal women, particularly her portraits documenting the mother and child relationship that previously had only received attention of a more

biographical nature. Previously restricted archival material was used to raise and inform questions about her photographic practice. Moodie strategically placed her images in major collections and sold or gifted them to high-ranking officials in order to make connections that would further her professional career. One of the aims of this study has been to re-position Moodie as a professional photographer rather than a marginalized amateur.

This is the first Canadian study to apply the techniques of cultural analysis to the work of early Canadian women photographers. For this reason, it opens up a variety of possibilities for new inquiry that are beyond the scope of one study. Fresh lines of inquiry include further analysis of all four women's work. For example, Gunterman's strong relationship with nature, evident in her self-portraits, should be considered in relationship to the large body of landscape photographs she made. To date, little has been published about Victorian women landscape photographers, and the practice of landscape photography has until recently been viewed as an almost exclusively male domain. The research for this study produced the names of dozens of women photographers and prompted the examination of countless images before the final four women were selected. By focusing on the turn of the nineteenth-century photographic practices of women, this study provides a substantial foundation for further revisionist research into the activities and accomplishments of Canadian women photographers.

