

## **Forbidden Fruit: Mary Cassatt’s Mural of “Modern Woman” at the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893**

Tricia Cusack

Independent Scholar

### Abstract

This paper considers a large mural of “The Modern Woman” painted in France by the American artist Mary Cassatt for the Woman’s Building at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. It focuses in particular on the large central panel of the mural titled Young Women Plucking the Fruits of Knowledge or Science that depicts women and girls apple-picking. Cassatt’s mural drew on various traditions and myths. Apple harvesting was a common sight in America. Cassatt’s title though points to the story of Eve and forbidden fruit, in which Eve seeks knowledge, but is severely punished for it. Cassatt employs the historical tradition of allegory to subvert the biblical message. In Cassatt’s mural, the women and girls are all part of a symbolic appropriation of knowledge as they pluck the apples. Her mural depends on carefully balanced forms, so that the viewer perceives the scene as more like a tableau than as a representation of labour. The painted figures are modernised through a contemporary visual language that draws on Japanese prints and Impressionist art, so distancing them from the narratives of the early scriptures as well as from classical art. Cassatt’s Modern Woman also wears loose and comfortable garb that references the contemporary dress reform movement, unlike the Exposition visitors who still displayed their corseted waistlines. Cassatt’s mural sadly is now lost and we are left only with traces of her Modern Woman..

### Keywords

Mary Cassatt; World’s Columbian Exposition; Modern Woman; apple-picking; allegory

My paper focuses on a mural painted by the American artist Mary Cassatt for the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 that depicts women and girls apple-picking in a visual allegory of feminine knowledge acquisition. The mural reappropriates the parable of Eve and the forbidden fruit in a setting based on a traditional local apple orchard. In shaping the “Modern Woman,” it incorporates the historical form of allegory, as well as modernist art, and it alludes to the contemporary campaign for dress reform. World Fairs arguably represent

vast rituals that reveal power relationships – both real and desired – among competing segments of society. Through pageantry, symbols, and official

recognition, they mirror the relative status of social groups vying for political and economic advantage."<sup>1</sup>

The World's Columbian Exposition was a massive spectacle with many pavilions in various classicist styles. Among them stood the Woman's Building, in an unostentatious classicist style, with a long arcade and a central pediment. It was the first of the main exhibition buildings to be constructed, and completed on 30 June 1892.<sup>2</sup> The Woman's Building at once symbolised a segregation of women's art from most of the exposition, and gave women an unusual opportunity both to design their building and to furnish it with their art. Regina Palm, writing in the *Journal of Design History* in 2010, pointed out how the Woman's Building offered women artists a "socially sanctioned space in which to work or exhibit" and allowed them an entry to the masculine field of public mural painting.<sup>3</sup> A Board of Lady Managers for the building and its contents was established by an Act of Congress.<sup>4</sup> A number of women disliked the term "Lady," which appeared to connote idleness.<sup>5</sup> However, Susan Wels has claimed that "[b]y authorizing and funding the Chicago fair's Board of Lady Managers, Congress was in fact recognizing the increasingly organized and influential role of women in American society."<sup>6</sup> At the opening of the fair in October 1893, the President of the Board of Lady Managers, Bertha Honoré Palmer, stated, "Even more important than the discovery of Columbus, which we are gathered together to celebrate, is the fact the General Government has just discovered women."<sup>7</sup> As a later critic put it, the Woman's Building and its contents, "however beautiful or interesting, were really adjunct to the furtherance of woman's status."<sup>8</sup> Cassatt's contribution was particularly germane to this cause.

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<sup>1</sup> Burton Benedict (1983) quoted in Susan Rebecca Wels, "Spheres of Influence: The Role of Women at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the San Francisco Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915," *Ex Post Facto* 8, University of San Francisco (1999): unpaginated.

<sup>2</sup> Regina Megan Palm, "Women Muralists, Modern Woman and Feminine Spaces: Constructing Gender at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition," *Journal of Design History* 23, no. 2 (2010): 126.

<sup>3</sup> Palm, "Women Muralists," 123-24.

<sup>4</sup> Maud Howe Elliott, "The Building and its Decoration," 19. Maud Howe Elliott, "The Building and its Decoration," in *Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building of the World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, 1893*, ed. Maud Howe Elliott, Official Edition (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & Company, 1894), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Sally Webster, *Eve's Daughter/Modern Woman: A Mural by Mary Cassatt* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 49.

<sup>6</sup> Wels, "Spheres of Influence," unpaginated.

<sup>7</sup> Wels, "Spheres of Influence," unpaginated.

<sup>8</sup> David F. Burg (1976) quoted in Wels, "Spheres of Influence," unpaginated.

Forty-one countries were represented in the Woman's Building.<sup>9</sup> It contained large murals as well as small-scale works and handicrafts. Mary Cassatt was invited to design a substantial mural on the theme, "The Modern Woman" for the south tympanum [timpanoom] a decorative recess of the Hall of Honour in the Woman's Building.<sup>10</sup> Her mural was to be complemented by another large mural on the theme "Primitive Woman" by Mary Fairchild MacMonnies for the north tympanum at the other end of the Hall, 61 metres distant. In February 1892, Bertha Palmer wrote to Sara Hallowell, a contributor to the official guide to the art of the Woman's Building, outlining her idea for the two murals,

Of course we should want something symbolic showing the advancement of women. My idea was that perhaps we might show woman in her primitive condition as a bearer of burdens and doing drudgery, either as an Indian scene or a classic one in the manner of Puvis [de Chavannes], and as a contrast, woman in the position she occupies today.<sup>11</sup>

Palmer thought each mural should be about twelve by fifty-eight feet or roughly 3.7x17.7 metres. Cassatt's mural turned out to be fifteen feet high and sixty-four feet wide or 4.5 by 19.5 metres, including its border.<sup>12</sup>

Cassatt wrote to a friend about the commission and the reaction to it of her friend Degas, who disapproved of using painting as decoration:

When the Committee offered it to me to do, at first I was horrified, but gradually I began to think it would be great fun to do something I had never done before and as the bare idea of such a thing put Degas in a rage ... I got my spirit up and said I would not give up the idea for anything.<sup>13</sup>

Cassatt's mural had three panels, a larger central panel titled *Young Women Plucking the Fruits of Knowledge or Science* which depicts a group of women and girls harvesting apples, and on either side smaller panels representing *Young Girls Pursuing Fame* and *Art, Music, Dancing*. A decorative border included three images of what might be mistaken for the conventional cherubs that graced so much early and contemporary art, but in fact each represented in Wanda Corn's words "a squirmy baby," with an apple in each hand.<sup>14</sup> My paper focuses on the large central panel, *Young Women Plucking the Fruits of Knowledge or Science*.

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<sup>9</sup> Webster, *Eve's Daughter*, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Elliott, "The Building and its Decoration," 45.

<sup>11</sup> Bertha Palmer to Sara Hallowell, February 1892, quoted in Webster, *Eve's Daughter*, 62.

<sup>12</sup> Webster, *Eve's Daughter*, 99.

<sup>13</sup> Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, summer 1892, quoted in Webster, *Eve's Daughter*, 64-65.

<sup>14</sup> Wanda M. Corn, *Women Building History: Public Art at the 1893 Columbian Exposition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 133.



Figure 1: Mary Cassatt detail, *Young Women Plucking the Fruits of Knowledge or Science*, mural, World's Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893, coloured print.

Murals no longer had to be painted in situ as a new technique allowed a canvas to be permanently fixed to the wall, enabling artists to paint away from the site. Cassatt

built a new studio to accommodate the enormous size of the painting at her summer residence in France, the Château de Bachivillers, north-west of Paris.<sup>15</sup>

Bertha Palmer reported in 1894 that Cassatt, who was quite wealthy, had constructed “an immense glass-roofed building ... where, rather than work on a ladder, she arranged to have the canvas lowered into an excavation in the ground when she wished to work on the upper part of its surface.”<sup>16</sup> Both Cassatt’s and MacMonnies’s works were painted in France and despatched to Chicago.<sup>17</sup> These murals are now lost. For Cassatt’s, there is not even a colour image of the complete mural, but there are contemporary photographs in black and white and a coloured print of part of the central panel has survived (**Figure 1**), together with statements from the artist and contemporary critical comments.<sup>18</sup>

This painting of *Modern Woman*, I suggest drew on feminist concerns, on the parable of Eve in Genesis and on historical and contemporary art. It was also based on local apple cultivation. Apple-picking was a traditional occupation in America where orchards were widespread by the nineteenth century. The apple orchard in Cassatt’s mural was based on an orchard near her summer residence at the Château de Bachivillers while the models were local women hired by her.<sup>19</sup> Some critics have noted and puzzled over the inclusion of turkeys in Cassatt’s mural. However, it seems to have been a common practice to combine turkey rearing with apple orchards, where they would graze and eat the windfalls.

The depiction of women picking apples, together with Cassatt’s reference to the fruits of knowledge, echoes the biblical story of Eve and the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden as narrated in Genesis. Genesis describes two particular trees in the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Good and Evil. The most common image of the Tree of Good and Evil is that it is an apple tree and that this is the fruit that Eve is tempted by the serpent to pick. In fact, Genesis does not mention any specific fruit for this tree, which is just said to bear “fruit” and to be good for “food.”<sup>20</sup> The forbidden fruit was not always imagined to be apples. For instance in the remains of the ancient Roman city of Pompeii, a fresco in the 3<sup>rd</sup> “Ornamental” Style

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<sup>15</sup> Debra N. Mancoff, *Mary Cassatt: Reflections of Women’s Lives* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 1998), 20. Webster, *Eve’s Daughter*, 72 n.90.

<sup>16</sup> Bertha Palmer (1894) quoted in Webster, *Eve’s Daughter*, 66.

<sup>17</sup> Elliott, “The Building and its Decoration,” 45. Cassatt did not go to Chicago as she disliked sea travel: Webster, *Eve’s Daughter*, 66.

<sup>18</sup> The mural was stored by Bertha Palmer for 18 years but vanished after her death in 1918. MacMonnies’s mural has also disappeared: Webster, *Eve’s Daughter*, 136, 139.

<sup>19</sup> Webster, *Eve’s Daughter*, 106.

<sup>20</sup> “Genesis.” In *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testament*. Trans. out of the original tongues (London: Cambridge University Press). Genesis: ch 2 vs. 8: “And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden;” ch. 2 vs. 9: “And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

of between 15 BC and 50 AD, depicts the serpent in a fig tree. The Latin word for an apple, *malum* is also the word for evil, possibly why the apple became identified with the forbidden fruit. Many visual depictions reinforced this idea, for example, Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Adam and Eve* of 1526 which poses Adam and Eve under a bounteous apple tree, as Eve hands Adam an apple and the serpent observes from above.

In Genesis, the woman tells the serpent “of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.” The serpent tells her she won't die but will know good and evil. The woman sees the tree is good for food “and a tree to be desired to make one wise” so she takes “the fruit” and eats it and gives some to her husband who also “did eat.”<sup>21</sup> The heaviest punishment for their transgression is for the woman to whom God says: “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee.”<sup>22</sup> So a woman's desire for knowledge is to be answered by suppression.

Cassatt's mural subverts the morality tale of Eve and the forbidden fruit. Cassatt's use of women as allegorical figures creates a new story focused on what had come to be known by the turn of the century as the New Woman. The women and girls are all part of a symbolic appropriation of knowledge as they pluck the apples. The baby in the border to the mural also holds an apple in each hand, as if to signify the passing on of knowledge. A girl is handed a single fruit from the tree but without a container to collect it, suggesting it is to consume (like Eve) or symbolises the handing on of wisdom. The curve of a girls' dress is partly encircled by the curved outline of the woman near her, symbolically protective as she takes possession of the apple. However, the girl is learning to seek knowledge for herself in the face of those who would still deny women access. Cassatt's reference to the fruits of “knowledge or science” alludes not only to knowledge in general, but the challenging new theories and methods that constituted the new discipline of science in the Victorian period, like the evolutionary theories of Darwin.

It is surely relevant to Cassatt's choice of theme that Cassatt herself had intellectual interests and she painted women of different ages reading, for example her mother reading *Le Figaro* (1878), a newspaper normally read by men up to this time. *Woman Reading* (1878-9) portrays her sister Lydia; *On the Balcony* the same year, 1878-9 depicts a young woman reading while *Grandmother Reading to Children* of 1880 represents the passing on of knowledge.

In the official handbook to art and handicraft in the Woman's Building, the editor, Maud Howe Elliott, in harmony with Cassatt's theme, asserted: “We have eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and the Eden of idleness is hateful to us.

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<sup>21</sup> Genesis, ch. 3, vs. 3, 5, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Genesis, ch. 3 vs. 16.

We claim our inheritance, and are become workers, not cumberers of the earth."<sup>23</sup> This claim to knowledge then is a major part of what Cassatt's mural is about. The women and girls in the central panel are depicted as a coordinated group engaged in apple-picking outdoors in an orchard, not sewing samplers in the drawing-room. The women's hair, workmanlike, is tied back out of their face and off their shoulders. The little girl's hair is loose, suggesting that she is not yet a worker. The women's facial expressions are quite serious, as they work to pick apples and symbolically accumulate knowledge. The figure to centre-right appears contemplative. There is no eye contact with the fictive viewer of the mural as the woman are oblivious to any other presence, as if on stage in their own world.



Figure 2: Camille Pissarro, Apple-Picking, 1886, oil on canvas, 125.8x127.4cm, Ohara Museum of Art, Japan.

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<sup>23</sup> Elliott, "The Building and its Decoration," 33.

Wanda Corn notes that the women do not look laboured in their work. Cassatt's women are pale-skinned, not sunburnt, unlike the ruddy-faced worker in Pissarro's *Apple-Picking* of 1886 (**Figure 2**). The attribute of remaining unburdened by the labour they represent draws

attention to the possibility that they represent something other than simply apple-pickers. Their off-white arms are a little like marble, adding a statuesque quality to the group. Neither do the women have individualised faces or bodies: these are not portraits but part of a symbolic narrative.

The use of allegory in painting has a long history and in particular the focus on women. The Greek derivation of "allegory" is "to speak other," that is, whilst talking of or representing one thing, to signify another. Marina Warner, a historian and mythographer found the female form was "a recurrent motif in allegory."<sup>24</sup> Female figures pleased and persuaded their audiences; as Warner says, "as a weapon of delight, the female appears down the years to convince us of the messages she conveys."<sup>25</sup> Cassatt was able to draw on early allegorical work such as Sandro Botticelli's *La Primavera* (*Spring*) of about 1482 which represented Spring and the Three Graces – mirth, elegance, youth and beauty – and also Flora, Goddess of Flowers. More recently, the allegorical work of the French artist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes had been much praised, especially *The Sacred Grove Beloved of the Arts and the Muses* painted between 1884 and 1889.<sup>26</sup>

Warner argued that with regard to female figures that allegorised civic or national values, this often depended upon "the unlikelihood of women practising the concepts they represent."<sup>27</sup> For example the allegorical figures of Britannia and Hibernia represented their nations at a time when women in neither Britain nor Ireland had the vote. In Cassatt's mural, however, there is perhaps less distance between what the women represent, that is, obtaining access to knowledge, and their potential to realise this aspiration. Although there remained severe restrictions for women wishing to further their education, a number of colleges for women had opened in the States. Sally Webster observed that although women still could not vote in the US they had achieved prominent positions especially in the spheres of education and social reform.<sup>28</sup> Sara Hallowell claimed in the official Exposition handbook, "To-day the American woman enters every art and every industry, and

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<sup>24</sup> Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*. London: Picador, 1987, xix.

<sup>25</sup> Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, xx.

<sup>26</sup> Mary MacMonnies, who like Cassatt lived in France, had trained in Puvis de Chavannes's studio: Palm, "Women Muralists," 129.

<sup>27</sup> Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, xx.

<sup>28</sup> Webster, *Eve's Daughter*, 47.



enters it successfully."<sup>29</sup> In France it was possible for women like Cassatt to undertake art training, whether at studios like the *Académie Julian* or through private tuition.

The modernity of Cassatt's image does not only rest on the theme of women plucking the fruits of knowledge or science. The bright colours and the abstract patterning of the forms of the figures and dresses signified a modern visual language, drawing on Japanese prints with their curved outlines and flat areas of colour, and on Impressionism with its bright hues. Degas had introduced Cassatt to the Impressionist circle in the 1870s, encouraging her to exhibit with them. Cassatt recalled, "I accepted with joy. I hated conventional art. I began to live."<sup>30</sup> Cassatt wrote to Bertha Palmer about her work in October 1892:

for the subject of the central & largest composition young women plucking the fruits of knowledge or science & that enabled me to place my figures out of doors & allowed of brilliancy of color – I have tried to make the general effect as bright as gay as amusing as possible. The occasion is one of rejoicing, a great national fête.<sup>31</sup>

Contemporary critics noted the brilliance of the colours and the flatness of the forms. Lucy Monroe, a Chicago-based art critic, witnessed the installation of Cassatt's mural and was able to describe the mural and its colours before it was raised high up to the ceiling.<sup>32</sup> She observed that,

The central panel represents an orchard with the apples red upon the trees and a group of graceful women engaged in gathering them – significant, or course, of the fruit of the tree of knowledge ... a bright grass green is the prevailing tone of the pictures themselves, and in brilliant contrast with this she has used in the wide borders around each panel a deep, rich blue. The result is admirably decorative, varied as it is by notes of dull red and of many gay and sunny colors in the costumes of the women ... Her entire work is conceived decoratively and painted flatly without shadows.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> S. T. Hallowell, "Woman in Art," in *Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building of the World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, 1893*, ed. Maud Howe Elliott, 67-77. Official Edition (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & Company, 1894), 73.

<sup>30</sup> Cassatt quoted in Mancoff, *Mary Cassatt*, 14. However she disliked her portrait by Degas, painted around 1884, thinking it showed her as "repugnant": Mancoff, *Mary Cassatt*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Cassatt, letter to Bertha Palmer 11 October 1892, quoted in Allen, "Gendered Spaces," 34-35.

<sup>32</sup> Webster, *Eve's Daughter*, 67.

<sup>33</sup> Lucy Monroe, "Chicago Letter," *The Critic*, April 1893, quoted in Webster, *Eve's Daughter*, 73.

Monroe also referred to “corn-color and violet” applied in the panel *Art, Music, Dancing* which complemented the bright green.

Cassatt's design employs forms and colours that are carefully balanced. The figure left of centre with both arms raised and the figure to the right with both arms lowered perform a kind of reverse symmetry. The woman on the ladder displays a dance-like balance between her raised right and her lowered left arms. These balanced forms in the central trio of figures creates an impression of grace and stillness so that the viewer perceives the scene as more like a dance or a tableau than as a representation of labour. Lighter colours centre to the left are balanced by the darker tones centre-right and linked by a prominent white collar. The figures' dresses are patterned in a variety of abstract motifs. Colours echo one another from different parts of the canvas. For instance the little girls' hair colour complements the dress of the woman at centre right. The idea of Modern Woman is therefore conflated with an avant-garde expression looking to the future. Cassatt's mural anticipated a new era for women and adopted an appropriately modernist style of painting.

The garb of Cassatt's apple-pickers could be associated with the contemporary campaign for dress reform, which rejected the unhealthy wearing of figure-pinching corsetry in favour of loose dresses in soft fabrics.<sup>34</sup> Corn points out how the figures' loose, uncorseted dresses are those of a middle-class parlour, by contrast with Camille Pissarro's apple-pickers who wear working clothes as they bend with their labour. There is a notable contrast between the dress of Cassatt's apple-pickers and the conventionally fashionable dresses shown in paintings of visitors to the Exposition. The garb of the women visitors is elaborate, including hats, and shows off the pinched waists that were enabled by constricting undergarments. Cassatt said "I have tried to express the modern woman in the fashions of our day"; she herself dressed fashionably, as Degas's iconic picture of her back view at the Louvre (**Figure 3**) suggests, but she explicitly rejected any notion of fashionable couturier wear.<sup>35</sup> The depicted visitors are surrounded by the Exposition buildings with a conventional basis in ancient architectural forms. Cassatt's figures, by contrast, are framed by grass and trees, by nature. There is no sky visible in the central panel, with a focus on the earth, grass, trees and their fruitfulness.

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<sup>34</sup> Webster, *Eve's Daughter*.

<sup>35</sup> Webster, *Eve's Daughter*, 81.



Figure 3: Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt at the Louvre - The Paintings Gallery, 1879-1880, etching, aquatint and drypoint on wove paper, 36.2x22.3cm. NGA.

Other decorative panels in the Exposition looked to more conventional ways of representing women's educational advances. A mural for the Woman's Building, by Lydia Field Emmet, was titled *Art, Science, and Literature*. As in Cassatt's painting, the figures, all female, wear modern dress and represent similar aspirations, but their symbolism is less abstract, for instance learning is signified by the conventional motif of an academic mortar-board. Amanda Brewster Sewell's *Arcadia* depicts women draped in Ancient Greek robes or half-naked, one languidly picks a fruit as she looks round at an Arcadian goat while the other holds her hand out to the goat. Although Maud Elliott approved this "echo of Hellenic beauty" and the women's "pagan loveliness," this seems to be the very "Eden of idleness" that she had rejected.

Commenting on Cassatt's mural, Sara Hallowell noted that "Miss Cassatt is easily the best of our women painters," but she observed that "Her work is probably better known to those intimately connected with art than to the general public. She is of the school of Degas, Whistler, and Monet."<sup>36</sup> So Hallowell recognised the modernism of Cassatt's work but also the fact that the general public might not be familiar with it. Cassatt's work did indeed receive some uncomprehending criticism. Florence Fenwick Miller found the colours of Cassatt's mural "garish and primitive."<sup>37</sup> Miller commented in the London edition of the *Art Journal* in 1893 that: "we are all too sadly aware that Eve herself gathered apples, and there is nothing whatever modern about this group of young women, who are nearly all in pink frocks, and standing upon the most vivid green grass."<sup>38</sup> Criticism was also founded on a traditional view of women's "natural" role in society. William Walton, author of a volume devoted to the Exposition and published in 1893 commented on the murals by Cassatt and MacMonnies:

[B]oth ladies chose, naturally, to celebrate the graces and the influence of their own sex. Both also naturally placed their figures in long pleasant green landscapes, though by so doing Miss Cassatt seems rather to have missed the point of her symbolism, as the occupation in which she has represented her "modern women" – gathering fruit – is scarcely that which best corresponds to the high claims put forth for their share in modern civilisation. Mrs. Macmonnies' primitive women were more appropriate in their household and domestic labors.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Hallowell, "Woman in Art," 74-75.

<sup>37</sup> Florence Miller quoted in Allen, "Gendered Spaces," 37.

<sup>38</sup> Florence Miller (1893) quoted in Webster, *Eve's Daughter*, 122-23.

<sup>39</sup> Walton, William. *World's Columbian Exposition 1893: Art and Architecture* (Philadelphia: George Barrie & Son, 1893) (facsimile), opposite xxxvi.

Walton's comment on Cassatt's mural is somewhat vague as to the symbolism he expects of it, perhaps a modernised version of the theme of household and domestic labour that he approves in MacMonnies's work.

To conclude, the central panel of Cassatt's mural of *Modern Woman* subverts the biblical morality tale from Genesis that punishes women for seeking knowledge, replacing it with an allegorical depiction of *Young Women Plucking the Fruits of Knowledge or Science*, framed by the common agricultural pursuit of apple-picking. Through the title, Cassatt clearly indicated the radical allegorical function of the mural. Yet it was not the title alone that provided her picture with allegorical meaning, but also the way in which the figures were shaped and posed, or poised in the scene. Cassatt drew on Japanese prints and contemporary Impressionist painting to modernise and stylise her figures. They differed from modernist representations of rural workers by realist painters such as Pissarro. The dress of Cassatt's figures alluded to the contemporary movement for dress reform, somewhat ahead of the Exposition visitors who still displayed their corseted waistlines. Sadly, the loss of Cassatt's mural is a sign of how her art was neglected in the years following the Exposition and we are left only with the traces of her *Modern Woman*.

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