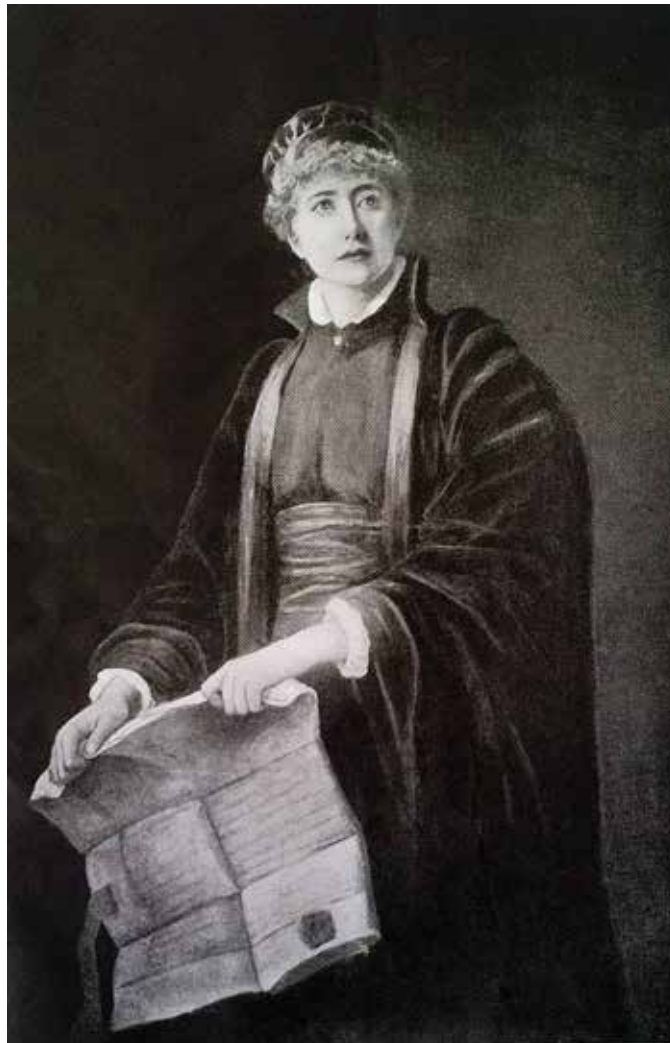


LOUISE JOPLING: ARTIST, TEACHER, CAMPAIGNER

Born in Manchester, England, the fifth daughter of a railway contractor, Louise (née Goode) Jopling (1843–1933) ultimately became one of Victorian London’s leading female artists. Despite social and economic boundaries that limited women’s careers, she led a remarkably independent life as a versatile painter of portraits, figures, and interiors. Jopling achieved professional status by showing her art at mainstream institutions and joining a select band of female artists (including her compatriot Elizabeth Thompson Butler and the French realist Rosa Bonheur) whose activities were followed closely by the media. In 1902, she was one of the first women elected to the Royal Society of British Artists, an institution second in rank only to the Royal Academy of Arts. Yet Jopling fully realized that her gender set her apart: “I hate being a woman,” she wrote. “Women never do anything.”

COSMOPOLITAN ADVANTAGES

Jopling first studied art in Paris (1867–68), exhibiting several works at the Salon there. Members of the Rothschild banking family featured prominently in her life at this time: her first husband, Frank Romer, was in the service of Baron Nathaniel de Rothschild, whose French wife, Charlotte, was a painter of note. The Baroness observed Jopling’s talent for portrait sketching and encouraged her to pursue formal training, first at the *École Nationale de Dessin pour les Jeunes Filles* and later at an atelier for women run by the Anglo-French painter Charles Chaplin.¹ The training she received from Chaplin, with its emphasis



Photogravure after *Ellen Terry as Portia*, 1883, oil on canvas, location of original unknown (photogravure from the Jopling family collection)

on life drawing, became the bedrock of Jopling’s career after her 1869 return to London, where she became a regular exhibitor at the Royal Academy and Grosvenor Gallery. That training also helped her secure entry to London’s most advanced artistic circles, which included such French-influenced talents as James McNeill Whistler and John Everett Millais.² Jopling retained her French contacts through Chaplin, who, from time to time, acted as an agent for her pictures in Paris, and through friends like Alfred Stevens, whose work she greatly admired.

Jopling’s subjects, chiefly portraits and domestic scenes, were chosen with a careful eye to the market and conformed, on the whole, to conventional prejudices about suitable imagery for women artists. Her expertise, for example, in producing a steady stream of children’s portraits appealed to collectors, as did her so-called “fancy pictures” of young women in historical dress. Leading actresses of the day sat for portraits — for example, Ellen Terry in her celebrated role as Portia in a production of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, and Lillie Langtry as Rosalind in *As You Like It*. Such images demonstrate Jopling’s fondness for starkly posed figures set against a dramatically lit background. This approach is reprised in *Dear Lady Disdain (Portrait of Miss Hetty Williams)*, a moment from Shakespeare’s *Much*

Ado about Nothing, in which the spirited central character of Beatrice banters with Benedick, Lord of Padua: “I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick: nobody marks you,” to which Benedick replies, “What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?”³



Most of Jopling's early commissions were obtained, however, through family and other social connections that included the literary circles of Charles Dickens and the satirical magazine *Punch*, as well as Sir Coutts and Lady Lindsay, founders of the avant-garde Grosvenor Gallery. While portrait sittings secured her a periodic income, Jopling remained focused on professional recognition within the predominantly male world of London exhibition societies. She enjoyed critical acclaim in 1874, when *Five O'Clock Tea* (1874), a large exhibition picture (six by four feet) in the then-fashionable Japanese taste, was displayed in a prominent position at the Academy, together with its companion, *La Japonaise*, a smaller portrait of a "pretty, pale Japanese belle."⁴ Perhaps influenced by seeing works set in studios — like *La dame en rose* (1866, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels) by Stevens, an early aficionado of Japanese art and decoration — Jopling arranged for friends to pose in kimonos purchased in Paris.⁵ She also accumulated a porcelain collection for use as studio props.⁶ Critics praised the "bright and vivid colouring ... the broad and masterly manner" of Jopling's painting.⁷

The success of *Five O'Clock Tea* in 1874 (the same year that Butler's *The Roll Call*, a monumental painting of a Crimean War episode, caused a sensation at the Academy) brought Jopling to the attention of the firm of Thomas Agnew, who purchased it for the then substantial sum of 400 guineas. Although Agnew's soon purchased *A Modern Cinderella*, a studio interior of a model relaxing between costume changes, their business relationship seems to have then fizzled out. Commissions from established patrons remained an easier prospect for Jopling than negotiating with dealers. Once again, her Rothschild connections came to the fore; portrait commissions from the English branch of the family (e.g., *Portrait of Sir Nathaniel de Rothschild*, 1877, National Trust, Hughenden Manor, High Wycombe) did much to consolidate Jopling's status as a chronicler of fashionable society in the 1870s.

Her second marriage, to Joseph Middleton Jopling (a watercolorist and administrator with an excellent network of contacts), compounded this success.⁸ Painting chiefly in oils, Louise worked on a larger scale than her husband did; this meant, as she later mused, that she could

Dear Lady Disdain (Portrait of Miss Hetty Williams), c. 1891, oil on canvas, 50 x 29 1/2 in., private collection



Five O'Clock Tea, 1874 (known only through this reproduction in the *Magazine of Art*, 1880)

command the lion's share of their domestic studio space, an unusual arrangement for an artistic couple of the period. Both employed models every other day, including at least four female regulars, among them Mrs. Annie Keene, who had also sat for Edward Burne-Jones, and the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron.⁹

By contrast, self-portraiture avoided the expense of hiring a model and, as the Academician William Powell Frith advised her, was "the finest practice an artist could possibly have." Jopling made at least 10 self-portraits during her career, in oil, watercolor, and pastel. In *Self-Portrait No. 2 in Red*, the finely modeled areas of the face contrast with Jopling's lively treatment of the dress, the surface of the wood panel often remaining visible through her sketchy brushstrokes. Here Jopling's gaze is concentrated, at times apprehensive, seemingly lost in youthful self-scrutiny. The half-length *Self-Portrait No. 4* strikes a different note, conveying her status as an established professional, her gaze level and composed, her palette and brushes on prominent display. This image also reflects Jopling's growing expertise as a pastelist; her skill led to a number of portraits of literary figures she admired, such as the playwright and critic George Bernard Shaw. Another sitter was Samuel Smiles, whose *Self-Help* enthralled improvement-minded Victorians from its first publication in 1859, with its patchwork of inspiring biographical examples and homespun philosophy.

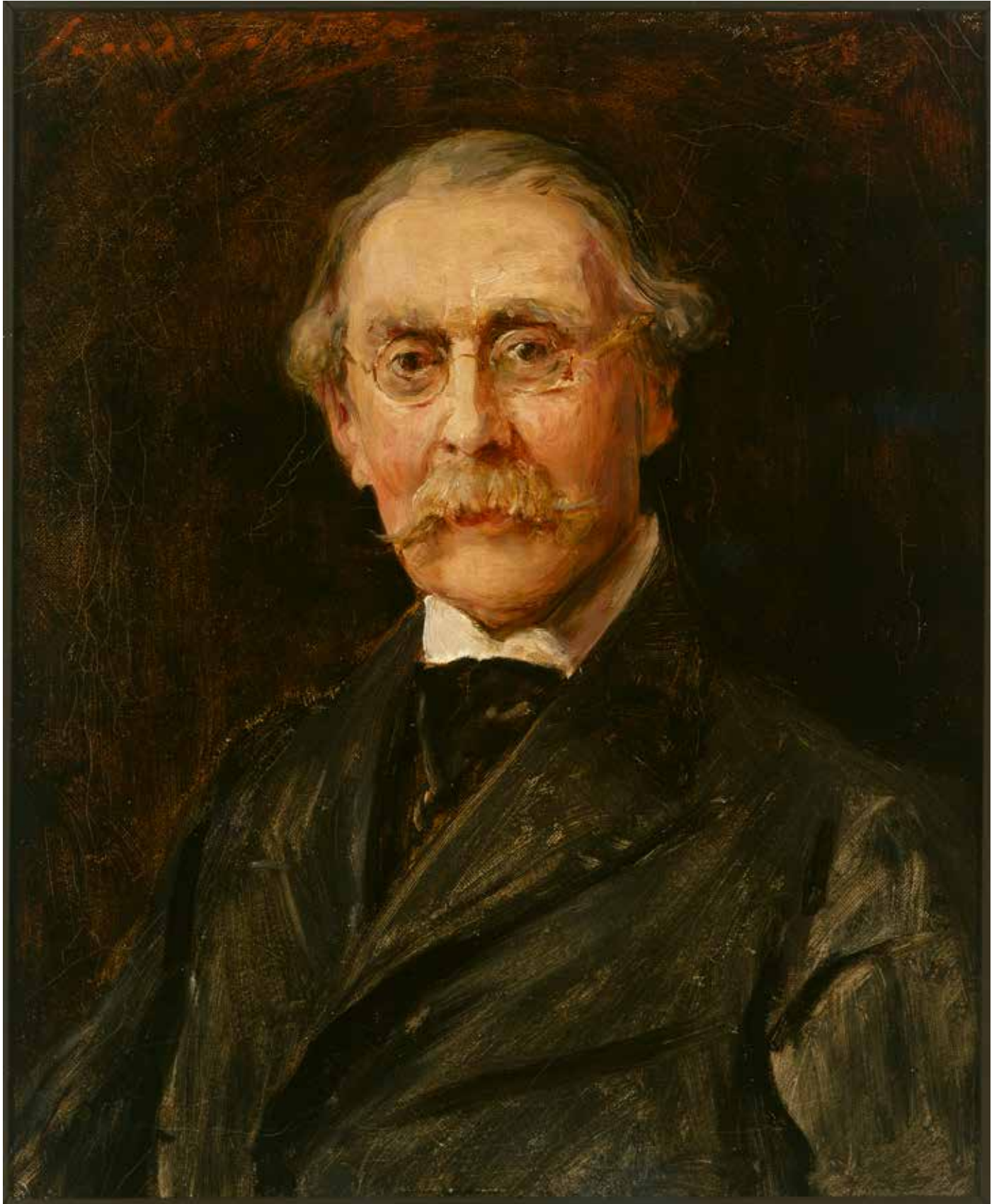
Though firmly rooted in London, Jopling remained conversant with contemporary French art, aided, perhaps, by Parisian dealers like Paul Durand-Ruel, who relocated their businesses to London temporarily during the Franco-Prussian war (1870–71) and then continued to supply British firms such as Agnew's. She also visited the Paris Salon in June 1878, exhibiting two portraits there the following year. As in her

earlier self-portrait, a French-inspired manner is discernible in the energetic brushwork of Jopling's portrait of the physician, collector, and artist Sir Henry Thompson (c. 1888–90), which contrasts with the finer modeling of his face.

TAKING CHARGE

The 1880s were marked by personal loss: in December 1884, Joseph Jopling died suddenly, leaving his widow with a young son and many debts. With Millais's encouragement, she began weekly classes in her studio, during which she would paint a life-sized head while demonstrating a range of painterly effects. "I found teaching intensely interesting," she recalled. "I learned so much myself."¹⁰ By 1887, advertisements for "Mrs Jopling's School of Art" for women began to appear and the school grew rapidly into a substantial enterprise that lasted until the eve of World War I. One of the first London schools modeled on the Parisian atelier system, its daily routine included a visit each morning from Jopling, sittings with a life model (of either sex) under the supervision of a senior pupil, and monthly lectures on perspective and anatomy. At the heart of Jopling's practical advice, which she later recorded in a handbook, *Hints to Amateurs and Students*, was an emphasis on draftsmanship and the life model. In one passage, she clearly evokes Chaplin's teaching:

Try to look upon a head whilst you are drawing it as a square, or block of marble, and at each curve that composes it as made of several short, straight lines ... When you have completed your drawing, it is easy to find your curves within the angles of your straight lines. In this way you will have grander and bolder curves, and will get into your drawing what the French call "style." My master used to continually impress upon me to "dessiner carrément."¹¹



Portrait of Sir Henry Thompson, Bt., c. 1888/95, oil on canvas, 22 3/4 x 18 3/4 in., University College London Art Museum

Self-Portrait No. 2 in Red, 1875/78, oil on panel, 5 1/4 x 4 1/2 in., Jopling family collection

Also in accordance with Chaplin, Jopling taught her students the so-called Rubens palette, which features, from right to left, “vermillion, flake white, Naples yellow, yellow ochre, raw sienna, light red, cobalt, ultramarine, cavel earth and ivory black.”¹²

Her experience of running a school ultimately informed Jopling’s activism promoting the idea that women should be educated on equal terms with men, most notably in her essay “On the Education of the Artistic Faculty” (1903). An accomplished networker and social butterfly, she exploited her celebrity status later in life to champion women’s suffrage and other progressive causes, even offering her studio as a meeting venue.

Jopling recorded her daily life assiduously through diaries, studio notebooks, and several bound volumes of press clippings, all of which survive in a family archive. Richly documented by this material, which is rare in its depth and extent, Jopling’s career represents an illuminating case study of the professional woman artist at work in late 19th-century Britain. Unusually, she enjoyed a 50-year exhibiting career in an era when the artistic lives of most women ended with marriage and motherhood. Crucially, Jopling’s Parisian training endowed her work with a distinctive confidence and vigor that diverted many British critics from their habitual criticism of women’s art as tentative and deficient in regard to figure drawing. Moreover, her positive experiences in the French atelier system (which occurred earlier than most British and American women) led Jopling to promote its methods through her popular school and handbook.

Much of Jopling’s prodigious output remains in private collections, but some works can be viewed by appointment today in such British museums as the Lady Lever Art Gallery (Port Sunlight, near Liverpool), Manchester City Art Gallery, and London’s National Portrait Gallery. ●

Dr. Patricia de Montfort, based at the University of Glasgow, has been engaged for some years in a study of Louise Jopling (louisejopling.arts.gla.ac.uk). New information about Jopling’s work is welcomed and will be treated in confidence. Her latest book, *Louise Jopling: A Biographical and Cultural Study of the Modern Woman Artist in Victorian Britain*, was published by Routledge last year.

Endnotes

1. Chaplin’s atelier opened between October 1866 and early 1867.
2. Whistler and Millais would later paint her portrait, now, respectively, in the Hunterian (University of Glasgow) and the National Portrait Gallery, London.
3. *Much Ado About Nothing* (I:i:5).
4. Private collection, Jopling press cuttings, PC1.
5. Possibly at Madame Desoye’s Oriental shop on the Rue de Rivoli.
6. Some items survive in the family although the full extent of her collecting is yet to be fully explored.
7. Private collection, Jopling press cuttings, PC1.
8. Frank Romer died in 1873.
9. *Louise Jopling, Twenty Years of My Life* (London: 1925), 68.
10. *Ibid.*, 307.
11. “Dessiner carrément,” lit. “to draw straight,” *Hints to Students and Amateurs* (London: 1891), 22.
12. Jopling, “On the Education of the Artistic Faculty,” *The Women’s Library*, 6 vols. (London: 1903–12), 156–7. The Rubens palette was widely praised by artists during this period.

Self-Portrait No. 4, 1888, pastel on paper, 35 1/4 x 27 1/2 in., Jopling family collection

