

Ruskin Art Club

founded 1888

A tax exempt 501 c (3) non-profit corporation

www.RuskinArtClub.com

Ruskin Art Club (Founded 1888)

200 S. Ave. 66,
Los Angeles, CA 90042
info@ruskinartclub.com
(310) 640-0710

Executive Director
GABRIEL MEYER

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
President
ERIC JESSEN

Vice-president
KATHLEEN BONANN
MARSHALL

Treasurer
DAVID JUDSON

Secretary
BEVERLY DENENBERG

Members
LYN BOYD-JUDSON
NOAH BRETZ
ELENA KARINA BYRNE
SARA ATWOOD
STUART DENENBERG
TYSON GASKILL
SUZANNE ISKEN

"We seek in the arts, in Nature, and in the mysterious power of beauty, the instruments not only of personal transformation, but, in the spirit of John Ruskin, of the transformation of the physical, social, and cultural landscape of our world."

- Ruskin Art Club

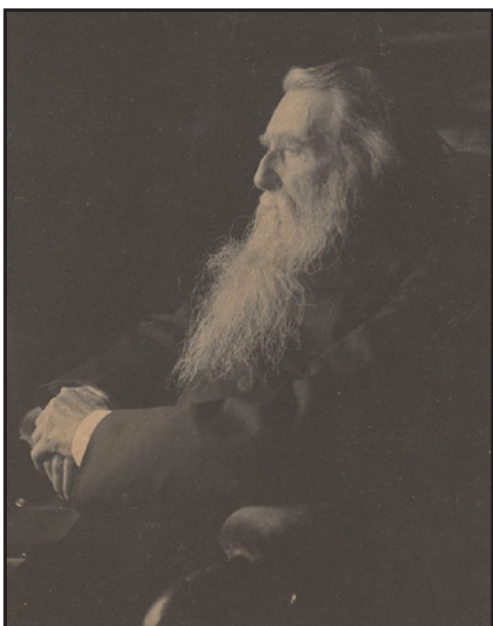
FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: GABRIEL MEYER

"Traces of a Missing Ruskin Bronze"

One of the prized items in the Ruskin Art Club's archives at the Doheny Library's Special Collections at USC is a worn Curator's Book from the early years of the 20th century. It catalogs the art holdings of the Club in its heyday, which included several historic California plein air canvases. Unsurprisingly, many of these treasures "disappeared" over the years. One of the Club's missing treasures, however, has left a photographic trail behind it.

Sometime in the early 1920s, the sculptor Julia Bracken Wendt donated an artfully framed photograph (and a duplicate!) of a bronze plaque she had made of Ruskin earlier in the century, and, if not-always-reliable Club lore is to be trusted, a plaster cast of the bas-relief itself, both now very rare.

The plaque, clearly based on a famous Frederick Hollyer photographic portrait of the "sage of Brantwood" taken in 1894, entitled "Datur Hora Quieti" after Sir Walter Scott's poem, shows Ruskin seated in profile, his hands folded before him. Incised into the background of the plaque are the words: "Life without Labor is guilt. Labor without art is brutality" – a slightly amended quote from Ruskin's 1870 Oxford lecture, "The Relation of Art to Morals," which reads: "Life without industry is guilt and industry without art is brutality."



*Relief plaque by Julia Bracken (1901)
Portrait of Ruskin by Frederick Hollyer (1894)*

One of the pioneering women sculptors in the US, and, later on, a teacher and mentor of sculptors, Julia Bracken studied at the Art Institute of Chicago in the 1880s under Lorado Taft. Taft, a conservative sculptor with a Beaux Arts background, is widely credited with championing the careers of a group of women sculptors, particularly in connection with the 1893 Chicago Exposition, this at a time when it was considered socially unacceptable for women to work in the “masculine” craft of sculpture.

Influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement inspired by Ruskin and Morris, Bracken was a prominent member of the Bohemia Guild in Chicago, which operated a School of Industrial Art and Handicraft. This guild, like many of the period, was a gathering place both for artists and labor and social reformers. In 1901, Bracken carved relief plaques for the guild hall featuring portraits of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris.

The Ruskin plaque, clearly, is a copy of the one originally cast by Bracken for the Chicago workers’ guild.

Bracken married painter William Wendt in 1906 and moved to Laguna Beach, where she continued to mentor sculptors well into the new century. She and Wendt were instrumental in founding the California Art Club in 1909, which, headquartered in Pasadena, still thrives, on the basis of admitting sculptors and women artists. (For information about the California Art Club, visit www.californiaartclub.org.)

She created a number of notable civic sculptures for Los Angeles, including the *Three Graces: History, Science, and Art* (1914) for the old Los Angeles City Hall, later installed in what is now the Natural History Museum in Exposition Park, under a County commission, with the financial help of the Ruskin Art Club and the stained-glass enhancements of Judson Studios.

Like our Ruskin plaque, it must be said that many commemorative busts and sculptural groupings for public parks attributed to Bracken and her students, including a graceful Pershing Square fountain, the focus of an old painting I once glimpsed in the lobby of the Hotel Laguna, have fallen victim to changing civic tastes, the depredations of urban “renewal,” and the attenuated memories of a century obsessed with the new.

Julia Bracken Wendt died in 1942.

“Traces of a Missing Ruskin Bronze” By Gabriel Meyer — Continued

While her work was relatively “invisible,” even in the recent past – her “three graces” sculpture did not emerge from a dark corner in the Natural History Museum to its current restoration as the foyer centerpiece until the 1980s – the 21st-century has been kinder. There is a modest, but measurable growth of interest in her work and in her place as a pioneering woman sculptor these days, a fact that shows up in the rising prices her smaller pieces – commemorative plaques and medallions, for example – fetch at auctions.

So, where is our Ruskin bronze, or, at least, one of the plaster casts the old Curator’s book lists as among the Ruskin Art Club’s treasures? As a friend of mine posits (with considerable optimism) about all missing things – “It must be *somewhere*.”



The Three Graces: History, Science, and Art (1914)

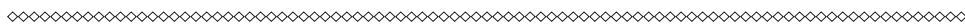
If you hear anything, you’ll be sure to let me know.

Gabriel Meyer is the Executive Director of the Ruskin Art Club in Los Angeles

“Remembering: Ann Walnum, 1928-2020”

By Emily Jo Wharry

Note from the editor: In addition to her many other commitments, Ann Walnum was a longtime member of the Ruskin Art Club. Her activism is indicative of the civic spirit and commitment to lifelong learning that inspired older generations of the Club. We are grateful for her example and we mourn her loss.



Ann Walnum, a local community activist, public school teacher and music instructor, died on March 3. She was 92.

A resident of Mount Washington for 67 years, Walnum is best known as a champion for the revitalization of the Southwest Museum, the oldest museum in Los Angeles, located in Mount Washington. But her activism on behalf of the museum was part and parcel of decades of energetic



Ann Walnum is best known for her advocacy on behalf of the Southwest Museum.

(Photo by Martha Benedict Photography)

advocacy that touched all corners of Northeast L.A. and spanned local politics, history, education, the arts and the environment.

“A single-word description of Ann Walnum would be ‘indefatigable,’ said Eliot Sekular, a longtime resident of Highland Park who worked with Walnum on many projects. “Her persistence, commitment and passion were the stuff of community legend. When not completely focused on her advocacy, she was warm and funny and very good company.”

Born February 19, 1928, the only child of Dean and Catherine Wells, Walnum was raised in Mundelein, Illinois. Mundelein was a small town, but its proximity to Chicago allowed for a childhood spent visiting museums. In an interview in 2019 with Occidental College’s (NE)LA Stories community archival project, Walnum said that her childhood experiences shaped her love of museums and her commitment to preserving them.

She moved to Los Angeles in 1949 to attend the University of Southern California, earning her bachelor’s degree and teaching credential. It was here that she met Sven Walnum, a film school student from Norway and her future husband.

Soon after graduation, in 1953, she moved to Mount Washington, and began her 30-year career as a third-grade teacher at Margaret Heath Elementary in the Baldwin Park Unified School District.

She also taught outside of the classroom. An accomplished violinist, Walnum gave violin and piano lessons both privately and in free community workshops.

Her most profound legacy, however, is her advocacy for the 106-year-old Southwest Museum, once the home to a collection of 250,000 Native American and Mexican artifacts.

Her most profound legacy, however, is her advocacy for the 106-year-old Southwest Museum, once the home to a collection of 250,000 Native American and Mexican artifacts.

Walnum volunteered at the museum from 1995 until 2003, when the museum officially merged with the Autry Museum of the American West due to financial troubles.

That same year, Walnum co-founded the *Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition*, a group of

community organizations and individuals dedicated to ensuring that the Autry lived up to the merger agreement, namely, to revive the museum and display the collection there.

In a 2013 editorial, *the L.A. Times* sided with the Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition, saying that the Autry “should not turn the Southwest into a garden-variety cultural center until there has been a serious attempt to rehabilitate it as a museum.”

Throughout the years of work on behalf of the Southwest Museum, Walnum was also active in cultural preservation, politics and environmental issues.

She served on the board of the Historical Society of Southern California and the Highland Park Heritage Trust and volunteered with the Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society.

Walnum was also a founding member of the *Lummis Legacy League*, a nonprofit formed in 2019 and dedicated to preserving the cultural and artistic history of the L.A. Arroyo Seco region and the archival accomplishments of Charles Fletcher Lummis, the founder of the Southwest Museum.

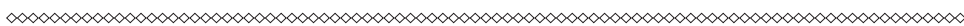
Adapted from an article that appeared in the March 28, 2020 edition of the Eagle Rock-based newspaper, Boulevard Sentinel.

NEWSLETTER ESSAY:

“Reevaluating the Common Good with Ruskin”

By Zachary Bullock

Note from the editor: Continuing the theme of our last newsletter essay by Dr. Kay Walter — teaching Ruskin in today’s schools and universities — high school sociology teacher Zachary Bullock, who studied sociology with Prof. Jim Spates of Hobart and William Smith Colleges (Geneva, New York), one of this country’s leading Ruskin scholars, relates his experiences teaching Ruskin to high school students in Charlottesville, Virginia.



“...you must get into the habit of looking intensely at words, and assuring yourself of their meaning...”

- “Of Kings’ Treasuries,” from *The Crown of Wild Olive*

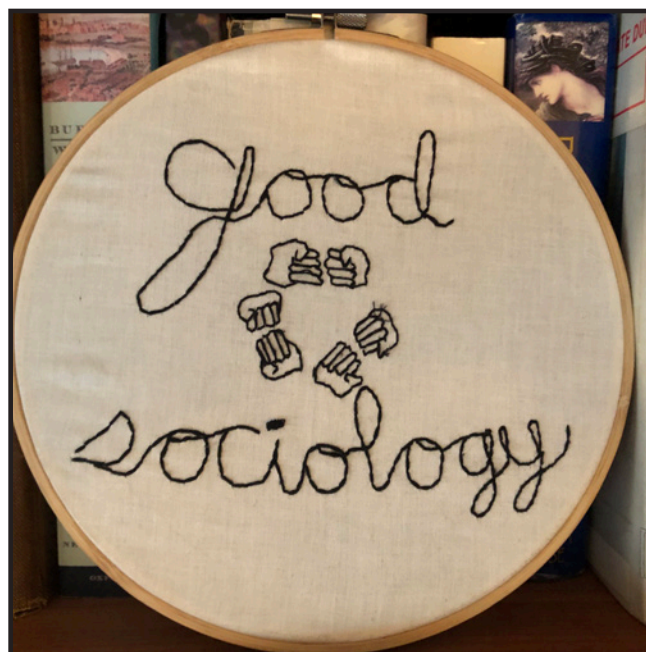
“Reevaluating the Common Good with Ruskin” By Zachary Bullock — Continued

Sociology is full of challenging issues. By the end of the school year in my introductory sociology course, my students know about many of them. So, at the end of my course, I take a few weeks to explore what a “good” society is and how we might achieve it.

Exploring issues related to a “good society” is more often the purview of activists and policy makers than of sociologists. John Ruskin’s political economy provides an interesting bridge between the two. While not prescribing a particular set of policies, Ruskin’s political economy criticized the underpinnings of laissez faire capitalism and then proceeded to derive logical conclusions about the principles for creating a healthier and more equitable society.

In preparation for reading Ruskin’s political economy, my students work in small groups to draw sketches of the ideal classroom desk. I provide no other prompting than asking them to draw their desk with as much detail as they would like to include. My students enjoy this exercise immensely, often laughing about outrageous ideas or griping about the uncomfortable desks in which they spend the majority of their school days.

Every desk they sketch is always a little different from another, some emphasizing comfort more than function or vice versa. Some desks fit well within the confines of a normal classroom, while others test the limits of known physics. Regardless of the specific design elements my students chose to include, their desks tend to reveal the same design principles every time. There is always a strong emphasis on physical comfort, useful desktop and range of motion, and places to store their materials.



I use this exercise to set the stage for Ruskin’s political economy because Ruskin, too, was interested in deriving principles from experience. In his case, studying political economy was a means for identifying the guiding principles of a “good society.”

After their brief foray into desk design, my students read “Ad Valorem,” Ruskin’s final essay in his collection *Unto this Last*. In this essay, Ruskin develops the concept of “value.” He returns to the word’s Latin root, from which he derives the definition, to “avail towards life.” Ruskin then develops the implications of this word for social and economic life until he has revealed that each member of society is in a moral relationship with one another, a relationship through which every person is dependent on the quality of the things we make, exchange, and consume.

As my students unpack the ideas in “Ad Valorem,” the word “value” remains at the center of our discussion. Every element of the essay returns to this word. With this in mind, my students begin to consider how we might know value within our current social reality and how might we ensure that we get it.

My students’ greatest revelation from “Ad Valorem” is thinking about social relations and institutions through this lens of moral worth and responsibility. This awareness, especially when extended on the global scale, can be daunting for young people. For students who struggle with knowing what to do with this knowledge, I ask them to first think about what they buy. We all buy goods and services, and when we make a purchase, we set off a chain of events that impacts every worker and natural resource in the supply chain. When organized, consumption is a daunting economic power.

Ruskin’s political economy remains an important part of my teaching because I believe that the magnitude of his ideas may help my students intervene in social life as they enter their adult lives. As children of the twenty-first century, my students are evaluating their futures with the knowledge of looming and interlocking global crises. These crises will require creative problem-solving that draw on a wide range of cultural traditions and ways of thinking. Ruskin’s political economy provides a way toward a reconception of the “common good” that we desperately need to consider. Revisiting and assuring ourselves of the meaning of “value” in its moral and social context is a treasure that I hope my students continue to keep.

Zachary Bullock is Department Chair of History and Social Sciences at Charlottesville High School, Charlottesville, VA.

UPCOMING EVENTS [VIRTUAL]

The Ruskin Art Club is regrouping, as all organizations are these days, under the “virtual” banner. Until public authorities indicate that we can safely resume in-person events, all our activities will be in the form of virtual, online presentations. Please register for these events online at **info@ruskinartclub.com**. We will then send you the Zoom link for the event.

JANUARY 2021

“Return to Nature: The Historic Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco (1895) and Its Role in California Arts and Crafts”

by Ted Bosley (Don Hahn, moderator)

Thursday, Jan. 28th, 5pm PST



Edward (“Ted”) Bosley is the executive director and CEO of the Gamble House Conservancy in Pasadena. In addition to his duties there, he has published and lectured widely on the Gamble House, architects Greene and Greene who designed the Gamble House in 1908 and the American Arts and Crafts Movement.

This talk focuses on the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church as a paradigm expression of the Arts & Crafts era in the American West, bridging the movement’s Ruskinian origins in Britain to its development on the edge of the continent. It

is a story of artists, architects and the craft collaboration and cohesion that came about through the vision of the Reverend Joseph Worcester more than a century ago. Worcester’s quiet brand of persuasion would override “professional” advice to bring about an enduring work of inspiring architectural poetry, rooted in spiritual lessons.



Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco (1895)

FEBRUARY 2021

Ruskin's Birthday Concert with the Zelter Quartet (Thornton School, USC)

Thursday, Feb. 11, 5pm PST

Praised by LA Opus for their “seemingly effortless precision and blend”, the **Zelter String Quartet** formed in Los Angeles in 2018. The quartet is comprised of violinists Kyle Gilner and Gallia Kastner, violist Nao Kubota, and cellist Allan Hon. The quartet has worked with several distinguished artists including Lina Bahn, Joseph Lin, Alasdair Tait, Glenn Dicterow, Karen Dreyfus, and Ralph Kirshbaum, as well as members of the St. Lawrence and Danish String



and Danish String Quartets. In August 2021, the quartet will be participating in the Rencontres Franco-Américaines de Musique de Chambre, as winners of the USC Ofiesh Chamber Music Competition.

This special event will feature performances of Haydn's C-major String Quartet (op. 20, no.2) and Beethoven's E-minor String Quartet (op. 59, no. 2), along with short readings (with actors Joanna Cassidy and Kathe Mazur) from Ruskin's works and a special US musical premiere.



“Made Out of WHAT??!?: Revivifying the World Through Art, Design, and Innovation”

by Denise Domergue

Thursday, Feb. 25, 5pm PST

Denise Domergue, founder and director of Made Out of WHAT, a non-profit organization founded to raise awareness about the challenge of industrial and consumer waste by showcasing brilliant, practical solutions from artists and designers around the world.

We did not send out membership dues renewal notices in 2020 due to the uncertainties Covid-19 imposed on our ability to mount a full season of events. However, beginning last fall, we launched our series of virtual events, which continues with even more creativity in 2021 (see Upcoming Events). We feel confident that members who signed on in 2019 will wish to renew their commitment to the Ruskin Art Club and its mission.

Membership Renewals can now be made online at www.ruskinartclub.com as well as by check to: Ruskin Art Club, 200 S Avenue 66, Los Angeles, CA 90042.

If you renew online, be sure to include your current mailing address so that we can mail you the Ruskin fine-press pamphlet or pamphlets that members receive each year. Please consider moving up to the next level of membership, if that works with your budget, OR sponsoring a gift membership at any level.

For news of Ruskin Art Club events, especially our new season of **virtual programs, lectures, and field trips**, visit us at:

**www.RuskinArtClub.com
www.facebook.com/RuskinArtClub
www.youtube.com/RuskinArtClub**