



The Reading Figure in Irish Art in the Long Nineteenth Century

By Tricia Cusack

Pub Date: 01 February 2022

Binding: Hardback

Price: £80.00 / \$125.00

ISBN: 9781785276446

BISAC CATEGORY: ART / History / General ART /
Subjects & Themes / Portraits, ART / Women Artists

BISAC CODE: ART015000

BIC CODE: AGHF

Extent: 250 pages

Size: 153 x 229 mm /

6 x 9 inches

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Exclusive: WORLD

Series: Anthem Nineteenth-Century Series

‘Cusack’s book draws the reader into an imaginary world of readers, contextualizing representations of mostly women readers through larger concepts of class, cultural, and gender identities in modern Ireland. With a prevalence of women artists representing female sitters, Cusack probes aesthetic and iconographic strategies for representing interiorized thought while deflecting penetrability in the era of the New Woman.’ – Dr. Emily Burns, Auburn University, US

‘In this highly original study, Tricia Cusack argues that the reading figure in art offers a lens through which to apprehend politics at a variety of levels, from the micro-politics of gender to public suffrage agitation, and offers vivid evidence of the emergence of the “New Woman” in sections of Irish society. Reading evidence with creativity and care, and developing valuable typologies of reading figures in Irish art, Cusack argues persuasively for the emergence of a distinctive Irish portraiture tradition over the long nineteenth century, and for treating it as both an index and builder of important gendered identities in the Irish context.’ – Kevin James, University of Guelph, Canada

This book examines Irish portraits during the long nineteenth century in which figures read or hold a book. Reading fiction was cast as unmanly, while ‘silent reading’ allowed women of means to read widely and privately. Portraits of such women helped construct the idea of the ‘New Woman’ in Ireland.

About the Author

Tricia Cusack taught at the University of Birmingham, Cardiff Metropolitan University, and the Open University. Her research focuses on how visual art embodies ideas about social, cultural, and national identities.

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