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SECAC/ATSAH Conference  
**Baltimore, Maryland 2022**  
**October 26 – 29, 2022, Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel**  
**Hosted by the Maryland Institute College of Art**

Open Session: American and European Symbolist Paintings: 1850-1900

Organizer/Chair:

Liana De Girolami Cheney, President of ATSAH

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Symbolism started as a literary movement in France but was quickly embraced by painters throughout Europe and North America. The Symbolism movement emphasized subjective representation rejecting Naturalism. Symbolism is devoid of natural observations, focusing on “dreamlike” visions of decadence, death, and the allegorical world. The Symbolist painters employ mythological characters and biblical events: dark spirits, angels, gods, and goddesses to give meaning to their dream-like visualizations. This session focuses on papers addressing to the aspect of Symbolism experienced in dreams, fairytales, and mythology; hence expressing the artist’s inner subjectivity

**Presenter 1:** Rosina Neginsky, University of Illinois  
Rosina Neginsky <[rosina.neginsky@gmail.com](mailto:rosina.neginsky@gmail.com)>

**Title:** Russian artist Mikhail Vrubel and Theater.

**Abstract:** Russian Symbolist artist Mikhail Vrubel was passionate about the theater. His passion for theater manifested itself in designing costumes and sets especially because his wife, Nadejda Zabella-Vrubel, was a singer and sang in the private opera of the art sponsor, Savva Mamontov.

In my paper, I will concentrate on Vrubel’s designs of theater costumes and stage sets, especially on his works for Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas such as “Sadko,” “The Tale of a Tsar Saltan,” “Snow Maiden,” “The Tsar’s Bride,” and “Kitezh” -- mainly inspired by

Russian fairytales, where performed his wife -- and will show that he developed his own original visual language to convey the spirit of a fairytale and mystery.

**Presenter 2:** Cassanra Sciortino, University of California, Santa Barbara  
Cassandra Sciortino [cassandra.margarita@gmail.com](mailto:cassandra.margarita@gmail.com)

**Title:** Symbolist Idealism at Haute-Claire: Armand Point's *Lady with a Unicorn*

**Abstract:** In 1895 French symbolist artist, Armand Point, moved to the Fontainebleau forest where he founded Haute-Claire, a colony of artists dedicated to medieval and Renaissance methods of craftsmanship and a symbolist-idealist aesthetic that was self-consciously anti-naturalist.

This presentation considers the symbolist aesthetic of Haute-Claire through a close consideration of Armand Point's bronze and enamel bas-relief, *Lady with a Unicorn*. Widely acclaimed after its exhibition in Paris in 1899, Point's *Lady with a Unicorn* reflects the artist's study of Quattrocento Florentine painting and sculpture, as well as the medieval collections at the Cluny Museum, especially its gilded champlevé enamel of Limoges, Merovingian jeweled metalwork, and *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries. While inspired by the Arts & Crafts movement organized by William Morris at Merton Abbey, Point and the artists at Haute-Claire sought in the form, content, and most notably, medium, of their work expressions of an idealist aesthetic that opposed naturalism's pursuit of externals. For example, Armand Point understood egg tempera to be "lighter" and "clearer" than "fleshy" oil paint; the linearity of champlevé to engage line as an expression of the spirit; and celebrated enamel for its "capriciousness" or difficulty to control as it takes shape through fire.

**Presenter 3:** Jennifer Bates Ehlert, Salve Regina University  
Jennifer Ehlert [jenniferehlert17@gmail.com](mailto:jenniferehlert17@gmail.com)

**Title:** Circe's Notebook: Alchemy, Symbolism, and Female Empowerment (?) in J.W. Waterhouse's *Circe* paintings

**Abstract:** The goal of this paper is to address the Alchemical and magical themes present in John William Waterhouse's *Circe* paintings to express his Symbolist tendencies, as well as his continued interest in the powerful sorceress, Circe. In Waterhouse's paintings, *Circe Offering the Cup to Odysseus* (1891) *Circe Invidiosa* (1892), and *Circe or The Sorceress* (1911), Circe appears as commanding queen, jealous witch, and finally a full-fledged Alchemist. These three images, this paper argues are full of feminine power, ritual, magic, and explore themes of the *femme-fatale*, but also portray a woman's growing power and knowledge as well as Waterhouse's Symbolist tendencies.

Building on the scholarship of Robert Upstone, Patty Wageman, and others, this paper addresses the undercurrents of Symbolist art in Waterhouse's work. Additionally, feminist viewpoints on Waterhouse's works will be addressed as this paper assesses some of the darker, more challenging qualities of his work.

Presenter 4: Abby Aron  
Abby Aron <abbyaron@gmail.com>  
To be confirmed