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Thesis Abstract for:

A Craft of their Own: Women and Metalworking in the American Arts and Crafts Movement in Boston and Chicago

The American Arts and Crafts Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created viable professional opportunities for its craftspeople, specifically in the areas of jewelry and metalwork. The spread of the movement within the United States was not ubiquitous but was, instead, confined to a few major cities and their outlying regions. Two major centers in the United States emerged as leaders of American Arts and Crafts style, namely Boston, Massachusetts on the East coast and Chicago, Illinois in the Midwest.

This thesis focuses on seven talented women as representative of the many extraordinary and accomplished female metalworkers of American Arts and Crafts who were able to rise to prominence in the areas of craft and design due to the breakdown of the sexual division of labor within the movement. From Boston, Josephine Hartwell Shaw, Margaret Rogers, Elizabeth Ethel Copeland, and Mary Catherine Knight stand out among a group of metalworking practitioners as creative individuals whose work represents some of the most impressive Arts and Crafts output. Clara Barck Welles, Jessie M. Preston, and Florence Koehler all worked in Chicago and, although each had a unique style, they shared some commonalities such as using vernacular decorative themes in their work to convey a specific Midwestern Arts and Crafts ideal.

The existing scholarship on the American Arts and Crafts rarely focuses on the work and achievements of these women as professionals. Both the jewelry and careers of these seven artists has been analyzed here in order to draw comparisons of the Arts and Crafts styles generated by two of the major contributing American cities and the particular decorative dialect created in each locale. By exploring the connections between the making of jewelry and metal

objects as well as the social situation that allowed for their creation, a clearer understanding of the American Arts and Crafts movement will emerge. Through the lens of prominent women involved in the movement, this paper also examines the gender issues that arose in the world of craft at the turn of the century and compares extant work of each artisan and how it reveals the regional differences in the interpretations of the Arts and Crafts style and philosophies.