



# Henry & Gertrude Massey

*A Life's Class at Heatherley's*

*fine* Simart

# A Life's Class at Heatherley's

*“Henry Massey was the last Proprietor Principal of Heatherley's School of Art, London's oldest independent art school. Over 86 years, James Matthews Leigh, Thomas Heatherley, John Crompton and Henry Massey each made a strong professional input into the school while retaining a remarkable continuity in their approach to art education and the school prospered. The school was physically destroyed and closed down in the Second World War and while a merger with the Grosvenor School of Modern Art injected some new life it was short lived.*

*The last 40 years, however, have seen the rebirth of a school that Henry Massey and his predecessors would be both amazed and delighted to see. A school that still retains in its Open Studio the traditional French atelier so beloved of Leigh & Massey.”*

John Walton  
Principal at Heatherley's  
1974 - today



*Breakfast at Heatherley's*

*Overleaf: Henry Massey & model at Heatherley's, with a portrait of wife, Gertrude.  
Photograph courtesy Heatherley's Archive*

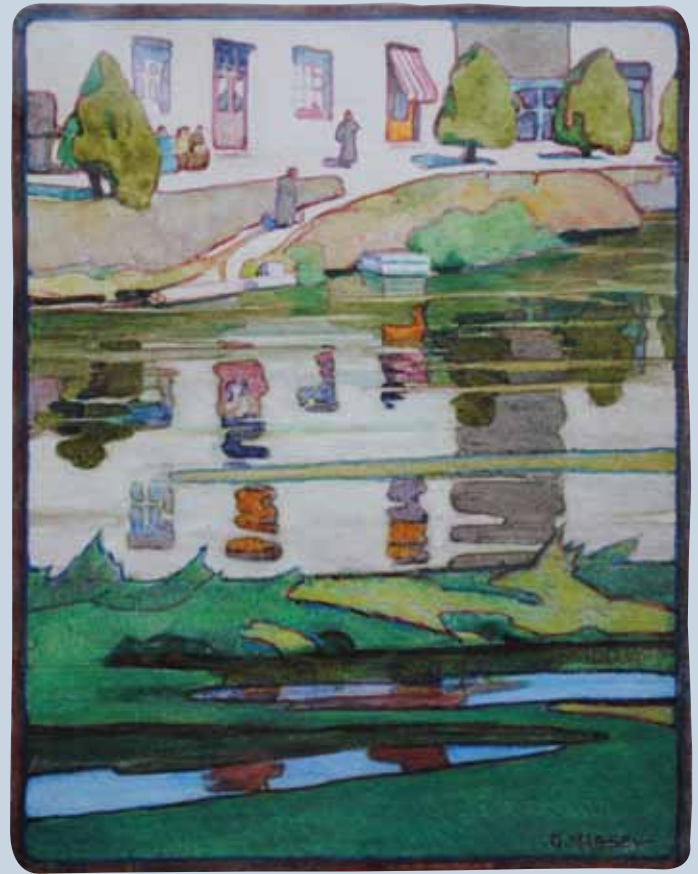
What do Evelyn Waugh, Mabel Lucie Attwell and Ray Bolger, the scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*, have in common? They all, at one time or another, took classes at Heatherley's, the oldest independent art school in London, during the gently eccentric and benign reign of Henry and Gertrude Massey, between 1907 and 1934.

Henry Gibbs Massey, whose kindly sixty-something face peers out proprietorially from a series of publicity photographs taken at Heatherley's in the 1920s, was a man with hard won and wryly expressed views about art and how it should be taught. He'd learnt his trade in Paris in the 1880s and wanted to bring the school "into line with the best of the modern art schools of Paris".

Life at Heatherley's under the Masseys, however, was very much a practical education for students wishing to pursue working careers as artists, rather than a breeding ground for abstract ideas and 'isms'. "Art defies convention" said Henry, "but artists should know where to draw the line".

Massey's artistic ambitions had been forged the hard way, very much against the wishes of his solidly middle class family, who nurtured rather different hopes for their son. Massey senior was a schoolfriend of the original W.H. Smith and placed the young Henry at the feet of the great bookseller and stationer on leaving school, in the hope that his dream of becoming an artist would fade on exposure to hard work and hard cash.

It didn't. In fact, as Gertrude, Henry's wife, remembers in her autobiography, the gold sovereign presented to Henry by his new employer on the completion of his first fortnight at work, "hung upon his watch-chain for many years, and at length was made into my wedding ring".



*Gertrude Massey - Reflections*

Massey threw up his job and enrolled as an art student at the South Kensington School of Art, reassuring his father that he wanted to become an art master. Henry gained his certificates with distinction, impressing his father so much, that he was permitted to embark upon a veritable odyssey of art training, passing from the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours (he was the first student to enrol) to a distinctly spartan spell in a Parisian garret.

*“Art defies convention, but artists should know where to draw the line”*

Massey’s father, who kept a very close eye on Henry’s finances had asked a friend “what was the lowest possible sum on which a young student could live in Paris?” to which the answer was “five pounds a month”. This, according to Gertrude, instilled in her husband a lifetime’s habit of frugal living and an intimate knowledge of what made Paris and art students tick. “The keynote of the place” according to Gertrude, who later revisited her husband’s haunts, “was dirt”.

Apart from the grime, it was the informal practicality of the French *atelier* system, with its emphasis on the life class and practical training from an established artist: “that really impressed Massey, who, although determined on a career as an artist at the time, was storing away the teaching methods for use at his own art school, which was later advertised as ‘a Parisian *atelier* in London’.

In Paris Henry attended the Académie Colarossi founded by the Italian sculptor Filippo Colarossi. It was in many ways a model for what Heatherley’s would become. It was less conservative than the official École des Beaux Arts, laid great emphasis on



Henry Massey - Antwerp c.1890

life drawing from the nude and admitted women students – even, later, appointing the young New Zealander, Frances Hodgkins, as a teacher. While there, Massey is known to have spent a summer at the artist’s colony at Pont Aven, where he met and became friendly with Paul Gauguin.

According to Gertrude, it was during this time that the desire to teach art in the Parisian way began to take root, but before these plans could come to fruition, Massey continued to combine study with beginning to ply his trade as an artist, working at studios in Paris and in St Ives, as well as paying homage to the great realist painter Sir Hubert Von Herkomer at his school in Bushey. It was in Hertfordshire that he first encountered a young art student called Gertrude Seth, eight years his junior and very much in awe of the young artist fresh from Paris and his exposure to its dangerous new ideas.

In late 19th century Hertfordshire, female art students were not allowed to study from the nude, a situation described as ‘ridiculous’ by young Gertrude, but under the influence of her husband-to-be, things changed. “Henry Massey convinced me as to the necessity of studying from the nude and he insisted that on every possible occasion I should draw from the life ... We got our nude class after much persuasion.”



*Gertrude Massey - Down by the River*



*Gertrude Massey - Frances Cornford, poet*



Henry Massey - Parliament Square



Henry Massey - Mansion House



*Henry Massey - Marble Arch*

Massey's influence on Gertrude's development as an artist was considerable: "I owe practically all my art training to him" she later wrote, but because of straitened family circumstances, she was forced to earn a commercial living as an artist from the outset, painting portraits of local people. Gertrude's natural inclination was towards the miniature, both in terms of subject matter and, as it turned out, subject. Miniature paintings of children and then pet dogs became Gertrude's speciality and an extraordinary upwardly mobile beanstalk of clients led eventually to commissions from the Prince of Wales to paint his French Bulldog to the Empress of Russia, her Japanese spaniel – exquisite little productions that survive in Royal collections to this day.

The Masseys were married in 1890 and, very unusually for the period, both pursued independent artistic careers. The pictures collected here, which derive from the family and have mostly never been shown, reflect their distinctive, individual styles and focus. Gertrude's work, almost invariably on a small scale, is intensely coloured and stylised, influenced by Japanese and European styles,



*Henry Massey - Dahlias*



Gertrude Massey - Self portrait

while Henry's involves more reportage and is broader and looser in style. He became adept as an etcher of landscapes, street scenes and portraits, and elected an Associate of the Royal Society of Paint-Etchers (A.R.E.) in 1894.

The pair lived in St John's Wood, with Gertrude, as befitting her status as portrait painter to canine royalty, occupying a studio in the house, with Henry relegated to the garden. The pictures in the collection provide a unique insight into the life of an artistic couple at the turn of the last century: the street life of fashionable London, sketching holidays in newly fashionable European watering holes like Ostend and Bruges; the demi-monde of Paris. It is a rare window onto the output of two busy, working artists of the period. Henry was a member of the Langham Sketch Club and the influence of popular illustrators like John Hassall and Dudley Hardy can clearly be seen in both his and Gertrude's work.

It was over supper at the Langham Sketch Club one night in 1907 that Henry discovered that the 'famous old school' of Heatherley's was up for sale. Gertrude remembered: "Although it was nearly ten o' clock, the idea appealed so much that he went straight to the school and opened negotiations", settling the matter in a few days.



Henry Massey - Old Park Lane in 1905





*Gertrude & Henry c.1925*



*Heatherley's was the first art school to admit women on equal terms*



*Henry Massey - Belgravia, 1905*

Both the Masseys continued to work as artists and exhibit, but the direction of Heatherley's as a practical and progressive art school along the lines of a Parisian *atelier* became their life's work. The atmosphere engendered by the Masseys at Heatherley's was designed to foster individuality but also to inculcate "sound training in the practice and theory of the arts".

Pretension and posturing were out: 'Abandon swank all ye who enter here' was the motto pasted on the door of the studio: a levelling dictum that resulted in the attraction of an unusually eclectic and socially mixed clientèle. Evelyn Waugh may have sneered at the 'underbred hours in gaudy overalls' but most students appreciated the breaking down of barriers. As Gertrude remembered: "students of all ages ranging from sixteen to sixty and of all nationalities... a well-known painter is working next to a girl straight from school; nearby is an ex Vicereine of India working near an Indian student. All are equally at ease, united in the study of the mysteries of art."

*Andrew Sim 2013*

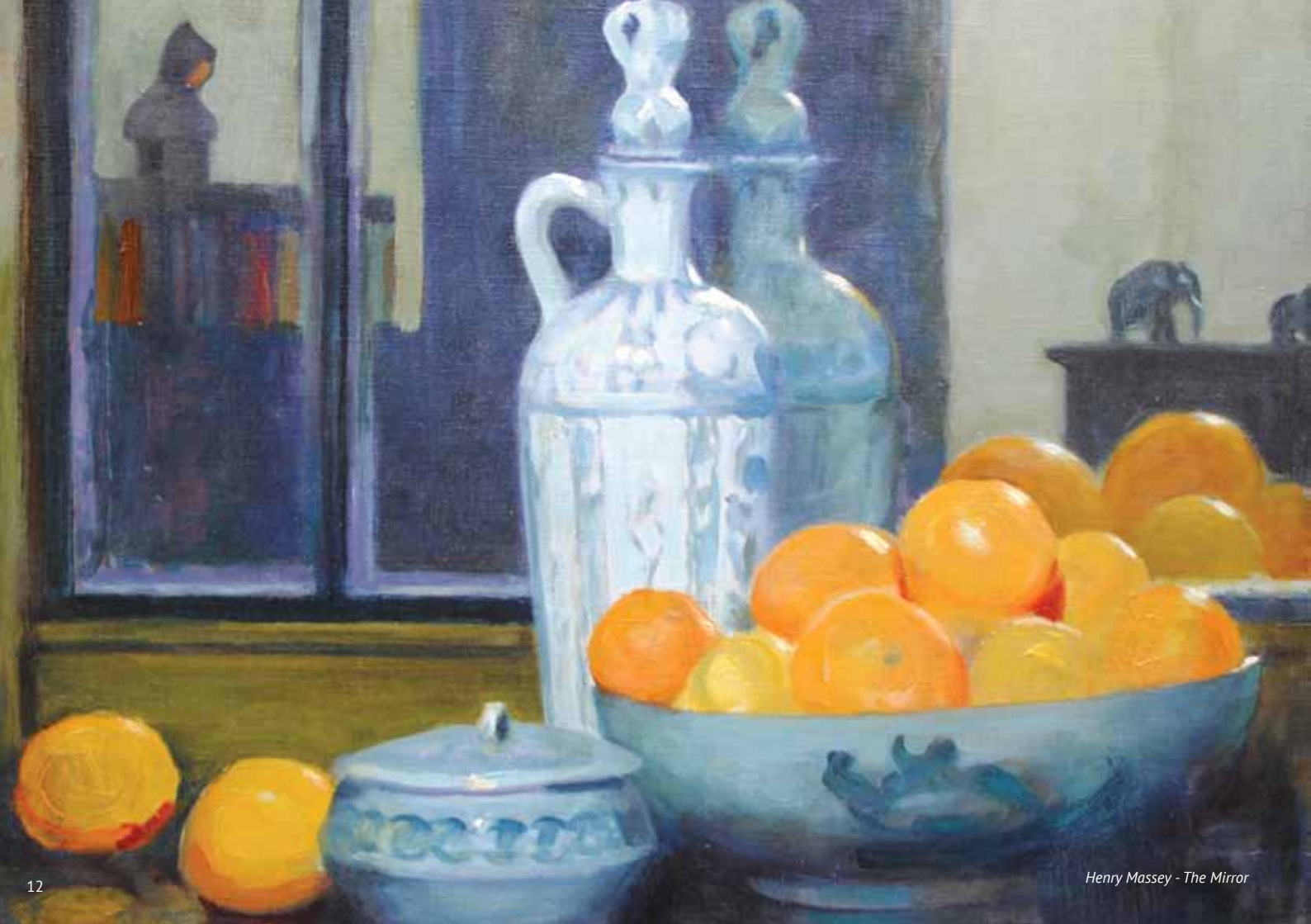


Gertrude Massey - *Bucket & Spade and Beach Huts*



Henry Massey - *A Bridge nr Pont Aven c.1886*





Henry Massey - A Colour Chord





Gertrude Massey - At the Dance

# THE MASSEY COLLECTION

## Henry Massey A.R.E. (1860-1934)

St Paul's Cathedral from Waterloo Bridge <i>Watercolour</i>	24cm x 32cm
Battersea Bridge <i>Watercolour</i>	26cm x 36cm
Horse Guards, c.1905 <i>Watercolour</i>	18cm x 23cm
Park Lane <i>Watercolour</i>	14cm x 17cm
Clarence House, St James's <i>Watercolour</i>	18cm x 20cm
Belgravia <i>Watercolour</i>	24cm x 19cm
Hyde Park Corner <i>Watercolour</i>	18cm x 16cm
Marble Arch <i>Watercolour</i>	13cm x 17cm
Law Courts <i>Watercolour</i>	16cm x 19cm
The City from Mansion House <i>Watercolour</i>	34cm x 26cm
Parliament Square <i>Watercolour</i>	38cm x 26cm
Dahlias <i>Watercolour</i>	27cm x 23cm
Banks of the Seine <i>Watercolour</i>	34cm x 46cm
Notre Dame, Paris <i>Watercolour</i>	17cm x 18cm

Bruges <i>Watercolour</i>	27cm x 37cm
Crécy, 1922 <i>Watercolour</i>	19cm x 27cm
Antwerp <i>Watercolour</i>	23cm x 18cm
'Le Dernier Appel' – British Military Cemetery <i>Watercolour</i>	30cm x 40cm
British Military Cemetery, Boulogne <i>Watercolour</i>	30cm x 40cm
Bastille Day celebrations <i>Watercolour</i>	24cm x 30cm
Park at night, Bastille Day <i>Watercolour</i>	30cm x 20cm
Bridge nr Pont Aven <i>Watercolour</i>	21cm x 26cm
"A Colour Chord" Floral still life <i>Oil</i>	50cm x 50cm
Dahlia blossoms <i>Oil</i>	52cm x 52cm
The Mirror (porcelain & oranges) <i>Oil</i>	55cm x 55cm
The Old Barn <i>Oil</i>	37cm x 49cm
A Village Lane, summer afternoon <i>Oil</i>	42cm x 44cm

## Gertrude Massey (1868-1957)

At the Dance <i>Watercolour</i>	10cm x 13cm
Beach Huts <i>Watercolour</i>	11cm x 15cm
A Windy Day <i>Watercolour</i>	8cm x 11cm
Bucket & Spade <i>Watercolour</i>	10cm x 12cm
Down by the River <i>Watercolour</i>	13cm x 12cm
Reflections <i>Watercolour</i>	14cm x 12cm
Self Portrait <i>Watercolour</i>	40cm x 28cm
Frances Cornford, poet <i>Watercolour</i>	16cm x 16cm

## Bibliography

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## Acknowledgements

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*Gertrude Massey - A Windy Day*

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