Re-imagining a Modern Pacific: Paintings by Arthur Haythorne Studd (1863 - 1919)  
Dr Prue Ahrens

It’s commonly believed that Paul Gauguin worked in isolation in Tahiti, living in self-imposed exile from France and far from the reach of the European avant-garde. But from 1897 to 1898 Gauguin was joined in Tahiti by a British painter, Arthur Haythorne Studd (1863 – 1919). It was Studd’s wish, as he declared in a letter to his friend James McNeil Whistler (dated 22 June, 1897), to establish a ‘Studio of the South Seas’, and his work from Tahiti includes the View from Gauguin’s House of 1898. This paper will compare Studd’s paintings to Gauguin’s treatment of the Tahitian subject, and examine how these artists imagined the Islands for a modern European audience. It will tease out the various influences on Studd’s Tahitian work, from his Slade School and Academie Julian training, to his ties to Whistler, and an artistic circle which included the New English Art Club, French painters Degas, Picard, and Puvis de Chavannes, and Australian Charles Conder. Notwithstanding the influence of contemporary artists, Studd’s paintings will also be understood in the context of colonial modernity and the extent to which modern political, economic and cultural agendas may have impacted his treatment of the Tahitian subject. Though the focus of this paper is on Studd’s contact with Gauguin and modernist re-imaginings of the Pacific Islands, it will also begin a biography of this important British painter and collector, whose story remains to be told.

Biographical Note: Prue Ahrens is a member of the cultural history project at UQ. Her research interests lie mainly in the history of cross-cultural exchange, particularly case histories of Euro-American and Pacific encounters. Her publications in the field explore the impact of nineteenth century European missionary work in Pacific Islands, American presence in the Pacific during WWII, and the impact of Polynesian communities on Australian cultures.

Enquiries: Jason Jacobs, School of English, Media Studies & Art History, j.jacobs@uq.edu.au. To subscribe to the Cultural History Project mailing list please contact Amaya Regano, Faculty of Arts, a.regano@uq.edu.au.