

MEDIA RELEASE

1 - 30 September 2023



Transformations:

Art of the Scott Sisters

1 to 30 September 2023

Transformations: Art of the Scott Sisters is a touring exhibition produced and sponsored by the Australian Museum. It presents reproductions of the work of Harriet and Helena Scott, two extraordinary (19th artists and naturalists distinguished for their skilful scientific illustrations and strong understanding of biology. Born in Sydney in the early 1830s the sisters were trained by their father, an amateur entomologist. In 1846 the family moved to Ash Island in the Hunter River near Newcastle and here the sisters were able to focus on their interest in natural history and help illustrate their father's book *Australian Lepidoptera* and their *Transformations*. The sisters often worked from living specimens, which they collected and raised.

This exhibition provides an interactive app to explore their illustrations and is complemented by insect specimens lent by Macquarie University Biology Discovery Centre.

Image credit: Harriet Scott, *Emperor Moth Syntherata Janetta*, 1850/1870

MEDIA contact:
Mary Faith, Lisa Jones 02 9473 7878,
gcsgallery@abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au

High resolution images are available.

The Grace Cossington Smith Gallery is a not-for-profit gallery, run by Abbotsleigh, serving the public through free admission and a changing exhibition program. Enter via Gate 7, 1666 Pacific Highway Wahroonga.

The Grace Cossington Smith Gallery respects and acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this land as the First People and Custodians of this country.



HONOURING PIONEERING WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND ART

Australian Museum celebrates legacy of two of our great scientific illustrators in stunning exhibition
Transformations: Art of the Scott Sisters.

Transformations: Art of the Scott Sisters features reproductions of 35 delicate watercolours, as well as large animated projections of butterflies and moths based on the original illustrations of Harriet (Hattie) and Helena (Nellie) Scott, two of Australia's most prominent 19th century natural history artists.

Kim McKay AO, Australian Museum Director and CEO, the first woman to hold the role in the AM's history, said Hattie and Nellie Scott exuded wit, intelligence and scientific expertise at a time when these qualities were largely attributed solely to men.

"The sisters were incredibly talented and determined to make a difference, flying in the face of gender norms of the time, yet they were unable to study science formally at Sydney University as they had wished," she said.

"Their work at the Australian Museum in the 1850's to 1870's provided them with an outlet for their extraordinary talents, having been taught the techniques to paint flora and fauna by their father, A.W Scott, who was also an artist and scientist. He shared with them the scientific skills to observe, collect and record behavioural and distribution data," she said.

Paintings created by the sisters between 1846 and 1851 for their father's landmark publication Australian Lepidoptera and their Transformations – depicting caterpillars in life-like poses, gorgeous butterflies and native flowers – are considered to be among their finest work, and are still used by scientists today.

The success of the Lepidoptera opened many doors for the sisters. Over the following decades they would produce most of the art for science publications in Sydney, including then-curator of the AM Gerard Krefft's Snakes of Australia (1869), Australian Fossil Remains (1870) and Mammals of Australia (1871).

Australian Museum Entomologist, Derek Smith said the sisters' work had been incredibly valuable to generations of scientists.

"The Scott sisters were among the first to illustrate the life stages of Australian moths and butterflies. They were meticulous and understood the biology of their subjects in great detail," Smith said.

Visitors to Transformations: Art of the Scott Sisters are invited to turn back the pages and discover the captivating story of these two extraordinary women, whose love of nature and tremendous skill in rendering its beauty enabled them to distinguish themselves amid the male-dominated world of 19th century science.