

## WomenArts Salutes Caroline Watts on International SWAN Day

In 1908, British suffragist Caroline Watts designed a logo aptly nicknamed “The Bugler Girl” which was later adopted by the American suffrage movement as well. The co-founders of International SWAN Day, Jan Lisa Huttner of WITASWAN and Martha Richards of WomenArts, understand how art can motivate political change, and so they updated the image in time for the 90th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment on August 26, 2010. Watts earned her living illustrating medieval potboilers, but she never received any payment for her Bugler Girl imagery; she just did it for the cause. By giving Watts’ logo new life, WomenArts has finally provided symbolic compensation more than 100 years later.

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In 1908, British suffragist Caroline Watts designed a logo for the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS): a woman with long, flowing hair underneath a helmet, wearing a dress covered in a breastplate, proudly blowing a bugle.

Aptly nicknamed “The Bugler Girl,” Watts’s image was later adopted by Harriot Stanton Blatch and her Women’s Political Union (WPU) members. The American Bugler Girl held a flag decorated with stars, each one symbolizing a state that had ratified the 19th amendment (which prohibited states from gender-based voting restrictions). “The herald announcing the new dawn,” says Robert Cooney, author of 2005 book *Winning the Vote: The Triumph of the American Woman Suffrage Movement*, “is a stirring image because it rouses the emotions and rekindles the timeless passion for freedom. It’s a call to the battlements, a piercing reminder that liberty was won and always has to be defended.”

The militant imagery didn’t represent a violent organization—as a NUWSS governing-council member explained, “Our Bugler Girl carries her bugle and her banner; her sword is sheathed by her side; it is there, but not drawn, and if it were drawn, it would not be the sword of the flesh, but of the spirit. For ours is not a warfare against men, but against evil; a war in which women and men fight together.”

The garb made sense. An artist and member of the Artists’ Suffrage League, Watts earned her living illustrating medieval potboilers. But Watts drew the Bugler Girl for no financial compensation. She just did it for the cause.

In August 2010, anticipating the 90th anniversary of women’s suffrage in the United States, San Francisco-based nonprofit WomenArts released an updated version of Watts’s iconic image, partly as a way to create excitement for Women’s Equality Day celebrations on August 26, and partly as a way to celebrate Watts’s work. “The two goals of WomenArts are to increase funding and employment opportunities for women artists, and to challenge gender and other stereotypes in the arts and media,” says founder Martha Richards. “We are interested in increasing opportunities for all women artists.”

Even if that artist has been dead for decades! By giving Watts’ logo new life, WomenArts has been able to help her symbolically earn something for her work more than 100 years later.

The idea for updating the Bugler Girl image was born only a few months before in Chicago. AAUW Chicago (the American Association of University Women’s Chicago branch) was planning a Women’s Equality Day celebration in partnership with the local branch of the League of Women Voters. Eager to make this 90th anniversary celebration “a big thing,” AAUW Chicago’s program VP Jan Lisa Huttner started looking for publicity materials.



Watts' Bugler Girl

“I like planting flags,” says Huttner, and she considers the New Bugler Girl logo a flag for the whole next decade.”

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### Attachments



[New Bugler Girl \(2010\)](#)

Because Women's Equality Day is a national event (celebrated every August 26 since 1971), Huttner assumed Women's Equality Day imagery would be easy to find. She was wrong. Spending hours on Google, all she found were dull, "lame" graphics, like a button on Café Press with the words "Votes for Women" or a banner with stars—nothing that would get people excited about this historic 90th anniversary moment.

Then Huttner stumbled on Watts' 1908 design in a 2008 issue of the Keynoter (the journal of the American Political Items Conservators). Even though the image was antiquated, it still excited her. "While we're centuries away from medieval culture today," says suffrage historian Cooney, "and have lost any true experience of castles and battlements, the imagery still translates. Who can fail to recognize the sound of alarm, the uniform of a cause, the military bearing, the sense of standing in defense of what is dear?"

Like Caroline Watts and WomenArts founder Martha Richards, Huttner understands how art can motivate political change. As founder of an internet initiative called WITASWAN (Women in the Audience Supporting Women Artists Now), Huttner helped organize International SWAN Day, which promotes events celebrating women artists every year on the last Saturday of March (aka Women's History Month). "Study after study, report after report, and good old common sense bear out the fact that art changes people," says graphic designer Melissa Wilks, the WomenArts employee who took Huttner's raw sketches and designed the updated Bugler Girl logo. "The arts are a record of time and place: they can motivate, irritate, elevate."

For the new Bugler Girl, WomenArts decided to go for a cleaner, "more streamlined" design. Wilks kept the general layout of Watts' drawing and the purple, green, and white colors of the US women's suffrage movement. However, the dawn coming over the ramparts (indicated by rays behind the bugler girl in the original design) which symbolized the new era of getting the vote weren't necessary in the new design. They also decided to take out the military references, so Wilks drew the figure wearing more modern—but still feminine—clothing.

One of the biggest design questions involved what to put on the bugler's flag. At first, they decided to leave it blank because it was impossible to add all 50 American stars. But when the preliminary design was brought to AAUW Chicago's 90th anniversary planning committee for approval, member Margaret O'Hara noticed that there was nothing on the image about the 19th amendment. "I thought that was what this event was all about!" she said in an e-Mail message. Huttner and Wilks instantly agreed to add the number "19" in Roman numerals (XIX), just as it appears today in the U.S. Constitution.

"I like planting flags," says Huttner, and she considers the New Bugler Girl logo a flag for the whole next decade. "In nine years, we will celebrate the centennial of the 19th amendment, so this image reinforces a great historical marker." As a symbol, says Richards, "the Bugler Girl is a reminder of how hard and how long women worked to get the vote in this country. These times are very challenging in so many ways, and the Bugler Girl reminds me that progress may take a very, very long time, but the dawn of a new day will eventually come."

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