

Gwen John, The Seated Woman, 1910-20

Kerri Offord, Curator of Art at Ferens Art Gallery.

To refer to a female artist of the late 19th and early 20th century as overlooked has become a cliché of museum and gallery interpretation, but for the artist Gwen John this is a statement of truth. John commented that she was often neglectful of herself in her relationships, she was famously the lover of the sculptor Auguste Rodin and the sister of the painter Augustus John. Gwen John differed greatly from her social brother, having a more reserved demeanour that is reflected in her contemplative works and muted palette.

She sat for her lover Rodin and created a work in Tate's collection at around the same time, that has been interpreted as a self portrait of John quietly waiting in her Parisian room for Rodin to return to her. However, John also had close relationships with women and is beginning to be recognised as a rare icon of bisexuality in the art world. The victim of unrequited love for a fellow female student at Slade. John's letters reveal the strong attachment she formed for women throughout her life. Reading these letters from a hetero-normative perspective does not allow for the true depth of John's feelings to be understood.

This painting, *The Seated Woman* from The Ferens collection, is one of 15 paintings of the same subject, often known as *The Convalescent*. The model is unknown but appears in about 50 works by John. Acquired in 1994 it has recently been chosen as one of the favourite works in The Ferens' collection by the public and it has also been included in the *Pride in Our City* exhibition curated by LGBTQ+ communities from Hull, where the question was posed "Is this sitter a friend or a lover of Johns?"