

Artists: Harriet and Helena Scott

Exhibition: *Transformations* 1 to 30 September 2023



About

This exhibition brings to life the work of Australian natural history artists Harriet and Helena Scott. With their paintbrushes, microscopes and magnifying glasses, they worked together to transform nature into their art in extraordinary paintings of moths and butterflies.

<https://australian.museum/learn/collections/museum-archives-library/scott-sisters/>

The Artists

Born in Sydney in 1830 and 1832, Harriet and Helena Scott were trained from a young age to observe and draw by their father, Alexander Walker Scott, a trustee of the infant Australian Museum, who was an enthusiastic amateur entomologist. At their home, on isolated Ash Island in the Hunter River, the family worked on a project to describe and illustrate all known Australian butterflies and moths. A 50-year labour, *Australian Lepidoptera and Their Transformations* was published in two volumes in 1864 and 1898. Celebrated as colonial Sydney's finest natural history artists, the sisters were also collectors and dedicated field naturalists. In their later years, Harriet and Helena had to earn a living from their art, and they were among Australia's first professional women artists.

Studying

The natural history illustrations of the Scott Sisters depict the form, colour, and details of plant and insect life, successfully combining scientific accuracy with visual appeal. As a technical discipline, this form of nature illustration emphasizes the depiction of accurate information, documenting the anatomical and functional aspect of a plant and insect throughout its life cycle. Illustrators frequently work from observation of real plants and insects.

1. Look at paintings by the Scott Sisters on the Australian Museum website (above) and compare their approach and style to two other artists who are interested in documenting natural life: Albrecht Durer <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103QS6> and John Wolseley <https://johnwolseley.net/exhibitions/one-hundred-and-one-insect-life-stories>
2. Research Durer and Wolseley

Making

Look at the butterflies and moths in this website; <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/butterflies-and-moths-life-written-on-wings-natural-history-museum/gAVRoOrOpBNllw?hl=en-GB> (copy link to browser to open)

1. Create your own natural history style drawings
2. Create a series of abstract works based on details of the colour and pattern of the insects.