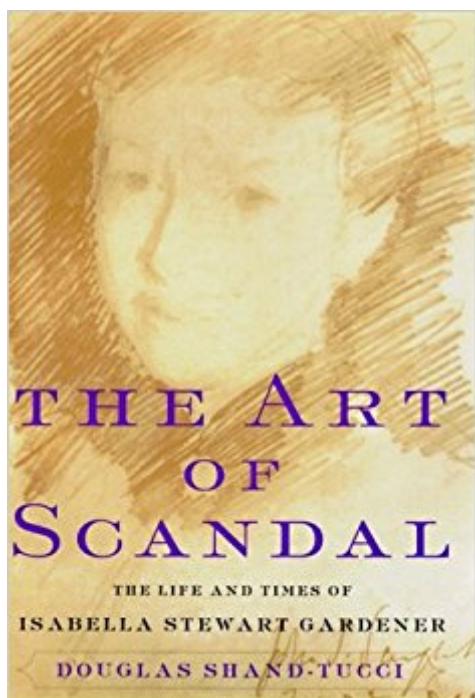


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The Art Of Scandal: The Life And Times Of Isabella Stewart Gardner



Synopsis

Immortalized by Henry James in print and by John Singer Sargent on canvas, Isabella Stewart Gardner has remained an elusive original whose independent life and work shocked the Boston aristocracy she married into. Based on extensive new research, this is the first biography of Isabella Gardner in 30 years. It reveals the many strands of her life as a cultural maverick and as muse and mentor, friend and patron to writers, musicians and artists such as James, Sargent, Lady Gregory, Bernard Berenson, Elsie De Wolfe, Martin Loeffler, Julia Ward Howe, Okakura Kakuzo, Henry Adams, T.S. Eliot and Paul Manship. The climax of her life came after her husband's death in 1898, when she designed and built an innovative museum in the form of a Venetian palazzo and, with the legendary art historian Bernard Berenson, created America's first great private art collection. The Art of Scandal is the story of a striking woman of great force and character and of the Boston she lived in, from the Brahmins of Beacon Hill to the newly emerging ethnic communities and the little-known gay subculture. Isabella Gardner emerges as one of the most evocative figures of America's gilded age.

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Customer Reviews

Henry James fictionalized her, John Singer Sargent painted her, Bernard Berenson advised her. But art collector extraordinaire Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840-1924) was more than a rich socialite who lucked into friendships with the leading cultural figures of her day. Boston historian Douglass Shand-Tucci convincingly claims her as a pioneering multiculturalist--her famous museum in

Fenway Court enshrined Asian art as well as that of the old masters--and a rebel who befriended Jews, homosexuals, and other outcasts from Victorian society. Shand-Tucci's highly colored, romantic prose aptly evokes his fiery, willful, egotistical subject.

Isabella Stewart Gardner's life was about as multidimensional as anyone's could be. Well acquainted with such luminaries as Bernard Berenson, Julia Ward Howe, Okakura Kakuzo, and T.S. Eliot, she was immortalized by the likes of Henry James in print and John Singer Sargent on canvas during her lifetime (1840-1924). In this first biography of her in 30 years, American art and architecture historian Shand-Tucci examines Gardner as social maverick and as muse to writers and musicians, showing how she went on to create America's first great private art collection and museum in Boston. Using a nonlinear approach, he provides a detailed look at a fascinating era and a fascinating woman. ?Ronald Ratliff, Chapman H.S. Lib., Kan. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Quick service - Great price

Outstanding for its analysis as well as its prose.

This was a gift for a friend who really enjoyed the Museum. I loved the book but it has been some time since I read it. However, it is of interest that the I. S. Gardner Museum gift shop does NOT carry the book!! Too scandalous???

Shand-Tucci gets bogged down painting the gay agenda into much of this book, but there are some interesting topics or tidbits included in this book. Sometimes, you don't like everything served at dinner but still enjoy some tasty treats! That's the case with "Art of Scandal: The Life and Times of Isabella Stewart Gardner."

This book was the monthly selection for our book club, but none of us could wade through it without falling asleep or becoming distracted. While the subject sounded interesting, the execution forces the reader to untangle long strings of writing in return for details of the lives of moderately interesting people. The author fails to translate what seems to be his personal passion into something interesting to the general reading public.

Having only read one book, on the fascinating ahead of her time Mrs. Gardner, "Mrs. Jack" which was written in 1965 but is so stuffy in its prose that you'd imagine it was written in 1865, I was so looking forward to "The Art of the Scandal" by Douglass Shand-Tucci. I can't remember now if I got this book as a gift or if I had the misfortune to purchase it when it hit the book stores, but it is truly awful. I've never read a biography where the biographer offers his own opinion incessantly. I'm glad to know that Mrs. Gardner was a pioneer when it came to befriending gay people but the author just beats this subject to death. Mrs. Gardner was intelligent and therefore, ahead of her time and loved to be around interesting fun people. You would assume that half way through book, the palace would be nearly built and Berenson would be attending auctions and helping amass her incredible art collection; instead the biographer is fixated on who is in the closet and who isn't. This book is insufferable as well as being unreadable.

What a shame this book is so poorly written. Isabella Stewart Gardner was a fascinating woman, and Shand-Tucci brings insight to her story, but the style is so intrusive as to be distracting. Mrs. Jack, a New Yorker transplanted to Boston by marriage and alienated from the Brahmins by character, was often generous but not always kind. She acted as mentor and patron to outcasts of the time -- homosexuals, Jews, artists and (to a lesser extent) women -- but she was also quick to reject those she considered beneath her interest. She built Fenway Court, a truly unique and visionary museum, for the people of Boston; but she would also have her carriage park on the sidewalk in inclement weather even though many pedestrians were inconvenienced. Furthermore, the enigmatic Mrs. Gardner destroyed many of her letters and papers shortly before her death, so the fact that Shand-Tucci's insightful speculations about her seem plausible is no small feat. That is why it is particularly tragic (perhaps too strong a word, but close) that the reader can never forget the presence of this heavy-handed narrator. Here is a sample sentence (page 158): "Though stimulated by her patronage-Gardner was one of the first to see Loeffler not only as a virtuoso but as the composer he wished to be and increasingly today is regarded as-Loeffler grew to feel at one point distinctly imposed upon by Gardner, who seemed to him possessive and only too willing to "show him off" in Ralph Locke's words, as "a kind of in-house virtuoso" in the Gardner music room, all of this, or (sic) course, quite classic behavior on the part of humble but artful, trustworthy but vain, kind but cruel and rampagingly dominant Isabella!" One can open the book to almost any page, as I did with this example, and find sentences as bad or worse. The jacket states that the author won an award for a previous book, but that is difficult to imagine. It is almost unreadable, and I put the book down twice before I finally finished reading it. On the other hand, it did make me want to

revisit Fenway Court (now the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum) in Boston. The content is great but the style is almost insurmountable.

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