



From left: Dr Katharyn Hanson wears dress by Fendi, £2,470, and earrings by Sophie Buhai, £230, both at Net-A-Porter.com; Zoë Lescage wears dress by Carolina Herrera, £910, cuff by Jennifer Fisher, £530, and earrings by Melissa Joy Manning, £120, both at Net-A-Porter.com; Dr Amanda Foreman wears dress by Antonio Berardi, £845, earrings by Jennifer Fisher, £180, both at Net-A-Porter.com, and ring her own

The History Girls

There's been a revolution in the ivory tower world of history. No longer the domain of fusty and impenetrable academics, modern-day historians are feisty and stylish with society and social media at their fingertips. And more and more of them are female. Here, PORTER introduces three dynamic women who have seen the future of the past

Photography by Pamela Hanson

Zoë Lescaze

the reviver

Zoë Lescaze is standing beneath a giant allosaurus skeleton in the lobby of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. It's an appropriate meeting place for this 26-year-old author and art historian, whose first book *Paleoart* will be published by Taschen in the fall. Given the title, you would be forgiven for assuming the book is about prehistoric cave art created in the Paleolithic era. But, in fact, *Paleoart* looks at 19th- and 20th-century artists and illustrators whose works depict the prehistoric world and its inhabitants, in particular dinosaurs. "What's fascinating," says Lescaze, a willowy blond with high cheekbones, "is that these extinct creatures became blank slates onto which artists projected not just their own aesthetic preferences and personal psychology, but the broader ideals and anxieties of their age."

To illustrate her point, she describes the work of artist Charles R. Knight, who painted vividly colored murals of "friendly and cheerful dinosaurs," which are still on display in the museum. They reflect, she says, a distinctly American optimism, whereas the artist Zdenek Burian, who was working in the Czech Republic during World War II, created far more apocalyptic visions of prehistory. What's equally interesting is that such a young person has found affinity with a curious niche sector of art history—one that highlights the varied ways we as humans find self-expression, and that we can still learn from today.

Despite the genre's long and fascinating history, paleo works have often been overlooked. Lescaze's book makes the case that we should examine them as "works of art in their own right, with a lot to say about their cultural and historical moment." In pursuit of this aim, the author—who secured her book deal at the age of just 23—has spent the past two years traveling the world in search of paleo masterpieces: "riding a single car train to Bohemia, in the Czech Republic, to visit a remote zoo" or "going to Moscow to track down works that have never been reproduced and which I'm excited to show to a wider audience."

Lescaze's first contact with paleo art was as a child, growing up in New York with frequent visits to the Natural History museum. "As a five-year-old tearing through

these halls, I was excited to see the animals; the dinosaurs! I wanted to travel all over Africa, all over Asia. My experiences here have inspired my love of travel and my interest in the intersections of natural history and art."

Her parents encouraged and supported her interests. Her late father, Lee Lescaze, was the editor of the foreign desk at *The Washington Post* and then *The Wall Street Journal*. Her mother, Lynn Darling, is a writer and the author of two memoirs. An only child, Lescaze spent her early years poring over books in her parent's Greenwich Village loft. When she wasn't reading, she was creating elaborate sketches of the animals that fascinated her. "One of my earliest memories is coming home from school with my babysitter and spotting an abandoned iguana in a tree," Lescaze recalls. "I insisted that we go home to get my drawing supplies so that I could sketch it."

After high school, she attended Bowdoin College in Maine, where she majored in studio art and art history, with a minor in anthropology. By her junior year, she was traveling to northern Cameroon on an archaeological excavation, where she served as project illustrator. She wrote her honors thesis on the American Museum of Natural History's taxidermy dioramas and their relationship to the paintings of the contemporary artist Walton Ford. After graduating in 2012 (magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa no less), she worked at the *New York Observer* on the arts desk. "Walton [Ford] was familiar with my byline and contacted me through the newspaper," she explains. They have since become a couple.

With Ford at her side, Lescaze is now a fixture at the city's art galas and gallery openings, cutting a striking figure in favored designer labels, such as Céline and The Row, or in vintage pieces found on her travels. She says she will continue to write about art history and aspires to go to graduate school. "I'm also hoping to go on several archeological excavations as an illustrator—to Benin and the Central African Republic." In the meantime, her heart remains uptown at the Museum of Natural History, where she makes a weekly pilgrimage with her sketchbook, to draw. "It's still my favorite place in the world." >

Words by *Eve Claxton*

Portrait: *Moments of the Prehistoric Past*, 1880; 1890 (Taschen) will be published in fall 2016



"As a five-year-old tearing through these halls, I was excited to see the dinosaurs"

Dress by Dior, £1,750; earrings by Melissa Joy Manning, £120, at Net-A-Porter.com