



British Art Studies

November 2015

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Issue 1, published 15 November 2015

Cover image: Patrick Staff, *The Foundation* (video still), 2015, Commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery, London; Spike Island, Bristol; Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; and Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver. Co-produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London and Spike Island, Bristol.

PDF generated on 15 February 2024

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Published by:

Paul Mellon Centre
16 Bedford Square
London, WC1B 3JA
<https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk>

In partnership with:

Yale Center for British Art
1080 Chapel Street
New Haven, Connecticut
<https://britishart.yale.edu>

ISSN: 2058-5462

DOI: 10.17658/issn.2058-5462

URL: <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk>

Editorial team: <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/about/editorial-team>

Advisory board: <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/about/advisory-board>

Produced in the United Kingdom.

A joint publication by



PAUL MELLON
CENTRE

YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART

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Acknowledgements

Making a digital journal from scratch involves a huge amount of creative, intellectual, and physical work, as well as financial investment. Like all of our activities, it has only been possible to pursue this project thanks to the extraordinary legacy of [Paul Mellon](#) himself. The creation of *British Art Studies* has also depended upon the support, expertise, and advice of our colleagues, beginning with those at the PMC and the YCBA. Mark Hallett, Director of Studies at the PMC, initiated the idea of the journal in 2012, and together with Amy Meyers, Director of the YCBA, formed an [editorial team](#). Headed by Sarah Victoria Turner, the PMC's Deputy Director for Research and the Managing Editor of *BAS*, this team consists of staff from both centres: Martina Droth (Deputy Director of Research and Curator of Sculpture, YCBA); Martin Postle (Deputy Director for Collections and Publications, PMC). Until recently, it also included Eleanor Hughes (formerly YCBA and now Deputy Director for Art and Program at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore).

Meanwhile, our international [Advisory Board](#) has supported this venture from the outset with generous amounts of time and advice. We would also like to acknowledge the help of Maisoon Rehani (PMC), Emmanuelle Delmas-Glass (YCBA), and Matthew Hargraves (YCBA). Beyond the PMC and YCBA, we have been fortunate to work with some wonderful people in creating this journal. Adrian Cooper of Intelligent Heritage has guided us through the many pathways of the digital realm and open-access publishing. Bernard Horrocks's advice and inspiration in all matters associated with copyright, image permissions, and fair dealing has been invaluable. Tessa Kilgarriff came on board to assist with the huge task of sourcing all the images. Rose Bell, our copy editor, refined and polished the texts throughout. And our peer reviewers offered constructive feedback, greatly helping to shape the contents. We are indebted to the generosity and support of the many institutions, organizations, and individuals, who provided images for us to use.

Furthermore, the journal would not exist without the phenomenal creativity and talents of our designers and developers at Keepthinking, led by Cristiano Bianchi. We have developed this journal in tandem with this extraordinary team and our thanks go in particular to Tom Heather, Lelia Mak, Parahat Melayev, Luca Rosean, Evgenia Spinaki, and Katy Swainston.

The day-to-day work and many hours of correspondence, technical development, image sourcing, and uploading of content has been borne by a small and very dedicated team at the PMC. Hana Leaper, Editorial Assistant Postdoctoral Fellow, and Tom Scutt, Digital Manager, who both joined the PMC in the autumn of 2014 and have made an enormous contribution to the development and delivery of *BAS*; we offer them our deepest thanks.

Finally, we thank our authors, for providing us with excellent scholarship and endless enthusiasm. They were prepared to take a risk on a journal that did not yet exist; we hope that they—and you—are pleased and captivated by the results!

Cite as

British Art Studies Editorial Group, "Editorial", *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/editorial>

British Art Studies is the joint publication of two research centres dedicated to British art: the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art (PMC), London, and the Yale Center for British Art (YCBA), New Haven. The journal has grown out of many conversations and collaborations between the two centres, working with scholars and institutions worldwide. The foremost aim of *British Art Studies* (*BAS*) is to provide a platform for innovative thinking, debate, and dialogue about British art, an area of research that, as our first issue makes clear, is constantly changing, expanding, and being re-defined. Through *BAS* we want to encourage and share a multitude of approaches, voices, and objects.

Born digital

British Art Studies is a “digital first” publication, meaning that it has no printed counterpart and is designed primarily to be read on screen (although all content can be downloaded or read offline). Many people now read on the move, using various devices. The “pages” of *BAS* responsively adapt to the size and orientation of the device, whether a computer, tablet, or smartphone.

From the very beginning, the guiding principle for developing *BAS* has been to ask what could be done with a digital journal that could not be done in print. This starts with our [cover](#) where we have moved away from the convention of using a single image. Of course, a digital publication does not need a cover in the traditional sense; but we wanted to develop a feature that offers content, as well as a compelling visual threshold at which to pause before delving into the journal. For our first issue we have worked with the artists and curators of *British Art Show 8* to create a dynamic set of covers, featuring eight works and a “[Cover Collaboration](#)” commentary. Each time the journal is reloaded or refreshed, a new image will be displayed.

Although emerging out of the research cultures of our two centres, *BAS* uses the digital to reach beyond the physical walls of our buildings in London and New Haven. Articles are chosen through an open call for submissions and, as our first issue shows, address a diverse range of topics, periods, and approaches. The second issue of *British Art Studies* will appear in spring 2016, and will be followed by a special issue in summer 2016 on “British Sculpture Abroad, 1945–2000”. This will also be our future publication pattern—two open and one special issue each year—allowing us to remain responsive and engaged with the very best and most exciting scholarship in the field.

BAS offers new models for digital publishing. As well as single-author articles, it includes interactive features that foster dialogue, discussion, and the participation of many voices—including those of readers. Our first

Conversation Piece, led by Richard Johns, solicits responses from academics, curators, and artists to the provocation “There’s no such thing as British art.” Through text, film, and visual work, this conversation opens up arguments with and approaches to the field we call “British art”. The Conversation Piece will build cumulatively over the coming weeks. The first wave of the launch presents four responses; more will be added in the coming weeks. Readers can contribute too, using the discussion board. Interactivity is offered throughout *British Art Studies*. We actively encourage users to share content using the “Share” button which appears on the right-hand side of every article. We hope this will open the conversation about British art and architecture even more widely.

Free and open access

British Art Studies is free and open access: there are no subscriptions, no passwords, and no fees to pay. All content will be preserved as a free-to-use resource. The ethos of open access is one that YCBA and PMC have adopted for all their digital efforts, in the recognition that conventional proprietary models represent a major obstacle to scholarship. It is published under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC licence, meaning that you are free to share and re-use its contents for non-commercial purposes, provided that appropriate credit is given to the author/s. No permissions are needed. Currently, only a handful of digital-only journals within the field of art history are fully open access. *Tate Papers*, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art*, and the *RIHA Journal* are among those that have led the way, navigating through complex issues such as online copyrights and digital preservation. We have benefited enormously from their pioneering efforts, and acknowledge the model with which they have provided us.

We hope that, in turn, *BAS* will provide a further model for innovative solutions to the challenges presented by online publishing: for example, that of how to capture accurate citations from online content, given there are no page numbers. *BAS* offers a more precise method than copying and pasting a URL (more precise even than the paper convention of page numbers). Every paragraph and figure is attributed with a DOI—a digital object identifier—allowing users to cite exact locations simply by clicking and copying the links provided by the “DOI” buttons.

In 2014, the Zurich Declaration on Digital Art History stated: “Digital change requires critical reflection about the methods and practices of art history, such as the way pictures are analysed and canons are formed. There should be a productive two-way relationship between research questions and digital applications.” Our goal is that *BAS* becomes an incubator for such critical reflection, providing a space for a digital art history which makes use of computational technology and data, as well as a digitized art history that

makes scholarship widely—and freely—available online.¹ The Zurich Declaration also calls for use to be made of recent fair dealing (UK)/ fair use (US) exemptions to copyright law, a discussion that has become even more prominent with the publication of the College Art Association's Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for the Visual Arts (2015). The image-sourcing policies we have established for BAS are intended to support and contribute to these developments.

Over several years, both centres have led efforts to support digital scholarship, by channelling resources into new outputs and activities, while providing support and guidance to other institutions. The PMC has transformed some of its standard publication formats into digital-only platforms: the first, *Richard Wilson Online*, appeared in 2014, and in early 2016, the Francis Towne catalogue raisonné will appear online. The YCBA was a major supporter of a Yale-wide effort to implement an open-access policy. In 2011, all of the YCBA's digital images of works in the public domain were released and made freely and easily available online, including for commercial purposes: there are no forms to fill out, and no permissions to request or restrictions on use. YCBA and PMC are also collaborating with international consortia to develop online spaces for scholarship. YCBA's images are now also available as IIIF assets, meaning they meet an agreed international standard to enable interoperability. The web-based open-source image viewer Mirador is being developed into an online space for collaborative work, where scholars can effortlessly collect, compare, manipulate, and share images from multiple institutions. Similarly, YCBA has made its collections available as Linked Open Data, which allows its information to harmonize with that of other institutions, making it easier for users to find, link, and build relationships between works of art.

All of the articles in *BAS* make use of the phenomenal work carried out by public and private collections to make their holdings available online. Seemingly instantaneous in some cases, but in reality the product of Herculean efforts by curatorial, imaging, technical, and conservation staff, images of art works are becoming publicly available in ever-increasing quantities.

An interactive experience

We want this journal to offer a powerfully visual and interactive experience. The abundance of large-scale images, the clean design and the distinctive fonts (Tiempos Headline and Aperçu), together with the inbuilt connectivity to other websites and online resources, will, we hope, give *British Art Studies* a unique look and create an absorbing, stimulating, and exciting

environment for our users. The digital realm offers new ways of looking at and engaging with images, the possibilities and pitfalls of which are being extensively debated.

Film, photography, and audio are used throughout this issue. Our Look First feature is offered as an experiment in using the medium of film to explore images in new ways. The filmmaker Jonathan Law, collaborating with James Boaden and Paul Rousseau, has created an extraordinary series of films about the double-exposure photographs by John Deakin. In our One Object feature, Cyra Levenson, Chi-ming Yang, and the artist Ken Gonzales-Day, take a single work—a black limestone bust by the eighteenth-century sculptor Francis Harwood— as a starting point to think about materiality, portraiture, and race. As Gonzales-Day’s photographic essay exemplifies, the digital undoubtedly creates a new visuality—what might be described as an aesthetics of the digital—which we will continue to explore in future issues.

Footnotes

- ¹ Pamela Fletcher’s and Joanne Drucker’s observations about the difference between “digital art history” and a “digitized” art history are particularly useful. See Pamela Fletcher, “[Reflections on Digital Art History](#)”, *caa.reviews* (18 June 2015) and Johanna Drucker, “[Is There a ‘Digital’ Art History?](#)”, *Visual Resources* 29, nos. 1–2 (2013): 5–13.

There's No Such Thing as British Art

Richard Johns



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Cite as

Richard Johns, "There's No Such Thing as British Art", *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/conversation>

Introduction by

Richard Johns, Senior Lecturer in History of Art at the University of York

“The paradox of British art becomes apparent every time a work of art, or collection of works, is made, looked upon, or labelled as such.”

For the six million and more annual visitors to the National Gallery in London, Britain’s most popular museum of historical painting, “British art” is represented by a selection of work by just ten artists—mostly English, all white men, and all born within eighty years of one another. Is it any wonder that British art can sometimes seem like an exclusive club with prohibitive requirements for entry?

The immaculate, beautifully conserved array of painting from Hogarth to Turner in the Sackler and adjacent rooms is a consequence of a legal separation, decreed by the National Gallery and Tate Gallery Act 1954. It comprises a few select paintings which, for the most part, were judged worthy of inclusion alongside the prevailing canon of Western European art, while the majority of the national collection of British painting became the charge of the newly independent Tate. British art at the National Gallery is thus a wholly modern, establishment vision of a presumed Golden Age: a paragon of nineteenth-century taste, distilled by twentieth-century cultural policy and inflected by twenty-first-century curatorial practice. The handful of subsequent acquisitions—Mr and Mrs Andrews by Thomas Gainsborough in 1960, Whistlejacket by George Stubbs in 1997 (fig. 1)—only reconfirm the exclusionary nature of the canon of British art.

The same postwar decade that shaped the presence of British art in Trafalgar Square also witnessed the broadcast in 1955 and subsequent publication of Nikolaus Pevsner’s affectionate reflections on the Englishness of English Art. Around the same time, a new generation of artists emerged whose work disturbed the sentimentality of what Pevsner famously termed the “geography of art”. David Hockney’s painting Man Stood in Front of his House with Rain Descending (1962; fig. 2), also known as The Idiot, does this by presenting a catalogue of clichés of Britishness: its architecture, dress codes, habits. In its content, its painterly figuration, in the droll textual framing of its title, and even its size—it occupies the same wall space as a full-length portrait by Joshua Reynolds or Gainsborough—it is at once quintessentially, undeniably British (or should that be English?) *and* contemptuous of the patriarchal confines of its own, rain-soaked national mythology.



Figure 1.
George Stubbs, *Whistlejacket*, 1762, Oil on canvas, 292 × 246.4 cm,
National Gallery London Digital image courtesy of National Gallery,
London (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

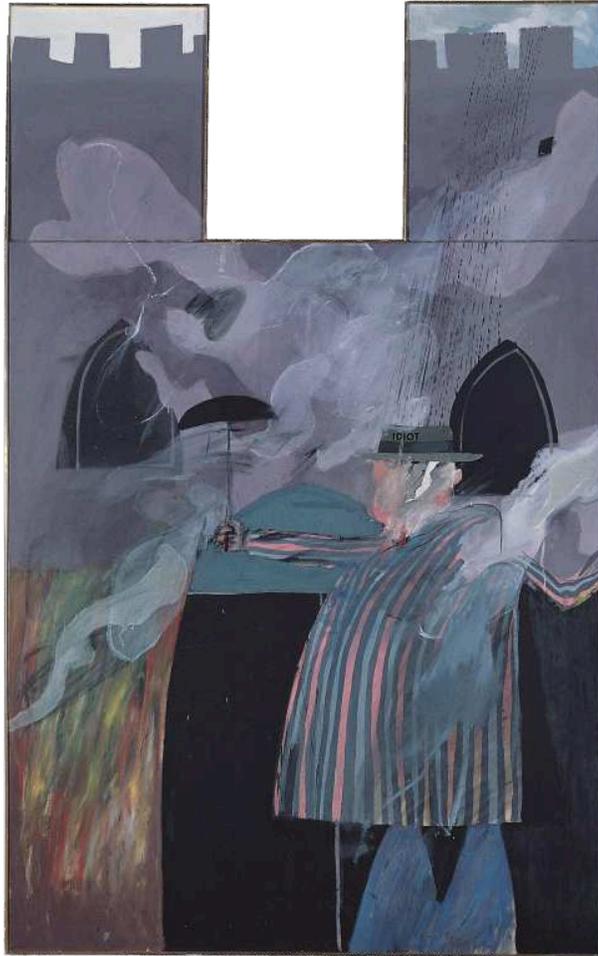


Figure 2.

David Hockney, *Man stood in front of his house with rain descending (The Idiot)*, 1962, oil on canvas, 243 × 152.5 cm. S.M.A.K., Belgium Digital image courtesy of S.M.A.K.

The Idiot was completed a few months before Hockney quit the British Isles for the sun and swimming pools of California. By the end of the decade the painting itself had been relocated abroad, and is now one of the highlights of a major international collection of modern and contemporary art at the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst in Ghent. Within this richly mobile context, the Britishness of Hockney's painting has been magnified, and refracted, for a largely non-British audience: it is at once compelling and absurd.

The paradox of British art that plays out so explicitly in Hockney's work of the early sixties (and in different ways on the walls of the National Gallery) becomes apparent every time a work of art, or collection of works, is made, looked upon, or labelled as such. Consider, for example, the gilt-edged

collection of British art endowed to Yale University by [Paul Mellon](#); or the globally dispersed holdings of the UK [Government Art Collection](#); or the more recent integration of British painting as a permanent feature at the Louvre. Each one is a construction of British art shaped over time by private interest and public ambition; each, in its own way, revealing of the illusive character of British art.

We continue to think about, and assign value to, art in national categories for many good reasons, but how do such labels enable or interfere with an understanding of the mobility of art, artists, and ideas over time; with established notions of chronology, style and influence; or with critical issues of race, class, and gender that have done so much to enliven modern academic and curatorial practice? Is there still any purpose in identifying works of art made in (or of, or on behalf of) the British Isles as “British” first and foremost?

On the one hand, it might seem necessary, natural even, to acknowledge the physical and political geographies in which works of art become meaningful, and to explore the patterns that emerge over time as a result of institutional, linguistic, and other cultural localities. On the other, to invoke a “British School” can seem antiquated and inward looking—of little value other than as a sale room shorthand for placing works of uncertain authorship. We must also question whether such a concept is capable of registering the constitutive role of the visual arts in Britain’s long imperial history (including the tumultuous politics of regional and national identity within the British Isles).

In short, if we are to continue to associate with, argue over, and invest in this most basic of taxonomies, it seems appropriate every so often to reflect upon the multiple challenges that the category of “British art” raises by imagining, if only for a moment, that there may be no such thing at all.

The diverse responses to that proposition, published here, emerged from a symposium held under the aegis of the British Art Research School at the University of York on 22 May 2014. That event coincided with a European parliamentary election that was characterized by a significant rise in the influence and profile of nationalist parties across the European Union, as well as by a growing critique of the EU’s supranational programme from the political left. It was also a time when media attention began to turn in earnest towards the then forthcoming referendum on Scottish independence, during which the politics of Britishness was subject to different (and ongoing) kinds of pressure.

These contemporary reminders of the fractured and contested complexion of Britishness were rarely far from view as those gathered in York collectively put British art to the test, calling on works of art and makers from the most

recent to the very distant past. In preparation for that event, there was no call for papers, no abstracts submitted, no individual titles put forward—just one proposition, or provocation, to which each participant was invited to reply in whichever way they saw fit. The concise responses that resulted, and the wide-ranging discussion that ensued, have provided the inspiration for this, the inaugural “Conversation Piece” of *British Art Studies*.

In the same spirit of experiment, and play, the interventions that appear on these pages will contribute to a broader and ongoing exchange involving the readers of the journal. The first three responses—from Liz Pettejohn, John Munns, and Richard Wentworth—have been published with the launch of the first issue of *BAS*. They will be followed over the coming weeks by three further “waves”, each foregrounding the ideas of other artists, art historians, and curators. Throughout this time, the journal’s comment page will remain open, for all those with an interest in British art (past, present, or future) to join the debate. The aim is to take on a big issue with a light touch, without agenda, and it is a conversation to which every reader is warmly invited to contribute.

Response by

Elizabeth Prettejohn, Professor, History of Art, University of York

“We need to look much more seriously at a far wider range of works whose value is genuinely uncertain.”

There certainly was no such thing as British art at Harvard University when I was an undergraduate there in the early 1980s, despite the fact that the Fogg Museum has one of the finest collections of British art in the United States. British pictures were confined to the back stairs, or propped on blocks in the corridor. We occasionally bumped into them with our book bags, but they did not feature in the teaching programme.

More strangely, there was no such thing as British art at the Courtauld Institute in London, either, when I arrived there as an MA student in 1985. There was some study of British architecture, but not painting or sculpture. I'm not sure there's any parallel for this: we would think it bizarre not to find the study of French art thriving in a leading French art-historical institution, ditto for Italian, or Dutch, Russian, Hungarian, or Chinese.

That was thirty years ago, and a lot has changed. However, after a period of zeal in the 1990s, I do wonder whether we have backtracked in confidence about the value of studying British art. As an expression of British national identity, or Britain's imperial project, British art remains a perfectly respectable field of historical enquiry, but such emphases have allowed us to evade potentially uncomfortable questions about aesthetic value: or, to put it bluntly, to ask whether British art is any *good*.

And yet, more or less secretly, even guiltily, people actually love British art as *art*—as something wonderful to look at and think about in complex ways. For the millions who consume British art (in galleries or virtually) around the world, that love is relatively uncomplicated. But it produces a distinctly odd result in much scholarship, where the note of moral disapproval about the nationalistic or imperialistic character, on the “British” side, assorts strangely with the claims made on the “art” side. In the US context, I'd conjecture, the “British” side doesn't seem very important, and the “art” side remains unproven, or positively problematical; and that may be true in the global context too.

Consider, for example, the recent work by the Korean artist [Bae Joonsung](#), which features paintings by John William Waterhouse and Lawrence Alma-Tadema in a complex composition involving lenticular technology. Should we

be pleased that British nineteenth-century art is so conspicuous in the international contemporary art world; or should we worry about whether its role in this context is to represent “kitsch”?

I think we still need to tackle the “art” side—then we can get beyond the stock examples and the knee-jerk connotations they invoke. We need to look much more seriously at a far wider range of works whose value is genuinely uncertain. Forget they are “British”, for the moment, and ask whether they’re worth looking at as “art”—and by that I don’t mean mere visual delight (though I am much in favour of visual delight), I mean do they make us think more creatively, and look more intelligently?

The argument is best made visually, with a selection of paintings from the period I study ([figs. 3-9](#))—works that so far have evaded serious scholarly attention, and which remain on the “back stairs” of art history.



Figure 3.

Marianne Stokes, *St Elizabeth of Hungary Spinning for the Poor*, 1895, oil on canvas, 96.5 × 61 cm, Private Collection Digital image courtesy of Private Collection via Wikimedia Commons, photograph belonging to and uploaded to the public domain by Rlbberlin on 18th November 2006



Figure 4.

Robert Bateman, *The Pool of Bethesda*, 1877, oil on canvas, 50.8 × 73.7 cm, Yale Center for British Art Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



Figure 6.

Rosa Brett, *The Hay Loft*, 1858, oil on canvas, 26.5 × 34.7 cm, Private Collection Digital image courtesy of The Athenaeum



Figure 7.
Kate Elizabeth Bunce, *The Keepsake*,
1898-1901, Tempura on canvas, 495 × 813 mm,
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery Digital
image courtesy of Birmingham Museums Trust

Response by

Richard Wentworth, Artist

“I think the weather test, or rather the fall of light, is mightily powerful, pretty much political.”

It's hard to see art and not know its provenance. There's probably a short, sanctified period in childhood when one might encounter things which don't fit into tidy cultural categories and, slowly learning that they might be art, not exactly locate them.

For a twentieth-century child growing up in southern England and speaking English as their first language, it won't have taken me long to have understood that there were other adjacencies—the Welsh, the Scots, the Irish, and the French. At a time when cars were distinct objects and carried “nationhood” about their form it was common practice, as much as collecting stamps, to notice differences and describe different origins. The French built cars, as did the Swedish, the Germans, the Italians, even the Dutch and the Spanish, but not the Irish. The time it took for those identities to dissolve into a general world of Japanese and American components assembled into assorted amalgams runs parallel to my most focused questioning of cultural identity.

Anybody who travels notices different dispositions, usually climatically driven though often architecturally described. Nobody is going to confuse walking down a street in Havana with a stroll in Hove.

If you know even a little bit about the European story in relation to the historic East and the new West you already have a lot to consider. It seems impossible to live in these islands without understanding religious histories and orthodoxies, the monarchy, and the overall sense of a mercantile middle class peaking and troughing. It would also be hard not to have internalized that it is not a federated structure, even though there are powerful national distinctions harboured within the ugly umbrella of “UK” (a relatively recent device to evade saying Britain or Great Britain).

The impulse towards art making seems to have numerous sources, and in Britain something to do with trades and crafts never seems very far away. There is always a strong sense, rather like much of our food and material well-being, that things and ideas are being imported and adapted and sometimes re-exported. The Mississippi/Liverpool connection, say, fuelled pop music in much the same way as the railways encouraged the entente cordiale.

The multiple forms of cultural expression from film to television, clothing to music, games to cuisine, wrapping around codes of sexuality, marriage, and death, are beyond elaborate.



Figure 8.

Richard Wentworth, *Look Both Ways*, Digital image courtesy of Richard Wentworth

It's rare for me to see artistic activity and not nominate its bloodline. I think it's part of my critical apparatus and I often ascribe passport as well as gender. I'm not always right. I think of the greater part of British art production as being in a conversation with Europe as much as its implication in the transatlantic drift, largely fudged by the pity that few British people speak more than their own language. I'm not being judgmental, but I am suggesting that there are long lines of interest and engagement in any work of art. It's true that there is something that can be mistaken for anti-intellectualism in British art which is often extruded through the aperture marked humorous, or baulked up with a sometimes visible philosophical force field.

There are questions of scale which come directly from perceptions of landscape and the politics of space—a row of brownstones never feels in any way like a British street. Everybody knows that the sea can never be more than seventy miles away and an island mentality is a distinct condition. Ours comes with eight weather systems and the possibility of four types of weather in a single day. There is never consistent strong sun so there are never black shadows, so Goya wasn't going to live here. I think the weather test, or rather the fall of light, is mightily powerful, pretty much political.

As a metropolitan, it's probably Walter Sickert who I think best represents the conundrum of British art. A bit German, partial to the French, knocking around in North London with a graphical awareness, a big appetite, and a

strong sense for “a bit of rough”. I think any examination of the music hall would take you on a line out through the history of television, pop music, and British art.

Response by

John Munns, University of Cambridge

“In the majority of ways in which the term might be understood more recently, ‘British art’ makes no sense in the high medieval context.”

In the High Middle Ages not only was there no such thing as British art, there was no such thing as “British” and no such thing as “art”, at least not in the senses in which they might be used today. It’s not that “British” and “art” mean nothing in the medieval context, but they don’t mean the same as they do in the modern world.

Having said that, some of the problems with regard to “British” (if not to “art”) are surprisingly similar. Take, for example, Peter Paul Rubens’s ceiling in the Banqueting House at Whitehall. The central canvas depicts *The Apotheosis of King James I*, one of Rubens’s sketches for which lives at Tate Britain. The [blurb](#) that accompanied an exhibition of that sketch in 2008–9 describes it as “a unique treasure in the history of British art.” The Tate, reasonably and matter-of-factly, states it to be a work of British art. In fairness, the sketch probably was produced in Britain, but the finished painting was not. The *Apotheosis* may be British in some senses (commissioned by a British patron, for a British destination, and with a peculiarly British subject matter), but it also is the work of a Flemish artist, painted in Flanders, in a Flemish Baroque style.

Rubens’s friend Anthony van Dyck was also from the Low Countries, but surely nobody would exclude his portraits of Charles I from the canon of British art? Unlike Rubens, Van Dyck moved to Britain, lived here, and died here. His portraits of King Charles were made here. Whilst here, his style developed into something that would lead to a long and rather distinctive tradition of British portraiture.

In 1984 there was an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery entitled *English Romanesque Art*. “English”, in this case, not “British”, but never mind, for the sake of the argument it might as well have been. Ask any group of medieval art historians which objects such an exhibition should contain and they would come up with pretty similar lists. They would certainly all include the Bury Bible. If only it wasn’t fixed down they would probably all want the Winchester Cathedral font. Now, the Bury Bible was made in Bury St Edmunds, but the man who made it, Master Hugo, was almost certainly not from Britain. In all probability the Winchester font was not even made in Britain, let alone by British craftsmen.



Figure 9.

The Warwick Ciborium, ca. 1150-1175, copper alloy; gold; enamel, 11.7 × 19.7 cm, V&A, London Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The Warwick ciborium (fig. 9) is the work of a Mosan craftsman. Its typological schema, however, probably derives from Worcester, and before that from Canterbury.¹ So the schema could be “British”, but the figure style is Mosan. It may have been produced here, or in the Meuse Valley. It might represent the work of an artist from modern-day Belgium, working in the local style, but on a distinctively British subject matter, probably for a British patron and for use in Britain. This man, I think, would be our twelfth-century Rubens.

Two other ciboria exist that are almost identical to the Warwick ciborium, the main difference being their figure style. Their closest stylistic corollaries are to be found in English manuscript illumination. They were made either by Mosan craftsmen who moved to Britain and went native, or British craftsmen trained by a Mosan master. Whichever way, let these be our twelfth-century Anthony van Dycks.

The point is this. In order for the category of “British art” to mean something across the centuries from the twelfth to the twenty-first, it can be little more closely defined than “art that pertains in some way to the island of Great Britain”, and this makes it a very inclusive category indeed. In the majority of ways in which the term might be understood more recently, “British art”

makes no sense in the high medieval context. On the other hand, if we were to mount an exhibition called, say, "British Romanesque Art", we probably all know what would be in it. Everything would pertain in some way to Britain; little if any of it would pertain to Britain exclusively. Perhaps the question, then, is not so much whether there is such a thing as British Art, but in what sense, if any, is it a useful category?

Response by

Cora Gilroy-Ware, Associate Professor, History of Art, University of Oxford

“James Barry’s demise and Benjamin Haydon’s suicide serve as only the most infamous case studies of the British historical painter’s premature proximity to his own mortality.”

“The Historical Painter, whatever be his talent . . . is considered half cracked or completely mad.”²

From the founding of the Royal Academy in 1768, historical painting possessed a ghostly authority. Joshua Reynolds praised it but did not devote his practice to it; Benjamin West’s exclusive appointment as “Historical Painter to the King” ended in suspicion and ill feeling. No other genre better indicates the gulf between the taste of patrons, connoisseurs, and the exhibition-going public, and the ambitions of the emergent professional artist in the Academy’s orbit. Over the course of the long eighteenth century, many were sceptical that there was—or ever could be—(a viable) historical painting in Britain.

In September 1855, the *Art Journal*’s monthly column, “British Artists: Their Style and Character”, begins with a fable designed to sum up the perils of attempting to earn a living as a historical painter in Britain.³ The story is of an artist who “finding little or no patronage” and burdened with a studio full of unsold objects leaves town after informing a trustworthy friend of his plan to fake his own death. The friend is instructed to close the artist’s house not long after his departure and to disseminate the message that he had “died suddenly”. The paintings are then to be sold by auction. They sell well, and the artist returns home, content with his newfound status.

While the term “social death” carries with it implications of racial, religious, and other forms of terror, it can be said that for this allegorical British artist, a kind of “social suicide” is preferable to financial ruin and critical neglect. Indeed, during the period, this particular strain of artistic practice was marked by precarity. James Barry’s demise and Benjamin Haydon’s suicide serve as only the most infamous case studies of the British historical painter’s premature proximity to his own mortality.

It is the lesser-known William Hilton (1786–1839) whose biography is introduced by the fable. No self-conscious martyr, Hilton’s career was nonetheless informed by the spectre of death. With industrial capitalism flourishing during his lifetime, the risk—moreover the life-threatening

danger—of attempting to earn a living painting grand-scale historical subjects was at this point almost a cliché. To follow this path was to disavow bravely the increasing commodification of artists and artworks. Furthermore, in common with his generation, Hilton's access to canonical ancient sculptures and old-master paintings was defined by the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars and their outcome. The artist was finally able to visit the Continent in 1814; in the Louvre he sketched looted works, some of which were imminently to be packed up and reinstated.

Precarity becomes visible through the artist's use of materials. In pursuit of dazzling effects that could quickly call to mind the aura of old-master works, many academic painters followed Joshua Reynolds's example by mixing an array of additives to their pigments and oil-binding mediums. Yet in certain works Hilton exceeded all others with this approach. He employed harmful substances such as megilp and bitumen in abundance. Late works such as his *Sir Calepine Rescuing Serena* (exhibited 1831) and *Editha and the Monks Searching for the Body of Harold* (exhibited 1834) were painted at a time when the discourse surrounding the damage caused by these materials would have been unavoidable for a Royal Academician, let alone Keeper of the Academy: a post Hilton held from 1827.

As such, these works can be seen to anticipate the Auto-destructive art developed by Gustav Metzger in 1959. Conceived as "a form of public art for industrial societies" that "demonstrates man's power to accelerate disintegrative processes of nature", the concept was Metzger's response to the ravages of war and an attack on capitalist values.⁴ The precarious position of Hilton's paintings within the history of British art, and the extent of their ongoing deterioration, suggest that Hilton was aware of their eventual decay. The humanist values that formerly sustained historical painting were declining simultaneously. Paintings by Hilton materialize such moral decay.

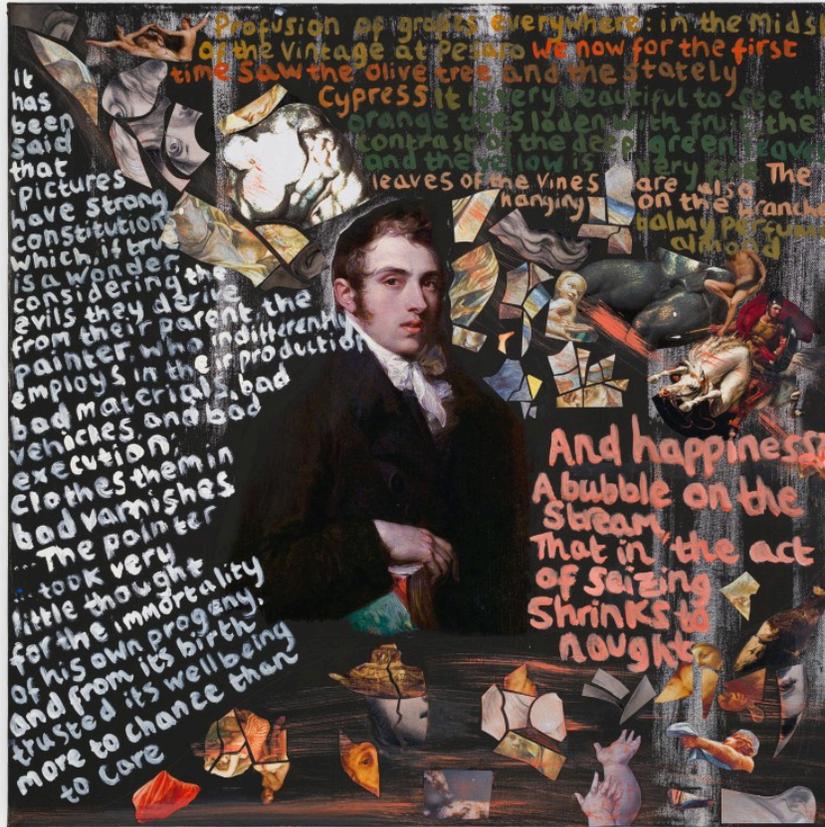


Figure 10.

Cora Gilroy-Ware, *Untitled (visual aid #3)*, 2015, oil and collage on canvas, 700 x 700 mm Digital image courtesy of Cora Gilroy-Ware

The accompanying image (fig. 10) is a visual aid that uses Hilton to open up British art, its style, and its character. Painted in oils, text is symbolic rather than pertaining to narrative, emphasizing the dominance of the written word in relation to high-artistic practice. The quote in white is lifted from the *A Century of British Painters* (1866) by Richard and Samuel Redgrave, who consistently denigrate Hilton's material practice. At the top are extracts from the artist's letters from Italy in 1825. Some lines from John Clare's poem "What is Life?", published at the time Hilton met Clare and was commissioned to paint his portrait of 1820, match the sense of *vanitas* conveyed in the materiality of the artist's works. Streams of collage evoke the fragmentation of the classical tradition and the variety of emulation associated with historical painting. Composed of pieces of paintings by Titian, Peter Paul Rubens, and Correggio, drawings by Hilton, and details from works by Barry and Haydon, they conjure the *craquelure* of paint. At the centre is Hilton's self-portrait. Freed from obscurity and the stigmas that cloud his art, we confront him head-on.

Response by

David Peters Corbett, University of East Anglia

“The words ‘British art’ were never more than a flag of convenience . . . a means of getting attention to where it was required.”

I have never been very keen on exam questions, and “There’s no such thing as British art” is horribly like one. “Discuss.” Its ability to unnerve is surely to do with its similarity to questions of the “Have you stopped defrauding the Revenue?” type— “Answer yes or no.” So I don’t think it’s irrelevant of me to say at the start that I am not at all sure that the demand to know whether British art exists is the right question. More germane is what it is for. Many objections can be levelled at the idea of British art—political, definitional, and conceptual—but I want to say that its advantages are also substantial, if pragmatic.

When, in the mid-1980s, I wrote a PhD thesis in a Department of English Literature, I think it is true to say that there was little or no anxiety about whether there was an “English Literature” or not. The term was taken unproblematically to mean literature written in the English language. This had the enormous advantage that it was not necessarily national. It was not so much that “English” seemed a natural category—even then that wouldn’t have stood a moment’s real thought—but that the category was sufficiently flexible—or sufficiently fudgeable, if you like—to serve its necessary purpose of defining a field of enquiry.

When I moved by various stages to work as an art historian, one of the many things that seemed culturally unfamiliar about my new discipline was that the conceptual cake was cut very differently. Among the assumptions that seemed to be taken for granted was that modern art before 1945 meant French art. Modern art in England in the period I was interested in was—as everyone apparently knew quite well—inevitably derivative, and if you could even bring a question like “Was Vorticism a native modernism?” into meaningful focus, you were bound to find that it was not. This state of affairs was compounded rather than improved by the appearance of innovative methodologies during the 1970s and 1980s. The potency of the social history of art was communicated through studies of Impressionism, or Van Gogh, or the Parisian art world, and it was generally assumed in the discipline—or so it seemed to me—that this was inevitable and right.

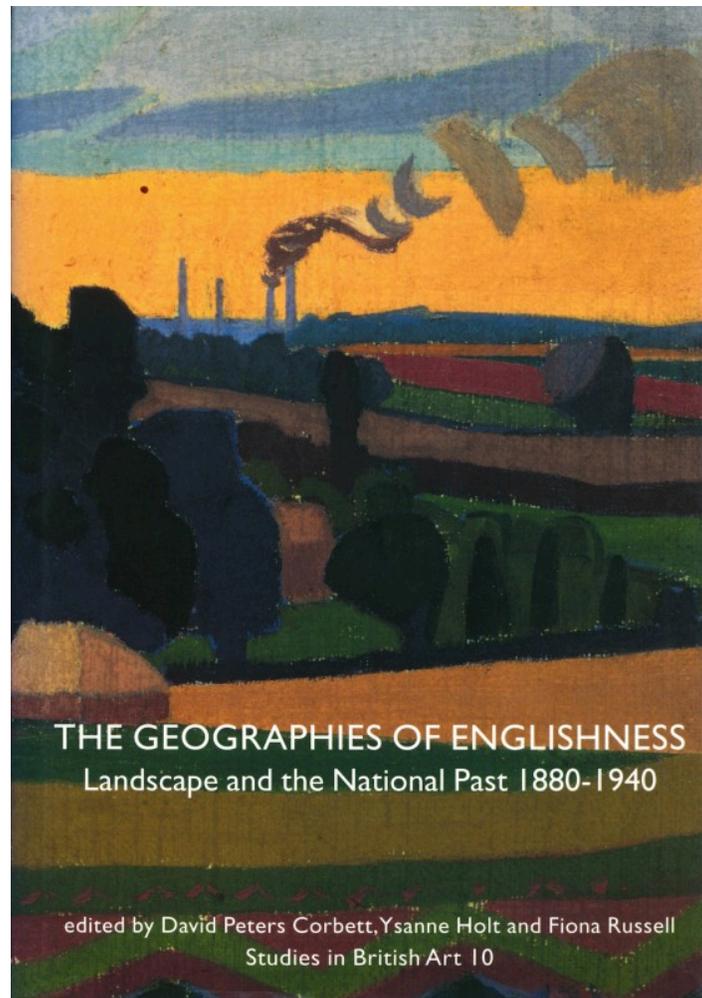


Figure 11.

Cover of *Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past, 1880-1940*, ed. Ysanne Holt, David Peters Corbett, and Fiona Russell (London: Yale University Press, 2002) Digital image courtesy of Paul Mellon Centre, 2015

There were in fact many historians of British art at work in the 1980s, some doing inspirational work, and I owe deep debts to a number of them. My point is that this work was done against a general background in which the conceptual action seemed from the start to be located largely elsewhere. The organization of art history, the literature that then existed, the routine assumptions, and the sheer weight of attention and traditions of scrutiny, all combined to make “British art” something that needed to be argued for. I do not mean by this that the key thing was to argue for the category, rather the opposite. The category—“British art”—needed to emerge in order to sustain what was truly important: studies of artists and, in the widest sense, their historical contexts, that acknowledged their particularities and specifics and which were not beholden to a more or less distorted version of concepts developed to deal with other subjects.

It seemed to me, living through the growth of British art studies in the nineties and after, that the words “British art” were never more than a flag of convenience. That term was a means of getting attention to where it was required. If the origins of the idea of a “national school” as a tool of enquiry and organization were largely lost for art historians, the concept nevertheless continued to provide a major criterion of organization within the discipline and its adjuncts (publishers for instance, or libraries). In that context, it was important to find a recognizable focus through which the communal effort of scrutiny and understanding could take place.

One way of putting this would be to say that the term “British art” eases communication. It makes it possible for publishers’ catalogues, advertisements for university jobs, and new journals to hail their likely audiences and to occupy clear positions in a complex series of institutional contexts. I am suggesting that it is this pragmatic presence that provides one of the major strengths of “British art” as an idea. We should refer our criteria to that presence rather than to the more abstract question of its existence: what best builds a context in which we might study (or indeed think it important or feasible to study) the work of artists who lived and worked on this island, for instance, or the modernism of artists in London before and immediately after the First World War? Thirty years ago it was not the case that such things were self-evidently available for study, nor that there was an intellectual context capable of dealing with them. That things are now different is one major gain for the idea of “British art”, however wayward it might be in other ways.

I also think that its very indeterminacy and lack of boundaries makes the category flexible in a productive way. This does not mean that we are unable either to define it at moments, or to adjust the category within which we make and promulgate knowledge. For some time now it’s been the case that “British art” has been responding to the interest in the global, the transatlantic, or the postcolonial in ways that inflect and open up the nature of the field. What is important is that we have a conceptual category in which to focus work and through which to communicate it. We can adjust that category as we need to.

Response by

Cliff Lauson, Hayward Gallery

“Contemporary British art may be wavering in its definition, but the nation’s geo-political boundaries are as strong as ever.”

The exhibition *History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain* was staged at the Hayward Gallery, London, in the run-up to the 2015 general election. Within this context of debate and decision-making, our aim was to provide a space for the public to reflect on the nation’s recent past, with a view to illuminating the future. The show was also conceived as an experiment. By asking artists to take on the role of curator, we hoped to open up and challenge traditional ideas of British history, art, and culture in unexpected ways.

After wide-ranging preliminary discussions, I invited seven artists from a variety of backgrounds and artistic positions to each curate a section of the exhibition: John Akomfrah, Roger Hiorns, Simon Fujiwara, Hannah Starkey, Richard Wentworth, and, working together, Jane and Louise Wilson. Behind the decision to enrol the artist as curator was a belief, and trust, in the creative ways that artists engage with the world, as well as a recognition of the intellectual freedoms assumed by (and expected of) them—freedoms that supersede the usual institutional responsibilities of an in-house curatorial team.

At the heart of the project was the idea that the artist-curators should focus on British history, although what that meant in practice was open to interpretation, and would indeed be challenged through the inclusion and foregrounding of forgotten, conflicted, and unusual histories. The artists’ interests were spread thematically and chronologically across seven decades of postwar British history, and there were no prescriptions as to the content or curatorial approach. As a result, six distinctive positions emerged.

The artists embraced the challenge of creating an exhibition about British history in a gallery of contemporary art in ways that echoed the variety and complexity of the nation’s history itself. Works of art were placed alongside archive material, photographs, and other everyday objects in ways that leaned towards a social history of art, and away from the familiar canon of British art and movements. Numerous and sometimes unexpected themes came to the fore, from the defence of the British coast during the Cold War to the BSE epidemic, or “mad cow disease”, to the post-Thatcher dematerialization of labour. Moreover, these issues were not raised as explicit political critique, or posited as necessarily revisionist, but were representative of the multiple forgotten, alternate, and personal histories

usually missed in mainstream recountings of history. From a Pye V4 television of 1953, on which many Britons watched the Queen's coronation, to Christine Voge's photographs of 1978 of the first women's shelter in London, the exhibition as a whole served as a powerful reminder that the grand narratives of history are comprised of intimate stories.

On the outdoor terrace we installed a newly restored Bristol Bloodhound surface-to-air missile and launcher, selected by Richard Wentworth and borrowed from the RAF Air Defence Radar Museum in Norfolk (fig. 15). Installed by the dozen along the eastern seaboard from the late 1950s, this Cold War weapon was the last line of defence against inbound Russian nuclear bombers. At over eight metres long and gleaming white, overlooking Waterloo Bridge and the River Thames, this was the first time in recent history that such weaponry had been on display in central London. It was not a weapon masquerading as art, but a military artefact evidencing its own historical moment. It recalled, tangibly, the anxiety of a bygone era, while invoking the more recent memory of the Rapier missiles (the current equivalent of the Bristol Bloodhound), which had been controversially installed by the British army on East London rooftops during the 2012 Olympics.

In the week before the exhibition opened, as we were applying the finishing touches inside the galleries, the BBC reported that Russian Bear bombers carrying nuclear payloads had crossed into British airspace. RAF fighters had been scrambled to intercept the bombers and escort them back to neutral airspace. A quarter of a century after the end of the Cold War, both sides continue to test and provoke one another with reciprocal shows of military strength. Contemporary British art may be wavering in its definition, but the nation's geo-political boundaries are, it seems, as strong as ever. If we are to consider art as inextricably linked to history, then perhaps it too must accept some national resolve.



Figure 12.

Courtesy Hayward Gallery / Photo by Roger Wooldridge, Installation view of John Akomfrah's section, *History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London, 10 February - 26 April 2015

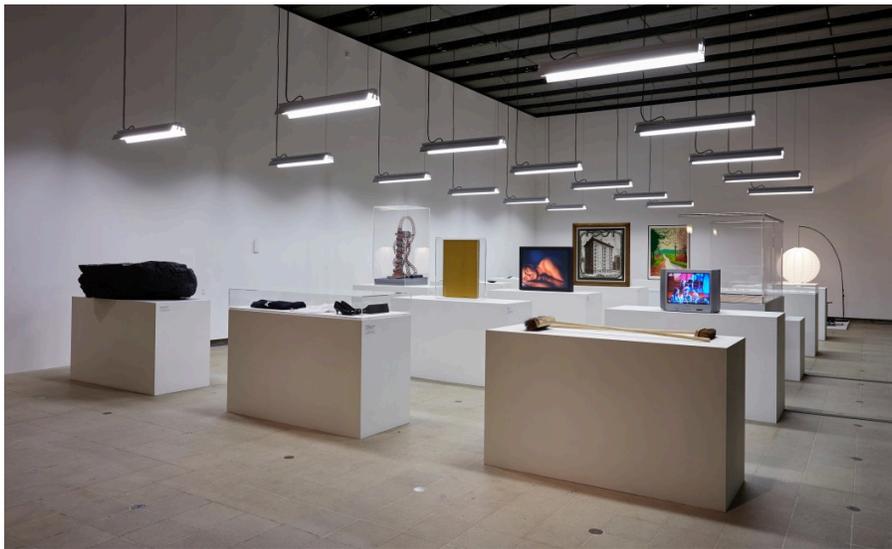


Figure 13.

Courtesy Hayward Gallery / Photo by Roger Wooldridge, Installation view of Simon Fujiwara's section, *History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London, 10 February - 26 April 2015



Figure 14.

Courtesy Hayward Gallery / Photo by Roger Wooldridge, Installation view of Roger Hiorns's section, *History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London, 10 February - 26 April 2015



Figure 15.

Courtesy Hayward Gallery / Photo by Roger Wooldridge, Installation view of Richard Wentworth's section, *History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain*, Installation view of Ferranti International plc, British Aircraft Corporation Bloodhound Mark 2 Surface-to-Air Missile and Launcher, Guided Missile, Type 202, circa 1965-66. Missile: aluminium, magnesium alloy, stainless steel, wood, resin embossed fabric; launcher: steel. RAF Air Defence Radar Museum. Hayward Gallery, London, 10 February - 26 April 2015



Figure 16.

Courtesy Hayward Gallery / Photo by Roger Wooldridge, Installation view of Hannah Starkey's section, *History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London, 10 February - 26 April 2015



Figure 17.

Courtesy Hayward Gallery / Photo by Roger Wooldridge, Installation view of Richard Wentworth's section, *History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London, 10 February - 26 April 2015



Figure 18.

Courtesy Hayward Gallery / Photo by Roger Wooldridge, Installation view, Jane & Louise Wilsons' section, *History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London, 10 February - 26 April 2015

Response by

Sarah Victoria Turner, Director

“Discussions about Britain’s imperial past and postcolonial present have put pressure on the historiography of British art.”



Figure 19.

Eric Ravilious, Front cover of '*British Art BBC talks pamphlet*', designed by Eric Ravilious,

In 1934 the BBC announced its broadcast of six talks on British art given by Reginald Gleadowe, the Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University between 1928 and 1933, with a striking pamphlet designed by Eric Ravilious ([fig. 19](#)) and printed by the Kynoch Press, which was noted for its progressive and lively artist-designed typographic collection. No artists are present in the image and, apart from the glimpse of a framed image of a tree in the background, neither are any works of art. Enclosed within a patterned oval are tubes of paint, set squares, a mallet, a compass, a mahlstick, a fanned

array of brushes, pencils, and a palette and knife. Here, Ravilious puts the tools of the artist and designer's trade right at the very centre of British art. There is no hint of the "big names" of British art that one might expect—no Joshua Reynolds, John Constable, or J.M.W. Turner. Painting is referenced, but as part of a larger and connected world of art, design, and craft. Throughout his career, which has recently been the subject of a hugely popular exhibition at Dulwich Picture Gallery (closed August 2015), Ravilious sought to break down divisions between the artist and the designer, as well as image and text (brought together in this image through pattern and the overlapping composition). His is a vision of British art in which craft, making, and production are given central attention.

Ravilious's cover prompts me to think about what kind of image would adorn the front cover of a promotional booklet, or website, for a series of talks on British art broadcast in 2015. Would craft, making, and tools get such a prominent look-in? Probably not. How would an artist or designer go about responding to such a brief today? If there *is* indeed "no such thing as British art", perhaps a blank page would do! An infinitely more interesting task would be to commission a cover that in some way tried to capture the diverse, complicated, hybrid nature of British art and British art studies today.

When some of the contributors to this Conversation first met to discuss the provocation, "There's no such thing as British art", it was the day of a European election—an event that undoubtedly cast a prescient shadow over our conversations about a nation-bounded terminology for the study of art. The boundaries and definitions of British art have undoubtedly been redrawn in recent years as historians and curators in this field have reflected seriously on the implications of national categorizations in relation to the organization of works of art, artists, and histories of art. Discussions about Britain's imperial past and postcolonial present have put pressure on the historiography of British art, opening up routes in and routes out of what was once perceived to be, by some, a fairly restricted, closed-off and rarefied field of studies. "British art" is no longer an island within the discipline of the history of art. As a result, "British art" has, in my opinion, become a considerably more expansive, connected, and interesting area in which to work. In some ways I accept that there is no such thing as British art—by which I mean that there certainly isn't one version or officially sanctioned definition of what it is or is not. And that, to my mind at least, is very much a good thing. What there is, however, is a lively and ever-growing community of researchers, artists, curators, and students all of whom are working with—and sometimes against—British art. In my job as Deputy Director for Research at a centre devoted to the study of British art, I don't feel the need to defend the concept, but rather to facilitate and indeed champion the brilliant, considered, and varied work carried out in the field of British art studies today.

Response by

Jane Hawkes, University of York

“In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the ‘Celtic’ art of the Britons was invoked as an art of resistance to ‘British’ imperialism.”

If we take the term “British art” at face value, if we understand the term to pertain to the land-mass incorporated by the Acts of Union between England and Scotland of 1706 and 1707 (as an historian of the early medieval art produced in Britain and Ireland might be inclined to do), there might well be “arts” that could be considered “British”. However, the ways in which the term has been used to construct and underpin the institutions, museums, collections, and university departments devoted financially and publicly to the study and promotion of what is currently deemed to be “British Art” suggest that, in practice, the term is perhaps not as inclusive as might be hoped.

To demonstrate this it is worth considering, briefly, two arts that might variously be considered “British”, but which are not generally included in the so-called canon of “British art”. The first is the art produced by the Britons—those peoples who lived in mainland Britain between the third century BCE and the fourth century CE—who were, ethnically speaking, a Celtic peoples. Their art can be characterized as one favouring textured reflective surfaces, shifting shapes, and linear patterns constructed from motifs that are arranged to appear simultaneously as both figure and ground. However, while such a distinctive artistic tradition might be identified lexically as “British”, to anyone from the modern countries of Ireland, Scotland, or Wales this would be anathema, as it is, of course, generally defined as “Celtic” art, largely as a result of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century movements for cultural and political independence from England. The “Celtic” art of the Britons is thus generally identified with nation states other than England, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was indeed invoked as an art of resistance to “British” imperialism. Yet, it remains the case that the peoples living in mainland Britain were known collectively as the Britons, and indeed still are (academically). Used in this context, “British art” is something of a troubled term—both for suggesting an art that is largely devoted to what today might be termed “decorative”, “minor”, or “applied” (rather than the fine arts of painting and sculpture), and for describing an art form that was common to the peoples making up Britain and Ireland at the time it was produced.



Figure 20.

The Desborough Mirror, ca. 50BC - 50 AD, Bronze, 350 x 258 mm, British Museum Digital image courtesy of British Museum, London (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license

Leaving this to one side, the second example that might be considered is the art produced across these islands in the early historical period from the sixth to the eleventh or twelfth centuries—an art which involves painting (albeit in manuscripts, on sculpture, walls, and glass) and sculpture in diverse monumental forms and varying scales, in both stone and ivory. This is an art that not only utilized the various media of the so-called fine arts, but which was also one capable of great abstraction, sophisticated visual ambiguity, and paradox (involving what Mary Carruthers has termed the “polyfocal perspective”⁵), as well as remarkable naturalism. This example of “British art” is of course that which is notionally referred to by art historians as “Insular art”, as a means of avoiding the tricky (post-1924) term “British”. For, in the sixth to eighth centuries CE the Britons lived in south-west Scotland, Wales, and Cornwall; the Scots lived in north-west Scotland and Ireland; and various Germanic tribes, comprising collectively the Anglo-

Saxons, lived in the area now covered by England, but which at times extended to the Firth of Forth and into Dumfries and Galloway. Modern geopolitical terms invoked to denote art or any other cultural phenomenon in this period, verge on the nonsensical.

So, when considering the arts produced in the early medieval period it would seem that *if* “British art” is to continue being promoted institutionally, and *if* that term is to be deemed lexically relevant to denote the visual arts produced by peoples from the islands of Britain and Ireland, or working elsewhere within its traditions, it is perhaps time to be pro-actively more inclusive in what is denoted by the term. It is perhaps time to actively include and promote the work produced by those from across the entire region of Britain and Ireland, across a wider history (that extends the current working boundaries of the eighteenth through to the early twentieth centuries), and across all media. We are surely well beyond the point in time when it is acceptable to promote as British, art (largely painting and sculpture) primarily produced by the English, wherever they worked—or those from elsewhere working in England—by which “London” is generally understood.

This said, using the term “British” in a postcolonial context does, of course, raise significant issues which the examples cited here have demonstrated. For medievalists, with Ireland and Wales being the oldest of the English colonies, and part of Ireland still being subsumed into that colonial power which is euphemistically referred to as Great Britain, it is difficult indeed to refer to any art produced in the region as “British”.

Response by

Amy Tobin, Goldsmiths College

“The question of British or American art is not so much about the national as the translocal; not identity, but identification and misidentification.”

The question of whether or not there is such a thing as British art, for me, is a question of context. For instance, it hardly seems useful to look for and trace particular national characteristics or tastes, especially in an age of increasing opportunities for physical and technological connection. I am more interested in thinking about national contexts as shifting entities, imbued with complex power relations. This includes looking at how national identities are constituted through art and in cultural institutions, as well as looking at how those identities function ideologically, how they are challenged and broken down. In Britain in the 1970s feminist politics was a vital part of this dynamic field of cultural activity.

The characterization of Britain in the histories of art and feminism in the 1970s is often limited to Mary Kelly’s six-part installation *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), Susan Hiller’s *paraconceptualism*, and Margaret Harrison’s *crafted image-text works*, as well as the influential art-historical work of Griselda Pollock, Lisa Tickner, and Rosemary Betterton. But in recent years knowledge and analysis of this field has begun to expand, with many more books, exhibitions, and PhD research projects charting women artists’ work in Britain since the seventies. The practices are diverse, ranging from *photography* to *performance*, *painting* to *film*, and so too are the artists’ approaches to feminism. But a question that remains to be asked about this complex art history is its relationship to Britain and Britishness.

In the late 1980s Britain was characterized as the site for the development of a more theoretical feminism, with Pollock, Tickner, and Kelly all publishing important texts espousing theoretical methodologies. However, this categorization, formed in response to attempts at recuperation associated with artists and writers in the United States, has resulted in a problematic “progress narrative”—pithily summed up by Pollock as a genealogy of “American foremothers and British daughters”.⁶ But if this narrative obscures the diversity of feminist work in Britain, more recent thematic methodologies risk erasing this context altogether. For instance, Helen Molesworth’s article “*House Work and Art Work*” (2000) counters the divisions between “essentialist” artworks (like Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79) and “theoretical” work (like Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document*). But in deconstructing the “progress” narrative, she leaves geographic difference by the wayside. And in fact, she erases the problem completely by

repatriating Mary Kelly, an American who worked in Britain in the 1970s, into a coterie of American artists. And although histories of second-wave feminism are often critiqued for an Anglo-American focus, it is a far more America-centric history.

Despite its problems (over-identification, lacunae) transatlantic antagonism was an important part of the women's art movement. Women artists, critics, and writers exchanged materials and ideas in print, through reproductions and touring exhibitions. The context of this intercontinental interaction means that the national borders we might draw are diffused and disrupted. This is further complicated by the decentralized organizations that structured the Women's Liberation Movement in the seventies, which extended from micro-level, grass-roots groups to macro-level exchanges across distance. Through these networks of material exchange coherent national identities were splintered. So just as it is important and timely to look again at feminist-influenced art made in Britain, I would dispute that this could really be called British art, and likewise that work produced in the United States could be thought of as definably American. Many of these practices are the product of competing forces, including socio-economic and cultural context, the artist's or group's particular brand of feminism, as well as their relationship (antagonistic or celebratory) to other works of art or practices, historical or contemporaneous.

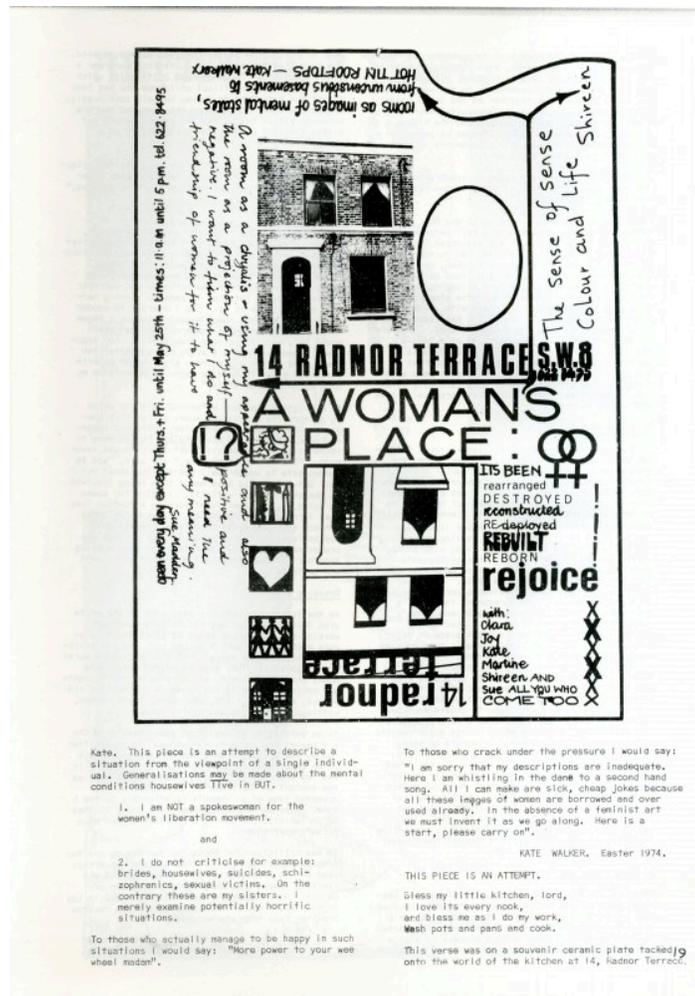


Figure 21.

Unattributed poster for *A Woman's Place*, 1974, printed in *Mama-Women Artists*, Women's Art Library Digital image courtesy of Women's Art Library

Perhaps this is best illustrated in relation to two installations: *Womanhouse* and *A Woman's Place*. The first, *Womanhouse*, opened in Los Angeles in 1972; the second, *A Woman's Place*, in South London in 1974 (fig. 21). The later work was conceived as a version of the earlier; it sought to mimic the collaborative enterprise of *Womanhouse*, in which its women participants found, converted, and made art within a domestic setting. Both projects subverted women's traditional "place" through incisive feminist critique of the home and domestic labour. But unlike the clean surfaces and bright colours of *Womanhouse*, made in the context of Judy Chicago's feminist art programme, *A Woman's Place* was tatty, run-down, and knee-deep in rubbish, to paraphrase Tickner's description of the work in *Studio International*.

The stale materiality of the London work seemed to play out the trajectory of its transatlantic journey, entropically transforming pristine surfaces into a crumbling mess. But this difference is not a metaphor for British art's belatedness. And neither can we say that *Womanhouse* or *A Woman's Place* stand for "American" or "British" art more broadly. Instead if we take the conversation between the two works as our subject, difference becomes a matter of context: Walt Disney-funded Californian art school versus South London squat; young students versus working mothers without commercial or Arts Council support. The local context of each work, then, opens out onto national issues such as the West/East Coast divide in America or the economic downturn in Britain in the 1970s.

By focusing on the relationship between these works, we can begin to get a sense of the conversations flowing between women nationally and internationally, while also seeing when this communication fails to translate, as very similar projects play out very differently. So across this dense field of interaction and exchange—comprised of hold-ups, hitches, and miscommunications—the question of British or American art is not so much about the national as the translocal; not identity, but identification and misidentification; and more about distance than difference. In the context of second-wave feminism, British art came under the same pressure as other fine art definitions and classifications. Focus shifted from particular aesthetics, associated with types and stereotypes, to a diverse field of experiment and exchange. So there may be no definably British Feminist Art but, crucially, we are yet to map how this political vitality impacted on art, cultural production, and institutions in the United Kingdom.

Response by

Grace Brockington, University of Bristol

“The seam of material and contexts that coalesce around the idea of British art is rich, and there remains much to mine and to re-evaluate.”



Figure 22.

Jacob Epstein, *Lilies*, 1936, gouache, 58.4cm X 45.7cm, Carrick Hill, Australia Digital image courtesy of Collection of the Carrick Hill Trust, Hayward Collection, 1983

There is a fine Jacob Epstein in the British art collection at Carrick Hill near Adelaide, Australia, the home created in the 1930s by Edward and Ursula Hayward, and now open to the public as a country-house museum. It is not the sort of Epstein that one might expect to find: not a bronze bust of Lady Hayward, or even one of the artist's experiments in direct carving. Instead, the Haywards acquired a painting entitled *Lilies* (1936; [fig. 22](#)), one of four hundred-odd flower studies that Epstein made in one of his occasional orgies

of painting. It was a moment of defiant departure from his sculptural practice, and it suits the collection at Carrick Hill because the house is set in beautiful gardens, and because Ursula Hayward loved lilies.

If an aim of the present debate is to develop a paradigm, or to evaluate a canon, of British art, then Epstein's *Lilies* is not a good example. But its location at Carrick Hill points to the expansiveness of the category of British art, and to its rich variety and unpredictability: its mobility across the British Empire, which has left Australia with some of the best collections of British art in the world; its absorption of that empire's resources, which stocked institutions such as the British Museum, where Epstein learned so much about non-European art; its significance for anglophile creations such as Carrick Hill, with its Jacobethan manor house overlooking Adelaide and the great expanses of the Australian bush; and its inclusiveness of artists such as Epstein, an American Jew of East European origin, who arrived in London as a young man, and ended his days a central figure in British art and a knight of the realm. If British art is anything, it is many things, in many different places. Its traditions and genealogies must constantly adjust to accommodate the news from everywhere and nowhere, and the shifting boundaries, and hence definitions, of Britishness.

The seam of material and contexts that coalesce around the idea of British art is rich, and there remains much to mine and to re-evaluate. So why do I sense a degree of anxiety behind the motion that *there's no such thing as British art*? Does it suggest a research community that has talked itself into a corner of self-doubt? That after several decades of ground-breaking research, and strategic challenges to disciplinary prejudice against the very idea of British art, we fear a loss of momentum, a shifting of attention, even an obsolescence of the questions and discoveries that have so energized the field? If this is the case, then I am not sure that arguing the point all over again is the right way forward. British art matters. The case has been made. The problem surely has to do with the larger one of academic specialization, the absence of a general conversation across isolated fields of enquiry, and the limitations of a traditional model of national schools in a curriculum that is moving towards a global history of art. The challenge becomes one of connection, and of finding a place in that global dialogue, in its radical sense as a mapping of transnational contacts and networks, rather than as a compilation of local case studies. In such a forum, values adjust. The qualities that can make British art seem so nebulous—so provisional, contingent, peripheral, even derivative—become the most interesting thing about it. Maybe it has indeed become redundant. Or maybe our motion is less a provocation to British art studies, than a blueprint for its future direction.

Response by

Martin Hammer, Professor of Art History, University of Kent

“Interesting art tends to be invested in a more complex sense of identity than the simplistic ‘them and us’ polarities that prevail elsewhere.”

In the discourse around British Modernism, my own patch, reference to Englishness, Britishness, or Scottishness has featured in commentary on many leading artistic figures (John Duncan Fergusson, Paul Nash, Stanley Spencer, Henry Moore, Peter Lanyon, David Hockney, Richard Long, Gilbert & George, to name a diverse few). The categorization sometimes mattered to the artists themselves. In broader terms, it crops up too in the writing of key critics of the period, including Roger Fry, Herbert Read, Kenneth Clark, and Nikolaus Pevsner. The conceptions of “Britishness” invoked by these artists and writers are as diverse as the work they produced and discussed, but might include reference to native precursors (Romantic landscape painting, for example); perceived predispositions (linearity, a love of nature, eccentricity, emotional reticence, and so on); or implied contrasts with the stereotypical characteristics of other cultures (the boldness of American art, for example). Talk about national identity—whether in relation to art, literature, cooking, or politics—tends to involve a cocktail of affirmation and differentiation: it expresses tribal loyalty, and the need for self-esteem and self-realization, in tandem with a sense of difference, fear, and inferiority/superiority in relation to some “other”.

Concepts of nationality can function as both stick and carrot. A negatively tinged example comes from David Sylvester’s review of a Walter Sickert centenary show in 1960: “The tragic flaw in English painting is compromise, unwillingness to be committed to a point of view, a desire to have the best of two or more worlds (especially, in our time, a present and a past world).”⁷ More affirmatively, a defensive emphasis on national identity could serve as an antidote to a perceived excess of “influence” from abroad, just as asserting an internationalist ethos could work against parochialism, or an oppressive nationalism. In relation to the latter, a helpful reflection comes from the leading painter Graham Sutherland in a letter of 25 January 1947 to the *New Statesman* about Benedict Nicolson’s survey of “the changes which have taken place during the last thirty years”:

During the course of his argument—that English painting has gained by the enforced insularity of the war—Mr. Nicolson writes of myself (and others) as *having turned their backs on Paris to seek inspiration in the English romantic movement of the early*

nineteenth century. I cannot let this pass. Current art criticism is peculiarly absolutist; and here is yet another example of the habit of art historians to oversimplify—to label and to pigeonhole. I do not deny that I received great adolescent stimulus from Palmer and Blake; but that does not mean I turn my back on Paris. The question of influences is not as easy as that, and is surely a more complex and subtle matter than can be covered by such snap judgements. Painters are affected by things which come to them from all over the place; from many kinds of painting and many things. One absorbs what one needs at a given time.

Palmer was actually much more than an “adolescent stimulus”, rather an ongoing point of reference, which demonstrates that attitudes in this terrain are usually rooted in polemic and propaganda. Sutherland’s approach to imagery, technique, and style in a work such as *Black Landscape* (1940; [fig. 23](#)), for example, owed as much to Palmer’s *A Cornfield by Moonlight, with the Evening Star*, then in Kenneth Clark’s collection, as it did to the remote west Pembrokeshire landscape, or to what one contemporary critic called “spiritual agony [and] suffering of a society at war”. But to generalize from Sutherland’s point, we might assert that significant artists (British or otherwise) are always rooted in their own immediate environment and its traditions, in conscious and unconscious ways, but also responsive to wider, international stimuli, whether or not because of an émigré background. Sylvester’s observation about compromise seems a crude caricature. Interesting art tends to be invested in a more complex sense of identity than the simplistic “them and us” polarities that prevail elsewhere (for example, politics). And in relation to the individual we often need to allow for the possibility of at least “dual nationality”: an artist’s perceived personal and artistic roots might be both British and English/Scottish/Cornish/Jewish/West Indian/Romanian (Home Counties Sutherland gets claimed as Welsh for his reliance on Pembrokeshire motifs).



Figure 23.

Graham Sutherland, *Black Landscape*, 1939-40, oil paint and sand on canvas, 81 × 132.1 cm, Tate Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2015, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 licence (Unported)

Following Gombrich's remark about art in general, we might say there is no such thing as (quintessentially) British art; there are only "British" (in whatever qualified sense) artists who, in the production of their work, draw upon a cluster of self-identifications (positive and negative), and respond to a complex array of points of reference, influences, and determinants (cultural, social, educational, genetic), both long- and short-term. We are left with one all-purpose question: how, where (if anywhere), and why did some particular sense of British identity or tradition enter into the making or reception of specific works of art? For British, one could substitute all sorts of other things, which might or might not be more interesting in specific cases. Artists are indeed affected by things which come to them from all over the place. They absorb what they need at a given time. The devil, as always, is in the detail.

Response by

Adrian George, Curator, Government Art Collection, UK

Adrian George, Deputy Director and Senior Curator of the Government Art Collection, joins the debate with a filmed response that reflects on his own position as a curator and draws on varied works from the Collection.



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 24.

Response by Adrian George, Deputy Director & Senior Curator, Government Art Collection.,

Response by

Margarita Cappock, Head of Collections, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane

“The history of the Hugh Lane Gallery neatly encapsulates the conundrum of Ireland’s relationship with Britain.”

In the course of my writing this conversation piece, a controversy erupted concerning the use of the term “British” in an Irish context. It concerned the appropriation, by Sky journalist Richard Suchet, of Irish actress Saoirse Ronan as British, and reference that she was “one of our own” because she was from “the British Isles”—a claim, Suchet went on to suggest, that should be taken as “a compliment”. The ensuing furore both in printed and social media aptly demonstrates how the use of the word “British”, in an Irish context, can be both a maligned and loaded term. It demonstrates how Anglo-Irish relations can still be marked by a sense of condescension (albeit benign), and resultant indignation. As one of the oldest historical territories of Britain, Ireland’s relationship with its neighbour is complex. British rule had drastic effects on Ireland’s language, ethnicity, faith and class system. Whilst in the past, British colonialists insisted on the absolute and hierarchical difference between themselves and the Native Irish, the idea that today, when it concerns successful Irish people, they can be neatly subsumed into British identity is anathema to many Irish people and provokes a visceral response.

When it comes to the question of British art, and of who can be classified as a British artist, from an Irish perspective this is controversial. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, British art was dominated by successful foreigners. But from the 1730s Hogarth flourished and became a dominant figure, followed by Gainsborough, Reynolds, Turner, Constable and Blake—each of whom ranks among the most original geniuses of British art. However, if we go solely by nationality, two of the great British history painters, James Barry and Daniel Maclise, were both Irish-born. The three towering figures of twentieth-century British figurative painting, Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach and Francis Bacon, were all born outside Britain. Yet all these artists fall within the category of British art. In an era of globalisation and multiculturalism, is the use of the label “British art” anachronistic? Does it promulgate a sense of exclusivity rather than inclusivity? Undoubtedly, the question prompts a contentious debate, but can it not also be a progressive one that encourages us to explore the contemporary importance of national boundaries and identities in terms of art? One important and positive step is the acknowledgement of a nation’s complex history, and open debate and discussion in forums such as this are to be welcomed.



Figure 25.

Photograph of Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Dublin, Digital image courtesy of Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Dublin

The history of the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, neatly encapsulates the conundrum of Ireland's relationship with Britain. And given the current arrangement of the 39 Lane paintings shared with the National Gallery, London, it is one that still resonates. The founder, Hugh Lane (1875–1915) was born in Ireland, brought up in Britain and lived in London, where he became a highly successful art dealer and collector. Lane embarked on a mission to provide access for the Irish public to international art and to promote a distinctive school of Irish art. In late 1904, he offered his art collection to the city of Dublin and garnered the support of an eclectic group of individuals, including nationalists, unionists, artists, poets, journalists and scientists, to assist in the foundation of a gallery of modern art. Lane received a knighthood in the King's Birthday Honours in 1909 for his services to Irish art. When the gallery opened in temporary premises in 1908, it was grouped by school—Room I was “Irish Painters (by birth or descent)” and Room II “British School”. This arrangement was significant given that it predated Ireland becoming an independent state in 1922.

One of the most significant acquisitions of recent times is the studio of the Dublin-born artist Francis Bacon. It has inevitably raised the question of whether Bacon is an Irish or British artist. Since 2006 the gallery has also had a permanent display of paintings by Sean Scully. He was also born in Dublin, but left Ireland at the age of four when his family emigrated for financial reasons. Whilst Scully spent his formative years in England, he strongly

asserts his Irish identity. Conversely, the collection also includes British artists who have settled in Ireland, such as Nick Miller, Hughie O'Donoghue and Barrie Cooke.

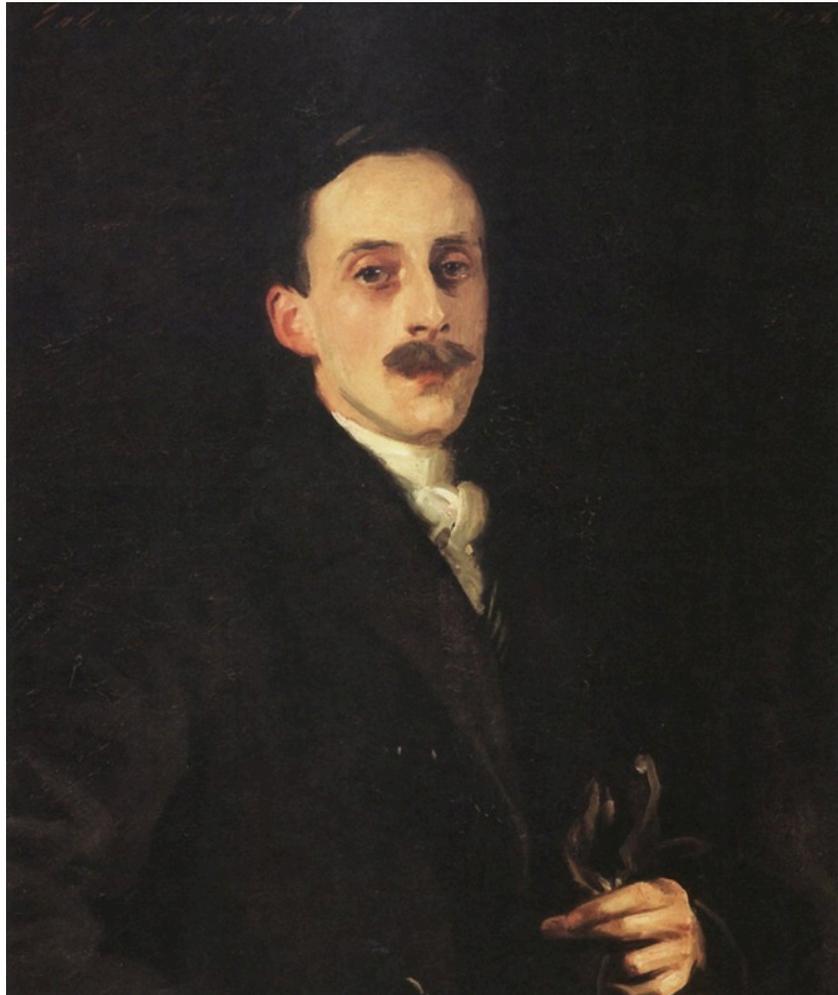


Figure 26.

John Singer Sargent, Hugh Lane, 1906, oil on canvas, 74.3 × 62.2 cm, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Dublin. Digital image courtesy of Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane

A recent exhibition of the work of the father of British Pop Art, Richard Hamilton, and his partner, Rita Donagh, at the Hugh Lane Gallery highlights the independence of thought of some artists, regardless of nationality. "Civil Rights etc." was to be Hamilton's final exhibition. Both artists tackled the difficult subject of Northern Ireland, but whilst Donagh has Irish roots, Hamilton was an English artist looking at Ireland from outside. His iconic work The Citizen (1981-83, Tate Collection) is based on an image of a prisoner on a 'dirty protest' in the Maze (Long Kesh) prison in Northern Ireland. In this case, the artist's emotional response to a situation overrides neat categorisation.

It is tempting to subscribe to Whistler's statement, "There is no such thing as English art. You might as well talk of English mathematics! Art is art and mathematics is mathematics." To my mind, it is more interesting to question and debate the character of British art, rather than come to narrow definitions. It can be explorative rather than definitive, inclusive rather than exclusive in scope.

Response by

Lubaina Himid,

“To understand British art as an artist, learn to know your place.”

There is certainly such a thing as British art; it is contained and restrained, boxed and categorised but not fixed; still fluid.

To understand British art as an artist, learn to know your place. It is certainly fashioned on the British class system but is not an exact model. There are artist equivalents of self-assured aristocrats, military men, visiting diplomats, society women, all of whom seem to know each other and who can often be seen gently, easily moving to and fro, encouraging and reassuring each other.

There are thousands of busy and eager-to-please strivers, making marvellous work of quality but who must earn their living supporting the intricate infrastructures hidden in the corridors of power.

Then there are the artist equivalents of the desperate, the homeless and the poorly educated, who have never been taught that all is not what it seems. They do not know that critics, curators and collectors are human beings who form friendships with artists; who sometimes go on holiday together, have dinner together and live in the same streets in the same cities.

British art is fully able and happy to be critical of the questionable political structures and falsely constructed art histories which underpin it. At the same time it rewards and seeks to celebrate an entitlement of belonging. An acceptable art work may demonstrate a sophisticated awareness of both the inevitable magnificence and unavoidable hysteria of work made anywhere else.

British Art is slightly flawed, casually disciplined, still and patient, hard-working with plenty of sweat and dirt, grey and brown. Greys: warm and light infused with yellow, or dark and icy with blue running through. Browns: laced with burgundy, or verging on green or leaning softly on the edge of orange.

British Art speaks English well and acknowledges the importance of English literature and history, the Scottish and Welsh landscape, German classical music, French food and wine, Italian ice cream and architecture, Spanish painters, Brazilian heat, American men and Irish hospitality.

There is within it, a few of us think, some potential room for manoeuvre.

Footnotes

- 1 See T. A. Heslop, "St Anselm and the Visual Arts at Canterbury Cathedral, 1093-1109", in *Medieval Art, Architecture & Archaeology at Canterbury*, ed. A. Bovey (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2013), 204-16.
- 2 The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon, 6 September 1828.
- 3 "British Artists: Their Style and Character", *Art Journal* 1 (Sept. 1855): 253-55.
- 4 Gustav Metzger, "Auto-Destructive Art", London, 4 Nov. 1959, in *Auto-Destructive Art: Metzger at AA* (London: Destruction/Creation, 1965).
- 5 See, for example, Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013).
- 6 Griselda Pollock, "The Politics of Theory", in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Pollock (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 12.
- 7 David Sylvester, "Sickert", *New Statesman*, 4 June 1960; reprinted in *About Modern Art: Critical Essays, 1948-2000* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 152-57.



“A beautiful assemblage of an interesting nature” : Gainsborough’s *Charity Relieving Distress* and the Reconciliation of High and Low Art

Georgina Cole

Abstract

In the competitive environment of the eighteenth-century London art scene, Thomas Gainsborough and Sir Joshua Reynolds were often perceived as great rivals. While they shared patrons, sitters, and a stake in the future of British art, their differing artistic approaches caused considerable friction, indeed Gainsborough seceded from the Royal Academy of Art in 1784, boycotting its exhibitions and activities. This essay, however, argues that Gainsborough’s Charity Relieving Distress, painted in the year of his secession, proposes a charitable resolution of their aesthetic attitudes. The complex interrelation of allegorical and anecdotal form is interpreted as a pictorial attempt to reconcile their approaches through the concept of charity, a virtue of powerful artistic lineage in the western tradition, and of contemporary social importance.

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the two anonymous peer review readers for their suggestions, which substantially clarified the writing and direction of this piece. Sincere thanks to Michael Hill and Jennifer Milam for reading early drafts of this essay and their always insightful commentary. The excellent resources and wonderful scholars at the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven, CT, also contributed to the development of this paper; many thanks especially to Jonny Yarker and Rosie Ibbotson for their conversation and encouragement.

Cite as

Georgina Cole, "'A beautiful assemblage of an interesting nature" : Gainsborough's *Charity Relieving Distress* and the Reconciliation of High and Low Art", *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/gcole>



Figure 1.

Thomas Gainsborough, *Charity Relieving Distress*, 1784, oil on canvas, 98 × 76.2cm. On display at Gainsborough's House. Digital image courtesy of Gainsborough's House

In 1784, the celebrated painter Thomas Gainsborough did two remarkable things: he seceded from exhibitions of the Royal Academy of Arts, and he painted *Charity Relieving Distress* (fig. 1). Although invited to join the Academy as one of its inaugural members in 1768, Gainsborough's relationship with the institution and its president, Sir Joshua Reynolds, was both distant and conflicted. From 1773 to 1776 he boycotted its yearly exhibitions, complaining of the way his paintings were displayed, and in April 1784, after another quarrel with the hanging committee, withdrew all his works from the exhibition.¹ For the next three years, Gainsborough absented himself from the Academy's operations and showed his works, not at the official, annual exhibitions at Somerset House, but privately in his painting room at Schomberg House, Pall Mall.² The press followed the row with alacrity, contributing to the public perception of Gainsborough's temperamental eccentricity, and the rivalry between him and Reynolds.³

While the dispute was ostensibly over the placement of his portraits of the royal family, it can also be read as the culmination of Gainsborough's long-standing ambivalence towards the authority of the institution and its ideas about art. Exhibited at Schomberg House three months after his much-publicized break with Britain's first, and much awaited, crown-chartered institution of art, *Charity Relieving Distress* may be interpreted in relation to Gainsborough's complex relation to its theoretical programme. Through subject, compositional structure, and iconography, it challenges the hierarchy of artistic modes adopted by the fledgling institution. In place of political invective, however, *Charity Relieving Distress* seems to propose, through the deliberate interrelation of allegorical and anecdotal forms, a charitable resolution between the higher and lower genres of painting as they were set forth in Reynolds's *Discourses*.

Painted in luminous glazes and rich colour, *Charity Relieving Distress* depicts a young woman dispensing food to a ragged family in front of a townhouse. On the stairs below the group, a solitary male figure looks on with admiration at the spectacle of benevolence, and on the left hand side, a third woman is seated on the ground by a loaded mule. The house, forming an architectural backdrop to the event, is ornamented with vines and doves roost on its eaves, and the whole scene is suffused with light from the upper left, which bathes the figures in golden evanescence. In subject and style, *Charity Relieving Distress* is an idealized image of private and spontaneous benevolence, in which the wealthy share the excesses of the table with those in need. What we see today, however, is but a fragment of the original work, which was significantly cut down sometime in the nineteenth century.⁴ A copy made after the original by the artist's nephew and apprentice, Gainsborough Dupont (ca. 1784; [fig. 2](#)), as well as a mezzotint by Richard Banks Harraden published in 1801, more than a decade after Gainsborough's death ([fig. 3](#)), reveal that the painting was initially much larger, with a more extensive compositional and iconographical programme. The act of charity was specifically located within the doorway of the house, which, decorated with an ornate pediment and a crest, was once an imposing motif.⁵ Beside it, two finely dressed young women, presumably daughters of the house, were placed as additional spectators to the giving of alms. On the left-hand side, a large archway balanced the open door, and the loaded mule was driven through it by a bowed figure mounted on a donkey, past the woman seated on the ground.⁶ Conferring religious approbation on charitable giving, a square-towered Gothic church presided over the scene.



Figure 2.

Gainsborough Dupont, *Charity Relieving Distress*, circa 1784, oil on canvas, 127.6 × 102.2 cm. Collection of Indianapolis Museum of Art. Digital image courtesy of Indianapolis Museum of Art



Figure 3.
Richard Banks Harraden, *Charity Sympathizing with Distress*,
1801, mezzotint, 59.6 × 42.8 cm. Gainsborough's House,
Sudbury Digital image courtesy of Gainsborough's House

When the painting was exhibited at Schomberg House in July 1784, Henry Bate-Dudley, champion of Gainsborough and editor of the *Morning Herald*, catalogued these details, providing a useful description of the painting:

This picture consists of an elegant building, in one of the approaches to which, is an ascent of steps, and at a distance an arch, through which a loaded mule is passing. The principal objects are a beggar-woman, who is receiving relief from a female servant belonging to the house. The beggar has an infant in her arms, and one on her back, and is also surrounded by others: some of whom, appear terrified at a dog who will not suffer their approach to the House.— Two children, on the steps of the door are represented making observations on the circumstance. A very

fine summer sky is introduced. A vine is represented against the side of the house; several pigeons also are described fluttering about the building. The whole of which forms a beautiful assemblage of an interesting nature.⁷

Bate-Dudley itemizes many of the components of Gainsborough's painting, and is an important guide for the modern viewer. Some details, however, seem to be hastily observed, or only vaguely remembered. The charitable woman is called a servant, but the similarity of her clothing to that worn by the young ladies in the doorway, as well as her proximity to them, suggest she could well be a member of the wealthy family. Moreover, Harraden's mezzotint was dedicated to "the Nobility and Gentry, Whose Humane exertions are employed in alleviating the distresses of the Poor", interpreting the benevolent young woman as a member of the family to whom the house belongs.⁸ In addition, the dog that seemed so threatening crouches in a pose of friendly interest characteristic of Gainsborough's paintings, and the children pay him little attention.

Despite these discrepancies, Bate-Dudley's description of the painting as a "beautiful assemblage of an interesting nature" evokes the original complexity of Gainsborough's picture, and allows one to broach the work's sophisticated narrative and aesthetic meanings. By way of his review, Dupont's copy, and Harraden's print, the compositional and iconographical programme of Gainsborough's painting may be reconstructed and interpreted, particularly in connection to debates about the nature and future of art in Britain. Through the elaborate architectural setting, especially the use of doorways and threshold spaces, Gainsborough's painting aligns with contemporary conceptions of charity as a form of benevolent exchange, a mediating disposition that forms ideal relationships between individuals and allows access to the heavenly realm. Furthermore, through the self-conscious mixing of allegorical and anecdotal forms, the idea of charity as a mediating social virtue is extended to issues of aesthetic politics; indeed, the painting seems to offer the prospect of a benevolent reconciliation between high and low forms of art.

This argument builds upon Martin Postle's ingenious realization that in painting the beggar family, Gainsborough drew on Reynolds's personification of Charity for the New College Chapel window at Oxford University.⁹ While Postle used this identification to stress the religious meanings of Gainsborough's painting, I would like to add a further layer of interpretation by suggesting that Gainsborough depicts two figures of charity: an allegorical one and an anecdotal one, which, in their benevolent encounter, propose a

charitable reconciliation between the general and the particular, the visual vocabularies of history painting, promoted by Reynolds, and the “fancy picture” genre popularized by Gainsborough.¹⁰

Though the competitive relationship between Reynolds and Gainsborough has been widely addressed, this article examines the ways in which Gainsborough negotiated the theoretical principles espoused by the president in his own art practice.¹¹ It identifies a distinctly pictorial attempt by Gainsborough to reconcile their divergent approaches through the concept of charity, a virtue of powerful artistic lineage in the western tradition, and of contemporary social importance. This approach is indebted to the interpretative framework of Gainsborough scholars Ann Bermingham, Michael Rosenthal, and Amal Asfour and Paul Williamson, who have examined his oeuvre in relation to questions of aesthetic ideology and contemporary sociability.¹² Bermingham’s important exhibition and book, *Sensation and Sensibility: Viewing Gainsborough’s Cottage Door* (2005), which included essays by Rosenthal and Asfour and Williamson, considered the Cottage Door paintings as ambitious, emotive subject pictures that challenged conventions of public art and academic tradition and contributed to the visualization of the modes of seeing and feeling specific to sensibility.¹³ Indeed, Bermingham and Rosenthal’s contributions to this book are part of a long-standing exploration of the modernity of Gainsborough’s art, its critical position in relation to the civic humanist tradition of academic art theory, its engagement with contemporary culture, and its response to a growing middle-class audience.¹⁴

The present article likewise takes *Charity Relieving Distress* as visual evidence of Gainsborough’s attitudes to academic painting and his own ambitions for the direction of British art.¹⁵ Despite the charm of the painting’s subject, and its fanciful combination of buildings and figures, it has a very real message that relates pointedly to the hierarchy of forms established in Reynolds’s *Discourses on Art*.¹⁶ In adopting the charitable imagery of contemporary morality, Gainsborough’s painting deliberately stages a reconciliation of the allegorical and the observed, offering an “argument in paint” for a composite formulation of morally serious art fitted to a commercial and benevolent age.¹⁷

Charity on the threshold

Charity was a crucial subject and practice in the development of eighteenth-century British art. It was the basis of one of the earliest, semi-public exhibitions of painting and sculpture in London, at Thomas Coram’s Foundling Hospital in 1747, a key attempt, led by William Hogarth, to foster a

national, modern school. The exhibition was designed to attract patrons to the institution (and the exhibiting artists) and mingled the display of art with the humanitarian culture of charitable giving. It also provided an opportunity to show ambitious art on religious themes in the absence of patronage from the Church or state.¹⁸ Hogarth, Francis Hayman, Joseph Highmore, and James Wills contributed large-scale biblical subjects on charitable themes, and John Michael Rysbrack sculpted an allegory of Charity and a marble frieze. Gainsborough himself contributed a roundel of the building to the exhibition, early evidence of his association with the St Martin's Lane Academy and the empirical, modern approach to painting advocated by Hogarth, Hubert Gravelot, and Hayman.¹⁹

Charity remained, in the latter half of the century, one of the most enduringly popular subjects of British art. From the 1760s on, remarkable numbers of paintings and prints on charitable themes were exhibited at the Society of Artists and the Royal Academy.²⁰ Edward Penny's *The Marquis of Granby giving Alms to a Sick Soldier and his Family* (1764; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1765, proved so successful that he made three autograph versions and marketed a mezzotint engraved by Richard Houston.²¹ Paintings of charity were also exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts by Johann Zoffany, who showed his *Beggars on the Road to Stanmore* in 1771 (private collection), and Penny's student, William Redmore Bigg, who was praised for his sentimental scenes of benevolence, such *Schoolboys Giving Charity to a Blind Man*, exhibited in 1780 (location unknown), and *A Lady and Her Children Relieving a Cottager* of 1781 (Philadelphia Museum of Art).²² These paintings and prints answered the call for moralizing imagery made by critics such as Vicesimus Knox, who argued in his *Essays* of 1778 that painting, by depicting benevolent acts, "may be rendered something more than an elegant mode of pleasing the eye and the imagination; it may become a very powerful auxiliary of virtue".²³ In their idealized depictions of benevolence to the deserving poor, these accessible portraits and fancy pictures mobilized the everyday for the purposes of moral edification and sentimental satisfaction.²⁴

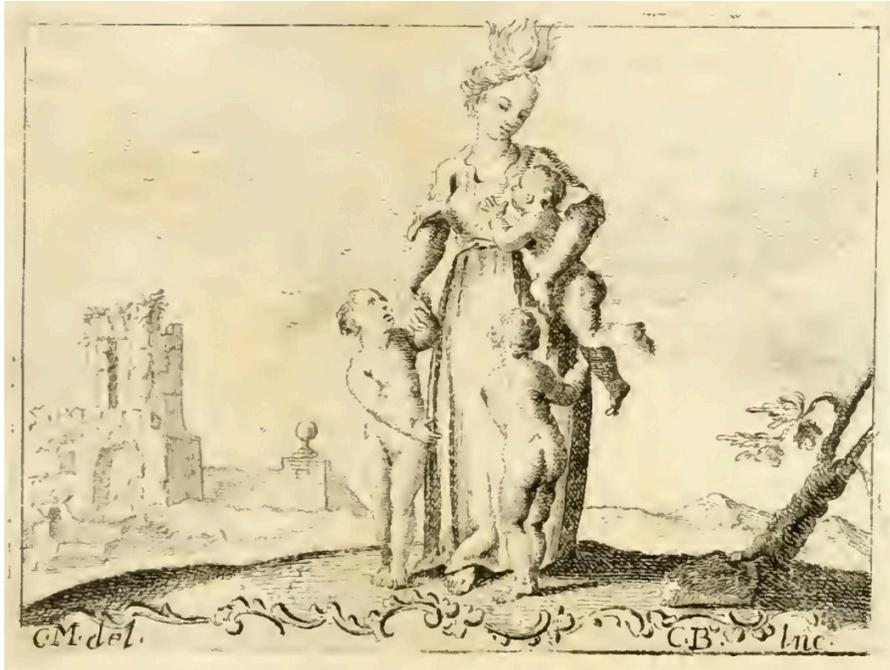


Figure 4.

Cesare Ripa, *Carità* from *Iconologia*, Padua, 1611, 72 Digital image courtesy of The Warburg Institute

In depicting the giving of alms in everyday situations with recognizable contemporary figures, paintings by Penny, Zoffany, and Bigg revised the allegorical image of Charity that dominated the old-master tradition. Charity, in allegorical guise, was traditionally represented as a breast-feeding mother embracing two children.²⁵ According to Cesare Ripa's influential compendium of allegories and personifications, *Iconologia* of 1611, the children represent Faith and Hope, who Charity nurtures, and the image forms a Christian allegory of maternal and divine devotion (fig. 4).²⁶ The allegorical image of Charity was well represented in English collections at mid-century; an Anthony van Dyck *Charity* (ca. 1627-8; fig. 5), which depicts a woman in red robes embracing several children, was in the collection of the Earl of Lonsdale by 1763, and the Duke of Devonshire possessed Carlo Cignani's *Charity* (private collection), which was engraved by Simon Ravenet after a drawing by John Hamilton Mortimer in the same year.²⁷

While the allegorical tradition continued to inform eighteenth-century paintings of charity, as the example of Reynolds will attest, on the whole, benevolence was increasingly represented in terms of contemporary British experience. This contemporary reworking of the theme can be linked to the influence of Hogarth's pioneering "modern moral subjects". This "intermediate species of subjects", drawn from the common incidents and customs of urban life, mingled the strategies of comic Northern genre painting and the high moral seriousness of classicist history painting to

“entertain and improve the mind”.²⁸ While eschewing the satire of Hogarth’s approach, modern painters of charity from the 1760s onwards, Gainsborough included, took advantage of his re-invention of moralizing subjects by using the familiar spaces and figures of contemporary British life. Indeed these paintings of everyday benevolence can be connected to the increasing importance of “social” virtues in contemporary British society and what John Barrell has termed the “attenuation” of the discourse of civic humanism in moral philosophy and art. Aimed at an audience of private individuals, modern charitable subjects promoted the softer virtues of an increasingly commercial age, such as generosity, kindness, amiability, liberality, and compassion.²⁹ In representing civil ideals of humanity and benevolence, pictures of charity could in this sense atone, at least at the level of representation, for the deleterious social effects of commerce and industrialization.³⁰

Artists were thus responding in pictorial ways to the contemporary interest in the practice of almsgiving and the moral virtues of compassion and benevolence.³¹ As Samuel Johnson rather drily put it, “no sooner is a new species of misery brought to view, and a design of relieving it professed, than every hand is open to contribute something, every tongue is busied in solicitation, and every art of pleasure is employed for a time in the interest of virtue.”³² Charity is in many ways the primary social virtue of the eighteenth century, enshrined as a Christian duty, a social necessity, and a demonstration of sympathetic feeling. In 1752, Henry Fielding claimed it to be “the very characteristic of this Nation at this Time”. “I believe”, he wrote, “we may challenge the whole World to parallel the Examples which we have late given of this sensible, this noble, this Christian Virtue.”³³ Johnson, in a 1758 edition of *The Idler*, rather agreed, conceding, “the present age, though not likely to shine hereafter among the most splendid periods of history, has yet given examples of charity, which may be very properly recommended to imitation.”³⁴ The moralist Hannah More crowned the century as “the Age of Benevolence” in 1791, affirming the popular conception of Britain as a charitable nation.³⁵



Figure 5.

Studio of Anthony van Dyck, *Charity*, ca. 1630s, oil on canvas, 141.9 × 105.4 cm. Dulwich Picture Gallery, London Digital image courtesy of Trustees of Dulwich Picture Gallery, London

This atmosphere of self-congratulation was in some measure justified by the unusual provisions made for the poor in English law and the rise of humanitarian institutions. Unique in Europe, England possessed a parish-based, tax-funded structure of relief for the destitute.³⁶ In addition, rising numbers of “associated charities” were founded to assist particular groups of needy individuals.³⁷ Inspired by the success of the joint-stock economic enterprise, many entrepreneurial Britons took part in philanthropic ventures funded by private subscription and managed by committee.³⁸ Charities such as the Foundling Hospital, chartered in 1739 to house, feed, and educate “exposed and deserted young children”; the British Lying-In Hospital “for delivering poor married women”, established in 1749; and the Magdalen House “for the reception of reformed and penitent prostitutes”, founded in 1758, complemented and critiqued the provisions of the poor laws,

generating a modern humanitarian culture that mingled personal benevolence with a sense of public duty.³⁹ Eschewing traditional notions of aristocratic benevolence, charity in the eighteenth century was increasingly the purview of a morally anxious middle class that aimed to improve the health and condition of the distressed, and fortify moral virtue.⁴⁰

Rather than a simple matter of giving alms, however, charity in the eighteenth century was also understood as an ideal relationship between oneself and one's fellows. Summing up its many personal and social manifestations, the popular Presbyterian preacher Dr Hugh Blair described charity as:

the comforter of the afflicted, the protector of the oppressed, the reconciler of differences, the intercessor for offenders. It is faithfulness in the friend, public spirit in the magistrate, equity and patience in the judge, moderation in the sovereign, and loyalty in the subject.⁴¹

As Blair suggests, charity is a disposition of generosity and compassion that permeates all levels of social life and establishes a contract of reciprocity between the enfranchised and those in need. Joseph Addison said as much in 1711, when he wrote in *The Spectator* that charity was the practical application of "Good-Will or Benevolence, in the Soul", and that "Gifts and Alms are the Expressions, not the Essence of this Virtue."⁴² Voicing a similar attitude, Johnson, in the first edition of his *Dictionary of the English Language*, defined the primary meanings of charity as "tenderness; kindness; love", and "goodwill; benevolence; disposition to think well of others", putting "liberality to the poor" and "alms, relief given to the poor" as the last of his definitions of the term.⁴³ Blair, Addison, and Johnson suggest that charity in the eighteenth century entailed a mode of being as well as an act of giving. The Christian virtue of charity constituted love—for God, and for one's neighbour.⁴⁴ As the animating principle of Christianity, and foremost of Faith and Hope among the three Christian virtues, Charity formed an ideal attitude of openness to the plight of others, and established the spiritual foundation for more practical forms of assistance.⁴⁵ In its more secular application, it was the love, kindness, and generosity that mediated and moderated relationships between self and other.⁴⁶

For Gainsborough, charity was a vital social virtue, inspired by his quickness of feeling for other human beings. Defending the state of his finances in a letter to his sister, Mary Gibbon, he insisted "as God is my Judge, I do what I do more from Charity and human feelings than my other Gratifications."⁴⁷

His biographer, Philip Thicknesse, confirmed his generosity, publishing accounts of his benevolence in the *St James's Chronicle* and his *Sketch of the Life and Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough* at his death in August 1788.⁴⁸

Recalling his attempts to secure a subscription for a gentlewoman and her child impoverished by the suicide of her husband, Thicknesse congratulated Gainsborough on his immediate and generous response, claiming that despite his tendencies as a "Humourist", his "susceptible mind and his benevolent heart, led him into such repeated acts of generosity".⁴⁹ In keeping with this biographical portrait, an obituary published in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1788 asked that a "tear be shed in affection for that generous heart, whose strongest propensities were to relieve the claims of poverty, wherever they appeared genuine!"⁵⁰ As a man with an "indisputed reputation of strong sensibility", charity was the necessary expression of Gainsborough's emotional sensitivity to the sufferings of others.⁵¹

Considered in this context, Gainsborough's *Charity Relieving Distress* appears to draw deliberately on the eighteenth-century practice and conception of charity. Firstly, in positioning the giving of alms at the doorway of the townhouse, the painting reflects the importance of doors as sites of benevolence in eighteenth-century London, as well as the idea of charity as an act of compassionate exchange. In a 1752 pamphlet on poverty and the poor laws, the clergyman Thomas Alcock included church doors among the sites at which mendicants accumulated. Beggars, he claimed, "take their stand at the Corners of Streets, or the Doors of Temples, at any public Places of Passage or Resort, in order to make their Distress more known, and move the Charity of Travellers, Passengers, or Worshippers, by a view of their pitiable case".⁵² Likewise, domestic doors were also popular places to petition for alms. In his *Covent-Garden Journal*, Fielding remarked upon the "immense numbers of beggars who frequent our streets, and are to be found at almost every door".⁵³ Traditionally, a woman or child would knock at the door of a house requesting money, employment, or some food. As Tim Hitchcock has shown, the ritual of knocking for charity and "charring" for alms survived undiminished into the eighteenth century.⁵⁴ In this sense, doors formed regular places for charity, sites of sometimes sudden and unsolicited contact between the affluent and the indigent. Forming thresholds between social classes and the spaces they inhabited, doors frequently demarcated an area in which rich and poor made contact through charitable exchange.⁵⁵

Gainsborough, however, expands the architectural iconography of charity by using doors and passageways to position the act of almsgiving in a larger in-between space. On the right-hand side of the scene, the door of the house opens into the interior of the wealthy abode, and on the left-hand side, an archway leads into the town. This area, framed by the two apertures, is

extended into a stage-like space. Elevated by the set of stairs and flanked by entrances and exits, it provides a kind of theatrical setting for the charitable act, replete with a seated audience member. Moreover, the paired doors and arches allow the mediating qualities of charity to be evocatively portrayed.

⁵⁶ Through this arrangement of figures and spaces, Gainsborough depicts the act of charity as an ideal exchange between social classes. Separated from the beggar family by the line of the stoep, the benevolent young woman reaches over this boundary to tip food into the upturned hat of the young boy.

On each side of this dividing line, different social spheres are constructed. Behind the beggar family, the mounted figure travelling through the archway and the indigent woman seated on the ground evoke the increasing movement of the poor as a result of the enclosure of commons and development of agrarian capitalism. ⁵⁷ In the doorway of the great house, the elegant pair by the balustrade represents the stability and comfort of privilege. Transgressing the line that distinguishes indigence from affluence, and public space from private property, the young woman makes contact with the poor family through her act of charity. Only she transcends the boundary between wealth and poverty, fortune and misfortune, connecting the two sides of the composition and momentarily uniting its opposed social groups. ⁵⁸ The whiteness of the plate directly between them additionally focuses the viewer's attention on this point of intersection, and the reaching arms of the standing girl and infant child, which mirror the outstretched curve of the young lady's arm, reinforce the physical contact taking place between giver and receiver. Her act of charity is thus represented as a gesture that transcends spatial and social boundaries.

Secondly, this moment of charitable contact is also extended metaphorically between earthly and heavenly domains. Fluttering about the eaves of the house, several doves roost and strut. A lone dove, however, has taken to the air and is captured with wings aloft, directly above the act of charity. Looking down upon the figural group, the dove seems to be transformed from an ordinary, ungainly pigeon into a suggestion of the Holy Spirit, positioned to crown the giving of alms as an act of divine virtue. ⁵⁹ Picked out in opaque greys and whites, this dove is more defined than its fellows, and the surrounding pentimenti indicate that Gainsborough took some care with its positioning. ⁶⁰ Illuminated by a clear, warm light, the dove is located above the infant in the woman's arms, who is made Christ-like by their alignment. Poised delicately over their heads, looking down on the exchange, the dove is the uppermost part of this central narrative group and invokes the religious approbation of charity, the presence of godliness in benevolence.

Through its iconography, Gainsborough's picture engages with the religious conception of charity as access to the spiritual world. Not only did charity mediate between self and other, but it was also imagined to form a link between the believer and the deity. As the Reverend Philip Barton told his congregation in 1736, "Charity unites us to God; it makes us a Part of the divine Image, and gives us the Resemblance of his Supreme Perfections." ⁶¹

Likewise, in a 1761 sermon, the Reverend Ebenezer Radcliff stressed the contact charity established between sinner and redeemer, preaching that charity "draws down the blessing of God upon our temporal concerns", and "brings us the nearest to the sublime character of the God of all perfection".

⁶² Charity thus formed a web of connection, both between humans on earth, and between the mortal and divine realms. ⁶³

Within Gainsborough's painting, the charitable act seems indeed to "draw down the blessing of God", creating a kind of spiritual contact between the mortal world and the heavenly realm. ⁶⁴ Here, both giver and receiver have a rough equivalence in terms of compositional structure; the benevolent giver is placed no higher than those she relieves, nor do the grateful beggars kneel to receive her bounty. Rather, it is the dove above their heads that takes precedence, and shows that Gainsborough's spatial hierarchy is not based upon the dictates of social class, but upon spiritual virtue. On this vertical axis, the dove invokes a connection between the unseen divine world above, and the earthly one below. Rising atmospherically into the clouds, the church tower in the background reinforces the dove's spiritual allusions. In Gainsborough's picture, the giving of alms to the distressed mediates horizontally between human beings and social spaces, and vertically between earthly virtue and divine reward.

Gainsborough's two charities

Gainsborough's construction of ideal, mediating relationships between social classes and between heaven and earth has, however, a further level of significance. The composition of the painting, its spatial motifs and iconographical references, not only gesture to charity's role as an ideal form of exchange between affluent and indigent, and the earthly and the divine, but also to its mediation of different approaches to the art of painting. Addressed in terms of eighteenth-century art theory, the painting can be viewed as an attempt to depict a compassionate and benevolent resolution between the visual vocabularies of history painting and the fancy picture. Alongside the dove, which shifts from being an ordinary pigeon into an image of the Holy Spirit, other figures in Gainsborough's painting take on powerful allegorical meanings. Recently, Postle has suggested that the mother draped with children, whom Bate-Dudley described as a "beggar woman", is in fact an allegorical figure of Charity. ⁶⁵ Postle founds this interpretation upon the

striking similarities between Gainsborough's figural group and Joshua Reynolds's *Charity* (ca. 1779; [figs. 6 and 7](#)), one of a number of Christian virtues designed for the New College Chapel window at Oxford University ([fig. 8](#)).⁶⁶ While the final product was to be painted directly onto the windowpanes by the glass painter Thomas Jervais, Reynolds did not waste the opportunity to exhibit his designs, working the panels up into finished paintings of the Christian virtues for the Royal Academy exhibition of 1779.⁶⁷



Figure 6. George Siegmund Facius after Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Charity*, 1781, stipple and etching print, 503 × 326 mm. British Museum, London Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 7.

Thomas Gainsborough, Charity Relieving Distress (detail), 1784, oil on canvas, 98 x 76.2cm. On display at Gainsborough's House. Digital image courtesy of Gainsborough's House



Figure 8.

Richard Earlom after Joshua Reynolds, *The West Window of the Chapel, New College Oxford*, 1785, engraving, 64.7 × 45.8 cm. British Museum, London Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

Reynolds here borrowed from the allegorical depiction of Charity in Renaissance and seventeenth-century art, in which she is personified as a woman nursing or embracing several children. The artist was well versed in this tradition; on his tour of Italy in 1752, he recorded seeing “a Charity by Guido” in the Pitti Palace, most probably Guido Reni’s *Charity*, of 1624–5 in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence (fig. 9), which includes the basic elements of Ripa’s model, showing a cloaked woman breastfeeding an infant and embracing another while a third leans over her shoulder.⁶⁸ As Francis Broun has shown, he also owned a small oil sketch on panel of part of a lost *Charity* by Van Dyck, either by Van Dyck’s hand or his own.⁶⁹ He made characteristic use of this model in his 1773 portrait of *Lady Cockburn and Her Three Eldest Sons* (fig. 10), showing a seated Augusta embracing her three young boys in a similar arrangement to that used by Van Dyck.⁷⁰ The

Cockburn painting may also have been modelled on a large Caritas drawing in ink by Jan de Bisschop (Morgan Library and Museum, New York) of a seated woman in an architectural setting surrounded by children that was in the artist's own collection.⁷¹ Drawing yet again upon this iconographic model, Reynolds's life-size personification of Charity for the New College window emphasizes its Christian and maternal aspects: against a swirling background of atmospheric clouds, a young woman holds an infant to her breast, clasps another around the middle, and looks tenderly down on a third who holds onto her waist and leans back to look up into her face.⁷²



Figure 9.

Guido Reni, *Charity*, 1624-5, oil on canvas, 116 × 90 cm. Palazzo Pitti, Florence Digital image courtesy of Palazzo Pitti, Florence via Wikimedia Commons. The reproduction is part of a collection of reproductions compiled by The Yorck Project. The compilation copyright is held by Zenodot Verlagsgesellschaft mbH and licensed under the GNU Free Documentation



Figure 10.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Lady Cockburn and Her Three Eldest Sons*, 1773, oil on canvas, 141.5 × 113 cm. National Gallery, London
Digital image courtesy of National Gallery via Wikimedia Commons, photograph belonging to and uploaded to the public domain by Arts639 on 28th April 2014



Figure 11.

Thomas Gainsborough, *A Study for Charity Relieving Distress*, black and white chalk on buff laid paper, 24.7 × 33.5 cm. Private Collection Digital image courtesy of Image courtesy of Sotheby's

While not so steeped in the allegorical tradition, Gainsborough's oeuvre also indicates an interest in the personification of Charity. An undated trois crayons drawing, probably from the 1780s, depicts a seated woman with three children of different ages, forming an intertwined figural group. Although the figures are in contemporary dress, the composition has a striking similarity to the allegorical Charity of art-historical tradition, which would have been familiar to Gainsborough, at the very least through Rysbrack's marble bas-relief for the Foundling Hospital.⁷³ In *Charity Relieving Distress*, however, the allegorical nature of the figure is beyond question, as is its emulation of Reynolds's work. Like Reynolds's *Charity*, Gainsborough's standing female figure is draped with children, although hers seem slightly younger: the child on her back and the baby in her arms are only infants. The small boy, hanging from his mother's waistband and holding his foot in the air, however, appears to have been lifted directly from Reynolds's painting. A preparatory drawing for *Charity Relieving Distress*, sold at auction in 2004, suggests that Gainsborough developed the figural grouping so that it emulated Reynolds's painting more closely (fig. 11). While the initial sketch depicts the same number of figures, they are more closely arranged, and the boy at the edge of the group only peeps around her skirts. In the final painting, he separated the children receiving alms from the mother and her infants and reworked the left-hand boy so that he leans back and kicks up his foot in the same manner as Reynolds's. Gainsborough's female figure has, however, a greater sensuality, revealing the hint of a

nipple, and she and her three children are more ragged. Their bare, dirty feet concede the actualities of the life of the poor and demonstrate their need, while the beauty of the mother and the grace of the children's deportment suggest they have been aestheticized for consumption within a genteel domestic interior. Despite these crucial differences, the basic vocabulary of Gainsborough's and Reynolds's figural groups is remarkably similar, and suggests a direct relationship between the two works.

Gainsborough would have had ample opportunity to see Reynolds's *Charity* when he presented it at the 1779 Academy exhibition, to which Gainsborough himself had contributed six works.⁷⁴ *Charity Relieving Distress* seems, in fact, to refer directly to Reynolds's figure, incorporating his allegorical image into an everyday scenario of spontaneous benevolence. Indeed, it is worth pointing out that the source of the boy's unusual pose in both paintings appears to be Raphael's Cartoon, *The Healing of the Lame Man* (ca. 1515-16; [fig. 12](#)), in which a nude boy in the foreground leans back and lifts his foot while tugging at the sash of one of the spectators.⁷⁵

Raphael's Cartoons were the epitome of high art in England; although ensconced at Hampton Court, they were highly visible to artists through James Thornhill's painted copies and Nicolas Dorigny's engravings, and were made the subject of various treatises espousing their virtues as models for aspiring artists.⁷⁶



Figure 12.

Raphael and workshop, *The Healing of the Lame Man*, ca. 1515-16, body colour on paper mounted on canvas, 342 × 536 cm. Royal Collection, London, on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Seeing Gainsborough's beggar woman as a personification of Charity, and as a deliberate quotation of the high-art tradition exemplified by Raphael and utilized in Reynolds's painting, has important implications for the painting's meaning and its relationship to eighteenth-century art theory. Indeed, it appears that Gainsborough presents two figures of charity here. The ragged woman lightly carrying her load of children epitomizes the allegorical, Christian, and maternal Charity of the high-art tradition, while the young woman in the door represents the particularized, individual almsgiving frequently depicted in British fancy pictures. From this point of view, it seems that the allegorical figure of Charity has brought the two additional children to the door, where they gratefully receive the alms that the young woman bestows. Two dimensions of charity are thus depicted: its generalized, allegorical conceptualization, and its everyday practice.

Reinforcing these differentiated, but complementary, forms of charity, the architectural elements of Gainsborough's painting correspond to their ideal and practical forms. Behind the personification of Charity, the church spire emphasizes her status as a visualization of one of the three Christian virtues; and, on the other side of the composition, the open door of the townhouse suggests the generous distribution of material wealth that ordinary benevolence entails. The paired figures of charity, and the paired apertures that allow access to the different edifices of benevolence, combine to form a composite image of charity that combines its ideal and everyday expressions. In this sense, Gainsborough's painting stages a moment of contact between the "general" and "particular" forms of representation that differentiate history painting from the lower genres in eighteenth-century British art discourse. From this perspective, *Charity Relieving Distress* offers an alternative approach to the hierarchy of pictorial modes that attempts to reconcile the putatively higher and lower forms of art.¹⁷

An aesthetic reconciliation

The discourse of general and particular forms was used by Reynolds to differentiate the best exemplars of painting, and the opposed visual vocabularies appropriate to history painting and the minor genres.¹⁸ In his *Discourses* Reynolds established his, and the institution's prerogative: to provide a system of art education that would elevate art and the status of artists to the highest possible level. In order to achieve this aim, sufficiently talented students were encouraged to dedicate themselves to the pursuit of general form and to the genre of history painting, traditionally viewed as the highest mode of art.¹⁹ While all art in Reynolds's theory is based upon imitation, the "great stile" of history painting is distinguished for its selective synthesis of particular observations to produce an ideal and unseen beauty. As the president put it, "the whole beauty and grandeur of the art consists . . .

. in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities and details of every kind.”⁸⁰ Through the combination of the best and most universal forms in nature and the study of the old masters (Reynolds recommends Raphael, Michelangelo, and the Carracci), the artist was to aim at producing an “idea of the perfect state of nature”.⁸¹ For Reynolds, general form presented a “true idea of beauty” and conferred an ennobling “intellectual dignity” upon the productions of art that would ensure their posterity and cultivation of public virtue.⁸²

Particular form, on the other hand, constituted a close observation of the varieties of things visible in nature. While general form depicted an ideal image of human action and beauty, carefully selected and composed, the particular was produced through the imitation of specific models. For Reynolds, it was epitomized by Dutch paintings by Adriaen van Ostade and Adriaen Brouwer, scenes that showed “people engaged in their own peculiar occupations; working, or drinking, playing or fighting”.⁸³ Dutch painting formed a paradigm of the particular for Reynolds, who concluded that the Dutch were “so far from giving a general view of human life, that they exhibit all the minute particularities of a nation differing in several respects from the rest of mankind”.⁸⁴ While Reynolds admits that the Dutch artists were “excellent in their own way”,⁸⁵ he encouraged his students to keep their “principal attention fixed upon the higher excellencies” and to practise producing the general form required for history painting.⁸⁶ In advancing the general over the particular, Reynolds aimed at promoting a universally elevating and ennobling form of art liberated from the dictates of fashion or other cultural specificities, and able to appeal to the apparently unchanging, abstract and universal principles of human nature.⁸⁷

Reynolds aligned general and particular form with a hierarchy of genres that elevated the “great style” of history painting and demoted the genres of portraiture, landscape, and the fancy picture. The generality of the subject matter conferred superiority upon the genre, hence, “a History-Painter paints man in general; a Portrait-Painter, a particular man, and consequently, a defective model.”⁸⁸ As a result, Reynolds advised students to take up “sufficiently general” subjects, such as “the great events of Greek and Roman fable and history”, which are “familiar and interesting to all Europe”, and “the capital subjects of scripture history, which, besides, their general notoriety, become venerable by their connection with our religion”.⁸⁹

Alternatively, the lower genres could be improved by borrowing from the methods of history painting, and to this end, Reynolds commended the use of allegorical figures in genres such as portraiture as appropriately general inclusions that will elevate the picture through allusion to grand and heroic ideas and concepts. Unlike allegorical poetry, which he found rather tedious,

Reynolds insisted that allegorical figures in painting could produce “a greater variety of ideal beauty, a richer, more various and delightful composition”, and create an opportunity to exhibit the artist’s skill.⁹⁰ As Reynolds’s *Charity* and *Lady Cockburn and Her Three Eldest Sons* attest, this was a method the president put to especial use.

Gainsborough’s invitation to join the Academy in 1768 put him in contact with the theoretical tradition of art espoused by Reynolds, and the ideological contrast it formed with his own practice generated considerable friction. Though characteristically evasive about the aims and meanings of his paintings, Reynolds’s prejudice in favour of the great style provoked occasional private outbursts from Gainsborough that reveal his ideas about the nature and role of art. In a 1773 letter to the painter William Hoare, who had sent him a copy of Reynolds’s fifth Discourse of 1772, in which the subject of general and particular forms continued, Gainsborough confided:

Betwixt Friends Sir Joshua either forgets, or does not chuse to see that his Instruction is all adapted to form the History Painter, which he must know there is no call for in this country . . . Every one knows that the grand Style must consist in plainness & simplicity . . . but Fresco would no more do for Portraits, than an Organ would please Ladies in the hands of Fischer; there must be Variety of lively touches and surprizing Effects to make the Heart dance.⁹¹

The evident incongruity of calls for generalized, elevated history painting with the demands of patrons for domestically scaled paintings of secular subject matter, and indeed with Gainsborough’s own empirical practice, which depicted the sensual and ornamental in landscape, likeness, and dress, appears to have troubled the artist, and curtailed expressions of his artistic ambitions. In a 1783 letter to architect William Chambers, describing his latest painting, *Two Shepherd Boys with Dogs Fighting* (ca. 1783; Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood) he attempted to distance himself from Reynolds’s lofty aims. Declaring himself without ambitions towards history painting, he wrote: “you know my cunning way of avoiding great subjects in painting & of concealing my ignorance by a flash in the pan.”⁹² These flippant remarks disguised, however, a deeper engagement with academic precepts, and submerged a current of thought that surfaced in his paintings.⁹³



Figure 13.

Thomas Gainsborough, *Diana and Actaeon*, ca. 1786, oil on canvas, 158.1 x 188 cm. Royal Collection, London Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection Trust / © HM Queen Elizabeth II 2015

Despite his protestations against history painting, Gainsborough's works of the 1780s betray a shift in attitude towards its style and subjects, and carefully incorporated a response to Reynolds's dictates.⁹⁴ Concluding his letter to Hoare, he claimed that "there is no other Friendly or Sensible way of settling these matters except on Canvass", and in his productions of the 1780s, it appears he did just that, by introducing deliberate, inconspicuous historical references into his paintings.⁹⁵ Indeed, the evidence of Gainsborough's only attempt at mythological painting, *Diana and Actaeon* (ca. 1784-6; [fig. 13](#)), started some time in 1784 (the same year as *Charity Relieving Distress*), confirms his interest in the possibilities of history painting, blending and blurring mythological subjects with his own idiosyncratic painterly style.⁹⁶ Furthermore, in a 1783 letter to William Pearce, Gainsborough claimed that his landscapes at the coming Royal Academy exhibition were to be mounted "in the great stile", undoubtedly an indication of his new artistic ambitions.⁹⁷

After numerous disputes with the hanging committee of the Academy exhibitions, Gainsborough seceded from the institution in April 1784 and, in this climate of artistic independence, appears to have taken up the axioms of

the Academy in complex and provocative ways.⁹⁸ *Charity Relieving Distress* was not included in the list of paintings due to have been exhibited that year at the Royal Academy, and given Gainsborough's rapidity of execution, it is conceivable that the painting was completed between his secession in April and its private showing on 26 July.⁹⁹ With its evident paraphrasing of Reynolds, *Charity Relieving Distress* can indeed be read as a response to the president's ideals, but rather than rancorous invective against the institution, it seems to propose an alternative relationship between the artistic modes classified by Reynolds that levels the hierarchy and reconciles the divergent impulses of theory and practice, history painting and fancy picture.¹⁰⁰

With Reynolds's *Discourses* in mind, it appears that *Charity Relieving Distress* takes up the academic doctrine of general and particular forms. In this sense, the painting gives us two versions of charity—one presented in a generalized, allegorical style, and the other, a particular instance of everyday benevolence appropriate to the fancy pictures that Gainsborough was creating at this time. Moreover, Gainsborough uses the contact established between the two figures through the act of almsgiving to provide a conciliatory connection between the pictorial traditions they represent. He brings these two figures together via the children they succour. Converging to assist the distressed, the two charities fulfil the spiritual and practical demands of compassion, and in so doing, combine the general and particular forms of representation that Reynolds had argued to be representative of the "great" and "inferior" styles of painting.¹⁰¹ Their contact thus reconciles the allegorical and the everyday, the visual vocabularies of history painting and the fancy picture. From this perspective, Henry Bate-Dudley was right to call this painting a "beautiful assemblage of an interesting nature", for Gainsborough's work is indeed a composite image that conjoins and connects both general and particular form.¹⁰²

The two figures of charity, expressive of the ideal and practical forms of benevolence, thus enact an encounter between the theoretical ideals of the Academy and Gainsborough's work in the fancy picture genre. Reynolds himself had advocated the practice of borrowing or quoting from classical art, either a "thought, an action, attitude or figure", and "transplanting it" into one's work. This borrowing, however, was to be motivated by rivalry: "he should enter into a competition with his model", claimed Reynolds, "and endeavour to improve what he is appropriating into his own work".¹⁰³ For Gainsborough, this reference to Reynolds's allegorical figure of Charity appears made not to compete with or outstrip him, but to propose a benevolent resolution between his theoretical, generalizing model of art, and Gainsborough's own dedication to the observable world.¹⁰⁴ In their amicable cooperation, the two charities suggest a peaceful meeting between the opposed artistic formulae, a desired reconciliation between allegory and

anecdote. Moreover, the compositional equality with which they are treated suggests a radical equivalence between the “great” style of history painting and the everyday aesthetic of the fancy picture. ¹⁰⁵

Charity Relieving Distress thus appropriates the visual vocabulary of history painting into the compositional “particularity” of the fancy picture; but rather than incorporating history’s techniques through *paragone*-style competition, *Charity Relieving Distress* appears to argue for their fundamental equality as different approaches to similar moral questions. ¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, this transposition takes place in Gainsborough’s characteristically shimmering brushwork. Transparent, layered glazes of paint add a luminous, scintillating quality to the formal clarity of the figural group. The looseness and mobility of successive strokes invites the spectator’s optical completion, opening up the painting to the imaginative participation of the viewer. This appeal to the viewer’s sensibility was considered inappropriate by Reynolds, who expressed misgivings about “the great latitude which indistinctness gives to the imagination, to assume almost what character or form it pleases”. ¹⁰⁷

Gainsborough’s sensual and virtuosic style elicits an interactive kind of beholding that insists not on the authority of the artist’s own vision, but on a visual and sentimental collaboration between work of art and viewer. ¹⁰⁸ As a result, the painting represents a desired rapprochement between general and particular form with a “Variety of lively touches and surprizing Effects” that truly “make the Heart dance”.

Gainsborough’s painting thus constructs three narratives of compassionate exchange: charity is at once represented as a moment of social contact between needy and benevolent, a spiritual connection between earthly virtue and heavenly reward, and lastly, as an ideal, conciliatory meeting between the emblematic and the everyday that ultimately enacts a resolution between high and low forms of art. While it is perhaps tempting to see this painting as gesturing towards the broader and more personal reconciliation that took place between Reynolds and Gainsborough over the latter’s deathbed in 1788, it is better understood as a commentary, not simply on their personal rivalry, but on the nature and future of art in Britain. ¹⁰⁹ In this sense it continues Hogarth’s legacy of the “intermediate species of subject” and ongoing negotiation and attenuation of the discourse of civic humanism. Mixing the allegorical and the anecdotal, the theories of the academy with the discourse on moral virtue, Gainsborough’s painting offered a new paradigm for painting that reconciled the divergent impulses of history painting and the fancy picture and levelled the hierarchy of general and particular forms. ¹¹⁰ Like his contemporary, Joseph Wright of Derby, whose paintings of scientific spectacles made similar use of the scale and pathos of history painting, Gainsborough’s late work provides a model for a morally serious art conceived for domestic display and viewing by a middle-class

audience. ¹¹¹ *Charity Relieving Distress* therefore constitutes a pictorial argument for a modern kind of art that combines the emblematic with the everyday, and which is embedded in the values and experience of a commercial and sentimental age.

Footnotes

- 1 William T. Whitley, *Thomas Gainsborough* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1915), 95–97, 212–20, and John Hayes, ed., *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 160.
- 2 In late 1787, Gainsborough began to rebuild his relationship with the Academy. Had he not died suddenly in August 1788, there is evidence to suggest he would have achieved a full reconciliation with the institution and its members. See Whitley, *Thomas Gainsborough*, 294–95, 306–7, and William Vaughan, *Gainsborough* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 146. When Reynolds delivered his fourteenth discourse in the form of a eulogy to Gainsborough, it was clear that he was considered one of the most significant members of the Academy.
- 3 *The Morning Herald*, owned by Gainsborough's friend, Henry Bate-Dudley, editorialized in support of Gainsborough, and *The Whitehall Evening Post* against him. See *The Morning Herald*, 23 April 1784, and *The Whitehall Evening Post*, 22–24 April 1784. A more impartial account was given in *The Morning Post*, 23 April 1784, 14.
- 4 Ellis Waterhouse notes that the painting was cut down to 30 x 39 in. (76.2 x 99 cm) from its original size of 49 x 39 in. (124.5 x 99 cm). See Waterhouse, *Gainsborough* (London: Spring Books, 1966), 120.
- 5 The print was made in 1801, either after Gainsborough's painting, or Dupont's copy. There is little available documentation on the provenance of *Charity Relieving Distress*. Waterhouse notes that it appeared in the Lord Robert Spencer sale of 1799 as an "Italian Villa". See Waterhouse, *Gainsborough*, 120.
- 6 Postle has intriguingly described this figure as a Catholic monk, in an interpretation of the potential non-conformist religious meanings of this painting. See Michael Rosenthal and Martin Myrone, *Gainsborough* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002), 232. Although this hooded figure bears some resemblance to a Catholic monk, it differs widely from popular satirical images of Catholics produced at the time. See John Miller, *Religion in the Popular Prints, 1600–1832* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986).
- 7 Henry Bate-Dudley, "A View of Mr. Gainsborough's Gallery", *Morning Herald*, 26 July 1784, 4.
- 8 Most modern accounts of this painting describe the charitable woman as a servant. See Michael Rosenthal, *The Art of Thomas Gainsborough: "A Little Business for the Eye"* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), 231, and Martin Postle, *Thomas Gainsborough* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002), 67. Close examination of this painting provides little evidence for her identification as a member of the working class, however.
- 9 Postle, *Thomas Gainsborough*, 67, and Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Subject Pictures* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 178–79.
- 10 On the genre of the fancy picture, see Martin Postle, *Angels and Urchins: The Fancy Picture in 18th-century British Art* (Nottingham: Djanogly Art Gallery, 1998), 5–8.
- 11 The personal and artistic relationships between Reynolds and Gainsborough have been the subject of numerous exhibitions and debates. See Homan Potterton, *Reynolds and Gainsborough* (London: National Gallery, 1976); Timothy Clifford, Antony Griffiths, and Martin Royalton-Kisch, *Gainsborough and Reynolds in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1978); and Oliver Millar, *Gainsborough and Reynolds: Contrasts in Royal Patronage* (London: Buckingham Palace, 1994).
- 12 Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740–1860* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986); Amal Asfour and Paul Williamson, *Gainsborough's Vision* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1999); Rosenthal, *Art of Thomas Gainsborough*.
- 13 Ann Bermingham, ed., *Sensation and Sensibility: Viewing Gainsborough's Cottage Door* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2005).
- 14 See Bermingham, Introduction to *Sensation and Sensibility*, 1–34, and Michael Rosenthal, "Gainsborough's Cottage-Doors: A Matter of Modernity", in *Sensation and Sensibility*, ed. Bermingham, 77–95.
- 15 My article is indebted to existing scholarship on Gainsborough's attitudes to art theory, such as Michael Rosenthal, "Gainsborough's *Diana and Actaeon*", in *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art, 1700–1850*, ed. John Barrell (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), 167–94; Michael Cole, "Gainsborough's Diversions", *Word & Image* 13, no. 4 (1997): 366–76; and Asfour and Williamson, *Gainsborough's Vision*, 226–75.
- 16 Reynolds's discourses were published within his own lifetime and collected into a single edition in 1797. All citations are to Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1988).
- 17 The idea of an "argument in paint" is drawn from Edgar Wind's important essay "Hume and the Heroic Portrait", where it is applied to an analysis of the relationships between philosophy and portraiture. Here I use it in relation to art theory and Gainsborough's visualization of an alternative formula for morally serious painting to that outlined by Reynolds. See Edgar Wind, *Hume and the Heroic Portrait: Studies in Eighteenth-century Imagery*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 3.

- 18 See David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-century England* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), ch. 5.
- 19 The important influence of Hogarth and the St Martin's Lane Academy on the formation of Gainsborough's art and aesthetic politics is explored by Rosenthal in *Art of Thomas Gainsborough*, 121-45. On Hogarth's empiricism, see Frédéric Ogée, "Je-sais-quoi: William Hogarth and the Representation of the Forms of Life", in *Hogarth: Representing Nature's Machines*, ed. David Bindman, Frédéric Ogée, and Peter Wagner (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2001), 71-84, and Michel Baridon, "Hogarth the Empiricist", in *The Dumb Show: Image and Society in the Works of William Hogarth*, ed. Frédéric Ogée (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1997), 191-202.
- 20 See E. D. H. Johnson, *Paintings of the British Social Scene: From Hogarth to Sickert* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 97, and Postle, *Thomas Gainsborough*, 67.
- 21 David H. Solkin, "Portraiture in Motion: Edward Penny's *Marquis of Granby* and the Creation of a Public for English Art", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1986): 1-23.
- 22 The press regularly singled Bigg out for praise. See "Continuation of an Account of the Paintings, &c. exhibited this year by the Royal Academy", *The Morning Chronicle*, 27 May 1780, 6; "The Painter's Mirror for 1781, No. IV", *The Morning Herald*, 8 May 1781, 2; and "Account of the Exhibition of Paintings &c. at the Royal Academy", *St James's Chronicle*, 5 May 1781, 4.
- 23 Vicesimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary*, 2 vols. (London: Charles Dilly, 1778), 1: 222.
- 24 For the representation of the "deserving poor" see John Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 214-20, and *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), 83-85.
- 25 For the evolution of this motif and its dissemination through northern Europe, see Edgar Wind, "Charity: The Case History of a Pattern", *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1, no. 4 (1938): 322-30.
- 26 See Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (1611; New York: Garland, 1976), 72. Postle argues for Reynolds's appropriation of Ripa's model, while Wind traces his use of the Charity allegory back to Michelangelo and Raphael. See Wind, "Charity", 323.
- 27 See Susan J. Barnes and others, *Van Dyck: A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings* (New Haven and London, Yale Univ. Press, 2004), 298; John Sunderland, *John Hamilton Mortimer: His Life and Works* (London: The Walpole Society, 1988), 123; and Wind, "Charity", 326-28.
- 28 William Hogarth, *Anecdotes of William Hogarth, Written by Himself* (London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1833), 8-9.
- 29 John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: "The Body of the Public"* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1986), 2-4.
- 30 Barrell argues "the upgrading of such virtues as 'humanity' and 'pity' was especially of benefit to the victors of the commercial system, who were offered thereby the consolation of engaging in private moral transactions with its victims." *Political Theory of Painting*, 60.
- 31 Postle, *Angels and Urchins*, 21-24.
- 32 Samuel Johnson, *The Idler*, 2 vols. (London: J. Newbery, 1761), 1: 20.
- 33 Fielding, *The Complete Works of Henry Fielding, Esq.: Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. W. E. Henley (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1967), 14: 185.
- 34 Johnson, *The Idler*, 1: 19.
- 35 Hannah More, *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (London: T. Cadell, 1791), 42.
- 36 See Michael Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1700-1850* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 447, and Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 9-13.
- 37 On the rise of voluntary charities in the eighteenth century, see Michael J. D. Roberts, "Head Versus Heart? Voluntary Associations and Charity Organisation in England, c.1700-1850", in *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform from the 1690s to 1850*, ed. Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 66-86.
- 38 See Ruth McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), vii-viii.
- 39 Donna Andrew, in her study of charities in eighteenth-century London, argues that the most successful institutions were those that combined compassion, patriotism, and mercantile interest in their rhetoric. See Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 71-74. On the growing humanitarianism of eighteenth-century philanthropic culture, see David Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1964), 14. On the Royal Humane Society, see Carolyn D. Williams, "'The Luxury of Doing Good': Benevolence, Sensibility, and the Royal Humane Society", in *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Roy Porter and Mary Mulvey Roberts (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 77-107.

- 40 Owen has described eighteenth-century British charity as modern humanitarianism—a collective effort that replaced erratic and feudal forms of aristocratic beneficence. See Owen, *English Philanthropy*, 12–13. Paul Langford describes the new kind of entrepreneurial, middle-class charitable individual in Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 482–84. Eighteenth-century clerics and commentators also argued that charity constituted an opportunity for moral reform—of both giver and receiver alike. See Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 42–43. According to Barrell, the middle classes had the most to gain from the promotion of social virtues such as charity to the level of public responsibility, as the confusion between public and private virtues minimized the difference between the enfranchised ruling classes and the unenfranchised, “private” members of society, and thus permitted the latter to participate in the cultural shaping of English society. See John Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*, 54–58.
- 41 Rev. Hugh Blair, “Charity”, in *Sentimental Beauties from the Writings of Dr. Blair* (London: John Wallis, 1798), 185.
- 42 Joseph Addison, “Of Charity”, in *Maxims, Observations and Reflections Divine, Moral and Political* (London: E. Curll, 1736), 5. From mid-century, moral philosophy, literature, and poetry placed an increasing emphasis on the role of sympathetic feeling in creating social formations, in day to day social intercourse as well as the reception of books and works of art. Paul Langford describes this as a “sentimental revolution”. See Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 463. On sensibility and its emphasis on emotive experience and response in literature, morality, and philosophy, see G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-century Britain* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 43 Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. (London: J. Knapton, 1751), vol. 1.
- 44 On universal love, or universal benevolence, see R. S. Crane, “Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the ‘Man of Feeling’”, *ELH* 1, no. 3 (1934): 209–11.
- 45 Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians verse 13 supplied the most widely used notion of Christian charity, and proved a popular sermon topic. For the Christian tradition of charity, see Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 13–22.
- 46 Deborah Valenze stresses the wider definition of charity beyond the giving of alms in “Charity, Custom and Humanity: Changing Attitudes Towards the Poor in Eighteenth-century England”, in *Revival and Religion Since 1700: Essays for John Walsh*, ed. Jane Garnett and Colin Matthews (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), 61.
- 47 Hayes, ed., *Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, 135.
- 48 See *St James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 16–19 August 1788.
- 49 Philip Thicknesse, *A Sketch of the Life and Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough, Esq.* (London, 1788), 41–42.
- 50 Obituary, *The Morning Chronicle*, 5 Aug. 1788, 4.
- 51 Obituary, *The Morning Post*, 5 Aug. 1788, 2. On Gainsborough’s religious beliefs and background, see Hugh Belsey, *Gainsborough’s Family* (Sudbury: Gainsborough’s House Society, 1988).
- 52 Thomas Alcock, *Observations on the Defects of the Poor Laws, and on the Causes and Consequence of the Great Increase and Burden of the Poor* (London: R. Baldwin, 1752), 28.
- 53 Fielding, *Complete Works*, 14: 82.
- 54 See Tim Hitchcock, “Begging on the Streets of Eighteenth-century London”, *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005): 486–87.
- 55 See Tim Hitchcock, “Begging on the Streets of Eighteenth-century London”, *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005): 486–87. Doors were also used metaphorically to describe compassion. The Anglican theologian Bishop Joseph Butler called compassion a “door” to one’s innermost feelings. See Joseph Butler, “Upon Compassion”, Sermon 5, in *Butler’s Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel and A Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue*, ed. T. A. Roberts (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), 51.
- 56 On the role of doors in eighteenth-century British scenes of charity, see Georgina Cole, “Painting the Threshold: Doors, Space and Representation in Eighteenth-century Genre Painting”, PhD thesis, Univ. of Sydney, 2010, 158–210.
- 57 Michael Rosenthal sees Gainsborough’s repeated depiction of peasants on the move in his paintings from the 1770s and 80s as a critique of the impact of enclosure on the “moral economy” of the countryside. See Rosenthal, “Gainsborough’s Cottage Doors”, 90, and *Art of Thomas Gainsborough*, 202–10.
- 58 Charity is performed here by women, who seem to be the sources of benevolence. This may be linked to what Asfour and Williamson have pointed out are dominant themes of nurture and nourishment in the Cottage Doors, which are likewise administered by women rather than men. See Amal Asfour and Paul Williamson, “Gainsborough’s Cottage-door Scenes: Aesthetic Principles, Moral Values”, in *Sensation and Sensibility*, ed. Bermingham, 97.
- 59 Rosenthal identifies the pigeon as an evocation of the Holy Spirit in *Art of Thomas Gainsborough*, 231, as does Postle, *Thomas Gainsborough*, 67. Gainsborough was not averse to allegorical spiritual allusions. Rosenthal examines other traces of religious iconography in “Gainsborough’s Cottage Doors”, 81–83. Asfour and Williamson have also analysed the broad, heterogeneous spirituality of Gainsborough’s work, particularly its connection to themes of the New Testament and the life of Christ. See Asfour and Williamson, *Gainsborough’s Vision*, 261–67.
- 60 The residual smears of lead white suggest that Gainsborough moved the dove slightly to the right, where it hovers directly above the infant child and standing little girl.
- 61 Philip Barton, *The Superiour Excellency of Charity. A Sermon Preach’d Before the Sons of the Clergy, at Their Anniversary-meeting in the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Thursday, Febr. 19, 1735* (London: T. Wotton, 1736), 9.
- 62 Ebenezer Radcliff, *The Charitable Man the Best Oeconomist, Patriot, and Christian. A Sermon Preached at St. Thomas’s, Southwark, On January the First, 1761* (London: J. Waugh, 1761), 5, 9. For Gainsborough’s religion, see note 47.

- 63 Andrew argues that charity itself constituted an act of devotion in the eighteenth century that demonstrated faith in God and salvation. See Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 15.
- 64 Rosenthal argues there are also religious allusions in Gainsborough's cottage doors. See "Gainsborough's Cottage Doors", 81.
- 65 See Postle in Rosenthal and Myrone, eds., *Gainsborough*, 232, and Postle, *Thomas Gainsborough*, 67.
- 66 Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 171-79.
- 67 Oil sketches of the same dimensions were also produced. The sketch for Charity is in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Stipple engravings of Reynolds's virtues, including Charity, which were printed in black-and-white and colour editions, were published by John Boydell in 1781.
- 68 Reynolds's sketchbook of his journey to Florence in 1752 is held in the British Museum, Ass. No. 296123001, British 201.a.10 PIIIb. His account of the Pitti Palace is on folio 24.
- 69 Francis Broun, "Sir Joshua Reynolds' Collection of Paintings", PhD thesis, Princeton Univ., 1987, 100-102.
- 70 See David Mannings and Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 137. Wind sees this as evidence of Reynolds's "witty" appropriations of old-master paintings. See Wind, "Charity", 328.
- 71 I am grateful to Donato Esposito for sharing this insight. On Reynolds's collection of old-master drawings, see Donato Esposito, Jenny Graham, and Cristina S. Martinez, ed. Sam Smiles, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Acquisition of Genius* (Plymouth: Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, 2009).
- 72 Reynolds was a subscriber to George Richardson's English version of Ripa's *Iconologia* of 1777, which included new plates of the allegorical images. See George Richardson, *Iconology; or, a Collection of Emblematical Figures*, 2 vols. (London: G. Scott, 1779).
- 73 See Clifford, Griffiths, and Roylton-Kisch, *Gainsborough and Reynolds*, 22. There is a similar sketch in black chalk heightened with white in the Morgan Library, dated ca. 1780-5. See Rosenthal and Myrone, *Gainsborough*, 228.
- 74 Numbers 98-103. See Algernon Graves, ed., *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their Work from its Foundation in 1769 to 1904*, 4 vols. (1905; New York: B. Franklin, 1972), 2: 192.
- 75 This figure was singled out for praise in the *The School of Raphael; or, the Student's Guide to Expression in Historical Painting* (London: John Boydell, 1759), 16.
- 76 See Arline Meyer, *Apostles in England: Sir James Thornhill and the Legacy of Raphael's Tapestry Cartoons* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1996), 17-81.
- 77 Gainsborough also quoted from the ancient and old-master tradition in the portrait of his daughters of 1763-4 (Gainsborough's House, Sudbury), which included a statuette of the Farnese Flora. See Belsey, *Gainsborough's Family*, 88. Gainsborough also showed an interest in religious iconography, which is discussed in Asfour and Williamson, *Gainsborough's Vision*, 228-68. The question of Gainsborough's literary ambitions remains a vexed one, but it now seems clear that his paintings reveal a greater intellectual ambition than his letters and biographers cared to admit. On Gainsborough's evasiveness, in prose and paint, see Cole, "Gainsborough's Diversions", 366-76.
- 78 Barrell argues that the discourse of general and particular form is the foundation of Reynolds's attitudes toward art. See *Political Theory of Painting*, 82-90, and Walter J. Hipple, "General and Particular in the *Discourses* of Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Study in Method", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 11, no. 3 (1953): 231-47.
- 79 Rensselaer Lee has described Reynolds as "a late and important exponent of humanistic doctrine". See Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1967), 68-69. For Reynolds's variations from humanist discourse, and the context of his interpretation of it, see Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*, 69-162.
- 80 Reynolds, Discourse III (1770), in *Discourses*, 44.
- 81 Reynolds, Discourse III (1770), in *Discourses*, 44-45.
- 82 Reynolds, Discourse III (1770), in *Discourses*, 43.
- 83 Reynolds, Discourse IV (1771), in *Discourses*, 69.
- 84 Reynolds, Discourse IV (1771), in *Discourses*, 69. On the concept of minuteness in British aesthetic theory, see Harry Mount, "Morality, Microscopy and the Moderns: The Meaning of Minuteness in Shaftesbury's Theory of Painting", *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 21, no. 2 (1998): 125-41.
- 85 Reynolds, Discourse IV (1771), in *Discourses*, 69.
- 86 Reynolds, Discourse V (1772), in *Discourses*, 77.
- 87 Reynolds, Discourse III (1770), in *Discourses*, 48-49.
- 88 Reynolds, Discourse IV (1771), in *Discourses*, 70.
- 89 Reynolds, Discourse IV (1771), in *Discourses*, 58.
- 90 Reynolds, Discourse VII (1776), in *Discourses*, 129.
- 91 Hayes, ed., *Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, 112.
- 92 Hayes, ed., *Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, 152.

- 93 The complex relationship between Reynolds and Gainsborough was well documented by their contemporaries. See William Jackson, who catalogues their differences in *The Four Ages; Together with Essays on Various Subjects* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798), 170-84.
- 94 Rosenthal suggests that relations between Reynolds and Gainsborough began to change during this period. In 1782, Reynolds bought Gainsborough's *Girl and Pigs*, and in the same year, Gainsborough began to paint the president's portrait, a work that remained unfinished. See Rosenthal, "Gainsborough's *Diana and Actaeon*", 182.
- 95 Hayes, ed., *Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, 113. Rosenthal has argued that Gainsborough "painted against Reynolds's academicism" in landscapes that develop "serious" ethical and artistic meanings. See Rosenthal, "Landscape as High Art", in *Glorious Nature: British Landscape Painting, 1750-1850*, ed. Katharine Baetjer (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1993), 22-26. It is worth noting that Gainsborough's only trip abroad, to the Low Countries in September 1783, was taken not long before *Charity Relieving Distress* was painted. His exposure to the canon of European painting, particularly the Flemish grand manner style of Rubens and Van Dyck, may have inspired the inclusion of allegorical figures in this picture. On Gainsborough's trip, see Amal Asfour, Paul Williamson, and Gertrude Jackson, "A Second Sentimental Journey: Gainsborough Abroad", *Apollo* 146 (Aug. 1997): 27-30.
- 96 Rosenthal sees *Diana and Actaeon* as an example of Gainsborough's complex engagement with Reynolds's theory and practice that playfully combines an appropriate subject with an inappropriate method of execution. See Rosenthal, "Gainsborough's *Diana and Actaeon*", 184-92. In my view, *Charity Relieving Distress* is a similarly critical work, which engages with concepts of genre and representation. At Schomberg House in Pall Mall, where the Gainsboroughs moved in 1774, they were neighbours to the auctioneer James Christie. Gainsborough's friendship with Christie would have contributed to his knowledge of old-master paintings and perhaps the influence of this tradition on his practice in London. See Vaughan, *Gainsborough*, 112.
- 97 See Hayes, ed., *Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, 153.
- 98 The dispute was mainly over the hanging of *The Three Eldest Princesses* according to "the line", which dictated full lengths be hung more than eight feet (2.4 metres) from the floor. See *The Morning Herald*, 22 April 1784, and Hayes, ed., *Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, 160.
- 99 The Royal Academy archive has a list of eight paintings destined for the exhibition of 1784, but Whitley cautions it may be incomplete. The list includes portraits of royalty and aristocracy, as well as *The Three Eldest Princesses*, which was at the heart of the dispute. A letter to the editor of *The St James's Chronicle*, however, claims that "thirteen or fourteen pictures from Mr Gainsborough's pencil were withdrawn", and in Bate-Dudley's article in *The Morning Herald* of 1784, the number is increased to seventeen. See Whitley, *Thomas Gainsborough*, 212-13. It is therefore unclear whether *Charity Relieving Distress* was painted for the exhibition, or after Gainsborough's secession.
- 100 Rosenthal also argues that Gainsborough's Cottage Doors, especially *The Woodcutter's Return*, constitute an alternative to Reynolds's formula for academic painting. See Rosenthal, "Gainsborough's Cottage Doors", 82.
- 101 Solkin argues that an inverse movement in history painting toward the particularizing details of genre painting characterizes the works exhibited at Vauxhall and the Foundling Hospital by Hogarth and Hayman. Gainsborough's combination of genre echoes this tendency in the fancy picture. See Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 198-206.
- 102 Bate-Dudley, "View of Mr. Gainsborough's Gallery", 4.
- 103 Reynolds, Discourse VI (1774), in *Discourses*, 107.
- 104 Rosenthal, in this sense, describes Gainsborough as "committed to the representation of perceived realities", in "Gainsborough's *Diana and Actaeon*", 184. On Gainsborough's empiricism, see Asfour and Williamson, *Gainsborough's Vision*, 1-22.
- 105 This could also be read as a resolution between the public virtues of humanist history painting (evoked by the emblematic figure of Christian charity), and the private virtues depicted in genre painting (symbolized by the generous young lady). In this sense, Gainsborough's painting responds to what Barrell has identified as a "complication of the distinction between public and private virtue" that ultimately attenuated the authority of humanism in British culture. See Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*, 58.
- 106 The seventeenth-century *paragone* debate, initiated by Leonardo da Vinci's *Trattato della pittura*, considered which of painting, sculpture, or architecture, was the most difficult and superior of the arts. On the persistence of this debate in the eighteenth century, especially in terms of the relationship between painting and sculpture, see Laura Auricchio, "The Laws of Bienséance and the Gendering of Emulation in Eighteenth-century French Art Education", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36, no. 2 (2003): 231-40.
- 107 Reynolds, Discourse XIV (1788), in *Discourses*, 259.
- 108 Bermingham argues persuasively that Gainsborough's paint handling produces an "optical fusion" between painting and beholder. See her Introduction to *Sensation and Sensibility*, 15-16. Barrell has remarked that Reynolds "repeatedly attributes value to what is fixed, settled, permanent, solid, as opposed to whatever is floating, fluctuating, fleeting, variable". See *Political Theory of Painting*, 80. Asfour and Williamson have suggested that Gainsborough's paintings are in fact about perception, and "less concerned with apprehending nature *per se* than with an awareness of the process of apprehension". See Amal Asfour and Paul Williamson, "Splendid Impositions: Gainsborough, Berkeley, Hume", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 405-6.
- 109 See Gainsborough's letter to Reynolds in Hayes, ed., *Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, 183. Reynolds alluded to the affecting nature of this final meeting in his fourteenth Discourse of 1788, in *Discourses*, 252.
- 110 Michael Cole argues that Gainsborough developed an "alternative, anti-Historical ideal for the fledgling British school", in "Gainsborough's Diversions", 371. Here, however, I have argued that instead of rejecting Reynolds's precepts, Gainsborough's late works combine and resolve their principles with his own.

- 111 On the modernity of Wright's paintings, and their conscious appeal to a new kind of private, polite, and commercial audience, see David H. Solkin, "ReWrighting Shaftesbury: The Air Pump and the Limits of Commercial Humanism", in *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art, 1700–1850*, ed. John Barrell (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), 73–99.

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Painting that Grows Back: Futures Past and the Ur-feminist Art of Magda Cordell McHale, 1955–1961

Giulia Smith

Abstract

At the end of the Second World War, the Hungarian-Jewish painter Magda Cordell McHale fled to London, where she remained until 1961, when she moved to the United States to pursue a career in futurology with her husband, the artist John McHale (d. 1978). The decade or so she spent in London was the most prolific phase in her artistic career. It saw her involved in the foundation of the Independent Group (1952–55), and exhibiting at the Institute of Contemporary Arts and the Hanover Gallery. Although Cordell was widely recognized for her ambivalent portrayals of the female body as mythic archetype and techno-scientific testing ground, she has not received due acknowledgment in the recent literature on postwar Britain and the Independent Group. This article re-evaluates the legacy of her proto-feminist artworks, arguing for Cordell's important contribution to postwar British art and culture.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sheldon Berlow for his generosity and invaluable help.

Cite as

Giulia Smith, "Painting that Grows Back: Futures Past and the Ur-feminist Art of Magda Cordell McHale, 1955–1961", *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/gsmith>

Magda Cordell's paintings from the 1950s are monumental and monumentally lurid. Reviewers have compared them to monsters and fertility idols, likening their texture to blood, amniotic liquid, and, on one occasion, "neon-lit pleura".¹ Born in 1921 into a Hungarian-Jewish family before the outbreak of the Second World War, Cordell fled Hungary to escape Nazism and eventually migrated to Great Britain with her husband, the English composer Frank Cordell.² Together they participated in the creation of the Independent Group (IG), an unofficial movement of artists, architects, designers, musicians, and critics who met at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London from 1952 to 1955 with the shared ambition of introducing mass culture into what they saw as the conservative establishment of the fine arts galleries.³ Cordell was the only female and non-British artist in the IG, with connections to the world of Continental painting and the community of émigrés artists of middle European and Jewish origin who gravitated in the orbit of the Hanover Gallery. What little posterity has made of her artistic legacy is tied to her founding role in the group, even though her canvases sit uncomfortably with the proto-Pop aesthetic of advertisements and Americana commonly associated with that moment. This article reconsiders a series of paintings and exhibitions that Cordell produced during her last London years (a period of about half a decade following the end of the IG meetings in 1955), with the objective of drawing attention to her consistent attempts to denaturalize on the plane of the canvas the stereotypical identification of femininity with the nurturing maternal body.

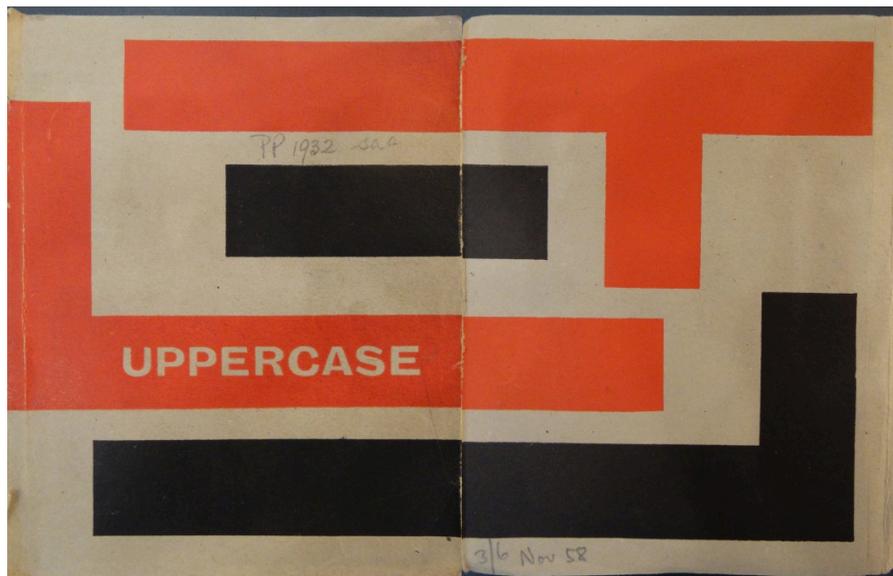


Figure 1.

British Library, London, *Uppercase 1* journal cover, 1958,

The art historian David Mellor is right to claim that what is “exceptional” about Cordell’s paintings “lies in their aspect of female signs; that is, they act as signs for an internal and—crucially—maternal body, unrepresented elsewhere in British art at this moment”.⁴ In spite of this, or perhaps for this very reason, first-hand testimonies of her postwar activities are few and far between. The most comprehensive source of information is a lamentably short feature on her work published in the first issue of the journal *Uppercase* (1958; [fig. 1](#)), a remarkable experiment in the graphic arts initiated and edited by the British architect Theo Crosby.⁵ Among its illustrations the reader will find a compelling portrait of Cordell standing in front of *Figure (Woman)* from 1956-7 ([fig. 2](#)), a signature example of her treatment of the female body as a ballooned aggregate of pictorial lumps. Presumably included to give a sense of the epic scale of her canvases, the photograph frames a three-quarter-length Cordell glamorously posing against the figure’s swollen navel ([fig. 3](#)). Not only is this portrait a rare document of the artist’s legendary panache, but it is also a highly symbolic illustration of what is at stake in rediscovering her practice, for it dramatizes the naturalized correspondence of womb and woman in its midst.



Figure 2.
Magda Cordell McHale, *Figure (Woman)*, 1956-57,
unconfirmed medium (mixed materials on canvas),
231.2 × 152.2 cm. Tate, London Digital image courtesy
of Tate, London 2015



Figure 3.

Sam Lambert, Magda Cordell with *Figure (Woman)*, 1956-57, untitled photographic portrait reproduced in *Uppercase 1* (1958). British Library, London

Little secondary literature is available on Cordell, and none of it revisits Crosby's feature in *Uppercase*.⁶ Being sidelined is not an uncommon fate for a woman active in a male-dominated art world, especially in the postwar period, but such a manoeuvre downplays the original circumstances of this artist's career, for Cordell was a successful painter, with shows in prominent London venues such as the Hanover Gallery and the ICA.⁷ This article is an attempt to make up for the neglect that her art has suffered. The works that will be considered were all made before 1961, when Cordell moved to the United States with her second husband, fellow IG artist John McHale, to pursue an academic career in futurology, an interdisciplinary research field concerned with postulating future global trends on the basis of patterns of continuity and change.⁸ Importantly, Cordell never stopped considering herself a painter. Looking back to the experience of the IG many years later,

she wrote: “I am a European painter, for me that figure, that shape, is still superior to all that”—“all that” presumably meaning the spectacle of mass reproducible images that in the 1950s other artists in the IG had started to assimilate into their works of art through techniques of montage.⁹ In spite of such statements, Cordell’s postwar paintings suggest that she shared the group’s fascination with popular varieties of anthropology, ethnography, science, and science fiction. Like her peers, Cordell was interested in how these disciplines offered an evolutionary perspective on the nature of intergenerational change, and in particular on the mechanism of collective adaptation to changing environmental circumstances. This had become an intimate concern for a generation of young men and women who had survived the Second World War only to witness the transition to a mass consumer society and the new global configuration that emerged with the Cold War. The following pages posit that this is the arena in which Cordell’s figures come alive. Her paintings from the late 1950s pit nurture against nature by reconstructing the effects of a changing techno-cultural environment on the maternal-foetal organism, whilst also exposing this as a powerful symbolic vessel for the fantasies of collective regeneration of the postwar society.

New figures

In 1945 the Allied victory had tipped the balance of world power in favour of the United States, paving the way for the dissolution of the British Empire and the onset of inflation and austerity in the motherland. Britain’s foreign policy was increasingly assimilated within a broader Western bloc piloted by the US in the ensuing Cold War against Soviet Communism, while the emphasis on techno-industrial regeneration and military capability dominated domestic politics across parties.¹⁰ It was only in the late 1950s that efforts to intensify the rate of technological innovation and accelerate consumption came to fruition under the wings of the dollar. Cordell’s move to figuration coincided with Britain’s recovery from the war. It was in 1955, in fact, that she switched from abstraction (large grid compositions, none of which survive today) to figuration, a genre that was to dominate her work for the rest of her life. She exhibited her new paintings in 1956, the year in which the consumer-driven economic boom officially ended a decade of rationing, giving way to a general—though by no means truly inclusive—sense of rising affluence.¹¹ The mass media played a key role in cementing the psychological effects of this epochal regeneration; and even before the verdict of economic growth was official, American magazines and films in Technicolor projected the cathartic fantasy of an unprecedented opulence. The IG was quick to register the euphoric effects of this bonanza. “In some sense we felt that the new images might help us to prevent the

repetition of the inhuman and unseemly past”, Cordell later remembered. “It was with some excitement, then, that we approached the new and tried to erase the old.” ¹²

Cordell started experimenting with a range of techniques and binders (including oil, ink, wax, acrylic, and polymer resin) to achieve different degrees of density and transparency on canvas. She worked in series, testing out the variations on two main iconographic typologies, often differentiated with the alternative titles of “Figure” or “Presence”. The former tend to be acephalic (headless) and gynomorphic (female shaped), though Cordell also produced a number of male variants with elongated necks, reminiscent of Francis Bacon’s screaming creatures of the same period. The gender is sometimes noted in the title, as in the case of *Figure (Woman)* (fig. 3), against which she had her portrait taken in 1958. Lost in the black-and-white reproduction is the bright blue background against which the figure emerges as a blazing assemblage of bright orange and red body parts, which, far from being anatomically accurate, are concentrated around three areas with overt feminine connotations: thighs, breasts, and navel.

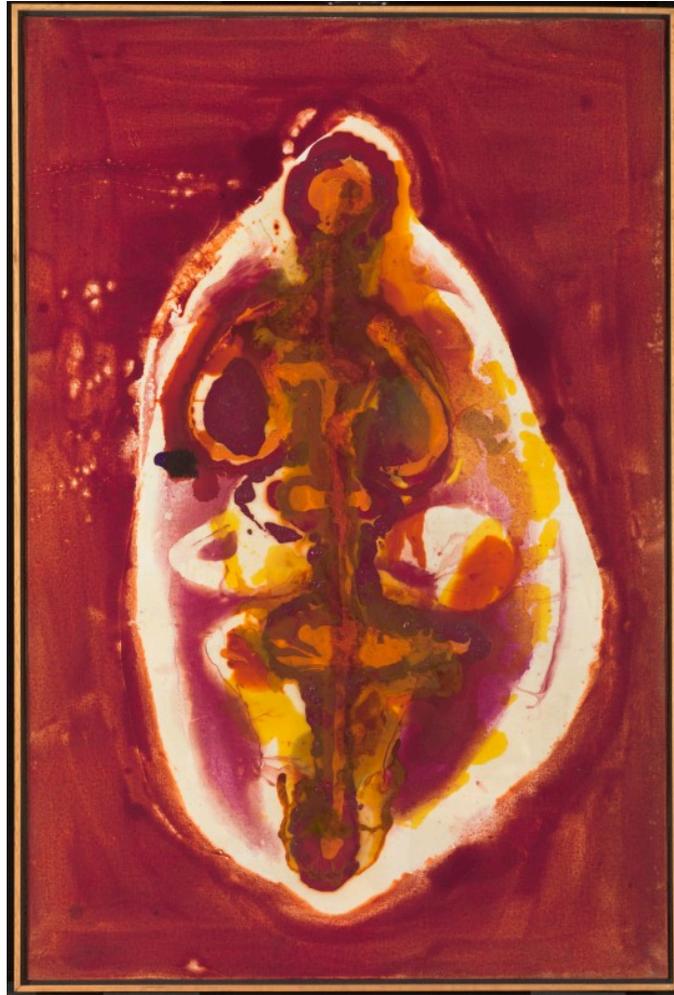


Figure 4.

Magda Cordell McHale, *No. 12*, 1960, unconfirmed medium (mixed materials on canvas), 152.4 × 101.6 cm. Tate, London Digital image courtesy of Tate, London 2015

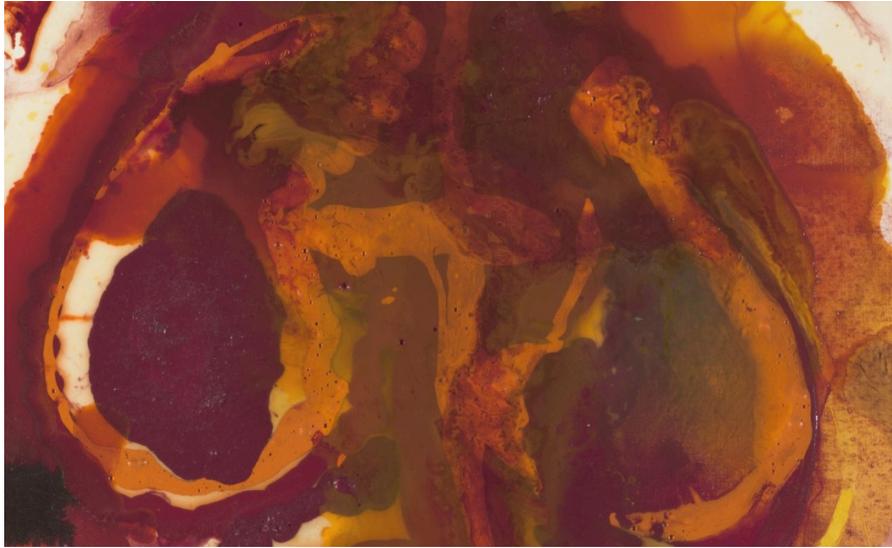


Figure 5.

Magda Cordell McHale, *No. 12* (detail), 1960, unconfirmed medium (mixed materials on canvas), 152.4 × 101.6 cm. Tate, London Digital image courtesy of Tate, London 2015

More so than the Figures, whose labyrinthine tangles of paint sometimes look flattened by the pressure of a rolling weight, the Presences emerge out of the pictorial frame in relief. They are smaller, abstract entities that tend to be organized in concentric haloes, combining the mystical tradition of religious icons with the recently discovered dimensions of sub-atomic physics and cytological cross-sections on a Petri dish. Whether their core is in fact a relief or a gaping hole is left to the imagination of the viewer. Take painting *No.12* (fig. 4), for example. The background is deep crimson and encircles a thicker, oblong halo, inside which floats an even more clotted globular nucleus (in bright pink, yellow, and red), whose texture betrays the use of liquid plastic (fig. 5). Not only do Cordell's Presences evoke the body on the plane of the haptic imagination, but often they also resemble internal organs in formation, oscillating in the eyes of the beholder between embryo, placenta, kidney, liver, and pleura. Their ambivalence as signs treads the line between abstraction and figuration, complicating the idea that Cordell simply dropped one for the other—rather, the figure here appears “under abstraction”, to borrow from Andrew Lee.¹³ Perhaps it would be accurate to say that Figures and Presences represent an ecosystem of interdependent organisms, with the former depicting a grotesque maternal body and the latter hinting at its embryonic content, though both can also be seen to collapse the relation between inside and outside.

Theo Crosby's introduction to Cordell's work in the first issue of *Uppercase* offers the most authoritative account of her technique to date. After crediting her for having “heralded the abstract expressionist movement in this country”, the editor informs us that “the AE [Abstract Expressionist] fallacy

of the happy accident does not apply” to this painter. According to him, she was more concerned with “reconstructing the human image” through a painstaking, quasi-sculptural process of accretion that involved collaging, glazing, and overpainting, and which ultimately led her to work directly with pigment and plastic on canvas, “producing some quite remarkably beautiful effects”.¹⁴ Only a few years earlier, Lawrence Alloway—possibly the most imaginative art critic in the IG and a very close friend of Cordell’s—had compared her working method to a speeded-up movie of a tapestry being woven.¹⁵ On her part, Cordell called herself a “binge painter”, who would go on layering pigment until she was “limp and all wrung out”.¹⁶ Everyone agreed that her works were monuments to process.

Crosby was also quick to remark on the visceral physicality of Cordell’s paintings, claiming that they offer the human body “sliced any way you like”.¹⁷ This choice of words situates *No.12* at the interface of surgery and butchery, drawing out the impression of violent bodily disintegration transmitted by its bloody tonalities. In this respect, Cordell’s work is in keeping with that of a generation of postwar painters who tried to reduce the brutalities of the recent war to a common denominator that would transcend history’s contingencies: truly abstract horror, distilled at the limit of the amorphous. For artists as different as Francis Bacon, Jean Dubuffet, and Alberto Burri this meant dismembering and tearing at the human form on the plane of the canvas. Bacon called it “a complete interlocking of image and paint and *vice versa*”.¹⁸ In 1955, the architectural critic Reyner Banham explicitly linked Cordell’s work to the European context of *Tachisme* and *Art informel* (as well as American Abstract Expressionism). In a manifesto-like article titled “The New Brutalism”, Banham announced the emergence of a new avant-garde movement with international affiliations and a local epicentre in the context of the IG.¹⁹ “As a descriptive label”, he wrote, Brutalism “has two overlapping, but not identical senses”: the first is architectural and is indebted to the postwar designs of the British couple Alison and Peter Smithson; the second refers to the *art brut* of Jean Dubuffet and includes Jackson Pollock, Karel Appel, and Alberto Burri, among the foreign artists, and Eduardo Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson and Cordell in London.²⁰ Together with the Smithsons, these last three artists were to represent the Brutalist sub-faction of the IG. There is no evidence that Cordell welcomed the epithet of Brutalist artist, though she was familiar with, and perhaps inspired by, the work of Dubuffet and Burri, which travelled to London for major exhibitions at the ICA and the Hanover Gallery.²¹ Indeed, her paintings appear just as distant from Dubuffet’s funereal bricolages of mud and ashes, as they are from the rustic iconography of scarification

recognized by many in the stitched up *Sacchi* that Burri made after serving as a military surgeon in the Second World War (whereas his experiments with red plastic came later in the 1960s).²²

In a 1960 interview, Cordell used the metaphor of organic self-repair to describe her works, and explained that “they can cut away huge pieces of your internal organs and you will grow them again or compensate for their loss. And also, all the time that your body is renewing itself, so in your lifetime you are remade countless times. This to me is an incredible thing.”²³

Clearly the question of biological endurance was close to the bone for someone who had escaped the Holocaust. Yet, her paintings resist being reduced to symptoms of wartime trauma. More than open wounds and existential incisions, they evoke supernatural embryos in formation, or organs waiting to be transplanted whilst still beating to the artificial rhythm of a technologically inflected vitalism. Crucially, the solidified blotches of polymer resin on Cordell’s canvases cast the allusion of biological plasticity in a highly synthetic facture. Hence, when she said that “for me that figure, that shape, is still superior to all that”, Cordell did not dismiss the material world of the postwar society. Quite the opposite, her paintings show fantastical regenerative properties precisely because their surfaces are visibly projected towards the high-tech sensorium of the consumer miracle. Ultimately, the event of physical renewal appears simultaneously a meta-commentary on painting’s cathartic faculties and a signifier of the transformations of the postwar epoch—Cordell’s complete interlocking of image and paint.

Prototype

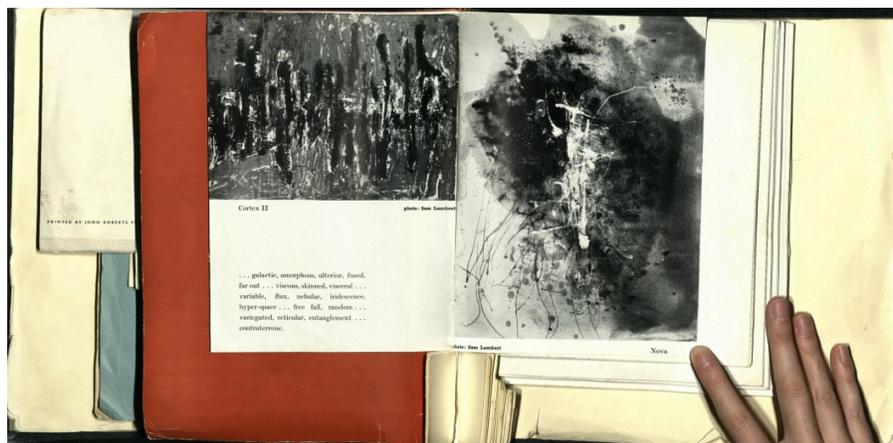


Figure 6.

Magda Cordell McHale, *Cortex and Nova*, 1955, reproduced in *Paintings and Drawings by Magda Cordell*, 1956, exhibition catalogue. National Art Library, London

Cordell discovered the power of speculative thinking in popular science fiction magazines imported from the United States, such as *Galaxy Science Fiction*. That she approved of sci-fi is evinced from the titles of the works on display in 1956 in her solo show at the Hanover Gallery (all 1955): *Android m* and *Android f* hint at trans-human robots; *Osmotic I* and *II*, as well as *Algal*, speak of elemental life forms; while *Nova* and *Supernova* take the evolutionary poetics of origins to the realm of the galactic, imagining atomic explosions in white dwarf stars.²⁴ If the androids are Figures of sorts, the outer space series fits in with Cordell's more abstract Presences, displaying the same concentric structure. A black-and-white close-up of the nucleus of *Nova* (fig. 6) reproduced in the exhibition catalogue tells us that the painting was organized around an oblong spark of white paint bursting out of a cloud of darker washes, as in a contained galactic explosion (Wols may have been a direct reference here). Taken together, the different works in the exhibition can be imagined as tracing the evolution of the human into the alien—be it by interstellar breeding or terrestrial gene modification. Importantly, popular science's fantasies of genetic rewiring had just come one step closer to reality with the discovery of the double helix, made in 1953 in Britain with the aid of X-ray crystallography. In truth, however, the audience of Cordell's solo show did not make the link with this particular discovery, comparing it instead to the paintings of Jackson Pollock and Willem De Kooning on display at the same time at the Tate, in *Modern Art in the United States: A Selection from the Collections of the Museum of Modern Art* (1956). The first major display of Abstract Expressionism in London, its reception rapidly permeated Cordell's own exhibit, even though she maintained not to have been aware of the work of Pollock and De Kooning beforehand.²⁵ Alloway corrected this misapprehension in the catalogue of the Hanover Gallery show, explaining that Cordell's paintings actually "reconstruct Action Painting's missing content" with a "compulsion of found iconographies". The critic then goes on to launch into an equally compulsive list of descriptive adjectives from the realm of physics, chemistry, and physiology:

solar, delta, galactic, amorphous, ulterior, fused, far out, viscous, skinned, visceral, variable, flux, nebular, iridescence, hyper-space, free fall, random, circulation, capacious, homeorphism, variegated, reticular, entanglement, multiform, swimming pool, contraterrene.²⁶

In another passage, Alloway put the same concept into prose: what struck him at the Hanover Gallery was Cordell's lyrical superimposition of the body's internal organs on outer space. It would be hard not to relate this impression to the levelling of micro and macro vision operated by camera.

Cordell's generation witnessed several revolutions in technological imaging, chiefly as a result of the new demand for scientific techniques of recording prompted by the two world wars. In the early part of the twentieth century, the photographic medium was successfully adapted for use in defence. Most notably, in 1945 aerial reconnaissance photographers were instrumental in planning D-day. In the aftermath of the Second World War, British scientists and captains of industry were united in calling for further strategic investment in the medium's military and peacetime applications. Scientific photography was recognized as having the potential to deliver a new order of reality, with almost limitless possibilities for advancing the frontier of human knowledge and rationalizing the natural world into increasingly precise visual data. The business community was adamant that mechanical techniques of visual recording could be used to boost the country's competitiveness in the most disparate fields, from agriculture to biomedical research.²⁷ To promote this argument, illustrations of the camera's versatile uses—from X-rays to space photography, electron photomicrography, aerial reconnaissance, and infrared imaging—started to circulate widely across a range of specialized and popular magazines, quickly gaining iconic currency in the collective imaginary. The IG's enthusiastic discovery of recent avant-garde experiments with the visual world of science—particularly László Moholy-Nagy's *Vision in Motion* (1947) and György Kepes's *Language of Vision* (1944)—was in keeping with this context.²⁸

Cordell's paintings suggest that she owed as much to sci-fi plots as to the—only marginally more sober—visual landscape revealed by the scientific forays of the day. *Figure 59* (1958; [fig. 7](#)), for example, demonstrates that the artist was interested in registering the impact of the X-ray on the visual identity of the human body. This decapitated, life-size figure does indeed look sliced up or squashed into the dirty-white background to the point of implosion. Its silhouette is reduced to an irregular rectangle with only two pathetic lumps protruding at the bottom (limbs once, perhaps), while its interiors appear as a formless halo of soft body parts in dark pinks, yellows, and browns. A red exoskeleton emerges in relief against this mess of muddled viscera, with the anatomically incorrect addition of a couple of breast-like rotundities on either side of the spine. Presumably, this is the X-ray of a female. Unsurprisingly, given how elaborate it is, *Figure 59* was selected by Theo Crosby for publication inside *Uppercase 1*, albeit in black and white. Here it features next to another one of Cordell's Figures, again photographed in black and white, but this time toned in orange—a choice of Pop design that was perhaps intended to convey the Horror B-movie connotations of the originals ([fig. 8](#)). If anything, however, the lack of colour and three-dimensionality corroborates the impression that *Figure 59* conjures a radiographic vision of the body.



Figure 7.
Magda Cordell McHale, *Figure 59*, 1958, oil and acrylic on Masonite, 243.84 × 152.4 cm. Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY Digital image courtesy of Estate of Magda Cordell McHale

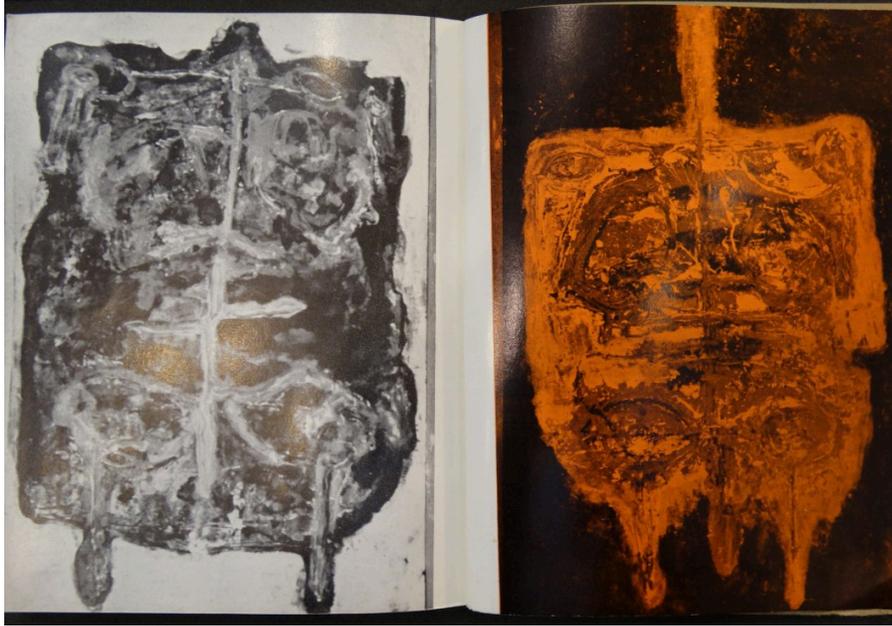


Figure 8.

Magda Cordell McHale, *Figure 59*, 1958, and an unidentified painting, reproduced in *Uppercase 1* (1958). British Library, London

In his study of Cold War “visuality”, John Curley has persuasively argued that photo-pictorial hybrids are symptomatic of the epoch’s blossoming romance with the illustrated press, citing an article that appeared on 16 November 1959 in *Life* magazine, under the title “Analogies with Nature Help Explain Abstract Expressionist Work”, which primed the audience for interpreting De Kooning’s paintings with the aid of nature photographs that came seductively close to abstraction.²⁹ Curley suggests that the comparisons invited by the article were not all that misguided, in so far as what passed for non-objective painting in the West was often tied to the indexical mechanism of the camera.³⁰ Whether Cordell was painting directly from photographic sources or not is open to speculation, however. What is clear is that her solo show at the Hanover Gallery came into focus through the lens of a hybrid photo-pictorial visuality seeped in the Cold War’s cult of scientific discovery. The exhibits were immediately recognized as superimposing the domains of anatomy and astrophysics on the ground of the canvas, appearing to Alloway as a sort of meta-atlas of the most popular discoveries of the day. The numerical titles of so many of Cordell’s paintings (*Figure 59*, *No. 5*, *No. 12*, and so on) reinforce the parallel with the world of repeatable scientific experiments, suggesting that they are visual specimens of sorts, serial prototypes testing the mutual contamination of mechanical and biological reproduction.

The question of survival loomed large in the context of early Cold War debates about the long-term clinical and environmental effects of new subatomic technologies, from the H-bomb to the more realistic threat of nuclear energy plants, inaugurated in Britain in 1956.³¹ Indeed, scholars such as Julian Myers have previously considered the IG's distinctive "future fetish" in relation to the nuclear arms race and the space race.³² What has gone unremarked is how Cordell explored these anxieties in relation to the maternal-foetal body, the ultimate "future fetish" and the symbolic ground par excellence for imagining the survival of mankind as well as its demise. Nowhere was this more explicit than in Edward Steichen's world-touring photo-exhibition *The Family of Man*, which opened in 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and one year later at the Southbank Centre in London.³³ Curated in the name of global peacekeeping, but widely criticized as a vehicle of US propaganda, the exhibition led the audience through a tour of essentialist fantasies of universal brotherhood centred to a significant extent on the motif of pregnancy and family-making. The MoMA installation ended with a large-scale colour transparency of the mushroom cloud, a reassuringly abstract reminder that the future of all life on earth hung by a thread. In such an ideologically charged context, the swollen womb came to symbolize the budding nucleus of a humanity to be globalized under the paternalist wings of capitalist democracy. So Allan Sekula argued in 1981, writing that the exhibition was a musty "celebration of patriarchal authority that found its global expression in the United Nations".³⁴

Cordell's solo show at the Hanover Gallery coincided with the Southbank iteration of the *Family of Man* as well as with the Abstract Expressionism exhibit at the Tate. The dystopian undertones of her exhibit are exacerbated when this is read against MoMA's attempt to deliver an idyllic snapshot of American soft power in the complementary image of free gestural expression and universal love. In her plea for a more humane tomorrow, Cordell breathed life into a species of monumental ogresses and androids whose X-rayed interiors reveal mutating organs and a progeny worthy of the Cold War's worst apocalyptic fears. Their glowing nuclei metaphorically evoke the phenomenon of radioactivity and by extension the atom bomb, whose atrocious effects on the human body had only become evident in the early 1950s, when visual documentation of the aftermath of the American attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was leaked in the international press (and then deliberately left out of the *Family of Man*).³⁵ Pregnant women were seen to carry the most monstrous consequences of the explosions, and even those who were not expecting at the time were cursed with the stigma of having "damaged" and "dangerous wombs".³⁶ While not explicitly referencing these stories, Cordell's paintings symbolically warn against the perils of another armed confrontation on a global scale. If they display regenerative

faculties, then, they also cast a dystopian shadow on the scientific achievements of a civilization which had already gone too far down the road of technologized imperialism.

Archetype

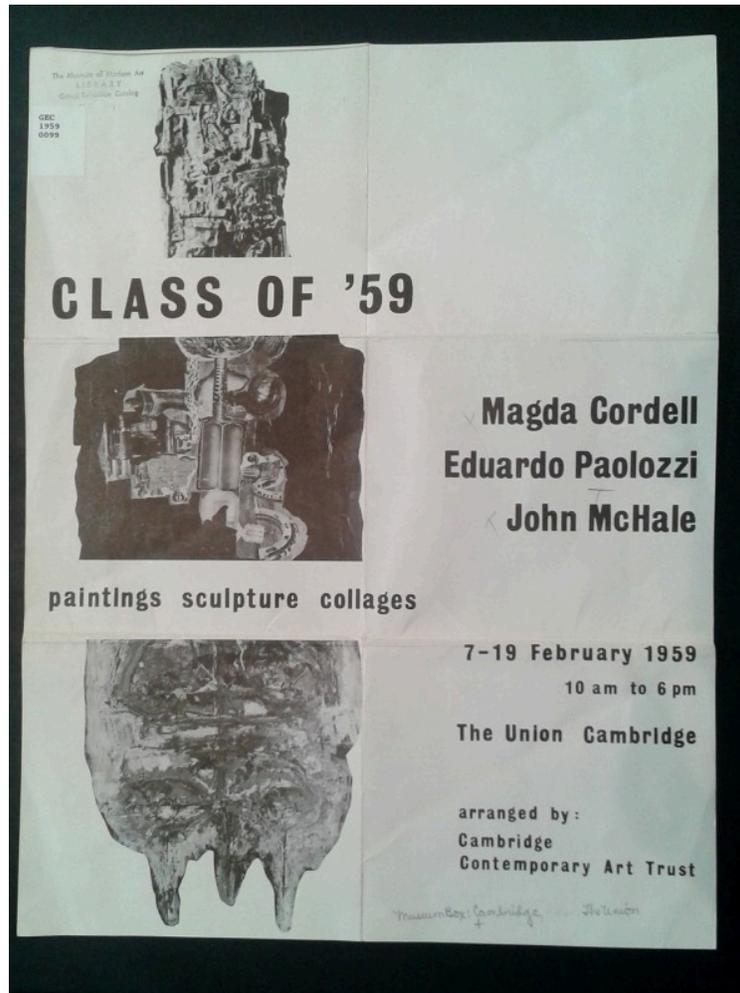


Figure 9.

Magda Cordell McHale, *Class of '59*, Paintings, Sculpture, Collages: Magda Cordell, Eduardo Paolozzi, John McHale, exhibition brochure, recto. MoMA Library, New York

One look at the brochure of *Class of '59* (The Union, Cambridge, 1959), a group exhibition that Cordell shared with McHale and Paolozzi, is enough to show that from the outset her series were brought together under the sign of the womb.³⁷ A single, poster-like foldable sheet, the document parades a grotesque *cadavre exquis* with a sculpted head by Paolozzi, the entrails of a collage by McHale, and the pelvic extremity of one of Cordell's figures (fig. 9). On the back, Alloway's commentary reinforces this hierarchy, explaining

that, while Paolozzi's heads "peppered with mechanisms" are all male and McHale's collages represent consumers, "Cordell's transparent anatomies are like the object of the cult of the female." ³⁸

Alloway goes on to describe what we can safely guess to be one of Cordell's Presences with a series of metaphors borrowed from Theodore Sturgeon's science-fiction bestseller *More Than Human* (1954): "Like a stone in a peach, a yolk in an egg It was passive, it was receptive, it was awake and alive." ³⁹ This reading imbues the artwork with a sense of narrative suspense, as if the canvas itself was in the process of gestating and coming into being. The young photographer Robert Freeman followed Alloway's lead, praising the subject of Cordell's canvases—"the idol of fertility, the great Mother-Whore and creator"—for reawakening a savage instinct in "this age of corsets, cosmetics and celluloid sex". ⁴⁰ Never mind the fact that the paintings in question are just as synthetic as celluloid, Freeman's interpretation consigns them to the archetypal myth of the procreative body—and to some extent it gets it right. For Cordell almost certainly drew on prehistoric statuettes believed at the time to be fertility idols and spuriously renamed "Venuses" (the most widely admired of which was the Venus of Willendorf, dated to approximately 25,000 BCE and discovered in 1908 in Willendorf, Austria). ⁴¹

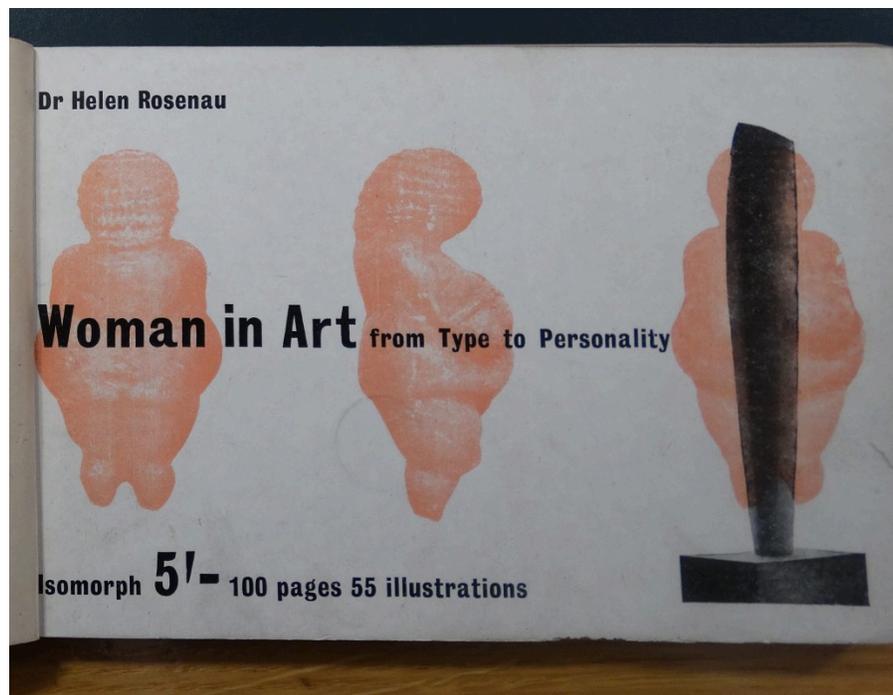


Figure 10.

Reproductions of the *Venus of Willendorf*, ca. 25,000 BCE, Reproduced on the cover of Helen Rosenau, *Woman in Art: From Type to Personality* (London: Isomorph, 1944). British Library, London



Figure 11.

Reproduction of the *Venus of Willendorf*, ca. 25,000 BCE, Reproduced in Amédée Ozenfant, *Art. I: Bilan des Arts Modernes en France. II: Structure d'un nouvel esprit* (Paris: Jean Budry & Cie, 1928). British Library, London

Cordell seemingly reconfigured the archetype of the genetrix into a monumental portrait of her own might and arguably a grander vision of universal female empowerment. She would not have been the first to do so. In 1944, the Venus of Willendorf was reproduced in faded red and from three different angles on the cover of Helen Rosenau's book, *Woman in Art: From Type to Personality* (fig. 10).⁴² Herself a Jewish refugee who came to England, Rosenau here charts the development of artistic form from prehistory to Barbara Hepworth's abstract effigies (one of which is superimposed onto the last Venus of Willendorf on the cover), correlating this visual history with the evolution of the female sex from "mere biological phenomenon" to an individual "with a mind and a will of her own".⁴³ It is tempting to play off Rosenau's proto-feminist art history against Freeman's

male gaze. After all, Cordell was the first to pit self-expression against stereotype, the first to set the stage for a gargantuan confrontation between the haptic drama of her “binging” brushstrokes and the abstracting logic of seriality and common denomination at the level of the species. Indeed, the figures in her paintings are often only distinguished by their gender, as with *Figure (Woman)*.

It is certainly possible that Cordell encountered the Venus of Willendorf in Rosenau’s book, but not quite as likely as her finding it inside Amédée Ozenfant’s *Foundations of Modern Art* (1928), where the Willendorf statuette is reproduced next to a woman in a modern swimming suit (fig. 11).⁴⁴ Among the pages of Ozenfant’s book, Cordell would also have found an image of the Venus of Lespugne (ca. 25,000 BCE; discovered in 1922; fig. 12).⁴⁵ The striking resemblance between the painter’s binary iconographic typologies and these two artefacts leaves little doubt as to their connection. On the one hand, the rotund outline of the Venus of Willendorf, with its plump limbs and overinflated breasts, is the archetype for Cordell’s *Figure (Woman)*, with the notable difference that the latter is headless. On the other hand, some of Cordell’s Presences are unmistakably linked to the oblong assemblage of dangling body parts that is the statuette uncovered at Lespugne. Let us return to *No. 12* (fig. 4). We can just about make out a head, a trunk, and a number of breast-like body parts; the rest is an elongated and vaguely gynomorphic aggregate of carnal tints characteristic of Cordell’s palette. Similarly, the anatomy of the Lespugne Venus is distorted by rotundities which have gone all limp and out of place.

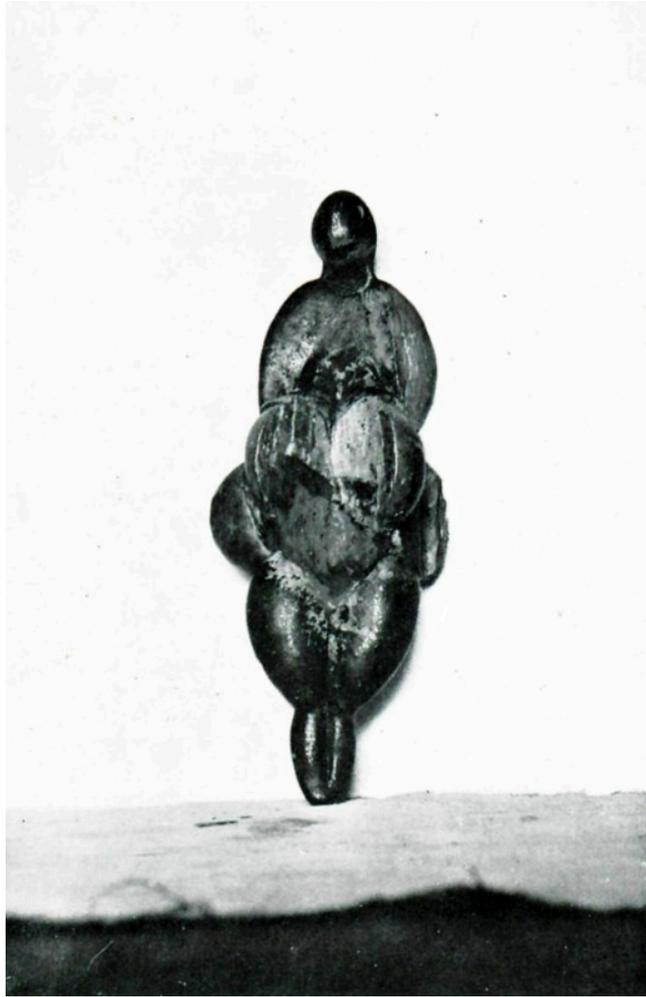


Figure 12.

Reproduction of the *Venus of Lespugne*, circa 25,000 BCE in Amédée Ozenfant, *Art. I: Bilan des Arts Modernes en France. II: Structure d'un nouvel esprit* (Paris: Jean Budry & Cie, 1928). British Library, London Digital image courtesy of The Paul Mellon Centre, 2015

In the late 1940s, *Foundations of Modern Art* had become something of a cult text for the artists and critics at the ICA, who were mesmerized by its transhistorical juxtapositions of black-and-white reproductions of artefacts from disparate epochs and disciplines.⁴⁶ While doing away with linear chronology, Ozenfant's montage nonetheless visualizes a fundamentally evolutionist teleology, according to which the machines of the Industrial Revolution and the art of the avant-garde correspond genealogically to prehistoric tools and cave paintings. Man's technological instinct, the reader is shown, survives across millennia of adaptations. In 1959, McHale penned a comparable argument for the value of fertility idols in the age of consumer choice, equating "the ikonic content of the mass media" with ancient masks and totems that from the dawn of time had enabled mankind to understand

and deal with its environment—“external and internal”.⁴⁷ As noted by Mark Wigley, McHale put forward a universal theory of the visual as adaptive prosthesis, whereby “images are literally consumed as a form of nutrition.”

⁴⁸ This analysis provides a compelling rationale for the sustained anthropomorphism of his montages of the second half of the 1950s, following earlier experiments with geometric abstraction in works such as *Construction Kit* (1954), reprinted in *Uppercase 1*, 1958 (figs. 13 and 14). As paintings such as *Figure (Woman)* show, Cordell was similarly concerned with the archetypal function of the human image as the original “artificial organ”.

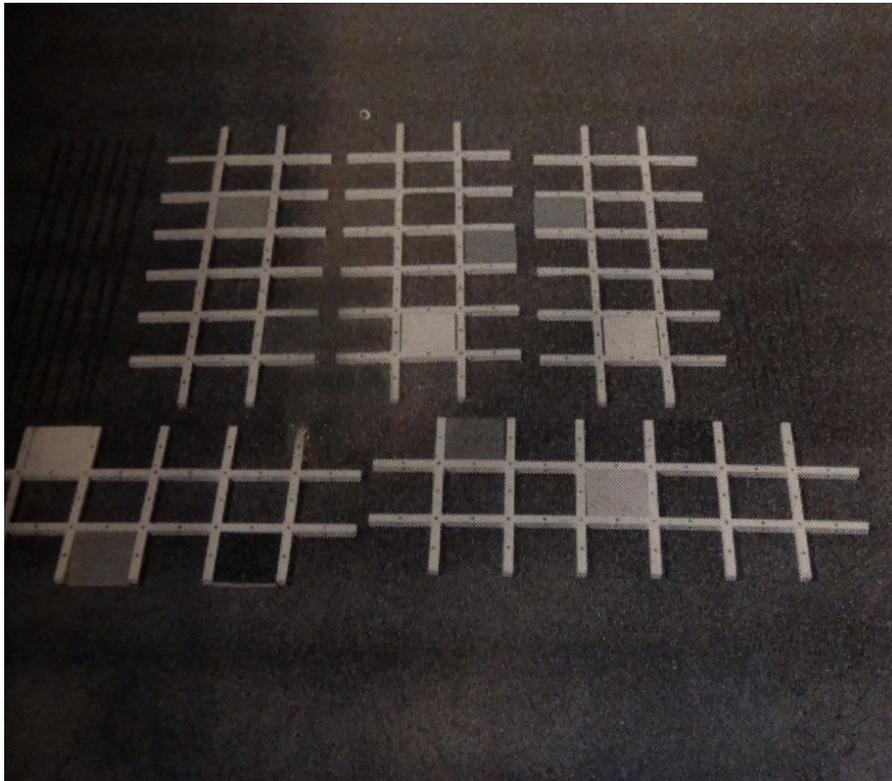


Figure 13.

John McHale, *Machine Made*, 1957, mixed-media montage, reproduced in *Uppercase 1* (1958). British Library, London

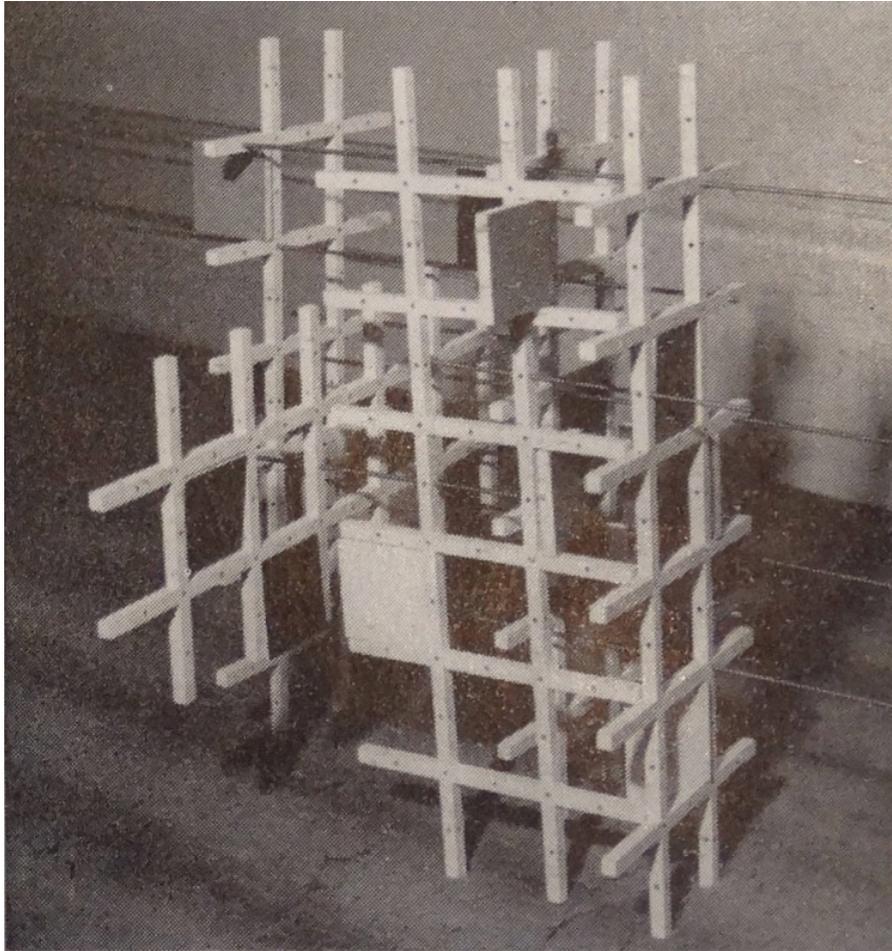


Figure 14.

John McHale, *Machine Made*, 1957, mixed-media montage, reproduced in *Uppercase 1* (1958). British Library, London

More importantly, however, McHale's ruminations chime with widespread debates about the role of habitat versus biology (or, in the philosophical terms of postwar existentialism, existence versus essence) in shaping the development of the individual and society. The war, the emergence of the welfare state, and, later, the onset of the consumer society, put the question of adaptation and "natural" development under the spotlight, reigniting the age-old nature/nurture dispute across a wide range of academic and popular platforms. Unprecedented advances in embryology, epigenetics, and genetics called for greater understanding of biological plasticity and recognition of its limits, while a new political commitment to welfare was responsible for an efflorescence of sociological studies that stressed the role of the environment. Anthropology offered a theoretical model for mediating between biology and society, and McHale and his peers were quick to apply it to the particular phenomenon of a changing visual landscape. A case in point, Alloway drew on evolutionary anthropology in his introduction to *Class of '59*, suggesting that each of the artists on display had presented a

universal “generalisation” and a “stereotype” of the generation in question (the class of 1959). Yet, the reader is told, there is nothing innate at the core of the anthropomorphic figurations presented by Cordell, McHale, and Paolozzi. Their only “survival characteristic”, Alloway writes in markedly Darwinian spirit, is the “legibility of the outline”. For the rest, they “exist in a state of ambiguity, which means they have a potential for change”.⁴⁹ This pseudo-epigenetic interpretation resonates with Cordell’s *Figures and Presences*, whose dripping insides are barely kept together by their silhouettes.

It seems plausible to infer that Cordell had a manifest interest in denaturalizing the rhetoric of biological destiny at the heart of the postwar reconsolidation of the nuclear family. Speaking from the perspective of psychoanalysis, Juliet Mitchell remembers that “child-and-mother was the theme song” of postwar Britain.⁵⁰ Handbooks on family interaction became a phenomenon; while a chorus of male experts placed “an almost mystical importance” on the figure of mother as an agent of national restoration.⁵¹ In the media and in the pages of women’s magazines the popular psychoanalyst John Bowlby and his adepts promoted the idea that maternal care was the only antidote to the feral imprint left by the war on British children. Read against this context, Cordell’s portrait in *Uppercase* takes on a more polemical value than it would otherwise. *Figure (Woman)* appears to merely parody the ur-female—the woman as pure flesh, untainted by “make-up and celluloid”. For her the nurturing attributes of Mother Nature are ballooned to a point of saturation and toxic chemical explosion. Equally, the abject misogynist fantasy of the alien maternal interior is overstated by Cordell to a point of caricature. This aligns her with later, so called “essentialist” feminist artists, who found in the representation of the abject female body a powerful channel through which to play up their “feminitude”.⁵² Crucially, unlike femininity, feminitude indicates the problem of a female condition (rather than essential quality) rooted in the body, real and imaginary.

Ur-feminism

In 1961, in a short introductory note to the last exhibition that Cordell had at the ICA before leaving London for good, the visionary architect Buckminster Fuller felt it appropriate to describe her as so “pre-occupied in her painting” as to be “aloof to her gender”.⁵³ Since then, her canvases have been saluted as “feminist Ur-paintings” anticipating the future strategies of feminist art rooted in the body. In 1998, Marc Mayer, the curator of a small retrospective of Cordell’s work, opened the door for revision: “Until I saw these works”, he admitted, “I had believed, naively it turns out, that the aesthetic of blood and guts, of entrails and viscera, was a major contribution

to art history that women had very recently made.”⁵⁴ If the works already spoke for female empowerment, Cordell’s vocal condemnation of gender inequality came only years after she and McHale had joined Buckminster Fuller, their friend and inspiration, in the United States to become futurologists.

Futurology, or future studies, can be broadly explained as the predictive analysis of the impact of technology on global populations and the environment. In the 1960s, it flourished across Europe and the United States through networks of think tanks sponsored by private firms as much as academic institutions. The nature of their research varied, but a key distinction can be traced between what is sometimes called “technocratic” or “elite futurology” and “liberal futurology”. The former is distinguished by consultants working directly for military or corporate agencies, while the latter is comprised of university based groups cooperating with a wider range of experts—anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, and even artists—to widen science’s public sphere and monitor its ethical mandate (also known as “liberal futurology”).⁵⁵ The Center for Integrative Studies set up by Cordell and McHale at various universities in the United States fell into the second category, presenting itself as an alternative to the expansionist logic of military and industrial planning.⁵⁶ Only as part of this operation did Cordell denounce gender inequality in print.⁵⁷

The artist made a statement about her position on matters of biological destiny in a report titled *Women in World Terms*, authored with McHale and fellow futurologist Guy Streatfeild. Armed with plenty of statistics and trend charts, the report foresees the continued oppression of women across both developed and undeveloped countries unless change is implemented immediately. Crucially, the authors maintain that it is only as a result of social convention that the “mythical stereotype” of biological destiny assumes the form of a natural law that justifies patriarchy by positioning women in the subordinate role of reproductive carers (as opposed to matriarchal leaders, for example). “Though myths may not be history they do make history”, explain the authors of *Women in World Terms*.⁵⁸ According to their analysis, one particularly nasty piece of mythology is the archetype of the woman as duplicitous life giver and man-eater: “it is not surprising that from the social control of such mythic ambivalence, most societies have developed elaborate sets of institutional rules to govern, control and channel the assumed latent powers of women.”⁵⁹ This passage in and of itself offers a commentary for the subject of Cordell’s earlier paintings, suggesting that they can legitimately be called ur-feminist and for two different reasons. Firstly, because they can be seen to denaturalize the idea of “natural” gender roles at its archetypal root, by appropriating and re-imaging the

modern reception of the Venus of Willendorf; and secondly, because they anticipate the attention to the body and the demand for reproductive freedom of the feminist movements of the 1970s.

The American journalist Betty Friedan's landmark publication, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), took the first steps toward disclosing the oppression of the "happy housewife heroine" of the early Cold War period, sparking a so-called "second-wave" of feminist liberation movements in the United States.⁶⁰ Friedan's book documents the devastating psychological effects of a decade of female "withdrawal into fertility", citing the words of the popular American anthropologist Margaret Mead, who had only just spoken against a "return of the cave woman" in the heyday of technological advancement.⁶¹ Mead was connected to Cordell and McHale through futurology and had likely been an influence on their critique of biological determinism. Importantly, anthropology and the study of myth underlie futurology's evolutionary concept of time and the notion that the transformations of the future are always already incubated in the past. Mark Wigley used this model to his own ends when he argued that the seeds for McHale's futurological studies of the 1970s (which were addressed primarily to an audience of economists and sociologists) were actually planted in the creative context of the Independent Group.⁶² With *Women in World Terms*, Cordell and her collaborators were joining what was by that point already a loud chorus pointing the finger against the paternalist emphasis on domesticity and maternal nurturing that had accompanied the turn to social welfare in the aftermath of the Second World War.⁶³ Reproduction was elevated to become the "yardstick of womanly virtue", and women's disenfranchised lives were filled with a "highly dysfunctional" and "essentially false" cult of motherhood.⁶⁴ In conclusion, they write, "we may posit that much of the 'reproductive ambition' of women is socially inculcated and maintained."⁶⁵ It is worth repeating one more time that Cordell (who never had children of her own) had already expressed her feelings about the cult of motherhood on canvas, where she had repeatedly exposed reproduction as a site of techno-imperialist colonization. Indeed, her paintings from the 1950s strike a dystopian note, at odds with her own belief in the powers of auto-repairing mechanisms, biological and man-made. Not only do these works imply a grave critique of nuclear life from sub-atomic to familial, but they also put pressure on contemporary expectations for growth and sustainability. True, they stage the event of biological regeneration with ineluctable seriality, but each and every single time they also bear the eco-nihilistic question of whether it is wise to reproduce at all.

Footnotes

¹ Lawrence Alloway, Commentary, in *Class of '59, Paintings, Sculpture, Collages: Magda Cordell, Eduardo Paolozzi, John McHale* (Cambridge: Contemporary Art Trust, 1959), exhibition brochure.

- 2 David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2000), 64.
- 3 Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945–59* (Manchester and New York: Manchester Univ. Press, 1995).
- 4 David Mellor, “A ‘Glorious Techniculture’ in Nineteen-Fifties Britain: The Many Cultural Contexts of the Independent Group”, in *The Independent Group*, ed. Robbins, 235.
- 5 Theo Crosby, ed., *Uppercase 1* (London: Whitefriars Press Ltd, 1958).
- 6 A notable exception is Martin Harrison, *Transition: The London Art Scene in the Fifties* (London: Merrell with Barbican Art Galleries, 2002), exhibition catalogue.
- 7 Importantly, in the 1950s the Hanover Gallery and the ICA were run by two formidable women: Erica Brausen and Dorothy Morland, respectively. James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain During the Cold War, 1945–1960* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 5.
- 8 Since the 1960s, Magda Cordell and John McHale worked to consolidate this discipline within American academia. For further insight into their research, see John McHale, *The Future of the Future* (New York: George Brazillier, 1969).
- 9 “Magda Cordell McHale: Obituary”, *The Times*, 21 April 2008, 50.
- 10 Jon Agar, “Science and Information Technology”, in *Britain Since 1945*, ed. Jonathan Hollowell (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 348–49. In the 1920s, approximately £6 million per year was spent in Britain on research and development between government establishments, universities, and industrial laboratories. Between the Second World War and the 1960s the same figure shot up to £777.4 million.
- 11 David W. Ellwood, *Rebuilding Europe, America and Postwar Reconstruction* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), 219. The phrase “economic growth” appeared for the first time in 1956 in the reports of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation.
- 12 Magda Cordell, quoted in *The Independent Group*, ed. Robbins, 190.
- 13 Andrew R. Lee, “Vulgar Pictures: Bacon, de Kooning, and the Figure Under Abstraction”, *Art History* 35, no. 2 (April 2012): 387.
- 14 Crosby, “Magda Cordell”, in *Uppercase 1*.
- 15 Lawrence Alloway, Foreword, in *Paintings and Drawings by Magda Cordell* (London: Hanover Gallery, 1956), exhibition catalogue.
- 16 “Magda Cordell McHale: Obituary”, 50.
- 17 Crosby, “Magda Cordell”.
- 18 Francis Bacon cited in David Sylvester, “Post-War” (1955), in *About Modern Art: Critical Essays, 1948–96* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996), 51.
- 19 Reyner Banham (1955), “The New Brutalism”, *October* 136 (Spring 2011): 19–28, and *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural Press, 1966).
- 20 Banham, “The New Brutalism”, 21.
- 21 In 1955, *Painting and Drawings by Jean Dubuffet* opened at the ICA, while in 1960 both Dubuffet and Alberto Burri had solo shows at the Hanover Gallery.
- 22 Jaimey Hamilton, “Making Art Matter: Alberto Burri’s *Sacchi*”, *October* 124 (Spring 2008): 33. In London, it was Herbert Read who presented Burri’s sacks in biographical terms, writing in the catalogue of the Italian artist’s solo show at the Hanover Gallery that “he began to saw pieces of this burlap into patterns—as a surgeon saws up incisions or wounds.” Herbert Read, Preface, in *Alberto Burri* (London: Hanover Gallery, 1960).
- 23 Magda Cordell, in Peter Rawstorne, “Art is a Job, She Says”, *News Chronicle*, London, 1 July 1960.
- 24 Lawrence Alloway, untitled contribution to “Comments on John McHale and his Work”, in John McHale and others, *The Expendable Ikon: Works by John McHale* (Buffalo: Albright Knox Gallery, 1984), exhibition catalogue, 31. Alloway singled out the American periodical *Galaxy Science Fiction* amongst Cordell’s favourite science fiction reads. According to him, Cordell preferred “organic” science fiction to the “mechanical” kind.
- 25 *Modern Art in the United States: A Selection from the Collections of the Museum of Modern Art* (London: Arts Council, 1956), exhibition catalogue. Cordell denied the influence of Abstract Expressionism on her technique. However, others have argued that it was this exhibition, rather than the influence of *Tachisme* and *Art informel*, that prompted painters in Britain to take up synthetic binders like polymer resin. These allowed them to paint in gushes and straight from the can, with the canvas on a horizontal plane. See Harriet A. L. Standeven, “The Appeal of An Image: The Explosion of Commercial Paint Use Amongst Britain’s Abstract Artists in 1956”, in *Third Text* 20, no. 2 (March 2006): 253–54.
- 26 Alloway, Foreword, *Paintings and Drawings by Magda Cordell*.
- 27 D. A. Spencer, “Modern Applications of Photography”, *Science News* 7 (May 1948): 74–111.
- 28 László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (1947; Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1965), György Kepes, *Language of Vision: Painting, Photography, Advertising-Design* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1944).
- 29 John J. Curley, *A Conspiracy of Images: Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, and the Art of the Cold War* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2013), 49–50. Curley’s use of the term “visuality” is indebted to Hal Foster, ed., *Vision and Visuality* (1988).

- 30 Two exhibitions organized at the ICA by members of the IG explicitly immortalized the new photo-pictorial landscape: *Growth and Form*, curated in 1951 by Richard Hamilton, and *Parallel of Life and Art*, put up in 1953 by Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Alison and Peter Smithson. See Victoria Walsh, "Seahorses, Grids and Calypso: Richard Hamilton's Exhibition-making in the 1950s", in *Richard Hamilton*, ed. Mark Godfrey (London: Tate Publishing, 2014), 62–68, and Alex Kitnick, "The Brutalism of Life and Art", *October* 136 (Spring 2011): 63–86.
- 31 Catherine Jolivet, ed., *British Art in the Nuclear Age* (Farnham: Ashgate: 2014), 2. The world's first nuclear power plant became operative in 1956 at Calder Hall in Cumberland. Initially the public responded with cautious hopes for meeting the energy needs of the future, but things changed drastically after 1957, when a fire in the Windscale reactor produced radioactive discharges and the area had to be closed off for decontamination.
- 32 Julian Myers, "The Future as Fetish", *October* 94 (Autumn 2000): 62–88.
- 33 Edward Steichen, ed., *The Family of Man: The Greatest Photographic Exhibition of all Times: 503 Pictures from 68 Countries* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955).
- 34 Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs", *Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 20.
- 35 Carol Jacobi, "'A Kind of Cold War Feeling' in British Art, 1945–1952", in *British Art in the Nuclear Age*, ed. Jolivet, 19–50. American intelligence censored visual evidence of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, making sure that the abstraction of the mushroom dominated the imagination of the bomb in the international press. Only after US troops left Japan in 1952 did images of the victims appear in a news-breaking reportage in *Life* magazine, headed "When Atom Bomb Struck—Uncensored", on 29 September 1952.
- 36 Maya Todeschini, "The Bomb's Womb? Women and the Atom Bomb", in *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery*, ed. Veena Das and others (Berkeley, CA, London, and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2001).
- 37 To my knowledge, there are no visual records of this installation.
- 38 Alloway, in *Class of '59*.
- 39 Alloway, in *Class of '59*.
- 40 Robert Freeman, "The Human Image", *Lady Clare: A Review* 44 (June 1959): 8.
- 41 Ian Chilvers, "Venus of Willendorf", in *The Oxford Dictionary of Art* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004).
- 42 Helen Rosenau, *Woman in Art: From Type to Personality* (London: Isomorph, 1944).
- 43 G. P. Gooch, Foreword, in Rosenau, *Woman in Art*.
- 44 Amédée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art*, trans. E. Allen Asburn (1928; London: John Rodker, 1931).
- 45 In 1948, a reproduction of a similar statuette was also included in the ICA's inaugural exhibition curated by Herbert Read. See Herbert Read and others, *40,000 Years of Modern Art: A Comparison of Primitive and Modern* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1948), exhibition catalogue.
- 46 In 1962, Lawrence Alloway even cited Ozenfant's book in a statement titled "Pop Since 1949" which appeared in the *Listener* on 27 December 1962, and was broadcast on the radio on the Third Programme. See Lawrence Alloway, "Pop Since 1949" (1962), *Artforum International* 63, no. 2 (Oct. 2004): 57–58.
- 47 John McHale, "The Expendable Ikon 1" (1959), in John McHale, *The Expendable Reader: Articles on Art, Architecture, Design and the Media* (1951–79), ed. Alex Kitnick (New York: GSAPP Books, 2011), 48.
- 48 Mark Wigley, "Recycling Recycling", *Interstices* 4 (1996): 10.
- 49 Alloway, in *Class of '59*.
- 50 Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (1974; London: Basic Books, 2000), 228.
- 51 Michael Rutter, *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed* (London: Penguin, 1972), 123.
- 52 Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York; London: Routledge, 1991), 158. Minh-Ha makes a parallel between "negritude" and "feminitude" as strategic words that reclaim "difference" semantically, though often in a reactive rather than confrontational stance.
- 53 R. Buckminster Fuller, "Magda Cordell: Presences", in *Magda Cordell, John McHale* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1961), exhibition catalogue.
- 54 Marc Mayer, Commentary, in *Magda Cordell McHale* (Buffalo: Univ. of Buffalo Art Gallery, 1998), exhibition catalogue.
- 55 Andrew Ross, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits* (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 174.
- 56 In 1968, the Center for Integrative Studies was set up at the State University of New York in Binghamton. In 1977, it moved to the University of Houston. The following year, John McHale died and in 1980 Cordell moved the Center to Buffalo.
- 57 Magda Cordell, John McHale, and Guy Streatfeild, *Women in World Terms: Facts and Trends* (Houston: Univ. of Houston, Center for Integrative Studies, 1975). See also Magda Cordell McHale and Peggy Choong, "A Measure of Humanity", *Futures* 21, no. 1 (Feb. 1989): 93.
- 58 Cordell, McHale, and Streatfeild, *Women in World Terms*, 5–6.
- 59 Cordell, McHale, and Streatfeild, *Women in World Terms*, 5–6.
- 60 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; London: Penguin, 1965), 39.

- 61 Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 148.
- 62 Mark Wigley, "Afterword: Never at Home", in *John McHale*, ed. Kitnick, 276.
- 63 Denise Riley, "War in the Nursery", *Feminist Review* 2 (1979): 85. Ironically, in the Britain of the 1950s, the token concessions of relative reproductive autonomy through contraception was matched by a new, psychoanalytically informed emphasis on maternal duty. In a series of regular radio broadcasts, psychoanalysts such as John Bowlby and Donald Winnicott popularized the idea that women should not choose career over family, insisting on natural mothering as the lynchpin of the future sociality of the child.
- 64 Cordell, McHale, and Streatfeild, *Women in World Terms*, 11-12.
- 65 Cordell, McHale, and Streatfeild, *Women in World Terms*, 52.

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Haptic Blackness: The Double Life of an 18th-century Bust

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Acknowledgements

This essay follows from several years of research undertaken to develop the exhibition *Figures of Empire*, held at the Yale Center for British Art in 2014, which Cyra Levenson co-curated with Esther Chadwick and Meredith Gamer, doctoral candidates in the History of Art at Yale University. The authors extend their gratitude to Esther and Meredith, and to the many colleagues and faculty at Yale who supported the project. In addition they wish to thank Sarah V. Turner and Hana Leaper of the PMC, Anne-Lise Desmas and Julie Wolfe of The J. Paul Getty Museum, and Matthew Hargraves of the YCBA.

Cite as

Cyra Levenson, Chi-ming Yang and Ken Gonzales-Day, "Haptic Blackness: The Double Life of an 18th-century Bust", *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/harwood>

“One Object” is a British Art Studies series that uses an object from a collection as a starting point for collaborative research. Cyra Levenson and Chi-ming Yang have co-authored this essay which is followed by a photo-essay by artist Ken Gonzales-Day and an interview between him and the authors.

Francis Harwood’s *Bust of a Man* (1758) is a conversation starter—across time, across continents, across collections, across disciplines. Some of those conversations will be explored in this essay. There are two known copies of the bust in museum collections. A signed and dated version, likely to be the original, is held atop a sundrenched hill at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles (fig. 1, right). A second, unsigned and undated, is at Yale Center for British Art (YCBA) in New Haven, Connecticut, amidst its Neo-Gothic campus (fig. 1, left). For years both busts sat quietly in their respective museum settings: the Getty’s Grand Tour gallery of mostly white marble European sculpture (fig. 2), and the YCBA’s display of eighteenth-century British painting and sculpture, featuring portraits of affluent white patrons. In each context the bust stands out, primarily due to its sensuous blackness, but also because of the paucity of information regarding its origins.



Figure 1.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, 2015, photograph of Francis Harwood, *Bust of a Man*, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA. chromogenic print, 84 × 164.7 cm. Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day

Although relatively few people might have seen Harwood’s busts in the museum context, their images have been reproduced broadly through print as well as public art. The Getty bust has been displayed on a billboard created by artist Ken Gonzales-Day in Los Angeles, and the Yale bust is prominently featured on the cover of the third volume of the series, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, edited by David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Both works are accessible as digital images through the online

collections of the [Getty](#) and the [YCCA](#). Yet this is the first time that the two busts have been imaged together, and considered as objects in dialogue across time and space. While they share many characteristics, the two versions are not identical; artist Ken Gonzales-Day's images put them in conversation and ask us to take a closer look at what appear to be doubles. Through this online format, the works will have an enhanced digital life that will no doubt spark other conversations about the media of their display.



Figure 2.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Panorama of Museum West Pavilion*, 2015, chromogenic print, 20.32 × 99 cm, taken in the West Pavilion, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day

The three contributors to this essay had each been studying the busts separately—Cyra Levenson as co-curator, with Meredith Gamer and Esther Chadwick, of an exhibition focused on slavery and portraiture in eighteenth-century Britain, Chi-ming Yang as a scholar of eighteenth-century globalization and East-West relations, and Ken Gonzales-Day, whose photographs and interview are included here, as an artist exploring ethnographic portrait busts in museum collections. To all of us, Harwood's figures connect moments in time when the contradictions of the raced body—its invisibility and hypervisibility—might give rise to new ways of seeing and feeling. To many contemporary viewers, the haptic blackness of Harwood's bust humanizes the work, at the same time that it renders the bust an exception to the overwhelming images of whiteness that populate the world of eighteenth-century art, and museum spaces more generally. How and why does the materiality of this work resonate so profoundly with present-day audiences? How does the context of display shape the ways we view each bust?

By putting into dialogue and holding in tension various perspectives on the objects, we reframe their physicality. We also address the construction of racial identities and racism in these eighteenth-century busts that continue to resonate in our present moment. How might we avoid the tendencies to fragment, scrutinize, and objectify the black body? Looking at the two busts in a shared frame redoubles our vision. It highlights the ongoing social construction of black masculinity as a type of exceptionalism—in both idealized and denigrated forms. At the same time, the sensuality of these figures interweaves the legacies of slavery, racial construction, and collective resistances to institutional racism.

The enigmatic portrait

The faces of Harwood's busts betray little emotion, but details such as the slightly upturned head, forehead scar, and wrinkle lines under the eyes invite speculation as to the nobility of character under a range of possible circumstances. The undulating black surface of the polished limestone brings out the muscularity of the bare shoulders, chest, and torso; the overall effect of the monochrome blackness is a sensuous masculinity at once idealized and racially specific, even realistic. Many viewers have commented that they recognize the bust, and that it reminds them of someone they know. Its august form refers it back in time to classical antiquity, yet it also seems absolutely contemporary. The attention to detail and specificity of its features contribute to a sense of its individuality or personhood, despite the anonymity of the original, eighteenth-century sitter.

When comparing the two busts, perhaps the most obvious difference is their surfaces. The scratchy veins on the Yale bust indicate a dark though unpainted stone, although technical analysis has not yet been done to determine its material composition. Two heart-shaped pupils have been carved into the eyes, which add a sense of definition and angularity to the face, in comparison to the slightly broader visage of the Getty bust. Certain questions remain unanswered. Why were two busts made, and for whom was each intended? What journeys did each undergo after leaving Harwood's workshop? What difference would it make if the signed, Getty bust were not the original, but instead, either a lesser copy or a more developed version of Yale's?



Figure 3.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, 2010, photograph of Charles Cordier, *Negro of Sudan*, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. chromogenic print, 28 × 20.32 cm. Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day

We do know that 1758 was a busy year for the workshop of the expatriate British sculptor, Francis Harwood (1726/27–1783). Since arriving in Florence, Italy, five years before, he had established a reputation for copying antiques for patrons eager to furnish their English homes with such illustrious figures as Cicero, Julius Caesar, Marcus Aurelius, and Sappho. In addition to these four commissioned works, in the same year Harwood also completed a naturalistic, classicized bust of an unnamed African man. Made during the height of the transatlantic slave trade, the busts were unusual during the period, and are still remarkable to behold. It is difficult to know the extent to which, if at all, Harwood intended to personalize an individual subject in response to the pervasive de-humanization of Africans across European society. Such naturalism certainly long predates the ethnographic depictions of Africans by nineteenth-century artists like Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier (fig. 3).

From 1865 up until 1922, the Getty bust was in the possession of the descendants of Hugh Percy, the first Duke of Northumberland. For this reason, the subject of the bust was first thought to be an athlete named Psyche who was in the service of the first duke. However, no Black servants were employed by Northumberland before 1764. The sitter's identity has also been misattributed to the African-American boxer Bill Richmond (1763–1829), who served the second Duke of Northumberland, formerly Earl Percy (1742–1817), a Revolutionary War general; but this took place long after the bust's making. Other theories point to a "savage" or captive warrior,¹ the mythological Ethiopian king Memnon, or an allegorical representation of Africa dubbed "Africus", but all similarly lack conclusive evidence.

Harwood himself is something of an enigma—despite his prolific output, he has been described as "such stuff as footnotes are made on".² He arrived in Rome in 1752, entered the Florentine Academy in 1755, and acquired the former studio of fellow sculptor Giovanni Battista Piamontini (d. 1742) on the Via della Sapienza in 1762. Harwood died in Florence in 1783, unusual among his British peers for having established a career in Italy and permanently resided there. He made a total of thirteen portrait busts (a Homer was recently rediscovered in Ireland in October 2014), and of these the *Bust of a Man* (fig. 5) is one of only two without classical precedents, the other being that of Oliver Cromwell.³ At the same time, the African figure's bare chest and deep torso is modelled on a type of classical nudity that Harwood was not alone in reviving, as we can see in the *Bust of Lord Chesterfield* (fig. 4) which was sculpted by his contemporary and friend, Joseph Wilton.⁴



Figure 4.

Joseph Wilton, *Portrait bust of Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield*, 1757, marble, lead alloy, 67 x 45 cm. British Museum, London Digital image courtesy of British Museum, London (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license



Figure 5.

Francis Harwood, *Bust of a man*, 1758, black limestone on a yellow marble socle, 71.1 × 50.8 × 26.7 cm. Yale Center for British Art, New Haven Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art

Ultimately Harwood left behind a reputation for working with polychrome marbles and fulfilling private commissions for British aristocrats and expatriates. In addition to library busts and statues, his workshop produced marbled funerary monuments and tabletops, chimney pieces, vases and urns; in other words, ornamental pieces to be incorporated into the design ensemble of particular rooms. Unfortunately, we don't know where the *Bust of a Man* would have been placed within its intended domestic interior, or how it would have been coordinated with the other decorative elements.⁵ Its status as a luxury object, though, connects it to not only other portrayals of people (along with individual patrons and artists), but also to other things (furniture, marble, varnish).

Classicized slaves and the blackamoor legacy

Before Paul Mellon bought it in 1967, the Yale bust had been part of the Esterhazy Collection in Vienna, where it was misattributed to the Renaissance artist Alessandro Vittoria (1525–1608) and called “The Blackamoor”, and in 2006 it became part of the Yale Center for British Art collection. Though the bust has been renamed, this tendency to read it as a classicized “savage” type in the Italian blackamoor tradition (fig. 7) has continued.⁶ Such a conclusion, however, captures neither the individuating and portrait-like features of Harwood’s sculpture nor the changing attitudes towards slavery and classicized representations of blackness. By the mid-1750s, these attitudes were increasingly sensitive to human suffering, even sentimental.



Figure 6.

Andrea Brustolon, *blackamoor chair* (detail), possibly early 18th century, originally made for the Venier family. Ca' Rezzonico. Venice, Italy Digital image courtesy of Chi-ming Yang



Figure 7.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, 2011, photograph of *Bust of Moor*, Sanssouci Palace, Berlin-Brandenburg. chromogenic print, 30 x 22 inches, 76.2 x 55.88 cm Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day

Nakedness, of course, does not necessarily signal savagery. Paradoxically, in classical antiquity, sculptural nudity could reference either a slave or a god. On the one hand, it deified emperors like Caligula, Claudius, or Trajan and conquerors like Alexander the Great. Neoclassical sculptors often imitated such idealized “heroic or metaphorical nudity”.⁷ On the other hand, an unclothed figure could represent a slave, whose musculature would become an excuse to show off anatomical detail. Slaves were thus often realistically or sympathetically rendered. The sculptural tradition of figuring slaves nude attests to the particularization of the experience of slavery and suffering, as conveyed especially through bodily and facial expressiveness. See, for example, statuary such as the monumental Atlas figures installed at the Frari Church in Venice (1665–69) by Melchior Barthel (1625–1672), or the “Moors of Livorno” (ca. 1623–26) by Pietro Tacca (1577–1640), which not only

express humanity and suffering, but were also modelled after two individuals living in Italy, a Turkish galley slave named Ali Salentino and an African man called Morgiano.⁸

Although Harwood's busts appear largely unprecedented in the British context, in Florence, the place where he made his career and home, Harwood was immersed in a Renaissance tradition of depicting African boys and men in painting as well as architecture. These Italian images include paintings of Ethiopian Christians and Black magi from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries and countless portrayals of dark-skinned pages dressed in livery. The ubiquity of the so-called "Moor" in Italian culture inspired American artist Fred Wilson's 2003 Venice Biennale installation, "Speak of Me As I Am." In citing words spoken by Shakespeare's now iconic Othello, the Black Christian "Moor of Venice", Wilson aimed to give voice to a "Moro perspective" across history. Servants, gondoliers, and other labourers were an active part of Venetian life from the early 1500s, and the art of the period indexes a long history of Mediterranean trade in goods and slaves.⁹ Wilson compared these depictions to those of his own culture and found: "When I look at the images of blacks in Venetian Renaissance art, I see a humanity in the depictions that you would not normally see in early American art."¹⁰

The most common form of sculpture depicting the black figure in the eighteenth century was decorative, blackamoor statuary in the form of servile figures used as supports for chair arms (fig. 6) or incorporated into doorknobs, candlesticks, and garden fountains. Some are made of painted wood or stone, crudely rendered and stiffly posed, holding up a platter, urn, or vase, and many are dressed in Moorish or Turkish costume. The popularity of these diminutive Moors and their "ornamental blackness"¹¹ can be seen in the construction of entire rooms such as the Château de Meudon's Salon des Maures later in the century, or the furniture suite of carved stands and chairs in the Venetian palace, Ca' Rezzonico. However generic, these statues also point to the actual black servants, often simply termed "Moors", who worked as pages, footmen, and valets de chambre and who were in fact dressed in the Turkish-style feathered caps and turbans so fashionable in the period. The Italian tradition of blackamoor sculpture thus orientalized, reproduced, and updated classical forms of ancient slavery (such as caryatids, which were also based on real, Dacian captives) to resonate within an eighteenth-century context of Atlantic slavery and servitude.

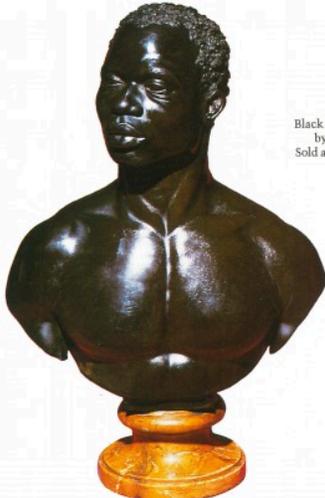
Blackamoor sculptures themselves were made with varying degrees of realism, and some were humanized. Harwood's bust was more likely, though, a response to the crude figurations of many Black people in art, and a response shared by audiences who increasingly registered their disgust and discomfort towards the upsetting depictions of suffering in the shapes of classical atlantes or caryatids. As the architect Isaac Ware wrote in 1756,

“Men of rude genius . . . represent them [slaves] crushed and sinking under the weight, and think it a high degree of merit, if they can figure in their sculpture starting eyes or bursting sinews.” ¹² Such objections to classical, sculptural representations of slaves attest to the perceived realism of the works, on the one hand, and the viewer’s acknowledgment of the real bodies and experiences of contemporary slaves referenced by these works, on the other. Amidst a developing culture of sensibility, suffering was becoming distasteful. Though the abolitionist movement was still several decades away, already philosophers like Adam Smith were positing ideas of universal moral sympathy. As Smith wrote in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* of 1759: “How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others.” ¹³

What’s in a name?

Apollo July 1987
vol. 126 no. 305

CHRISTIE'S
LONDON



Black marble bust of a negro
by Francis Harwood.
Sold at Christie's London for
£88,000
in April 1987.

**The athlete that
outpaced the aesthetes**

The owner of this fine marble bust made in 1758, received a generous offer of £7,000 for it. Instead he brought it to Christie's, where our specialists thought it might fetch considerably more. In the event, keen bidding at the Christie's sale forced the price up to £88,000, reflecting the renewed interest in fine sculpture.

If you own fine sculpture of the 18th century or

earlier which you wish to sell, please telephone Dr Charles Avery or Simon Yates on (01) 839 9060. Alternatively, write to them at the address below, enclosing a photograph and brief description of each piece.

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PEPPERHART COLLECTION
 OBJECT FILE
 NO. 00 - 88.SA.114

Figure 8.

Advert from *Apollo* 126, no. 305 (July 1987), 13.,

Today at the Getty (as at Yale) Harwood's sculpture is titled, "Bust of a Man". Its name has changed over the last two decades, reflecting a history of increasing institutional sensitivity about race, and at the same time a subtle re-inscription of blackness as a type of racial alterity. In 1987, when Christie's purchased the bust from a private dealer, it was called "Bust of a negro", and referred to also as "Bust of a Blackman". At this point art dealers assumed the sitter's identity to be an eighteenth-century servant and athlete named Psyche. In one catalogue advertisement it was dubbed "The Property of a Gentleman", ¹⁴ and in another, "The athlete that outpaced the aesthetes" (fig. 8). ¹⁵ The value of the bust was thus articulated respectively with the language of the slave trade, and the commodification and superior performance of black bodies in sports. We should also note that the client for whom it was sold by Christie's (for the high price of £99,000) had wanted it out of his own house because "it was so ugly and terrifying that his children became frightened." ¹⁶ Such a reaction could have been taken straight from a page of eighteenth-century aesthetics, as in Edmund Burke's description in 1757 of the sublime terror ("Darkness Terrible in Its Own Nature") invoked by a "negro" woman's body in the eyes of an impressionable white child. ¹⁷ This denigration of the bust seems a far cry from its current status as an exquisite, or at least exotic thing of beauty that has been included in special exhibits at Tate Britain and the Palazzo Pitti, and placed alongside works by luminaries Joseph Nollekens, Joseph Wilton, and Antonio Canova.

After its arrival at the Getty Museum in 1988, the work was catalogued as "Bust of a Black Man". By 1990, the distinguishing qualifier "Black" had been removed, in part due to staff and visitors' objections, and no doubt in an effort to correct the racism that had framed it in the past. The adjective "black" currently reappears twice in the caption, however: "Sculptor Francis Harwood chose a black stone to reproduce the sitter's skin tone", and "This work may be one of the earliest sculpted portraits of a Black individual by a European." To be sure, differentiating between a lower-case "black" colour and an upper-case "Black" person of African descent follows a laudable grammatical practice—and a point of ongoing debate—that aims to recognize the proper humanity of a people through the standard of capitalization. In this essay, we have chosen to capitalize the term when a person (rather than a concept, figure, or object) is being referenced. In the above example of the museum label, one unintended consequence of designating the stone "black" is a curious essentializing and racializing of the material itself. It is as though the floating signifier of blackness has been transferred from the identity of the subject onto the physical object and its making.

The materials of blackness



Figure 9.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, 2013, photograph of Francis Harwood, *Bust of a Man*. chromogenic print, 76.2 × 55.88 cm. Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day

Today, a visitor to the Getty Museum reading the bust's label might easily assume that the colour of the marble is naturally black. In fact, the glossy colour that strikes our eyes (fig. 9), especially from a distance, is a result of the application of black gouache paint and varnish to a matt, tan, sandy limestone nowhere near black. Scientifically speaking, this stone is unusual; it contains a high variation of colours and embedded minerals when examined closely, though the samples of the bust tested by Getty conservation staff were too small to determine the type of stone (whether pietra da paragone, Belgian Black, or Nero di Colonnata) or where it might have been quarried.¹⁸ Variation is of course apparent upon close scrutiny of any marble, coloured or white (let us remember that whiteness, too, is constructed), and clearly the artist intended an overall effect of the dark stone to reference coloured skin. Yet the conservation work and analysis shows that the bust's original, eighteenth-century coating was a medium,

translucent brown. In fact, conservators have in recent years removed much of the thickly applied black paint, wax, and shellac that had been applied to the bust in the 1980s, in an attempt to bring the surface colour closer to the varied texture and tone of the underlying marble.

Heeding the bust's constructed blackness reminds us of the social construction of race more generally; it helps us question the particularizing tendency to read and interpret identities, human or representational, at surface level, even to the extent that we project these assumptions of race onto non-human matter. The danger of equating a naturally black stone with the biological race of an individual can also be seen in the scholarly argument that African subjects were merely an excuse for an artist to work with rare and difficult materials such as black marble.¹⁹ The difficulty of working with black material to render flesh tones across a range of arts, including dyeing and oil painting, have too often led critics to celebrate the virtuosity of the artisan at the expense of even considering the dehumanizing practices of art making and aesthetics. Nineteenth-century sculptor Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier used newly quarried, precious materials like coloured Algerian onyx to create his ethnographic portrait masterpieces; and yet, this was a resource extracted as part of an imperial agenda of the Napoleonic state, as trenchantly studied by James Smalls.²⁰ Paying attention to the materials of representation and the ecology of colonialism also nuances the history of racial representations. After all, colour has a political as well as an aesthetic history.²¹

Sculptors like Harwood welcomed the creative challenge of carving hard, coloured stones. He also catered to a demand for colour in interior design; and the *lustratori*, or artisans who typically cleaned and polished the final pieces are likely to have played a critical role in creating the haptic, glossy artefacts that held so much allure. The interplay of colours and textures reflects a culture taken with the imitation of luxurious surfaces such as porcelain, marble, and tortoiseshell.²² Glossy blackness was associated with Roman copies of classical polychrome sculptures made of black-green basanite; in the Ptolemaic era of Hellenistic Egypt, a limestone sculpture of a seated African boy might, like Harwood's limestone bust, be varnished to "produce the glossy appearance of skin".²³ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, black shine also referenced the vogue for imported Japanese and Chinese lacquer and shellac, a varnishing substance we find in the original coating of the Getty's Harwood bust.²⁴ From another perspective, the glossy blackness of Harwood's portrait also echoed the slaving practice of subjecting peoples to being oiled to heighten their value and healthy appearance on the human market. The cruel irony here is that the expendability of actual labouring, sweating bodies runs counter to the

ideal of perfectly preserved, aesthetic surfaces used to represent black skin and to showcase the virtuosic artistry and technical sophistication demanded by eighteenth-century European consumers.

In the case of Harwood's busts, equating human skin colour with the blackness of the stone essentializes both human and stone. When the material is itself rare or "exotic", the fascination with it creates comparative registers across media and between different orders of colour—both racial and ornamental. Thus a person's cultural identity can be projected onto stone, and the "naturalness" of the stone can reinforce the essential alterity of the figure.

Centering the bust: portrait, type, and display



Figure 10.

Yale Center for British Art, 2014 / Photo by Richard Caspole, Installation view, *Figures of Empire*, 2 October - 14 December 2014, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, CT

Undoubtedly, the racialized blackness of Harwood's marble bust adds to its exemplarity. The colour appears at once to humanize and to objectify. This tension between its particularity and generality—its duality as modern portrait and classical type—is in fact a feature of the broader genre of the eighteenth-century sculptural portrait.²⁵ Harwood's case is complicated by the question of the sitter's identity. Was the hypothetical subject a slave or a free man? Do we consider this work a "slave portrait", a "particular individual", a "particular likeness", or a "particularizing portrait"?²⁶ These are all efforts to address, in different ways, art-historical debates over distinguishing a portrait from a type. David Bindman argues that the very

idea of a “slave portrait” is an oxymoron, that is, that slavery is premised on the denial of a person’s subjecthood, whereas portraiture celebrates an individual subject. Yet, too often the focus on an individual’s identity can shut down conversation around the work’s social impact and obfuscate the broader context in which a likeness is constructed and makes meaning. Refusing the binary between the singular portrait and the generic type, Agnes Lugo-Ortiz and Angela Rosenthal soundly argue that portraits, too, follow conventions, and by no means guarantee singularity. With respect to slave portraiture, even the most racist, scientific, and ethnographic images can subvert their intended function “if the information contained in or excited by the image exceeds its frame of discursive intentions”.²⁷ We take their lead in studying the distinguishing features of Harwood’s busts as at once idealized and naturalized, singular and generic; in fact, the combination of these extremes, held in tension, imbues the work with its signifying power.

In the Fall of 2015 the YCBA version of the Harwood bust became the centre of an exhibition (fig. 10) motivated by the idea that a portrait might be defined less in terms of a likeness, or even a particularizing representation, and more as itself an encounter between sitter and artist, image and viewer. Titled *Figures of Empire: Slavery and Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Britain*, and co-curated by Cyra Levenson, Meredith Gamer and Esther Chadwick, the exhibition examined the ways that eighteenth-century Britons negotiated their relationship with slavery through portraiture. The Harwood bust was placed in the centre of the gallery amongst approximately sixty paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, and decorative objects drawn from Yale’s collections (figs. 11 and 12). Most of the black figures in the exhibition were portrayed in paintings alongside white sitters. In portraiture, qualities that eighteenth-century Britons valued—freedom, whiteness, and refinement—were imagined in opposition to the bondage and blackness of those who arrived in Britain from Africa or the Caribbean as slaves. The exhibition challenged viewers to consider all of the figures depicted as subjects with histories and as “figures of empire”—as people whose lives shaped and were shaped by Britain’s imperial world.



Figure 11.

Yale Center for British Art, 2014 / Photo by Richard Caspole, Installation view, *Figures of Empire*, 2 October - 14 December 2014, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, CT



Figure 12.

Yale Center for British Art, 2014 / Photo by Richard Caspole, Installation view, *Figures of Empire*, 2 October - 14 December 2014, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, CT

The physical centrality of the bust of a dignified Black man provided a different frame of reference for viewing the other objects in the exhibition space, creating new dialogues between visitors and works of art. Life-size,

solid, and three-dimensional, the bust met one's gaze at eye level. It presented a free-standing Black man in the eighteenth century depicted not in the shadow of a white subject, but on his own. The bust also became the catalyst for a series of revelatory connections made by viewers linking our racial present and our slavery past. How do we challenge ourselves to see the unnamed black figures painted during the eighteenth century as individuals with histories despite their anonymity? During the course of the exhibition, artist Fred Wilson gave a talk and then led a discussion in the galleries. As someone who has worked with the vexed imagery of slavery for most of his career, he wondered at first whether he would have anything new to say about objects with which he was so familiar. It was the juxtaposition of the bust and the portrayal of a young boy as a page by Sir Joshua Reynolds hanging on the wall behind it (see [fig. 11](#)) that caught his attention. Wilson noted that he had never considered boys such as the one in the painting growing up into adults. The Harwood bust became a way to imagine a future for the boy in the painting, how he might become a man with stature and presence.

At the centre of the exhibition, the Harwood bust also asked viewers to imagine a life story for the figure while respecting the limits of what we can ever know. As such, it seemed to invite a direct and personal connection, an ability to solicit what queer theorist Carolyn Dinshaw has termed “the touch across time”.²⁸ Nell Painter, historian, author, and artist participated in a podcast interview that placed the bust in the context of the lived experiences of the eighteenth century. Her personal response to the bust was equally powerful. As she remarked, “when I first saw this sculpture . . . I blurted out, this is the artists’ boyfriend!” She went on:

the piece is so tenderly beautiful, so caressingly detailed of face and shoulders that it can only be of a particular person . . . not allegory, not myth, he is someone well known to the artist and I figure someone well loved. Now that I have spent time, I recognize this person, or someone he closely resembles.

Painter’s response makes explicit the bust’s captivating eroticism. As discussed above, we know so little of the exact circumstances involved in its making. Isn’t it likely that there was a relationship or interaction of some kind between the sitter and the sculptor? Clearly they spent time together, and this physicality and sense of touch is expressed through the attention paid to the surface of the skin and the bust’s musculature. This layered encounter with the bust—imagining its history while simultaneously projecting one’s own history onto it—is envisioned not as an incongruity but as an acknowledgment of what the field of psychology calls “confirmation bias”.

We see what we know and what we are prepared to understand; this is not a shortcoming, but a fundamental aspect of human perception and knowledge production.

Echoing the scholarly discussions of portraits as particularizing representations, high school students who visited the exhibition were often able to interpret the bust as both an individual and a representative image, and did not experience this as a contradiction. Whether narrating a personal or collective history, the bust, in their eyes, exists in relation to others. One student wrote: “I see to the day this sculpture was made. By his posture and smirk I feel this man is proud to be representing something, whether it’s he or a group. . . . Maybe he was a part of something special? Maybe that’s why he and the artist worked to make this bust?” Another student picked up on the idea of portrait as encounter: “His eyes portray little about his life, yet seem to tell us so much about the day the sculpture was created.” She is as much focused on the interaction between artist and sitter as she is on the narrative of the bust.

One could argue that depictions of people, including portraits, are created to invite us to imagine. This is not a new notion. It was put forward by anti-slavery art and activism premised on the very possibility of fellow feeling and universal kinship. Perhaps the most familiar black icon of the British eighteenth century is Josiah Wedgwood’s abolitionist ceramic medallion of 1787 of an enchained, kneeling slave pictured in profile and applied in relief, who pleads the words of the caption, “Am I not a Man and a Brother?”. He is a contained figure—miniaturized, suppliant, and generic. Nonetheless, the sentimental appeal of the image led to its instant reproduction in the form of tokens, bracelets, plates, and even snuffboxes. Even earlier, Sir Joshua Reynolds in his fourth discourse of 1769 argued: “there must be something either in the action or in the object in which men are universally concerned, and which powerfully strikes upon the public sympathy.” ²⁹

In its public display, having moved from the margins to the centre of the space, Harwood’s bust has played a pivotal role in framing the changing meaning of objects across time, and in reckoning with uncomfortable notions of the past while also allowing new meanings to be created. Especially when shown together, these pictorial representations of slavery in portraiture ultimately fail to dehumanize their subjects and instead allow us to see individuals in relationships of intimacy and in negotiation with power.

The matter of a Neoclassical black icon



Figure 13.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, 2012, installation view of photograph of Antico [Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi], *Bust of a Young Man*, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Francis Harwood, *Bust of a Man*, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. chromogenic print, 165.1 × 485.14 cm. Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day

Whereas each of Harwood's busts is an anomaly within its own museum setting, when studied in relation to each other they also enable a fuller consideration of the individual representation not only as a type, but also as one among countless other unnamed Black Europeans of the eighteenth century. Acknowledging the limits of the positivist, historicist impulse to identify the real person, and hence the objective truth of the work of art, also helpfully redirects us to its affective realities. That is, we can begin to ask how the object invites us to look, and how its ambiguities disrupt the "grammar of violence"—to borrow a term from Saidiya Hartman—of a slaving society premised on eighteenth-century notions of personhood. ³⁰

Black is a colour with a history.³¹ Even while it cannot be simply reduced to one colour among other colours, activating the metonymic play of its signification across history and in linguistic and material registers—between blackamoor, black stone, and Black man—might help unfix some of the constrictions of essentialism. We have suggested that the interplay of universal and particular undergirds the bust's power and enigma as a portrait; yet we are less concerned with parsing the difference between portrait and type, as we are with understanding our ways of seeing, categorizing, and disciplining the eighteenth-century past. Philosophies of racism can help illuminate the social implications of the contradictions embodied by the Harwood busts. Whereas racism is usually seen as an extreme form of particularism, the philosopher Étienne Balibar posed the question: how might racism be aligned with universalism through its reliance on, rather than merely exclusion of, essential differences? By extension, do we, by classifying portraiture as the container of the elusive ideal of singularity, inadvertently uphold a system of ideal types, indeed valorize “a desire for knowledge which becomes fulfilled by a system of differential categories”?³² To return to the question of the bust's “Blackened” blackness, we might adapt Balibar's provocation of “racism as universalism” and posit racism as anthropomorphism. In other words, assigning blackness to the human and projecting the biases of the social onto the inanimate—such as the stone—makes matter speak as though it were an objective, living truth.

Today, it is as though we want the bust to speak; to be a Black superhero that has travelled through time and withstood the ravages of history. To a current-day audience, the materiality of the Harwood busts animates the history, indeed the matter, of Black life. It reassures us that “black is beautiful” at a moment when the mantra of “Black Lives Matter” asserts, tragically, what should be a given rather than an exception. In this way, the bust is a modelled minority, and an icon of sorts.³³ Icons are made in order to fill a social or institutional need, and their fetishized exceptionalism can become as limiting as the invisibility of the raced subject.

It is the space between and around the busts that defines their blackness, particularly when they are photographed. Between 2008 and 2009, artist Ken Gonzales-Day created a body of work centred on the Getty's version of Harwood's bust. He selected the object because it resonated with themes in his own work such as the construction of race, the history of physiognomy and classical standards of beauty, and the history of scientific racism and museum display. His resulting photographs, the “Profile Series”, placed the bust in dialogue with the Getty collection in new ways, raising questions about the racial and racist underpinnings of sculpting, indeed of profiling, the human figure. One of the images, which pairs the Harwood Bust with a European Bust of a Young Man (Untitled, by Antico [Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi]) was featured on a public billboard in Los Angeles as part of the

citywide exhibit, in February and March of 2010. By transporting the image outside and beyond the museum, the bust is at once flattened and made newly interactive. In orchestrating a face-off between the two black figures, who share a colour though not a race, the work makes evident the need for radical juxtapositions and critical re-framings of the object (fig. 13). Just as the spaces we have explored here—museum display, artist and audience encounters, scholarly debates—are subject to change, so we continue the conversation in the photo-essay and interview with Gonzales-Day, in the hopes of generating further dialogue. For onto the bust is projected not only our knowledge of the past, but also the productive gaps which remain.

Photo-essay by Ken Gonzales-Day



Figure 14.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, 2015, photograph of Francis Harwood, *Bust of a Man*, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA. chromogenic print, 84 × 164.7 cm. Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day



Figure 15.
Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, photograph of Francis Harwood,
Bust of a Man, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles Digital
image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day

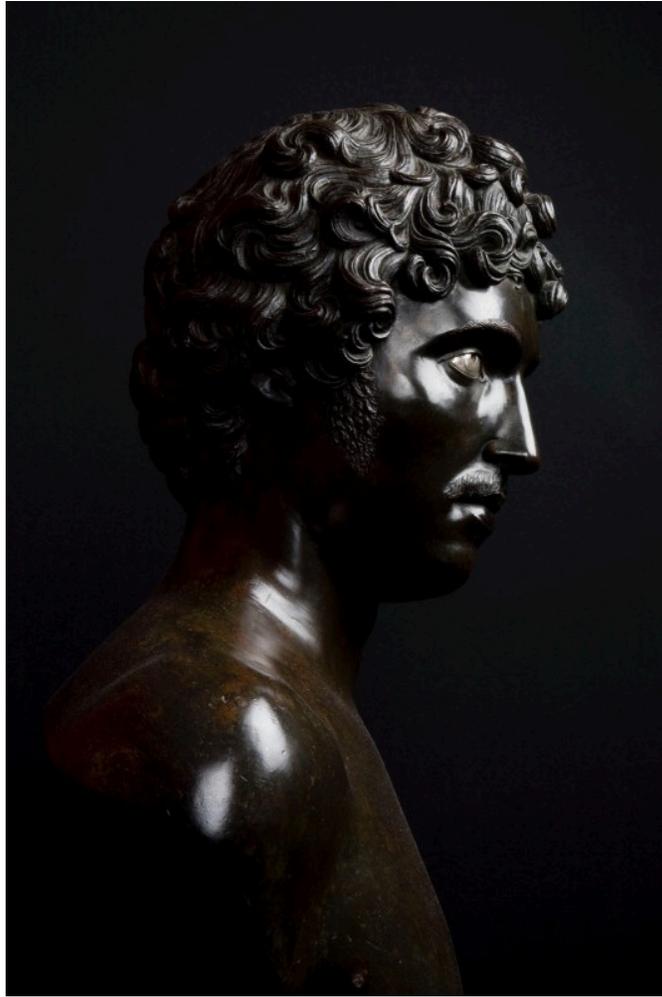


Figure 16.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, photograph of Antico [Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi], *Bust of a Young Man*, the J. Paul Getty Museum, CA Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day

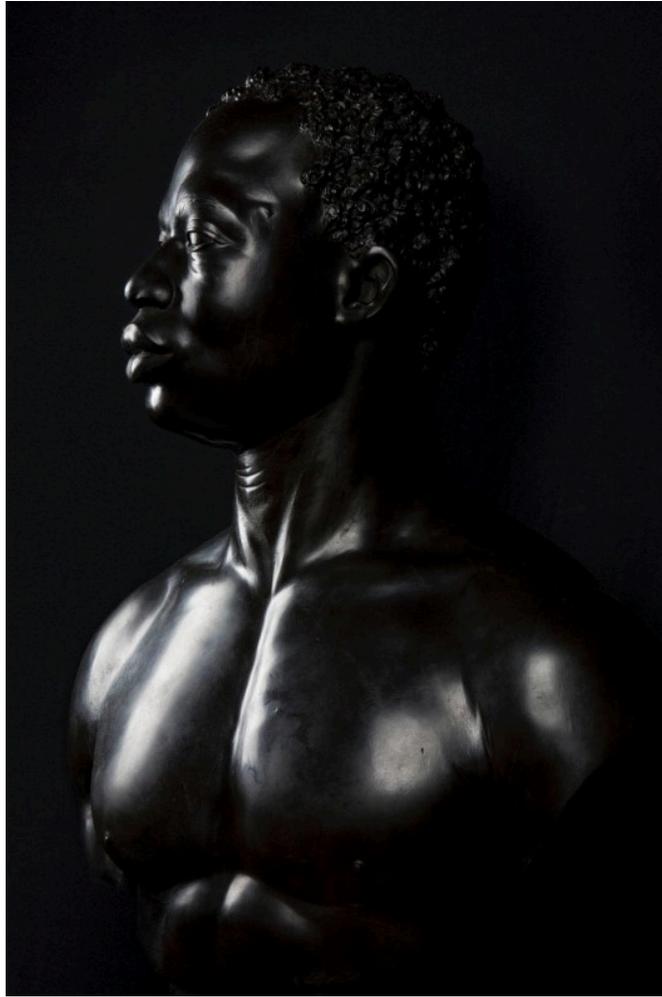


Figure 17.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, photograph of Francis Harwood, *Bust of a Man*, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day



Figure 18.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, photographs of *Bust of Moor*, marble, Sanssouci Palace, Berlin- Brandenburg; *Torso of Pan*, antique, Sanssouci Palace, Berlin- Brandenburg Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day



Figure 19.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, photograph of Antico [Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi], *Bust of a Young Man*, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Francis Harwood, *Bust of a Man*, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day



Figure 20.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Panorama of Museum West Pavilion*, 2015, chromogenic print, 20.32 × 99 cm, taken in the West Pavilion, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day



Figure 21.

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Untitled*, 2012, photograph of Antico [Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi], *Bust of a Young Man*, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Francis Harwood, *Bust of a Man*, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. chromogenic print, 165.1 × 485.14 cm. Digital image courtesy of Ken Gonzales-Day

Ken Gonzales-Day interview

Could you describe how you first encountered the Harwood bust?
What drew you to it?

I was a Visiting Scholar (and artist-in-residence) at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. I used to walk past the Harwood sculpture quite often and I remember being rather struck one day by its location, near a passageway. It was in a room with life-size white marble sculptures of *Venus* (1773), *Minerva* (1775), and *Juno* (1776), by Joseph Nollekens and Joseph Wilton's white marble *Bust of a Man* (1758), and *Bust of Pseudo-Seneca* (1755-65). There was also *Faun Holding a Goat* by an unknown Frenchman, a herm, another portrait bust, and perhaps unintentionally, Francis Harwood's *Bust of a Man* seemed to be gazing directly towards a rather lithe marble figure of *Apollo Crowning Himself* (1781-82) by Antonio Canova.

In a small mountain's worth of white marble, this was the only depiction of race that I could see. A black male bust carved in black stone, with broad shoulders, a bare chest and the muscular definition of a superhero. It was, and is, a striking figure, but what surprised me most was the speed at which viewers passed by and scarcely gave it a glance. It occurred to me that this was a rather remarkable room and I went there often. His name was not known. There was also no explanation of how he came to be there, in Los Angeles, at the J. Paul Getty Museum, nor of how he might relate to the other

sculpted figures in the room. This is not a criticism of the museum display but an observation. To most viewers, he was a man without a past, out of context, perched high upon a pedestal well above eye level. He was literally and figuratively isolated from the pulsing flow of visitors who walked in a steady stream past him on their way to the nearby elevated garden with a spectacular view of the city—steep competition for sure, particularly at such a well-known tourist destination.

How did you decide you wanted to photograph it?

It was after this experience that I altered my then current project at the Getty, and decided to photograph every portrait bust in the J. Paul Getty Museum as a way of thinking about sculptural depictions of race and whiteness. It is true that I could perhaps have simply purchased a museum catalogue, or searched the collection database online, but for my project I wanted to see these objects, to witness their presence, their scale, their surfaces, and to create a body of work from that experience. The project was so massive that the Getty extended my time there to allow me to complete the project, and I should say that none of it would have been possible without the support of the Getty Research Institute, the museum and security staff.

This is a method and genre question: why make photographic images of existing art works, and how does what you do differ from documentary photography? How would you describe your aesthetic vocabulary?

There is a larger question here about whether or not these photographs can or should be seen as part of a documentary project. I can say that unlike a museum photographer working to document an object for an exhibition catalogue, I am not bound by the rules, which is to say that a conventional documentary image may simply wish to present the sculpture as objectively as possible, so that the work will be well lit and recognizable. However, I often use lighting or my angle of view as a way of highlighting specific aspects of the object, perhaps drawing attention to a profile or trait that has been foregrounded by the sculptor. More than this, however, is the existence of the series as a whole, since it now includes well over one thousand objects. It is both an archive and a form of agency, and in fact many of the objects that I have photographed are rarely or never placed on view, and so in many ways, the work it has produced may be the only way many viewers will ever be able to experience these objects.

There is also the issue of experiencing these works in sometimes vastly different contexts than those imagined by their creators. For example, how might our interpretation of a work change if it were presented as scientific evidence of human difference, or as an example of individual self-expression, an artistic style, directed by a commissioning body, or the product of a historic period? As with so many of these contested objects, context is everything and nothing, at the same time.

What were some of the challenges of photographing this bust in particular, and of sculpture in general?

On a technical level, the Harwood bust is a challenging work to photograph precisely because it is so dark and shiny. From nearly every angle it catches reflections on its highly polished surface. In addition, it was, and is, on a very high pedestal and so I had to stand very precariously on a stepladder and try to manipulate a very old 8x10 Deardorff camera to get the shot. Lastly of course, I was only able to photograph in the galleries on Mondays when the museum is closed to the public, so it actually took many weeks to get the right shot. At the Yale Center for British Art, I had additional challenges in not being able to control the lighting.

In general, the greatest challenge with photographing sculpture is trying to get access to the objects, working around museum hours, and also photographing something that often cannot be moved.

On a more conceptual level, all photographers take pictures, but in this case, they are pictures of someone else's artwork. So the challenge for me is often to try to capture something particular about a given sculpture, just as one might try to capture something unique or telling about a person in a portrait. In my case, I was trying to understand why a given feature might have been given emphasis by the sculptor. In some cases, I would dramatically alter the conventional lighting of the sculpture to "uncover" some quality or feature not present in the museum presentation.

For example, I might shoot one sculpture to foreground an idealized treatment of the face, while in another I might focus on a highly detailed treatment of facial features, like wrinkles in eighteenth-century terracotta portrait busts, to highlight a particular fascination with character analysis present in that time period.

I think for me there was also a conceptual level which allowed me to look at all these representations as just that, as representations that could be studied, considered, and that such considerations could be used to create a new work of art that would do a different kind of work than those articulated in the original object. What does race look like? What does whiteness look like? What other factors might also be a play? And so on.

What kind of digital enhancement or technical manipulation, for example, through lighting, went into the construction of the jet-black colour of the Harwood bust? What were you hoping to achieve by highlighting its blackness?

The image was produced in black and white in order to reduce the material differences between the objects juxtaposed and the colour or treatment of the stone in particular. In a way it was also a response to the question and ongoing debate or discussion about which of the two Harwood busts came first. I was wondering how much the ordering of their production would change their significance, and asking myself, what could their differences tell us, and how might that change depending on which one came first? For example, the scar and hair are treated very differently in both of the sculptures, so much so that they could easily be seen as two different works. Then there is the choice of material, the treatment of the shoulders and the back, and so on.

So rather than simply anaesthetizing what are very different and beautiful surfaces I wanted to create a work that might sketch out a different set of questions than those I had been hearing. It was also intended to encourage the viewer to consider the very question of demarcation itself, the mark-making that is sculpture.

What were some of the challenges of photographing this bust in particular, and of sculpture in general?

On a technical level, the Harwood bust is a challenging work to photograph precisely because it is so dark and shiny. From nearly every angle it catches reflections on its highly polished surface. In addition, it was, and is, on a very high pedestal and so I had to stand very precariously on a stepladder and try to manipulate a very old 8x10 Deardorff camera to get the shot. Lastly of course, I was only able to photograph in the galleries on Mondays when the museum is closed to the public, so it actually took many weeks to get the right shot. At the Yale Center for British Art, I had additional challenges in not being able to control the lighting.

What did you notice about the differences between the Yale and the Getty busts as you photographed them?

Did Harwood humanize the figure more in one than the other, did he racialize one more than the other, were there specific distinct locations imagined for each sculpture? Here, we can think of the backs of the sculptures. One seems to have been intended for a niche or alcove. And for myself, I was also wondering about the differences in the way the objects are displayed. Location, lighting, and even height, all impact my perception of the work. Is one more accurate than the other? Are they sculptural types or portraits? And what critical tools can we use to distinguish the similarities and differences between them?

In eliminating the colour, I wanted to draw attention to the form. I also brought the contrast levels closer together because they were taken in very different lighting conditions. To my eye they look very different, and these marks of difference seem to want to tell another story, one beyond the individual depicted, and one beyond which came first. I wanted the image to remind us that each work was the result of physical acts, created in different moments, which when brought together, might add up to more than a literal description of light on stone in a still evolving narrative that is very much tied to the present: tied to what is visible, and what can never be visible.

Juxtaposition plays a big role in your image-making, often a kind of “face-off” between different works. What does juxtaposition do for you?

Juxtaposition allows the works to create new dialogues. It often literally creates an empty or open space between objects, which the viewer can then fill with their own questions or answers. It is a generative space. It marks a potential; a site for dialogue; it can stand in for time; it can be the space between texts. This de-contextualization can sometimes help to raise questions about racial formation, gender normativity, and any number of other topics. Lastly, of course, this juxtaposition is a way to give the objects life again. It allows them to enter into current debates. Many of the objects I photograph are quite remarkable and so even though the context in which they came into being may have changed, shifted, or even become unrecognizable, there is no reason why we cannot still productively engage with them. One need only think of the recent media coverage on police violence to be reminded that the discussion of race and racial profiling is anything but a thing of the past.

Did your image-making of the busts shift or change your overall thinking about racial profiling and the history of ethnographic typecasting? What new knowledge did it add or questions did it raise for your practice and thinking?

It was after photographing the Harwood bust at the Getty that I also began looking for and photographing other sculptural depictions of race, including works by Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier (1827–1905) and Malvina Hoffman as well as the Harwood bust held at the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven. So, yes, it set me on a path to photograph more works by other artists and in different kinds of collections, ultimately drawing on both the fine arts and the sciences as a way of re-thinking the role three-dimensional work has contributed to our understanding of race within museums and beyond.

Footnotes

- ¹ David Bindman, Bruce Boucher, and Helen Weston, “The Theater of Court and Church: Blacks as Figures of Fantasy”, in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, Vol. 3: *From the ‘Age of Discovery’ to the Age of Abolition*, Part 3: *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2011), 40. See also David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century* (London: Reaktion, 2002), 32.
- ² John Fleming and Hugh Honour, “Francis Harwood: An English Sculptor in XVIII Century Florence”, *Festschrift Ulrich Middeldorf*, 2 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968), 1: 510.
- ³ Ingrid Roscoe, Emma Hardy, and M. G. Sullivan, *A Biographical Dictionary of Sculptors in Britain 1660–1851* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2009), 584.
- ⁴ Peggy Fogelman, “Francis Harwood”, in *The Color of Life: Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Roberta Panzanelli and others (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008), 156.
- ⁵ Marjorie Trusted, *The Return of the Gods: Neoclassical Sculpture in Britain* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 143.
- ⁶ See Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*, 32.
- ⁷ Hugh Honour, *Neoclassicism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 118, 122.
- ⁸ See Anthea Brook, “From Borgo Pinti to Doccia: The Afterlife of Pietro Tacca’s Moors for Livorno”, 125, and Jean Michel Massing, “The Iconography of Mediterranean Slavery in the Seventeenth Century”, 94, both in *The Slave in European Art: From Renaissance Trophy to Abolitionist Emblem*, ed. Elizabeth McGrath and Jean Michel Massing (London and Turin: Warburg Institute and Nino Aragno Editore, 2012).
- ⁹ Paul Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1985).
- ¹⁰ Interview with Kathleen Goncharov, in Paul Kaplan and others, *Fred Wilson: Speak of Me as I Am*, 50th International Exhibition of Art, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, 2003 (Cambridge, MA: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2003), 22.
- ¹¹ Adrienne L. Childs, “Sugar Boxes and Blackamoors: Ornamental Blackness in Early Meissen Porcelain”, in *The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth-Century Porcelain*, ed. Alden Cavanaugh and Michael E. Yonan (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 159–77.
- ¹² Quoted in Elizabeth McGrath, “Caryatids, Page Boys, and African Fetters: Themes of Slavery in European Art”, in *The Slave in European Art*, ed. McGrath and Massing, 8.
- ¹³ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 11.
- ¹⁴ Christie’s, London, *Important European Sculpture and Works of Art*, 9 April 1987, 43.
- ¹⁵ *Apollo* 126, no. 305 (July 1987): 13.
- ¹⁶ *Christie’s International Magazine* (June–July 1987): 85.
- ¹⁷ Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 131.
- ¹⁸ The J. Paul Getty Museum Examination Report and Treatment Proposal for 88.SA.114 (28 Aug. 2009). See also the Treatment Report for 88.SA.114 (7 Sept. 2010), 2.

- 19 According to one line of reasoning, “the possibility of using ‘black marble’ induced the subject, not vice-versa.” Philippe Malgouyres, “Coloured Stone, Sculpted Objects: Subjects for Sculpture”, in *Revival and Invention: Sculpture through its Material Histories*, ed. Sébastien Clerbois and Martina Droth (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 162.
- 20 James Smalls, “Exquisite Empty Shells: Sculpted Slave Portraits and the French Ethnographic Turn”, in *Slave Portraiture in the Atlantic World*, ed. Agnes Lugo-Ortiz and Angela Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 283-314.
- 21 See for example, Jordanna Bailkin, “Indian Yellow: Making and Breaking the Imperial Palette”, *Journal of Material Culture* 10, no. 2 (2005): 197-214; David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion, 2000); Andrea Feeser, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds., *The Materiality of Color: The Production, Circulation, and Application of Dyes and Pigments, 1400-1800* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012); Nina G. Jablonski, *Living Color: The Biological and Social Meaning of Skin Color* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: Univ. of California Press, 2012); Michael Taussig, *What Color is the Sacred?* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009); Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz, eds., *An Economy of Colour: Visual Culture and the North Atlantic World, 1660-1830* (Manchester and New York: Manchester Univ. Press, 2003).
- 22 Even the white marble work of Canova was often waxed and stained with yellow to make it appear more antique. See Hugh Honour, “Canova’s Studio Practice II: 1792-1822”, *The Burlington Magazine* 114, no. 829 (April 1972): 2, 218-19.
- 23 Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), 76.
- 24 Jan Stubbe Østergaard, “Emerging Colors: Roman Sculptural Polychromy Revived”, in *The Color of Life*, ed. Panzanelli, 52, and Getty Examination Report and Treatment Proposal (28 Aug. 2009), 1.
- 25 Malcolm Baker, *The Marble Index: Roubiliac and Sculptural Portraiture in Eighteenth-century Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2014), 8, 67.
- 26 See, respectively, the work of David Bindman, “Subjectivity and Slavery in Portraiture: From Courtly to Commercial Societies”, in *Slave Portraiture in the Atlantic World*, ed. Lugo-Ortiz and Rosenthal, 75; Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity* (London: Reaktion, 2013), 48; Georges Didi-Huberman, “The Portrait, the Individual and the Singular: Remarks on the Legacy of Aby Warburg”, in *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 165; and Linda Kim, “Mediating Race Science: Art and Common-Sense in 1930s America”, book MS (under review).
- 27 Agnes Lugo-Ortiz and Angela Rosenthal, “Introduction: Envisioning Slave Portraiture”, in *Slave Portraiture in the Atlantic World*, ed. Lugo-Ortiz and Rosenthal, 10.
- 28 Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999), 43.
- 29 Sir Joshua R. Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 57.
- 30 Saidiya V. Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”, *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 4.
- 31 See, for instance, Michel Pastoureau, *Black: The History of a Color* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009).
- 32 Étienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 201.
- 33 See Nicole R. Fleetwood, *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2015).

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Arts and Crafts Painting: The Political Agency of Things

Morna O'Neill

Abstract

Can there be such a thing as “Arts and Crafts” painting? This article will address that question by interrogating the points of connection between Pre-Raphaelite painting and the Arts and Crafts object. Taking its cue from William Morris’s reflection on the “English Pre-Raphaelite School” from 1891, this article examines the interplay between painting and design in both Pre-Raphaelite painting and the Arts and Crafts movement. It addresses the ways in which paintings depicted decorative art, as well as the aspiration of decorative art to the symbolic potential traditionally associated with painting. It is my contention that Pre-Raphaelite painting unleashed a radical possibility for decorative art: the Arts and Crafts belief in the political agency of things.

Authors

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the curators of Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design, including Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld, Alison Smith, and Diane Waggoner, as well as the organizers of the “Pre-Raphaelitism and International Modernisms” Public Symposium at the National Gallery in Washington for the opportunity to consider these questions and present this material. My sincere thanks to Jay Curley and Jessica Richard for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this essay and to Patrick Moran for encouraging me to think about things. I am grateful to the two anonymous readers for their comments, and any inconsistencies that remain are my own. I would also like to thank Sarah Victoria Turner, Hana Leaper, and the excellent team at British Art Studies.

Cite as

Morna O'Neill, "Arts and Crafts Painting: The Political Agency of Things", *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/moneill>

In 1889, the artist and designer Walter Crane summarized the goals of the Arts and Crafts movement with a poem entitled "The Craftsman's Dream".¹

In sixty-five stanzas, this poem encapsulates the ideals of the movement in which Crane played a vital role, as he describes what happens when an unemployed craftsman wanders into a museum and strolls through the galleries admiring the decorative arts on display. Crane planned to publish an illustrated edition which was never realized: a drawing for the frontispiece shows the craftsman at the beginning of his visit, facing off with an Egyptian sphinx (fig. 1). This object and other physical traces of the past, characterized as remnants of "golden ages", inspire and inform. And yet the craftsman cannot escape a sense of despair, even in his admiration, that such wonders should be "cast aside" from use and imprisoned in museum cases.

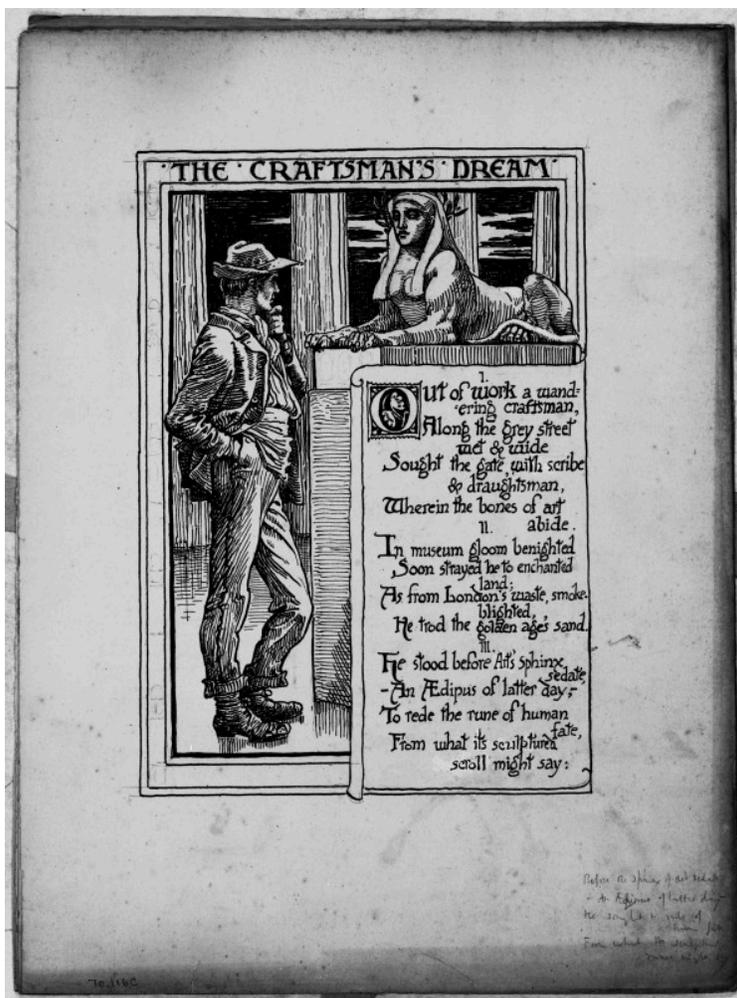


Figure 1.

The Craftsman's Dream, *The Craftsman's Dream*, n.d, pen and ink, 38.1 x 27.9 cm. The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA. Gift of the Friends Digital image courtesy of The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Garden



Figure 2.

Walter Crane, illustration for *The Craftsman's Dream*, ca. 1890, pen and ink, 38.1 × 27.9 cm. Walter Crane Archive, Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester Digital image courtesy of Courtesy of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester

What happens next in the poem is surprising: after contemplating the decorative arts of the past, the craftsman comes upon a painting that decorates the walls of the museum. And this is not just any painting; it is an imaginative projection of his thoughts onto the canvas, a proto-cinematic kaleidoscope of shifting scenes. What begins as a barren landscape painting quickly transforms into a battle scene, as bands of artists and workers, assisted by figures from history and mythology, defeat a monstrous Capitalist and his minions. In a second planned illustration, Crane depicted the Capitalist astride a decorated mount (fig. 2). He wears the armour of industrialism and the helmet of the factory, a “stove-pipe” hat that Crane would later describe as “the crown of the modern king, the financier—the business man—he who must be obeyed”.²

The Capitalist is also referred to as “The Philistine”. He is an accumulator of “sordid spoils” from “ruined lands” who cares only for the monetary value of art and not at all for its historical conditions or symbolic purpose. The craftsman imagines victory for the workers, and the painting once again transforms, this time into a depiction of the ideal society. In this utopia, art unites utility and beauty, and thus liberates all workers, including the artist: “for styles and learning vexed them not/ But, singing at his craft, each one,/ Was happy in his working lot.” With these lines, Crane alludes to the goals of the Arts and Crafts movement, as well as its politics. It is significant in this regard that “The Craftsman’s Dream” did not appear in an artistic journal but was published in the *Labour Leader*, a socialist newspaper.³

Crane’s poem summarizes Arts and Crafts ideals: a protest against industrial manufacture and an attempt to make daily life more beautiful inspired by, but not in imitation of, the best examples of past art. Looking to the past as a way to critique the present and imagine the future was a popular trope in socialist writing of this period, especially in William Morris’s *A Dream of John Ball* from 1888.⁴ The disjunctive temporality of “The Craftsman’s Dream” is also indebted to the writings of John Ruskin. The poem signals Crane’s admiration for Ruskin’s praise of the Gothic stonemason in *The Stones of Venice* (1851–3), a text that provided aesthetic and moral justifications for preferring handicraft to mass-produced decoration in the age of industrial manufacture. That text in particular championed the individual creative impulse, set in opposition to the contemporary urge to make man into a machine. The espousal of craftsmanship led to a further critique of political economy in Ruskin’s *Unto this Last* (1862). His promotion of craftsmanship and the concomitant denigration of industrialization, along with his assertion of the public function of art, influenced the political development of not only artists but an entire community of English socialists.⁵ William Morris in particular transformed Ruskin’s ideas into a type of artisanal socialism.⁶ The question remains, however, as to why Crane selected *painting* as the transformative artistic medium in his dream of the craftsman, bypassing crafts such as metalwork or ceramics or carpet weaving. Can there be such a thing as “Arts and Crafts” painting?

This article will address that question by interrogating the relationship between Arts and Crafts design and Pre-Raphaelite painting. In most popular accounts, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones occupy dual positions; they are both the “second generation” Pre-Raphaelites and guiding forces in the Arts and Crafts movement.⁷ And yet William Morris merited only a single entry—for an oil painting—in the catalogue for the Tate Gallery’s groundbreaking exhibition *The Pre-Raphaelites* from 1984.⁸ On the other hand, the Pre-Raphaelites were a mere prologue to Morris’s heroic work as a designer in the Victoria and Albert Museum’s exhibition *William Morris* from

1996.⁹ This divide between “fine” art and “decorative” art says more about ways in which museums classify objects than about the interconnectedness of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts movement.¹⁰ The recent exhibition *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* (Tate Britain; 12 September 2012 to 13 January 2013) broke new ground by displaying a more expansive view; indeed, when the exhibition travelled to the National Gallery in Washington, DC, it was titled *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design* (17 February–19 May 2013). By re-connecting the personal and artistic links between these two movements, the exhibition articulated the ways in which painting and design shared concerns with craft, narrative, and ornament.



Figure 3.

Ford Madox Brown, *Work*, 1852–65, oil on canvas, 137 × 197.3 cm.
Manchester City Art Galleries Digital image courtesy of Manchester City Art Galleries

Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde explored the interplay of art and design from the establishment of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848 into the 1890s. I would like to further this investigation by interrogating the points of connection between Pre-Raphaelite painting and the Arts and Crafts object. The dynamic interaction between painting and design has long been considered a hallmark of early twentieth-century avant-gardes such as Russian Constructivism and De Stijl. In the latter example, both the abstract art of Piet Mondrian and the furniture design of Gerrit Rietveld sought to articulate a utopian vision of a new society. According to art historian Nancy Troy, these artists held “a common set of ethical and aesthetic principles” and explored “the possibility of merging the arts” through “collaborative relationships” over a period of some fifteen years (1917–32).¹¹ The example

presented by the “merging”, to borrow Troy’s formulation, of Pre-Raphaelitism and the Arts and Crafts movement is earlier and more complex, if equally utopian. Her terms could describe the creative dynamic between Ford Madox Brown’s *Work* (1852–65; [fig. 3](#)) and the “artisan” furniture he created for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. during this same period ([fig. 4](#)).

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Figure 4.

Ford Madox Brown for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Co, Washstand, ca. 1860, painted wood originally stained, 88 × 93 × 63 cm. Society of Antiquaries of London, Kelmscott Manor Collections Digital image courtesy of Kelmscott Manor, The Society of Antiquaries of London

Both examples declare a commitment to craft. While *Work* explores the various types of productive and unproductive labour, the unadorned yet elegantly solid form of the washstand celebrates construction. Yet, as I will discuss, Pre-Raphaelite painting was also critical to the later development of the “Arts and Crafts”, closer to the time that T. J. Cobden-Sanderson coined

the term in 1887. Crane's "Craftsman's Dream" presents painting as both wall decoration and revolutionary agent. The frame of the painting encountered in the museum likewise forms the frame of his dream of a socialist utopia. Taking my cue from William Morris's reflection on the "English Pre-Raphaelite School" from 1891, I will examine the interplay between painting and design in both Pre-Raphaelite painting and the Arts and Crafts movement. I will address the way in which paintings depicted decorative art, and the way in which decorative art aspired to the symbolic potential traditionally associated with painting. It is my contention that Pre-Raphaelite painting unleashed a radical possibility for decorative art: the Arts and Crafts belief in the political agency of things.

"The English Pre-Raphaelite School"

William Morris reflected on the influence of the "English Pre-Raphaelite School" on 2 October 1891 at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.¹³

Looking back upon the artistic events of 1848, Morris suggested that the Pre-Raphaelites "revolted" against the art establishment in three ways: through the "presentation of nature", "the telling of a story", and "the ornamental function of art". He then reviews the importance of each of these categories. One would expect, given Morris's interest in the decorative arts, that he would focus on the final category, the way in which Pre-Raphaelite painting re-imagined the "ornamental function of art". Yet this "decorative side of the school" is inseparable from its commitment to realism and its interest in narrative, and Morris traces all of these categories back to the Pre-Raphaelite presentation of things.

Pre-Raphaelite realism resides in what Morris terms the "presentment of natural facts". In other words, viewers of Pre-Raphaelite paintings say to themselves, "Here are such and such things as we have seen them, as we see them every day, exceedingly like the things in question."¹⁴ For Morris, this mode of presentation constitutes the democratic impulse of Pre-Raphaelitism: its art is addressed to the public rather than to the art establishment, and meaning is built up through the assemblage of recognizable things. At the same time, it underscores the important role of what we might call "accessories" or even "decorative art" within the paintings themselves: the meaning resides in the interpretation of things. This process is not unlike what Erwin Panofsky called the "transfigured reality" of Early Netherlandish painting in his monumental study from 1953.¹⁵ He argues that "symbolism and realism permeate one another fully"; to give just a few examples, the single lit candle in the chandelier that hangs over the couple in the *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) by Jan van Eyck represents the eye of God, while the dog represents fidelity, and the oranges on the windowsill communicate purity.¹⁶ The Pre-Raphaelites admired the Northern

Renaissance painters like Van Eyck, and the *Arnolfini Portrait*, in the collection of the National Gallery since 1842, exerted a wide influence on their art.¹⁷ As George Landow has demonstrated, the Pre-Raphaelite interest in narrative and iconography constituted a kind of “typological symbolism”, the co-mingling of the material world and spiritual meaning.¹⁸

Morris’s emphasis on “things” in his discussion, and the ability of the viewer to recognize “things as we have seen them”, brings to mind the

development of “thing theory” in literary studies.¹⁹ Yet in this theoretical formulation, the thing is designated as such because it is *unrecognizable*.

According to Bill Brown, to designate an object a “thing” is to separate it from the world of objects, to suggest that it lies “beyond the grid of intelligibility the way mere things lie outside the grid of museal exhibition”.

²⁰ Brown here contrasts the inchoate status of the “thing” to the orderly classification of objects in museums. The organization of, for example, keys, or masks, or charms against the evil eye at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford transforms things into objects. But what about the organization of paintings in a museum such as the National Gallery? As John Plotz has pointed out, thing theory “is not a theory about the cultural significance of objects”, one of the key functions of museal exhibition.²¹ Rather, thing theory identifies the “limit cases at which our ordinary categories for classifying signs and substances, meaning and materiality, appear to break down”.²² Objects depicted in paintings, what we might call “painted objects”, present an interesting inversion of this logic. In these terms, the painted object is always a thing, since its status as representation means that it is unintelligible as an object. And yet the very fact of this representation restores the thing to the “museal”. Morris praises the “things” in Pre-Raphaelite painting (“here are such and such things”) in a way that suggests he would be familiar with this paradox: the viewer recognizes the specific qualities of a quotidian object—its shape, colour, surface—only through its representation in painting.

In some discussions of the Arts and Crafts movement, the thing itself is irrelevant. In his consideration of C. R. Ashbee, Alan Crawford declared that “the object is not the object.”²³ To put it another way, Ashbee’s own Arts and Crafts enterprise, the Guild of Handicraft, extended Ruskin’s understanding of creative labour to its logical conclusion: the experience of the craftsman should guide any creative enterprise. In a sense, the actual outcome of that enterprise is beside the point. In her recent study *Arts and Crafts Objects*, Imogen Hart suggested that the objects of the movement cannot be reduced to crafts alone. Carpets, tapestries, wallpapers, and the like offer multiple stories of what it means to be an “Arts and Crafts object”. For example, William Morris’s magnificent “Peacock and Bird” carpet (1885–90; [fig. 5](#)) communicates its meaning through its making.



Figure 5.

William Morris and Morris & Co, *Peacock and Bird Carpet*, 1885-90, hand-knotted pile on cotton warp, 410 × 410 cm. William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest Digital image courtesy of Friends of William Morris

The carpet is a beautiful and useful thing that also expresses the ideals of handicraft, fitness of purpose, and the sensitive use of materials in a design that looked to nature and the artistic past for inspiration. To be “Arts and Crafts”, then, is to exhibit a mode of making, to portray a type of decoration, and to re-imagine what an object can be. As she asserts, “encouraging people to look at decorative art in new ways is one of the most important Arts and Crafts ‘objects’.”²⁴ This dynamic between viewer and thing, between subject and object, underpins Morris’s musing on the Pre-Raphaelites as well as Brown’s theorization of the thing. According to Brown, “the story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relationship to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation.”²⁵ For Morris, Pre-Raphaelite naturalism and narrative was inseparable from decoration. Specifically, Pre-Raphaelite paintings modelled a particular kind of subject-object relation which we could call decoration.

The attention to decoration links the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts movement in conceptual terms. When we think of “decoration” in terms of the Arts and Crafts, we usually think of objects that fall under the category “decorative art”, such as the “Peacock and Bird” carpet: a commodity likely intended for a domestic setting, its design and fabrication reflects both aesthetic and functional considerations. Victorian artists and critics, however, had a more expansive understanding of the term. Take, for example, William Morris’s definition of Pre-Raphaelite painting. While artistic naturalism goes hand in hand with its ability to tell a story, these two qualities are subsumed under the category of decoration. For Morris, painters such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones present “things” in a way that also acknowledges the painting itself as a kind of thing, an example itself of decoration: “it ought to be possible for it [a painting] to be part of a beautiful whole in a room or church or hall.”²⁶ For these reasons, Pre-Raphaelite painting suggested a mode of engagement with things—with furniture and decorative art and with the very idea of decoration—that was critical to the Arts and Crafts movement. Pre-Raphaelite paintings reveal the potential of objects to have meaning by rendering them as things. The Arts and Crafts movement then returned these things to the world of objects.

Crafting the object, painting the thing

The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society introduced the term “Arts and Crafts” to the public in 1888, the year before Crane wrote “The Craftsman’s Dream”, with an exhibition at the New Gallery in London. A loose confederation of designers and craftsmen had banded together in 1887 to draw attention to their work in order to, in the words of their first president Crane, “give opportunity to the designer and craftsman to exhibit their work to the public for its artistic interest and thus to assert the claims of decorative art and handicraft to attention equally with the painter of easel pictures”.²⁷ Here Crane signals a number of the innovations we now associate with the movement: a dual emphasis on the intellectual practice of design as well as the maker’s skill, the desire for a greater public appreciation of these interlinked processes, and recognition that “decorative arts” were as worthy of public exhibition and attention as the fine art of painting.

Artists such as Crane found inspiration in the collaborative projects undertaken by William Morris and the design work he pioneered with Burne-Jones, Rossetti, and Ford Madox Brown in the preceding decades. The moment when Morris and Burne-Jones met Rossetti constituted what many have called a “second phase” of Pre-Raphaelitism in the 1850s, one in which decorative practices like mural painting came to the fore. When Rossetti invited Morris and Burne-Jones and others to join him in creating frescoes for the new debating hall of the Oxford Union, he shifted Pre-Raphaelitism from

easel painting into decorative practice. As I will discuss, this interest in mural painting as a mode of wall covering became a central aspect of the Arts and Crafts movement, even though opportunities to realize this ideal were few.



Figure 6.

Philip Webb and Edward Burne-Jones, *The Prioress's Tale Wardrobe*, 1859, oil on pine and oak, 219.71 × 157.48 × 53.7 cm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Bequeathed by Miss May Morris, 1939 Digital image courtesy of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Painting also became a part of furniture design, as in “The Prioress’s Tale Wardrobe” (1857–8; [fig. 6](#)), planned as a wedding present from Burne-Jones to Morris. The wardrobe exemplifies the junction between Pre-Raphaelite painting and Arts and Crafts design. This type of “decorative painting”, as it was known, was a regular feature of the movement. Such hand-crafted decoration resisted the cheap, mass-produced ethos of the marketplace even as it addressed the functionality of the wardrobe: in this instance, the jamb between the two doors divides heaven from earth in relating a story from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. A further division in the lower portion

divides narrative (Chaucer writing his story) from narration (a portion of the text in painted form). A few years later, the establishment of Morris's firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in 1861 broadened the audience for this type of thoughtful integration of art and craft.

A Pre-Raphaelite exploration of historical forms of art and the admiration of nature also guided the pattern designs produced by "the Firm" and by its later incarnation, Morris & Co., established in 1875. As Diane Waggoner has discussed, Morris's "Cray" (1884; [fig. 7](#)) blended contemporary Indian textiles and historic examples with an organic structure rooted in his deep affinity for the natural world.²⁸ The rounded meandering lines evoke but do not delineate the abundant banks of the Cray, a tributary of the Thames. Morris's philosophy of a lively pattern design rooted in and yet abstracted from nature exerted a profound impact on the next generation, including Walter Crane, as suggested by his "Teazle" wallpaper design for Jeffrey & Co. from 1894 ([fig. 8](#)). Crane borrowed the curving forms of Morris's diagonal lines to structure his own pattern while eschewing the dense floral background considered more appropriate for textiles than for wallpaper. This attention to nature, combined with an admiration for the expressive forms of historical art, brings the concerns of Pre-Raphaelite painting into the realm of pattern design. "Cray" also evokes interest in older, often labour-intensive forms of artistic practice. Morris revived a method of cloth printing known as the "indigo-discharge", and this pattern required no less than thirty-four printing blocks to achieve its lively and vivid design.²⁹ "Cray" presents a design analogue to the Pre-Raphaelite attention to the craft of painting; the layering of the printing is here akin to the layering of paint on canvas, both beginning with the white ground that characterized the Pre-Raphaelite approach to painting.³⁰ The crafting of a Pre-Raphaelite canvas conceptualized an approach to artistic process that would become central to the Arts and Crafts movement.



Figure 7.
William Morris, *Cray*, 1884, block-printed cotton, 96.5 × 107.9 cm.
Victoria and Albert Museum, London Digital image courtesy of
Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 8.

Walter Crane for Jeffrey & Co, *Teazle*, 1894, colour woodblock print on paper, 89.5 × 51.4 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The displays of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society brought these paradigms to public attention.³¹ We can see how these strands came together with the presentation of Crane's wallpaper design entitled "The Golden Age" (1886) at the inaugural 1888 exhibition. It was featured in a section of the display devoted to the wares of the wallpaper manufacturer Jeffrey & Co., whose director Metford Warner appreciated the expressive potential of design. As such, "The Golden Age" appeared in four different treatments: one sample of embossed leather with the design hand-painted by Crane (fig. 9) and a second sample made of embossed paste-board that simulated leather (fig. 10), again with the design hand-painted by Crane. The exhibition also featured a hammered metal plate with the same pattern designed by Crane but executed this time by Thomas Godfrey, a skilled metalworker. The final iteration was not a manufacturer's sample: Crane's

showed his original watercolour design for the paper (fig. 11).³² While it was typical for a design to be available in a variety of treatments for different types of markets, in its various permutations “The Golden Age” also suggested the inventiveness of the designer and his collaboration with other makers. In addition, Crane’s design acknowledged the individual agency of the consumer in selecting a treatment, as it was also available in two colourways, red and blue (figs. 13 and 14) as a wood-block printed wallpaper.



Figure 9.

Walter Crane for Jeffrey & Co, *The Golden Age*, 1886, exhibited 1888, embossed leather with brown-and-gold lacquer, painted by Crane, 79.4 × 59.1 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 10.

Walter Crane for Jeffrey & Co, *The Golden Age*, 1886, exhibited 1888, embossed pastebord simulating leather, with coloured lacquer, painted by Crane, 89 × 50.8 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 11.

Walter Crane, Design for *The Golden Age*, 1886, exhibited 1888, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, 101 × 66.7 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London Digital image courtesy of victoria and Albert Museum, London

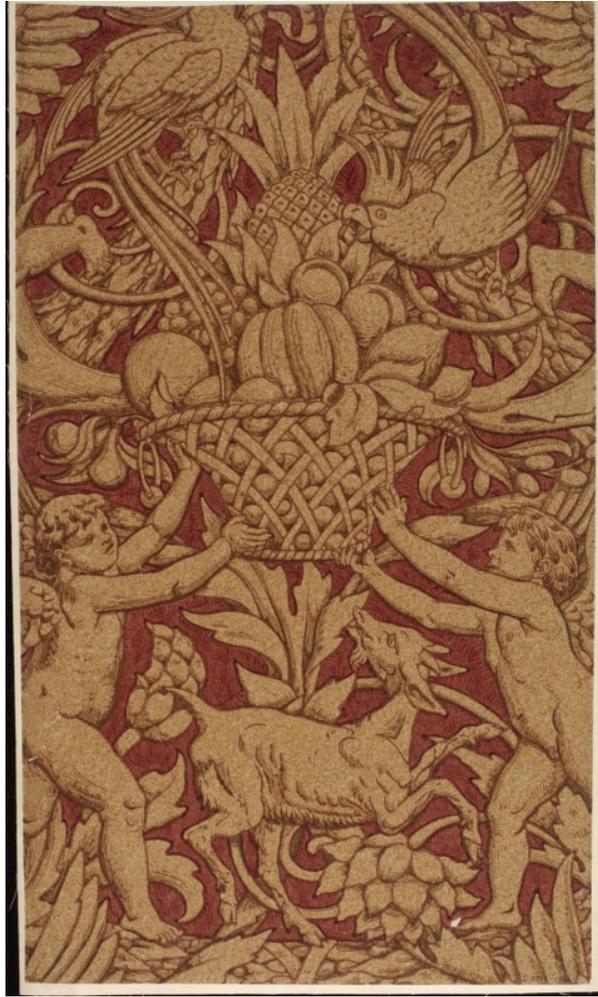


Figure 12.

Walter Crane for Jeffrey & Co, *The Golden Age*, 1886, colour woodblock print on paper in red colourway, 85.1 × 49.2 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London

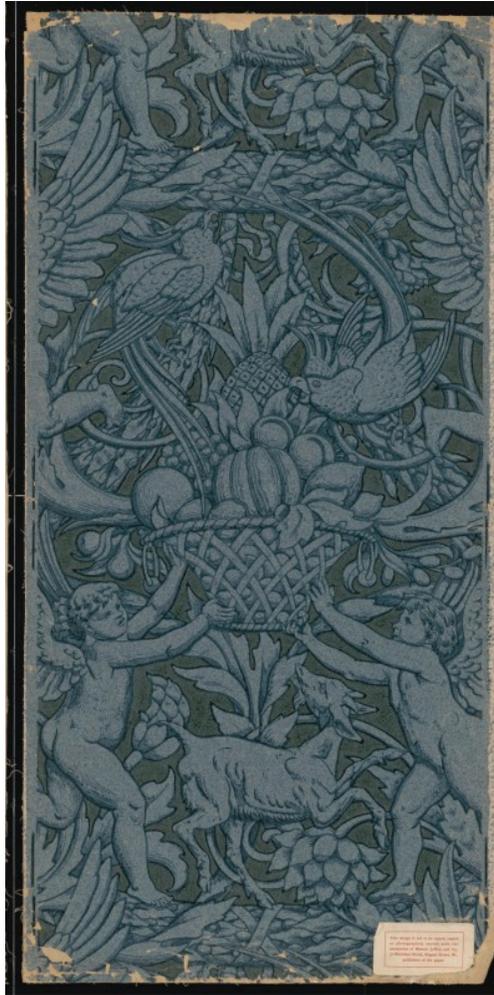


Figure 13.

Walter Crane for Jeffrey & Co, *The Golden Age*, 1886, colour woodblock print on paper in blue colourway, 116.9 × 54 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London

If the museum presented the golden ages of the past for Crane’s wandering craftsman in “The Craftsman’s Dream”, then the Arts and Crafts display illustrated the golden age of the present. But the two were in dynamic contact: Crane found inspiration for his design of stylized putti holding aloft a basket of ripe fruit crowned by a pineapple in historical examples, such as an embossed leather panels from the seventeenth century, like those still extant at Dyrham Park in Gloucestershire.³³ Crane’s four samples of “The Golden Age” ally a Pre-Raphaelite evocation of an artistic past to the goals of the Arts and Crafts movement. In this, he and others drew inspiration from the imaginative and self-conscious reconstruction of a past that never existed—an imagined “golden age” of art also evoked by objects such as “The Prioress’s Tale Wardrobe”. Yet these concerns with decoration and

meaning predate the collaborative venture launched by Morris in the late 1850s; in fact, they reach all the way back to the first examples of Pre-Raphaelite painting and the depiction of decoration.

Take, for example, John Everett Millais's *Isabella* (1848–9; [fig. 14](#)), one of the “manifesto” paintings shown at the Royal Academy in 1849 and signed with the initials PRB. If we focus on the decorative objects in the painting, we find that they communicate the narrative of forbidden love and family violence that will end with the murder of Lorenzo at the hands of Isabella's brothers, a post-mortem beheading, and the planting of his head in a pot of basil. For example, Isabella dines on a majolica plate that depicts a beheading scene ([fig. 15](#)). It is likely a scene of Hercules beheading the Hydra, similar to one now in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford ([fig. 16](#)). As Elizabeth Prettejohn has pointed out, “the setting and accessory details are literally ‘Pre-Raphaelite,’ Italian examples from the time before Raphael.”³⁴ Yet they are more than just historically appropriate props; their detailed description demands that the viewer look, and look again, to puzzle over their form and significance in the same way that decoration and description are integrated in “The Prioress's Tale Wardrobe”. In Bill Brown's terms, these objects become things, and both engender what Tim Barringer has called one of the central “paradoxes” of Pre-Raphaelite painting: an insistence on the contemporary that also asserts the historical.³⁵



Figure 14.

John Everett Millais, *Isabella*, 1848–9, oil on canvas, 103 × 142.8 cm.
National Museums Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery Digital image courtesy of
National Museums Liverpool



Figure 15.

John Everett Millais, *Isabella* (detail showing the plate in front of Lorenzo), 1848-9, oil on canvas, 103 × 142.8 cm. National Museums Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery Digital image courtesy of National Museums Liverpool



Figure 16.

probably Maestro Giorgio Andreoli, *Maiolica dish with Hercules and the Hydra*, ca. 1520, tin-glazed earthenware (maiolica), lustred, 32.2 cm. diameter. Ashmoleum Museum, Oxford. Bequeathed by C. D. E. Fortnum, 1899 Digital image courtesy of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

The new “Pre-Raphaelite” way of painting pioneered by Millais and his fellow travellers furthered this paradox: the emphasis on line in the delineation of forms, and the use of bright, unmixed colours creates a visual effect not unlike a pattern. Without the traditional use of light and shade, the pictorial space is daringly uniform, always threatening to collapse into flatness. ³⁶

Both Walter Crane and Ford Madox Brown would later describe this treatment of space as decorative. In a lecture on “Decorative Painting” to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1888, Crane explained that “the first essential of a decoration is that it shall be related to its environment, that it shall express or acknowledge the conditions under which it exists.” ³⁷ If it is a painting, then it should acknowledge the two-dimensionality of its support. Ford Madox Brown reiterated this point with characteristic candour when he lectured on painting at the 1889 exhibition: “the very essence of the wall-

picture is its solidity, or at least, its not appearing to be a hole in the wall.”³⁸ This flatness keeps our eye on the surface, returning again and again to the things and faces outlined against that golden backdrop.

The repeating pattern of Millais’s wall covering is an example of good design; it, at least, acknowledges the flatness of the surface—and this is another aspect of its contemporaneity. In fact, it resembles wallpaper designs from the 1840s by A. W. N. Pugin, one of the first pattern designers to declare that ornament should “enrich” the construction of the surface rather than disguise it.³⁹ For a Gothic Revivalist such as Pugin, this meant studying the principles that governed a pattern and adapting that to a modern design such as his “Rose and Lion” wallpaper from about 1848 (fig. 17). To garner motifs and patterning for his designs, ecclesiastical and secular alike, Pugin studied historical examples of Italian woven silks from around 1500 (fig. 18).⁴⁰ These same fabrics were often depicted as the “cloths of honour” that cover the throne of the Virgin Mary in Early Renaissance panel paintings in gold and tempera, as in *Gentile da Fabriano’s Quaratesi Altarpiece*, and this selection by Millais perhaps emphasizes the pure and sacred love that Lorenzo and Isabella share.⁴¹ The artist repeats this decorative scheme to different narrative ends a few years later with his *Mariana* (1850–1; fig. 19). In this narrative of sexual frustration, the flora and fauna of the golden wall covering seem to taunt Mariana in their fecundity. And yet they also present a contrast to the vivid description of nature that lies outside her window. By placing these two “side by side”, as it were, Millais emphasizes not only the flatness of the decorative wall covering but also its potential for symbolic narrative. Millais’s chosen wall coverings, then, are both strikingly modern and historically precise in each instance.

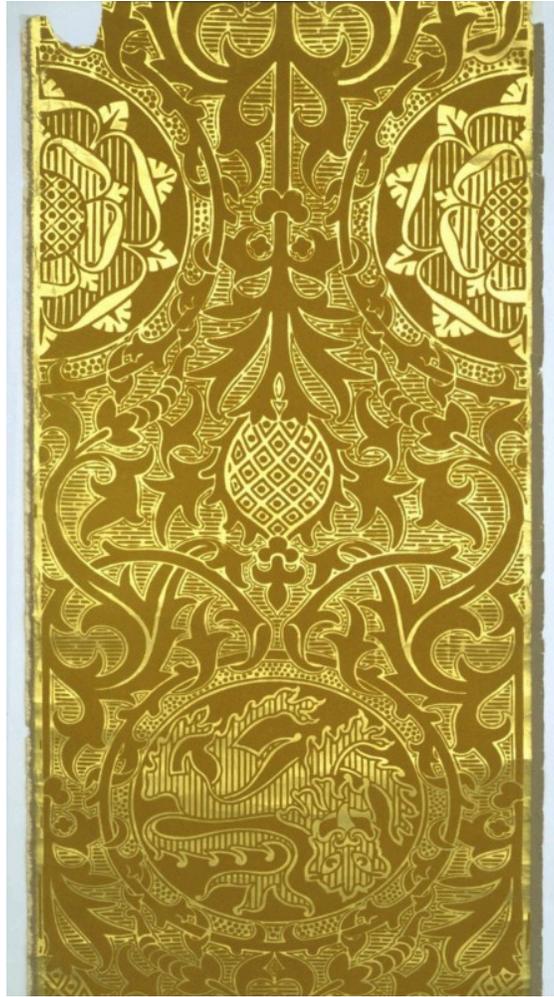


Figure 17.

A. W. N. Pugin, *Rose and Lion*, ca. 1848,
woodblock print and gold flock, 154.8 × 55.2
cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert
Museum, London

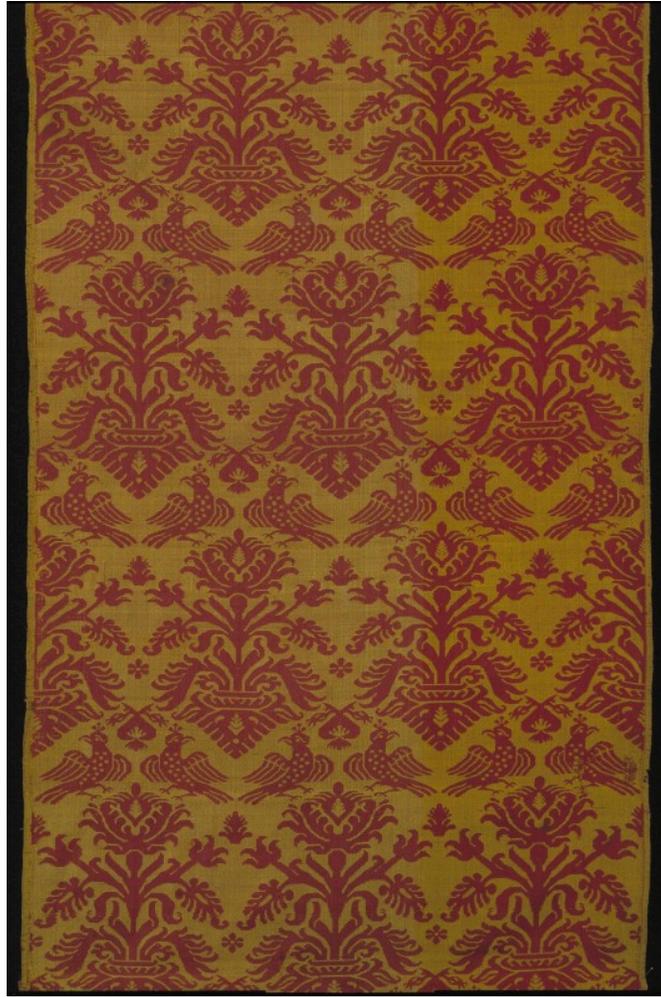


Figure 18.

Italian woven silk, ca. 1550, 194 × 53 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Crane would explore this type of decoration in his practice as a painter, as in his depiction in 1872 of his wife reading, *At Home: A Portrait* (fig. 20). Crane recalled in his autobiography that his first-hand encounter with Millais's paintings at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1857, when Crane was only twelve years old, "impressed me beyond words".⁴² In emulation of the Pre-Raphaelites, he adopted a consciously archaizing painting style, using tempera here as his medium. Mary Frances Crane, the artist's wife, leans on a mantelpiece, her arm gently resting beside an Italian-style vase labelled "Maria". The interior is artfully composed, and every surface appears decorated or designed, from the quilting of her costume to the gold-embroidered saddle blanket in the hunting scene on the wall. In the study for the work (ca. 1870; fig. 21), Crane sketched his wife posing in front of a

green wall, beside a chair nearby that resembles the "Sussex" side chair by Morris & Co. He later revised the design to include a decorative background, a tapestry abounding in narrative detail.

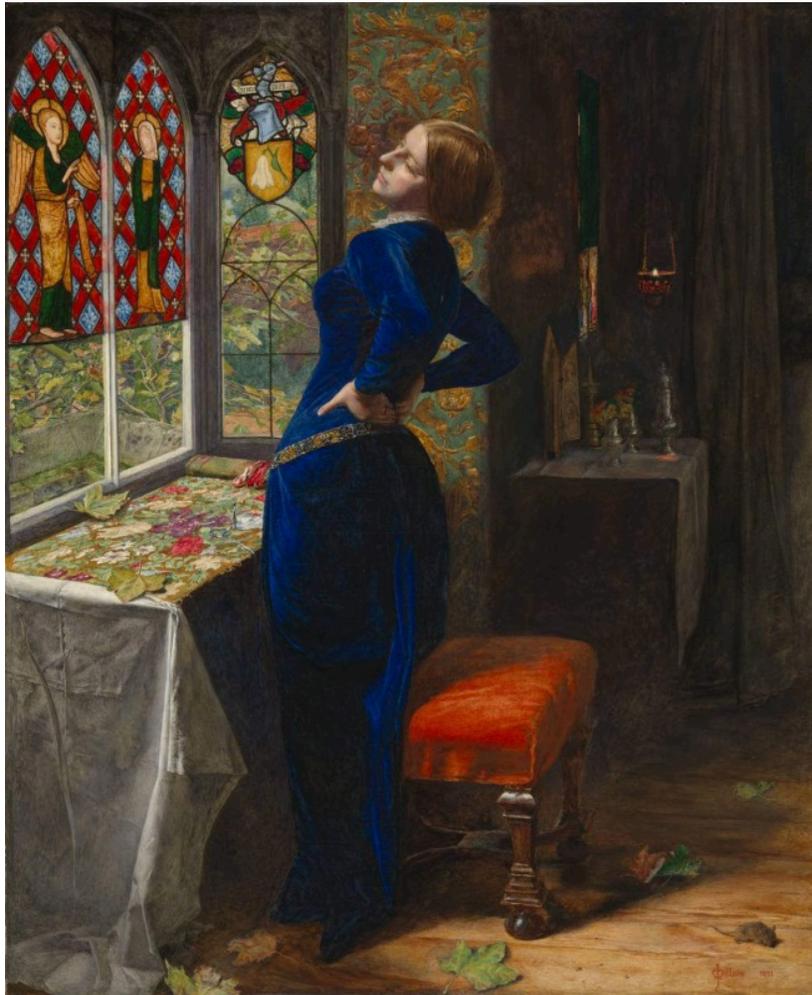


Figure 19.

John Everett Millais, *Mariana*, 1851, oil on mahogany panel, 59.7 × 49.5 cm. Tate. Accepted by HM Government in lieu of tax and allocated to the Tate Gallery, 1999 Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2015, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported)



Figure 20.

Walter Crane for Jeffrey & Co, *At Home*, 1872, tempera on paper, 71.7 × 40.6 cm. Leeds Museums and Galleries, City Art Gallery Digital image courtesy of Leeds Museums and Galleries, 2015

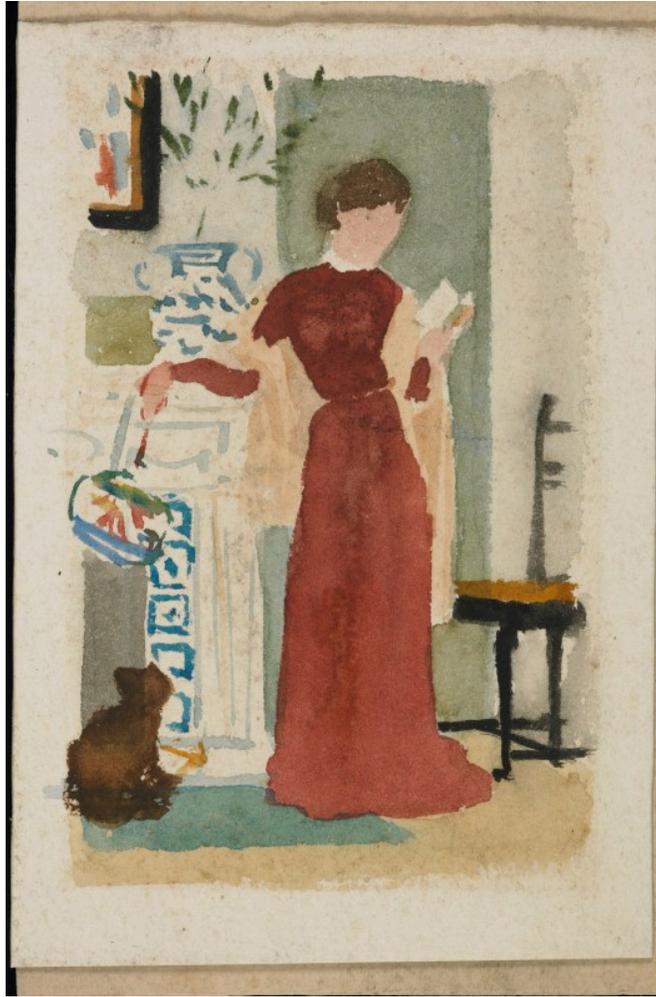


Figure 21.

Walter Crane, Study for *At Home: A Portrait*, ca. 1870, watercolour. Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester Digital image courtesy of Courtesy of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester

The decoration enriches the painting's evocation of domestic life. The story is hunting in romantic and spiritual terms related through an amalgam of pagan and Christian symbolism. Just above Crane's wife's head, a rider carries a staff with a banner labelled "St. Hubert", the patron saint of the hunt who was converted to Christianity by a vision of the Crucifixion between the horns of a stag. A doppelgänger for Mrs Crane appears in the decorative background as a Renaissance princess wearing split sleeves and a white lace collar, coiffure adorned with the half-moon crown of the goddess Diana as Queen of the Hunt. Below the huntress, the fox's head points towards a motto from Virgil that refers to Diana's famed hunting ground in Sparta. Above the huntress, Cupid takes aim while a crane flies overhead. The disparate elements of this pictorial background coalesce in a fascinating evocation of the Cranes' life together, as the artist blends religious tradition,

classical mythology, and ancient literature to explain how this huntress captured him. In the manner of tapestry decorations undertaken at the same time by Morris & Co., the full narrative potential of the image emerges only in the decorative background, a powerful comment upon the power of the object, or the image, in this instance, to conjure alternate worlds.



Figure 22.

Walter Crane , Illustration from *Beauty and the Beast*, ca. 1875, *Beauty and the Beast*, (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1875), 27 × 54 cm, facing p. 4. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven. Digital image courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

The symbolic potential of decoration, gleaned from the Pre-Raphaelites, also informed Crane's work as a book illustrator. Decorative art abounds in his illustrations for *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *The Frog Prince*, and *Beauty and the Beast* created throughout the 1870s. Yet these things all contribute to the narratives of the stories. In *Beauty and the Beast*, for example, the internal emotional progress of Beauty is shown through the decoration. In one illustration, she stands in front of a wall painting that depicts the Garden of

Eden, where human and beast coexist peacefully, near a female nude who is a dual image of Venus and Eve, foreshadowing the developing romance between Beauty and the Beast (fig. 22). A later critic argued that Crane's illustrations realized the relationship of part to whole, depicting "the equal importance of what are generally regarded as accessories".⁴³ Crane himself claimed that illustrations were essential in children's books as "the eye" is "the chief organ for the reception of ideas".⁴⁴ The latter rely upon emblems to communicate narrative and trust in the ability of the viewer or reader to translate the message from fantasy into reality. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, early childhood educators emphasized the role of symbolism in pedagogy and the accompanying need to teach children how to interpret non-verbal signs.⁴⁵

In the same way, paintings such as *At Home: A Portrait* and Crane's book illustrations are premised on the idea that the decoration can be read and interpreted. But what happens when we remove the framing device of the painting or the page? What does the decorative wall communicate in the real world, rather than the realm of art? William Morris discussed the symbolic potential of decoration in his lecture "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing" from 1881. He declared that all decoration is "futile" and "degraded" unless it reminds the viewer of "something beyond itself, of something of which it is a visible symbol".⁴⁶ However, he suggested that natural forms were the most appropriate inspiration for such work. In this regard, Crane's wallpaper is a symbolic design that more closely resembles paintings by Millais than patterns of Morris. Decorative design such as Crane's "Golden Age" depends upon a broad visual language, a kind of alphabet of forms, to communicate meaning.⁴⁷ The art historian Ernst Gombrich warned against the "multiplicity of meaning" inherent in the study of symbols.⁴⁸ And he suggested that the decorative in particular was not a successful symbolic mode, wondering "where does meaning end and the decorative pattern begin?"⁴⁹ Perhaps for this reason, most pattern designs by Morris resist narration: it is beside the point to ask what "Cray" means. In his lecture, Morris noted that such designs are "suggestive" rather than "imitative". For this and other reasons, it doesn't tell "facts".⁵⁰ It expresses its ideals through its pattern.

For Crane, however, the pattern is narrative. In "The Craftsman's Dream", a visit to the museum prompts a meditation on the golden ages of the past and a dream of their future realization. With "The Golden Age", the design reframes the question of temporality in terms of the ages of humankind: when was "the golden age" and will it be again? Here the design figures the very negotiation of past, present, and the future inherent in this process: one putto looks towards the basket, the promise of the golden age. Yet the other looks away, out towards the viewer, or perhaps into the room that the

wallpaper adorned. One cockatoo approaches the basket, while another looks up, leading the eye to follow the repeat of the pattern to the next set of putti.⁵¹ As the pattern travels up and over, across the wall, it acknowledges the space that it adorns, and it asks the inhabitant of that space to reflect upon the past in the present moment, as well as to contemplate the future.

“The Golden Age” is, to paraphrase John Ruskin, an object that can be read “rightly” in terms of pictorial narrative. Ruskin formulated this idea in response to William Holman Hunt’s *The Awakening Conscience* (1853-4; [fig. 23](#)), a painting whose complex iconography of sin and redemption had confused some contemporary critics and offended others. In a letter to the *Times*, Ruskin explained that the key to understanding the painting was to allow “trivial objects” such as the discarded glove, or the veneer of the piano, to “force themselves upon the attention” with an insistence that does not allow the viewer to look away.⁵² Likewise, the art critic F. G. Stephens, a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, noted that here “the very decorations on the wall are significant.”⁵³

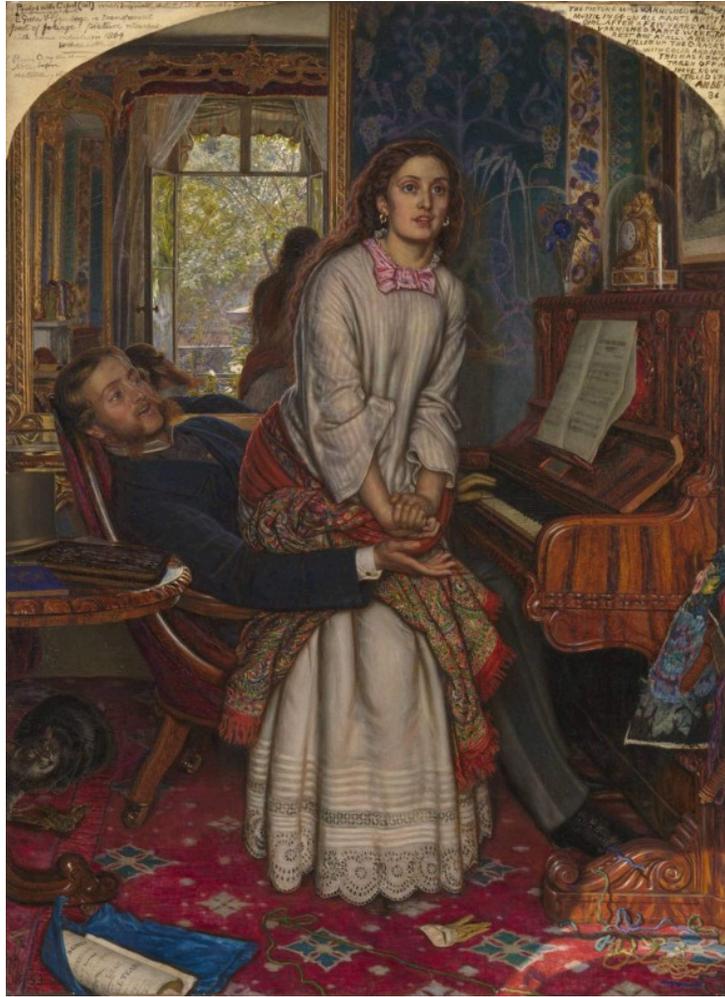


Figure 23.

William Holman Hunt, *The Awakening Conscience*, 1853-4, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 55.9. Tate, presented by Sir Colin and Lady Anderson through the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1976
Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2015, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported)



Figure 24.

William Holman Hunt, *The Awakening Conscience* (detail of wallpaper), 1853-4, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 55.9. Tate, presented by Sir Colin and Lady Anderson through the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1976 Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2015, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported)

This significance functions in two ways: the wallpaper is a gaudy and overwrought example of bad design, a further marker of the room's immorality. No overarching principle of pattern unites the birds, vines, grapes, sleeping child, and sheaves of wheat (fig. 24). Furthermore, the floral border disguises the corner of the room and thus disrupts the surface of the wall (perhaps for this reason it is sometimes suggested that this is a tapestry, and not wallpaper). At the same time, a perceptive critic like Stephens noted that the wallpaper encapsulated the story of the painting: "a vineyard, in which corn is mingled with the vine; birds destroy the grapes of the latter, while at the foot sleeps a boy-guardian, whose horn, fallen from his hand, indicates neglected duty".⁵⁴ I do not want to suggest that this type of symbolic decoration was a new feature of painting; the art historian George Landow, for example, pointed to Holman Hunt's admiration for

William Hogarth and his “modern moral pictures”.⁵⁵ Rather, it provided an important model for artists of Crane’s generation. Morris’s “Peacock and Bird” carpet was one response to the cheap machine-made goods catalogued in Holman Hunt’s painting, yet it resists any attempt to interpret it in the way that Stephens can interpret Holman Hunt’s rendering of wallpaper. With “The Golden Age”, in contrast, it is as if Crane has extracted the decorative background from a Pre-Raphaelite painting but maintained its symbolic power.

A “Golden Age” of things

Crane, a committed socialist since 1884, would have been aware of the political import of the notion of a “Golden Age”. It became a trope in socialist and anarchist discourse to re-direct the longing for an idealized past into a future hope, usually expressed as the dictum, “the Golden Age lies in the future, not in the past.”⁵⁶ We find this “golden age” in Crane’s political cartoons, designs such as “The Triumph of Labour” from 1891 (fig. 25), a scene brimming with natural vivacity—the abundance promised by the fruit of “The Golden Age” is here realized.⁵⁷ Morris made only a few designs for the socialist cause and employed a visual language of natural forms familiar from his wallpaper designs, as in his membership card for the Democratic Federation (fig. 26). Crane’s works, in contrast, combined the human figure and natural forms to convey their message. It was Crane who created the visual culture of English socialism: he even designed the punning emblem for Morris’s own Hammersmith branch of the Socialist League: Morris is the smith who quite literally forges the instruments of a new society (fig. 27). The design would later be adapted to Morris’s Hammersmith Socialist Society. Other designs often depicted a utopia not unlike the “Nowhere” found in Morris’s novel *News from Nowhere* of 1890. The cover of Morris’s socialist newspaper, *Commonweal*, from 24 May 1890, elegantly juxtaposes Crane’s vision with that of Morris: in the centre of the serialization of *News from Nowhere*, now at the chapter describing revolution entitled “How the Change Came”, we find Crane’s vision of that change: a cartoon declaring the international “Solidarity of Labour” depicting the united workers of the world (fig. 28). Hand in hand, they encircle the globe. Reproduced in newspapers and given away at rallies, these cartoons do not have recourse to the usual arsenal of satire, parody, and caricature, or even Morris’s own allusions to revolutionary violence in his explanation of “how the change came” in *News from Nowhere*. Rather, they gain their power through their very idealism, the portrayal of a coming golden age, rendered in a decorative style familiar from Crane’s wallpapers.



Figure 25.

Henry Scheu, *The Triumph of Labour* engraving after Walter Crane, 1891, first published in the *Pall Mall Budget*, 30 April 1891, 31.5 × 59.7 cm. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven Digital image courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

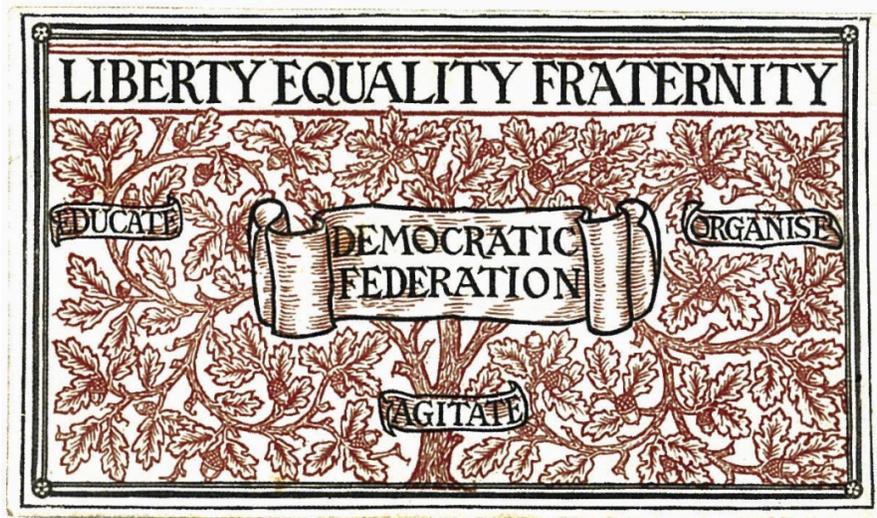


Figure 26.

William Morris, Design for the *Democratic Federation*, used on membership card, ca. 1884, 8.5 × 14.5 cm. Trades Union Congress Library Collections, London Digital image courtesy of TUC Library Collections, in Fiona McCarthy, *Anarchy & beauty : William Morris and his legacy 1860 - 1960* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2014), plate 49, 48



Figure 27.

After Walter Crane, Membership Card for the Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League, 1890, for Henry Holiday Sparling, designed 1885, 11.5 × 5 cm. Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA Digital image courtesy of Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens

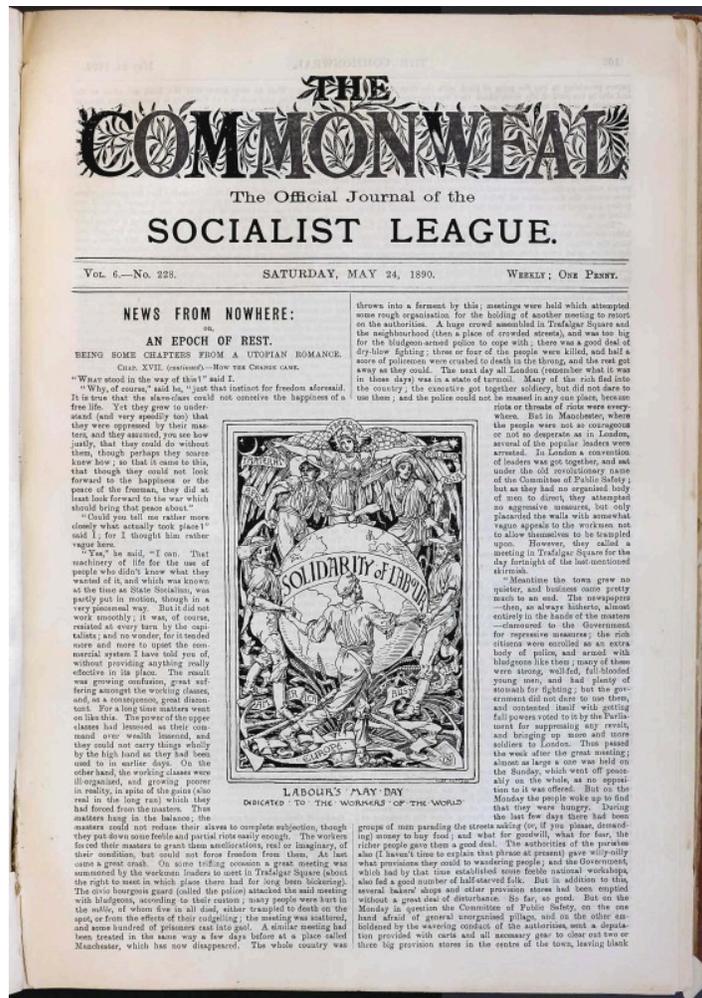


Figure 28. Walter Crane, *The Commonwealth*, 24 May 1890, front page featuring Walter Crane's "Solidarity of Labour: Labour's May Day, dedicated to the workers of the world", 1890, 15 x 31 cm. Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Digital image courtesy of Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, CC-BY 4.0 license

These designs further confused the category “decoration” at the very moment when others sought to fix these terms. Morris, for example, excluded easel painting from the decorative arts in a lecture from 1877, since most canvases were “ingenious toys for a few rich and idle men” that were “at the present day divorced from decoration”.⁵⁸ In this regard, we must distinguish between Morris’s own views and the programme put forth by the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. The establishment of the Society derived in equal measure from Morris’s championing of the decorative arts and from the powerful critique of the Royal Academy, first expressed by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848 and re-stated in 1886 by Crane, along with William Holman Hunt and the painter George Clausen. They wrote an open letter to the Academy lambasting its restrictive exhibition practices. In

its place, they proposed a truly national exhibition that would bring together the work of artists, designers, and craftsmen. Crucially, this agitation did not exclude painters.⁵⁹ Instead, they argued that painting was a decorative art with its own discourse of use and materials.

This activism resulted in the creation of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, and Holman Hunt and Ford Madox Brown both joined. These exhibitions regularly featured designs and cartoons for mural painting—a historic mode of wall covering that could be narrative and decorative, like tapestry or wallpaper. Crane, Edward Burne-Jones, Frederic Leighton, and George Frederick Watts all showed cartoons at these displays, and the few photographs that have survived, taken by Emery Walker, show the diversity of items on display as well as the surprising fact that the majority of display space is given over to wall coverings (fig. 29). The acknowledged master of this decorative art was Ford Madox Brown, who created twelve murals depicting the history of Manchester for Manchester Town Hall, executed from 1877 to 1893. For Crane, these were the most important examples of public painting in England—moving beyond the boundaries of the picture frame to address a broader public. They signalled a return to the ideal of the integrated artistic practice, when “painting was once what it might be again . . . at the head of the decorative arts.”⁶⁰ As I have argued, we can trace this logic back to the Pre-Raphaelites.



Figure 29.

Emery Walker, Fifth Exhibition of the *Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society* at the New Gallery, Regent Street, 1896, photograph. National Portrait Gallery, London. Image in Morna O'Neill, "Rhetorics of Display: Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau at the Turin Exhibition of 1902", *Journal of Design History* (2007) 20 (3): 205-225. doi: 10.1093/jdh/epm013 Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery

Intriguingly, a letter from William Holman Hunt to the Arts and Crafts organizing committee in 1889 asked "whether framed pictures were or were not admissible to the exhibition".⁶¹ The minutes note that the question was left undecided. But at least one oil painting did feature in an exhibition: the second, smaller version of Ford Madox Brown's *Work* from 1863 (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; [fig. 30](#)), which served as the centrepiece for a memorial retrospective of his decorative designs in 1896. In a sense, this display treated the smaller version as a kind of cartoon for its larger (and earlier) iteration in Manchester.



Figure 30.

Ford Madox Brown, *Work*, 1863, oil on canvas, 68.4 × 99.9 cm.
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery Digital image courtesy of
Birmingham Museums Trust

It is intriguing to think of *Work* as a design that decorates a wall—what Brown called a “wall-picture”—rather than an easel painting. For one, the perspectival recession of space constructed by the brick wall on the left and Heath Street on the right begins to waver, overtaken by a series of horizontal bands marked out by the raised shovels of the navvies. What remains is, in the words of Tim Barringer, a “great secular altarpiece”, with a rich and complex narrative about the redemptive value of work, one that would have resonated with the crafts on display in the adjacent galleries.⁶² Given the scale, ambition, and message of *Work* as a decorative design, it did not seem out of place beside mosaics, stained glass windows, and wallpaper, in addition to Brown’s own designs for furniture. William Morris stated, “Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.”⁶³ Perhaps Morris’s use of “nothing” should be interrogated further in light of the distinction between thing and object prompted by thing theory. Houses should not have unintelligible and unrecognizable things but instead be filled with objects. The “Peacock and Bird” carpet not only covers the floor but also re-imagines the relationship between producer and consumer. Arts and Crafts objects re-imagined subject-object relations. In this regard, *Work* is an Arts and Crafts painting, and it represents at least a partial fulfilment of Crane’s dream of the craftsman.

Footnotes

- 1 Crane wrote the poem in 1889 but would not publish it until almost a decade later. *Labour Leader*, 1 May 1897, 206.
- 2 Walter Crane, "Of the Influence of Modern Social and Economic Conditions on the Sense of Beauty", in *Ideals in Art: Papers Theoretical, Practical, Critical* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1905), 82.
- 3 For a further discussion of Crane's own socialist politics in relation to art, see Morna O'Neill, *Art and Labour's Cause is One: Walter Crane and Manchester, 1880–1915* (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 2008).
- 4 William Morris would also use the themes of dreams and battles in social revolution in *A Dream of John Ball* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1888). See Stephen F. Eisenman, "Communism in Furs: A Dream of Prehistory in William Morris's *John Ball*", *Art Bulletin* 87, no. 1 (2005): 92–110. My thanks to an anonymous reader for making this point.
- 5 See Morna O'Neill, *Walter Crane: The Arts and Crafts, Painting, and Politics, 1875–1890* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2010).
- 6 See, for example, William Morris, "Useful Work versus Useless Toil", 1884, William Morris Internet Archive (hereafter WMIA) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1884/useful.htm>.
- 7 Jennifer Meagher, "The Pre-Raphaelites", in "Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History" (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–). http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/praf/hd_praf.htm (Oct. 2004).
- 8 The exhibition featured Morris's oil painting *Queen Guenevere* (now known as *La Belle Iseult*). See Leslie Parris, ed., *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Gallery and Penguin Books, 1984), 169–70.
- 9 "Morris also developed an interest in modern painting and particularly the work of the Pre-Raphaelite painters Rossetti, Holman Hunt, and Millais." Linda Parry, ed., *William Morris* (London: Philip Wilson in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996), 14.
- 10 For an important intervention in this regard, see Caroline Arscott, *William Morris & Edward Burne-Jones: Interlacings* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2008).
- 11 Nancy J. Troy, *The De Stijl Environment* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1983), 3.
- 12 For Ford Madox Brown's "artisan" furniture, see Julian Treuherz, Kenneth Bendiner, and Angela Thirlwell, *Ford Madox Brown: Pre-Raphaelite Pioneer* (London: Philip Wilson, 2011), 54.
- 13 William Morris, "Address on the Collection of Paintings of the English Pre-Raphaelite School", 2 Oct. 1891, WMIA <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1891/english.htm>
- 14 Morris, "Address".
- 15 Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origin and Character*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953).
- 16 As discussed in Bernhard Ridderbos, "Objects and Questions", in *Early Netherlandish Paintings: Rediscovery, Reception, and Research*, ed. Ridderbos, Anne van Buren, and Henk van Veen, trans. Andrew McCormick and Anne van Burne (original Dutch ed., 1995; Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 64.
- 17 See Jenny Graham, "Artistic Inspirations", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 32–46.
- 18 George P. Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1979).
- 19 Bill Brown, "Thing Theory", *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1–22.
- 20 Brown, "Thing Theory", 5.
- 21 John Plotz, "Can the Sofa Speak? A Look at Thing Theory", *Criticism* 47, no. 1 (2005): 110.
- 22 Plotz, "Can the Sofa Speak?", 110.
- 23 Alan Crawford, "The Object is Not the Object: C. R. Ashbee and the Guild of Handicraft", in *Pioneers of Modern Craft: Twelve Essays Profiling Key Figures in the History of Twentieth-Century Craft*, ed. Margot Coatts (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1997), 1–12.
- 24 Imogen Hart, *Arts and Crafts Objects* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2010), 12.
- 25 Brown, "Thing Theory", 4.
- 26 Morris, "Address".
- 27 Walter Crane, "Of the Arts and Crafts Movement", in *Ideals In Art*, 22.
- 28 See Diane Waggoner, "Cray", in Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld, and Alison Smith, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 186.
- 29 See Barringer, Rosenfeld, and Smith, *Pre-Raphaelites*, 186.
- 30 See Joyce H. Townsend, Jacqueline Ridge, and Stephen Hackney, eds., *Pre-Raphaelite Painting Techniques: 1848–1856* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004).
- 31 As suggested by Peter Stansky, *William Morris, C. R. Ashbee and the Arts and Crafts* (London: Nine Elms Press, 1984), 4.

- 32 *Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society Catalogue of the First Exhibition 1888* (London: New Gallery, 1888), nos. 65 and 66 (both hand-painted samples), 67 (design), 68 (plate).
- 33 Although it is not known if Walter Crane ever visited Dyrham Park, he was familiar with historical examples of stamped leather, as suggested in his entry on "Mural Decoration" in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. Hugh Chisholm (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica Company, 1911), 19: 16–26.
- 34 Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), 32.
- 35 Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), 18.
- 36 As discussed by Prettejohn, *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 30 and Alison Smith, "Isabella, 1848–9", in Jason Rosenfeld and Alison Smith, *Millais* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), 34.
- 37 Walter Crane, "Of Decorative Painting and Design", in *Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society Catalogue*, 29.
- 38 Ford Madox Brown, "Of Mural Painting", a lecture delivered in 1889 and reprinted in *Arts and Crafts Essays by Members of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society* (London: Rivington, Percival & Co., 1893), 157.
- 39 As discussed in Charles Locke Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and other Details* (London: Longman, Green, & Co., 1868), 34. For a further discussion of Pugin's theories of design in relation to his contemporaries, see Jules Lubbock, *The Tyranny of Taste: The Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain, 1550–1960* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), especially "Part V: Good Design", 205–90.
- 40 See Dom Bede Millard, Linda Parry, and Paul Harrison, "Chapter 16, Textiles," in *Pugin: A Gothic Passion*, ed. Paul Atterbury and Clive Wainwright (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1994), 207–18.
- 41 Barringer, Rosenfeld, and Smith, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 46.
- 42 Walter Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences* (London: Methuen & Co., 1907), 38.
- 43 Arthur Popham, Foreword, in *Catalogue of Memorial Exhibition of Paintings and Water-Colour Drawings by Walter Crane* (London: Bromhead, Cutts, & Co., 1920).
- 44 Walter Crane, "Correspondence: Out of the Mouth of Babes", *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 March 1886, 6.
- 45 For a discussion of these concerns as they relate to Crane's children's book illustrations, see Grace Brockington, "Rhyming Pictures: Walter Crane and the Universal Language of Art", *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry* 28, no. 4 (2012): 359–73.
- 46 William Morris, "Some Hints on Pattern Designing", delivered 10 Dec. 1881, WMIA <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1881/hints.htm>.
- 47 In a series of lectures to the Royal Society later published as *Of the Decorative Illustration of Books Old and New* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1896), Crane acknowledged the importance of the alphabet to design theory: "We know that the letters of our alphabet were once pictures, symbols, or abstract signs of entities and actions, and grew more and more abstract until they became arbitrary marks—the familiar characters that we know." Crane, *Decorative Illustration of Books*, 17.
- 48 E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, 2 vols. (London: Phaidon, 1972), 1: 12–13.
- 49 Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 1: 3.
- 50 Morris, "Some Hints on Pattern Designing".
- 51 Contemporary critics praised Crane's "facile handling of gorgeous birds . . . as decorative motifs". See Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper, 1509–1914* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1925), 172.
- 52 John Ruskin, "Letters on Art: The Awakening Conscience", *The Times*, 24 May 1854, reprinted in John Ruskin, *Arrows of the Chace: Being a Collection of Scattered Letters Published Chiefly in the Daily Newspapers, 1840–1880* (Boston: Dana Estes & Co., 1880).
- 53 F. G. Stephens, *William Holman Hunt and his Works: A Memoir of the Artist's Life, with Description of his Pictures* (London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1860), 34.
- 54 Stephens, *William Holman Hunt*, 34.
- 55 Landow, *William Holman Hunt*, especially 47–59.
- 56 The French anarchist Charles Malato used this phrase in *La Revue Anarchiste*, 1 Nov. 1893, 78. The English anarchist journal *Freedom* 3, no. 37 (Dec. 1889): 53, mentions an article in the journal *L'Attaque* by Francesco Saverio Merlino with the title "The Golden Age".
- 57 For a further discussion of these concerns, see O'Neill, *Walter Crane*.
- 58 William Morris, "The Lesser Arts", delivered 4 Dec. 1877, and reprinted in *Hopes and Fears for Art* (1882), WMIA <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1882/hopes/chapters/chapter1.htm>.
- 59 As described by Crane, *Artist's Reminiscences*, 288.
- 60 Walter Crane, "The Claims of Decorative Art", in *The Claims of Decorative Art* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1892), 6. Crane originally titled this essay "On the Position and Aims of Decorative Art" when he first published it in 1881.
- 61 "Minutes of the General Committee", 14 April 1889, Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society Papers, AAD 1/43-1980. Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

- 62 Tim Barringer, *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2005), 21.
- 63 William Morris, "Hopes and Fears for Art", 1882, WMA <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1882/hopes/chapters/chapter3.htm>.

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- . "The Craftsman's Dream." *Labour Leader*, 1 May 1897, 206.
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Deakin: Double Exposures

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Cite as

Paul Rousseau, James Boaden and Jonathan Law, "Deakin: Double Exposures", *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/look-first>

Introduction

The Look First feature represents a different kind of article to its companions in *British Art Studies*; one that is pre-eminently visual and necessarily collaborative, and that is made possible by the digital format of the journal.

In this series of short films made by Jonathan Law, the art historian James Boaden, and the curator of The John Deakin Archive, Paul Rousseau, discuss the double-exposure images made by the photographer John Deakin (1912-1972) in the 1950s and 1960s.

The films ask you, firstly, to look closely at the images being discussed. Each one begins with a sustained and intense shot of a single image before opening up to a wide-ranging discussion about Deakin, double exposures, and photography.

“Only Those With a Daemon”

In this film, John Deakin’s double-exposure images are discussed in relation to a longer history of revealing the unseen in photography. The film begins with Deakin’s double exposure of Muriel Belcher, the founder of the Colony Room, the infamous private club in London’s Soho district that was regularly frequented by artists and musicians such as Francis Bacon and George Melly. Deakin’s images are here discussed in relation to Victorian spirit photography and to a longer history of the doubled image in twentieth-century photography.



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 1.

“Only Those With a Daemon” , Conversation between Paul Rousseau and James Boaden. Digital image courtesy of Film by Jonathan Law.

Queer Looks

John Deakin started his career as a dresser of shop windows and his images of windows set the scene for this discussion. The film explores Deakin’s double exposures in relation to the queer cultures of postwar London. Boaden and Rousseau discuss the ways in which the double exposure served as a metaphor for the idea of living a doubled life at a time when homosexuality was illegal. They explore the ambivalent character of such photographs as works that both reveal and conceal, bringing this idea up to the present by discussing the double exposures made by contemporary photographer Daniella Zalcmán.



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 2.

Queer Looks, Conversation between Paul Rousseau and James Boaden. Digital image courtesy of Film by Jonathan Law.

Double Exposures and Modernism

This film explores John Deakin's artistic development from the 1930s into the war years, contextualizing his work within a broader framework of 20th century Modernism. Presenting new research from the Tate Gallery Archives that connects Deakin to British photographer Barbara Ker-Seymer, it includes the discovery of an early double exposure that could have been taken by either photographer. Paul Rousseau and James Boaden take account of the surrealist elements of the double exposures, exploring connections to Francis Bacon's *Man in Blue* series; and Jonathan Law presents Deakin's double exposure portraits alongside a rich seam of others by artists including Degas, Duchamp and Picasso, positioning the time-based multiple planes within these photographs alongside the generation of cubism.



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 3.

Double Exposures and Modernism , Conversation between Paul Rousseau and James Boaden. Digital image courtesy of Film by Jonathan Law.

Exchanges with Francis Bacon

This film investigates the social and artistic exchanges between John Deakin and Francis Bacon, and in particular how elements of Deakin's photographic imagery contributed to Bacon's painting practice.



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 4.

Exchanges with Francis Bacon, Conversation between Paul Rousseau and James Boaden. Digital image courtesy of Film by Jonathan Law.

Repeating the Process

The final film in this feature explores the mechanical processes involved in producing a double exposure image with a Rolleiflex camera. The photographer Peter Hamilton explains the process with Paul Rousseau.



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 5.

Repeating the Process, Conversation between Paul Rousseau and Peter Hamilton. Digital image courtesy of Film by Jonathan Law.

About John Deakin

John Deakin (1912-1972) was a British photographer, best known for a striking series of portraits he took when working for British *Vogue* magazine in the early 1950s. He moved from being a window dresser to a painter, having a well-regarded exhibition in 1938 at the Mayor Gallery, Cork Street, London. Later, he claimed his skills with a camera were initiated around this time in Paris in the circle of André Ostier, Christian Bérard and Michel de Brunhoff, but he was also close to the photographer Barbara Ker-Seymer in London, and may well have learned something from her experimental portraiture studio practice. During the Second World War he refined his skills in the Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) serving in Malta, Egypt, Libya, and as far south as the Gold Coast, now Ghana. Deakin claimed the war changed him from “a painter who passed himself off as a photographer, to a photographer who sometimes painted”.¹

After the war Deakin became a central presence among the hard-drinking bohemian artists, poets, and characters in the bars and clubs around Soho London. This put him among many of the key cultural figures of the period,

including the poet Dylan Thomas, the painter Lucian Freud, and especially Francis Bacon. He worked for *Tatler* and *Picture Post* and used his Paris connections to win a contract at British *Vogue*.

The John Deakin Archive holds over four thousand negatives and hundreds of vintage prints rescued from under Deakin's bed by Bruce Bernard. Nearly four hundred are photographs of Paris, of which around one hundred are portraits including Christian Bérard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Picasso, with around another 100 vintage prints of street scenes, beggars, and surreal visions of circuses and shop windows.

Footnotes

- ¹ Robin Muir, *Under the Influence: John Deakin, Photography and the Lure of Soho* (London: Art/Books, 2014), 23.



Pregnant Wit: *ingegno* in Renaissance England

Alexander Marr

Abstract

This article examines the protean nature of ingegno in Renaissance England. Beginning with dictionary definitions and period translations, it traces the semantics of ingegno in writings by Haydocke, Hilliard, Sidney, Harington, and Dee, and in images by Gheeraerts the elder and Hilliard. The term's semantic elasticity carried over into English, changing shape to denote variously "wit", "inborn talent", "sharpness", "swiftness", "nobility", "freedom", and "ingenuity". The article concludes by considering the socio-economics of ingenuity, and how the slippage between "ingenious" and "ingenuous" speaks to a newly emerging understanding of the liberal status of the artist and his craft.

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Acknowledgements

In writing this essay I have benefitted from discussions with Gavin Alexander, Lucy Gent, Gordon Higgott, and Sarah Howe. I am grateful to the journal's anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

Cite as

Alexander Marr, "Pregnant Wit: *ingegno* in Renaissance England", *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/amarr>

Introduction

It has long been known that Elizabethan and Jacobean writers had difficulty comprehending, and especially translating, the terms of Italian art criticism. Richard Haydocke's translation of Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'arte de la pittura, scoltura, et architettura* (1584/5)—*A tracte containing the artes of curious paintinge, carvinge and buildinge* (1598)—is often singled out as a potent example of such difficulties. As Lucy Gent noted pithily, "Where Lomazzo writes about 'arte disegnatrice', Haydocke is floored."¹ But while the English response to a word/concept such as *disegno* has attracted considerable scholarly attention, the reception of a key theme in Italian Renaissance writings on the arts—*ingegno*—has been largely neglected.² This essay explores the fortunes of *ingegno* in England, particularly in relation to Haydocke's influential book and the writings of his acquaintance, the limner Nicholas Hilliard.

The semantics of 'ingegno'

Deriving from the Latin *ingenium*, *ingegno* is a term that became semantically inflated over the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in Italy, in particular in writings about faculty psychology and the arts.³ The first dictionary definition in English is John Florio's in *A worlde of wordes* (1598), in which the adjective *ingegnoso* is rendered as "wittie, wilie, ingenious, subtile, wise, cunning, craftie, full of inuention".⁴ Florio's *ingegno* embraces qualities that had started to attach to *ingenium* over the course of the sixteenth century but which had previously been lexically distinct from it, such as "subtlety" (*subtilitas*), "cunning" (*sollertia*), and even "wisdom" (*sapientia*). Notably, the first translation he gives is "wittie", reflecting the widespread use in English of "wit" to denote the various properties of *ingenium*.⁵ Indeed, this is Haydocke's most frequent translation of Lomazzo's *ingegno*, such as the "excellency of . . . wit" required of the poet, or the "fineness of . . . wit" exhibited by Lomazzo's master Gaudenzio Ferrari in his painting of *cangianti* colours.⁶

Wit, *ingenium*, and *ingegno* could all mean generically "natural disposition" or the innate talents with which one is born. These talents may be brought to perfection and utility through teaching and diligence, neatly summarized in the popular mottoes *ars et ingenium* and *ingenium et labor*.⁷ Lomazzo invokes this "natural ability" sense of *ingegno* in the preface to his treatise, where, in a customary apology for deficiency, he writes that by his "debil ingegno" (aptly rendered by Haydocke as "as much as in me lay"), he has gathered together the rules of the "science of painting".⁸ Yet *ingegno* could also denote *special* talent. In particular, when mobilized by or on behalf of

artists it could refer to the creative potency necessary to imagine and invent in a way that cannot be taught, and which thus raises the possessor of *ingegno* above their less gifted peers.

Italian and English dictionary definitions capture some of these senses. For example, the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (1612) defines *ingegno* as “Acutezza d’inventare, e ghiribizzare, che che sia, senza maestro, o avvertitore” (“Sharpness in inventing and fantasizing whatsoever, without a teacher or prompter”).⁹ Lomazzo grants this capacity to the “ingenious painter”, who can “imagine of himself” a variety of postures and expressions.¹⁰ Crucially, these interpretations place *ingegno* within the realm of the imagination—especially, in La Crusca’s *ghiribizzare*, with the caprices of fancy—while distancing it from commonplace associations of *ingenium* with teachability or models. This implies not only that *ingegno* is an innate quality but also that it operates without or beyond rules. Moreover, the fact that it needs no prompting connects it to spontaneity and quickness.

Quick and pregnant wit

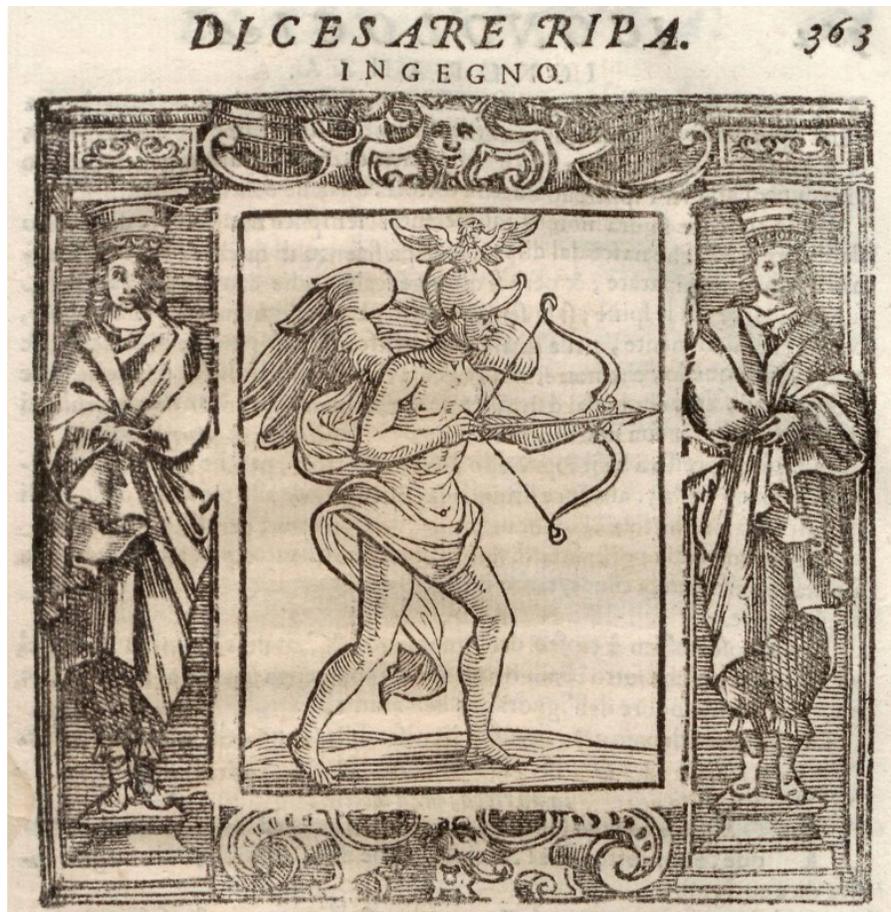


Figure 1.

Cesare Ripa, *Ingegno* from *Iconologia*, (Siena: Matteo Florimi, 1613), p. 362. Digital image courtesy of Heidelberg University Library

This is one of the key senses we find in Cesare Ripa's popular handbook of iconography: the *Iconologia*, in which "*Ingegno* is that potency of spirit which by nature inclines a man to be quick, able in all the sciences" (fig. 1).¹¹ Such a definition reflects period celebrations of visual artists who work in a rapid yet masterful way, underpinning also the increasing value of the sketch—sometimes referred to in Italian as a *ghiribizzo*—as the direct and immediate manifestation of an artist's idea.¹² In this sense, *ingegno* was related to *disegno*, which by the second half of the sixteenth century had become (at least in the hands of academicians such as Giorgio Vasari and Federico Zuccaro) the means of explaining the connection between a metaphysical idea, the artist's mental creation in his intellectual faculties, and its subsequent manifestation through the skilful workings of the hand.¹³

Despite the evident confusion about *disegno* in England around 1600, something of this kind is at work in Sir John Harington's anecdote about Nicholas Hilliard (see fig. 2), published in his 1591 translation of Ariosto (which Haydocke had plundered for his translation of Lomazzo):

My selfe have seen him, in white and blacke in foure lynes only,
set downe the feature of the Queenes Majesties countenance;
that it was eve[r] thereby to be knowne; and he is so perfect
therein . . . that he ca[n] set it downe by the Idea that he hath,
without any patterne. ¹⁴

Harington's observation that Hilliard could work "without any patterne" presumably alludes to the widespread practice of using a "face pattern" in the making of portraits, a topic to which we shall return. ¹⁵ Yet he may also be trading on the conventions of Aristotelian faculty psychology in which mental pictures (i.e. patterns) are impressed on the memory. Certainly, his comments are reminiscent of Sir Philip Sidney's Platonic notion of the fore-conceit in *The Defence of Poesy*, while conveying some of the key qualities of *ingegno*: sharpness, quickness, and (although this is less common) economical elegance. ¹⁶



Figure 2.

Nicholas Hilliard, *Elizabeth I*, ca. 1595–ca. 1600, watercolour on vellum, 6.5 × 5.3 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London

We have already encountered the sense of quickness in Ripa, found also in the first English dictionary proper: Robert Cawdrey's *A table alphabeticall* (1604), in which "ingenious" is defined as "wittie, quicke witted".¹⁷

Sharpness—a visual property of the type of linear image Harington describes, but also a mental quality—pervades translations from or into Latin, such as Thomas Thomas's 1587 translation of *perargutus* as "Very subtile, ingenious, wittie, and captious".¹⁸ Similarly, in one of his annotations to Daniele Barbaro's edition of Vitruvius (*I Dieci Libri dell'Architettura di M. Vitruvio*, 1567), Inigo Jones translated "Et questo non solo per dottrina, ma per acutezza d'ingegno si puo fare" as "no rule to teach this but by sharpenes of witt."¹⁹ We may note that Sidney, whom Hilliard knew, described "wit" in precisely these terms in his *Defence of Poesy*, referring to the "point of man's wit". Here Sidney deploys the imagery of

pen, needle, and sword, in a play on the intimate but oblique relationship of “stylus” to “style”, linking mental acuity with sharp instrument and finessed (but pointed) manner.²⁰ Harington’s comments should be placed within this field of discourse, and he was clearly impressed by the economy of Hilliard’s likeness, created using a refined implement in “foure lynes only”. We might tentatively relate this to the association of ingenuity with both pithiness and with salt, specifically the “Attic salt” of an elegant and succinct turn of phrase, which by 1623 had led Cockeram to include “Atticke” as a definition of “witty”, alongside “ingenious” and “pregnant”.²¹

The association of Hilliard with “Attic grace” is not implausible, given that William Scott compares the limner favourably to Apelles in his *Model of Poesy*.²² The notion that the limner would have been thought of as pregnant is especially apt. Haydocke deploys this term when translating Lomazzo’s account of the “first inventor of Plasticke” (i.e. modelling), Prometheus, described as a man of “a most pregnant wit and sounde wisdom”.²³ This returns us to one of Florio’s translations—“full of invention”—suggesting that the *ingegnoso* is both ready and replete with wit; perhaps, *pace* Harington and Sidney, full of ideas or fore-conceits.²⁴

The language of “pregnancy” to denote the intellectual quickness and readiness of “wit” was widespread in the period. As early as 1530 John Palsgrave—an acquaintance of Thomas More and Erasmus—had translated the French “empraignant” as “Quycke/ pregnant of wytte”, while for John Rider in 1589 the Latin “pregnans” meant “A pregnant, or sharpe witte. Acre ingenium. Acutum ingenium.”²⁵ Haydocke’s use of the word is especially appropriate given its connotations of birthing, for Prometheus, we are told, “formed men’s images of earth, adding a certaine artificiall motion unto them, so that they seemed to be indued with spirit and life”. Literally and figuratively, Prometheus is equated with the sort of inspiration sometimes appended to *ingegno* in the Neoplatonic tradition of poetic fury.²⁶ Indeed, we see him in the act of “inspiring” in the frontispiece to the *Tracte*, accompanied by other representatives of the “artes of curious paintinge, carvinge and buildinge”: Juno, Pallas, and Daedalus (fig. 3).²⁷ More could be said about the implicit connection here between curiosity and ingenuity, but at the very least we may note that by this date Daedalus was synonymous with ingenuity, as the entry for “Dédalo” in the Perceval-Minsheu Spanish-English dictionary of 1599 shows: “Dedalus, a proper name signifying ingenious.”²⁸

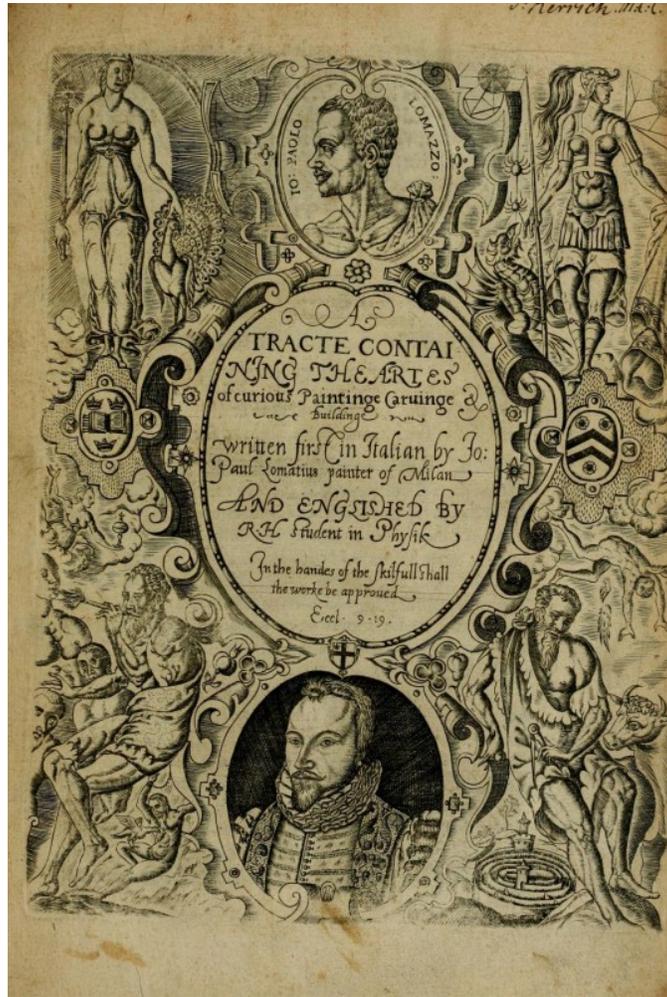


Figure 3.

Richard Haydocke, Title page from 'A tracte containing the artes of curious paintinge, carvinge and buildinge', (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1598) Digital image courtesy of Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program

Ingenious/ingenuous: the birth of the liberal artist

The equation of pregnancy and birthing with ingenuity is part metaphorical, part the result of etymological confusion, since throughout the sixteenth century the Latin *ingenium* mingled liberally with the word *ingenuus*, meaning “freeborn” or “noble”. The conflation of these terms, stemming in part from the “natural” aspect of *ingenium*, is particularly pronounced in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English, so much so that by 1676 Elisha Coles could state in his *Dictionary* that “Ingenious and Ingenuous, are too often confounded.”²⁹ To a certain extent this slippage is explainable in social terms: in the hierarchical society of early modern England it was natural to ascribe qualities of superior intelligence and ability to the nobility,

and the importance of this relationship for the standing of the liberal arts in the Renaissance is well known. For our purposes, we should observe chiefly its significance for the justification of drawing (and therefore painting, which rests upon it) as a liberal art. The introduction of this idea into England via Italy, especially through Thomas Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *Il cortegiano*, has been thoroughly examined and need not be rehearsed, other than to note that it is given full vent by Lomazzo, who in a typical passage asserts: "For to saye the trueth, what Prince or ingenuous man [*huomo libero*] is there, which taketh not delight, with his pencell to imitate God in Nature, so farre foorth as he is able?"³⁰ With this in mind it is surely no accident that Haydocke, writing for a socially elite audience that required convincing about the legitimacy of the visual arts, addressed his paratextual letter to "the ingenuous reader".

Let us investigate further the nature of the ingenious-ingenuous nexus in Elizabethan and Jacobean England by considering the economics and aesthetics of freedom, specifically in relation to the status and self-presentation of the visual artist. We will focus especially on Hilliard, singled out by Haydocke as a representative of English *ingegno*; that is, a native painter whose ability rivals those artists cited by Lomazzo as exemplary, such as Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, and Dürer. As Haydocke explains:

Nicholas Hilliards hand, so much admired amongst strangers [may] strive for a comparison with the milde spirit of the late worldes-wonder Raphaell Urbine; for . . . his perfectio[n] in ingenuous Illuminating or Limning . . . [is] so extraordinarie, that when I devised with myselfe the best argument to set it forth, I found none better, then to perswade him to doe it himselfe . . . and by mee promiseth you a treatise of his owne Practice that way, with all convenient speede.³¹

Some seventy years ago, John Pope-Hennessy argued that the treatise in question—the incomplete and only posthumously published *Arte of Limning* (ca. 1598–1603)—is shot through with the influence of Lomazzo's treatise in Haydocke's translation.³² This is evident not least in Hilliard's assertion that limning is "a kind of gentle painting, of less subjection than any other", in part by virtue of its ease, cleanliness, and secrecy.³³ But Hilliard is at pains to show that this freedom comes at a price. As he explains:

[Portrait limning] is for the service of noble persons very meet And this is a work which of necessity requireth the party's own presence for the most part of the time, and so it is convenient

that they be gentlemen of good parts and ingenuity, either of ability, or made by prince's fee able so to themselves as to give such seemly attendance on princes as shall not offend their royal presence. ³⁴

Here the introduction of a “prince's fee” into the equation injects a note of tension into the ingenious-ingenuous relationship. Hilliard raises this delicate matter elsewhere in his treatise, where, reflecting on the glories of antiquity, he complains: “Like as one good workman then made another, so one botcher nowadays maketh many, and they increase so fast that good workmen give over to use their best skill, for all men carry one price.” ³⁵

This is an echo of Haydocke's explanation as to why he sought to “increase the knowledge of the Arte [of painting]” by publishing his translation of the *Trattato*:

First the Buyer refuseth to bestowe anie greate price on a peece of worke, because hee thinkes it is not well done: and the Workemans answer is, that he therefore neither useth all his skill, nor taketh all the paines that he could, because hee knoweth beforehand the slendernes of his reward. ³⁶

Poverty and freedom: the socio-economics of ingenuity



Figure 4.

Geoffrey Whitney, *Paupertatem summis ingeniis ne provehantur* from *A Choice of Emblemes*, (Leiden: Christopher Plantin, 1586), p. 152. Digital image courtesy of British Library

Both Haydocke's and Hilliard's statements reflect the very specific situation of the visual arts in Elizabethan England in comparison to the Continent, not least, in Hilliard's case, the absence of a regular stipend for his services from the Queen.³⁷ Yet they speak also to a more general and widespread concern for the relationship of financial means to creative endeavour, encapsulated in the motto *Paupertatem summis ingeniis obesse ne provehantur* ("Poverty hinders the greatest wits from advancing"). Widely distributed in emblematic form by Alciati and others, it appears in England both in Geoffrey Whitney's *Choice of Emblemes* (1586; [fig. 4](#)) and, more elaborately, in Marcus Gheeraerts the elder's drawing *The Unfortunate Painter and his Family* (1577; [fig. 5](#)).³⁸ Both bear a quotation from Juvenal: "Haud facile emergent quorum Virtutibus obstat res angusta domi" ("With difficulty shall they emerge whose virtues are obstructed by poverty at home"). This alerts us to the proper subject of Gheeraert's drawing, in which a harassed artist turns from his work—and from Mercury, protector of the arts and financial gain—to attend to his mewling infant, needy wife, and brood of unruly children. Hilliard doubtless knew Whitney's book and it is not impossible that he had

seen the Gheeraerts drawing (although the latter seems to have been intended as a gift abroad). The latter, especially, strikes a chord with his cautionary tale of the indigent and otherwise completely unknown painter, John Bossam:

Nevertheless, if a man be so endued by nature [to be a painter], and live in a time of trouble, and under a savage government wherein arts be not esteemed, and himself but of small means, woe be unto him as unto an untimely birth! For of mine own knowledge it hath made poor men poorer, as among others . . . the most rare English drawer of story works in black and white, John Bossam; one for his skill very worthy to have been Serjeant Painter to any king or emperor. . . . Who, being very poor . . . and growing yet poorer by charge of children etc., gave painting clean over. ³⁹



Figure 5.

Marcus Gheeraerts the elder, *The Unfortunate Painter and his Family* (detail), 1577, pen and wash drawing on paper, 24 × 37.6 cm. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Estampes, Rés. B 12 Digital image courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Early modern Englishmen routinely equated the ingenuousness of the freeborn nobility with “open-heartedness”. But Hilliard leaves us in no doubt that the liberal stature of the ingenious painter depends not just on an open heart but also on an open purse. Strikingly, this is a two-way street, extending equally to the “good painter” himself. In a curious diatribe against

the “common slander . . . that cunning men are ever unthrifths”, Hilliard offers us a compelling picture of the liberal—in every sense of the word—artist. “Such men”, he says,

are commonly no misers, but liberal above their little degree, knowing how bountiful God hath endued them with skill above others And oft times when they have performed a rare piece of work (which indeed they cannot afford) they will give it away to some worthy personage for very affection, and to be spoken of. They . . . serve their fancies, having commonly many children if they be married If a man bring them a rare piece of work they will give more for it than most men of ten times their ability.

40

Beyond what this tells us about the economics of ingenuity, two aspects of the passage stand out. The first is Hilliard’s introduction of God-given talent. He refers to this elsewhere in his treatise, equating the divine gift of artisanal cunning with freedom from slavery:

God . . . giveth gentility to divers persons, and raiseth man to reputation by divers means . . . he called Bezaleel and Aholiab by name, and filled them with wisdom, skill and understanding, without any teaching, but only of his own gift and grace received. He taught them Himself to be cunning in all fine and curious work . . . being men before brought up but in slavery and making of

bricks in captivity. 41

There can be little doubt that this deployment of Bezaleel and Aholiab (the artificers of the Ark and the Temple) derives from Haydocke’s *Lomazzo*, specifically from the physician John Case’s letter to the reader printed therein. Case names both Bezaleel and Aholiab as “cunning men” and cites Exodus 31 to explain why, having read Haydocke’s translation, he now understands “what Aristotle meant in the sixth book of his *Ethics*, to call Phidias and Polycletus most wise men”. 42

The second significant aspect of Hilliard’s account of the liberal artist is that such men “serve their fancies”. Given the reference to abundant procreation that follows, this is clearly about the licit indulgence of sexual appetite within marriage (which, as per the image by Gheeraerts, literally breeds trouble in the form of needy children). But it pertains also—if we recall some of the definitions of *ingegno* with which we began—to the free following of imaginative fancy. Does this equate to freedom from rules? After a fashion,

since Hilliard, responding to a question from Sir Philip Sidney about the nature of proportion, explains that “our eye is cunning, and is learned without rule by long use.”⁴³ This, too, probably derives from Lomazzo, as we may discern from the important but little known response to Haydocke’s text by Sir Clement Edmondson, in his *Observations upon Caesar’s Commentaries* (1609):

Lomazzo . . . saith of a skilfull Painter; that being to draw a portraiture of gracefull lineaments, will never stand to take the symmetry by scale, nor marke it out according to rule: but having his judgement habituated by knowledge, and perfected with the varietie of shapes and proportions; his knowledge guideth his eye, and his eye directeth his hand, and his hand followeth both, with such facilitie of cunning, that each of them serve for a rule whereby the true measures of Nature are exactly expressed.⁴⁴

There is not space here to elaborate further upon this swirl of ideas connecting rules, experience, proportion, and cunning. Let us conclude, then, by glancing at a final aspect of freedom: not from rules, but from utility.

Proportionate freedom

This is at the very heart of Hilliard’s arguments as to why limning is “gentle”: “It tendeth not to common men’s use, either for furnishing of houses, or any patterns for tapestries, or building, or any other work whatsoever.”⁴⁵ Here we have a painter who worked—or so Harington claimed—“without any pattern”, and whose creations are not intended to *be* patterns.⁴⁶ This is a striking inversion of the standard arguments for painting’s worth circulating in learned circles at the time, such as John Dee’s in his account of the “Mechanical Zographer (commonly called the Painter)” in the “Mathematical Preface” to Henry Billingsley’s English translation of Euclid’s *Elements*:

To what Artificer, is not Picture, a great pleasure and Commoditie?
Which of them all, will refuse the Direction and ayde of Picture?
The Architect, the Goldsmith, and the Arras Weaver: of Picture,
make great account. Our lively Herbals, our portraitures of birdes,
beastes, and fishes: and our curious Anatomies, which way, are
they most perfectly made, or with most pleasure, of us beholden?
Is it not by Picture onely?⁴⁷



Figure 6.
Thomas Trevilian, Queene EL[i]zabeth, from
Miscellany, 1608 Digital image courtesy of Folger
Shakespeare Library, Shelfmark V.b.232

In writing this passage Dee was doubtless thinking of (to use his term) “mechanical” artists, such as the (probable) embroiderer Thomas Trevilian, whose several manuscripts show ample evidence of the sort of copying Dee praises (fig. 6).⁴⁸ Yet it has not hitherto been recognized that the above passage informed John Case’s letter to Haydocke, mentioned earlier, in which the scholar subtly shifts emphasis to indicate that painting offers not simply a pattern to be replicated, but a model of practice, learning, and (ultimately) ethics. As he explains:

One shaddow of man, one image of his partes, in this [Lomazzo’s] Booke showeth us better use. For if Hippocrates will read an Anatomie, heere-hence he may learne exact and true proportion

of humane Bodies; if Dioscorides will make an Herball, here he may have skill to set forth hearbes, plantes, and fruites, in most lively colours. Geometricians heere-hence for Buylding may take their perfect Modelles. Cosmographers may finde good arte to make their Mappes and Tables. Historians cannot heere want a pencell to over-shaddow men's famous Actes, Persons, and Morall pictures.⁴⁹

This liberal attitude towards painting is undoubtedly connected to contemporary English poetics concerned with how pictorial and literary mimesis relate to moral exemplars, the best known expression of which is Sidney's in the *Defence*. There, Sidney distinguishes "the meaner sort of painters, who counterfeit only such faces as are set before them" from "the more excellent, who having no law but wit" can "paint the outward beauty of virtue", without ever having *seen* the paragon concerned.⁵⁰

Despite their acquaintance, it is perhaps doubtful that Hilliard shared Sidney's view, not least since he seems obstinately literal in his conviction that "all painting imitateth nature, or the life."⁵¹ But a connection may yet be found in the very topic about which the poet questioned the painter: proportion. Central to Lomazzo's conception of art, "good proportion" is, according to Hilliard, the "greater part" of beauty: "Whereof our divine part . . . by an admirable instinct of nature judgeth generally."⁵² This is the stuff of *ingegno*: a natural instinct of the liberal artist. Yet strikingly, this aesthetic quality pertains not just to the artist, but also to his creations. As Lomazzo explained: "All the inventions of men carry with them so much the more grace and beauty, by how much the more ingenuously [*ingegniosamente*] they are proportioned."⁵³ Thus, ingenuity in Renaissance England was not simply an attribute of the artist, nor was it solely a social bond between him and his patron. Ingenuity had the capacity to be an aesthetic property, an affective quality of the work of art exemplifying the talents of its maker and exciting the curious admiration of the beholder.

Footnotes

- 1 Lucy Gent, *Picture and Poetry, 1560–1620: Relations between Literature and the Visual Arts in the English Renaissance* (Leamington Spa: J. Hall, 1981), 9. On Haydocke and his translation, see, for example, Karl Josef Hölzgen, "Richard Haydocke: Translator, Engraver, Physician", *The Library*, 5th ser., vol. 33, no. 1 (1978): 15–32.
- 2 See, for example, Michael Baxandall, "English *Disegno*", in *England and the Continental Renaissance: Essays in Honour of J. B. Trapp*, ed. Edward Chaney and Peter Mack (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1990), 203–14, and Gent, *Picture and Poetry*.
- 3 See, for example, Rhodri Lewis, "Francis Bacon and Ingenuity", *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2014): 113–63.
- 4 John Florio, *A worlde of wordes* (London: Arnold Hatfield for Edward Blount, 1598), 181. Florio's definition of the noun *ingegno* is comparable to the adjectival form, although we may note the object sense he offers first: "Ingégno, an engine, a toole, a devise, an artifice, an invention, an implement. Also wit, arte, skill, knowledge, discretion, foresight, fancie, cunning. Also the nature, inclination or disposition of a thing."

- 5 See C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1960), chap. 4.
- 6 “Che si come al Poeta fà di mestiero ch’insieme con l’ecellenza dell’ingegno habbia certo desiderio & una inclinatione di volontà onde sia mosso à poetare, ilche chiamavano gl’antichi furor d’Apollo, & delle muse” (“For as it is required in a Poet, that besides the excellencie of his witte, he shoulde moreover be furnished with a certaine propension and inclination of will, inciting and mooving him to versifie (which the ancient called the Furie of Apollo and the Muses)”). Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell’arte de la pittura, scoltura, et architettura* (Milan: Gottardo da Ponte, 1584), 108, Richard Haydocke, *A tracte containing the artes of curious paintinge, carvinge and buildinge* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1598), book 2, 5. “In tutte l’opere sue si scuopre la sottigliezza del suo ingegno in penetrare questa convenienza de’ colori; tanto che non è possibile à fare cangianti più vaghi, più naturali nè meglio accompagnati con l’arte, e co’l disegno” (“In all his [Gaudenzio’s] other workes, wherein he showeth the finenesse of his wit, in pearcing so deepe[ly] into the sweete agreement of colours; that it is impossible for any man to make changeables, more fresh, more naturall, or more agreeable to art”). Lomazzo, *Trattato*, 201, Haydocke, *Tracte*, book 3, 111. We know that Haydocke used the 1584 edition of Lomazzo’s treatise for his translation. See Lucy Gent, “Haydocke’s Copy of Lomazzo’s *Trattato*”, *The Library*, 6th ser., vol. 1, no. 1 (1979): 78–81.
- 7 See Patricia Emison, *Creating the “Divine” Artist: From Dante to Michelangelo* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), appendix: “The Historiography of *Ingegno*”, 321–48.
- 8 “Accioche almeno doppo che non si può persuadere à gl’huomini di questo tempo, che si sforzino d’apprendere tutte queste scienze necessarie (come si è detto) per la pittura, facciano qualche studio in questa mia fatica; percioche vi troveranno raccolto, per quanto si sono potuto stendere le forze del mio debil ingegno, se non tutto almeno parte di quello che è bisogno per riuscire in questa professione di qualche pregio & consideratione” (“To the end that although I cannot perswade men of these our daies to study the perfection of this most necessary science of painting; Yet I mighte drawe them at the least to bestowe some time in this my worke, where they shall finde gathered together (as much as in me lay) if not all, yet surely a great part of that which is necessary to the perfecting thereof”). Lomazzo, *Trattato*, 12, Haydocke, *Tracte*, book 1, 8.
- 9 *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Venice: Giovanni Alberti, 1612), 444. Given this definition it is rather surprising that the definition of *ingegno* in Baldinucci’s lexicon of art terminology is somewhat generic: “Una certa forza da natura in noi inserta, per ritrovar tutto ciò, che si può con la ragione giudicare” (“A certain force of nature placed within us, for retrieving all things, which may be judged by reason”). Filippo Baldinucci, *Vocabolario Toscano dell’arte del disegno* (Florence: Santi Franchi, 1681), 76.
- 10 “Con allargar di braccia, spuntar di pancia, inchini, torcimenti, guardi fissi, & altri atti simili che il pittore ingenioso può da se stesso imaginare” (“Throwing abroad the arms, thrusting out the belly, bowinges, turninges, stedfast lookes, &c. which the ingenious Painter will imagine of himselfe”). Lomazzo, *Trattato*, 167, Haydocke, *Tracte*, book 2, 70.
- 11 “Ingegno è quella potenza di spirito, che per natura tende l’uomo pronto, capace di tutte quelle scienze”. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Siena: Matteo Florimi, 1613), 362.
- 12 See, for example, Giancarlo Maiorino, *The Portrait of Eccentricity: Arcimboldo and the Mannerist Grotesque* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1991), 51 and n. 27; Philip Sohm, *Pittoresco: Marco Boschini, his Critics and their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991); and Nicola Suthor, *Bravura: Virtuosität und Mutwilligkeit in der Malerei der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010). As Gent notes, the idea of the sketch was poorly understood in England for most of the sixteenth century, although by about 1600 it was starting to become less obscure. Gent, *Picture and Poetry*, 14.
- 13 See, for example, David Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), and Robert Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-century Italy: From Techne to Metatechne* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997).
- 14 Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso in English heroicall verse*, trans. Sir John Harington (London: Richard Field, 1591), 278. As Haydocke explains in the preface to his book, he relied on Harington for translations of those passages from Ariosto that appear in Lomazzo’s treatise. Haydocke, *Tracte*, sig. [¶v^r].
- 15 For examples of sixteenth-century English works made from (and perhaps used as) face patterns, see Karen Hearn, *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England, 1530–1630* (London: Tate Publishing, 1995), cat. nos. 98 and 102. For discussion of patterns in relation to the portrayal of Elizabeth I, see Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987). See also the entries for John Audrey I, George Cable, Hans Eworth, Richard Flint, Peter Geberd, Robert Greenwood, John Knight II, and Thomas Playne in Edward Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters, 1547–1625”, *The Walpole Society* 76 (2014).
- 16 For the fore-conceit in Sidney and William Scott see Gavin Alexander, ed., *Sidney’s “The Defence of Poesy” and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (London: Penguin, 2004), and William Scott, *The Model of Poesy*, ed. Gavin Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013). For faculty psychology in the context of English poetics and visual culture of the period, see Sarah Howe, “‘Our Speaking Picture’: William Scott’s *Model of Poesy* and the Visual Imagination”, *Sidney Journal* 33, no. 1 (2015): 29–68, esp. 36.
- 17 Robert Cawdrey, *A table alphabetically* (London: James Roberts for Edmund Weaver, 1604), unpaginated.
- 18 Thomas Thomas, *Dictionarium linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* (London: Richard Boyle, 1587), sig. Vv^v.
- 19 See John Newman, “Inigo Jones’s Architectural Education before 1614”, *Architectural History* 35 (1992): 18–50, 37. I am very grateful to Gordon Higgott for bringing this reference to my attention.
- 20 Alexander, ed., Sidney’s “The Defence of Poesy”, 9. See also, in general, James Elkins, “Style”, in *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press. 8 July 2015, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T082129>.

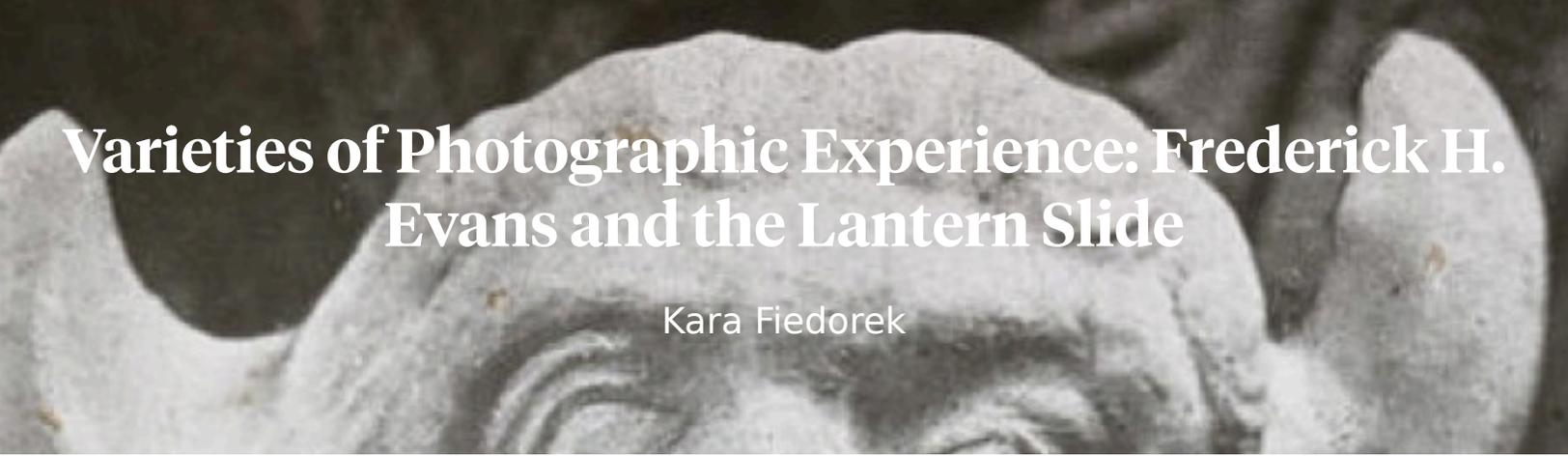
- 21 Henry Cockeram, *The Englishe dictionarie* (London: Edmund Weaver, 1623), sig. G4^f.
- 22 Scott, *Model of Poesy*, 17.
- 23 “Prometheus . . . was the first inventor of Plasticke . . . being of a *most pregnant wit* and sounde wisdome; that he brought the rude and barbarous people to a civile conversation, being the first that formed men’s images of earth, adding a certaine artificiall motion unto them, so that they seemed to be indued with spirit and life: whence afterwarde the Poets tooke occasion to invent such fables as we reade of him” (“Prometeo . . . fu il primo inventore de la plastica . . . era huomo di *acutissimo ingegno*, et di granprudenza, talche indusse gl’huomini rozzi, & barbari à la vita politica, & fu il primo che formasse le imagini de gl’huomini di terra, facendole con certa sua arte muovere, come se havessero havuto spirito, & vita: onde presero poi i poeti occasione di fingere tante sue favole, quante ne leggiamo”. Haydocke, *Tracte*, book 1 (Preface), 7, Lomazzo, *Trattato*, 10. Emphasis mine.
- 24 See also Bullokar’s definition of “pregnant” as “Quickewitted, that will soone conceive”. John Bullokar, *An English expositor* (London: John Legat, 1616), sig. M4^v. We may note the possible connection of these definitions to certain aspects of rhetoric, such as synecdoche, defined by Puttenham as “the figure of quick conceite”. George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie* (London: Richard Field, 1589), 162.
- 25 John Palsgrave, *Lesclarcissement de la langue francoyse* (London: Richard Pynson and John Hawkins, 1530), fol. xciii^v, John Rider, *Bibliotheca scholastica* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1589), sig. Aa5^v.
- 26 On which see, for example, Noel L. Brann, *The Debate Over the Origin of Genius During the Italian Renaissance: The Theories of Supernatural Frenzy and Natural Melancholy in Accord and in Conflict on the Threshold of the Scientific Revolution* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002).
- 27 For a full interpretation of the frontispiece, including Haydocke’s unconventional choice of Juno to represent the art of painting, see Margery Corbett and Ronald Lightbown, *The Comely Frontispiece: The Emblematic Title-page in England, 1550-1660* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 67-78. See also Judith Dundas, “Arachne’s Web: Emblem into Art”, *Emblematica* 2, no. 1 (1987): 109-37, and Hóltgen, “Richard Haydocke”.
- 28 Richard Perceval and John Minsheu, *A dictionarie in Spanish and English . . . enlarged . . . by John Minsheu* (London: Edmund Bolifant, 1599), 85. Pallas, who appears on the frontispiece in her guise as goddess of crafts and in competition with Arachne, is equally pertinent to *ingegno*, since on the first page of the *Trattato* Lomazzo explains how, “in somuch as our bodies being borne naked by Nature, were diversly annoyed by the untemperatenesse of the ayre, it [the Understanding] most ingeniously invented the art of Weaving and Tailery” (“Similmente ancora, percioche i corpi nostri cosi ignudi come erano stati da la natura prodotti erano diversamente offesi da l’intemperie de l’aere; ingeniosamente rirtuovò l’arte del tessere et fabricare le vesti”). Haydocke, *Tracte*, book 1 (Preface), 1, Lomazzo, *Trattato*, 1.
- 29 Elisha Coles, *An English dictionary* (London: Samuel Crouch, 1676), sig. T2^f.
- 30 “Plinie calleth it [painting] plainly a Liberal arte; which authority of his may be prooved by reason. For although the Painter cannot attaine to his ende, but by working both with his hand and pencel; yet there is so little paines and labour bestowed in this exercise, that there is no ingenuous man [*non ci è huomo libero*] in the world, unto whose nature it is not most agreeable and infinitely pleasant. For we read of the French King Francis, the first of that name, that hee oftentimes delighted to handle the pencell, by exercising drawing and painting. The like whereof is reported of divers other Princes, aswell auncient as late. . . . So that in these and the like exercises, nothing is base or Mechanicall but all Noble and ingenuous [*libero, & nobile*]. For to saye the trueth: what Prince or ingenuous man [*huomo libero*] is there which taketh not delight, with his pencell to imitate God in Nature, so farre foorth as he is able?” Haydocke, *Tracte*, book 1, 14, Lomazzo, *Trattato*, 18-20. On arguments for the liberal status of the visual arts in England in this period, see, for example, Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), chap. 1, and Katherine Coombs, “‘A Kind of Gentle Painting’: Limning in 16th-Century England”, in *European Visions: American Voices*, ed. Kim Sloan (London: British Museum Press, 2009), 77-84.
- 31 Haydocke, *Tracte*, sig. [¶vi^{f-v}].
- 32 John Pope-Hennessy, “Nicholas Hilliard and Mannerist Art Theory”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 6 (1943): 89-100.
- 33 Nicholas Hilliard, *The Arte of Limning*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton and T. G. S. Cain (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), 43.
- 34 Hilliard, *Arte of Limning*, 45.
- 35 Hilliard, *Arte of Limning*, 43.
- 36 Haydocke, *Tracte*, sig. [¶iv^v]. See Tarnya Cooper and Maurice Howard, “Introduction: Artists, Patrons and the Context for the Production of Painted Images in Tudor and Jacobean England”, in Tarnya Cooper, Aviva Burnstock, Maurice Howard, and Edward Town, eds., *Painting in Britain, 1500-1630: Production, Influences and Patronage* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press and The British Academy, 2015), 4-28 (at 5). This essay provides a useful overview of the current state of the field.
- 37 See, for example, Roy Strong, *The English Icon: Elizabethan & Jacobean Portraiture* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Pantheon Books, 1969), and Tarnya Cooper, *Citizen Portrait: Portrait Painting and the Urban Elite of Jacobean England and Wales* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2012).
- 38 See Erin L. Webster, “Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder and the Language of Art: Images with Text in the Elizabethan Renaissance” (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve Univ., 2001), 208-224. On this iconography see also Alexander Marr, “Walther Ryff, Plagiarism and Imitation in Sixteenth-century Germany”, *Print Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2014): 131-43.
- 39 Hilliard, *Arte of Limning*, 47. On Bossam, see Town, “Biographical Dictionary”, 39.

- 40 Hilliard, *Arte of Limning*, 89. Given the tenor of this passage one cannot help but think that it was motivated by some personal sense of injury on Hilliard's part.
- 41 Hilliard, *Arte of Limning*, 45.
- 42 Haydocke, *Tracte*, sig. *j^r. On Bezaleel as an exemplar of curiosity, see Alexander Marr, "Gentile curiosité: Wonder-working and the Culture of Automata in the Late Renaissance", in *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. R. J. W. Evans and Alexander Marr (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 149-70 (at 165).
- 43 Hilliard, *Arte of Limning*, 63.
- 44 Clement Edmondos, *Observations upon Caesar's Commentaries* (London: Matthew Lownes, 1609), 4. On this passage, see Alexander Marr, "'Curious and Useful Buildings': The 'Mathematical Model' of Sir Clements Edmondos", *Bodleian Library Record* 18, no. 2 (2004): 108-49.
- 45 Hilliard, *Arte of Limning*, 43. This is, in effect, a succinct definition of what Haydocke calls "curious paintinge".
- 46 We may note a certain tension here between Hilliard's rhetorical claims for his art (and Harington's praise of it) and actual practice, since not only did Hilliard effectively rely upon a face pattern for his later portraits of Elizabeth (the famous "mask of youth"), he also made designs to be reproduced in other media, for example for the Queen's Great Seal (1584; Victoria & Albert Museum). There is, though, a subtle difference between Hilliard's reliance on a pattern committed to memory and the deployment of a physical face pattern in the reproduction of portraits.
- 47 John Dee, "Mathematical Preface", in Euclid, *The Elements of Geometrie*, trans. Henry Billingsley (London: John Daye, 1570), sig. dii^v.
- 48 See Thomas Trevilian, *The Great Book of Thomas Trevilyan: A Facsimile of the Manuscript in the Wormsley Library*, ed. Nicolas Barker (London: Roxburghe Club, 2000), and *The Trevelyon Miscellany of 1608: A Facsimile of Folger Shakespeare Library MS V.b.232*, ed. Heather Wolfe (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 2007). I am conscious of the irony in setting Trevilian's "patterns" against the work of Hilliard, especially (as discussed above) his later portraits of Elizabeth. However, there remains a distinction between Hilliard's mimetic art, rooted in (as he says) "long use" and the memory, and unmediated copying from a two-dimensional model.
- 49 Haydocke, *Tracte*, sig. *j^r.
- 50 Alexander, ed., *Sidney's "The Defence of Poesy"*, XXX.
- 51 Hilliard, *Arte of Limning*, 55. While plainly stated, Hilliard's meaning here is not completely clear. From the passages that follow it seems he means some sort of combination of drawing from life and the capturing of character in a portrait.
- 52 Hilliard, *Arte of Limning*, 58.
- 53 Haydocke, *Tracte*, book 1, 25, Lomazzo, *Trattato*, 33. On proportion in English poetics of this period, see Gavin Alexander, "Sidney, Scott, and the Proportions of Poetics", *Sidney Journal* 33, no. 1 (2015): 7-28.

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Varieties of Photographic Experience: Frederick H. Evans and the Lantern Slide

Kara Fiedorek

Abstract

Frederick H. Evans (1853–1943) spent the turn of the twentieth century photographing English and French cathedrals, always using the church to figure a particularly late Victorian alarm at the lost vitality these medieval structures symbolized. This article illuminates his art's deep religious stakes by exploring the mystical resonances of his stated preference for the lantern slide as a support for his images, a matter that has been long overlooked despite his extensive articles on the topic. Evans's cathedral photographs are most fully comprehended when his promotion of glass over paper is acknowledged and interpreted through his affiliation to Swedenborgianism.

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Robert Slifkin, Shelley Rice, Sean Nesselrode, and the editors of British Art Studies for their thoughtful feedback on different versions of this paper.

Cite as

Kara Fiedorek, "Varieties of Photographic Experience: Frederick H. Evans and the Lantern Slide", *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/kfiedorek>

In an iconic photograph, Frederick H. Evans (1853–1943) frames Lincoln Cathedral in an ethereal, weightless mist above the industrial town below, its spired towers reaching heavenward away from the patchwork of properties in the foreground (1898; [fig. 1](#)). In Evans’s words, this general view suggests “the crowning effect” the cathedral gives the East Midlands city, “the grandeur, the atmosphere and sense of quietude, the feeling of past greatness, the aloofness from the current and contemporary”.¹ Evans spent nearly three decades photographing English and French cathedrals, always using the church to figure a particularly late Victorian alarm at the lost vitality these medieval structures symbolized. Cathedrals ameliorated a pervasive sense of religious and cultural enfeeblement felt on both sides of the Atlantic at the turn of the century: Henry Adams wrote in the same years that “Ennui had driven him to Chartres” to learn what that “mass of encrusted architecture meant to its builders”.² In defiance of quickening amateur technologies that shaped this nascent “snapshot” era, Evans maintained a slow and deliberate photographic process that brought him into communion with the antiquity and authenticity of ecclesiastical architecture.

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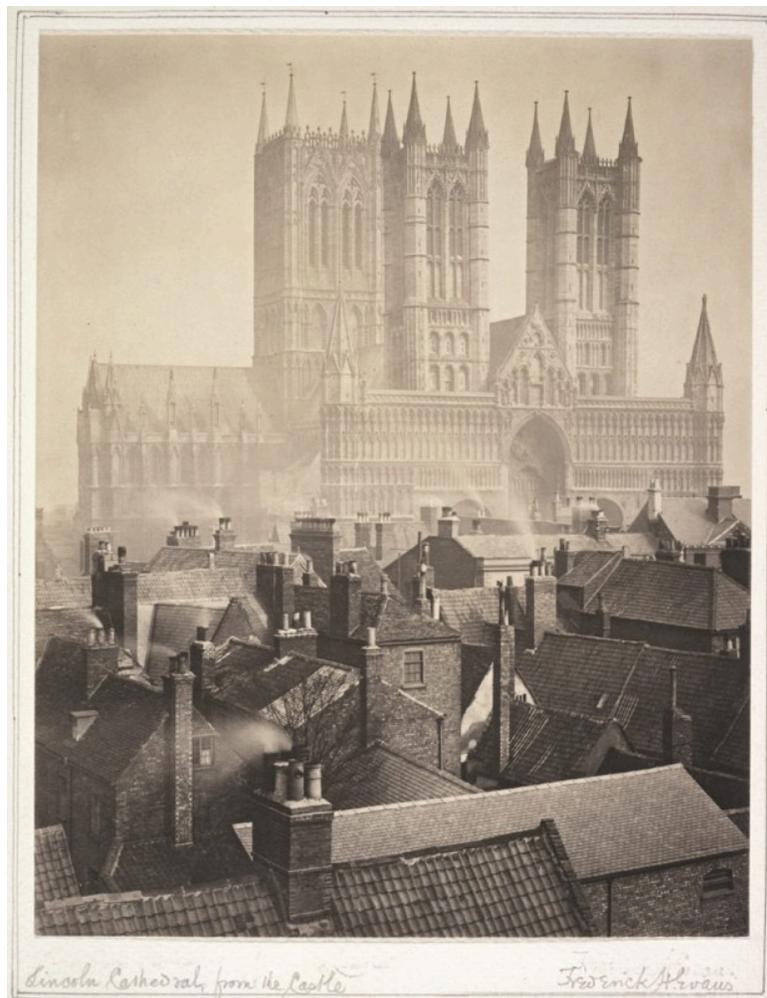


Figure 1.

Frederick H. Evans, *Lincoln Cathedral from the Castle*, 1898, platinum print, 23.8 × 18.8 cm. George Eastman House, Rochester, NY Digital image courtesy of George Eastman Museum

Photography for Evans was akin to a religious practice involving time, labour, and repetition like the multi-generational construction of cathedrals, and he habitually spent weeks studying them and waiting for the moment of revelation. His friend and colleague Alvin Langdon Coburn recalled later that “The visit of Evans to a cathedral town was a solemn Rite. He went there and lived.”⁴ As the general view of Lincoln Cathedral’s thin, double-bordered mount and dramatic, high-contrast printing in platinum attests, Evans was not only a perceptive and skilful photographer but also a creative *presenter* of photographs. His innovative framing devices and exhibition designs for the London photographic club the Linked Ring (1892–1910) earned him universal acclaim, while they simultaneously expressed a newly physical notion of experiencing religious architecture through the photograph.⁵

Today Evans holds a significant place in the history of photography for such pristine platinum prints, but this was only part of his contribution to the international campaign for photography as art connected with turn-of-the-century Pictorialism. An under-studied but essential component of his work is the more than one thousand lantern slides he made in the first twenty years of his career, until failing eyesight forced him to stop producing slides in 1902. This abrupt conclusion partially explains the almost total lack of attention to this format in existing scholarship on Evans, which is undoubtedly due in part to a perceived incompatibility between the mass-market associations of slides with the career of a pre-eminent art photographer.⁶ However, the process of making photographs of Anglican and Catholic structures *on glass* had an enduring relevance to the way Evans conceived of his elegiac images on similar themes *on paper*. The print of Lincoln Cathedral pictures a faith that was becoming increasingly remote to modern culture, while the lantern slides he made of the cathedral recuperate this same loss in a more directly experiential, bodily, and, as this article will argue, mystical way.

Evans approached the transparent medium in an essentially redemptive manner: he advocated vocally in the photographic press throughout the early 1900s for pictorial photographers to rescue the potentially inartistic lantern slide, by then firmly associated with dry lecturers and spectacular entertainment, for the purposes of making art.⁷ More than any other format, transparencies for Evans dramatized enduring connections between photography and divine light, and their centrality to what many viewers have identified as the spiritual presence of light in his photographs merits further attention.⁸ If the genesis of the photographic image in light was read in theological terms immediately upon its conception, the lantern slide that visibly operated by a stream of light contributed in salient ways to Evans's broader project of eulogizing sacred architecture.

The significance of religion to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photography has largely escaped modern viewers, though matters of faith frequently shaped how photographers approached their medium and how contemporary audiences read their images. Despite a strong bias within the literature on Evans towards aesthetics, consistent with the larger tendency to excise social and historical dimensions from the discussion of Pictorialism, the religious motivations and meanings of his photography have been studied in connection with several of his works on paper, especially those that make the link explicit in titles taken from the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer.⁹ This article extends and complicates that approach by exploring the mystical resonances of his stated preference for glass as a support, a matter that has been long overlooked despite the fact that he published extensively on the topic.¹⁰ Evans's lantern slides of Lincoln

Cathedral, made in 1895 and presented in lectures for photographic societies between 1896 and 1902, offer a unique opportunity to revisit this formative aspect of his practice and its relation to his deeply held mystical beliefs. Evans found theoretical and formal inspiration in the enthusiastic writings of the German mystic Jakob Böhme (1575–1624), who sought to re-absorb belief in guidance by divine impulses into Lutheranism, and principally in the work of the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), who investigated the divine properties of light and seeing and on whom Evans published. ¹¹

The manner in which Evans's images of cathedrals embody a way of perceiving religious space that is indebted to Christian mysticism is clear in his writings on Swedenborg, which resonate conceptually with his many articles on photography on glass. The physical format in which his slides were exhibited at one representative lecture on the architectural history of Lincoln Cathedral delivered in 1902, likely before a London photographic club, also illuminates this affinity between photography and faith by fostering a sympathetic engagement with projected imagery of the church. ¹² Evans's Swedenborgian belief system not only provided a subtext but also shaped the nature of this and similar lectures, probing beyond the realm of newly prevalent photographic reproductions of famous works of art and buildings that simply duplicated their referents. Evans's methods were informed by religious ideas whose ultimate goal was to regain the originary state of unmediated spiritual vision described by Swedenborg: photography on glass was the purest expression of this project.

Photography on glass and Swedenborgian influx

Pronouncements of an ebbing faith were pervasive in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Already in 1843, Thomas Carlyle raised the alarm about religion's replacement by utilitarian philosophies and scientific progress: "There is no longer any God for us! God's Laws are become a Greatest-Happiness Principle, a Parliamentary Expediency; the Heavens an Astronomical Time-Keeper; a butt for Herschel telescopes to shoot science at." ¹³ The challenges presented to religious belief by positivism continued to gain force and energy throughout the century. By 1873, Matthew Arnold wrote that to "re-inthroned" the Bible to its former supremacy in English consciousness would be "as impossible as to restore the feudal system, or the belief in witches". ¹⁴ The overarching sense at the turn of the century that orthodox Christianity was discredited, even at an end, gives special poignancy to Evans's photographs of deserted cathedrals, where pews await worshippers who never arrive (fig. 2). Evans later became known for asking deans to remove the pews for the hours he spent making negatives, revealing his desire to evacuate signs of modern life from his views. For

Evans, the furnishings of worship had become superfluous: the buildings themselves provided the genuine religious experience that he sought to capture in his images. ¹⁵ In this sense, the emptiness of Evans's cathedrals rescued these spaces from parochialism and their fraught histories as Catholic structures violently appropriated by Anglicans in the sixteenth century, offering them up to a more universal, potentially agnostic, spectator. ¹⁶



Figure 2.

Frederick H. Evans, *South Aisle of Lincoln Cathedral*, 1895, lantern slide, 8.5 × 8.5 cm. University of Nottingham Digital image courtesy of Manuscripts and Special Collections, The University of Nottingham

Growing up in London in the 1850s and 1860s during the period of feverish church building and restoration that followed the Oxford Movement, Evans saw firsthand that a society losing its interest in religious tradition continued to invest in the physical authority of churches, even as churchgoing itself declined. The historian Clive Field estimates that by the Edwardian era, only

one quarter of adults, largely women, attended mass on any given Sunday.¹⁷ Evans blamed ecclesiastical institutions for the absence of a “vital religious sense” among the people: “It must be that the Churches and their ministers have lost hold, by their manifest unrelatedness to daily life, their unreality, the impossibility of making their doctrines real and valid in practice.”¹⁸ There is a pointed irony in the fact that Evans’s lectures on Lincoln Cathedral and similar structures brought his early twentieth-century audiences—exactly those who went to church less frequently—into a long and meaningful encounter with a cathedral, forcing them to linger on something that was becoming increasingly alien in lived experience. Given that slide presentations require an audience, the presumably occupied chairs of the secular lecture space symbolically substituted for the vacant pews on view.

Already accustomed to the rise of secularism to some extent, Evans’s late Victorian and Edwardian contemporaries often looked nostalgically upon religion and religious subjects. In his seminal *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), William James was less eager to throw the baby out with the bathwater than some of his forebears, recognizing that religion “adds to life an enchantment which is not rationally or logically deducible from anything else”.¹⁹ If religion was to survive, it had to be a modern, everyday kind, one that was more flexible than what Emerson called the “withered traditional church yielding dry catechisms”.²⁰ Herein lay the attraction of the eighteenth-century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, whose voluminous, anti-creedal writings on the permeability of the natural and spiritual worlds made Evans “all the more impatient with the official pulpit”.²¹ Although Swedenborg never commanded a huge popular following in the “market situation” of religious volunteerism that emerged in industrial England, he intrigued many artistic and intellectual luminaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Blake, Coleridge, Emerson, and Henry James, Sr.²² Evans primarily encountered Swedenborg through James (whom he considered “perhaps the most acute and profound theological thinker of his century”) and even more thoroughly through the scholar and homeopathic physician James John Garth Wilkinson (1812–1899).²³ Evans wrote to Wilkinson that his English translations and several volumes on Swedenborg from the 1840s to 1890s were “celestial food” for the photographer.²⁴

Where Swedenborg offered a fundamental “fullness of message”, Evans valued Wilkinson’s interpretation of his mystical writings for “the perfect picture-making effect of so many of the sentences”. Evans corresponded with Wilkinson in 1886 and wrote his biography to celebrate the centenary of his birth in 1912, which is essentially a short book on Swedenborg. Part of these letters details a publication Evans proposed that would include

selections from Wilkinson's writings, which he considered "emphatically the public medicine now most needed", to gain Wilkinson and Swedenborgian thought a larger popular following. Evans wanted to title this *Christian Verities for Daily Life Being Passages from the Writings of James John Garth Wilkinson*, and to organize it around Swedenborgian themes such as Divine Influx, the Second Coming, Incarnation, and Justification by Faith Alone, including those excerpts from Wilkinson "most valuable and in most urgent need for the awakening and teaching of this recalcitrant age". In his mid-seventies at the time, Wilkinson politely declined and the anthology never materialized. However, from his studies of the Swedish mystic through the English author, Evans formulated an informal "workaday Gospel" and a conviction that "the practical religious sense, a living for and in communion with the invisible, must be made to invade, to permeate the business life".²⁵ Swedenborgian theories of vision infused his own professional life as a photographer and form a critical subtext to his photographs, especially those on glass.

In terms of his photography, Evans looked to Swedenborg especially for a philosophy of perception, an extrasensory form of sight, and a spiritual context for artistic form, rather than a creed. Swedenborg represented a self-consciously modern, enlightened form of Christian thought, one that was more accommodating to the materialism and scientific progress of the late nineteenth century.²⁶ He rejected the idea that a large spatial, temporal, or metaphysical gap exists between this world and that of the dead; inspired by Romans 1:20 ("For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made"), he believed that nature was created to clothe the spiritual. As Henry James, Sr., put it: "nature for Swedenborg is not a being but a seeming (it is apparitional, phenomenal); it is a shadow, not substance."²⁷ The Mystic's hypothesis of our constant nexus with an invisible world, where a person is successful according to the measure of his or her obedience to inspiration from beyond, resonated with Evans's approach to photography from the beginning.

Evans started his career in photography by making photomicrographs as lantern slides for his friend George Smith in 1883 (fig. 3); he won an award for these from the Royal Photographic Society in 1887, at a time when he was deeply engaged in Swedenborgian thought and corresponding with Wilkinson.²⁸ As the image of a cross-section of a sea urchin's spine suggests, the camera immediately became a tool of making visible an invisible world and extending the range of human vision—a religiously rooted precursor to the New Vision photography emerging after the First World War. According to categories proposed by James Coates's *Photographing the Invisible* (1911), an interest in the "material invisible" (such as X-rays or photomicrographs) gave way to one in the "immaterial invisible" (which

Coates equates with the psychic but could also be more generally metaphysical) for Evans as he moved from scientific to architectural views. ²⁹ Throughout, the light-sensitivity of the gelatin bromide emulsion on his glass negatives provided a model of sensitivity to unseen or interior forces, generally referred to as “influx” by Swedenborg. ³⁰

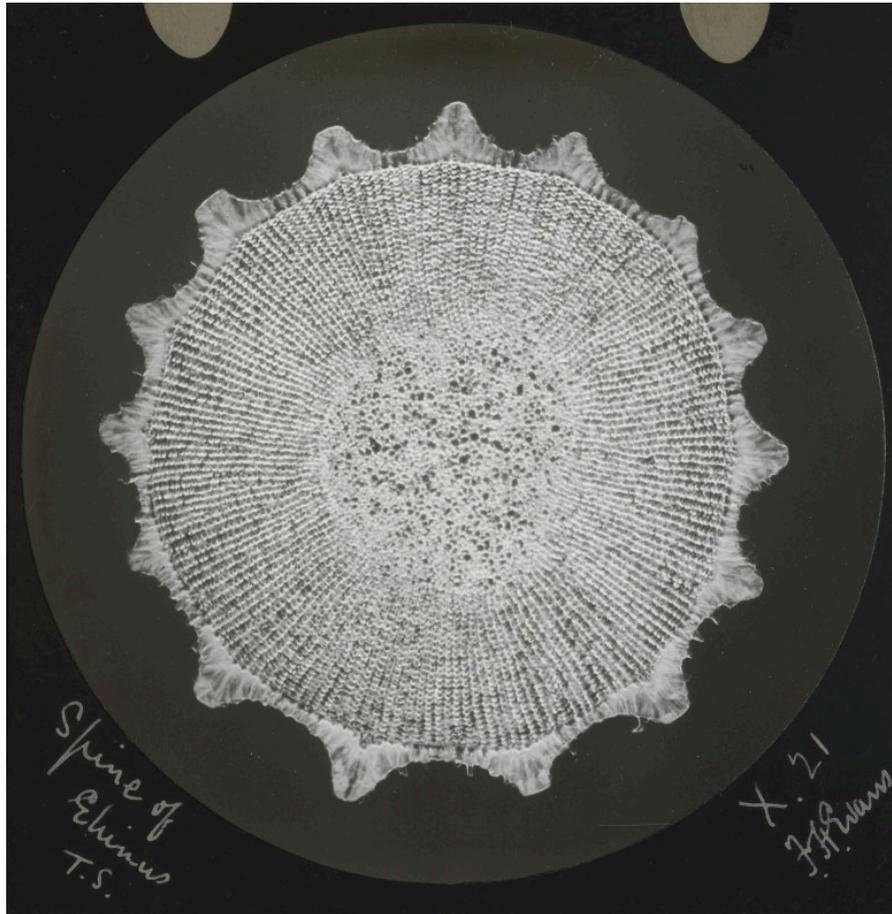


Figure 3.

Frederick H. Evans, *Spine of Echinus, T.S. x21*, 1886, lantern slide, 7.1 × 7.1 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles Digital image courtesy of Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program

Evans's descriptions of the ontology of photography and Swedenborgian perception are closely related. Where photography “only recalls; it does not create”, an attuned individual might discern the spiritual significance of the visible world as outlined in Swedenborg's theory of correspondences: ³¹

A genius is one who is abnormally sensitive and open to influx; has a finer receptivity. Man makes nothing of himself; . . . We only form, give body and appearance to what already exists latently, or is given us from other-where. ³²

Evans's religiously inflected photography was a uniquely powerful medium for insisting upon those *latent* presences beyond the reach of the naked eye and for educating one's senses in detecting the living reality underlying the surfaces of things. A better understanding of his religious beliefs gives new meaning to his demonstrated interest in printing his photographs of cathedrals as lantern slides beginning in the mid-1880s. In a Swedenborgian epistemology where the material and celestial worlds are contiguous and in constant communication, Evans felt this veil to be at its thinnest in the sacred spaces of cathedrals: the glass transparency materialized this permeability.

Though it displays some of the same affinities, this extrasensory perception differs significantly from the popular phenomenon of spirit photography, where double-exposed prints brought portrait sitters into communion with the spectral image of the recently departed. While the photographic press generally considered spirit photographers "barefaced impostors", the late Victorian British public countenanced the veracity of their images far more than in the United States and France, so that they particularly riled a purist like Evans. ³³ As a self-described "red-hot enthusiast" for pure photography, Evans adamantly opposed any such multiple exposures and believed that only a process of perceiving the subject slowly and over successive encounters, not in the spectacle of a séance or a commercial studio, could yield meaningful correspondences. ³⁴ He considered spirit photographs "easy puerilities" that told only of the psychic needs of humans, not heavenly communications. ³⁵ As someone sympathetic to Christian mysticism, he believed visions were spontaneously given by the grace of God, rather than purposefully summoned as for spiritualists. ³⁶

Swedenborg reported experiencing what his late nineteenth-century readers, most notably William James, called "photisms", or flashes of light, during his moments of deepest insight. ³⁷ For Evans, camera technology had very specific mystical associations given the opening of the lens to allow for influx, the plate's receptivity to immaterial forces, and the final image's augmentation of the reality of the unseen. As Evans told one interviewer: "I myself cannot paint or draw; but I have Vision, and photography lets me put down what I see." ³⁸ Swedenborg described the state of communication in the "Most Ancient Church" as an "internal respiration" of perceptions. ³⁹

Given his presumption of a direct and untroubled transfer from his perception as a viewing subject to the final print or slide, it is easy to imagine how Evans regarded photography as the fulfilment of Swedenborg's encouragement to relearn an immediate, direct, and involuntary vision that was not reliant on representation but was more akin to breathing. Evans's glass slides reclaimed some sense of unmediated contact with the infinite that overcame the seeming remoteness of the experience of cathedrals. The lantern slide that transmitted light, physically moving rays between seemingly separate spheres at the border of which the photographic glass stood as both dividing and uniting line, was in profound sympathy with his religious perspective.

Magic lanterns as religious experience

In parsing the connection between Evans's photography on glass and Swedenborgian mysticism, it is worth thinking in broader terms about the experience of the magic lantern show around 1900 and how it structured the reception of the photographic image.⁴⁰ In *Swann's Way* (1913), Marcel Proust marvelled at the miraculous vividness of the magic lantern that distracted him from his childhood fits of bad temper:

After the fashion of the master-builders and glass-painters of Gothic days, it substituted for the opaqueness of my walls an impalpable iridescence, supernatural phenomena of many colours, in which legends were depicted as on a shifting and transitory window . . . The body of Golo himself, being of the same supernatural substance as his steed's, overcame every material obstacle—everything that seemed to bar his way—by taking it as an ossature and absorbing it into himself: even the door-knob—on which, adapting themselves at once, his red cloak or his pale face, still as noble and as melancholy, floated invincibly—would never betray the least concern at this transvertebration. And, indeed, I found plenty of charm in these bright projections, which seemed to emanate from a Merovingian past and shed around me the reflections of such ancient history.

41

Conjoining iconography from the Early Middle Ages and the projected image, Proust characterizes the magic lantern as a vehicle that moves the experience of a stained glass window into new sites and contexts, namely, his bedroom. It is safe to say, however, that Proust was not talking about photographs when he describes colourful imagery from this medieval legend, because Proust generally considered photographs banal, utilitarian, and

vulgar.⁴² His account of this transubstantiative experience raises an important problem for understanding the context in which Evans produced his lantern slides: in Walter Benjamin's era of mechanical reproduction, had photography robbed the magic lantern of its magic?⁴³

As opposed to painting, the prosaic exactitude offered by the camera might seem to undermine Evans's unspoken goal of attaining a higher visionary state. Misty landscapes by the American painter George Inness (1825–1894) have been taken as the pre-eminent expression of Swedenborgian faith in nineteenth-century art, predicated on the idea that spiritual sight is opened when physical sight is compromised.⁴⁴ When it came to colour theory, Evans's interpretation of Swedenborg's tenets in a monochrome medium was necessarily looser than Inness's version, where hues held specific spiritual qualities. For Inness, photographic detail offered no gain in meaning: "The memory is the daguerreotype shop of the soul which treasures all God creates through eye and touch. What we painters have to learn is to keep this shop closed in the presence of nature: to see, and not to think we see."⁴⁵ Inness apprehended what he called "the reality of the unseen" through a wilful blindness, while Evans sought the same through a cultivated hyper-vision.⁴⁶ To be sure, photography's perceived illusionism and pervasiveness in modern culture aligned it more closely with the core of Swedenborgian thought in terms of a descent of religion into everyday life—what Henry James, Sr., called "no longer a Sunday but a week-day divinity, a working God".⁴⁷ At the same time as photography provided a desirable vernacular, its presentation in the lantern slide, which relied on light piercing through the solid medium of glass, could evocatively penetrate beyond the surfaces of the visible world.



Figure 4.
Frederick H. Evans, *Southeast Porch of Lincoln Cathedral, chapels*, ca. 1895, lantern slide, 8 × 8 cm. Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ Digital image courtesy of Center for Creative Photography, Tucson



Figure 5.
Frederick H. Evans, *Southeast Porch, from an old engraving*, ca. 1895, lantern slide, 8 × 8 cm. Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ Digital image courtesy of Center for Creative Photography, Tucson

Even before being projected, the fact that lantern slides constituted a positive version of the glass negative—still used by many “serious” photographers like Evans as against the newly available roll film immediately embraced by amateurs—invested the format with primal, auratic qualities. When projected, Evans seems to have thought that photographic transparencies were magical precisely for their ability to viscerally transport the viewer into the scene at hand (figs. 4 and 5). He included other media like an “old” engraving in his lecture on Lincoln Cathedral in 1902 to reinforce this point that photography was more “valuable” and “truthful”. Only when the cathedral itself presented obstacles to photographs (i.e. lack of scaffolding) did he make recourse to lithographs, preferring the “absolute fac-simile photography alone can give”.⁴⁸ In this vein, Evans was exceedingly “obstinate” about ideal viewing conditions.⁴⁹ A low point of sight made the scene most natural, “so alive and real as to yield the notion that all one has to do is to get up and to walk into the picture before one”, a complementary vehicle for his photographs whose “chief aim” was to “give the irresistible feeling that one *is* in an interior, and that it is fully of light and space”.⁵⁰ In principle, the image became coextensive with the interior in which it was projected, so that the photograph was less a discrete picture than an immersive environment dramatically illuminating the darkened space of viewing and suffusing with light any architectural interruptions like Proust’s door-knob. The projected image united the depicted architectural space with the actual architectural space of the lecture hall so that the enlarged photograph even sacralized the presumably non-religious site of the lecture. For instance, the inclusion of walls on either side of one slide pre-empted the lines of a hall and invites the viewer into the meeting-room at the far end, eliding the pictured church and the audience’s space of viewing (fig. 6). As Proust’s magic lantern flooded his childhood bedroom with a medieval legend, the lantern slide brought the Gothic cathedral into a present-tense space.



Figure 6.

Frederick H. Evans, *Chapter House at Lincoln Cathedral*, 1895, lantern slide, 8.5 × 8.5 cm. University of Nottingham Digital image courtesy of Manuscripts and Special Collections, The University of Nottingham

The insistent immediacy of Evans's photographic lantern lectures was compounded by the enduring connections between both divine providence and light, specifically in the form of a lantern, and between divine agency and photography as *light-writing*. William Holman Hunt's sensationally popular *The Light of the World* (1853) provided a model for images of lanternists as Christ-like wayfarers bearing the message of light to a public in need of salvation. Since the official announcement of photography's invention in 1839, the light of Heaven, the blessed sun, the Eternal eye, and even God himself had consistently been invoked as the true authors of a photograph.⁵¹ Magic lanterns were one technology in a wider network of popular entertainment including the diorama and panorama; though they were by no means exclusively religious, they were seized upon to illustrate the edifying potential of the lecture format and the symbolic valences of

light. Indeed, the magic lantern was warmly embraced by religious organizations by the 1890s, from evangelical and missionary groups to temperance societies and Sunday schools, as well as famous American reformers associated with the Social Gospel movement like Jacob Riis, who described his magic lantern lectures on tenement conditions as “fit topics for any sermon”.⁵² There are even accounts of lantern slide observances in British churches, for example a Good Friday lantern service held in 1902 at St Mary’s Church in Torquay, a seaside town in Devon.⁵³ This rich cultural nexus between light, photography, Christianity, and the magic lantern suggests how the realist view of the photograph as an unmediated duplication of nature gained pronounced religious dimensions in the slide show.

Relative to paper, Evans thought transparencies had a “more potent, more magic power of suggestion”.⁵⁴ There is a tragic appropriateness to the fact that these images, so invested in engendering a keener vision, should eventually lead to the deterioration of Evans’s eyesight, leading him to work almost exclusively in platinum prints. On the topic of glass versus paper, Evans wrote:

Photography is an art-method that relies on a presentment of the image given in planes, enveloped in atmosphere, real, and not suggested or simulated by lines or washes; and that fully to exploit these, *the final base of the image should be as nearly transparent as the original vehicle, air replaced by glass*, so that when one sees the final shaping of our picture, it shall be as nearly *free and intangible* as any recalling of the original can hope or expect to get. Glass, not paper, I submit, gives the perfect expression of the perfect photograph.⁵⁵

The ambition here is nothing short of the modernist desire to transcend the material objecthood of the work of art, to etherealize the photograph by making it transient, weightless, and transparent. As Proust would make more explicit a few years later, a sympathetic attraction emerges with the medieval stained glass window, which was an important precedent for this use of transmitted light through glass to dematerialize space. Evans preferred this temporary projection of images onto walls to their chemical absorption into paper, which he felt presented an “arbitrary stoppage” of the image.⁵⁶ This helps explain why his lantern slides tend to be more frontal and less oblique than the prints for which he is famous, beyond their straightforwardly instructive purpose. For example, the slide of the Chapter House at Lincoln enfolds the viewer in its space in contrast to the teasing recession and withheld gratification of one of Evans’s well-known prints, *Ely*

Cathedral: View into Nave (1900; fig. 7). Evans incorporated a more dynamic sensation of passage or trajectory into the print to compensate for what he understood to be its “stoppage” of the experience. The lantern slide’s conveyance of “innumerable planes inseparably connected”, on the other hand, instantiates a Swedenborgian understanding of nature as having no end but rather an ascent from thing to thing; paper could not accommodate this sense of infinity and flux as effectively.⁵⁷

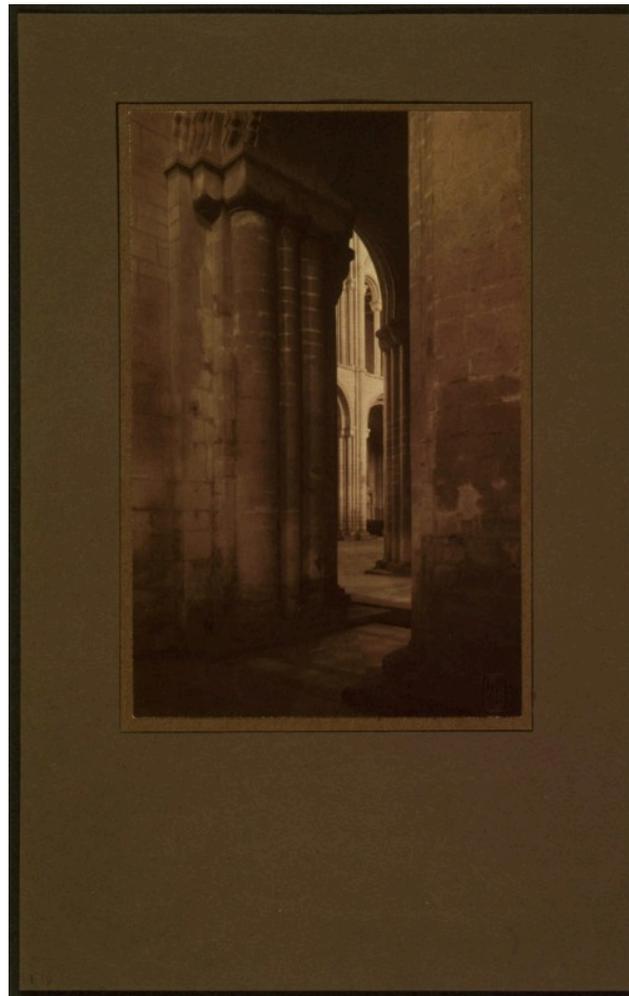


Figure 7.

Frederick H. Evans, *Ely Cathedral: View into Nave*, 1900, sepia-toned platinum print, 20.4 × 13.2 cm. Library of Congress, Washington, DC Digital image courtesy of Library of Congress, Washington

There were also tremendous differences in the social aspects of viewing a photograph on glass versus one on paper that further supported Evans’s aim to help his audience develop “the seeing eye”.⁵⁸ This focus on religion as a social phenomenon of mystic participation was consonant with the period’s great works in comparative religion, from James’s *Varieties of Religious*

Experience to Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). Magic lanterns inspired communal viewing in which substantial audiences all focused on one and the same image at a given time rather than picking and choosing from the densely packed salon-style hangings of photographic exhibitions. In place of the contingent meanings existing between different prints on the wall was a radical and deep concentration on a single subject. Evans's performance as lecturer, guiding the audience through each view, was (per Riis) not unlike a sermon on the cathedral, and indeed churches and mission halls were frequent venues for lantern shows in this period. The much larger scale of the photographic image in a lantern show as well as the experience of slides unfolding in time shaped a viewing environment that echoed Evans's own process of training eye and memory through close study. In other words, the phenomenology of Evans's slides worked to counteract the "unreality" of medieval houses of worship in modern life by creating a real-time, virtual experience. Unlike the "abnormal" and "over-actual" stereograph, the optical lantern provided "as perfect a translation as possible" of the original photographic negative, so that Evans could help "fulfill [the lantern's] manifest destiny as the great educational instrument of the future" in teaching his audience how to see a church in all its spiritual significance. ⁵⁹



Figure 8.

Frederick H. Evans, *Retrochoir at Lincoln Cathedral*, 1895, lantern slide, 8.5 × 8.5 cm. University of Nottingham Digital image courtesy of Manuscripts and Special Collections, The University of Nottingham

Evans's pictures counterbalance a lost and regained religious feeling in a way that enacts the corollary between stained glass windows and photography on glass (fig. 8). Fragile Gothic windows had almost always been destroyed by hostile human action over intervening centuries, and this destruction became a ripe metaphor for comparing a glorious, coherent past with a degraded, fragmented present. For Evans in his 1902 lecture, this “makes one again sigh and long for the treasures of old glass that our Philistine forefathers so ruthlessly and stupidly destroyed”, lamenting the demolition of the originals by Puritan soldiers during the English Reformation.⁶⁰ As such, the stained glass window symbolized religious conflict and the fragility of one creed's dominion over another, an ugly sectarian history from which Swedenborgians stood apart. What is more, as liminal objects—the early fourteenth-century Dominican Gulielmus Durandus wrote on the dual

role of windows to keep out the elements and to allow the light of God to filter in—both windows and lantern slides transmit light rather than merely reflect it, which protracts and redirects photography’s genesis in light.⁶¹ Halation in the arched windows gives a true sense of how light dematerializes space, overcoming the limestone’s physical confines photographically much like Proust described the effect of the magic lantern as one of *transvertébration*, literally a moving across spinal columns.

The physical force of light in Evans’s photographs of cathedrals was equally palpable as projected light in the dark space of the lecture hall. The art historian John Harvey has noted that the magic lantern is technically the opposite of a camera; where the camera takes in light to form the image, the magic lantern emits illumination, concretizing the agency of light.⁶² Even in Evans’s platinotypes, however, darkness is never truly dark, which connects his slides to the prints that came to dominate his later practice.⁶³ One critic remarked upon how Evans’s treatment of light conveyed an impression of “unseen presence”, while another wrote that his photographs produce the illogical impression “that there is more light inside a building than there is outside it”.⁶⁴ Evans used double-emulsion Sandell film to hold excellent detail in the shadows, which was registered by platinum’s long tonal range despite its low to moderate contrast. As George Bernard Shaw wrote of his friend’s work, “the obscurest detail in the corners seem as delicately penciled by the darkness as the flood of sunshine through window or open door is penciled by the light.”⁶⁵

Marshalling Swedenborgian ideas of correspondence and the reality of the unseen, Evans’s materials emphasized how light forces continuity between spheres that appear physically separate, re-investing the vacant cathedral with spiritual life. This marks a subtle but important difference from the only imagery he credited as a source of inspiration, in J. M. W. Turner’s early watercolours of cathedrals. Though he admired these “tiny masterpieces” for their formal attributes, including their “superb sense of height, bigness, light, atmosphere, grandeur”, they could not embody the scale, duration, visceral three-dimensionality, and mystical potency of his projected photographs.⁶⁶

The communication of divine experience at Lincoln Cathedral

While his 1902 lecture on Lincoln Cathedral was putatively scholarly, it simultaneously exemplified Evans’s tacit ambition to cultivate Swedenborgian vision, a heightened faculty of sight attentive to how the symbolic language of the divine resides in the material world. Moving from the general to the particular, from the outside of the cathedral to the inside, Evans summons the process of influx of divine energy streaming in as he

progressively narrows in on details with specific meaning to Swedenborgians. Craftsmanship and attendant issues of scale are a primary modality linking Evans's lantern slides to a way of seeing inflected by the Christian Mystic.

Evans contextualized his image of Lincoln's intricate choir stalls carved by medieval builders with Augustus Pugin's commendment of their craftsmanship as "the finest examples of woodwork in the kingdom, both for rarity and beauty of design and for accuracy of workmanship" (fig. 9).⁶⁷ Evans was a disciple of William Morris, who used photographic slides to enlarge and replicate medieval typographies for his Kelmscott Press and also designed celebrated stained glass windows for Morris & Co. Both artists recognized in the humble medieval craftsman a purposefulness and even anti-authoritarianism that appealed to their unconventional sensibilities.⁶⁸ Evans's painstaking methods replicated the craftsmanship he pictured: his repeated use of the zoom-in, such as in the stone sculptures of the Judgment Porch, photographically simulates the medieval artisan's crafting of details and the progressive revelation of information to a visitor to the site.



Figure 9.

Frederick H. Evans, *Choir Stalls at Lincoln Cathedral*, 1895, lantern slide, 8.5 × 8.5 cm. University of Nottingham Digital image courtesy of Manuscripts and Special Collections, The University of Nottingham

Photo-historian Anne Hammond has argued that selecting from the innumerable planes of focus parallel to the ground glass in his architectural views owes a great deal to Evans's early work with a microscope, whose extremely shallow depth of field trained him to move zoom-lens-like through

successive planes in the subject.⁶⁹ Making slides of cathedrals involved shifts in scale in *both* directions: rather than contact printing the glass negative, he used a reducing camera to shrink the image (the strong summer light necessary for this reduction work is what caused his eyesight to deteriorate) before enlarging it again through projection. He repeatedly mentions this fact of enlargement throughout his lecture. On this question of scale, Evans describes the oak choir stalls as a “forest of pinnacles”, emphasizing that they are a miniature version of the spires of the cathedral itself, whose prototype in nature was the tree.⁷⁰ For a Swedenborgian believing that every object in nature is a microcosm of the universe—in Emerson’s words, that “*nature is always self-similar*”—the projected image and accompanying lecture made immediate for the viewer the sliding scales between small and large that the very production of photographs on glass enacted.⁷¹

Through the second half of the lecture from 1902, Evans looked at sculptural forms in Lincoln Cathedral that resonated closely with Swedenborgian thought on correspondence with invisible worlds, namely the worlds of angels and devils who communicate with humans. Indeed, Swedenborg’s principal work, *Arcana Coelestia* (1756), interpreted the Bible through the lens of his own revelatory experiences and conversations with angels. Evans offers three successive views that show the sculptures of the Angel Choir at Lincoln in situ and close-up so that their gleeful expressions and musical instruments can be clearly seen (fig. 10). A quote from *Arcana Coelestia* that Evans pasted into the frontispiece of his personal copy of Wilkinson’s *The Greater Origins and Issues of Life and Death* (1885) describes Swedenborg’s mystical experience of a mob of spirits:

But in the middle of them I apperceived a sound, soft, angelically sweet, with nothing but what was of order in it. The Angelic Choirs there were within, and the mob of spirits with their disorder was without . . . And it was said that hereby was represented how the Lord rules the ugly and disorderly elements which are outside by a peacemaking in the middle.⁷²

Comparing the actions of angels with the intercession of Christ, Swedenborg becomes conscious of their benevolent influence through music.



Figure 10.

Frederick H. Evans, *Angels in Lincoln Cathedral*, 1895, lantern slide, 8.5 × 8.5 cm. University of Nottingham Digital image courtesy of Manuscripts and Special Collections, The University of Nottingham

Musical instruments were a consistent metaphor for the camera for Evans, who was an enthusiastic pianola player. He defended the self-playing piano as a mechanism that could become more than a “soulless machine” in the hands of an insightful operator, urging that “the full control of its perfect technique is formed by a musicianly spirit, which is equivalent to my photographic doctrine.”⁷³ Like the angels pictured playing string instruments, Evans viewed his role as photographer as one of deriving “soulful” expression from a machine. Moreover, Evans analogizes hearing the inaudible music of angels with seeing the invisible through the photograph: both measure faith in terms of an extrasensory perception.

Angel musicians such as those at Lincoln were first represented in the thirteenth century at exactly the moment when the actual use of musical instruments in church became problematic.⁷⁴ Evans’s slides sought to compensate for this past and present soundlessness, replacing music with the visual acuity of the photograph that enables a vision beyond that of the physical eye. His slides made these angels observable in a way that a visit to the site could not; the soaring scale of the cathedral and their position in the triforium made it difficult to see such marginal sculpture from below. In separate slides of the angels, Evans utilized photography’s capacity to

enlarge its subject to bring to light the unseen but highly animate forms of the cathedral and to help his audience understand the vital religious sense of the Middle Ages. Paradoxically, the modern technology of the camera enabled a pre-modern vision, a deliberate attentiveness that Evans associates with the medieval in contrast to the incursions and distractions of modernity; the camera's powers of magnification fostered an appreciation for hidden detail at odds with the "idly-busy life that crowds outside" the cathedral around 1900. ⁷⁵ The angels and their heavenly music figure the kind of spiritual sight that Evans tries to obtain, an intuition of celestial forms delivered through the senses, whether aural or visual. If angels incarnate the forces of good and the sculptures at Lincoln solidify their spiritual forms, his photographs on glass enhance these layers of embodiment by providing the viewer with a very physical perception of the cathedral's details through the projected, large-scale image.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from angels lies the world of devils. In contrast to the uncritically optimistic relationship to invisible spheres shared by Spiritualists—their spirits are always *friendly* ghosts—Swedenborg stressed that inter-worldly communication could occur with devils as much as angels. Henry James, Sr., became a lifelong Swedenborgian and friend of Wilkinson's after one such visitation by a devil in 1844; in a further example of the relevance of the diabolical to the Mystic's belief, the fictional Swedenborgian Rev. Jennings in Sheridan Le Fanu's story "Green Tea" (1872) cuts his throat with a razor after he opens himself to influx and is terrorized by a demonic monkey. ⁷⁶ In a final eulogy for the Gothic craftsman, Evans concludes his 1902 lecture on Lincoln Cathedral with what he calls "our specimens of comic relief" in devilish forms spewed from the medieval imagination. ⁷⁷

Grotesques and gargoyles were valuable to Evans and his contemporaries because, in Morris's words, they were "evidently the work of the ordinary workman", expressions of his individuality, fantasy, and even subversion of official aesthetic programmes and dogma. ⁷⁸ The Lincoln Imp, a horned figure that seems to float mid-air in Evans's high-contrast, extreme close-up, is a pre-eminent example of the enchanting grotesque (fig. 11). According to popular legend, Satan sent this devil to Earth to cause mayhem and an angel retaliated by turning the imp into stone. Burrowed in the foot of a spandrel in the Angel Choir, the Lincoln Imp is practically invisible, even more so than the angels (fig. 12).



Figure 11.

Frederick H. Evans, *Lincoln Imp*, 1895,
lantern slide, 8 × 8 cm. Center for Creative
Photography, Tucson, AZ Digital image
courtesy of Center for Creative Photography,
Tucson

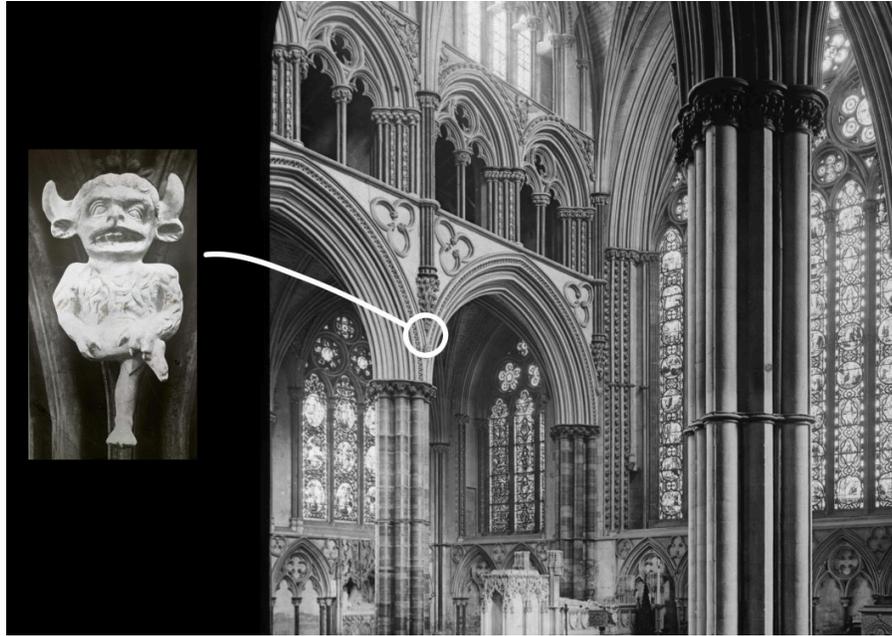


Figure 12.

Graphic describing the relationship of Figure 11 to Figure 8 (the imp is burrowed in),

Such grotesques held an important key to the medieval spirit as it was understood at the fin de siècle; as Swedenborg wrote that ancient men had a greater capacity for spiritual vision than their modern counterparts, so Evans discerned this acuity in medieval builders through their fascination with the monstrous. The exhibition catalogue for the Linked Ring salon of 1902 captioned one of Evans's photographs of a cathedral grotesque with the biblical verse, "They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion" (Psalm 22:13), where these terrifying figures simultaneously attract and repel within an Old Testament framework. According to Michael Camille in his study on the margins of medieval art, the intensifying emphasis upon sin and self-reflection in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) made these primordial beasts instruments of fear wielded by church authorities as much as reflections of the possible perversity of oneself.⁷⁹ Late nineteenth-century Decadents like Evans's protégé Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898) seized upon this latter aspect, utilizing the gargoyle trope to embody a modern world seeing itself as grotesque while simultaneously aspiring to an earlier imaginative ingenuity.⁸⁰

In a famous portrait, Evans pictures Beardsley like a gargoyle perched on the side of a medieval cathedral, his long spindly fingers recalling flying buttresses as they prop up his beaked face (ca. 1894; [fig. 13](#)). Beardsley protrudes from the support of his hands like the grotesque satyrs emerge from a swirling thicket of thorns in his bordering drawing. Years after Evans more or less gave up photography, he remained intrigued by the mystical

potential of this ghastliness, publishing *Grotesques by Aubrey Beardsley* (using this portrait as a frontispiece) with twelve platinum facsimiles from drawings in his personal collection in 1919. Evans saw a lineage of “monstrous ideas and imaginings” extending from Blake, who took an early interest in Swedenborg’s New Church, to Beardsley, whom Evans wrote “confirms Swedenborg to the core”.⁸¹ The same year that he wrote his treatise on Swedenborg in 1912, Evans published seventeen platinotype reproductions of *William Blake’s Illustrations to Thornton’s Pastorals of Virgil* (1821). These were not copies, but “enlarged fac-similes” that used photographic enlargement to make Blake’s miniscule original woodcuts (2.54 x 5.71 cm) observable as never before. Evans quoted Wilkinson on Blake at this time:

His imagination, self-divorced from a reason which might have elevated and chastened it, and necessarily spurning the scientific daylight and material reason of the nineteenth century, found a home in the ruins of ancient and consummated Churches; and imbued itself with the superficial obscurity and ghastliness, far more than the inward grandeur of primeval times . . . the artist yielded himself up more thoroughly than other men *will* do, to those fantastic impulses which are common to all mankind; and which saner people subjugate, but cannot exterminate.⁸²

Evans himself explicitly connected Blake and Beardsley’s “dreadful pictures” to Swedenborg’s doctrine of vastation, which literally means a laying waste or emptying out of evil qualities that animated his own practice in photography on glass.⁸³

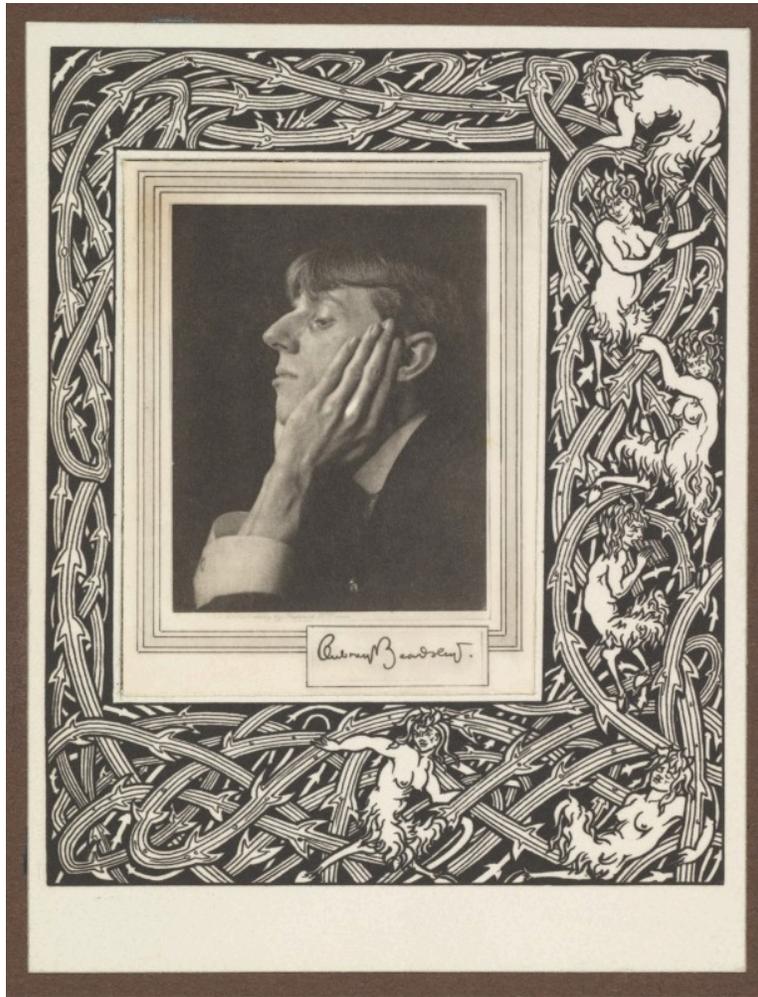


Figure 13.

Frederick H. Evans,, *Aubrey Beardsley*, ca. 1894, photogravure mounted with Beardsley's designs from *Le Morte d'Arthur*, 24.3 x 19 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Digital image courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. Gift of Gordon Conn, 1954

The theory of vastation gives a new gloss to Evans's storied preoccupation with purism, given that he approached the lantern slide as a medium that purged the photograph of potential duplicity. While on the one hand a marker of the Stieglitzian strain of Pictorialist practice, the purist character of his photographs also embodied his desire to unlearn the troubling mediations of modern vision and to exhume a primary spiritual sight as described by Swedenborg—a connection between “straight” photography and faith that would reach its pinnacle in Paul Strand's seminal essay, “Photography and the New God” (1922).⁸⁴ Wilkinson called this Swedenborg's “ocular honesty” and posited that it allowed him to perceive “communicated Divine Experiences”.⁸⁵ At Lincoln Cathedral, Evans mapped this purism onto the architecture itself.⁸⁶ In an early slide of the West Front View, he calls

attention to how the building is a palimpsest of various styles that are “without structural unity”.⁸⁷ The restoration of its jambs in 1860 was “a sheer imitation, a lie”.⁸⁸ Just as he condemned manipulated and retouched photographs, he abhorred architectural restorations that passed themselves off as genuine.

The sacred location made the work of the “restoration fiend” even more “criminal”: “certainly one would look for the keenest and purest evidence of truth in a building devoted to the worship of God!”⁸⁹ Evans similarly points out the restoration of the pillars of the North Aisle, arguing that before-and-after views can be correctives to such inauthenticity—photographs can actually purify the falsifications of the buildings. What Evans reads as fraudulence in the cathedral, shadowed as the potential misrepresentation of a doctored photograph, is precluded in his mind by the lantern slide format. Due to the nature of its enlargement of the photographic image, the lantern slide discriminated against the darkroom tricks that Evans called “heresies” by magnifying what might be imperceptible on paper.⁹⁰ In one of his many articles on photography on glass, Evans warned would-be manipulators: “Be sure your sin will find you out.”⁹¹ His lantern slides helped eliminate the barriers to an “honest” vision, and the sacred building thus became a way of figuring purity in photography.

Evans’s preoccupation with the grotesque was a way for him to conceptualize vastation, where forms that were by turn comic and terrifying stimulate the regeneration of perception as described by Swedenborg. As such, his photographs of grotesques catalyze the kind of incisive vision he compels his audience to learn throughout his lecture on Lincoln Cathedral. Understanding salvation as a progressive regeneration, Evans ended his talk with these images as a way of preparing viewers to leave the lecture hall with both a finer appreciation of the medieval building and renewed perceptual faculties.

The defining aspects of Evans’s practice—purism, craftsmanship, attention to the metaphysical qualities of light, as well as the angelic and diabolical undercurrents of existence—reclaim “the feeling of past greatness” that Evans perceived in his jointly spiritual and aesthetic study of places of worship. At the same time as photography on glass offered the promise of transcending the natural world to discern its latent spiritual plane, Evans understood that such an attempt must necessarily be rooted in the material. In his biography of Wilkinson, Evans quoted him challenging the Swedenborgian notion that outer or “ultimate” forms are “less living” than interior forms: “It is wrong, therefore, to attempt to transcend the fact of embodiment; the hope is mistaken that would lead us to endeavor thus after pure spirituality.”⁹² Evans used his lantern slides of cathedrals as the

materials to embody Swedenborgian mystical experience, and his lectures put into practice the tenet of modelling a viewer more open to influx. Evans's photographs of English cathedrals, this article has argued, are most fully comprehended when his preference for glass over paper as a support for images is acknowledged and interpreted through his affiliation to Swedenborgianism.

Towards the end of Evans's extended essay on Swedenborg, he praises H. G. Wells's "magically fine story", "The Door in the Wall".⁹³ In this widely read story from 1911, a mysterious door leading to an enchanted garden periodically tempts the protagonist Wallace, who defers from opening it until dissatisfaction with worldly success as a politician finally drives him to do so and he tumbles to his death. In a similar fashion, Evans's photographs implicitly question what would happen were it possible to chase down their fugitive light or to gain the immediacy of vision they endorse. Evans's admiration for what he called the "aching glimpses" of this story suggests that for him as for many of his contemporaries, "pure spirituality" was a moving target. Doubt about what lay behind the closed door was an integral component of the longing to open it, illuminating how faith was ultimately based on fragmentary spiritual insights rather than sure and certain proof. His photographs were aching glimpses of a sacred energy felt to have dissipated in the early twentieth century. Displayed as lantern slides, they were both necessarily partial views of a bygone magic and paradigms of its continuity in Edwardian culture.

Footnotes

- ¹ Frederick H. Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral Lecture Notes" (1902), Frederick H. Evans Collection, Center for Creative Photography, Univ. of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, 5, 2. Hereafter Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral". These forty-one pages of notes, addressed simply to "Gentlemen", include a general introduction to the site and numbered commentary on the corresponding slides. The main portions of the Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lincoln were built between 1185 and 1311.
- ² Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), chapter 26 (1901).
- ³ Kodak introduced the Brownie camera in 1900. This name had folkloric connotations, referring to good-natured, invisible brown goblins that helped with housework in rural Scotland and England. This was a way of mythologizing a new technology to play up its marvellous nature.
- ⁴ Alvin Langdon Coburn, "Frederick H. Evans", *Image* 2, no. 9 (Dec. 1953): 59. Coburn turned his own lens on religious architecture when he photographed Franciscan missions in California in 1902 and Liverpool Cathedral during its construction in the 1910s.
- ⁵ Evans's usual pseudonym within the Linked Ring was the Idler, but at least once he was known as the Hangman, and he referred to himself as the Hanger-Idler in the Linked Ring Papers dated 15 Aug. 1904.
- ⁶ Scholarship has focused almost exclusively on Evans's platinum prints, beginning with the first monograph dedicated to the photographer by Beaumont Newhall in 1964 and extending to more recent studies. When mentioned at all, the lantern slides most often reproduced are his early scientific photomicrographs. For the most current critical discussion of Evans's career, see Anne Lyden, *The Photographs of Frederick H. Evans* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2010). One notable exception is the groundbreaking work of Anne Hammond, who has made significant strides in shedding new light on other, "commercial" formats pursued by Evans, particularly in his photographs of English country church interiors commissioned to illustrate articles in the magazine *Country Life* in 1905. Though this was a commercial engagement, Hammond stresses that Evans had complete control of his subject matter. See Anne Hammond, "Frederick H. Evans and *Country Life*: The Parish Churches", *History of Photography* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 9-17.

- 7 Evans's articles on photography on glass include "Photo-Micrography", *Photographic Journal* 11 (31 Dec. 1886): 25-28; "Ely Cathedral", *Journal of the Camera Club* 2 (March 1897): 46-47; "Lincoln Cathedral", *Photographic Journal* 24 (23 Dec. 1899): 101-6; "Artistic Photography in Lantern Slides", *Amateur Photographer* 37 (19 Feb. 1903): 148-49; "The Exhibiting of Lantern Slides", *Amateur Photographer* 37 (3 March 1903): 192-94; "Glass Versus Paper", *Camera Work* 10 (April 1905): 36-41; "Summing up the Recent Lantern Slide Competition. By the Judge", *Photography* 21 (13 Feb. 1906): 133-34; "Lantern Slides and their Optical Projection", *Photography* 21 (20 Feb. 1906): 145-47, (27 Feb. 1906): 166-67, and (6 March 1906): 191-92.
- 8 This was based on the understanding that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). A theological reading of the illumination in Evans's photographs was common in his time, as now. See, for example, William H. Draper, "Shadows of Eternity", *Country Life* 18 (7 Oct. 1905): 473-77, and Brian H. Peterson, "Frederick Evans and the Theology of Light", *American Arts Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 20-27.
- 9 To date the most substantial account of Evans's photography, with respect to his religious beliefs, can be found in Anne Hammond's comprehensive study, *Frederick H. Evans: Selected Texts and Bibliography* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1992), as well as in several earlier essays and articles by the same author, notably "Frederick H. Evans, 1853-1943: The Interior Vision", *Creative Camera* 243 (March 1985): 12-26, and "Frederick Evans: The Spiritual Harmonies of Architecture", in *British Photography in the Nineteenth Century: The Fine Art Tradition*, ed. Mike Weaver (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 243-59. More recently, Alexander Nemerov has argued that Evans's most famous print of Wells Cathedral takes religion not just as a subject but also as a model of conversion to an aesthetic appreciation of life. See Nemerov, "The Religion of Art and Nothing of Life: Frederick H. Evans's 'A Sea of Steps'", in *Edwardian Opulence: British Art at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Angus Trumble and Andrea Wolk Rager (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2013), 125-52. For a brief but illuminating note on the relationship to the church shared by two friends and collaborators, see Kristin Potter, "Frederick H. Evans and G. Bernard Shaw", *History of Photography* 19, no. 2 (1995): 178-79.
- 10 In its attention to the materiality of the photograph, this essay follows scholars who have looked with renewed attention to the original physical contexts of nineteenth-century photographs to understand how their complex visual narratives spoke to cultural change. For outstanding examples of this approach, see Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View", *Art Journal* 42 (Winter 1982): 311-19; Elizabeth Hutchinson, "They Might Be Giants: Carleton Watkins, Galen Clark, and the Big Tree", *October* 109 (Summer 2004): 46-63; and Martha Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2004).
- 11 Like an increasing number of his contemporaries, Evans saw no incompatibility between his mystical leanings and identifying as a proper Protestant who accepted the authority of Christ. Böhme was central in introducing a mystical vocabulary from the Continent into England when John Sparrow and John Ellistone translated his works into English in the 1640s. Though his hero William Blake was equally interested in Böhme and Swedenborg, Evans wrote much more extensively on the latter mystic. See Robert Rix, *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
- 12 It is unknown where Evans delivered this particular lecture, for which full lecture notes are extant. However, he gave other lectures on Lincoln Cathedral to the London Camera Club in 1896 and the Royal Photographic Society in 1899, as well as a slide lecture on Ely Cathedral to the Camera Club in 1897. Conceivably, this was given to an audience of photographers as well.
- 13 Thomas Carlyle, *Past & Present*, Book III, in *Thomas Carlyle's Collected Works*, vol. 13 (London: Chapman & Hall, 1870-87), i.
- 14 Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma: An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1873), ix.
- 15 *In Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), Pericles Lewis has provided a literary corollary to some of the dynamics explored here. He studies the trope of lone male visitors wandering over the power of predominantly Catholic churches in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels (as well as Philip Larkin's poem "Church Going" from 1954).
- 16 Evans may even have been sympathetic to his atheist friend George Bernard Shaw's ideas about the free, non-denominational use of cathedrals for their spiritual respite, where Catholic structures could become truly Catholic. See Shaw, "On Going to Church", in *Shaw on Religion*, ed. Warren Sylvester Smith (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1967), 19-25.
- 17 Clive D. Field, "The Faith Society? Quantifying Religious Belonging in Edwardian Britain, 1901-1914", *Journal of Religious History* 37 (March 2013): 61.
- 18 Frederick H. Evans, *James John Garth Wilkinson: An Introduction* (London: Turnbull & Spears, 1912), 26.
- 19 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1902), 47.
- 20 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Swedenborg; Or, the Mystic", in *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (Boston, MA: Phillips, Sampson, 1850), 122.
- 21 Evans, *James John Garth Wilkinson*, 12. The eight volumes of Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* were published anonymously in neo-Latin in London during the years 1749-56. The first English translation was made by Rev. John Clowes in 1813.
- 22 Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914* (London: Longman, 1976), 69. Swedenborg himself never initiated the formation of a new denomination based on his theories, but late eighteenth-century English radicals established the Church of the New Jerusalem in 1789, which counted Blake as an early member. Many if not most committed Swedenborgians, including Wilkinson and Evans, were never officially baptized into this Church.

- 23 Frederick H. Evans, "James John Garth Wilkinson: A Memoir. Reviewed by F. H. Evans", *The Homeopathic World* 46 (1 Sept. 1911): 420.
- 24 Evans to J.J.G.W. (unpublished letter dated 3 Feb. 1886), Swedenborg Society, London (Archive no. K/125 (49)). Subsequent quotations are from here.
- 25 Evans, *James John Garth Wilkinson*, 27.
- 26 George Eliot's translation of David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (1835–36) in 1846 exposed an English audience to arguments by the German scholar and other proponents of the Higher Criticism centred in Tübingen that the Bible had multiple authors and that divine miracles were in fact supernatural myths.
- 27 Henry James, Sr., *The Secret of Swedenborg: Being an Elucidation of His Doctrine of the Divine Natural Humanity* (Boston, MA: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1869), vii.
- 28 Early subjects for lantern slides also included landscape views of the English countryside, close-ups of objects like a Japanese sword-guard, and studies of William Morris's house, Kelmscott Manor. These seem to have been less celebrated than his scientific images.
- 29 James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Spirit Photography, Spirit Portraiture, and other Rare but Allied Phenomena* (London: L. N. Fowler & Co., 1911), 1–2. Others took photosensitivity as a model of receptivity to immaterial forces at the turn of the century. See Henry Wood, *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photography: A Restorative System for Home and Private Use Preceded by a Study of the Laws of Mental Healing* (Boston, MA: Lothrop, Lee, and Shepard, 1893), where he advocates "photographing" Christian ideals upon the mind.
- 30 See, for example, Emanuel Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 1863), 6724: "what is interior, in consequence of being purer, acts upon each and every individual particular of the exterior, and thus disposes the external to its will. But in this case there must be good and truth in the external, wherein the influx from the internal can be fixed; and in this way good can be among evils and falsities, and yet be in safety."
- 31 In Swedenborg's theory of correspondences, matter, rather than condemned as secondary or derivative of the divine, serves as the means by which the divine can be expressed. See, for example, Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, 5711: "Nothing can exist anywhere in the material world that does not have a correspondence with the spiritual world—because if it did, it would have no cause that would make it come into being and then allow it to continue in existence. Everything in the material world is an effect. The causes of all effects lie in the spiritual world, and the causes of those causes in turn (which are the purposes those causes serve) lie in a still deeper heaven."
- 32 Evans, "Glass Versus Paper", 40; Evans, *James John Garth Wilkinson*, 36.
- 33 "Spirit Photographs", *Photographic Notes* (9 Jan. 1863): 19–20. Spirit photographers William H. Mumler in the United States and Jean Buguet in France were prosecuted for fraud in 1869 and 1875, respectively, in highly publicized trials. The similarly eminent spirit photographer Frederick Hudson of London faced no legal action during his career. This helps substantiate Rolf H. Krauss's claim that mediumistic photography began in America but henceforth belonged almost entirely to the Anglo-Saxon world, especially England. See Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow: The Role of Photography in Certain Paranormal Phenomena: An Historical Survey* (Tucson, AZ: Nazraeli Press, 1995), 144.
- 34 Frederick H. Evans, "An Art Critic on Photography", *Amateur Photographer* 47 (23 June 1908): 625.
- 35 Evans, *James John Garth Wilkinson*, 34.
- 36 John Harvey, *Photography and Spirit* (London: Reaktion, 2007), 27.
- 37 The term "photism", which only appeared as the German "Photisma" in 1881, was used by James to describe the blinding luminous phenomena of conversions experienced by prophets like St Paul in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 251. In footnote 21, page 253, James addresses how reports of sensorial (that is, physical) photism can shade off into metaphorical accounts of a new sense of spiritual illumination. Moreover, he acknowledges his debt to psychologists for this word, and indeed it appears several times in his review of Théodore Flournoy's *Des phénomènes de synopsie* (1894), reprinted in William James, *Essays, Comments, and Reviews* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), 463–67.
- 38 Evans quoted in Ward Muir, "A Chat with the Designer of the Salon", *Amateur Photographer* 36 (2 Oct. 1902): 274.
- 39 Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, 607.
- 40 For an excellent overview of broader visual cultures surrounding magic lantern displays, see Lynda Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c. 1900* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2007).
- 41 Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), 8–9.
- 42 Proust seems to have held onto the formative idea from his childhood that photographs are characterized by their "commercial banality": they lack the "thicknesses" of other media so that they need to be filtered through other mediations (e.g. his mother prefers that he look at a photograph of Corot's painting of Chartres to a photograph of Chartres in *Swann's Way*, 45–46). Later in the first volume, Proust describes a scene of iconoclasm where Mlle Vinteuil dares her lover to spit on a photograph of her father, which by profaning the photograph reveals its latent power. For the growing body of work on Proust and photography, see Aine Larkin, *Proust Writing Photography: Fixing the Fugitive in À la recherche du temps perdu* (Leeds: Maney, 2011); Dora Zhang, "A Lens for an Eye: Proust and Photography", *Representations* 118 (2012): 103–25; Mary Bergstein, *In Looking Back One Learns to See: Marcel Proust and Photography* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014); and Mieke Bal, *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually*, trans. Anna-Louise Milne (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997), Part Three, "The Flatness of Photography", 183–239.
- 43 The Langenheim brothers of Philadelphia first made photographic lantern slides ("hyalotypes", from the Greek for glass) in 1848. By the turn of the century, magic lantern shows using photographs drew huge crowds as a form of education and spectacular entertainment.

- 44 For an in-depth treatment of this subject, see Rachael Ziady DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007). See also Sally Promey, "The Ribband of Faith: George Inness, Color Theory, and the Swedenborgian Church", *American Art Journal* 26 (1994): 44-65.
- 45 Quoted in George W. Sheldon, "George Inness", *Harper's Weekly* 26 (22 April 1882): 244.
- 46 Editor, "Mr. Inness on Art-Matters", *Art Journal* 5 (1879): 377.
- 47 James, Sr., *Secret of Swedenborg*, vii.
- 48 Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral", 26.
- 49 Evans, "Exhibiting of Lantern Slides", 193. To be precise, he refers to his own "obstinacy".
- 50 Evans, "Lantern Slides and their Optical Projection", 167; Evans, "Opening Address", *Photographic Journal* 24 (30 April 1900): 238.
- 51 Douglas R. Nickel discusses an early French daguerreotype whose verso labels it "the work of God" in "Talbot's Natural Magic", *History of Photography* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 136; other examples include Dion Boucicault's play, *The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana* (1859), where a character's conviction rests on the unimpeachable witness of a photograph made by the "eye of the Eternal", and widely reprinted articles by Rev. H. J. Morton for the *Philadelphia Photographer* in the mid-1860s, among others.
- 52 Jacob Riis, "Reform by Humane Touch", *Atlantic Monthly* 84 (Dec. 1899): 745-47.
- 53 Steve Humphries, *Victorian Britain through the Magic Lantern* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989), 143.
- 54 Evans, "Glass Versus Paper", 39.
- 55 Evans, "Glass Versus Paper", 40, emphasis mine.
- 56 Evans, "Glass Versus Paper", 38.
- 57 Evans, "Glass Versus Paper", 40.
- 58 Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral", 41.
- 59 Evans, "Exhibiting of Lantern Slides", 194; Evans, "Artistic Photography in Lantern Slides", 149; George Smith, "On the Production of Transparencies for the Optical Lantern by the Woodbury Process", *Journal and Transactions of the Photographic Society of Great Britain* 11 (31 Dec. 1886): 22.
- 60 Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral", 38.
- 61 Gulielmus Durandus, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments: A Translation of the First Book of the Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, ed. J. M. Neale and B. Webb (London: Gibbings, 1893), 23.
- 62 Harvey, *Photography and Spirit*, 20.
- 63 For more on platinum printing, see the Rochester Institute of Technology's very informative website, Graphics Atlas: http://www.graphicsatlas.org/identification/?process_id=8.
- 64 A. Horsley Hinton, "Frederick H. Evans: A 'Romanticist' in Photography", reprinted in *Frederick H. Evans*, ed. Hammond, 84; Rev. F. C. Lambert, "The Pictorial Work of Frederick H. Evans", *The Practical Photographer*, Library series 5 (1904): 3.
- 65 George Bernard Shaw, "Evans—An , UT" (1903), in *Bernard Shaw on Photography*, ed. Bill Jay and Margaret Moore (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1989), 100.
- 66 Frederick H. Evans, "Camera-Work in Cathedral Architecture", *Camera Work* 4 (Oct. 1903): 17.
- 67 Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral", 28. The choir was a contested space for Anglicans, who per the advice of the Cambridge Camden Society had built chancels for the choir since the 1840s, altering Protestant worship by separating laity and clergy.
- 68 Morris was agnostic, which was not so unconventional by the time of his death in 1898, but his reasoning (essentially, that if God existed, he would not leave it a mystery) was idiosyncratic. His lifelong project to resuscitate medieval aesthetics suggests that he believed in the value of religious ritual though not doctrine. See John Hollow, "William Morris and the Judgment of God", *PMLA* 86 (May 1971): 446-51.
- 69 A sheet of ground glass inserted into the back of the camera was used for manual focusing and composing the image. A dark cloth was customarily used to block out light and see the upside-down image on the ground glass better. Hammond, "The Interior Vision", 21.
- 70 Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral", 27.
- 71 Emerson, "Swedenborg", 108. Hammond has explored how Evans's "pendulum curves" from 1899 to 1910, drawings made by a device he built called a "harmonograph" that suspended a pen from a pendulum, also demonstrated the universal harmony he found in the physical world. See Hammond, "Interior Vision", 21.
- 72 Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, 5396.
- 73 Frederick H. Evans, "Personality. Technique v. Individuality. A Reply by Frederick H. Evans", *Amateur Photographer* 43 (13 Oct. 1908): 350. Evans wrote about this connection between camera and pianola elsewhere, including "A Pianola for a Musician, and a Camera for an Artist", *Amateur Photographer* 43 (23 Jan. 1906): 75-76, and "The Value of the Piano-Player: Correspondence", *Musical Standard* 35 (4 March 1911): 199-200, (1 April 1911): 199-200, and (15 April 1911): 231.
- 74 Paul Binski, "The Angel Choir at Lincoln and the Poetics of the Gothic Smile", *Art History* 20, no. 3 (Sept. 1997): 361.

- 75 Frederick H. Evans, "And What Went Ye Out for to See?", reprinted in *Frederick H. Evans*, ed. Hammond, 54.
- 76 Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, "Green Tea", in *In a Glass Darkly*, ed. Robert Tracy (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 5–40.
- 77 Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral", 38–39.
- 78 Morris quoted in Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral", 39.
- 79 Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion, 1992), 81.
- 80 After meeting in 1889, Evans helped Beardsley secure his first commission when he recommended the young artist to the publisher John M. Dent for illustrations to a new edition of Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485).
- 81 Evans, *James John Garth Wilkinson*, 8.
- 82 Evans, *James John Garth Wilkinson*, 7.
- 83 Evans, *James John Garth Wilkinson*, 7.
- 84 Paul Strand, "Photography and the New God", in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 144–51.
- 85 Wilkinson, *The Greater Origins and Issues of Life and Death* (London: James Speirs, 1885), 277. Evans's annotated copy of this volume resides at the Swedenborg Society (Archive no. L/357).
- 86 Evans's attention to baptismal fonts at other cathedrals betrays his preoccupation with purity as a religious value.
- 87 Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral", 7.
- 88 Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral", 10. In his quest for the "untampered", Evans inserted slides taken by George Washington Wilson in cases where they document details before mid-Victorian restorations.
- 89 Evans, "Lincoln Cathedral", 10–11.
- 90 Evans, "Summing up the Recent Lantern Slide Competition", 133.
- 91 Evans, "Lantern Slides and their Optical Projection", 146.
- 92 Evans, "James John Garth Wilkinson", 424.
- 93 Evans, *James John Garth Wilkinson*, 42. The story was originally published as *The Door in the Wall, and Other Stories* (London: Grant Richards, 1911) and was illustrated with photogravures by Evans's colleague, Alvin Langdon Coburn.

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Abstraction's Ecologies: Post-Industrialization, Waste and the Commodity Form in Prunella Clough's Paintings of the 1980s and 1990s

Catherine Spencer

Abstract

This article's aims are twofold: firstly, it argues that Prunella Clough's engagement with consumer items in her paintings of the 1980s and 1990s constitute a sustained engagement with the fluctuating nature of the commodity form, moving beyond the established critical narrative whereby these works are understood as simply redeeming "everyday" materials. Secondly, in order to do this, it proposes new artistic frameworks for Clough's work, moving away from her early association with Neo-Romanticism to foreground her relationship with Pop and Minimalism, and with Post-Conceptual painting. Clough's late works, it finds, powerfully condense histories of industrial production and painting in Britain.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sarah V. Turner and Mark Hallett for the invitation to share material that developed into this article at the Paul Mellon Centre; also Rachel Smith and Helena Bonett for organizing Materials, Movements, Encounters: Modernist Art Networks at Tate St Ives, and Rye Holmboe and Andrew Witt for Art in the Age of Real Abstraction at University College London, where previous versions were presented. Thanks also to Tate Archive for their assistance with Clough's papers during cataloguing.

Cite as

Catherine Spencer, "Abstraction's Ecologies: Post-Industrialization, Waste and the Commodity Form in Prunella Clough's Paintings of the 1980s and 1990s", *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/cspencer>

During the 1980s and 1990s, in the last two decades of a career that began in the 1940s, the painter Prunella Clough embarked on a distinct phase within her work. The first part of Clough's oeuvre saw her create studies of dockworkers at Lowestoft harbour, and labourers in factories tending their machines. These were followed by industrial landscapes that became progressively more abstract throughout the 1960s and 1970s.¹ By the mid-1980s, however, Clough had shifted her attention away from the chemical works, gravel pits, and electrical plants that occupied her for many years, and onto small, cheap consumer items that she glimpsed for sale in London corner shops and markets, and on souvenir stalls at decaying seaside resorts.² The abstracted images Clough developed from her studies of these commodities constitute a unique episode in the artist's sustained meditation on the gradual movement from an industrial to a post-industrial economy in Britain.

Clough's first public presentation of this new subject matter occurred in 1989, with her first exhibition at the Annely Juda Fine Art Gallery in London.³ The titles of works included in *Prunella Clough: Recent Paintings, 1980-1989* signal Clough's concern by this point with the synthetic, packaged, and mass produced: *Wrapper* (1985), *Iridescent* (1987), *Sugar Hearts* (1987), *Toypack: Sword* (1988), *Sweetpack* (1988), *Vacuum Pack* (1988), *Plastic Bag* (1988), and *Party Pack* (1989). Clough had already undertaken one substantial solo show that decade with an exhibition in 1982 at the Warwick Arts Trust, but this was dominated by the very different agendas of her *Gate* and *Subway* series.⁴ While the catalogue for the 1982 show contained an introduction and rare interview with the artist by the curator Bryan Robertson, the depth of the painter-critic Patrick Heron's essay accompanying the exhibition of 1989 confirmed it as a significant departure.⁵ The result was a critical and financial success.⁶ It catalyzed Clough's upward trajectory in Britain over the following decade, which saw her embark on major exhibitions at the Camden Arts Centre in London (1996) and Kettle's Yard Art Gallery, Cambridge (1999).⁷ Shortly before her death in 1999, Clough received the prestigious Jerwood Painting Prize.⁸ The Annely Juda exhibition marked an important juncture in terms of Clough's professional visibility, as well as the formal and conceptual stakes of her painting.

Critics responded enthusiastically to Clough's engagement with the often-discarded fragments of advanced capitalism. In his catalogue essay, Heron observed that Clough was "fascinated . . . by many of those products of the present age whose magical potential she alone has perceived and in her paintings has insisted on celebrating".⁹ The wider critical reception of these works elaborated the implications of Heron's analysis, with the critic Tim Hilton stating that each of Clough's paintings presents "a singular

representation of a trivial object that, by reason of its existence in a serious modern painting, acquires an ontological aura".¹⁰ This perspective infuses reviews of Clough's other exhibitions, which similarly stress the "redemptive impulse" of her work, leading to the characterization of Clough's later paintings as primarily concerned with the metamorphosis of the everyday.¹¹

By contrast, this essay seeks to complicate the established trope that Clough's works from the 1980s and 1990s comprise acts of metaphorical, and for some commentators rather whimsical, salvage. Clough's exploration of commodity life cycles is by no means unconnected with an interrogation of painterly process, but the ecologies established by her treatment of abstraction are far more nuanced than the straightforward transformation of "low" culture into "high" art.

Rather, Clough's paintings of the 1980s and 1990s instigate an extended investigation of the commodity form. The art historian Margaret Garlake describes how Clough's later works "take an ironic look at a culture which has moved during her working life from austerity to satiety, in which industry is as much concerned with the production of instant rubbish as with the essentials of existence".¹² Yet Clough's cognizance of waste constantly undercuts apparent affluence with the shadow of boom and bust. As Andy Beckett observes in his history of Britain during the 1970s, "from 1945 onwards, the issue of Britain's decline changed from a matter for intermittent public debate into a major and growing preoccupation of political life."¹³

This anxiety stemmed from the fact that "between 1950 and 1970, the country's share of the world's manufacturing exports shrank from over a quarter to barely a tenth."¹⁴ The movement from an export to an import economy was linked to the rise of the service sector, the outsourcing of labour overseas, and the globalized circulation of inexpensive consumer merchandise. Clough's studies of mass-produced items register these developments, while acknowledging the rapidity with which desirable commodities might become unwanted under the pressures of overproduction and designed obsolescence. Indeed, Clough's approach to the commodity evokes Karl Marx's famous description of it in volume one of *Capital* (1867) as "a very queer thing indeed, full of metaphysical subtleties and theological whimsies".¹⁵ An awareness of the commodity's fluctuating nature, and the ramifications of this for painting as a practice, threads throughout Clough's work.

The aims of this essay are twofold. In order to reconceptualize Clough's late paintings as explorations of commodity relations, it proposes in tandem alternative artistic frameworks for considering Clough's work, prising her away from an early and surprisingly enduring association with Neo-Romanticism, which Heron condemned as a "totally incorrect (and . . . damaging) misconception".¹⁶ Clough's treatment of consumer products can

in the first instance be linked to the advent of Pop and Minimalism during the 1960s. Moreover, later debates about the so-called “death of painting”, followed by Post-Conceptual painting, provide suggestive contexts for her work. In the 1950s and 1960s painting enjoyed a pre-eminent position within the British, European, and North American art worlds Clough moved in, but she felt that the discipline subsequently entered something of a wilderness: “In the 1970s, ‘nobody was doing painting’.”¹⁷ The 1970s saw a diversification of artistic practices in Britain, and an embrace of alternative modes like Conceptual art and performance; according to John A. Walker in his history of this period, “painting and sculpture were experiencing [an] identity crisis”.¹⁸ This paralleled, and sometimes emerged directly from, conditions created by an economic downturn that saw strikes and fuel shortages.¹⁹ Although Clough exhibited fairly regularly in the 1970s, the decade’s reverberations can be detected in the works she created in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁰

Focusing on paintings that Clough displayed in 1989 at Annelly Juda, the first part of this essay situates the preoccupations of Clough’s later work in relation to Pop and Minimalism, while the second shows how still life provided a fertile genre for addressing consumption and the history of industrialization. The final section argues that the understanding of the commodity form developed in response to these models shaped Clough’s interest in recycling through citation and collage. Such strategies in turn correspond to the re-emergence of painting after Conceptualism in the 1980s and 1990s. Rather than painting’s exhaustion, we find in Clough’s late canvases what this essay identifies as ecologies of abstraction. Clough’s tendency to transplant and reuse forms and compositional devices from earlier works, alongside her experimentation with collage and found objects, establishes a network of interlinked, even organic references at the level of representation. Through this network, Clough’s paintings participate in a system of wastage and renewal, in which abstraction functions as a signifier for change and adaptation. By re-thinking Clough’s work in this way, the essay gestures towards a wider re-assessment of the traffic between painting in Britain since the 1980s and its longer histories.

Pop and Minimalism: alternative frameworks



Figure 1.

Prunella Clough, source photograph, date unknown, Prunella Clough Papers, Tate Gallery Archive Digital image courtesy of Estate of Ann Robin-Banks; Photographic Rights © Tate 2015, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 ([website](#))

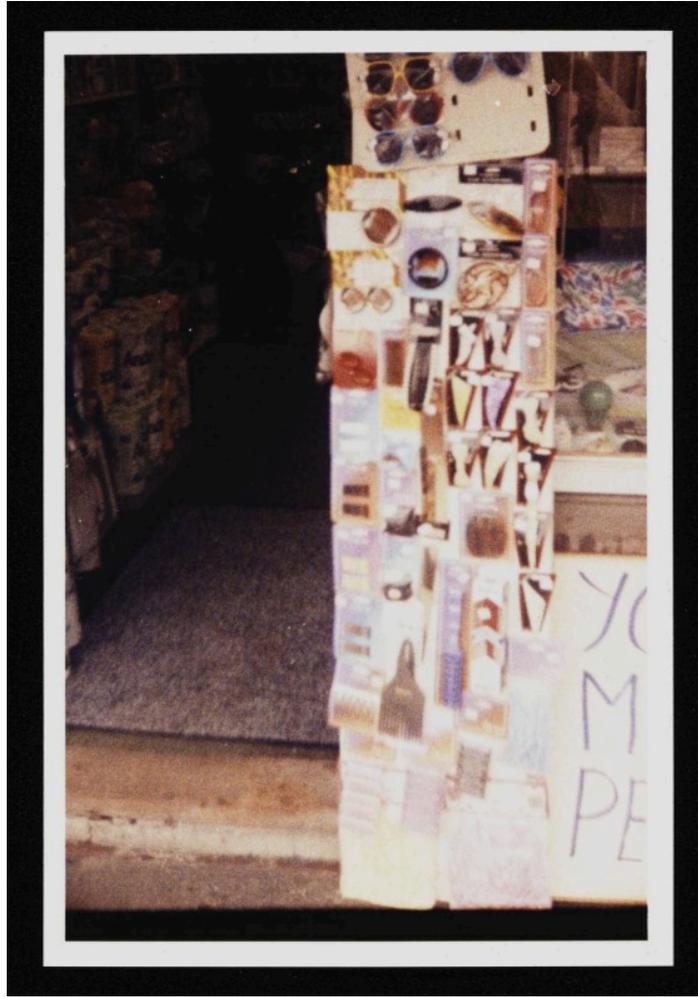


Figure 2.

Prunella Clough, source photograph, date unknown, Prunella Clough Papers, Tate Gallery Archive Digital image courtesy of Estate of Ann Robin-Banks; Photographic Rights © Tate 2015, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 ([website](#)).



Figure 3.

Prunella Clough, source photograph, date unknown, Prunella Clough Papers, Tate Gallery Archive Digital image courtesy of Estate of Ann Robin-Banks; Photographic Rights © Tate 2015, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 ([website](#))

The works that Clough showed in 1989 with titles like *Sweetpack*, *Plastic Bag*, and *Sugar Hearts* were, Hilton observed, full of “cheap and ridiculous plastic goods . . . little bits of moulded inconsequence, hairgrips, imitation jewellery, balloons, bags, sweet wrappers and stickers”.²¹ The sources for these subjects can be found in Clough’s photographic archive. Clough claimed in her 1982 interview with Robertson, “I occasionally take rough photos, but often do not refer to them; they are only approximate aids for the memory.”²² Clough’s papers tell a slightly different story. They contain several series of neatly packaged photographs, dating back to the 1940s but increasing in number during the 1980s and 1990s. Leafing through these snapshots, which Clough’s friend Robin Banks describes as “rough and tough, visionary and sometimes cropped badly or squint”, reveals how her eye snagged

repeatedly on certain clusters of objects.²³ Favourite subjects include stacks of brightly coloured plastic chairs, buckets and domestic goods slotted together into conglomerate forms (fig. 1); sunglasses and hairclips arrayed in serried ranks on display cards (fig. 2); and footballs cocooned in semi-transparent plastic, rendering them mysterious. One particularly suggestive image shows a vending machine full of plastic capsules, each of which contains a small trinket promising a surprise, but veiled and obfuscated (fig. 3).

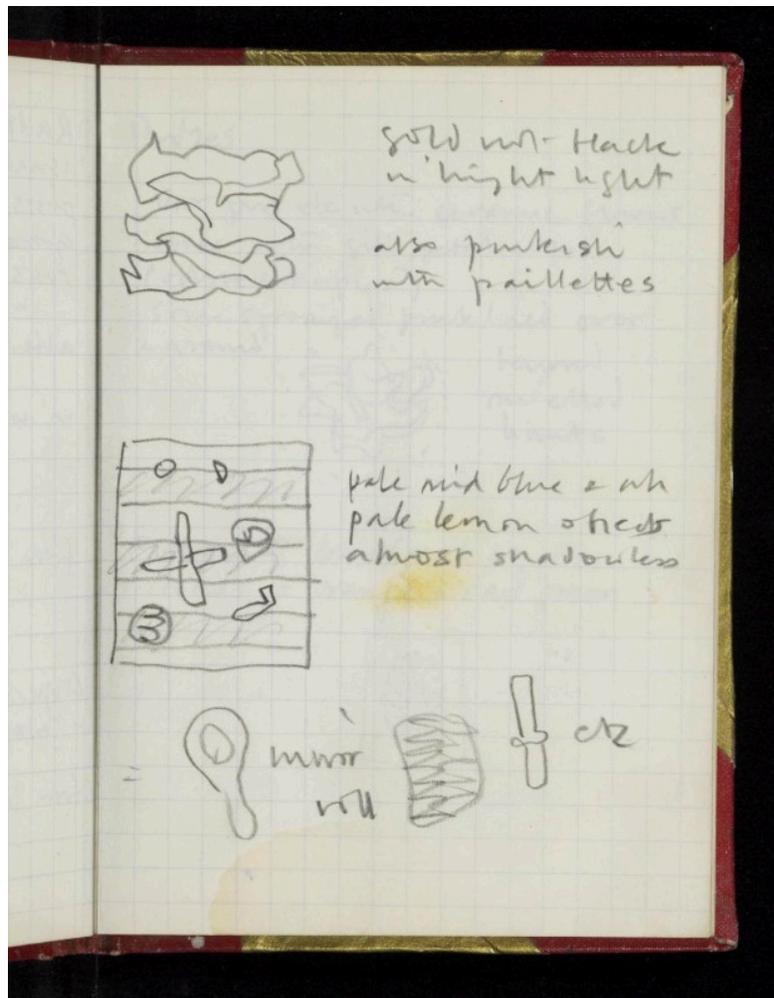


Figure 4.

Prunella Clough, notebook, page 31, ca. 1987, Prunella Clough Papers, Tate Gallery Archives Digital image courtesy of Estate of Ann Robin-Banks; Photographic Rights © Tate 2015, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 ([website](#))

Sacha Craddock notes that “Clough uses photographs and to some extent mimics the photographic view”, and the cropped, close-up perspective employed by her canvases replicates the seemingly casual aesthetic of the quick snapshot.²⁴ The distance insinuated and then marked by the camera

lens, through its act of mediation, underscores Clough's interest in transposition and change. Alongside her photographs, Clough made detailed written notes, such as those in a notebook dated to 1987: "'Toiletries' in spangle pale lime green & 'silver'", "Shellsuit violet / sand / turquoise" and "airless squashed balloons / pink, yellow, green on / wet pavement (4) / with damp patch".²⁵ These appear alongside rapid sketches of mirrors, toy windmills, and shapes that have already passed beyond recognizability (fig. 4). The notes and photographs unfold Clough's attraction to ersatz materials, and with those that might be used for camouflage and dissimulation in urban life. It is not simply the case that Clough "metamorphoses" these objects, but that she recognizes their inherently unstable physical character, which simultaneously results from, and comes to stand as an analogue for, their mutable use and exchange value.²⁶

This instability inflects even the most ostensibly decipherable imagery in the paintings Clough showed during 1989, such as the central motif of *Toypack: Sword* (1988; fig. 5). In the version of this work reproduced in the Anneli Juda catalogue, Clough presents a highly stylized, plastic-looking weapon, its hilt coloured sky blue and sherbet orange.²⁷ The sword floats against a backdrop composed of unidentifiable, abstract fragments, like the delicate machinery of a watch scattered across a white field (nothing as substantial as "ground" is offered here). For Hilton, Clough depicts her central image "with just enough realism for one to be able to grasp that here is a toy"; this is the kind of frippery that could be picked up cheaply in a store selling mass-produced consumer items, and used to beguile a child for a few hours.²⁸ The neologism of Clough's title stresses the point: "Toypack" indicates that this sword is part of a "pack", one of many identical cellophane-wrapped items.



Figure 5.

Prunella Clough, *Toypack: Sword*, 1988, oil on canvas, 128 × 102 cm. Whereabouts unknown. Image from *Prunella Clough: Recent Paintings 1980-1989* (London : Annely Juda Fine Art, 1989) Digital image courtesy of Annely Juda Fine Art

The viewer of Clough's paintings from the 1980s encounters commodity items at a slightly different stage in their life cycle to the celebration of newly minted goods in many Pop canvases of the 1960s. In *Toypack: Sword* an air of abandonment cuts against the toy's pastel shades. Yet although Clough's paintings have rarely been aligned with developments of the 1960s, she nonetheless recalled this period as especially generative, admitting "there were many difficulties in the Sixties which were also a pleasure and an exhilaration."²⁹ Clough kept abreast of occurrences in the United States, visiting New York and attending a variety of shows by American artists in Britain, such as Robert Rauschenberg's exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1964, and Roy Lichtenstein's Tate show of 1968.³⁰ *Toypack: Sword* registers the legacies of Pop, albeit at a determined move, not simply

in terms of its engagement with the commodity form, but in the way that the painting explicitly, almost jarringly, overlays representation onto abstraction, and in so doing fundamentally dislocates the co-ordinates of both.

Reflecting on Clough's career in the 1990s, Hilton observed: "I think she feels gratitude for the Sixties: not the fashionable or pop side of the decade but the way that painters kept putting new abstract ideas in the arena."³¹ While suggestive, this statement ignores the role that abstraction played within Pop, particularly the strand of visual experimentation in Britain that coalesced around artists like Richard Smith and Robyn Denny.³²

Furthermore, Hal Foster proposes that much Pop art is not easily resolvable as figurative or even realist in any meaningful sense: "Pop does not return art, after the difficulties of abstraction, to the verities of representation; rather, it combines the two categories in a simulacral mode that not only differs from both but disturbs them as well."³³ The navigation of abstraction and realism is a consistent aspect of Clough's work, but it comes into sharp focus in her studies of toys and product packaging during the 1980s.



Figure 6.

Prunella Clough, *Emerge*, 1996, oil on canvas, 91 × 102 cm. Whereabouts unknown Digital image courtesy of Lund Humphries

Equally, while Clough did not associate directly with Pop artists, she was familiar with the eminently fashionable 1960s phenomenon of Op art through her friendship with the painter Bridget Riley.³⁴ Clough's work provided a

significant precedent for the younger artist. On encountering her work in 1953 at the Leicester Galleries, Riley recognized Clough as “unmistakably a modern painter”.³⁵ Clough’s later paintings playfully return to the visual language of the 1960s. In *Emerge* (1996) Clough has overlaid several sections of black-and-white vertical lines within a scuffed surround, recalling Riley’s signature Op art images such as *Fall* (1963) and *Current* (1964). *Emerge* references both Riley’s pared down abstract striations and the perceptual flicker they establish, akin to the disruptive ripple of migraine aura (fig. 6). The edges of Clough’s striped sections do not quite match up, triggering the impression of movement and recession intimated by the painting’s title. Clough’s citation of Riley, however, is fully embedded within her own mode of working. Testifying to her predilection for “beaten up” canvases, in places the intersecting planes dissolve under a corrosive stain, their edges inexpertly sutured together.³⁶

Minimalist abstraction, however, clearly exerted a particular pull.³⁷ The productive challenges posed by the 1960s encompassed “the first sight of Donald Judd and Sol Lewitt, for instance, and minimalism. The ideas were of a kind that were incompatible with the European tradition that I grew up with.”³⁸ Clough also admired the work of the US painter Myron Stout, who created radically simplified black-and-white canvases dominated by single shapes. The British artist Rachel Whiteread recognized the intersections between Clough’s work and Minimalism, writing that she could “draw parallels” between her Postminimalist sculpture and Clough’s paintings.³⁹ Clough’s reference to Judd is particularly suggestive, however, given his use of seriality and modular repetition, modes which can be indexed to the forms and processes of the postmodern, service-oriented, white-collar city.⁴⁰

Clough’s photographic archive demonstrates the importance of repetition and replication for her later practice, but this equally informs her use of other media. Clough was an accomplished printmaker, accustomed to making multiple iterations of the same image.⁴¹ Clough also constructed assemblages from mass-produced items amassed on walks through urban and industrial environments, including “old work gloves, wire mesh, pieces of rusting metal, a plastic toy sword, fragments of Formica, a shard of coloured pottery or a steam-rolled tin can”.⁴² Ian Barker recounts that the discovery of reliefs made from these objects in Clough’s studio after her death came as “a total surprise”.⁴³ Clough nonetheless considered them part of her practice, as “on their reverse were Prunella’s carefully typed labels—identical to those she used to identify her paintings and drawings.”⁴⁴ Clough exhibited an assemblage only once during her lifetime, at Annely Juda in 1989, emphasizing the correlations between her found object reliefs and the paintings in the show.⁴⁵

One assemblage, entitled *Equivalence* (1965), offers a response to the provocations of the 1960s (fig. 7). Its white segments, nailed onto a synthetic mint-green background, look like the modular parts of a child's construction kit wrenched from their original purpose. Clough's use of plastic in this assemblage partakes in the artistic experimentation with new, prefabricated materials by practitioners associated with Pop and Minimalism. The abstract *Equivalence* proposed here is qualified. The white shapes either side of the central black partition seem like they could match up, but on closer inspection their number and distribution do not correspond. Similarly, *Toypack: Sword* offers a questionable equivalence. The painting presents the viewer with a depiction of a dagger that revels in its status of second-order representation, to the extent that its hovering form starts to seem like a simulacrum set adrift from a tangible referent. This inference migrates across Clough's work from the 1980s and 1990s, stemming from the commodity's paradoxical combination of materiality and abstracted labour power.

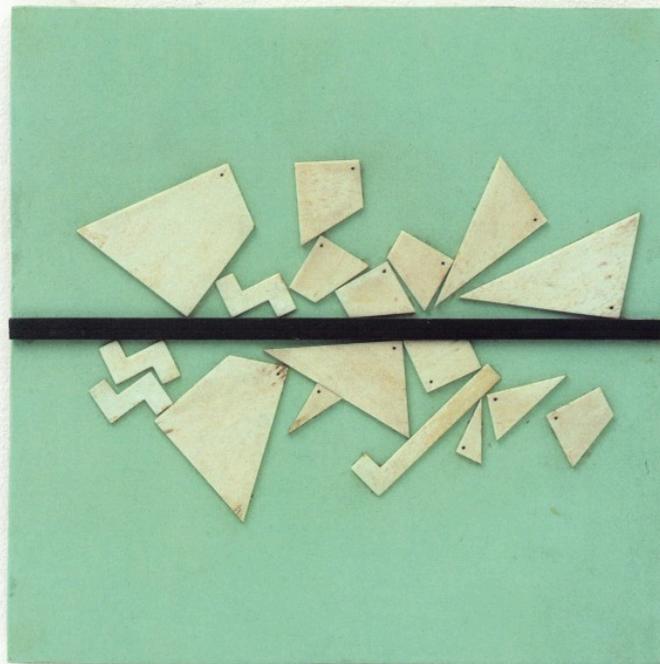


Figure 7.

Prunella Clough, *Equivalence*, 1965, plastic, paint, and wood on board, 40.5 × 40.5 × 1.1 cm. Whereabouts unknown Digital image courtesy of Annelly Juda Fine Art

This slipperiness can be tracked back through Clough's thinking about commodities from the outset of her career. During the 1950s, when Clough was still focused on landscape studies of factories, chemical works, and power stations, she and the painter David Carr exchanged a rich correspondence about these zones of production.⁴⁶ Clough never explicitly critiqued commodity production, stating dispassionately to Carr: "The fact that a lorry is loaded by a crane with a crate of useless objects and driven to some place where nobody wants them seems just an aspect of human stupidity which is so constant that one can hardly get upset about it."⁴⁷ Clough developed her thoughts on the nature of objects useful and useless in other missives, notably during an extended account of a trip to a paint factory. Clough immersed herself in the details of the site, with its "vats of chemicals, drying powder, paste paint, boiling oil, resins, tanks, roller grinders, millstone grinders, ball grinders, distemper mixers, sheet-tin can makers, spot welders".⁴⁸ It is, however, the following passage that proves particularly revealing in terms of Clough's conceptualization of production:

Men painty [sic] from head to foot, women putting on can handles without looking; and the transition—to simplicity, speed and visual boredom in the new "experimental" machines, the closed constructions where raw material is fed in and emerges a product, invisible, mysterious—whereas the others were open, explicit, logical.⁴⁹

In the space of a sentence, Clough maps a seismic change from earlier modes of manufacture. Where machines were once "open, explicit, logical", what she observes occurring in the new "experimental" factories is akin to alchemy, whereby the materials are put in, and the "product" emerges through unknowable processes. While humans attend to this transformation, the hand-made has been truly usurped by complex machinery, which has assumed total responsibility for the creation of goods.

It is as if Clough savoured this observation in order to apply it later in *Toypack: Sword*. The sword drifts over splinters of raw matter, replicating the sudden jump from inchoate material to final "product" observed by Clough at the paint factory. Its chemical colouring emphasizes that this is a plastic toy, recalling Roland Barthes's evocation of plastic's creation: "At one end, raw, telluric matter, at the other, the finished, human object. . . . More than a substance, plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation; as its everyday name indicates, it is ubiquity made visible."⁵⁰ The plastic items that Clough photographed, and then filtered through abstraction into works like *Toypack: Sword*, mark an intensification of the material's restless movement. By the 1980s, the production of budget plastic toys, accessories,

and cleaning utensils had largely been outsourced from Britain to other countries, and the physical evidence of industrial production receded from the landscape. It is also tempting to read *Toypack: Sword* as an analogy for the act of painting and its transpositions, which in light of Clough's captivation by the factory production of paint, simultaneously acknowledges the commodity status of the resulting work. Considering Clough's work in relation to Pop and Minimalism, even if she ultimately kept both at a distance, enables the full extent of her work's imbrication in cycles of mass production, industrialization, and consumption to emerge.

Still life and "machine life" painting

In the list of paintings for Clough's Annely Juda exhibition of 1989, one category impresses through its multiple recurrences: that of the still life. Of thirty-eight works in the show, six were specifically titled "still life". In his essay, Heron alights on this aspect of Clough's most "recent paintings", which "are actually entitled *Still Life* or *Interior*—not that they can for a moment be thought of as continuing any tradition of spatial reconstruction of inhabitable domestic space".⁵¹ Nevertheless, Heron felt, the paintings "seem to be projecting at us a spatial reality that implies those almost claustrophobic, limited sequences of depth which constitute the experience of the 'still life' or the 'interior'".⁵² This engagement with still life replays Pop art's obsession with domestic products, and with the commodity fetishism invested in household goods, again indicating the importance of the artistic frameworks established in the first section of this essay for Clough's practice.⁵³ It moreover ties into longer traditions of the still life from the Dutch seventeenth century onwards, and, in Clough's hands, with histories of commodity production in Britain.

Heron connected Clough's interest in still life to her regard for the French artist Georges Braque's Cubist experiments.⁵⁴ He compared Clough's enthusiasm for "mass-produced objects, manufactured to meet popular tastes" to "the crude and patently 'suburban' furnishings of small cafés near Varengeville [that] inspired many of Braque's most exquisitely classical pictorial inventions".⁵⁵ Clough's use of the still life genre to reflect on mass-produced commodity items can be rooted in Modernist pathways to abstraction.⁵⁶ It relates to a particular strand of Modernism that engaged with the everyday and the quotidian, the material effects of bourgeois living, and the impact of manufacturing and industry on popular culture.⁵⁷ Yet, as Heron intimates, Clough's still lifes diverge from these models, as they do not deliver the viewer into "inhabitable domestic space", but rather a disorientating and unstable topography.

These qualities can be discerned in many works Clough showed in 1989, notably *Still Life* (1987). At just over a metre high, it dominates the viewer's visual field. A synthetically coloured green oval, shimmering with hints of oil-slick iridescence, hangs amidst a constellation of white dots on a black background as if suspended in a sediment-filled solution. A transparent penumbra unfurls around its central nucleus like a watermark, or cloud of gas. Heron described *Still Life* as a painting of "electrifying strangeness", its queasy combination of diagrammatic flatness and shallow depth resisting coherent and identifiable representation.⁵⁸ Certain details, however, offer associative possibilities. The central shape mimics the opaque capsules containing small toys in the vending machine photographed by Clough. The umbilical loop of cord or rubber hosing protruding into the top of the painting, partially obscured by a rectangular scrim, has affinities with a drawing Clough made in her 1987 notebook, glossed as a "sk rope" (presumably "skipping rope") (fig. 8).⁵⁹ The colours echo those Clough deployed in contemporaneous works like *Sweetpack*, also included in the show, redolent of glistening confectionary wrappings. While visually alluring, this palette's evocation of oil on water alludes to the petrochemicals used to make plastic, so that like *Toypack: Sword* it evokes chains of commodity production.

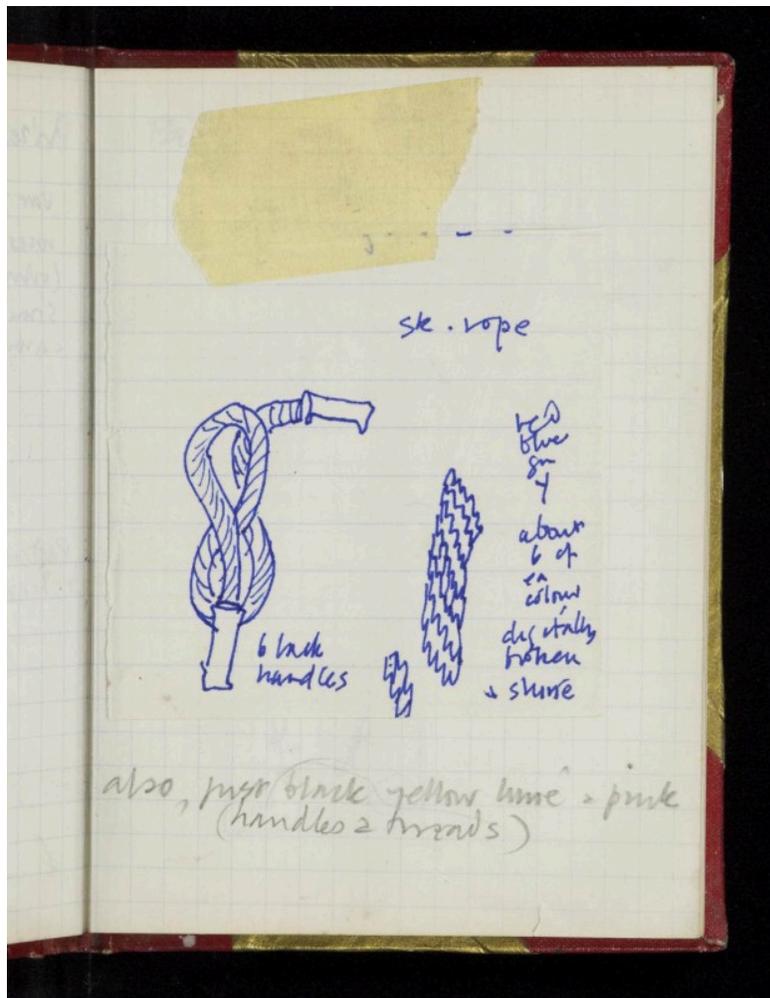


Figure 8.

Prunella Clough, notebook, page 35, ca. 1987, Prunella Clough Papers, Tate Gallery Archives Digital image courtesy of Estate of Ann Robin-Banks; Photographic Rights © Tate 2015, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 ([website](#))

Annely Juda insisted that Clough's earlier work "was very important to understand what she was doing later on".⁶⁰ Clough's consistent commitment to still life exemplifies this. In a review of Clough's Leicester Galleries exhibition in London of 1953, the critic and painter John Berger claimed: "The key to understanding Miss Clough's work is to realise that she is fundamentally a still-life painter. Above all, she is interested in the material, the density, the tactile 'feel' of the objects she paints."⁶¹ During the 1940s, Clough did produce conventional still lifes of fruit, flowers, and shell arrangements.⁶² In *Still Life with Yellow Marrows* (1948) four yellow courgette blossoms, framed by a wicker basket, glow softly against a dingy brown-black background. Garlake notes that during the 1940s, when Clough's career began, "still life was a simple subject demanding no more than a few vegetables or household objects, a favoured genre during the war

when artists often spent long periods without studios or access to models.”

⁶³ Clough herself enjoyed “the sort of paintings that . . . are intensive rather than extensive . . . early Giacometti, early Morandi, early de Chirico even.

They all have to do, in varying ways, with still life.” ⁶⁴ The title of Berger’s review—“Machine-Life Painting”—indicates, however, that the subject matter of Clough’s still lifes was not that of the bourgeois home.



Figure 9.

Prunella Clough, *Industrial Interior V*, ca. 1960, oil on board, 83 × 122 cm. Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London. Digital image courtesy of Arts Council Collection

Instead, Berger states, the “machine lifes” of the 1953 show, with titles like *Night Train Landscape*, *The Cranes*, and *The Old Machine*, are the progeny of the “industrial city—its greased axels, its riveted plates, its plane boards, its cables, ladders and tarpaulins, its rust, its crude protective paints, the condensation of its atmosphere”. ⁶⁵ As Clough succinctly put it: “Living

rooms are not exactly enough.” ⁶⁶ For Berger, the central “paradox” of Clough’s paintings was her ability to treat landscape with the “intimacy” gained through close looking and scrutiny, hallmarks of the still life genre. ⁶⁷

Clough’s studies of industrial machinery often contain the composite elements of a detailed still life within them, but fragmented and dislocated.

⁶⁸ *Industrial Interior V* (1960) homes in on a section of machinery, the exact function of which remains wilfully obscure (fig. 9). Clough rendered the dramatically simplified black forms with a strong degree of stillness and isolation, enlivening them momentarily at their centre with a cluster of shapes including a red diamond and a dun-coloured circle, like the atomized building blocks of a still life study.

Clough, meanwhile, saw her subject matter “mainly as landscape”.⁶⁹ The landscape with which she was engrossed was “the urban or industrial scene or any unconsidered piece of ground”, marked with traces of human labour, littered with parts of machines and the infrastructural detritus of the built environment.⁷⁰ Clough’s preference for this terrain emerged early in her career. In the catalogue essay he wrote to accompany her retrospective at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1960, Michael Middleton observed that Clough “paints these things . . . because she is tough-minded, non-escapist, determined to identify herself with the realities of a world shaped by industry, science and technology”.⁷¹ Clough and Carr deeply admired the painter Laurence Stephen Lowry, whose work provided a precedent for the serious consideration of what Clough sometimes called “urbscape”.⁷² Describing several paintings by Lowry that she had seen to Carr, Clough lingered on “the lighter, more open of the two big ones—which has that good strip of shed tops at the bottom and a railway arch. How inexhaustive [*sic*] his invention is in such detail!”⁷³ Lowry’s industrial subject matter was a key aspect of his appeal, but his incorporation of observational detail was equally important, and it was this that Clough would carry into her still lifes.⁷⁴

The paintings that Clough created in the mid- to late 1980s continue to merge still life examination with landscape elements. Many reviews of the Anneli Juda show in 1989 seized on the floating quality of Clough’s images, particularly *Still Life*. Sue Hubbard luxuriated in Clough’s “soft aqueous blues, thin watery greens . . . suggesting a world of ponds and rivers, or the magic of cells viewed under a microscope”.⁷⁵ Other critics associated Clough’s play with scale, and her oscillation between macrocosmic and microscopic, with intimations of biological life.⁷⁶ One reviewer discovered in *Still Life* a “floating emerald sac—are those eggs inside its belly?”⁷⁷ This aqueous quality relates to the seascapes Clough made during and after the Second World War, which elicited the latent surrealism of the landmines and sea-defences that rendered the beaches uninhabitable.⁷⁸ The legacy of these landscapes, border zones barred to everyday human use, informs the liminality of works like *Still Life*. Comparably, the sense of suspension in *Industrial Interior V*, as if the motion of the machine has just been stopped, or slowed down so that its interlocking segments can be observed, seeps into *Still Life*’s microscopic perspective.



Figure 10.

Prunella Clough, *By the Canal*, 1976, oil on canvas, 182.9 × 142.2 cm. Tate Collection Digital image courtesy of The Estate of Prunella Clough; Tate, London 2015

The watery suspension of *Still Life* also relates to Clough's paintings of the 1970s that resonate with industrial decline, such as *By the Canal* (1976). The letters Clough and Carr exchanged during the 1950s cumulatively portray a landscape of lively industry, but by the mid- to late 1970s Clough's work increasingly responded to the slowing of industrial production.⁷⁹ In 1981 the British economic historian Martin J. Wiener asserted that, "by the nineteen-seventies, falling levels of capital investment raised the specter of outright 'de-industrialization'—a decline in industrial production outpacing any corresponding growth in 'production' of services".⁸⁰ *By the Canal* is strikingly minimal in its imagery (fig. 10). A rust-coloured rectangle dominates the canvas, bristling with small hooks along one edge. This orange shape, the colour of oxidizing iron and steel, is semi-transparent,

merging with the blue of the background. Streaks of thinned paint course down the canvas like rivulets of condensation, so that the overall effect is of metal waste submerged underwater.

Clough had a fondness for canals: “I like looking. Industrial estates, preferably by a canal (watery-flexible) will do.”⁸¹ *By the Canal* was painted when Britain’s canal network had almost completely ceased functioning for commercial purposes.⁸² Once the arteries that fed the Industrial Revolution, they sank into gradual decay. Significantly, given Lowry’s importance for Clough, in a 1966 essay on the artist Berger identified his paintings with “a logic . . . of decline” that expressed “what has happened to the British economy since 1918, and their logic implies the collapse still to come”.⁸³ According to Berger, Lowry’s paintings provided visual evidence of the “recurring so-called production crisis; the obsolete industrial plants; the inadequacy of unchanged transport systems and overstrained power supplies”.⁸⁴ Although not quite as apocalyptic as Berger’s analysis, Clough’s re-invention of the still life tradition as “machine-life” comparably considers the life cycle of industrial production, its ebbs and flows, starts and stoppages. Painted over a decade after *By the Canal*, *Still Life* shares its impression of indeterminacy and desertion.

It is therefore arguably the 1970s, characterized by economic decline, the abandonment of industrial structures, and periods of strike and scarcity, which laid the ground for Clough’s experiments of the 1980s and 1990s.⁸⁵

The stilled life of Clough’s later paintings executes an oblique but powerful commentary on the impact of the 1970s, which the novelist Margaret Drabble characterized in 1977 using the metaphor of “the ice age”.⁸⁶

Frances Spalding compellingly observes, “it is as if [Clough] wanted to point to the brine and detritus left behind after a wave of modernity recedes, leaving the scraps, orts, fragments and sense of elegy for a vanished ideal.”⁸⁷

Clough developed the still life genre to such a pitch that it could encapsulate the long, complex history of industrialization and de-industrialization in Britain, through an extremely streamlined and elliptical vocabulary.

Samples, stacks, and painterly eco-systems in the 1990s

It is, however, important not to forget Clough’s exhilaration at the “first sight” of Pop and Minimalism when considering the still lifes of the 1980s and 1990s. What Heron refers to as the “electrifying strangeness” of *Still Life* might indicate an intrigued appreciation of outsourced mass production and its effects, as much as (if not more than) despair at stagnation. Clough’s adherence to still life suggests her consistent fascination with the products of

industry, and with the possibility that their fluctuating value might endow them with a life of their own at the margins of perception. Equally, Clough's return to the historical genre of still life during the mid- to late 1980s can be read as an affirmation of painting's enduring relevance after the doubts of the 1970s, during which the medium risked association with obsolescence, as the melancholy, rusting surface of *By the Canal* tacitly conveys.⁸⁸ By contrast, the works Clough embarked on in the 1980s share in the revivification of Post-Conceptual painting.⁸⁹ Critics have downplayed the Postmodern qualities of Clough's work, but the role of commodity culture and ironic painterly gesture in *Toypack: Sword*, and even *Still Life*, entail that these wider debates prove illuminating.

Writing in relation to the Post-Conceptual painting of the German artist Gerhard Richter, the philosopher Peter Osborne argues that:

What is peculiar about post-conceptual painting is that it must treat *all* forms of painterly representation "knowingly", as themselves the object of a variety of second-order (non-painterly) representational strategies, if it is to avoid regression to a traditional concept of the aesthetic object. The difficulty is to register this difference without negating the significance of the painterly elements; to exploit the significance of paint without reinstating a false immediacy.⁹⁰

The "knowingness" of Clough's painterly strategy, and her overt engagement with issues of representation, is clearly apparent in paintings like *Toypack: Sword*, which exploits the "significance of paint", but acknowledges its remove from the "real". This effect is one that Hanneke Grootenboer argues still lifes have long enjoyed, possessing as they do "the rare quality of raising the issue of the nature of their own representation".⁹¹ Clough deepens this reflexivity through her choice of subject matter, particularly in the studies of packaging that she first showed at Annely Juda in 1989 such as *Vacuum Pack* (1988), and continued into the 1990s with works like *Package Piece* (1998).

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Figure 11.

Prunella Clough, *Vacuum Pack*, 1988, oil on canvas, 80 × 102 cm. Private Collection, Paris Digital image courtesy of Lund Humphries

Vacuum Pack consists of a light grey grid overlaid onto a smeared background, as if a dirty surface has been given a hasty and ineffectual wipe (fig. 11). At the top of the painting, a small flare in pastel yellow, green, and pink emerges from the wire-like armature. Rather than the identifiable products celebrated by Pop art, or even by Postmodernism's embrace of consumer culture, design, and fashion, Clough's packaging is anonymous, subjected to extreme abstractions and distortions.⁹³ Clough resists what Osborne describes as the restitution of "false immediacy" by emphasizing surface through her focus on packaging, foregrounding the dissimulating nature of her chosen subjects in a way that invokes high modernism's adherence to the flatness of the picture plane, but ultimately subverts it to reflect instead on what Fredric Jameson theorizes as the "depthlessness" of late capitalism.⁹⁴ *Vacuum Pack* offers an acute comment on this state. Vacuum-packing works by removing the air around an object and encasing it in plastic, to stop products from decaying and facilitate transportation; Clough's title plays on the implicit paradox of attempting to package an absence or "vacuum". The subjects of paintings such as *Vacuum Pack* are not static, identifiable "objects", and their mutability aligns them with the ceaseless flow of abstracted commodity relations.⁹⁵

The self-depreciating humour that imbues *Vacuum Pack* corresponds with Post-Conceptual painting's knowingness. *Samples* (1997) is perhaps one of Clough's most "knowingly" ironic paintings. In it, Clough placed a strip of rectangular colour blocks, ranging through grey, pink, blue, green, and yellow, within a dynamic field of paint-marks that parodies the overblown swagger of American Abstract Expressionism (fig. 12).⁹⁶ The incongruous stripes of pigment resemble the charts produced by commercial paint companies, distributed at home improvement stores.⁹⁷ Clough apparently pits the hand of the artist against machine-mixed, chemically calibrated colours. Yet the painting ultimately infers that such a comparison is a false one, as the *recherché* marks sweeping down the canvas fail to overwhelm the jewel-bright swatch, and seem just as pre-programmed and "false" as the acidic palette of the latter. We are back with Clough on her visit to the paint works, where manufactured colours partake in a process of transformation comparable to the application of paint on canvas in the artist's studio.



Figure 12.

Prunella Clough, *Samples*, 1997, oil on canvas, 131.5 × 119.6 cm. Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London. Digital image courtesy of Arts Council Collection

Samples functions through the structuring principle of collage. Clough juxtaposes two different image registers, holding them in tension. This collaged quality, together with the titular reference to mixing and matching, signals another key aspect of Clough's later practice, especially in the 1990s. During this decade, Clough ranged across her oeuvre, citing motifs and processes from previous canvases, photographs, assemblages, and prints, recycling them to establish what can be conceptualized as a painterly ecosystem. In 1982 Clough reflected: "A painting is made from many . . . events, rather than one; and in fact its sources are many layered and can be quite distant in time, and are rarely if ever direct."⁹⁸ These "events" might include forms "left over from other paintings but [which] still demand to be used".⁹⁹ In this respect, Clough's work diverges from dominant trends in Post-Conceptual painting. The ecologies of her abstracted motifs remain

deeply imbricated with the history of her own work, and longer histories of painting in Britain, Europe, and the United States. Clough discovers a use-value in the outmoded and discarded that goes beyond knowing irony.



Figure 13.

Prunella Clough, *Untitled (Pink)*, ca. 1960s, collage, pastel and pencil on paper, 35 × 25 cm. Private Collection Digital image courtesy of Osborne Samuel Gallery

Although the collage aspect of Clough's work intensified in the 1990s, it originated in the 1960s. *Untitled (Pink)* (1960s) is an intriguing early collage which forms a pendant to *Equivalence*. Its collaged fragments coalesce on the page of a sketchbook as if only fleetingly arrested (fig. 13). Significantly, these pieces appear to have been cut up from one of Clough's own drawings, rendered dynamically in thick, waxy marks of pencil or crayon. Some sections suggest industrial materials—a filament of wire, iron girders—but the overall impression is of movement and play, while the hot pink colour anticipates Clough's neon tones of the 1980s and 1990s. *Untitled (Pink)* verifies the artist's longstanding interest in collage, specifically the re-

appropriation of previously used forms and materials, as both a compositional and conceptual device. The fragment was an important model for Clough, as the artist reflected: “I’ve always found that I have learnt more from some (less accomplished) less resolved (tentative, fragile, smaller) or incomplete work—it’s more accessible; on the other hand . . . there is a real need to feel that one is taking part in something bigger than oneself.” ¹⁰⁰ An inferred relationship between part and whole in Clough’s collage and assemblage works intimates that she considered each as belonging to a larger system of interlacing interests, ideas, and sources.

The citational qualities of Clough’s works extend to their relationship with the criticism they received. As well as referencing synthetic plastic goods, the saccharine hues Clough employed in the 1980s and 1990s can also be read as a way of deliberately wrong-footing the reviewers who designated her practice as essentially “feminine”. Writing with reference to US women artists grappling with the legacies of Modernism in the 1960s and 1970s, curator Helen Molesworth describes how in the formalist discourse dominated by Clement Greenberg, “the language of quality was largely the province of the critic, whose role it was to put forward the robust discourse of affirmation and persuasion. . . . What this often meant for women artists was a gendered use of language that served to undermine the authority of the works themselves.” ¹⁰¹ Clough was subjected to such qualifications throughout her career. ¹⁰² Words like “genteel”, “modest”, “feminine”, and “tasteful”, wielded with a strongly gendered subtext, have dogged her critical reception, while Clough’s personal reticence has been repeatedly invoked to explain the ambiguity of her paintings. ¹⁰³ Clough did not align herself with feminism, but it is tempting to speculate that the colours she chose in the 1980s and 1990s sampled and redeployed the ingrained assumptions of this critical discourse, in order to expose its superficiality. ¹⁰⁴

Clough’s recurrent return to the stack motif exemplifies her interest in recycling forms. *Stack* of 1993 is an ambitious, large-scale canvas, in which the titular stack balances on top of a concrete-block-like pedestal (fig. 14). This “stack” is configured from rainbow-coloured gradations, glimpsed through bands of horizontal black lines like a ventilator grille. The perforated backdrop, which takes up the majority of the composition, reiterates this emphasis on veiling. Large ragged holes punctuate its black surface, concealing and partially revealing other shapes and brief bursts of colour lurking behind. While the “stack” invites comparisons with the slotted-together contours of chairs and buckets in Clough’s photographs, it equally infers a flat block illuminated at dusk. The scale of the background swings between sky and cells enlarged under a microscope, as in *Still Life*. Ghosts of multiple structures shadow *Stack*, from the cooling towers Clough studied in the 1950s, to the abandoned industrial sites that appear in canvases of the

1960s and 1970s. Margaret Drabble interprets *Stack*'s "bright colours" as celebrating "the glory of the world of choice", yet this dense layering of references embeds it in a far more uneven history of production. ¹⁰⁵

This is further emphasized by *Stack*'s position within a longer chain of images. In *Small Stack* of 1996, Clough isolates the stack motif from the earlier painting, which now more than ever resembles a precarious tower of glittering merchandise (fig. 15). *Small Stack*'s title signals its seriality in terms of both content and making, parasitic as it is on the image of 1993. *Small Stack* also demonstrates how Clough employed found objects to make her work. Clough overlaid the central stack shape with a grid of regular dots, the precision of which indicates they were applied with a stencil. Clough improvised stencils from bits of old mesh, plastic draining boards, and sections of punched card (fig. 16). ¹⁰⁶ The surface invention of *Small Stack* stems from a process whereby Clough did not simply reference the obsolete detritus of mass-produced living in her canvases, but used it to generate replicable effects across her paintings. The result suggests that the worlds of painting and mass production are by no means polar opposites, but fundamentally interrelated.



Figure 14.

Prunella Clough, *Stack*, 1993, oil on canvas, 152.5 × 188 cm. Tate Collection Digital image courtesy of The Estate of Prunella Clough; Tate, London 2015



Figure 15.

Prunella Clough, *Small Stack*, 1996, oil on canvas, 122 × 124.5 cm. Digital image courtesy of CW+, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital

Through the connections Clough establishes between it and her other works, *Small Stack* participates in a painterly eco-system that refuses to ignore the pressures of commodity culture, but proposes ways in which waste items might be endowed with generative potential over time. This achieves its most suggestive expression in *Small Stack's* afterlife. The painting featured in Clough's Camden Arts Centre exhibition of 1996, and was evidently one of the works that the organizers selected to reproduce on promotional postcards. A stack of these samples found its way back to Clough, prompting the artist to meditate on her 1996 painting through its simulacrum. On forty-one postcards of *Small Stack*, Clough re-worked the image using collaged elements and stencils, exploring the infinite differences within repetition.¹⁰⁷ In some cases, Clough tore away the glossy top layer of the card to mine the furry white seam beneath. Elsewhere, she added drawn and painted elements. Clough overlaid one postcard with a section of red cellophane wrapper, containing a transparent circle stamped with a black letter "B" (fig. 17). This aperture frames the "small stack", but rather than allowing the viewer to focus on the original image, the de-contextualized lettering partially obscures the stack and transforms it into a new entity.¹⁰⁸

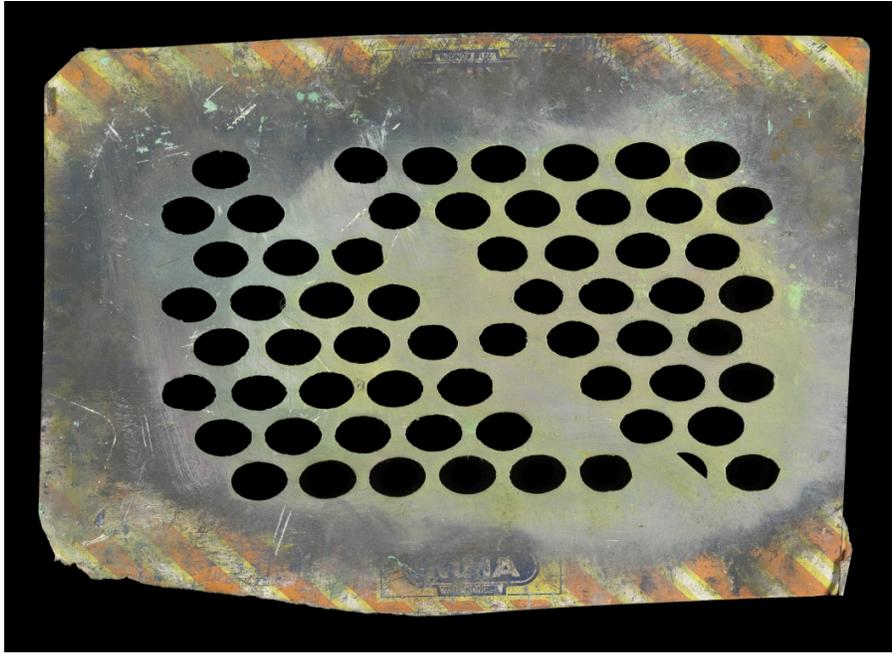


Figure 16.

Prunella Clough, punched cardboard stencil, date unknown, Prunella Clough Papers, Tate Gallery Archive Digital image courtesy of Prunella Clough Papers, Tate Gallery Archive

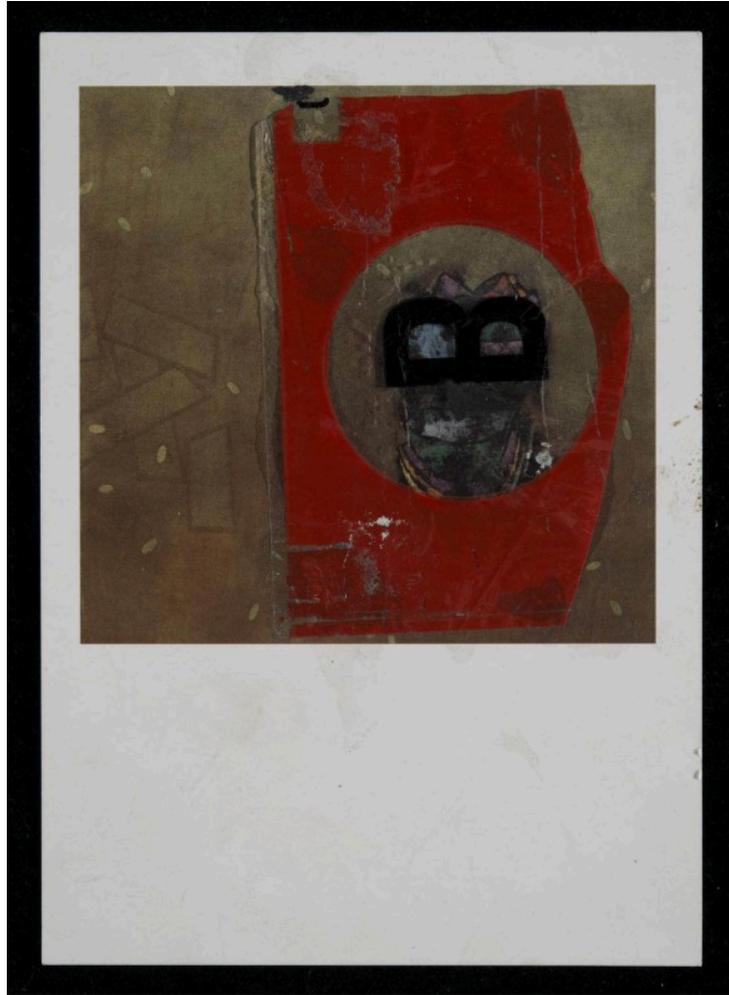


Figure 17.

Prunella Clough, worked postcard, ca. 1996, collaged postcard. Tate Gallery Archive Digital image courtesy of Estate of Ann Robin-Banks. Photographic Rights © Tate 2015, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 ([website](#))

It could be argued that the *Small Stack* postcards, particularly when combined with collaged packaging, witness the apotheosis of painting as commodity. Conversely, they might be understood as an attempt to use the former to resist and re-route the latter. Yet rather than either succumbing to the logic of consumption, or providing antidotes to mass production, Clough's work instead approaches painting and the commodity fetish as part of the same networked ecology.¹⁰⁹ For Theodor Adorno, artworks are "plenipotentiaries of things that are no longer distorted by exchange, profit, and the false needs of a degraded humanity".¹¹⁰ Despite their aesthetic qualities, Clough's paintings deliberately test and explore such systems of exchange and profit. By considering objects and images through the models provided by Pop, Minimalism, still life, Post-Conceptual painting and collage, Clough indicates that new eco-systems of ideas and forms must of necessity

build on existing processes of exchange and production. Abstraction does not entail removal from these systems and their resulting products, but engagement with them. The poet Stephen Spender caught this paradox in his review of Clough's first retrospective in 1960: "Her paintings are not abstractions: they are concerned with the nature of things; and great attention to the structure of things reveals, of course, abstraction." Clough's works of the 1980s and 1990s offer an intense contemplation of painting's histories, and in so doing propose new angles from which these histories might be viewed.

Footnotes

- ¹ Survey books and exhibitions of post-1945 art in Britain that include Clough focus predominantly on her early realist and figurative studies, and to a lesser extent on the abstract works of the late 1950s and early 1960s. See the entries on Clough in Julian Spalding, ed., *The Forgotten Fifties* (Sheffield: Graves Art Gallery, 1984); Margaret Garlake, *New Art, New World: British Art in Postwar Society* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1998); and James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War, 1945-1960* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2001). Two important publications that span Clough's longer career are Ben Tufnell, ed., *Prunella Clough* (London: Tate Britain, 2007), and Frances Spalding, *Prunella Clough: Regions Unmapped* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2012).
- ² Clough lived in London all her life, but visited the east coast regularly. Her family holidayed in Southwold, and in 1945 bought a house there so that the area "remained an important base". Spalding, *Prunella Clough*, 50.
- ³ Clough's representation by Juda from 1988 was a success: previously, Juda felt, no one had taken "proper care" of Clough professionally. Juda arrived in Britain from Kassel in Germany, via Palestine, in 1937. She trained as a fashion designer before opening the Molton Gallery in 1960. Annelly Juda Fine Art followed in 1968. Annelly Juda, interview by Monica Petzal, 12 Feb. 2003, British Library, National Life Stories Collection: Artist's Lives, C466/151/01-14, tape F14525.
- ⁴ Clough's *Gate* paintings were minimalist, mainly black-and-white works based on an abstracted gate motif. The *Subway* series, which explored the fleeting shadows cast by commuters on the walls of the underground, saw Clough experiment with cellulose on Formica tiles. *Prunella Clough: New Paintings 1979-82* (London: Warwick Arts Trust, 1982).
- ⁵ Under Robertson's tenure at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, Clough had her first retrospective there in 1960. The 1982 show itself "made a great impact, more than any other show since Clough's Whitechapel exhibition in 1960". Spalding, *Prunella Clough*, 193.
- ⁶ The *Independent* reported that "three-quarters of Prunella Clough's pictures at Annelly Juda were sold four days after the exhibition opened." Geraldine Norman, "Eager Buyers Snap up 'New' Art", *Independent*, 1 May 1989, page number unknown, Prunella Clough Papers, Tate Gallery Archive, London (hereafter TGA) 200511/1/2/12. Juda drily remarked: "she always sold a lot. More than she wanted to." Juda, interview by Petzal, 12 Feb. 2003.
- ⁷ Clough held other well-received exhibitions at Annelly Juda in 1993 and 2000, and in 1997 had her first major show outside Britain at the Henie Onstad Art Centre in Oslo. Hilton celebrated the 1993 exhibition as "the talk of the art world". Tim Hilton, "A Veteran With Youthful Verve", *Independent on Sunday*, 19 Dec. 1993, page number unknown, TGA200511/1/2/16.
- ⁸ For many observers, this was the year the jury finally "got it right". Martin Gayford, "Jerwood Finally Gets it Right", *Daily Telegraph*, 22 Sept. 1999, 24.
- ⁹ Patrick Heron, "Prunella Clough: Recent Paintings, 1980-89" (1989), in *Prunella Clough*, ed. Tufnell, 48.
- ¹⁰ Tim Hilton, "View from a Corner", *Guardian*, 26 April 1989, 46.
- ¹¹ Anon., review of *Eight Recent Monotypes*, London, New Art Centre, 1985, publication unknown, TGA200511/1/2/10. See also, for example, Tim Hilton, "Dreams of Everyday Life", *Independent on Sunday*, 3 Oct. 1993, 32, and Sue Hubbard, "The Romance of the Ordinary", *New Statesman* 138, no. 4935 (9 Feb. 2009): 44.
- ¹² Margaret Garlake, "'Skulpturen Republik'; Prunella Clough", *Art Monthly* 126 (May 1989): 21.
- ¹³ Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber, 2009), 15.
- ¹⁴ Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, 16.
- ¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul, 2 vols. (1890; London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1942), 1: 44.
- ¹⁶ Heron, "Prunella Clough", 50. See Malcolm Yorke, "Prunella Clough", in *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times* (London: Constable, 1988), and Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape: Places and Ideas in Twentieth-century English Painting* (London: Faber, 1990), 115.
- ¹⁷ Prunella Clough, cited in Judith Collins, "A Biography", in Judith Collins, Sacha Craddock, and Isabelle King, *Prunella Clough* (London: Camden Arts Centre, 1996), 8.

- 18 John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 113. For longer views of alternative art production in Britain since 1970, see Neil Mulholland, *The Cultural Devolution: Art in Britain in the Late Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), and Dominic Johnson, ed., *Critical Live Art: Contemporary Histories of Performance in the UK* (London: Routledge, 2013).
- 19 For the links between artistic production in the 1970s and the socio-economic context, see Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960–1975* (London: Methuen, 1986), and Astrid Proll, ed., *Goodbye to London: Radical Art & Politics in the 70s* (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010).
- 20 See *Prunella Clough* (Sheffield: Graves Art Gallery, 1972), and *Recent Paintings by Prunella Clough* (Edinburgh: Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, 1976).
- 21 Hilton, “View from a Corner”, 46.
- 22 Prunella Clough, “Interview with Bryan Robertson, 1982”, in *Prunella Clough*, ed. Tufnell, 44.
- 23 Robin Banks, “Some Personal Memories”, in Peter Adam, Robin Banks, and Michael Harrison, *Prunella Clough: The Late Paintings and Selected Earlier Works* (London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 2000), 6.
- 24 Sacha Craddock, “Prunella Clough: Paintings”, in Collins, Craddock, and King, *Prunella Clough*, 20.
- 25 Prunella Clough, notebook, ca. 1987, TGA200511/2/1/12.
- 26 Marx distinguishes between the use value and exchange value of a commodity, arguing that while sometimes the two are connected there are multiple permutations and distortions of this relation: “for any one commodity there are numerous elementary expressions of value, according as it is brought into a value relation with this or that or the other commodity.” Marx, *Capital*, 1: 34.
- 27 *Toypack: Sword* appears in the 1989 catalogue, but Clough reported in a 1992 letter: “incidentally a painting called TOY PACK 1989 is no more. . . . It is in process of becoming a different caterpilla [*sic*] / butterfly?” Clough refers to a work called *Toypack*, rather than *Toypack: Sword*, and dates it a year later, but it could be the same work. Prunella Clough, letter to Ian Barker, 14 Oct. 1992, TGA200511/1/2/13 (1 of 2).
- 28 Hilton, “View from a Corner”, 46.
- 29 Clough, “Interview with Robertson”, 43.
- 30 Prunella Clough, diary entry for 4 Feb. 1964 diary, TGA200511/5/19; and diary entry for 4 Jan. 1968, 1967 diary, TGA200511/5/22. Robertson included Clough in a touring exhibition of the United States and Canada entitled *New British Sculpture and Painting*, in which she “emerged as the star of the show, pre-eminently”. Bryan Robertson, letter to Prunella Clough, 5 Jan. 1967, TGA200511/1/2/4 (1 of 2).
- 31 Hilton, “Dreams”, 32.
- 32 Lawrence Alloway would periodize the “switch from the figurative to an abstract basis” as “characteristic of the second phase of Pop Art”, arguing that “in 1957, at the ‘Young Contemporaries’ . . . Smith exhibited a painting which was influenced both by Sam Francis and by American popular culture.” Lawrence Alloway, “The Development of British Pop”, in *Pop Art*, ed. Lucy R. Lippard (1966; London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), 44.
- 33 Hal Foster, *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter, and Ruscha* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2012), 7.
- 34 For Riley’s dismay at the fashion industry’s consumption of her designs, see Pamela M. Lee, “Bridget Riley’s Eye/Body Problem”, in *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2006).
- 35 Prunella Clough, transcript entitled “Prunella Clough and Bridget Riley: A Dialogue”, 7 May, year and venue unknown, 1. Prunella Clough artist’s file, Women’s Art Library (MAKE), Goldsmiths, University of London.
- 36 Clough, “Interview with Robertson”, 44.
- 37 Spalding traces the importance of Minimalism for Clough’s move towards a more rigorous mode of abstraction in the 1970s, exemplified by *Double Diamond* (1973). Spalding, *Prunella Clough*, 179.
- 38 Clough, “Interview with Robertson”, 43.
- 39 Rachel Whiteread, letter to Prunella Clough, 18 May 1983, TGA200511/1/2/9. Whiteread’s engagement with the legacies of Minimalist abstraction to explore domestic and interior space illuminates Clough’s project in turn. See Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 153–68.
- 40 Joshua Shannon explores the relationship between Judd’s modular, rectangular sculptures of the 1960s and the forms produced by the processes re-making US industry, notably the shipping container and the office: “The sculptures manage to represent not only the forms of the new stage in capitalism but also the logic that those forms endeavoured to naturalize or hide.” Joshua Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects: New York Art and the Rise of the Postmodern City* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2009), 180.
- 41 Apart from some early lithographs, Clough’s first extended encounter with printmaking came in 1961 when she was invited to the Curwen Studio in London. Spalding, *Prunella Clough*, 154. See also *Prunella Clough: Prints and Works on Paper* (London: Flowers Graphics, 2006).
- 42 Gerard Hastings, “Prunella Clough: Unconsidered Wastelands”, in *Prunella Clough: Unconsidered Wastelands* (London: Osborne Samuel, 2015), 11.
- 43 Ian Barker, “The Unseen Reliefs of Prunella Clough—A Brief Context”, in *Prunella Clough: Unseen Reliefs, Drawings and Prints* (London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 2003), unpaginated.
- 44 Barker, “Unseen Reliefs”, unpaginated.

- 45 Clough showed an undated assemblage entitled *Moonwater*. Barker, "Unseen Reliefs", unpaginated.
- 46 See David Archer, *Prunella Clough & David Carr: Works 1945-1964* (London: Austin/Desmond Fine Art, 1997).
- 47 Prunella Clough, letter to David Carr, postmarked 1953, TGA200511/1/1/23/12 (2/4).
- 48 Prunella Clough, fragment entitled "paint factory", undated, TGA200511/1/1/23/78.
- 49 Clough, "paint factory", undated.
- 50 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (1957; London: Vintage, 2000), 97.
- 51 Heron, "Prunella Clough", 49.
- 52 Heron, "Prunella Clough", 49.
- 53 For an overview, see John Wilmerding, ed., *The Pop Object: The Still Life Tradition in Pop Art* (New York: Acquavella Galleries and Rizzoli, 2013).
- 54 Braque was an important reference point for Heron: see "Braque", *The New English Weekly*, 4 July 1945, and "The Changing Jug", *The Listener*, 25 Jan. 1951, in *Painter as Critic: Patrick Heron, Writings 1945-97*, ed. Mel Gooding (London: Tate Publishing, 1998), 13-18 and 54-59.
- 55 Heron, "Prunella Clough", 49.
- 56 Hanneke Grootenboer proposes that still life is "arguably the most philosophical genre" and a key site for artistic experimentation, noting that "the still lifes of Cézanne are central to Merleau-Ponty's thought" while the "very first photographs were shots of typical still-life scenes and . . . cubism's final break with realism developed within a series of still-life paintings." Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-century Dutch Still-Life Painting* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.
- 57 William Packer celebrated Clough as "the heir to Klee and Schwitters". William Packer, "Prunella Clough", *Financial Times*, 21 March 1975, page number unknown, TGA200511/1/2/7. For an overview of artistic engagements with the "everyday" in the twentieth-century, see Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), and Stephen Johnstone, ed., *The Everyday: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery and MIT Press, 2008).
- 58 Heron, "Prunella Clough", 51.
- 59 Clough, notebook, ca. 1987.
- 60 Juda, interview by Petzal, 12 Feb. 2003.
- 61 John Berger, "Machine-Life Painting", *New Statesman and Nation* 45, no. 1154 (18 April 1953): 454.
- 62 Aspects of these works are reminiscent of Henry Moore's organic figure studies. Clough took sculpture classes with Moore at the Chelsea School of Art (then part of Chelsea Polytechnic) in the late 1930s. She reflected: "Work under Moore was a deliberate if juvenile exercise in 3 dimensional realisation for the benefit of work in 2—a thing inconceivable to regret." Clough, diary entry for 21 May 1945, 8 Nov. 1944–28 Nov. 1947 diary, TGA201215/1/1.
- 63 Margaret Garlake, "Fishermen and Velvet Kebabs: Prunella Clough's Subjects", in *Prunella Clough*, ed. Tufnell, 96. Clough taught throughout her career, and during her time at Chelsea School of Art still lifes of "red cabbages and suitable objects" were a classroom staple. Prunella Clough, interviewed by Bridget Jackson, date of recording unknown, British Library, National Life Stories Collection: General, C464/44/01, tape F13491.
- 64 Prunella Clough, cited in Bryan Robertson, "Happiness is the Light", *Modern Painters* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 20.
- 65 Berger, "Machine-Life Painting", 454.
- 66 Clough, "Interview with Robertson", 44.
- 67 Berger, "Machine-Life Painting", 455. See Norman Bryson's classic study, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion, 1990).
- 68 Garlake describes Clough's mode of still life as a "very idiosyncratic form of the genre". Garlake, "Fishermen", 97.
- 69 Clough, "Interview with Robertson", 43.
- 70 Clough, "Interview with Robertson", 43.
- 71 Michael Middleton, "Introduction", in *Prunella Clough: A Retrospective Exhibition* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1960), 8.
- 72 Clough used the word "urbescape" interchangeably with landscape in her appointment diaries, which combine administrative tasks with brief, Morse code-like lines about the weather and the progress of works. Prunella Clough, diary entry for 11 June, 1958 diary, TGA200511/5/13.
- 73 Prunella Clough, letter to David Carr, "Thursday, 6pm", undated, TGA200511/1/1/23/61 (1/3).
- 74 The esteem Clough and Carr had for Lowry is significant given the unevenness of his critical reception. For a valuable revisionist approach, see T. J. Clark and Anne Wagner, *Lowry and the Painting of Modern Life* (London: Tate Britain, 2013).
- 75 Sue Hubbard, "Prunella Clough: Anely Juda", *Time Out*, 10-17 May 1989, page number unknown, TGA200511/1/2/12.
- 76 For the impact of the microcosmic view on landscape painting in Britain, see Catherine Jolivet, "Growth and Form: The New Landscapes", in *Landscape, Art and Identity in 1950s Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

- 77 Amanda Sebestyen, untitled review, *City Limits*, 11–18 May 1989, page number unknown, TGA200511/1/2/12.
- 78 For the role played by coastal landscapes in British Surrealism, see Pennie Denton, *Seaside Surrealism: Paul Nash in Swanage* (Swanage: Pevensey Press, 2002).
- 79 For a key study of the US context that resonates with changes in Britain, see Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (1973; New York: Basic Books, 1999).
- 80 Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), 157.
- 81 Prunella Clough, draft statement containing excerpts from the 1982 Robertson interview, ca. 1982, TGA200511/1/2/8 (137/138).
- 82 The work can be compared to the paintings Rita Donagh has produced inspired by her childhood in the Midlands, such as *Canals* (2005). Donagh reflects: “The canals even in decline were very important, with their overgrown towpaths. One had a rich experience of nature, as it reclaimed industrial wasteland.” Rita Donagh, interview with Jonathan Watkins, 21 July 2005, Jonathan Watkins, “Back to the Black Country”, in *Rita Donagh* (Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 2005), 7.
- 83 John Berger, “Lowry and the Industrial North” (1966), in *About Looking* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1980), 92.
- 84 Berger, “Lowry and the Industrial North”, 92.
- 85 Clough’s diary for 1973 records that year’s oil shortage, with commentaries such as “crisis crisis” and “fuel and general crisis”. Prunella Clough, diary entries for 6 Dec. and 19 Dec., 1973 diary, TGA200511/5/28.
- 86 Drabble’s eponymous novel of industrial decline charts a terrain similar to Clough’s paintings. Drabble’s protagonist Anthony Keating, a property developer, acquires a gasometer: “It was not a very expensive gasometer, for the gas board had abandoned it some years earlier, on the advent of North Sea Gas, but it was a useful site, which would join very neatly onto a brewer’s yard and an old bomb site, and possibly a whole stretch of river frontage.” Margaret Drabble, *The Ice Age* (1977; London: Penguin, 1978), 31. Clough felt that “a gasometer is as good as a garden, probably better.” Prunella Clough, “Statement”, from “Seven Artists Tell Why They Paint”, *Picture Post*, 12 March 1949, in *Prunella Clough*, ed. Tufnell, 21.
- 87 Spalding, *Prunella Clough*, 159.
- 88 Douglas Crimp closes his provocative essay “The End of Painting” by anticipating a time in which “the code of painting will have been abolished”. Douglas Crimp, “The End of Painting”, *October* 16 (Spring 1981): 86.
- 89 See Thomas McEvilley, *The Exile’s Return: Toward a Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), and the texts in Terry R. Myers, ed., *Painting: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery and MIT Press, 2011).
- 90 Peter Osborne, “Modernism, Abstraction and the Return to Painting”, in *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics*, ed. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1991), 72.
- 91 Grootenboer, *Rhetoric of Perspective*, 22.
- 92 Clough’s photographs contain images of blister packs, a make-up compact with fold out sections, and, more startlingly, mortuary flowers at a cemetery decaying inside their cellophane wrappings. Prunella Clough, source photographs, undated, TGA200511/4/3.
- 93 Before she dedicated herself to painting, Clough produced graphic design work. For examples see Spalding, *Prunella Clough*, 20.
- 94 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1991), 9.
- 95 See Sven Lütticken, “Living with Abstraction”, *Texte zur Kunst* 69 (March 2008), in *Abstraction: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Lind (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery and MIT Press, 2013), and Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983).
- 96 Reviewing Clough’s Whitechapel retrospective, David Sylvester noted: “one suspects the influence of Americans like Rothko, Kline and Motherwell”, but concluded that any influences “are always thoroughly digested”. David Sylvester, “Exhibitions”, *New Statesman* 60, no. 1542 (1 Oct. 1960): 472.
- 97 A list in Clough’s archive juxtaposes “Homebase” (possibly an allusion to the British DIY chain of that name) with words like “downturn”, “rift”, and “baubles”. Prunella Clough, written fragment, undated, TGA200511/2/2/2 (29/39).
- 98 Clough, “Interview with Robertson”, 44.
- 99 Clough, “Interview with Robertson”, 44.
- 100 Clough, “Clough and Riley”, 2.
- 101 Helen Molesworth, “Painting with Ambivalence”, in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 434.
- 102 The examples are too many to list in their entirety. A couple suffice: Edward Lucie-Smith detected a “lack of ambition” in Clough’s work, despite the fact that he was writing after her major Whitechapel retrospective of 1960. Edward Lucie-Smith, “Round the Art Galleries: Reality and Style”, *The Listener* 1854 (8 Oct. 1964): 556. John Russell bestowed a particularly sexist backhanded compliment: “where scale is concerned there is a ‘recommended maximum’ above which women’s art decreases very sharply in its effectiveness. Someone who knows this and does not go outside her own best capacities is Prunella Clough.” John Russell, untitled clipping, *Sunday Times*, 31 March 1968, page number unknown, TGA200511/1/2/4 (2 of 2).

- 103 For the dangers attendant on applying a biographical lens to women's art, see Anne Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1996).
- 104 As early as 1966 Clough was held up as one of the "few really influential women" artists who had overcome institutional prejudices. Fiona MacCarthy, "Fiona MacCarthy talking about Women Artists", *Guardian*, 28 Feb. 1966, 6. Monica Petzal noted that Clough, together with Gillian Ayres, "represented for several generations of younger women artists—including myself—the most invaluable of role-models". Monica Petzal, "Prunella Clough, Gillian Ayres", unknown publication, ca. 1982, TGA200511/1/2/8 (25/138). For the gender politics of Clough's reception, see Joan Key, "The Metamorphosis of Attrition", *Women's Art Magazine* 70 (June–July 1996): 5–7. Clough's aunt, the designer and architect Eileen Grey, provided a role model that "did allow for other possibilities". Clough, "Clough and Riley", 2–3.
- 105 Margaret Drabble, "A Floating World", *New Statesman* 133, no. 4677 (1 March 2004): 39.
- 106 Hastings, "Unconsidered Wastelands", 12–13.
- 107 Prunella Clough, *Small Stack* postcards, TGA200511/3/1/2/1–41.
- 108 For the intersection of seriality and abstraction in the late twentieth century, see Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-Making Art After Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2004).
- 109 David Joselit's exploration of contemporary painting's 'networked' qualities addresses a different context (New York in the 2000s) but is suggestive here. See David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 125–34.
- 110 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (1970; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 310.

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The logo for 'British Art Show 8' features the words 'British Art Show' in large, bold, orange letters. The letters are set against a background of a dense, abstract pattern of blue and green, resembling a forest or a textured surface. The number '8' is also in orange and is positioned to the right of the word 'Show'.

British Art Show 8

Roger Malbert

Authors

Head of Hayward Touring at the Southbank Centre

Cite as

Roger Malbert, "British Art Show 8", British Art Studies, Issue 1,
<https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/rmalbert>

Response by

British Art Studies Editorial Group,

The “cover” of the first issue of *British Art Studies* plays with the conventions of the traditional cover of a journal or magazine. A cover traditionally has various functions: to illustrate or give a glimpse into the contents; to protect the pages sandwiched in between; and, occasionally, to conceal rather than advertise what is inside. The digital format of *British Art Studies* has allowed us to rethink what a cover is and what it can do. We have created more than simply a landing page for presenting text and practical information and made a feature worth visiting in its own right. The cover images selected for issue one do not illustrate any of the articles, but generate a stand-alone feature. For the first issue, we have collaborated with [British Art Show 8](#) (BAS 8) to make a cover that does not simply point to the content within but also connects outwards. Featuring new works by eight artists, who are all participating in BAS 8, the cover is never static and a fresh image will load each time you return to the journal. In this text, Roger Malbert, Head of Hayward Touring (the organization responsible for the British Art Show) reflects on the idea and history of the show. Exhibitions' histories have been a focus of research activity at the Paul Mellon Centre and the Yale Center for British Art recently through events such as a joint session at the Association of Art Historians conference in 2015, and a forthcoming conference in collaboration with Tate Britain on exhibitions of [contemporary art in Britain between 1945 and 1960](#). This collaboration with British Art Show 8 extends this conversation to consider the implications of exhibiting the contemporary under the rubric of “British art”, intersecting with the topic of our Conversation Piece, “There’s no such thing as British art”.

Introduction by

Roger Malbert, Head, Hayward Touring

A History of the British Art Show

The idea of an exhibition of contemporary British art, touring at five-yearly intervals to different regional cities, was first proposed to the Exhibitions Committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) by the legendary Director of Sheffield City Art Galleries, Frank Constantine, in the late 1970s. The Hayward Gallery, which was run by the ACGB, had initiated a series of influential—and often controversial—Annuals in 1977, focusing on aspects of contemporary art. The British Art Show was intended to offer regional museums and galleries an exhibition of equivalent scale and significance, a survey of current practice selected by guest curators and travelling each time to four different cities. Implicit in the idea from the start was a wish to redress the balance between the capital and the peripheries.



Figure 1.
British Art Show,



Figure 2.
British Art Show,



Figure 3.
British Art Show,

As the national funding body, the ACGB was always at pains to demonstrate its regional credentials and even-handedness. It was important that the British Art Show curators were seen to be visiting studios in every part of the country over an exhaustive two-year period of research—even though, as Joanna Drew, then Director of Art, remarked in 1984, they might ultimately come up with a list they could have arrived at sitting around a table in the Arts Council's offices in Piccadilly in a single afternoon. From the second edition on, London and Glasgow predominated, as they do today. The exhibition has at times been bitterly criticized for its bias in favour of the

metropolis and, in the eighties and nineties, a particular art college—Goldsmiths. In retrospect, however, the curators' choices seem on the whole to have been vindicated: there are relatively few major artists working in this country who have not appeared in one or another edition of the British Art Show. The formula of two or three well-informed guest curators basing their selection on empirical research, focusing exclusively on current activity, with no chance to roam back in time to make historical connections (which many curators are keen to do, as the Tate's comparatively short-lived Triennial illustrates), has become the show's signature.

An interval of five years is long enough for a new generation to emerge from art colleges and for new tendencies in practice to become apparent. The ostensibly parochial notion of a show confined to British art is mitigated by a loose definition of the criteria, and the fact that over the past thirty years London, the largest city in Europe by far (population 8.63 million, compared to its nearest rival Berlin's 3.5 million) has been a magnet for artists from across the world. This, combined with the complex legacy of Britain's imperial history, means that simple ideas of national identity are problematized almost out of existence. What can one say then, about the characteristics of "British art" as they have been revealed by the British Art Show over the past thirty-five years?

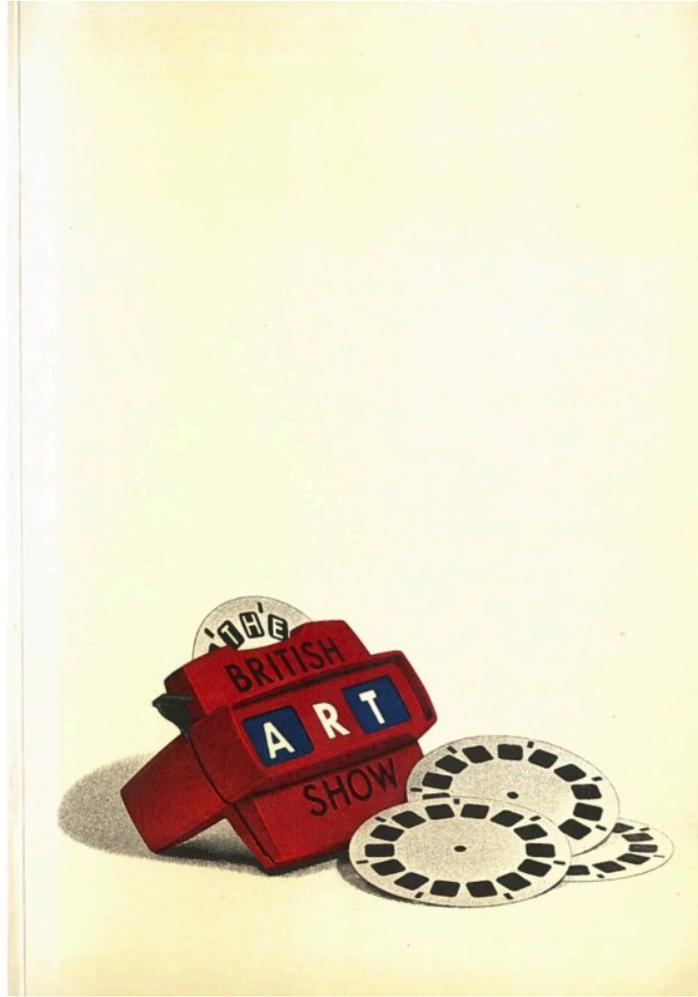


Figure 4.

by William Packer, British Art Show 1, ISBN: 9780728702196. Artists in British Art Show 1 featured the work of 112 artists working almost exclusively in painting and sculpture. Works by Anthony Caro, Lucian Freud, Terry Frost, Hamish Fulton, Maggi Hambling, David Hockney, Leon Kossoff, Richard Long, and Bridget Riley were included. The exhibition toured to venues in Sheffield, Newcastle and Bristol.

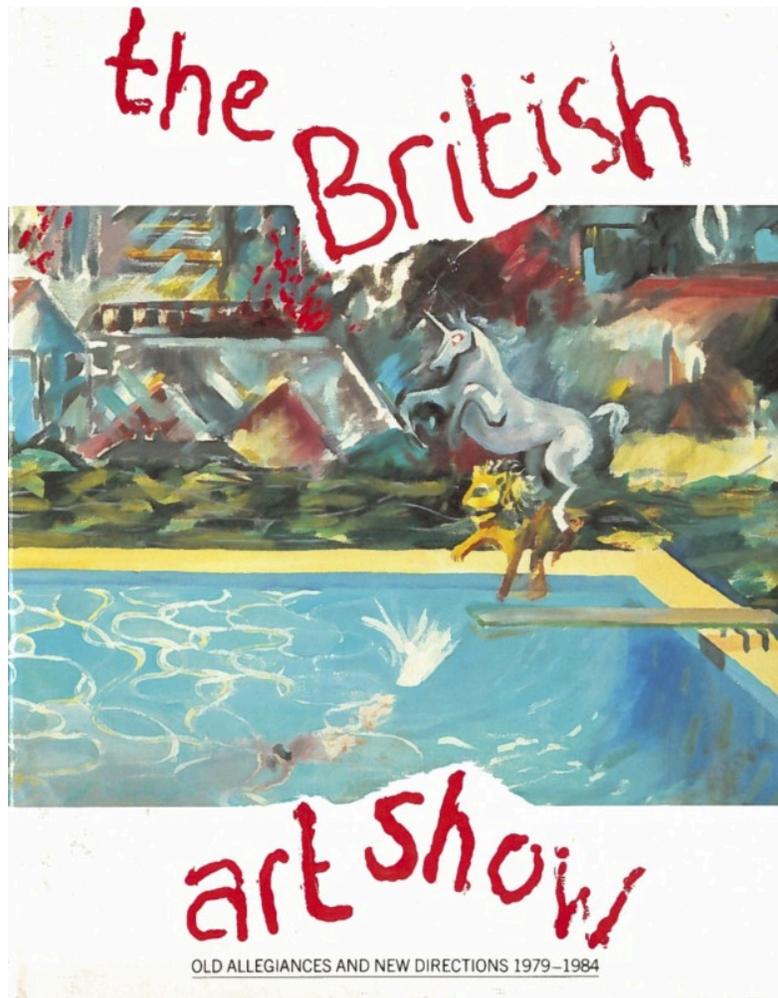


Figure 5.

by Alexander Moffat, Jon Thompson and Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton, *British Art Show 2*, ISBN: 9780856137945. *British Art Show 2* presented a wide-ranging selection of 84 artists working across media including performance, installation, film and video as well as painting and sculpture.



Figure 6.

by Caroline Collier, Andrew Nairne, and David Ward, *British Art Show 3*, ISBN: 9781853320545. They also concentrated on an emerging generation of artists aged under 35. *British Art Show 3* included Ian Davenport, Willie Doherty, Mona Hatoum, Gary Hume, Julian Opie, Cornelia Parker, Fiona Rae and Rachel Whiteread, as well as artist collectives such as the Black Audio Film Collective, whose members included the filmmaker John Akomfrah. The exhibition toured to venues in Glasgow, Leeds and London.

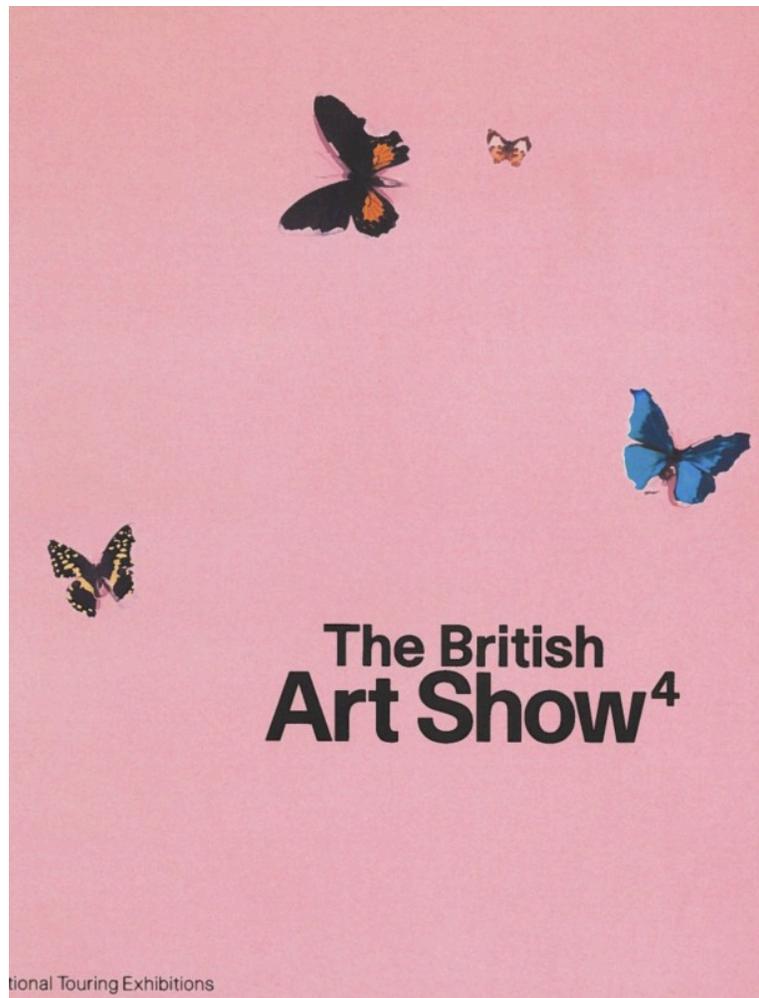


Figure 7.

by Richard Cork, Rose Finn-Kelcey and Thomas Lawson, British Art Show 4, ISBN: 9781853321450. Artists in British Art Show 4 included Tacita Dean, Anya Gallaccio, Douglas Gordon, Damien Hirst, Steve McQueen, Chris Ofili, Sam Taylor-Wood, Mark Wallinger, Gillian Wearing and Jane and Louise Wilson. The exhibition toured to venues in Manchester, Edinburgh and Cardiff.

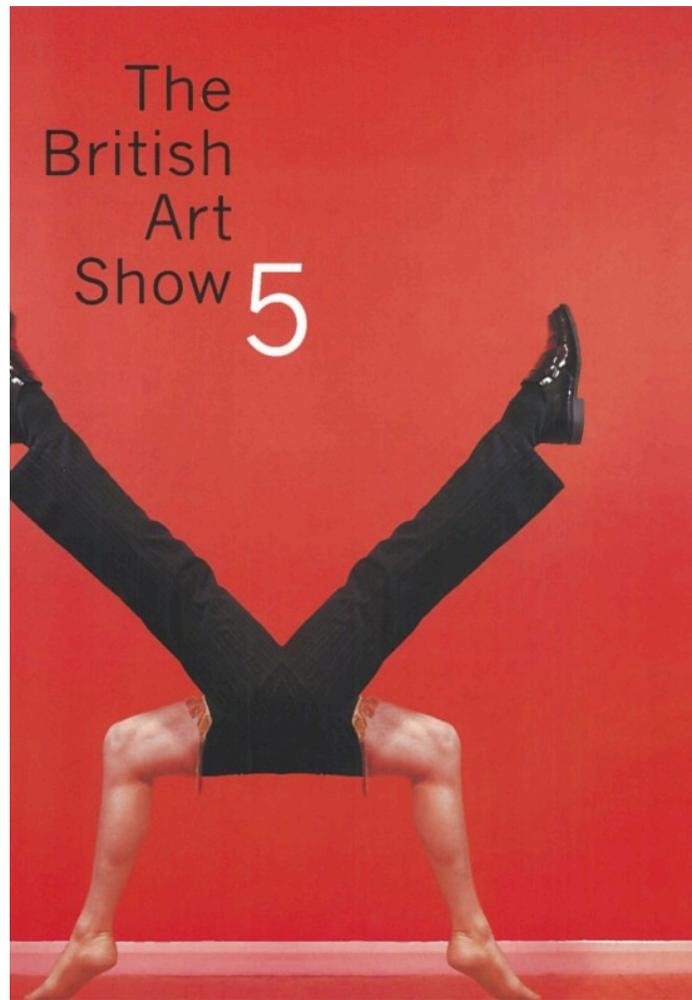


Figure 8.

by Pippa Coles, Jacqui Poncelet and Matthew Higgs, British Art Show 5, ISBN: 9781853322044. The 54 artists in British Art Show 5 included Phyllida Barlow, Martin Creed, Jeremy Deller, Tracey Emin, Liam Gillick, Susan Hiller, Sarah Lucas, Grayson Perry, David Shrigley and Wolfgang Tillmans. The exhibition toured to venues in Edinburgh, Southampton, Cardiff, Birmingham.

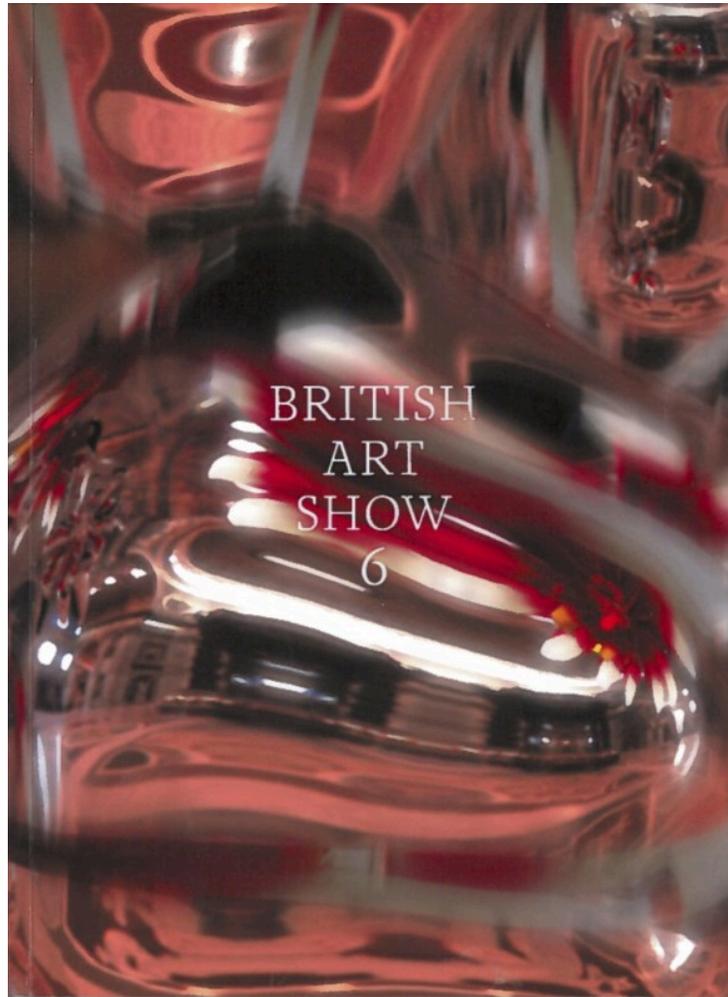


Figure 9.

by Alex Farquharson and Andrea Schlieker, British Art Show 6 , ISBN: 9781853322532. The 50 artists who took part in British Art Show 6 included Tomma Abts, Marcus Coates, Phil Collins, Roger Hiorns, Mark Leckey, Goshka Macuga, Eva Rothschild, Zineb Sedira and Mark Titchner. The exhibition toured to venues in Gateshead, Manchester, Nottingham and Bristol.

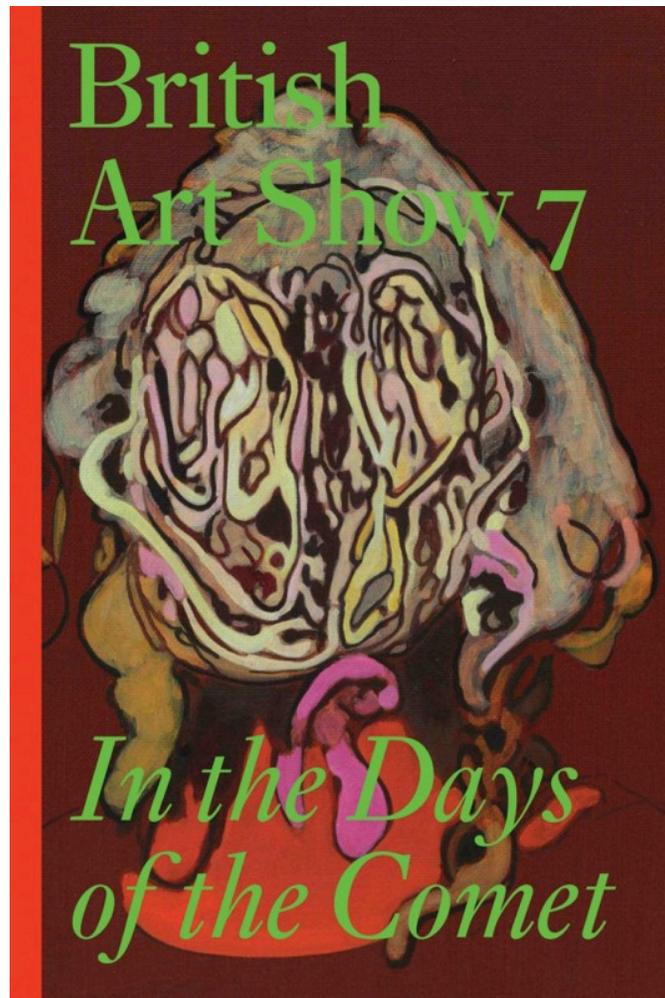


Figure 10.

by Tom Morton and Lisa Le Feuvre, *British Art Show 7: In the Days of the Comet*, ISBN: 9781853322860. Many of the 39 artists in *British Art Show 7* created new works for the exhibition. Like *British Art Show 6*, the exhibition changed and developed as it toured, with new works being added each time. The artists in *British Art Show 7* included Karla Black, Duncan Campbell, Spartacus Chetwynd, Matthew Darbyshire, Sarah Lucas, Christian Marclay, Haroon Mirza, Nathaniel Mellors, Elizabeth Price, and Tris Vonna-Michell. The exhibition toured to venues in Nottingham, London, Glasgow and Plymouth.

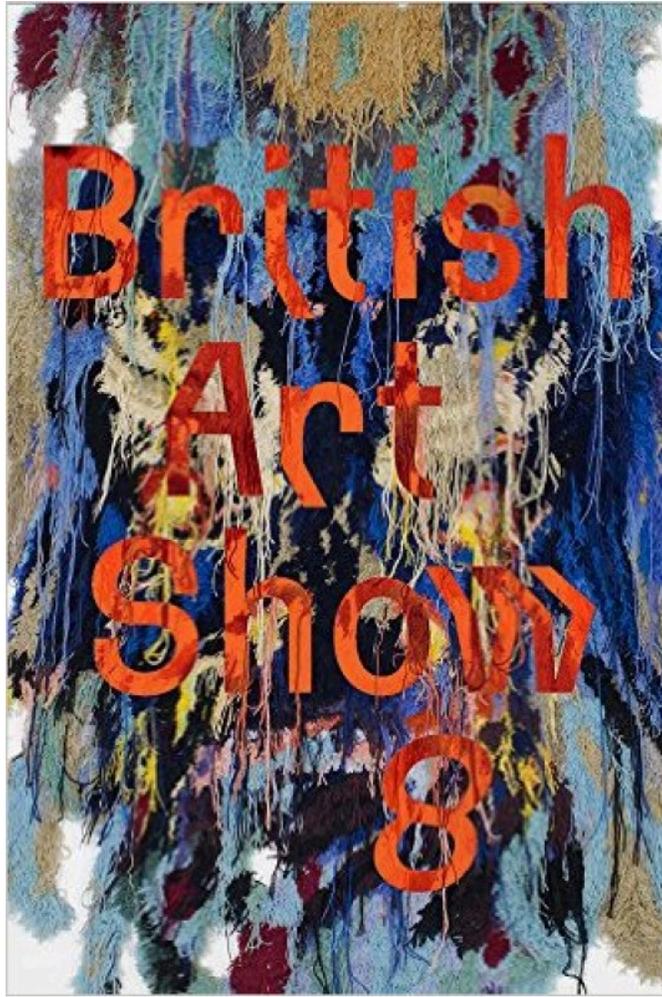


Figure 11.

by Anna Colin and Lydia Yee, British Art Show 8, ISBN: 9781853323416. Artists: Åbäke, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Caroline Achaintre, John Akomfrah and Trevor Mathison, Aaron Angell, Pablo Bronstein, Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, Andrea Büttner, Alexandre da Cunha, Nicolas Deshayes, Benedict Drew, Simon Fujiwara, Martino Gamper, Ryan Gander, Melanie Gilligan, Anthea Hamilton, Will Holder, Alan Kane, Mikhail Karikis, Linder, Rachel Maclean, Ahmet Ögüt (with Liam Gillick, Susan Hiller and Goshka Macuga), Yuri Pattison, Ciara Phillips, Charlotte Prodger, Laure Prouvost, Magali Reus, James Richards, Eileen Simpson and Ben White, Daniel Sinsel, Cally Spooner, Patrick Staff, Imogen Stidworthy, Hayley Tompkins, Jessica Warboys, Stuart Whipps, Bedwyr Williams, Jesse Wine, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. Opening in Leeds in October 2015, British Art Show 8 will tour to venues in Edinburgh, Norwich and Southampton over the course of 15 months.

Reviewing the eight editions of the British Art Show at a glance, certain obvious features stand out. They can be seen to reflect changes in culture, patterns of production, and the growth of new technologies as well as demographic and social shifts. The first edition in 1979 seems comparatively homogenous; the names of the 112 artists included are overwhelmingly English, and only 12 were women. This was a wide-ranging, if partial, painting and sculpture survey show. It includes such major figures as Lucian Freud, Bridget Riley, Richard Long, Michael Andrews, Terry Frost, David Hockney, John Hoyland, Michael Sandle, Euan Uglow, and Sean Scully.



Figure 12.

Installation view: British Art Show 2, 1984-5. Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh. Left: Tony Cragg. Right: Barry Flanagan.

A significant shift occurred with the next British Art Show in 1984. The artist Jon Thompson, who as Head of Goldsmiths Department of Art in the 1980s revolutionized art education in this country by dissolving specialist departments, allowing students to move freely between media, and employing many experimental artists on a part-time basis, co-curated with Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton and Scottish artist Sandy Moffat. The show bore the stamp of his radical open-minded approach with an astonishingly catholic selection encompassing every kind of practice from figurative painting to performance and video. Among the eighty-four names, hardly a single one is forgotten today. The list includes Anthony Caro, Michael Craig-Martin, Stuart Brisley, Paula Rego, Gilbert & George, Helen Chadwick, Mary Kelly, R. B. Kitaj and Howard Hodgkin. Perhaps most timely is the group of young sculptors, many of whom were associated with the Lisson Gallery: Tony Cragg, Bill Woodrow, Richard Wentworth, Richard Deacon, Antony Gormley, Anish

Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary, and Alison Wilding. If there was a common characteristic to much of this work. It was considered at the time to be peculiarly full of “English” irony and wit.

As the British Art Show has, over time, registered developments in contemporary art, it has also reflected changes in curatorial practice, moving away from the idea of a neutral survey to a more conceptually considered and “shaped” exhibition: from an over-crowded group show towards a more calculatedly composed, minimalist presentation. The third incarnation in 1990 took a turn away from the cross-generational survey, to focus exclusively on artists under the age of thirty-five. This was a quieter exhibition, with some outstanding contributions from Mona Hatoum, Cornelia Parker, Rachel Whiteread, Gary Hume, Julian Opie, and Callum Innes. As a record of a moment, it affirmed the hegemony of Goldsmiths and consequently provoked an indignant reaction from Julian Spalding. The then Director of Glasgow Museums, where the exhibition opened, publicly denounced it as “not a British art show” (since it was unapologetically partial), and proceeded to organize his own counter-exhibition, The Great British Art Show, with a line-up of figurative painters, including Beryl Cook. Opening a new Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow, Spalding began to acquire this type of work of popular appeal and resolutely refused to countenance collecting work by emerging Glaswegian artists such as (the now internationally renowned) Douglas Gordon. The conflict epitomized a fundamental divide in Scottish art at that time between those who could be categorized as the provincial populists, and the savvy conceptualists who were performing with confidence on the international stage, and whose work has been acquired and promoted by the Gallery of Modern Art since Spalding’s departure.



Figure 13.

Installation view: British Art Show 3, 1990. Hayward Gallery, London. Centre: Cornelia Parker.



Figure 14.

Installation view: British Art Show 3, McLennan Galleries, Glasgow.

The British Art Show reached a watershed in 1995, when the exhibition broke away from the confines of a single venue to spread across numerous galleries and exhibition spaces in each city. The standards of presentation (particularly of video and film projections) reached new heights in order to satisfy the requirements of a highly professional and ambitious generation of twenty-five artists, including Steve McQueen, Sam Taylor-Wood, Tacita Dean, Damien Hirst, Chris Ofili, Douglas Gordon, Jane and Louise Wilson, and Mark Wallinger. This was the YBA moment. Plenty has been written about this generation of artists and their influence persists. They have international reputations, are represented by high-powered galleries, collected by museums across the world, and several now live abroad.



Figure 15.

Photo: Roger Wooldridge, Installation view: British Art Show 7: In the Days of the Comet, Hayward Gallery, London, 2011

Subsequent iterations of the British Art Show have expanded to include many more artists (54 for BAS 5 in 2000 and 50 in BAS 6 in 2005, 22 of whom were women), with a good proportion of each continuing with successful careers. Phyllida Barlow, Martin Creed, Liam Gillick, Michael Landy, Sarah Lucas, Mike Nelson, Grayson Perry, David Shrigley, Wolfgang Tillmans were all in BAS 5; Tomma Abts, Zarina Bhimji, Marcus Coates, Roger Hiorns, Mark Leckey, Goshka Macuga, Zineb Sedira, and Mark Titchner were all in BAS 6—whose co-curator, Alex Farquharson, incidentally, later became the Director of Nottingham Contemporary and has recently been appointed Director of Tate Britain. The challenge he faces there is relevant to the question under consideration here: what, if anything, defines British art? The wise response would probably follow Wittgenstein's dictum, that the meaning of a term lies in its use, rather than in some essential definition. All of the many thousands of artists living in London, Glasgow, and—increasingly as the capital prices the property-less out of the picture—across the country, would qualify for inclusion, whatever their country of origin.

British Art Show 8

British Art Show 8 is a touring exhibition and it will travel to four UK cities — Leeds, Edinburgh, Norwich and Southampton — between October 2015 to January 2017. The curators of BAS8, Anna Colin and Lydia Yee, have selected the work of forty-two artists who have made a significant contribution to contemporary art in the UK over the past five years. The result is a wide-ranging exhibition that encompasses performance, film, sculpture, installation, and painting and design. Twenty-six of the 42 artists have produced new works for the exhibition, making this the most ambitious British Art Show to date.

A central concern of British Art Show 8 is the changing role and status of the physical object in an increasingly digital age. While some artists engage with this question through traditional craft-based techniques, others experiment with modes of industrial production. As the curators comment, “We were particularly interested in the rereading of objects by artists and other contemporary thinkers as active agents, generative entities, mutating forms and networked realities.”¹

Artists: Åbäke, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Caroline Achaintre, John Akomfrah and Trevor Mathison, Aaron Angell, Pablo Bronstein, Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, Andrea Büttner, Alexandre da Cunha, Nicolas Deshayes, Benedict Drew, Simon Fujiwara, Martino Gamper, Ryan Gander, Melanie Gilligan, Anthea Hamilton, Will Holder, Alan Kane, Mikhail Karikis, Linder, Rachel Maclean, Ahmet Ögüt (with Liam Gillick, Susan Hiller and Goshka Macuga), Yuri Pattison, Ciara Phillips, Charlotte Prodger, Laure Prouvost, Magali Reus, James Richards, Eileen Simpson and Ben White, Daniel Sinsel, Cally Spooner, Patrick Staff, Imogen Stidworthy, Hayley Tompkins, Jessica Warboys, Stuart Whipps, Bedwyr Williams, Jesse Wine, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.

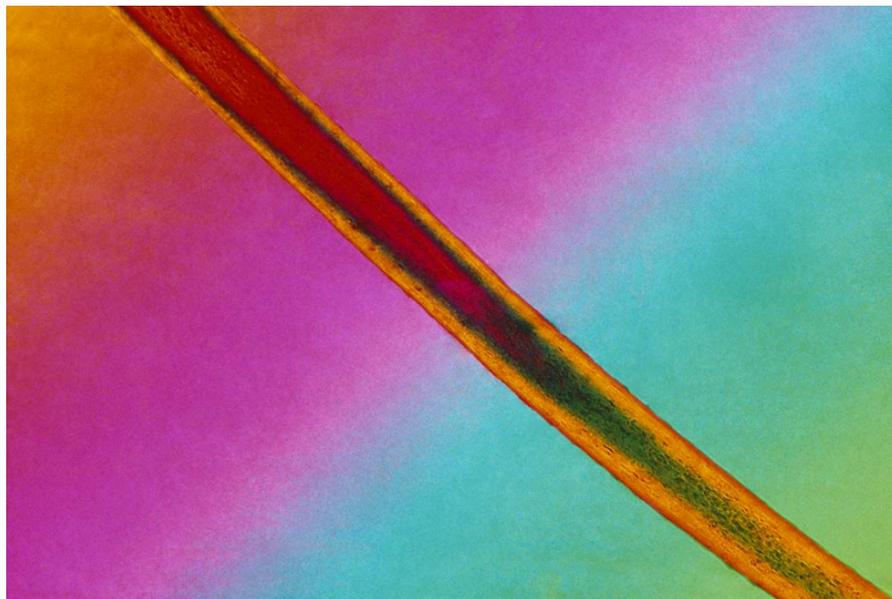


Figure 16.

Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin, *Trace fiber from Freud's couch under crossed polars with Quartz wedge compensator (#2)*, 2015, Digital image courtesy of the Artists and Lisson Gallery, London



Figure 17.

Linder, *Diagrams of Love: Marriage of Eyes* (detail), 2015, Digital image courtesy of Linder Sterling / Dovecot Tapestry Studio, 2015. Photo credit, Michael Wolchover. Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/Modern Art and Dovecot Studios Ltd. ([website](#))



Figure 18.

Bedwyr Williams, *Century Egg* (video still), 2015, Commissioned by the University of Cambridge North West Cambridge Development through the Habitation Artist in Residency Programme managed by Contemporary Art Society and InSite Arts Digital image courtesy of the artist and Limoncello Gallery



Figure 19.

Mikhail Karikis, *Children of Unquiet* (video still), 2013-2014, Digital image courtesy of Mikhail Karikis, 2015



Figure 20.

Patrick Staff, *The Foundation* (video still), 2015, Commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery, London; Spike Island, Bristol; Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; and Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver. Co-produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London and Spike Island, Bristol

Footnotes

1 Anna Colin and Lydia Lee, "About the exhibition", <http://britishartshow8.com/page/about-exhibition-1599>

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