

An abstract painting with a vibrant red background. On the left, a light-colored, vase-like form is depicted with thick, expressive brushstrokes. A dark, textured shape, possibly representing a plant or a shadow, extends from the top of the vase. To the right, a large, dark, rectangular shape is positioned at the top, with a circular, reddish-orange form below it. The overall composition is dynamic and expressive, with a focus on color and texture.

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Cover image: Margaret Mellis, Red Flower (detail), 1958, oil on board, 39.4 × 39.1 cm. Collection of Museums Sheffield (VIS.4951).. Digital image courtesy of the estate of Margaret Mellis. Photo courtesy of Museums Sheffield (All rights reserved).

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Contents

The Kitchen Sink Too, Abi Shapiro

1964: A Year of Exhibitions, Stephen Bann

Transatlantic Transactions and the Domestic Market:
Agnew's Stock Books in 1894-1895, Barbara Pezzini and Alan Crookham

Letters from the Home Front:
The Alternative War Art of Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde,
1940-1945, Sophie Hatchwell

Cumbrian Cosmopolitanisms:
Li Yuan-chia and Friends, Hammad Nasar

Whatever Happened to Delia Derbyshire?
Delia Derbyshire, Visual Art, and the Myth of her Post-BBC Activity, David
Butler

Delia Derbyshire: The Myths and the Legendary Tapes, Caroline Catz



The Kitchen Sink Too

Abi Shapiro

Abstract

The Kitchen Sink Too: British Art 1945–1975 is a project led by Research Curator, Abi Shapiro at Museums Sheffield. The project undertakes research into Sheffield’s post-war visual art holdings to improve public access to the collection through a range of activities and events including the exhibition, “This Life is So Everyday”: The Home in British Art 1950–1980, on display at the Graves Gallery in Sheffield (30 March 2019–6 July 2019). In this Cover Collaboration, Abi Shapiro reflects on the invisibility of women’s perspectives of domesticity in early post-war art, and the process of working with community groups to develop research towards the exhibition’s theme of “home”.

Authors

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The home and domesticity were the main subjects of “kitchen sink” painting, a short-lived style of realism active in London between 1952 and 1957. The four artists typically associated with this genre are Jack Smith, Edward Middleditch, Derrick Greaves, and John Bratby. Unlike other “schools” or movements in early twentieth-century British art, the four did not group themselves based on mutually agreed principles, but were linked by critics, curators, and their dealer, Helen Lessore at the Beaux Art Gallery, for a perceived commonality in style and their preference for domestic subject matter. From 1952, they were known as the Beaux Arts Quartet, until the critic David Sylvester colloquially described them in 1954 as painters of “the kitchen sink” and the name stuck.¹

In the histories of post-war British art, it remains widely unchallenged that these four men are the only “kitchen sink” artists.² Their works from the 1950s are considered as central in discourses of post-war representations of the home and labour, with critics and historians often locating “kitchen sink” painting’s legacy as a precursor to British pop art’s focus on everyday domestic objects.³ Yet despite the many “kitchen sink” works depicting women undertaking domestic labour, there is a lack of awareness of, and scholarship about, artworks made by women in the 1950s depicting the home. This has not only led to biased perspectives of representations of the home in post-war art, but it has also affected the way issues of gendered subjectivity and labour are (or aren’t) implicated in art-historical discourses of domesticity, as well as highlighting the fact that many women artists still remain absent from art’s histories.

In what can be considered a classic “kitchen sink” painting because of its mundane breakfast setting, in *Jean and Table Top (Girl in a Yellow Jumper)*, John Bratby depicts his new wife gazing blankly across their kitchen (Fig. 1). With hands clasped at her lap and head tilted, Jean appears small next to the cluttered table of cereal boxes, washing powder, dirty bowls, empty teacups, and glass milk bottles left over from breakfast. The scene does not suggest Jean’s domestic bliss, but bears witness to her disengaged affect in this everyday reality.



Figure 1.

John Bratby, *Jean and Table top (Girl in Yellow Jumper)*, 1953-1954, oil on board, 122.1 × 101.2 cm. Collection of Museums Sheffield (VIS.4712). Digital image courtesy of the artist's estate and Bridgeman Images. Photo courtesy of Museums Sheffield (All rights reserved).

John Bratby repeatedly painted the home he shared with Jean Bratby (Cooke) throughout the 1950s and 1960s, recording the mundane details of their kitchen, bedroom, and living room (even twice painting their toilet).⁴ In these paintings Jean is often portrayed by John as despondent and passive. In his numerous self-portraits, John Bratby depicts himself within the domestic space but not necessarily engaged with it (or with Jean). This can be seen in *Kitchen Interior* where John stands removed from the scene with his hands in his suit pockets as Jean washes dishes (Fig. 2). By documenting the interior of his material (and by extension, psychical) world for decades, Bratby honed a visual language that spoke not only of an unremarkable and everyday domesticity, but of a constructed and masculine domesticity that characterised his career and the genre of “kitchen sink” painting.⁵

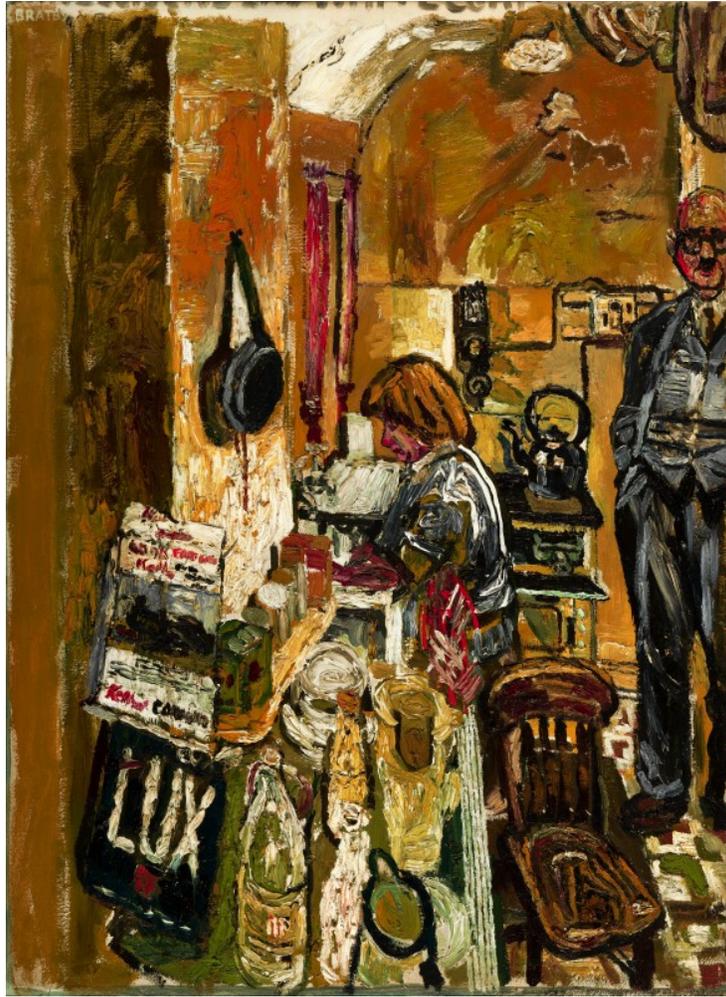


Figure 2.

John Bratby, Kitchen Interior, 1955-1956, oil on board, 119.3 x 86.3 cm. Collection of Williamson Art Gallery & Museum (BIKGM:3355). Digital image courtesy of the artist's estate and Bridgeman Images. Photo courtesy of Williamson Art Gallery & Museum (All rights reserved).



Figure 3.

Jack Smith, *Mother Bathing Child*, 1953, oil on board, 182.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of Tate (T00005). Digital image courtesy of the estate of Jack Smith (All rights reserved).



Figure 4.

Edward Middleditch, *Flowers, Chairs and Bedsprings*, 1956, oil on board, 112.7 × 175 cm. Collection of Tate (T06460). Digital image courtesy of the estate of Edward Middleditch and James Hyman Gallery, London (All rights reserved).

Using a thick impasto application of paint, usually in muted hues on large canvases, the four young male “kitchen sink” artists depict images of children and mothers in sparse and dingy kitchens (Smith) (Fig. 3), still lifes of stove tops or upturned mattresses (Middleditch) (Fig. 4), street scenes of children playing and Northern industrial cityscapes (Greaves) (Fig. 5), and a cluttered family home and its inhabitants (Bratby).



Figure 5.

Derrick Greaves, *Sheffield*, 1953, oil on canvas, 93.6 × 210.5 cm. Collection of Museums Sheffield (VIS.4586). Digital image courtesy of Derrick Greaves and James Hyman Gallery, London. Photo courtesy of Museums Sheffield (All rights reserved).

These unflinching images of daily life led to wider disagreements over realism as a politically motivated style. The artists denied this kind of intent with Smith nonchalantly stating, “I just painted the objects around me.”⁶ But “kitchen sink” painting was deployed as a pawn by critics debating the role of politics in art. In 1952, the socialist art critic John Berger insisted realism offered “a sharper meaning” to working-class reality.⁷ Yet for David Sylvester domesticity and realism were jointly rooted in art-historical traditions of painting interior space; subject was only a pretext for style.⁸ These debates brought attention to the young artists’ works, which reached a peak in 1956 when the four artists were chosen to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale (Fig. 6). This was, however, a short-lived moment of notoriety. While this international exposure provided each artist with a degree of fame, and recognised “kitchen sink” painting as a celebrated trend, the genre’s popularity soon fell out of favour. By 1957 “kitchen sink” painting was more or less over.⁹



Figure 6.

The British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 1956, photograph. Digital image courtesy of James Hyman Gallery (All rights reserved).

As these debates about realism played out on national and international stages, the “kitchen sink” painters’ version of domesticity became synonymous with post-war social realism. Yet in terms of how we understand early post-war depictions of domesticity in British art and cultural history, this has served to foreground “home” as seen from the perspectives of young, white, straight men in a heteronormative framework. Research by Greg Salter usefully explores the presentation of masculinity and domesticity in 1950s paintings by male artists (including Bratby) offering an analysis of the way selfhood, masculinity, and home were negotiated according to post-

war social values.¹⁰ Yet what other domestic narratives and subjectivities might appear by expanding the remit of “kitchen sink” realism beyond these four accepted artists?

This question is part of a wider research project at Museums Sheffield. The project, *The Kitchen Sink Too: British Art 1945–1975*, looks at Sheffield’s expansive modern British art collection of over 1,400 works of art to examine lesser-told stories both in the collection and in the history of British art more generally. The project aims to use research to improve public access and engagement with the collection through activities and events including an exhibition titled *“This Life is So Everyday”: The Home in British Art 1950–1980* at the Graves Gallery in Sheffield (30 March 2019–6 July 2019).

To focus the project towards developing an exhibition, the theme of home was chosen to trace a domestic trajectory across this thirty-year period in Sheffield’s collection. The project tracked approximately 150 artworks that relate to this theme from 1950s “kitchen sink” paintings, through to 1960s and 1970s pop art domestic objects, and feminist art in the 1970s. One aim was to undertake collection research and exhibition development that did not issue solely from the research curator’s viewpoint. As such, we sought input from the local community by working with groups with different domestic experiences during the period in question in order to explore various perspectives of “home”. This directed the sub-themes of the research as well as what would be included in the show and how it would be interpreted.

The first two groups we worked with were adults aged between 65 and 96 living in assisted accommodation in the Park Hill ([Fig. 7](#)) and Manor Top areas located in the east of Sheffield.¹¹



Figure 7.

Sheffield City Centre, showing Parkhill flats under refurbishment, aerial view, 7 June 2011. Digital image courtesy of Chris Mattison and Alamy Stock Photo (All rights reserved).

Crucially, most of the residents grew up and lived in South Yorkshire during the timeline of the project (1945–1975) and therefore we used museum collection objects to stimulate memories in a series of reminiscence sessions. A range of domestic issues materialised that we would not have otherwise considered. For example, there were stories about living in makeshift bomb shelters in the Sheffield blitz and stories of several families' excitement about acquiring a first television set. People also described the mental and physical challenges of requiring extra support at home in later life, which offered a key perspective on how home changes over a lifetime. As many participants were women, gendered domestic roles and the physical labour of home maintenance were also common themes. In terms of collection research, this encouraged questions about why “kitchen sink” paintings that often depicted women’s domestic labour were all made by men. The absence of women representing their own experiences directed a search for works in Sheffield’s collection made by women. These were, however, harder to find as they had a more subtle relationship to domesticity in the 1950s and 1960s and entered the collections at different times to other “kitchen sink” works. For example, Margaret Mellis ([Fig. 8](#)) and Anne Redpath created still life compositions staged in their homes using their own domestic objects, and Mary Potter ([Fig. 9](#)) and Winifred Nicholson painted the views from their home windows.



Figure 8.

Margaret Mellis, Red Flower, 1958, oil on board, 39.4 × 39.1 cm.
Collection of Museums Sheffield (VIS.4951). Digital image courtesy of the
estate of Margaret Mellis. Photo courtesy of Museums Sheffield (All rights
reserved).



Figure 9.

Mary Potter, *End of Daylight*, 1954, oil on canvas, 74.2 × 99.6 cm. Collection of Museums Sheffield (VIS.2584). Digital image courtesy of the estate of Mary Potter, DACS 2019. Photo courtesy of Museums Sheffield (All rights reserved).

We also worked with people living in Sheffield who attend the Conversation Club, a community-run group designed for refugees and asylum seekers to practise English and socialise. The activities we ran focused on writing personal responses to collection objects that related to the theme of home. Works that solicited strong aesthetic and emotional reactions were selected for inclusion in the exhibition with individuals' corresponding responses put on display. This encouraged more expansive ways of researching by thinking about what "home" means as Britain negotiates its national and international identity and borders for Brexit. For those (including myself) who have migrated to Britain, we discussed how "home" is often multiple places and identities at once, which can sometimes feel in conflict. This invited an exploration of artists in Sheffield's collection who had made Britain their home, as well as acknowledging the collection's lack of representation of artwork by some of the post-war migrant communities specific to the region. ¹² This led to researching prints by Avinash Chandra, an Indian-born British artist (Fig. 10), and Josef Herman, a Polish-born British artist, both of whom explored their cross-cultural heritage in their practices during the 1950s and 1960s. As is the case in most public British art collections, artists of colour, especially women of colour, are poorly represented in this period of

Sheffield's collection. ¹³ This stimulated research into BAME artists working in the early post-war period and making suggestions for future displays and acquisitions.



Figure 10.

Avinash Chandra, Drawing 3, 1963, watercolour, 57.1 × 66 cm. Collection of Museums Sheffield (VIS.3419). Digital image courtesy of the estate of Avinash Chandra. Photo courtesy of Museums Sheffield (All rights reserved).

With both groups, “home” materialised as a mutable and complex concept that could not be pinned down to even a small group of issues. Yet it was clear that domesticity has played a powerful role in people’s lives and the way their social and cultural subjectivities are shaped. For women in particular, domesticity has been a framework in the formation of private and public identities. Feminist historians and cultural theorists have shown the many ways women have been (and still are) politically, socially, and economically disenfranchised because of the presumed correlation between their reproductive capabilities and suitability to do domestic work (including home maintenance and child care).

In recent decades, scholars have tracked “a domestic turn” in the twenty-first century driven by the upheavals of traditional gender roles in post-war society. Bearing witness to this turn, contemporary art and feminist scholarship continues to explore how our configurations of home shape our understanding of the world. Common issues raised include the distinction

between public and private space, the politics of labour, nationalism and globalism, bodily rights and subjectivities, and how our relationships to objects construct our material lives. ¹⁴

As a research curator, my interest in the home and my methods in this project are indebted to these scholarly discourses and linked to recent discussions in feminist and queer art histories of “new domesticities”. This refers to approaches to material culture that consider domesticity as not only a theme or content for art but also as a critical lens through which to re-examine networks of cultural production and revise canons that privilege certain versions of domesticity (and domestic subjectivities) over others. ¹⁵

These methodologies of “new domesticities” have wide-reaching implications for revisiting and rethinking “kitchen sink” painting and domestic narratives in post-war social realism. For example, when exploring works of art that address key domestic concepts such as the normative family or gendered divisions of domestic labour, we need to account for whose artistic perspectives are shaping these representations of home. This is not to say that we must insist on knowing the artistic intention of depicting domestic life, but instead it means resisting the replication of domesticity in art galleries from the same privileged points of view, and also taking into account what or who is not represented.



Figure 11.

Margaret Mellis, *Woman and Fish II*, 1957, oil on board, 76.2 × 54.6 cm. Collection of Jerwood Collection (JF 217). Digital image courtesy of the estate of Margaret Mellis. Photo courtesy of Jerwood Collection (All rights reserved).

Researching Margaret Mellis' still life *Red Flower* (Fig. 8) in Sheffield's collection led me to examine her early works from the 1950s, including one particular image, *Woman and Fish II* (Fig. 11). The painting depicts a woman in an apron standing over a series of kitchen objects, including a fish in a frying pan, a plate of sausages, a vase of flowers, and a basket. The woman does not appear to be actively engaged with these items but instead ambivalently presides over them.



Figure 12.

Jean Cooke, *Early Portrait of John Bratby, R.A.*, 1954, oil on canvas, 122 × 91.4 cm. Collection of Royal Academy of Arts (03/850). Digital image courtesy of Royal Academy of Arts, London (All rights reserved).

It is highly likely that Mellis knew about the “kitchen sink” painters.¹⁶ Her depiction of the domestic scene in *Woman and Fish II* with the use of an awkward perspective (as Bratby often did) and her loose painterly brushwork surely puts this work in proximity to the genre of “kitchen sink” painting—if not as a part of it, then as a later reaction to it. Given that women at work in the home was a common subject in “kitchen sink” painting (unusually, so was depicting babies), it is important that *Woman and Fish II* is marked as an underrepresented interpretation of domestic experience. To make this point, *Woman and Fish II* has been borrowed for the exhibition in Sheffield from the Jerwood Collection and placed near Bratby’s *Jean and Table Top* (Fig. 1).

Further research into Bratby's painting, *Jean and Table Top* in Sheffield's collection, revealed another story: Bratby's wife, Jean, who was also a painter, painted interior scenes at the same time as her husband in the 1950s. In a striking work, *Early Portrait of John Bratby* (1954) (Fig. 12), Jean painted John with an almost an identical composition to the image he made of her in *Jean and Table Top* earlier that same year—but there are differences. In her work, John appears comfortable at their breakfast table with his legs crossed and the arrangement of two plates implies Jean's recent company for their meal. It is a far more relaxed and companionable image of domesticity than *Jean and Table Top*, with John presented as an unassuming and casual subject. Greg Salter has speculated that Jean's depiction undermined how John saw himself according to his many self-portraits. For Salter, John Bratby negotiated his unstable masculinity within paintings of a domestic sphere with which he couldn't connect. Jean's painting can be read as a remedial interpretation of John's unease at home, but also as a powerful reimagining of her husband in the same pose she once assumed in his painting.

Jean and John were known to have a tempestuous relationship with several sources indicating that he physically abused Jean.¹⁷ A close friend of Bratby has suggested that this was due to Jean's artistic success in the early 1950s, before John's career was aligned to "kitchen sink" painting's ascending fame. Jean's painting of John in many ways then seems a riposte to the painting her husband made of her as a dull subject. Bratby once said, "I sometimes painted my wife Jean Cooke as a particular person, not with affection. She was someone to paint".¹⁸ In *Early Portrait of John Bratby*, we see a rare moment in art history, with a corrective visual statement issuing from the objectified artist's muse. Here, Jean assumes authority by placing John into the position he put her in, but softens his affect into a version she chose to present to the viewer. *Jean and Table Top* will be in the Sheffield exhibition side-by-side with a reproduction of Jean's painting of John accompanied by interpretation that compares these two paintings in order to—quite literally—address another perspective of John Bratby's "kitchen sink" domesticity.

While the project at Sheffield will continue to undertake research into the collection, the exhibition showcases how working with local groups can impact on collections' research and curatorial practice. By reflecting on the personal and collective themes that materialised during the collaborations, a valuable dialogic process emerged. In the exhibition, this is evident in the interpretation where the groups' comments are prominently displayed on the artworks' labels, showing the diversity of responses generated. A video area in the gallery also features one of the groups of older adults sharing anecdotes in a series of interviews about their memories of home in the post-war period. Adjacent to the video is a display of the social history collection objects that were used to stimulate their recollections. These items

also correspond to objects that feature in the works of art in the exhibition, especially in the pop art works, including branded products and domestic appliances. The groups were later invited to the gallery to see all of the different communities' contributions to the exhibition.

This opportunity provided an alternative means for local Sheffield residents who did not typically engage with the museum or fine art to both access the collection in a focused way and to develop a sense of ownership over the cultural landscape of their city. The responses from the groups was overwhelmingly positive in this regard with almost all participants suggesting they would return to the museum again. From an institutional perspective, this collaborative approach proved key in decentring traditional curatorial authority as we developed the exhibition. It also enabled new research into Sheffield's post-war British art collection and new ways of engaging with post-war British art history to showcase the missing stories embedded in its public collections.

Footnotes

- ¹ David Sylvester first used the term "kitchen sink" painting after seeing John Bratby's work in 1953. He wrote, "the post war generation takes us back from the studio to the kitchen ... an inventory which includes every kind of food and drink, and even the babies nappies on the line. Everything but the kitchen sink? The kitchen sink too." David Sylvester, "The Kitchen Sink", *Encounter*, December 1954.
- ² Only two exhibitions considered Peter Coker as a fifth artist in the group. See, Frances Spalding, *The Kitchen Sink Painters* (London: Mayor Gallery in association with Julian Hartnoll, at the Mayor Gallery, March–April 1991, and *The Kitchen Sink Painters: John Bratby, Peter Coker, Derrick Greaves, Edward Middleditch, Jack Smith*, Galerie Michael Haas, Berlin, March–April 1995. Key publications which assume that the group consists only of the four male artists include: James Hyman, *The Battle For Realism: Figurative Art in Britain During the Cold War 1945–1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001) and Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2017).
- ³ Tim Hilton said "Was there a link between Kitchen Sink and RCA Pop? I think so." See Tim Hilton (1988), as quoted by James Hyman in *Derrick Greaves: From Kitchen Sink To Shangri-La* (London: Lund Humphries, 2007), 165.
- ⁴ Jean took Bratby's surname when they were married in 1953 and used his surname on her works of art mostly in the 1950s until reverting to her unmarried name of "Cooke" on her husband's insistence, so that their work would not be confused. Jean Cooke is the name by which her work is known today. See, Andrew Lambirth, "Jean Cooke: Painter of Wit and Subtlety", *The Independent*, 11 August 2008, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/jean-cooke-painter-of-wit-and-subtlety-890262.html>.
- ⁵ I am indebted to the scholarship of Greg Salter for examining this topic in depth. See Greg Salter, *Domesticity and Masculinity in 1950s British Painting*, unpublished PhD thesis, School of Art History and World Art Studies, University of East Anglia, 2013.
- ⁶ Jack Smith, *Ark* [1960] as cited by Nead in *The Tiger in the Smoke*, 368.
- ⁷ John Berger, "For the Future", *New Statesman and Nation*, 19 January 1952, 64.
- ⁸ See David Sylvester, "The Kitchen Sink", *Encounter*, December, 1954.
- ⁹ With the exception of John Bratby, the artists changed technique and subject matter after 1956, moving towards more abstract styles (Smith) or pop (Greaves). For a more detailed history of the last few years of the Kitchen Sink artists, see Hyman, *The Battle For Realism*, 178–186.
- ¹⁰ See Salter, *Domesticity and Masculinity in 1950s British Painting*.
- ¹¹ We are grateful to the residents of Gilbert Court and Applegarth Close and the Guinness Partnership staff for their collaboration on this project.
- ¹² According to the 2011 census, the largest post-war migrant group in Sheffield is the Pakistani community. Sheffield also has large Caribbean, Indian, Bangladeshi, Somali, Yemeni, and Chinese communities. See "Sheffield's Population", Sheffield City Council, 2011 Census, <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/your-city-council/population-in-sheffield>.
- ¹³ For a database of twentieth-century BAME artists' works of art in UK public collections, see "BAM National Collections Audit", led by Dr Anjalie Dalal-Clayton, *Black Artists and Modernism*, <http://www.blackartistsmodernism.co.uk/black-artists-in-public-collections/>.

- 14 For just a few examples of this scholarship see, Alexandra Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and the Global Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2011).
- 15 For a fuller discussion of the kind of scholarship this approach encompasses, see the Special Issue of *Oxford Art Journal* "Feminist Domesticities", 40, no. 1 (March 2017) including the "Introduction: Feminist Domesticities", by Jo Applin and Francesca Berry, "Introduction: Feminist Domesticities", *Oxford Art Journal* 40, no. 1 (March 2017): 1-5. doi:[10.1093/oxartj/kcx007](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/kcx007).
- 16 Mellis' husband at the time, Adrian Stokes, was close friends with the critic David Sylvester.
- 17 For more on this issue, see Salter, *Domesticity and Masculinity in 1950s British Painting*, 57.
- 18 John Bratby, as quoted by Greg Salter, *Domesticity and Masculinity in 1950s British Painting*, 45.

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1964: A Year of Exhibitions

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, the study of art criticism has come to the fore as one of the most promising new areas of art-historical research. This development owes much to the policy undertaken by recently established journals and related editorial initiatives. The journal *Word & Image*, launched by John Dixon Hunt in 1985, opened the door to wide-ranging discussions of the subject—from classical ekphrasis to the present day. In 1988, Norman Bryson initiated a series of studies by French- as well as English-speaking authors that was significantly named “Cambridge New Art History and Criticism”.¹ In the following decade, Cambridge University Press sponsored what was the first comprehensive attempt to make available to contemporary scholars the wealth of critical material that was lying largely unseen in the French periodical press of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1991, under the general editorship of Francis Haskell, Neil McWilliam and his colleagues produced two comprehensive bibliographies of French Salon Criticism that covered the entire period extending from 1699 to 1851.² A pioneering example of the dividend that could be obtained from such a thorough scrutiny of period criticism was Richard Wrigley’s *The Origins of French Art Criticism* dating from 1993.³ By this point, Michael Fried was already arguing for a methodology that made use of critical material with a view to challenging traditional strategies for interpreting visual works of art. In his book *Manet’s Modernism* (1996), he claimed that the paintings of Manet and his fellow painters could be best understood within the terminology of a contemporary discourse of painting that had its own history, rather than by paying exhaustive attention to the reading of individual works.⁴

This trajectory demonstrates the way in which art criticism has been brought into the fold of art history, to some degree as a direct outcome of new publishing ventures. But it is no accident that the foregoing examples relate primarily to the study of French art history and criticism. A rather different argument needs to be followed with regard to the case of British art criticism, though it is equally clear that the task has been recognised as timely. At least from the outset of the nineteenth century, the most significant art criticism is coloured not so much by the influence of a critical discourse embedded in past theory as by a direct and acknowledged acquaintance with artistic practice. William Hazlitt is doubtless the first clear example of an English critic who embeds within his writing the recollection of his own, admittedly quite limited, experience as a painter. John Ruskin needs no defence as an artist of exceptional talent in his own right. Indeed, the current popularity of Ruskin, which is manifested in the many events of his bicentenary year, sends a strong signal that criticism and creativity need not be divorced. It is surely significant that Tate Archives have already developed

research projects on the papers of two critics who were also well recognised as artists: Adrian Stokes, whose critical output mainly took the form of book-length studies with a historical component; and Robert Melville, whose critical practice took the form of regular articles for *The New Statesman* and *The Architectural Review*. The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art has recently struck out in this direction by acquiring the archive of Brian Sewell. The combative critic of the *Evening Standard* surely had more column inches at his disposal than any of his colleagues, and however debatable his conclusions, his arguments were invariably well informed and challenging. Such an acquisition is a striking way of proving the Centre's commitment as "the only archive repository in the UK formally acknowledged by the National Archives as a collecting institution for the papers of art critics".⁵

This online presentation is an opening contribution to what will be an ongoing series published in *British Art Studies* called "Animating the Archive". It is designed as a contribution to the context that has already been briefly outlined here. It makes use of the distinctive possibilities available through online publication in the belief that new technical features can stimulate new directions of research. Rather than standing alone as a polished piece of research, it also asks the question: what new avenues of research in this particular area might we fruitfully take? It goes without saying that these writings by an embryonic critic are not especially significant in themselves. But the specific form in which they are presented, ranging from journal notes through typescripts to printed publication, opens up a material dimension that the online facility can present for scrutiny. What is more, the documentary value of the critical comments is surely enhanced by the fact that 1964 was indeed not just a "Year of Exhibitions", but a year in which several exhibitions of diverse but equivalent importance took place: America's current stars, Rauschenberg and Johns at the Whitechapel Gallery (interspersed with Britain's "New Generation") and the unprecedentedly broad Gulbenkian exhibition of recent international art at the Tate Gallery that was upstaged (at least in this critic's book) by the lucid and coherent display achieved by documenta III at Kassel.

This focus on exhibitions brings to the fore another respect in which recent art history has successfully incorporated a previously little studied, yet vital, aspect of historical reception. Some of this interest may be traced to the posthumous publication of Francis Haskell's book, *The Ephemeral Museum* (2000), subtitled "Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition".⁶ Haskell had been assiduous in reviewing art exhibitions for various periodical publications from the mid-1950s onwards. The unprecedentedly broad display of French painting, *De David à Delacroix*, which opened at the Grand Palais, Paris, in November 1974 provoked what was perhaps his most vivid response. As he rightly noted, this was an art-historical milestone: it gave "the first opportunity for a large European public to see some of the results

of this radical reappraisal of one crucial period of French art.” But the effect was more momentous than that. As Haskell suggested in a striking phrase, viewing such an exhibition was “an experience comparable with trying on a new pair of spectacles”.⁷ It is surely significant that Haskell chose to define the change in perception in terms of a specifically technical modification. When putting on a new pair of spectacles, we not only see new things—we see everything differently.

The question then arises: how can such a vivid experience of art exhibitions be incorporated into the history of art? One method which has proved its worth is to recreate the ambiance of a past exhibition, ideally within the space where it would have been originally installed. This was the achievement of David Solkin’s 2001 exhibition *Art on the Line*, held in the Great Room at Somerset House that had served for many years to house the Annual Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts.⁸ A judicious selection of works was achieved, not claiming to reproduce any one exhibition but carefully conserving the important distinctions of genre and scale in its installation. Yet this enlightening show was in its turn, by its very nature, ephemeral. The recent initiative of the Paul Mellon Centre, working in conjunction with the Royal Academy, has been to put online, and make permanently available, the catalogues of all the Annual Exhibitions that took place at the Academy between 1769 and 2018. Utilising the resources of digital display, this project makes it possible to view in considerable detail a large proportion of the works that were placed on exhibition, while at the same time facilitating many individual tracks of research into specific artists, genres, and themes.⁹

This present exercise in “animating the archive” is, of course, far more limited in its scope. It is by comparison a minimal project, dealing with the exhibitions of hardly more than one year and the writings of one critic. But it will hopefully prove a stimulus to other exercises and experiments which are suited to the possibilities of online commentary and display. The justification for making these writings available is that they were indeed “eye-opening” for me, and hopefully they still communicate something of the excitement of my experience. I was at the time a graduate student at King’s College, Cambridge, moving from Cambridge to Paris in autumn 1964, when I began my second year of postgraduate research in the history of historiography. The publications that offered me a platform as a critic were precisely those that had welcomed Francis Haskell’s early reviews in the first years of the 1950s: the undergraduate literary magazine *Granta*, and *The Cambridge Review*, published by Heffers (the university printer and bookshop), and edited by a succession of postgraduates and younger fellows. By comparison with professional critics writing for national newspapers and magazines, I was allotted a generous amount of space, and managed to work out some of the main parameters that would define the approach of my first book on

contemporary art, *Experimental Painting* (1970).¹⁰ The unpolished character of the texts perhaps makes it easier to discern the variety of stimuli that I derived from my eclectic reading, as well as registering the impact produced by the sight of so much exciting new work. My movement from the figurative art of Bacon and Giacometti to the interpretation of Ian Hamilton Finlay's concrete poetry could be seen (quoting the words of one peer reviewer for this feature) as “the story of a transformation in thinking”.

No attempt will be made to reproduce the many works of art that are cited. What will be shown are reproductions of the catalogue illustrations. Since this is essentially an archival project, the focus is placed specifically on the role that these images played in accompanying and contextualising the critical writings. With this end in mind, the successive compositional stages of a review—involving a handwritten draft and a typescript—are also brought to the fore. Extracts from a contemporary journal are shown in their original form (and dramatised in a spoken recording) while samples of my own visual work at the time are included. The form and design of the respective exhibition catalogues will be a further feature that comes into prominence in a particular series of images. As a necessary concomitant to the study of exhibitions, the study of the extensive history of exhibition catalogues is now attracting an increasing amount of attention.¹¹ My own concern with the aesthetic and technical aspects of typography dates back to my school days. My interest in the varieties of lettering was rekindled in the period covered by this display. In their overall design and in their typography, the catalogues that greeted the spectators of the 1960s can be understood to enshrine a definite message of their own.

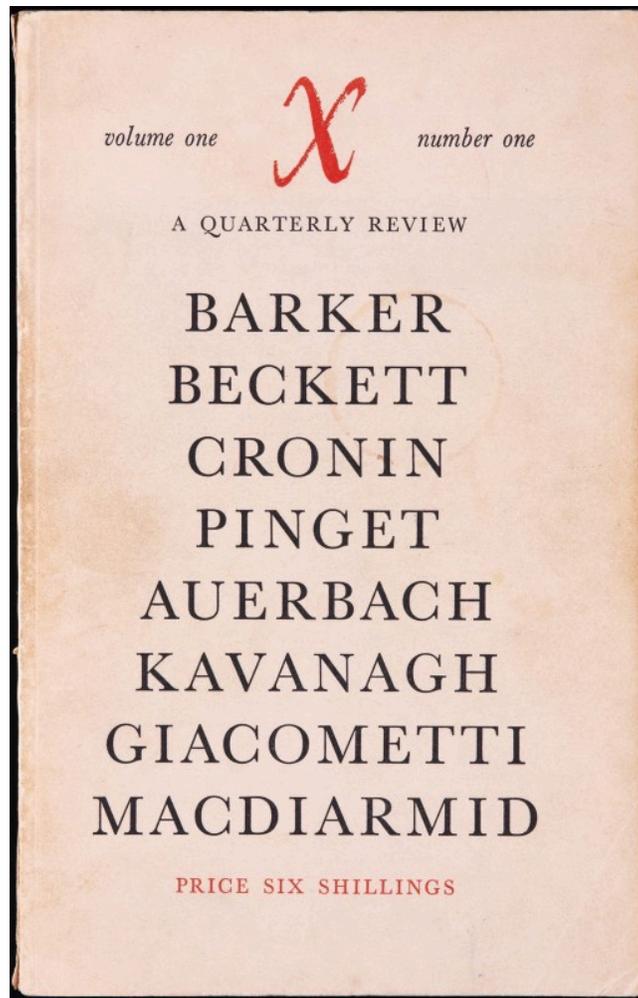


Figure 1.

X - A Quarterly Review, 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1959): jacket. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

X

X was my point of entry into the world of art by way of little magazines. With its generous format and list of contributors outlined in bold capitals, it caught my eye among the periodicals displayed in the Winchester branch of W.H. Smith. I was still at school in the autumn term of 1959, though my forthcoming entrance to Cambridge had been confirmed by Christmas. Having myself edited a school literary magazine, titled *Ariel*, I was intrigued by the promise of this new publication. I subscribed to it for all of the subsequent seven issues. *X* ceased publication in 1962.

What strikes me in retrospect is the point that *X* had adopted, from the start, two major directions in policy that might be considered to be somewhat disparate. On the one hand, it featured English figurative painting, with an

emphasis on the traditional genre of portraiture. On the other hand, it published experimental writing of various kinds by European authors. This approach testified to the adventurous and, in a certain sense, complementary interests of the three editors. They were the South African-born poet David Wright, the Irish painter Patrick Swift, and the British poet David Gascoyne, who maintained close connections with the French surrealist movement. I noted in particular the focus (beginning in the first issue), on the recent writings of Samuel Beckett and those of his less well-known Swiss-born friend, Robert Pinget, who was one of the pioneers of the French "nouveau roman". Among visual artists, the Swiss-born painter and sculptor, Alberto Giacometti, who had gained the attention of Parisian writers like Jean Genet, also featured in this first issue with reproductions of drawings and texts translated from French. In subsequent issues, several painters associated (as was Swift) with the Beaux Arts Gallery in London came into focus. Those who were given full-page black and white photographic reproductions on coated paper included Francis Bacon, Frank Auerbach, and Michael Andrews.

I would continue to keep up with the work of virtually all these figures. The novels of Robert Pinget were the subject of my first major essay outside of school and university publications (*London Magazine* 4, no. 7 [1964]). Before 1960, I had already had the opportunity of calculating the unexpected weight of Auerbach's paint-laden pictures when I helped to hang an Arts Council travelling show of current work in the school museum at Winchester. I later visited one of his exhibitions at the Beaux Arts in the early 1960s, and enquired timorously about the price of his drawings. But I was scared off by the piercing gaze of the gallery director, Helen Lessore, who enquired if this suspiciously youthful visitor was acting on behalf of someone else! Michael Andrews' large painting, *The Garden Party*, became very familiar to me when it was lent by the Gulbenkian Foundation to hang in the Dining Hall of Rutherford College, when I joined the University of Kent in 1967. Together with several other works by Auerbach, this splendid piece was discussed (and illustrated in colour) in my book, *Experimental Painting* (1970).

Giacometti and Bacon were, however, the two artists whom I found most challenging in the period leading up to 1964. This was unquestionably because of their intense preoccupation with the issue of figuration, and the radical approach they adopted to their respective media. In *Experimental Painting*, I classed the works of both under the rubric of "Destruction", together with the "Autodestructive" art of Gustav Metzger. The other directions that I chose to follow there were "Abstraction", "Construction", and "Reduction" (a category that contained Johns and Rauschenberg).

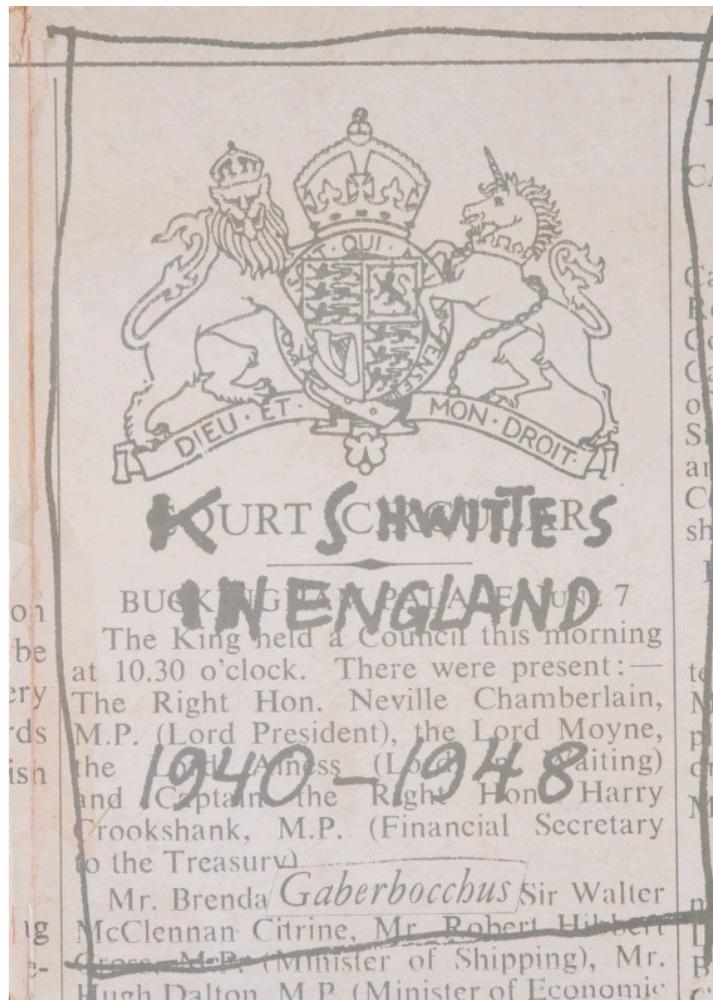


Figure 2.

Stefan Themerson, *Kurt Schwitters in England, 1940-1948*, (London: Gaberbocchus, 1958): jacket. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

Early Readings

Two books that I acquired in 1960 and 1961 stand out as pointers to my future interests.

I bought Stefan Themerson's *Kurt Schwitters in England* in 1960 with prize money from my performance in the Hawkins English Literature competition at Winchester College. Published in 1958, this was an extraordinarily ambitious experiment in book design, which faithfully mirrored the anarchic versatility of the artist himself. Themerson himself later accepted our invitation to come and speak on Schwitters to the Cambridge Society of Arts, whose programme I organised jointly with Philip Steadman in 1962/1963. The talk was notable for the fact that Themerson handed round some of the collages and small, improvised sculptures that were illustrated in his book. I

reviewed some of the new publications by Themerson's Gaberbocchus Press in *Granta*, which was then still a student-run publication in Cambridge, picking up on the point that "Gaberbochus" was a translation of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" in order to exclaim: "Gaberbochus still burbles as it comes!". Themerson later became a friend, and would contribute to a thematic issue on "The Boundaries of the Humanities", which I published as Editor of *20th Century Studies* in 1974.

Richard Hamilton published his typographic version of "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even" in 1960. It was an expensive item. In a diary entry of 23 August 1961, I stated that "Duchamp's book of preparation for the Bride etc." was a purchase that I wanted to make: "because the creative process is so important in an age without much spontaneity—and to an artist without an art-form." Luckily, a young woman whom I had met in the Dordogne (while serving as English tutor to the children of Josephine Baker) was working in a London bookshop. She obtained it for me at the trade price late in 1961. Duchamp was then steadily acquiring a notoriety that he never lost in subsequent decades. My copy suffered in the 1970s by being loaned to students. One of them kindly supplemented the damaged article with a new copy of the third edition, published in 1976 by the German practitioner and theorist of typography, Hansjörg Mayer.

Besides allowing the reader to follow the intricate stages of the composition of Duchamp's "Bride" or *Large Glass*, the work could be considered as an exercise in virtuoso typography, which drew attention to the eccentric formation, as well as clarifying the conceptual message, of Duchamp's manuscript notes. The supporting essays by George Heard Hamilton and Richard Hamilton were reserved to the end, and set very small in a uniform sans-serif typeface.

I attached great importance to both Schwitters and Duchamp in interpreting the art of the early 1960s. Both of them came to the fore in the first paragraph of my review of the 1964 Rauschenberg exhibition. Both of these books also called my attention to the infinite diversity of letter forms, and the potentiality they held for expression, as well as communication. They helped to inform my developing interest in concrete poetry (as signalled by my essay of November 1964 in *Image*). Hansjörg Mayer was the first to publish one of my concrete poems, in a portfolio of work by English-speaking poets, which appeared in 1965.

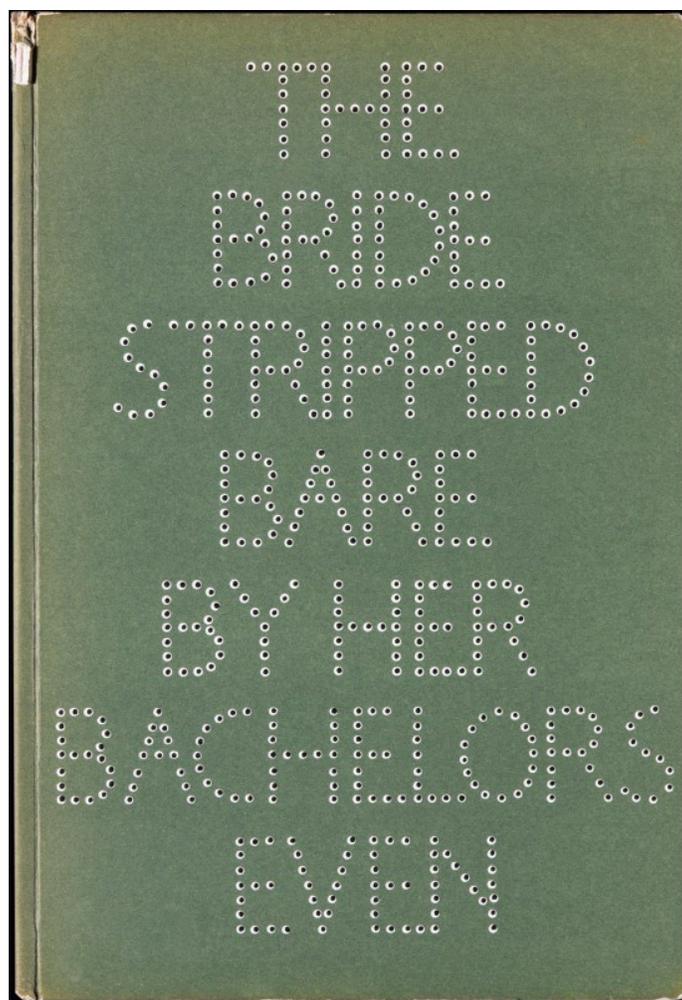


Figure 3. Richard Hamilton, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. A Typographic Version of Marcel Duchamp's *Green Box*, (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co., 1960): jacket. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

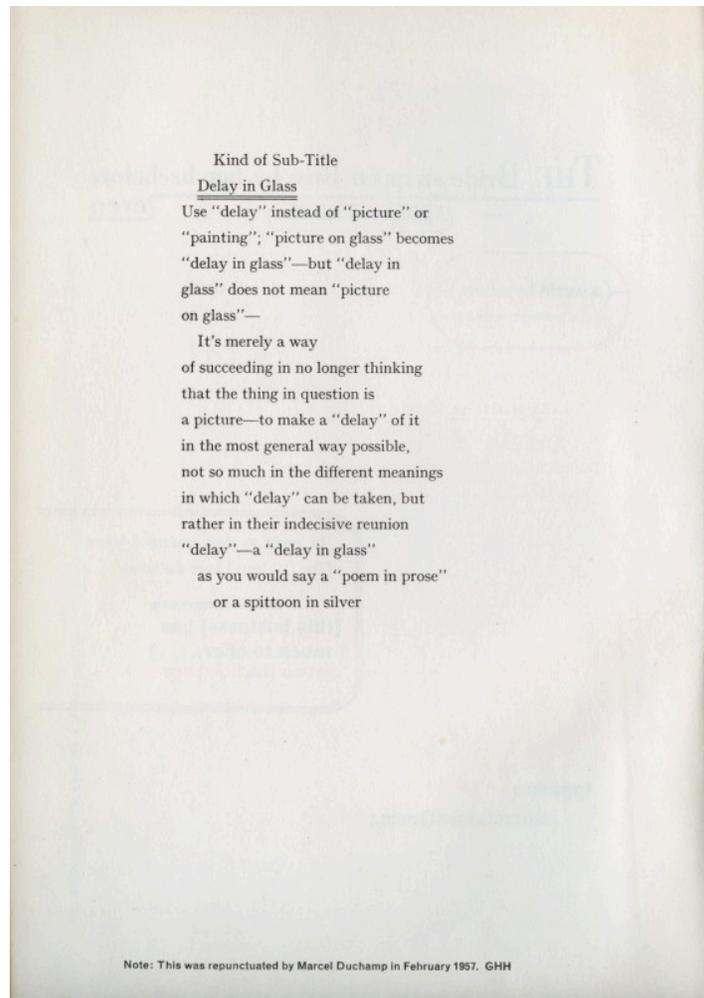


Figure 4.

Richard Hamilton, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. A Typographic Version of Marcel Duchamp's *Green Box*, (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co., 1960): 1. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

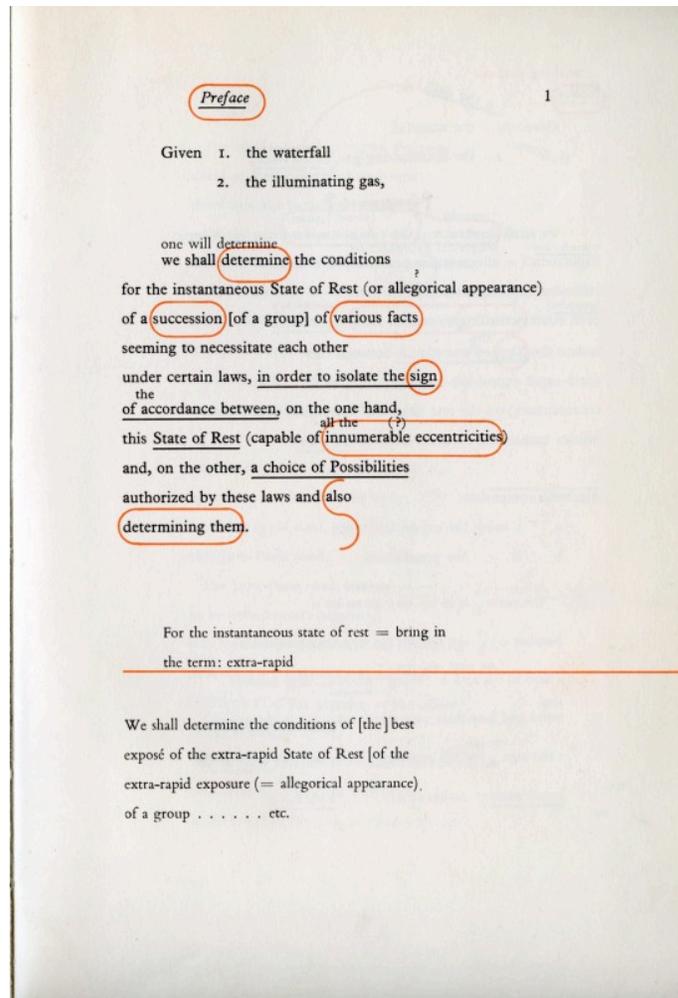


Figure 5. Richard Hamilton, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. A Typographic Version of Marcel Duchamp's Green Box*, (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co., 1960): 1. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

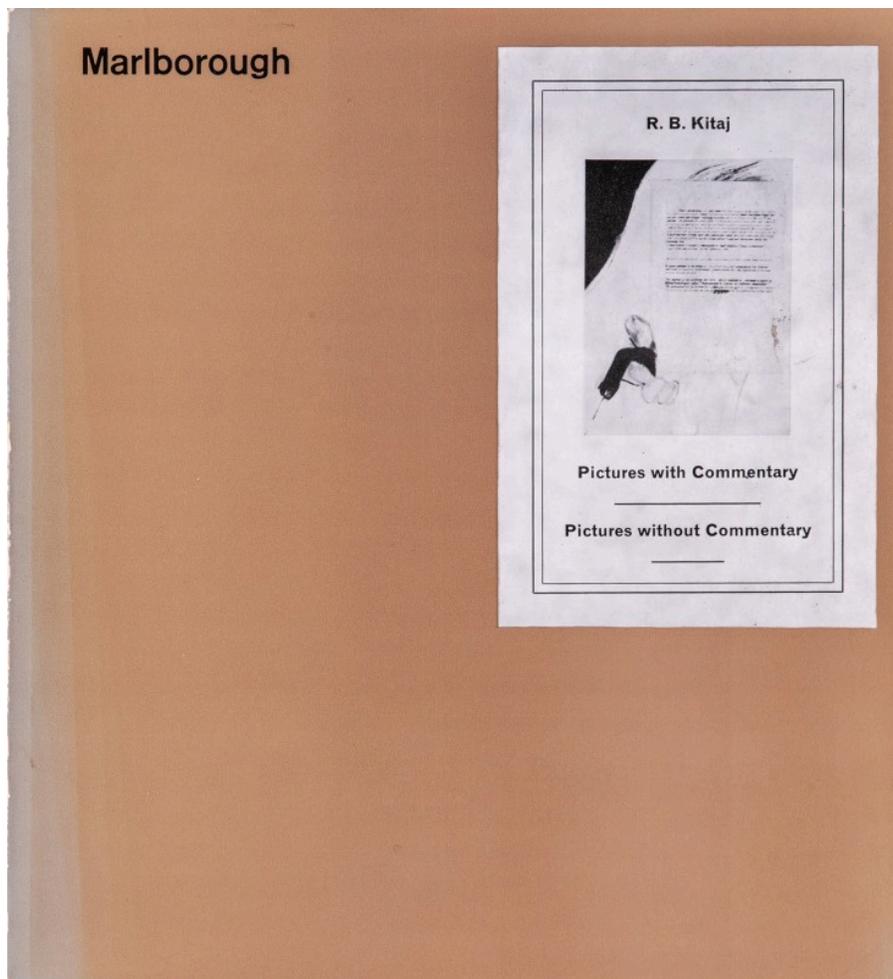


Figure 6.

R.B. Kitaj: *Pictures with Commentary, Pictures Without Commentary*, (Marlborough Gallery, London, 1963): jacket. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

Hosting Larry Rivers and Discovering Gombrich

My reaction to the exhibition of R.B. Kitaj at the Marlborough Gallery in 1963 was one of complete bafflement. I was entirely unprepared for the iconographical complexity, bearing as it did on historical figures whom I barely knew like Rosa Luxemburg and Walter Benjamin. Although I was struck by the originality of his technique, I could not relate it to what I was beginning to appreciate about the contemporary development of American painting. Though I must also have noticed his presence in subsequent exhibitions like *documenta*, where he was represented by his figure drawings, I had little to say about them.

By contrast, I was responsive to the work of the American painter Larry Rivers. This was probably because his profile was particularly high in Britain at the time. He had given talks on the BBC under the title, "Larry Rivers: A Self-Portrait", which were published in *The Listener* (11 January and 18 January 1962). Of course, the talks themselves have been delivered without visual illustrations. But Rivers had employed a striking verbal image to convey the intended impact of his paintings. This clever vehicle of self-promotion was probably what led us to invite him to give a talk to the Cambridge University Society of Arts in autumn 1963. Rivers described the shock effect that he wished to instil in his paintings as comparable to that of taking hold of a deer by its antlers, and having the antlers break off unexpectedly, thus remaining fixed in one's hand. Rivers certainly did not disappoint us on his visit to Cambridge, having mysteriously picked up a woman companion on the train. In the middle of the modest meal which we had prepared for him in our garret in Green Street, he exclaimed: "Now I'm going to give myself away. Have you any Teachers?"

I had been bewildered at Kitaj's reference in his Marlborough catalogue to the obstructive attitude of the Warburg Institute. At the time, I had no knowledge of this institution's existence. Nonetheless, by far most important theoretical stimulus to my critical writing in 1964 was Ernst Gombrich's collection of essays, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*. Although this had been published in 1963, I doubt whether I had read any of the essays before the end of that year. My interest in Giacometti and Francis Bacon, much advertised in my Munich notes of September 1963, followed quite different lines. I was fascinated by Delacroix, both as a painter and as a writer. In fact, it was precisely because of the lucidity of his introspective commentary that I had begun to look closely at the quality of his paintings. I had also been captivated, with reference to Giacometti in particular, by the philosophical and humanistic interpretations of art elaborated by French authorities like Genet and Sartre. Though it was published in *Granta* as late as autumn 1964, my essay on Francis Bacon, which also involved Giacometti, clearly reflected this reading.

Gombrich's actual subject matter impinged hardly at all, at that time or subsequently, on any direct treatment of the varieties of contemporary art, let alone on the work of Rauschenberg and Johns, with which I was confronted in 1964. But he drew on references to domains such as experimental psychology in order to present a coherent and compelling theory of representation as such. This soon appeared to me to be an indispensable tool in coming to terms with the art of Rauschenberg in particular. The essay that provided Gombrich with his memorable title was uppermost in my mind when I wrote my essay on Rauschenberg for *The Cambridge Review*.

A second essay from the same collection by Gombrich, titled “Expression and Communication”, was no less important in stimulating the new ideas on the interpretation of concrete poetry. These were developed for the first time in my essay for *Image*, published in November 1964.

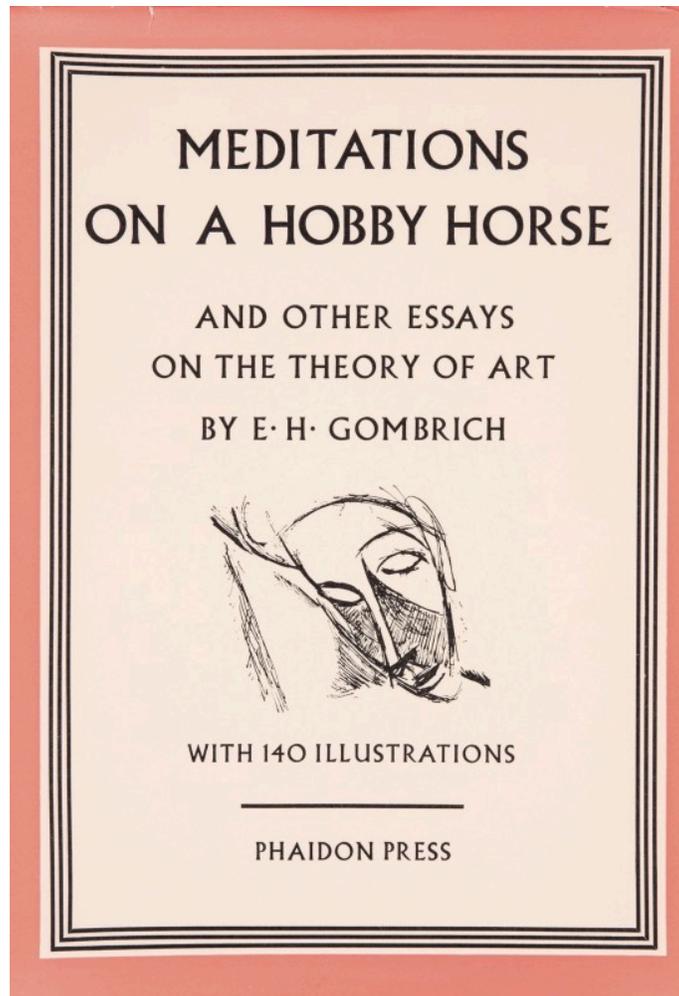


Figure 7. Ernst Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, (London: Phaidon, 1963): jacket. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

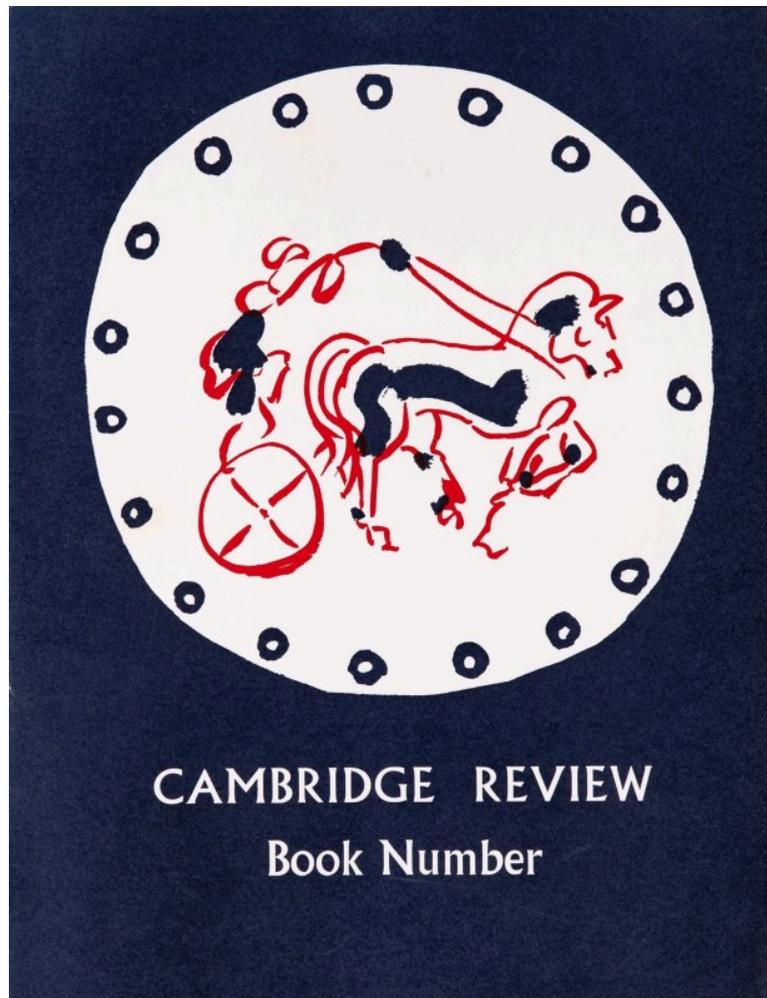


Figure 8.
Cambridge Review, Book Number, (University of Cambridge, 1964): jacket. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

Englishness and Book Design

The paperback edition of Pevsner's *The Englishness of English Art* was sent to me for review early in 1964. My review appeared in *Granta* on 14 May 1964. While welcoming the chapters on "Perpendicular England" and "Picturesque England", I deplored the fact that no revisions had been made to the section on "modern British painting", which smacked too much of the original date of publication in 1955. Pevsner had limited himself to a brief mention of Christopher Wood, John Piper, and Eric Ravilious. I asked if he could have given us "some rather more contemporary Aunt Sallies"?

Anglia TV, situated in studios in Norwich, chose to invite me as an art critic to a couple of televised round tables on contemporary themes held in spring 1964. One topic on which I was asked to speak was the contemporary

exhibition of Rauschenberg at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. Also under discussion between the participants in these broadcasts was Ernest Hemingway's vivid memoir of his experience of Paris in the 1920s, which involved reminiscences of many of the outstanding artists living there at the time.

The designer selected by Peregrine books for the new edition of Pevsner was Herbert Spencer. Whatever Pevsner's reservations about the direction of post-war English art, this was a crisp, rectilinear design, forming a modernist collage out of the geometrically arranged sans-serif titles and photographic details of some of the historic buildings discussed. Spencer had founded the magazine *Typographica* in 1949, and, in 1963, he published Dom Sylvester Houédard's article on the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay—the first discussion on the subject of concrete poetry to appear in Britain.

The design of the book jacket of the Hemingway memoir commissioned by Jonathan Cape was by the German-born artist Hans Tisdall, who had begun working with them in the 1950s. Rather than adopting a specific typeface, Tisdall devises an overall composition out of his hand-drawn lettering. His distinctive letter forms were, however, ultimately converted into a typeface by the epigrapher and letterer, Michael Harvey, a pupil of Reynolds Stone and, as a stone-carver and letterer, one of the poet Ian Hamilton Finlay's most important long-term collaborators.

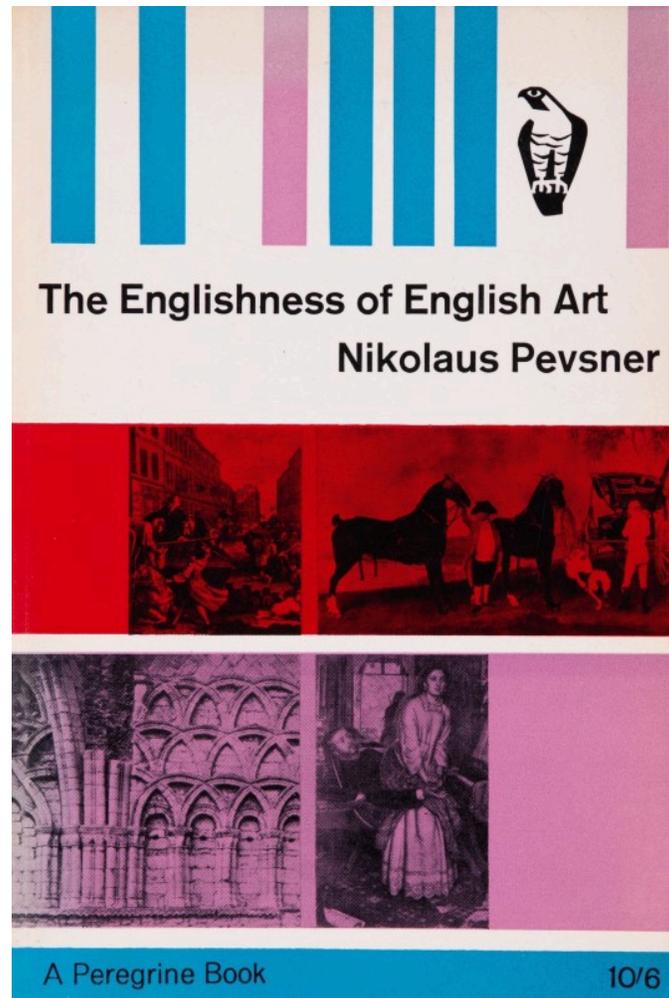


Figure 9.

Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, (London: Penguin, 1964): jacket design by Herbert Spencer. Reviewed in *Granta*, 14 April 1964. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

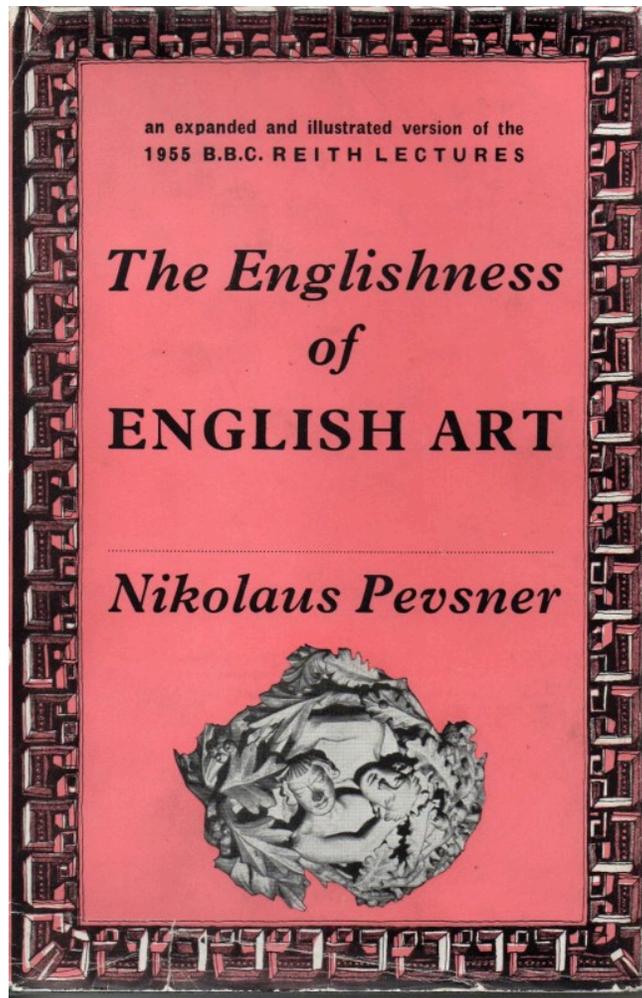


Figure 10.
Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness Of English Art*,
(London: The Architectural Press, 1956): jacket.

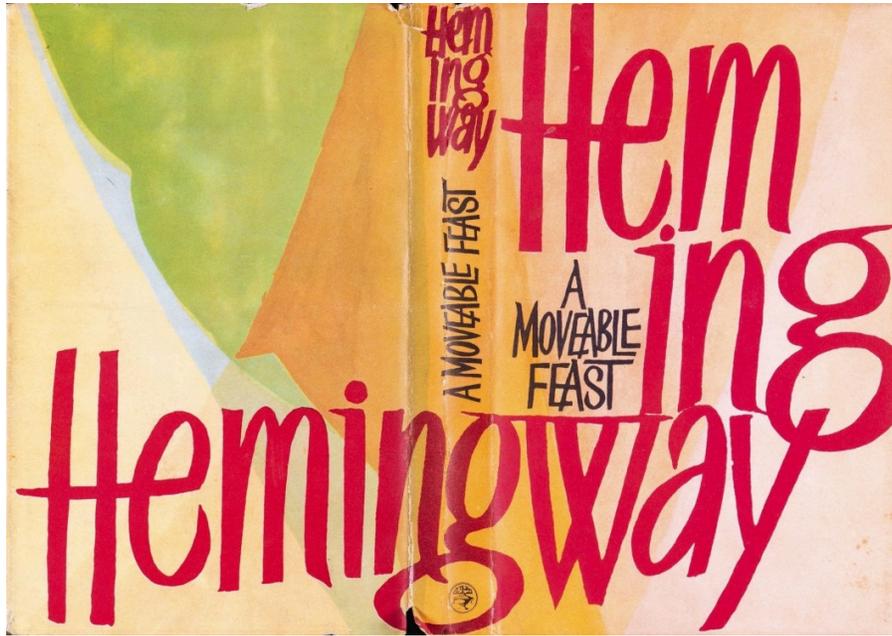


Figure 11.

Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964): jacket design by Hans Tisdall. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

A Visit to Munich

For a fortnight in September 1963, I visited Munich, staying in a student house close to the artistic quarter of Schwabing which had been recommended to me by a Cambridge friend. The ostensible reason for this visit was to brush up my German, which had been neglected since a perfunctory study for a few terms at school. I was beginning my second year as a postgraduate student, having narrowed down my field of study to the French politician, historian, and man of letters, Prosper de Barante. It had been impressed upon me by my supervisor, Herbert Butterfield, that the ability to read German academic texts was a prerequisite for anyone wishing to investigate the issues of the history of historiography.

I did take this mission very seriously, to the extent of bringing a copy of the works of the early nineteenth-century German dramatist Georg Büchner with me, and reading through his play on the rivalries of the French Revolution, *Dantons Tod* (*Danton's Death*). I had probably become acquainted with the writing of Büchner because another of his plays supplied the plot for Anton Berg's opera, *Wozzeck*. But this was not the only text that I was studying in Munich. I also brought with me the Pléiade edition of the work of Benjamin Constant, the French liberal politician and author, who was at one stage a close ally of Barante. The third, and probably the most absorbing, of my sources for study was, however, my edition of the *Journal* of Delacroix.

Perhaps it was the repeated perusal of this extraordinary record of Delacroix's inner life that impelled me to write my own journal, which commented retrospectively on the first ten days of my visit to Munich.

This interest in Delacroix's intimate writings was undoubtedly touched off by visiting the centenary exhibition of his paintings in the Grande Galerie of the Louvre. The exhibition opened in May 1963, and I would have seen it in the early summer, when I was also following the critical reception of this major artistic event. My copy of the catalogue still contains a cutting from *The Times* of 6 August 1963, titled "The Debt that Modern Painting Owes to Delacroix", in which reference is also made to "the active intelligence so manifest in the Journal". But it was of course Delacroix's art, and not his writing, that galvanised me initially, and indeed it was one painting in particular: his *Femmes d'Algers dans leur appartement* (first displayed at the 1834 Salon in Paris).

I penned a rapid sketch of this painting on the reverse of a letter which bears the date 27 June 1963. It shares the little sheet of paper with a list of book references that include Büchner and the Delacroix *Journal*, as well as featuring a few other titles relevant to my impending visit to Munich: a German Dictionary and Erich Heller's well-known study of modern German philosophers, *Disinherited Mind*. But the selection of this particular painting for my own amateurish efforts at reproduction can surely be explained by the fact that I had seen one of Picasso's virtuoso variations on the same work, dated 1955, in the Picasso exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1960. In January 1964, I was still experimenting with this motif, this time in watercolour, though I decided to cut out only the two right-hand figures in the composition from what must have been an unsatisfactory whole. Two oil paintings, one small and the other large in scale, eventuated from this series of studies, though by that point any reminiscence of Delacroix's original painting was far from obvious.

The two sketches are illustrated here to underline a point which also becomes clear in my journal. At the same time as I was pursuing my German reading agenda, I was painting my own topographical watercolours of the city and its surroundings. I had been accumulating similar studies for several years, and so was able to make retrospective comparisons, for example, between the subject of the Frauenkirch seen from the "English Garden", and a previous view of the Edinburgh skyline seen from Inverleith House. I expressed the feeling that these Munich studies were the best that I had ever done. Not surprisingly, this enthusiasm over my own paintings spills across into my commentary on the art that I was discovering at the same time in the Munich galleries, from Dürer and Altdorfer to Erich Heckel. And it is evident in my empathetic description of some of the architectural monuments around the city, such as the Nymphenburg Palace and the rococo Theatine Church.

As regards my art criticism, the journal makes a prediction that was not fulfilled: “My articles on Delacroix and Giacometti are just about ready to write.” My prior experience of the major Giacometti exhibition at the Beyeler Gallery in Basel was indeed, as can be seen in my entry, the first vivid recollection that was prompted by the writing of this journal. But the point remains that both Giacometti and Delacroix continued for a while to be central points of reference for my critical work. This is made very clear in my subsequent article on Francis Bacon for *Granta* (17 October 1964), which takes the work of both artists as points of reference for understanding the historical significance of his art. My short “Note from Paris” (*Granta*, 28 November 1964) also picks up on “recent remarks” by Giacometti in favour of “Pop art”. Finally, in my *Experimental Painting* (1970), I once more approached the work of Bacon by way of Giacometti and Delacroix.



Figure 12.
Stephen Bann, Schloss Nymphenburg, Munich, watercolour, 1963.

Thursday: September 12th 1968. Munich.
I have decided to write down what I have done here
in the past ten days, as a corrective to my perpetual
habit of sacrificing the present to a still uncertain
future. Yesterday letters from home & from Wichita
reached me. I still don't know if I am to
spend some days at Schwarz, but care less, try
attempt to care less. so :-
Tuesday 5th September. I left my family at Belfort
& eventually managed to see the Giacometti
exhibition at Basel, which had proved so elusive.
Reading about & waiting for such a long time
until it was possible to see it had made me
afraid of an anti-climax. In effect the only
trouble while I was at the gallery lay in my
need to preserve the immediate & overwhelming
effect of the sculptures & paintings as my mind
strayed to time-tables & other distractions. If I
stood at the far end of the room, I would see
one of the sculptures ~~just~~ at the furthest point
from me in another room. At this distance it
engraved itself vividly on my mind. I am so
wary of dragging metaphysical beads of
wisdom into aesthetics. Giacometti does not do
so, but how to talk about his work without
using such clumsy words myself? He simply
shows us a pure essential humanity, stripped
of contingency, reduced to a sliver of bronze yet
increased to an utter grandeur.
Wednesday. Munich. The Frauenkirche, sparkling
in its graceful white. Isambard.
Thursday. In the morning I saw the Alte
Pinakothek. The Vierer Four Apostles fascinates
me. Altstuffer was not as massive as I had

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Figure 13.

Stephen Bann, Journal recording the author's travel,
in Munich, Belfort, and Basel during September
1963.

Thought him small & tender character.
In the evening, I arrived at the Gurrillie's -
-Theater, feeling solitary because of my necessary
nonconformity of dress. Monteverdi's 'L'incoronazione
di Poppea', which Lange had tried to get tickets
on my behalf at Glynndebonne, seemed in this
perfect Italian theatre ~~to~~ to reach its
highest perfection. The form is remarkable. I
like to see it as a series of love-duets —
unapproached by any in the history of opera —
interspersed with the nobility of imperial
action & stoic suicide. The end a consummation.
Friday, I worked in the Staatsbibliothek, reading
Maurice Mauguin's 'L'empire romain' &
Sp. of resolution & Cambridge theology.
Saturday, Lenbach gallery (?) Early Kimbrough.
(Where are all the later ones?) Franz Marc is
perhaps much more sensitive a painter than
I thought.
Sunday, Palastina's 'Ave Maria' Mass at the
Theaterkirche, probably my favorite church
in Munich because of the splendid stone
facade & the delicate leaden white inside.
Went Pinaforek. All pale before Manet's
'Fischhuk im Atelier', Roden's 'Le Vitruv',
Macke's 'Badende' & Bérauld's 'Aufgehende
Artillerie'. Heterogeneous, enormous show of
modern art next door was depressing, but
raised my view of the quality of English work.
Monday, I walked to the Wynnberg, &
visited two water-towers, probably quite
successful because the weather & the buildings
Avalued less cruelly than I normally seem to
be. The Amalienburg fascinating.

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Figure 14.

Stephen Bann, Journal recording the author's travel,
September 1963.

Tuesday, Butler's most intelligent essay 'Bulzac
 et la Réalité' saw 'La Strada' in the evening.
 Wednesday. This was a wonderfully soft &
 delicate day, all Munich appearing most
 beautiful in light pastel colours under a
 blue but never intense sky. I walked by
 the side of the Isar, visited an interminable
 but expertly planned museum of sculpture,
 furniture etc, then had lunch in the
 English garden, writing to the family, Richard
 & Mrs Ward.

So to Thursday, today. I saw an exhibition of
 lithographs etc by Erich Heckel in the morning.
 Is he the only delicate painter in Die
 Brücke or have I not looked at Schmidt-
 -Pfeiffer etc. closely enough? Miraculous
 peach & pears - even more astonishing
 Begonia buds, since these last were in black
 & white - great mastery & very great depth of
 feeling. I had lunch in Schwabing & then
 spent the afternoon with Delacroix's journals.
 To quote: 'Le résultat de mes journées est toujours
 le même: un désir infini de ce qu'on n'obtient
 jamais; un vide qu'on ne peut combler, une
 extrême démanchéation de produire ~~rien~~ de toutes
 les manières, de lutter le plus possible contre
 le temps qui nous entraîne, et les distractions
 qui jettent un voile sur notre âme ...'

Here I am, free & with sufficient money, having
 Loustaud, Delacroix & Büchner at my fingertips,
 Pinget & Giacometti to write about, a city of
 treasures to visit. Yet surely this is more than enough.
 I wish for an attitude of mind which the night by
 sight of shining cars waiting before the typist, or
 the hooded facade of the Theatiner would suffice to give

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Figure 15.

Stephen Bann, Journal recording the author's travel,
 September 1963.

Friday, September 13th.

I continued to read Delacour's Journals in the morning & afternoon, reaching the end of 1847. There is a magnificent pessimism about the 1847 entries. Also two acts of René's Le Salom. A man who avowedly dislikes western theatre, (as he admits in the letter after Les Bourgeois) René enthralled me by his manipulation of the stage - his concern with actors who must play the part of men who are themselves driven to casting themselves in dramatic roles - general, judge & bishop.

I had lunch & tea at a small café opposite the gates of the English garden, where I walked for a short time in the late afternoon. It really has an English air, & recalled first Waterheads, which I hope to see on Sunday, then the garden at Thorpe brange, which always recurs to my memory in the same early evening glow & silence. Montenegro's office came into my mind. The Theatre just visible from the garden, with its small exquisite tower/domes.

Saturday September 14th.

I climbed to the top of the south tower of the Frauenkirche, but, as it was only midday, the mists had hardly cleared & I saw no mountains. K&S'schka drawings, watercolours etc. in a nearby gallery. Magnificent watercolours from c. 1910, with great wedges of colour. I spent the afternoon in the English garden, if possible even more perfect than yesterday. I had a watercolour of the city from

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Figure 16.

Stephen Bann, Journal recording the author's travel, September 1963.

Mornings, something like the picture of
 Edinburgh from Inverleith House that I did -
 is it three? - years ago. Some of it is an
 improvement, some maybe not. I also did a
 watercolour of Theahner from the Hofgarten,
 as good as anything I have done. My articles
 on Delavix & Bionetti are just about
 ready to write. The art of putting pen to
 paper & watching the imperfections ~~with~~ ^{disappear}
 is all that is needed.
 My life here is almost an ideal mixture of
 liberty, pleasant duty & immense possibilities
 of joy. *Ultima perfectio solitudinis*.

Sunday September 15th
 Mozart's Credo Mass at the Augustenkirche, then
 Bernabè's Mass 'Il bivio e delle oigne' at
 the Theahner. The first magnificent & the
 second equally enjoyable - it is, I presume,
 Italian music of the early 17th c. ? Venice.
 I then visited the Pinakotek & had an
 extravagant lunch. Two members of Trinity
 Hall, Hugh Pountney & Bernard Simons, were
 there - the first acquaintances I have met
 here.
 The Dinner from Apostles is incomparable.
 I returned with great pleasure to the little
 Chardin - a proof of the air of intimacy it
 lends is the contrastingly antiquated
 character of his signature. That belongs to
 the 18th c., but the picture is immediate.
 The Titian of Christ being scourged is the
 best I have seen - its brushed & scattered
 pigment ~~is~~ remarkable & most appropriate.
 I read Lombard's sober & eloquent picture of Table Talk

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Figure 17.

Stephen Bann, Journal recording the author's travel, September 1963.

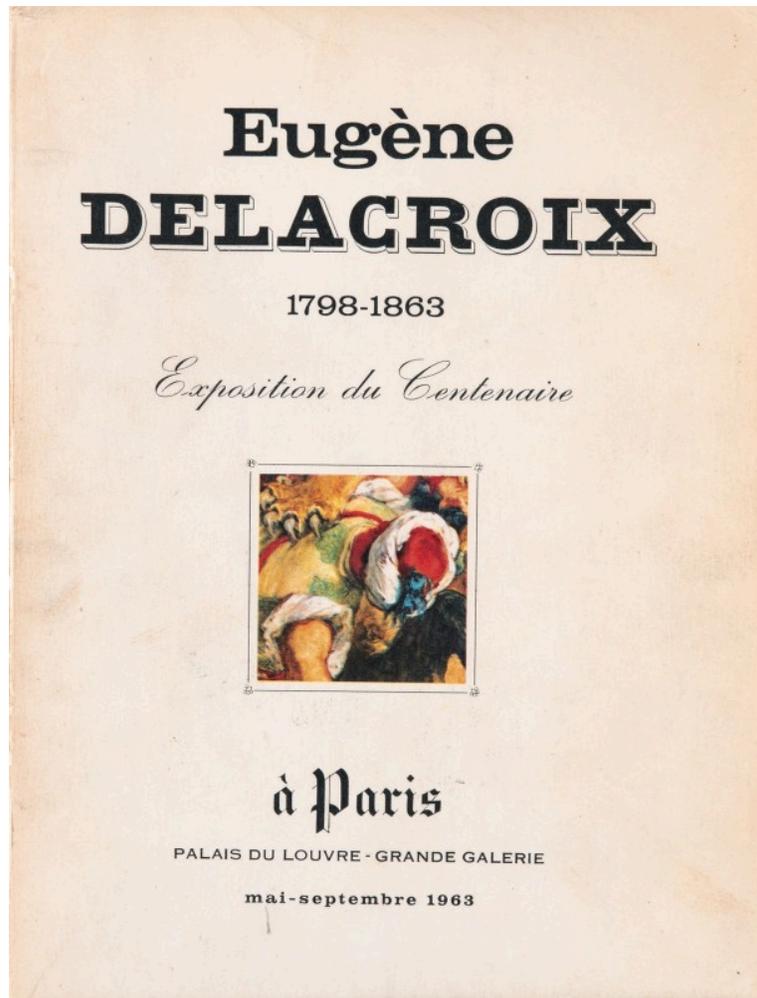


Figure 18.

Exhibition catalogue, Eugène Delacroix: 1798-1863 Exposition du Centenaire, Louvre, Paris, May-September 1963, (Paris: Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1963): jacket.



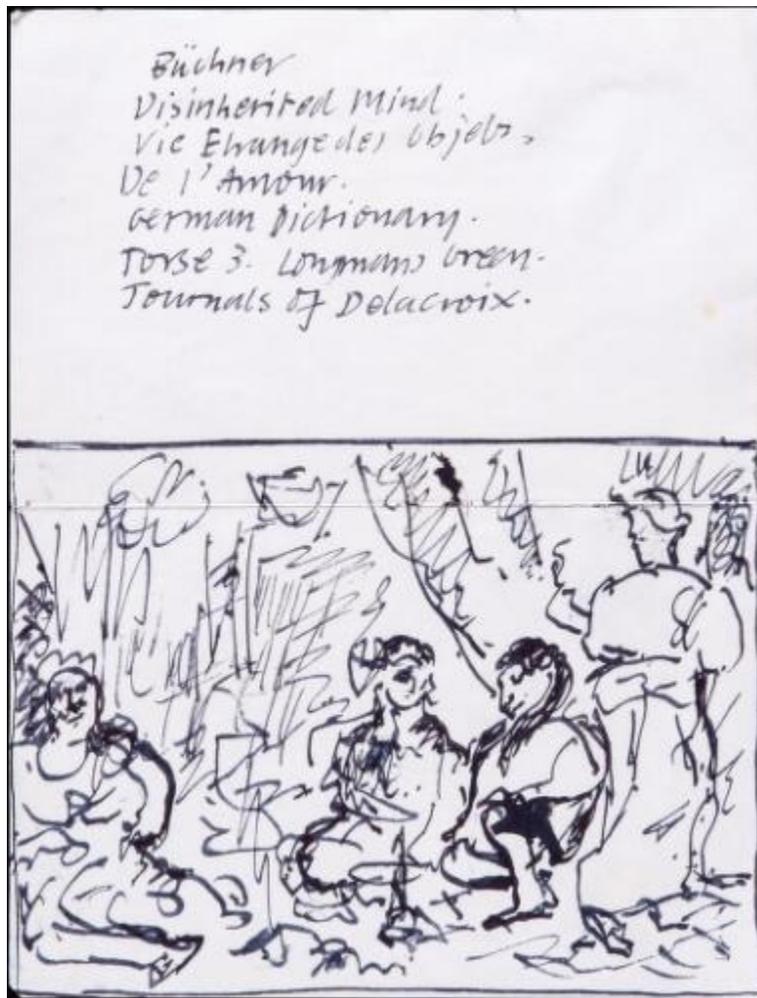
Figure 19.

Eugène Delacroix, Study for "Les Femmes d'Alger", pastel, 28 x 42 cm. Collection of the Louvre Museum, Paris (MI890). Reproduced in *Eugène Delacroix: 1798-1863 Exposition du Centenaire*, (Paris: Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1963).



Figure 20.

Eugène Delacroix, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1834, oil on canvas, 74 x 93 cm. Collection of the Louvre Museum (MD 2015-9). Reproduced in *Eugène Delacroix: 1798-1863 Exposition du Centenaire*, (Paris: Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1963).



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Figure 21.

Stephen Bann, Les Femmes d'Algers, ink sketch after Eugène Delacroix. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.



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Figure 22.

Stephen Bann, Les Femmes d'Alger, watercolour sketch after Eugène Delacroix, 13 January 1964. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

Rauschenberg & Representation

"PAINTING" relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)

This subtly qualified statement by the American artist Robert Rauschenberg, now exhibiting at the Whitechapel Gallery, seems to me to indicate his intense concern with the problems of representation, which exist precisely in the gap between art and life. As Professor Gombrich explains in his essay, "Meditations on a Hobby Horse," there exist true and false traditions of representation. The false tradition, which gains its strength from the development in methods of illustrative painting since the Renaissance, assumes that representation should involve an imitation of the external form of the object. This belief, implicit in popular criticism of modern art, has no real foundation. It is based on the need to recognize the image in terms of everyday objects rather than to view it in itself. The true tradition of representation relates not to imitation of external form but to the "making of substitutes." A hobby-horse, although it resembles few of the features of a real horse, "represents" the horse in the sense that it is a substitute. Government, once explained as an interview that real hair could never serve to give the impression of hair on a statue—"In fact it seems to me that the form must be fixed in an absolute, immaterial manner, and not abandoned, like an arbitrary form, in which similar alone could create confusion with what one wants to do."

Rauschenberg stands in the lineage of those artists—namely Marcel Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters—for whom representation is not a matter of established definitions but a field of exploration—relating both to art and to life—which should be probed in the context of their work. Duchamp's notable contribution in this area was the "ready-made," the object encountered in everyday experience which is removed by the artist without any modification to the status of a work of art. Duchamp also illustrates the characteristic tension of this mode of representation. First of all, the ready-made is not separated from the world of objects, as was the traditional work of art, by a process of technical adjustment. The instantly perceptible difference between the finished sculpture and the original block of stone is obliterated in the ready-made, which is identical in essential terms to what it was before it was selected. Indeed part of the effect of Duchamp's ready-mades is to ridicule the idea that what makes a sculpture or painting a work of art is simply the process of material adjustment which the artist performs. Duchamp is emphasizing the fact that a work of art becomes such not through the processes which unite it to the actions of the artist but, on the contrary, through its absolute distance from him. Although Duchamp's views on the status of the work of art appear to be totally in variance with those of Gombrich, he is in fact essentially in agreement with him. The work of art must be "fixed in an absolute, intentional manner. . . ." The notion of the ready-made hinges upon this fact. Duchamp ridicules the idea of representation as a mere imitation of external form by the blunt method of presenting works which, far from imitating other objects, simply are those objects, in substantial terms. All that removes them from the everyday world is the "absolute distance" conferred upon them by the artist, which depends not on any technical process or material distinction but on the intention of the artist. Duchamp's note for "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even" show how he felt it necessary to record and plan his choice of ready-mades. "Limit the no. of rhymanes

yearly (7)," he writes. Again, "buy a pair of kn-ting on a Kolyvade." The entire process of rendering the ready-made distinct from everyday experience depends on the fact that the artist does not merely encounter it in his everyday life, but removes it hypothetically from the world of objects in his memories before he actually encounters it.

Rauschenberg's work should be seen first of all in this context, but it should also be seen in the context of Kurt Schwitters' individual use of collage. The problem of the use of everyday materials in the work of art is relatively simple to sculpture, since what is already an object is easily presented as a sculptural object. But, in painting, objects are never presented as such. They form part of a painted surface and the relation of the painted image to the object is a matter of pictorial illusion. Hans Schwitters safeguards the individuality of his collage materials—chocolate papers, bus tickets, envelopes—in the unifying composition of the picture. The component pieces are pictorially incident in an overall plan and only secondarily objects relating to the real world.

To sort out the relative importance of the ready-made and the collage of everyday materials in the work of Rauschenberg seems to me a necessary, but by no means a simple task. It is clear that Rauschenberg differs from Duchamp in that he lacks the notion of equanimity as a metaphysical process. In Duchamp the metaphysical element is very strong—a striking example of this being his distinction between the sharp and the blunt razor-blade which hinges on the fact that the former has "cuttings" in reserve. Hence his ready-mades seem to "impress" the objects of their particular class in almost the same way as Plato's ideas represent the objects of a particular genus. As works of art, they seem to have arranged to themselves that ideal reality which Plato reserves for the eternal ideas in heaven. With Rauschenberg, however, objects proclaim their origin in the multifarious world of everyday existence. Schwitters covered his pictures with scribbled, soiled and worn fragments, which by combination acquired a transcendent beauty. Rauschenberg challenges Duchamp on his own ground and causes sculpture which, unlike Duchamp's gleaming literary bones, derive from the most object and unassuming rubbish. In his "combine paintings" he is also significantly different from Schwitters, since where Schwitters allows the illusion of a continuous surface to absorb the individuality of his random scraps, Rauschenberg maintains an exact equilibrium between the painting in its entirety and the particular objects. These works are not sculptures, since they relate implicitly to the conventional four-sided area of the canvas. But the objective elements in them seem to alternate between full integration in the unity of the picture and an aesthetic tendency to appear as objects in their own right.

The meaning of this ambivalence is well illustrated by one of Rauschenberg's most remarkable combine paintings, "Pilgrim 1965," in which a superbly painted, near to almost-indivisible sculpture, on the lower right hand side, an unrecognizable wooden chair. In a sense this could be called a picture of a chair, or, more accurately, a demonstration of what is implied in making a picture of a chair. The conventional habit of reading a picture involves a neglect for all "background" elements, and the singling out of objects seemingly confined within the picture in order to associate them with everyday objects. Rauschenberg offers a parody of this approach. The canvas can be seen as an abstract

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Figure 23.

Stephen, "Rauschenberg and Representation", The Cambridge Review, 85, no. 2072, 7 March 1964: 333.

background for the chair. But if this evidently absurd belief is examined, the whole notion of a picture as an arena for the identification of objects becomes ridiculous. If we view the work of art as a final product, coming in its own right, then there is no reason for preferring a painted chair to an actual chair attached to the painting. The latter solution is much more satisfactory. Only if it is assumed that the process of reproduction is *per se* confers some mysterious quality on the image can there be any reason for preferring the former. And if there is indeed such a mysterious transposition, then the identification of objects in the painting cannot be a central part of our appreciation. The important thing becomes not the recognition of objects but the recognition of the distance which the image imposes upon the spectator. "Pictures" therefore poses the problem of representation and provides a solution in terms of this absolute distance. Rauschenberg achieves an effect totally different from that of Manet, when the latter carefully models a chair in bronze. Manet's chair is sculptural and, because it has been fabricated out of bronze, distinctly removed from the everyday world. Rauschenberg's chair, however, continues to suggest questions of value and value. "Do you realize that this chair is worth one thousand pounds," an attendant is reported to have said to a spectator who was about to make the experiment of sitting on it. There is nothing remarkable about a bronze chair being worth a thousand pounds, since its construction bears no relation to that of an actual chair. But for an ordinary wooden chair to be so valued is intensely paradoxical. One must conclude that the incorporation of the chair into this picture has removed it to an entirely new scale of values, and this is yet another way of grasping the absolute distance which exists, irrespective of any material factors, between the work of art and the spectator.

But, however impressive these cerebral paintings are, it remains true that they raise the question of the status of the representational object without at the same time presenting a solution. Up to 1963 Rauschenberg has concentrated to an increasing extent on the integration of one object—or a small group—with an abstract painted surface. But the immense skill with which he achieves this end only serves to disguise the basic contradictions in such a project. I would like to illustrate this with the aid of an analogy which seems relevant to Rauschenberg's development. In the 1820s, the French theatre was characterized by a remarkable increase in the importance of *mise en scène*. In place of the schematic scenery of the classical theatre, natural settings were devised, substantial objects and authentic costumes introduced. But by 1830 a reaction against this process had set in. Critics claimed that spectators no longer listened to the spoken word but concentrated instead on verifying the circumstantial accuracy of details of costumes and scenic objects. The very presence of these objects was leading to a disregard for the essential thrust of the drama. It seems to me that this lesson can also be applied to Rauschenberg. Objects held an even greater disruptive potentiality in painting than they do in drama. In the theatre there must always be a certain element of pure spectacle. In painting, however, it is not enough to balance this element of spectacle against the intrinsic properties of the picture. The introduction of such an element may lead to an increased intensity and vitality, but it is ultimately self-defeating.

Rauschenberg has evidently realized this, since his recent paintings (since 1963) achieve a triumphant unity of expression. Despite the shifting of images from widely differing sources

across the surface of each painting, this surface remains intact. Every element of the picture is immersed through the application of oil paint to canvas. Rauschenberg's use of self-screen printing has enabled him to reproduce the texture of the photograph without needing to introduce any alien element. But his investigation of the problems of representation is by no means abandoned. It attains, in fact, a new degree of subtlety and penetration. This new subtlety centres around the use of photographic material. Rauschenberg is perhaps the first contemporary painter to realize the degree to which modern man accepts photography as a sufficient model of visual reality and so challenges this assumption directly in the course of his painting. He realizes that we are willing to suspend our disbelief in front of the photographic image and perform the supreme feat of projection—that is to say, we accept the objects represented in the photograph as real objects and the space enclosed as real space. As a result of this, the tendency to view all pictorial representation in terms of perspective and space has been strongly reinforced. Rauschenberg aims to recall to us in the first place that painting is not merely a means to such an evocation. This seems to me to be the significance of the motif which recurs like a signature in almost all his recent paintings, a continuously drawn geometric cube with an arrow pointing towards the top of the picture. For this is surely an allusion to the fact that we mentally project space into such a figure and a reminder that in the context of his painting such a projection is illicit. In "Barge 1963" drops from a passage of paint above invade the top of the cube, thereby reinforcing the suggestion that it does not and cannot include real space.

Rauschenberg's constant juxtaposition of freely worked paint with photographic images also acts as a reminder of this fact. Indeed his whole use of photographic material is designed to induce us to view such images in terms of their aesthetic qualities—the place they hold within the composition and the viscosity they lend to the surface of the canvas—rather than according to their privileged relationship, as photographs, to visual reality. To this end he starts certain photographic images with dominant colours that recall the component stages of a colour photograph. Because they are fragmentary as photographs, they gain power as images. Yet even when, as in the image of the helicopter in "Bicycle," the colours are overlaid to such a degree that all the ingredients of a colour photograph seem to be present, we are prevented from appreciating it in such because of the raw quality of the canvas, and once again feel we need to project space into the frame. Rauschenberg succeeds in making pictures of an extremely complex imagery, which present the possibility of an immense range of spatial projections and yet reverse the unity of the painted surface by preventing the attention from concentrating on any such projections. The Rubens Venus, contemplating her face in a mirror held by Cupid, occurs in "Bicycle" and in "Barge." In "Tower" another beautiful unclothed woman with her back to the spectator gazes out obliquely from the mirror in her hand. The significance of these motifs is clear. To introduce a mirror image within the total photographic image is to introduce a suggestion of a space within the picture which exists not for us, but for the figures within it. Whereas the Van Eyck portrait of Arnolfini and his wife reflect the painter in a mirror within the picture and thereby provide an ingenious means of entering vicariously the original relationship of the painter to the couple, the Rubens Venus remains steadfastly self-absorbed. Surely this is a remarkable way of conveying the fact that the space within the images is *involved*, bearing no

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Figure 24.

Stephen, "Rauschenberg and Representation", The Cambridge Review, 85, no. 2072, 7 March 1964: 335.

relative to the position of the spectator? In other words, Rauschenberg's final solution to the problem of representation is that the picture exists not in terms of its reference to the objects in spatial existence of the real world, but in terms of the distance from the spectator. To have established this through the use of figurative, indeed photographic material, which in itself almost compels the acceptance of a spatial framework and denies the prior utility of surface, is a very real achievement.

Rauschenberg therefore vindicates in his unique way the truth about representation of which I spoke at the beginning of this essay. Representation is not the imitation of the external form of an object. It is not concerned with evoking real objects and providing vicarious experience of the everyday world, but with the creation of a substitute. The reason why this notion is so important lies in the fact that, if the substitute is not self-sufficient, if the distance is not preserved between the work and the spectator, then a painting becomes nothing more than a convenient surrogate for emotions and illusion, and representation loses the magical quality which is its essential property. To quote from Ernst Fischer's book, *The Negativity of Art*: "George Thomson remarks in *Aschylus and Athens* that primitive magic is based on the idea that reality can be controlled by creating an illusion of controlling it. . . . But at the same time, because magic leads to action, it embodies the valuable realization that the outside world can actually be changed by man's subjective attitude towards it. . . . Rituals whose strength has been revived and organized by ritual mime are in fact better human than they were before." However paradoxical this may seem, our power to control the outside world has not superseded our need for that illusion of controlling it which is given by the work of art. These two things must not be confused. For magic does indeed lead to action and ritual mime makes a man a better hunter than he was before.

Ernst Fischer.

This Week's Books

The Later Romantic

ENGLISH LITERATURE, 1815-1832.

By Ian Jack. (Oxford University Press.) 1963. Pp. 663. 7s.

The first thing to be said of this volume, the sixth of the *Oxford History of English Literature*, is that it is a good deal more of a history than the apparently random collection of essays which made up the twelfth, Modern, volume. Dr Jack at least sets out to cover the period, and finds it short enough for seasons in this environment. Practically everyone whose name crops up within these vital years is mentioned and most of them, however minor, are succinctly discussed. Nevertheless, to be sure, the discussion is so succinctly-concise that it feels like the south of a wretched bird.

If he had lived longer it is possible that Brewer's attitude to the

Continued from page 335

cannot be credited with any transvaluation of values. He was no prophet; he failed to understand the pressing social problems that occupied the minds of his contemporaries. He could not see that millions of human beings were struggling desperately to become human, and that they had no time to spare for superstition. Perhaps Nietzsche's greatest error was that he envisioned Superman before man had learned to be human.

Gustave Mahler.

Christian faith might have been modified (p. 7).

p. 131, line 12, for with all but the greatest read among the most delightful (intermittent).

Against this, however, can be set a gift for art, almost epigrammatic economy:

In this the Quarterly was as characteristically English as the Edinburgh was Scottish: every Englishman is at heart a positivist, so every Scotsman is at heart a critic (p. 142, [in Blake's class]). It is as if Don Quixote had written the autobiography (p. 90).

Moreover, the Chronological Tables and the Bibliography—amounting all told to almost 200 pages—see both through and useful. Yet one is left dissatisfied, wanting not something better but something different.

The second thing to be said, in short, is that it is not fully a history; it lacks narrative and any sense of mobility and progression: the books just happen to be there in the period covered and we are told what is in them but not given a sense of cross-currents within a tale. This, in fact, is very much as *English Literature: A History* is written, somewhat superficial, not at all political or sociological; where background comes in it is strictly literary, and even then superficial. For instance, Dr Jack is (quite rightly) sceptical about the usefulness of the term "the Romantic Movement." He is wrong, though, in saying that there can't have been one because the supposed members don't know about it and in fact disagreed with each other. Writers may well be much aware of their difference; it is up to critics, who have the advantage of distance and hindsight, to provide coordination. If there is anywhere a place for such generalization surely it is in a history (and a unifying factor can be found, as I've suggested elsewhere, in the idea of an Oxford Curriculum). But perhaps a true literary history is hardly possible. If so, one tends to wish the best, if thorough, chronicler or reference work to be original.

The third point, though, is not that the volume abounds in mistakes, but rather that its omissions are serious and systematic. Dr Jack is very good on many of the minor writers, but his bibliographical notes significantly omit "disappointing" the Pelican Guide which has some brilliant critical essays on major ones (in the larger period, from Blake to Byron, which might have been noted here). Previous attention he largely ignores: Shelley's *Alas to the West Wind* is highly praised without any consideration of Lamb's deplorable but classic critical despair. There is no mention of *The Masque of Anarchy*, taken by some to be Shelley's best poem, nor of *Joan of Arc* (*The Tragedy and Power of the Maid of Orléans*) because the fact is "unestablished" that Shelley had no sense of himself. Dr Brewer's convincing discussion on the second *Myssore* and on the significant difference between the two versions is also ignored in favour of a noncommittal but rather superficial survey. Similarly, Keats's *The Graveyard* is most magnificently put in the light of "the letter to which Keats describes the origin" (p. 101, see note).

No readerably throws its shadow over this point of tradition and acceptance (p. 118).

No? What about "beard clock," "self-dying," "washed down," "shabby beds," the light wind that "runs and sings," the "delicious lamb" as, most dismally, for a man who knew he was dying, the fact that "the gathering realises winter in the air?"

Shelley . . . regards nature as the harbinger of death. . . . Keats remains wholly in the present (p. 118).

What about the reference to nature in the first stanza, the "songs of Spring" in the third, and the anticipation of winter in the last line? (What is the proof?)

Yet when all is said on the adverse side, it remains undeniable that so much information is covered with such unerring correctness (evidence that this volume is likely to remain for a long time both a general work of reference and a hand-book for the new research graduate).

Alan Rawson.

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Figure 25.

Stephen, "Rauschenberg and Representation", The Cambridge Review, 85, no. 2072, 7 March 1964: 336.



Figure 26.

Robert Rauschenberg: Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings and Combines 1949-1969, Whitechapel Gallery, February-March 1964 (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1964): jacket.

Preface

Robert Rauschenberg's work has been of key significance for young artists in Europe and America during the past decade. For young artists especially, because they are on his wave-length, they speak his language, and although they do not always share his American experience they understand his references. And the point of view which animates and gives fresh meaning to this experience is universal. Rauschenberg has in fact, evolved a new vocabulary, a new sentence construction even, that has permanently enriched our language. But it is probably only now, in the early sixties, that the general public is beginning to appreciate his contribution to recent art. And to see that when one has looked beyond the stuffed goat and the tyre, the winking light bulbs and the built-in radio sets, Rauschenberg is in fact, a classical artist with a fastidious sense of structure and a hypersensitive understanding of space.

His combines and paintings are part of a tradition accelerated and expanded by Cubism, and his object-sculptures and collages continue a path set by the early sculptures and constructions of Picasso and the work of the Dadaists, Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters. But what Rauschenberg has made is very much his own. In painting, he also has affinities with de Kooning, but here again Rauschenberg has imposed his own vision.

Considering the details, the constituent parts, of a Rauschenberg painting or the hallucinatory antics, personages, motifs and emblems in the great Dante drawings – a supreme achievement in art during the past decade – it is also clear that he has shown us how to look with fresh eyes at commonplace objects and fragments of visual information which form part of our day-to-day experience; and he has enveloped these subjects with a new eloquence and poignancy. With all his humour, Rauschenberg also reflects, most accurately and beautifully, the tragic and elegiac spirit of his time – whilst maintaining a quintessential lightness, sharpness and delicacy of touch. And he has been absolutely truthful to the inner light and imaginative energy of a young intellectual living in New York in the middle of the twentieth century. Rauschenberg is a true artist, and not merely a compiler of documentaries, but he is leaving us some formidable records for the future.

His work as a designer of sets, costumes, lighting and occasionally choreography, for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company cannot be recorded in this exhibition. Otherwise, the assembly of work is reasonably comprehensive. Rauschenberg is of course much younger than the other American artists seen at Whitechapel in recent years, Pollock, Rothko, Tobey and Guston, for example, and it is hoped that the present exhibition devoted to one of the leaders of the younger generation will give some indication of its continuing vitality and resourcefulness.

Bryan Robertson

Figure 27.

Robert Rauschenberg: Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings and Combines 1949-1969, Whitechapel Gallery, February-March 1964 (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1964): 3.

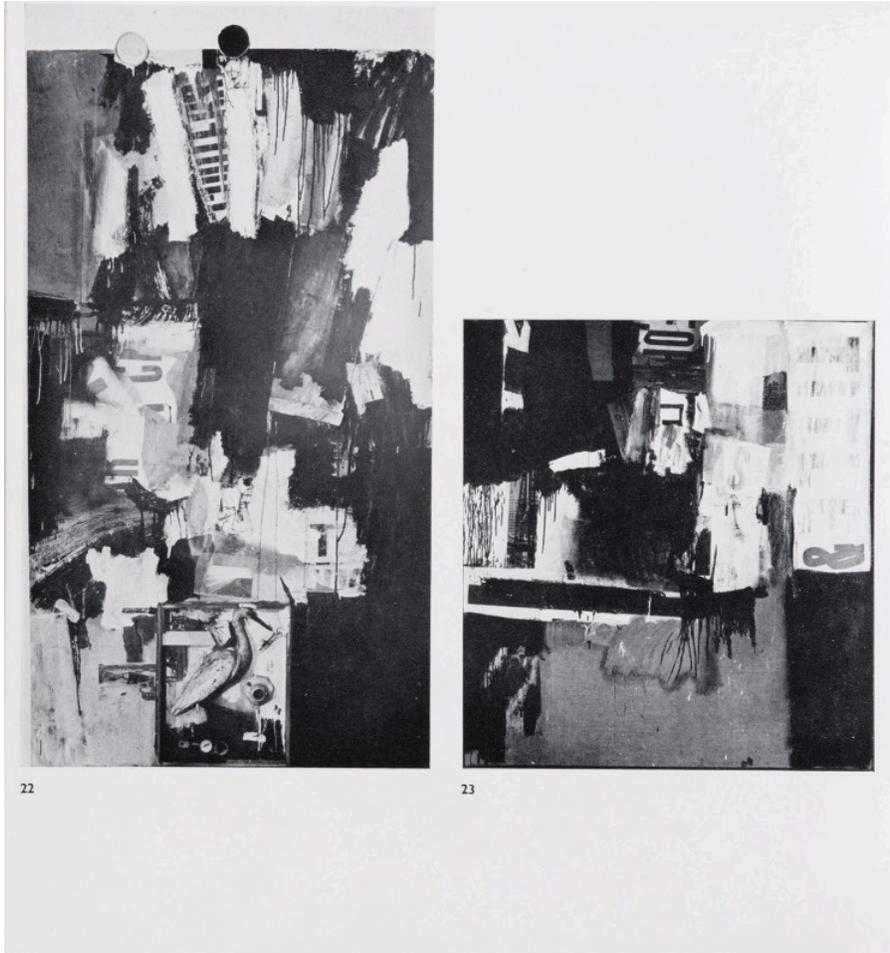


Figure 28.
Robert Rauschenberg: Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings and Combines
1949-1969, Whitechapel Gallery, February-March 1964 (London:
Whitechapel Gallery, 1964): plates 22-23.

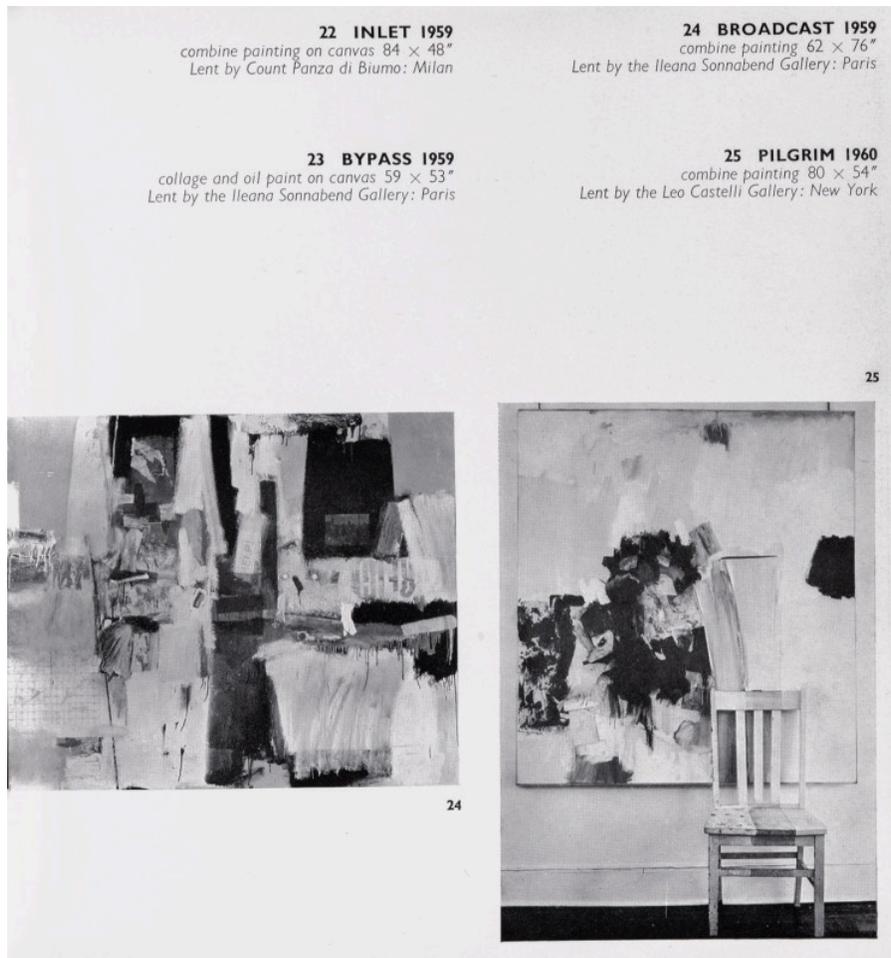


Figure 29.

Robert Rauschenberg: Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings and Combines 1949-1969, Whitechapel Gallery, February-March 1964 (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1964): plates 24-25.

Arts in Cambridge

Cambridge was an excellent place to be in the early 1960s, as far as modern and contemporary art were concerned. The resources of the Fitzwilliam Museum had been supplemented by the initiative of Jim Ede, who from 1956 had reconstructed the cottages of Kettle's Yard and filled them with his personal collection of British and International Modernist art. I was a frequent visitor. The Faculty of Architecture, under whose wing the History of Art was blossoming into a degree subject, was headed by Sir Leslie Martin, architect of the London Festival Hall, and the former collaborator with Naum Gabo and Ben Nicholson in the Circle group of the 1930s. It was in the newly built faculty lecture theatre at Scroope Terrace that the Society of Arts, organised by Philip Steadman and myself, held many of its meetings with invited speakers over the years 1963-1964.

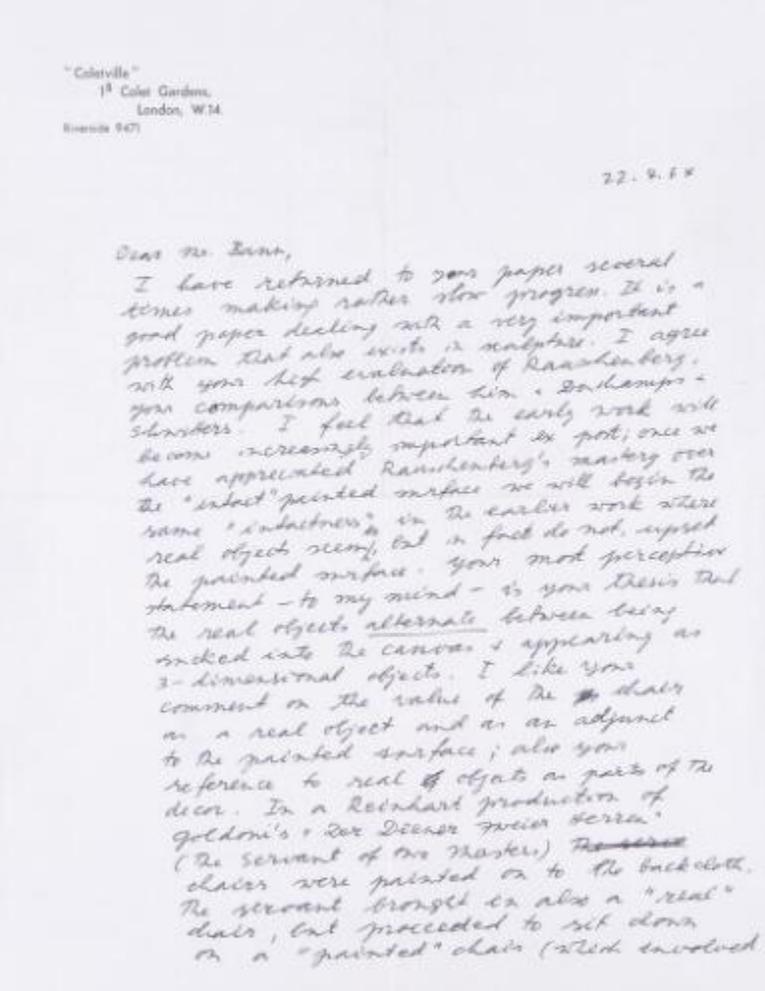
Cambridge also possessed, at the time, the only exhibition gallery outside London which was directly sponsored by the Arts Council. Its programme included important shows of contemporary British artists such as the "Situation" painters (so named by the critic Lawrence Alloway), which held an exhibition there not long after their first manifestation as a group in September 1960. I myself began to publish reviews of current exhibitions in 1962-1963 as an editor of *Broadsheet*, the roncotyped magazine edited by students, which covered the full range of artistic events taking place throughout the city. Though I took time off to praise the occasional London exhibition, such as Kokoschka at the Tate in October 1962, I was mainly focused on covering what was shown at the two commercial galleries in Cambridge (Heffers and the King Street Gallery) and, in particular, the Arts Council Gallery itself. It was through Muriel Wilson, the custodian of the latter and wife of the architect and collector Colin St John Wilson, that I then began, in 1964, to contribute very brief notes on the occasional Cambridge shows to the London-based magazine, *The Arts Review*.

The corollary was that I also began to write much longer reviews of London shows for a Cambridge-based publication. *The Cambridge Review* was a broadly based "Journal of University Life and Thought", priced at 1 shilling, which was published every Saturday during term. It had two editors, changing yearly, and in spring 1964, it was edited by two young English literature dons: Pat Rogers, an eighteenth-century specialist who later made his career in the United States; and David Morse, a modernist who moved to the University of Sussex. I can only suppose that I proposed to one of them that I should write an article on the work of Rauschenberg. But their acceptance must also have been a measure of the considerable stir which the exhibition had caused when it opened at the Whitechapel Gallery in February 1964. I opened my review with a quotation of the artist's "widely publicised statement". Before the exhibition concluded at the Whitechapel, I had been summoned to the television studios of Anglia TV at Norwich to take part in a critics' forum at which the work of Rauschenberg was under discussion.

There can be no doubt that the reading of Gombrich's essay, "Meditations on a Hobby Horse", had provided the interpretative framework for my review. But its message was reinforced from the start by a remark that I had gleaned from an interview with Giacometti, which explained that "real hair could never serve to give the impression of hair on a statue." No less relevant to my earlier enthusiasms was the suggestion that Rauschenberg should be placed "in the lineage" of Duchamp and Schwitters. What must be less obvious is the cross-fertilisation from my doctoral research. This comes across in my analogy between Rauschenberg's desire to integrate the object and the development of the *mise en scène* of French theatre in the Romantic period.¹² The final quotation from Ernst Fischer's *The Necessity of Art*

provides a somewhat incongruous conclusion in emphasising the “magical quality of representation”.¹³ But as an enthusiast for the critical writings of Michael Fried, I look back with interest on my development of the proposition that “the Rokeby Venus ... remains magnificently self-absorbed”.¹⁴

The courteous reply that I received from Anton Ehrenzweig on sending him a copy of my Rauschenberg review was a much appreciated dividend. Ehrenzweig was one of the speakers whom we had invited to speak at the Society of Arts. He had delivered a fascinating paper, related to his special interest in textile design, on the subject of the dangers of ‘over-precise visualisation in the arts’. This would later appear in a definitive version in his highly influential book of essays, *The Hidden Order of Art*, published posthumously in 1967.



"Coleridge"
18 Collet Gardens,
London, W14
Eirecode 947

22. 4. 64

Dear Mr Bann,

I have returned to your paper several times making rather slow progress. It is a good paper dealing with a very important problem that also exists in sculpture. I agree with your high evaluation of Rauschenberg, your comparisons between him & Zerkowicz-Skudlarski. I feel that the early work will become increasingly important ex post; once we have appreciated Rauschenberg's mastery over the "abstract" painted surface we will begin to see the same "abstractness" in the earlier work where real objects seem, but in fact do not, appear the painted surface. Your most perceptive statement - to my mind - is your thesis that the real objects alternate between being sucked into the canvas & appearing as 3-dimensional objects. I like your comment on the value of the ~~the~~ chairs as a real object and as an adjunct to the painted surface; also your reference to real objects as parts of the decor. In a Reinhardt production of Goldoni's "Der Diener zweier Herren" (The Servant of two Masters) ~~the~~ chairs were painted on to the backcloth. The servant brought on also a "real" chair, but proceeded to sit down on a "painted" chair (which involved

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Figure 30.

Letter from Anton Ehrenzweig to Stephen Bann, 22 April 1964.
Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

a gymnastic feat as there was nothing to support his behind). Reinhardt then insisted that the painted chair was ~~not~~ more real and promising of rest than the 3-dimensional chair. What I mean to say is that 3-dimensional objects in Theatre decor must be designed by an artist of Rauschenberg's calibre who can - sometimes at least - annihilate the difference between 2 and 3-dimensional. I am sure that after modern Breughel (not to mention real objects like the dragon) there will be a return to ~~the~~ Rauschenberg.

May I say that the manipulation (or annihilation) of ~~space~~ ^{common} space belongs to the core of all visual art - and - in a different sense - even to music. You have certainly tackled a vital problem in an original and instructive way.

With my best wishes
yours
Anton Ehrenzweig

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Figure 31.

Letter from Anton Ehrenzweig to Stephen Bann, 22 April 1964.
Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

“Coletville” 1^B Colet Gardens, London, W.14. Riverside 9471
22.4.64 Dear Mr. Bann, I have returned to your paper several times making rather slow progress. It is a good paper dealing with a very important problem that also exists in sculpture. I agree with your high evaluation of Rauschenberg, your comparisons between him & Dachamp & Schwitters. I feel that the early work will become increasingly important ex post; once we have appreciated Rauschenberg’s mastery over the “intact” painted surface we will begin the same “intactness” in the earlier work where real objects seem to, but in fact do not, upset the painted surface. Your most perceptive statement - to my mind - is your thesis that the real objects alternate between being sucked into

the canvas & appearing as 3-dimensional objects. I like your comment on the value of the chair as a real object and as an adjunct to the painted surface; also your reference to real objects as parts of the decor. In a Reinhart production of Goldoni's "Der Diener Freier Herren" (The Servant of two Masters) chairs were painted on to the backcloth. The servant brought in also a "real" chair, but proceeded to sit down on a "painted" chair (which involved a gymnastic feat as there was nothing to support his behind). Reinhart thus insisted that the painted chair was more real and promising of rest than the 3-dimensional chair. What I mean to say the use of 3-dimensional objects in theatre decor must be designed by an artist of Rauschenberg's calibre who can - sometimes at least - annihilate the difference between 2 and three dimensions. I am sure that after modern Bayreuth (without real objects like the dragon) there will be a return to Rauschenberg. May I say that the manipulation (or annihilation) of commonsense space belongs to the core of all visual art and - in a different sense - even to music. You have certainly tackled a vital problem in an original and instructed way. With my best wishes Yours Anton Ehrenzweig

What alas! has all this to Cambridge? There has been little absolute decline in the number of candidates for the Classical Tripos since 1917, but the future supply may be affected by what is happening now in the schools, and by any signs away from intensive scholarship. Always prone to divert the relative emphasis on literature in Part I has led to current proposals that composition should be made optional. We must not think that this might encourage less careful, unprepared and less creative writing, but that it is a consequence that may have to be considered. Always prone to divert the relative emphasis on literature in Part I has led to current proposals that composition should be made optional. We must not think that this might encourage less careful, unprepared and less creative writing, but that it is a consequence that may have to be considered. Always prone to divert the relative emphasis on literature in Part I has led to current proposals that composition should be made optional. We must not think that this might encourage less careful, unprepared and less creative writing, but that it is a consequence that may have to be considered.

tion of schemes like those here described, for they are meant to be part of a broader course. But one thing we might already to have a separate honours course in Latin for those who take it in the Medieval and Modern Languages Tripos. It is desirable that such candidates should be required to do the Latin part of the Classical Tripos, which looks back to Greek, rather than a specially devised course that should look forward to French, Italian and Spanish, in which emphasis would be on culture and ideas that proved influential as much as on those that were good in themselves. Apart for an occasional honours course to provide provision is made for them. No wonder they are few. Yet if full classical studies decline they may become more numerous and much more important.

L. P. WILKINSON

Bomberg, Picabia and the New Generation

INTEGRAL in the painting of David Bomberg was his conception of disintegration. The exhibition of his work recently on view at the Marlborough Gallery gave ample demonstration of this fact. "I am perhaps the most original artist in England," he once wrote, "and only because I am disintegrating first and painter second." For Bomberg the act of drawing was not simply a registration of the external outlines of a figure or landscape. It was a self-resolution and, at the same time, a discovery of hidden structure in the external world that mere mechanical rendering entirely ignored. "Drawing demands freedom, freedom demands liberty to expand in space—this is progress," he wrote. This idea of progress is linked to what seems to me his most fundamental definition of method: "A draughtsman has an opinion about the wrong and the right kind of art. He explores progress by the revelation of scale in the passage of time. The draughtsman cannot exist, unless being dead he speaks to those who have ears to hear." Here we have the essence of his work. Progress—the liberty to expand in space—is registered by the long, exploring strokes of paint which in successive creative and modify the structure of the scene. The "passage of time" is the important element, for Bomberg's paintings—the landscapes and flower pictures especially—give the impression not so much of a final composed structure as of a vital plan deriving from a sequence of actions. The magnificent "Tombstone in Blue, Cornwall" (1947) records the action of the painter in series of continual strokes towards structure—the sweeping strokes of orange reveal not only the inception, operation and termination of a single impulse, but also its order among themselves, and a constant interplay with the shorter strokes of contrasting colours. Bomberg writes that the draughtsman must be dead in order to work. Surely he means that the draughtsman finds perfect fulfillment only in the discovery, by "those who have ears to hear," that he speaks directly, fully and freely in the living structures of his work?

David Huxton, in the course of his excellent introduction to the catalogue, suggests Soutine as an artist akin to Bomberg, at least before Soutine fell under the influence of Courbet. But where Soutine gives the impression of a space-wreathed form, and makes the spectator conscious of the implacable force of his emotion, Bomberg gives evidence rather of a breadth and fulness of reaction. With Soutine colour writhes and bubbles. With Bomberg it enfolds and flows. Yet both these artists have the power of revealing themselves totally in their work, without at the same time destroying the

essential distance imposed by the fact that the picture is a representation of visual reality. This exhibition displayed many sides of Bomberg, from the early post-Cubist works to the distinctive, enigmatic self-portrait of 1936. But of the entire course of his work he could write with justice: "It is all one—and shows the way of youth to age."

It would be futile to attempt to trace the ways in which Bomberg differs from his contemporary, Francis Picabia, whose work has been on show at the I.C.A. Gallery, Dover Street. Picabia's main aim is the critical point of difference. "It was never ever his aim to progress (progress is contre le chaos)," he wrote. If Picabia's work has a unity, it lies in his consistent desire for imaginative experimentation, his refusal to wear out any distinctive manner of painting, his unrelenting search for an expression of personality, but as a method to be employed and then rejected. He proceeded, as Gabriele Buffet—Picabia remarked, by "an exasperation of his lyric vein." As a result, he produced pictures of a fascinating spontaneity and a virtual impenetrability. By calling them impenetrable, I do not mean that they are not immediately attractive. Quite the opposite, for a painting like the "Passe Hydraulique" (1922) possesses a fascinating balance and a vibrancy—in the two quadrants of lamp blue—that is sheer delight. Picabia's works are impenetrable in the sense that, behind the direct and touching lyricism, there is an personality with which we can make contact. The pictures have become entirely disengaged from their context and remain in detached expressions of a spontaneous idea. The three famous Orphic pictures, which are reproduced only in the catalogue although several smaller works from the same period can be seen in the exhibition, exemplify this point precisely. "It is not a question of abstraction," wrote Guillaume Apollinaire, "for these works give direct pleasure. Their surprise gives an important role. Can the taste of a peach be called abstract? Each picture of Picabia has a definite existence, the limits of which are set by the title." In all Picabia's work this "definite existence" involves a distance between painter and spectator that is irradicable. Surprise and delight condition our immediate reactions—as in front of the amazing "Chartre" (1928-29)—but the external structure of the picture remains a puzzle. We are introduced to the work by a quality as direct and uncomplicated as the taste of a peach, but, once this bridge has been crossed, the work remains self-sufficient and impenetrable. We have entered just far enough to be aroused and active, not passive and uncomprehending, in the face of the work of art.

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Figure 32.

Stephen Bann, "Bomberg, Picabia and the New Generation", The Cambridge Review, 85, no. 2075, 9 May 1964: 402.

In the introduction to the catalogue of the "New Generation" exhibition, which has recently been on view at the Whitechapel Gallery, David Thompson characterises the aesthetic aims and style of the twelve young artists represented with the words "toughness" and "ambiguity." This pattern seems to me precisely the one which I have described above in relation to the work of Picasso. The toughness resides in the fact the picture is regarded not as a means of expression—a unique deployment of the personality of the artist—but as a self-sufficient entity. The basic ambiguity relates to the need to break down the distance from the spectator which arises from such self-sufficiency and to provide an element that is immediately accessible. Distance of the picture thereby becomes a progressive exploration of what is intrinsic to the work. Paul Huxley, one of the artists, exemplifies this approach exactly when he writes: "If I were asked to give a guide as to how my work should be understood I would remember Mark's quote from, viz: "Please do not understand me too quickly," and say that the curiosity that is possibly aroused in the spectator and the queries he may wish to make are the picture's subject-matter." Anthony Donaldson, writes David Thompson, "admits to getting a certain kick from exploiting the sentimentality of sky-blue and baby-pink." But on a more fundamental level he gives nothing away. "See, why should I be innocent in communication," he writes, "I am neither a prophet nor seer—worker." With John Hoyland the spectator is at first attracted by the direct clarity and clarity of the painted surface, but inwardly emphasises the irreparability of the work in itself. For the artist, too, this irreparability may be paramount. Hoyland writes: "The shapes and colours I paint and the significance I attach to them I cannot explain in any coherent way. The exploration of colour, form, shape is, I believe, a self-exploration constantly varied and changing in nature: a reality made tangible on the painted surface."

Almost all of the painters in this exhibition, despite the considerable variation in style, adhere to this basic pattern. Patrick Procter, whose twelve figure-paintings might seem to depart from the formula, rejects any suggestion that his paintings are representational. Although his figures, seen at first sight to contain exaggeration and deformity, he tries to present these figures without either sentimentality or bitterness—without a too rapid concession to the emotions of the spectator—and to achieve a realism based upon an "unshakable relationship with the figure I paint." David Thompson justly remarks that David Hockney's paintings, far from being representational, involve the artist "watching his being representational." For all their autobiographical character, they do not reveal the personality of the artist. It was the world of the figure cut off at the shoulder to form a head, which recurs constantly in Hockney's work, a constant upon the maximum which we truly suppose to be inherent in the pictures?

This is a remarkable exhibition. Among the artists whom I have not mentioned, Brett Whiteley and Adere Jorke are showing particularly fine work. Derek Bostler's recent pictures represent a magnificently assured departure from the somewhat lazy figuration of his earlier works (in fact his latest work is a recreation to that of his first student paintings). To return in my earlier argument, the perceptible theme of the exhibition is the integrity of the work of art. Ultimate signs of the action are for the most part excluded from the surface, and the viewer is established contact with a necessity—in remote a direct communication from the artist—is rigidly confined. Although elements of colour,

design or figuration may make a strong impact upon the spectator, they will rarely satisfy his anxiety, and the anxiety of the artist is devoted to making this immediate appeal subordinate to a more profound escape. This anxiety has immense possibilities, especially since it is grounded in psychology. The notion of "typical distance," which Edward Balfour developed in the *British Journal of Psychology* in 1912, fits it exactly. This distance, he explains, "has a negative, inhibitory aspect—the cutting-out of the practical side of things and of our practical attitude to them—and a positive side—the elaboration of the experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action of Distance." The negative aspect, which when it is predominant prevents any contact at all between the work and the spectator, is symbolised in these works by the attempt to minimise the personal involvement of the artist as it is observed in the manipulation of paint. To compensate for this, some of the artists introduce an element of what Balfour calls the "aguable," which is a "non-distanced pleasure." But the real fulcrum of aesthetic reaction is derived from acceptance of the distance—from "the elaboration of the experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action of Distance." This is an art which demands a temporary abdication of the self, which desires and provides before it exists. Rapid and rapid reactions seem to have little or nothing to do with it. As Balfour says, "to be asked in the midst of an intense aesthetic impression, 'whether one likes it,' is like a summatable being called by name: it is a recall to one's sentient self, an awakening of practical consciousness which throws the whole aesthetic mechanism out of gear."

A critic reviewing this exhibition asked if, since modern goods are packaged, modern art should also be. Yes, I would say, if to package a picture seems to make it agreeable, provocative and irrefragable.

STEVENS BONE

This Week's Books

Self-Imposed Limits

THE WORLD OF HARLEQUIN

By A. NICOLL (Cambridge University Press, 1963, £3 5s.)

The Commedia dell'Arte has been the subject of an uncounting number of studies during the present century, and this very new contribution to its history should bring either new information on the subject or fully restate the results of investigations made by previous scholars.

Unlike most types of theatre, the Commedia was essentially an acting style, an "art" of improvised dialogue, action and activities. Because no texts of the actual words used in performance exist, historians are obliged to rely entirely on contemporary accounts of performances, comments made by the actors themselves and the "critiques" which were the fragments preserved as a guide by the actors. Naturally the very limitations of the information on the Commedia have given rise to inventions and extreme theorising, and Professor Nicoll states in the preface to his book that he has preferred to show a middle course. This in fact means that he has almost completely ignored each point of contention as the range of the Commedia and the probable social outlook contained in the improvised dialogue of the actors.

Professor Nicoll deliberately chooses not to discuss the origins of the Commedia because they "throw but little light on the qualities inherent in the Italian improvised theatre from 1550 onwards." This is but a personal point of view. It may equally well be said that the probable identification of the characters

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Figure 33.

Stephen Bann, "Bomberg, Picabia and the New Generation",
The Cambridge Review, 85, no. 2075, 9 May 1964: 403.

The New Generation

Coming directly after the Rauschenberg show, the exhibition of the "New Generation" of British artists in March-May 1964 confirmed the Whitechapel Gallery as the most exciting venue for contemporary art in London. Its Director, Bryan Robertson, had in fact begun his career as an exhibition organiser when managing the art gallery which occupied the top floor of Heffer's main bookshop in Cambridge. Nor was Cambridge unaware of the success which he had achieved at the Whitechapel. An editorial in *Granta* noted that: "the government's competition for the Tate Directorship is taking place [...] secretly." The editor, presumably Reg Gadney, noted: "it would appear that Mr Bryan Robertson is a clear favourite; certainly his success at the Whitechapel merits every accolade that is available." ¹⁵

Granta had already pinned its colours to the mast by inviting one of the “New Generation” artists, the painter Anthony Donaldson, to design a series of front covers for the magazine, based on a grainy black and white photograph of a nude.

My earlier piece for *The Cambridge Review* had been not so much a critical review of the Rauschenberg show as an essay that probed the theoretical concept of representation. In this shorter piece, I attempted a round-up of what seemed to me to be the most significant of the art exhibitions that were taking place in London in spring 1964. Besides focusing on the show at the Whitechapel, I considered what had been exhibited at what was probably London’s most prestigious commercial gallery, the Marlborough in Bond Street. I also took note of what was being shown in the nearby premises of the non-commercial Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in Dover Street. To some extent, I viewed the assignment as a way of engaging with other critics: David Sylvester, with whom I disagreed about the comparison between Bomberg and Soutine; David Thompson, whose choice of the words “toughness” and “ambiguity” coincided with my own intuition about the collective strengths of the New Generation; and indeed Guillaume Apollinaire whose comments on Picabia’s Orphist pictures (not actually shown at the ICA) had already struck a responsive chord.

I was clearly conscious of the difficulty of writing about three such disparate shows. Bomberg and his school had already become well known to me, since my subscription to *X* magazine had attracted me to the exhibitions of the Beaux Arts Gallery. Picabia was more of an unknown quantity, apart from what I had been able to glean from Apollinaire’s brilliant writings on Cubism. But I can recognise here in the structure of the review the early development of my tendency to advance the critical argument by means of a formal comparison. Having drawn the sharp contrast between Bomberg and Picabia, I then argue that the New Generation have nothing whatever in common with Bomberg, but will gain in significance if seen in the context of the historical avant-garde as exemplified by Picabia. This enables me to put a new gloss on some of David Thompson’s acute characterisations, with which I was broadly in agreement.

I can think of no obvious reason for my decision to bring in the concept of “psychical distance”, which had been published just over fifty years prior and derived from the work of the Cambridge aesthete, Edward Bullough. Probably my reading of Gombrich had alerted me to the need for a conceptual, and even scientific, base to judgements involving aesthetic appreciation.



Figure 34.

The New Generation: 1964, Whitechapel Gallery, March-May 1964
(London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1964): jacket.



Figure 35.

Granta, 69, no. 1236, 14 May 1964. Jacket image by Anthony Donaldson.

Art in London and Kassel

These two pieces published in Cambridge in October 1964 had awaited the revival of *Granta* and *The Cambridge Review* at the beginning of the new academic year. Both had been written during the course of the summer, and my visit to *documenta* had taken place some weeks after the opening of the exhibition on 27 June.

My essay on Francis Bacon was, in effect, the culmination of my project of writing on Delacroix and Giacometti, which had hung fire since the previous year. I invoked both of these artists in order to provide a broader historical context for Bacon's mode of figuration. My reading of another of Gombrich's works, in this case *Art and Illusion* (1960), provided a theoretical point of departure for an examination of Bacon's "specifically painterly method". I

had become interested in Bacon's work as a result of my visits to the Beaux Arts Gallery and my early subscription to *X*. I gave my copy of the issue of *X* featuring Bacon to Michael Peppiatt, then a Cambridge undergraduate. At the time, Peppiatt was editing an issue of the occasional magazine, *Cambridge Opinion*, on British contemporary art. He later became the major authority on the life and work of Bacon. ¹⁶

As I was already living in Paris by the beginning of October, I was unable to see proofs. Working from hand-written copy may explain howlers in the printed text like Delacroix's "*Massacre of Chivis*". The last lines of the article were unaccountably omitted and had to be inserted in ink in my own copy. No precise identification is given for the photographs of the paintings by Bacon, which had been obtained from Marlborough Galleries. In fact, they date from 1964 and show what was clearly intended at the time to be a triptych of Bacon's friend and fellow painter, Lucien Freud. These three large portraits have subsequently been dispersed. The right-hand painting was presented by Marlborough to the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. The left-hand painting, now in the Forbes collection, was shown at Tate Britain in the early months of 2018.

Bacon, however, was also represented by five paintings in the large exhibition, *Painting & Sculpture of a Decade 54-64*, which was held at the Tate Gallery in April-June 1964. I did not review this exhibition, no doubt partly because of the Cambridge publishing schedules, but also perhaps because I found my visit to be a frustrating experience. Beyond any doubt, this was the richest and most comprehensive British showing of contemporary art to date. Yet my reactions coincided precisely with those of a review I later discovered by Patrick Reyntiens: "twice as many works of art apiece as they should, each work being twice as large as it should be for comfortable viewing and as capriciously lit as any South American baroque church." ¹⁷ These works had been selected, at the invitation of the Gulbenkian Foundation, by Alan Bowness (shortly to become Director of the Tate), Lawrence Gowing, and Philip James (Director of Art at the Arts Council). But the introductory "notes" to the catalogue were anonymous and (to me) appeared somewhat alienating: "Abandon the philosophic guides. The idea of *expression* and the idea of the artist as someone in communication with us through some code that we can decipher are inadequate to the situation." ¹⁸

This was not a sentiment that I was inclined to take seriously. But it was the "impression of cluttered riches" generated by the layout of the exhibition that perturbed me most, and provided the greatest possible contrast to the subsequent experience of *documenta*. I had witnessed a rather hasty exposition of the previous *documenta* in 1959, since our enterprising school art teacher, Grahame Drew, showed us without comment the vast number of slides that he had taken there. But *documenta III* was a much more

considerable event, consolidating the position of this Hessian city on the fringes of the Western bloc as the foremost showcase for contemporary art in the post-war world. The rationale of the exhibition, carefully explained by its director, the art historian Werner Haftmann, was certainly “more didactic than anarchic.”¹⁹ But its success was due, above all, to the resourceful way in which this didactic rationale was underpinned by an inspired utilisation of the city sites.

As my review testifies, the achievement of *documenta III* was to set new standards for the very concept of an exhibition of modern and contemporary art. In part, this was a matter of financial resources. Reyntiens assessed the budget of the Gulbenkian show at £35,000 whereas *documenta III* cost “roughly £150,000” by my estimate. But it was also a question of visual realisation. Kassel provided several commodious and traditional spaces: the Museum Fridericianum, which had indeed been at its origin one of the first publicly accessible museums in Europe, and the later Alte Galerie, which was chosen by Haftmann to house an unprecedentedly broad display of modern and contemporary drawings. The Orangerie and the park surrounding it were devoted to the theme of “Painting and Sculpture in Space”, giving unstinted spatial provision to large pictures as well as to major items of sculpture. In short, ideal conditions were provided for close attention to detail, as well for exciting environmental effects. I continued to return to *documenta* in subsequent years, noting in particular the exhibitions of 1968 and 1972.

Francis Bacon

Stephen Bann

The use of paint as a medium for representation involves a basic ambiguity. The artist works with whatever pattern he has abstracted from reality, but he also works with brush and pigments. This has always been so—and the very nature of representation dictates that these two aspects should always be borne in mind. But, since the time of Delacroix and the Nabis, the ambiguity has become much more than an incidental factor. Sir Kenneth Clark has written in a discussion of Velasquez' *Les Meninas* (I quote from Professor Gombrich's *'Art and Illusion'*) that: . . . he wanted to observe what went on when the brush strokes and dabs of pigment on the canvas transformed themselves into a vision of transfigured reality as he stepped back. But try as he might, stepping backward and forward, he could never hold both visions at the same time, and therefore the answer to his problem of how it was done always seemed to elude him.' This impossibility of uniting the illusion and the material may apply to traditional painting. But it does not seem to me to be true today. The best of modern figurative painting has more than an incidental ambiguity, upon which the spectator can exercise his power of perception. To change the term slightly but significantly, it is ambivalent—it forces upon the spectator the conflicting realms of image and material, without allowing him to seize hold upon either.

Two historical developments seem to me to clarify this position. In the course of his long career, Delacroix reintroduced the notion of the brushstroke not merely as an adjunct to satisfactory representation, but as a direct sign of the artist's agency. Later, the Nabis began to view the surface of the picture not simply as a vehicle of personal energy, but as a rectangle decorated and diversified with pigments. Delacroix, in bringing a subjective tinge to his brushwork, was resuming contact with Titian, Tintoretto and Rembrandt. In his portraits of Chopin and Paganini he demonstrates that the great painter can make us feel his passionate use of paint not merely as an indication of his own personality, but also as an evocation of the subjective energy in another. Where Delacroix is concerned with energy of this type the Nabis demonstrated a combination of atmosphere and material, the urge to fit their subtle carpets of colour to the very edges of the pictorial surface.

All this serves to introduce the work of Francis Bacon. First of all, Bacon exemplifies precisely the ambivalence which I originally referred to. He has said in conversation with David Sylvester that he is unable to differentiate in his works between the paint which has a purely expressive function and that which 'represents' human features. It is not simply a case, as with Sir Kenneth Clark, of a painting which changes from transfigured reality to dabs of pigment as the spectator approaches. With Bacon the transitions take place not in relation to the movement of the spectator, but across the surface of the work—and although we isolate some passages as 'pure dabs' and some as 'pure reality,' the work as a whole continues to suggest two

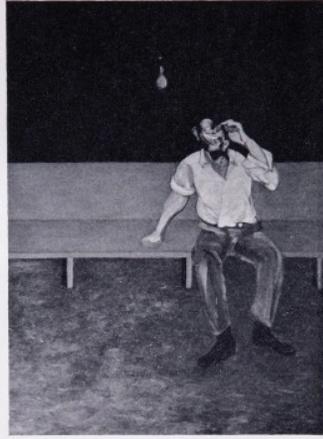


modes of activity simultaneously. Bacon's figures do not become transformed at closer inspection into amorphous patterns of coloured pigment. There is no way of cutting out the human, figurative element. On the contrary, this poignant element is intensified by the sonorous presence of the pigment, bringing to mind a remark by Rembrandt: 'Don't poke your nose into my pictures, the smell of paint will poison you.'

Bacon uses not only the signs of physical involvement which evoke human presence in a picture, but also the cohesion of surface which I have associated with the Nabis. He forms a skin of rich pigment—sometimes lush, sometimes chalky—and picks up with it the material presences of chairs, walls, tables and carpets. In this respect he shows himself to be more painterly than another great figurative artist, Giacometti. For Giacometti aims to create an illusion of space, within which he situates figures of a 'dureté intracassable.' He uses the picture to reproduce the mysterious self-sufficiency which is naturally associated with sculptural form. Here we touch on a criticism that has been levelled at Bacon's work. Reg Gadney in a previous number of this magazine, referred to a need for the modern painter to recover something of the nobility of Michaelangelo. But this is surely the nobility of sculptural presence—even in Michaelangelo's paintings the forms are moulded as if in volume. The inherent nobility of painting has always been different. It has involved acceptance of the infinitely manipulable, vegetable nature of pigment. Once again, this century has accentuated the fact. Bomberg's last self-portrait, in

Figure 36.

Stephen Bann, "Francis Bacon", *Granta*, 69, no. 1238, 17 October 1964: 6. Illustrated is Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait of Lucian Freud*, 1964. Courtesy of the estate of Francis Bacon (All rights reserved / DACS 2019).



which the shaded face seems to be invaded by a searing slash of paint bears witness to the fact that even a painter who is passionately attached to the old masters must obtain his tragic impact through a partial concession to the anarchic tendency of the material.

Bacon's attachment to a specifically painterly method—to a use of paint which is *positive* throughout the whole surface of the picture—has involved adjustments in the overall planning of his works. Much has been written of the so-called 'Grand Guignol' element in them. Sir John Rothenstein, in his introduction to the recent book on Bacon, suggested that it has declined to a minimum. But it seems to me that the scenic apparatus of Bacon's pictures has never been entirely, or even primarily designed to shock. In his interview with David Sylvester, Bacon spoke of his 'glass boxes' as being designed to concentrate attention on the figure. All his obvious devices can be explained in this light. They serve not to overlay the figure with specious ornaments, but to focus attention—to lead us directly into the theatre of events. Giacometti uses a parallel method when he fills the areas around his portrait figures with a smudged grey atmosphere—sometimes with a lined frame—and thereby makes more vivid the central presence. But where Giacometti's surrounding surfaces are negative—tending to evoke a spatial setting—Bacon leaves his surfaces definite and material. Therefore, in order to gain a central figure with intensity similar to that of Giacometti, he must make adjustments throughout the picture which *override these surfaces*. The development of his art can be traced to a great ex-

tent in terms of a movement from pictures in which these intermediate signs—cubes, tassels, etc.—are dominant to those in which they scarcely obtrude. In the *Triptych*, for example, the problem is brilliantly managed. The left-hand picture, in which the figure turns away and draws his knees towards him, contains three correctives to this stance—the hanging bulb, the dash of paint across the face and the two white blobs towards the bottom of the picture. The first supplies a vertical element to balance the relentless horizontal of the bench, the second in some measure cancels the indirect glance of the figure, the third emphasises the receding floor. In the middle picture, none of these are necessary. The figure provides a strong vertical in the middle of the picture, faces towards us and has his feet on the floor—no props are used. In the right-hand picture the bulb recurs to counterweight the posture of the figure.

If we grant that Bacon uses these devices primarily to focus our attention on his figures—to direct our reactions to the human element even if posture and situation prevent it from occupying the centre of the picture—we must still settle the basic question. What is the reason for this direct presentation? What is the state of the figures at which Bacon sedulously levels our attention? This I can most clearly answer by means of an analogy from Delacroix. His *Massacre of Chios* uses a device very close to that of Bacon. The foreground has a scrambled, hasty appearance that recedes dramatically to the main characters, like the rough purple foreground in Bacon's three studies. What we see in the *Massacre of Chios* is a state

Figure 37.
 Stephen Bann, "Francis Bacon", *Granta*, 69, no. 1238, 17
 October 1964: 7.

of arrested action—the presentation of a dramatic conflict—in which rearing horse and supine patriot are juxtaposed. There is no hint of moral pronouncement, as could be found in Delacroix' predecessor David. The impression is of a painter who is fascinated by action, and by the possibilities of moral choice, but who finds himself unable to present anything but an accentuated scene of dramatic conflict.

It is this quality that seems to me central to Bacon's work. But where Delacroix represents dramatic conflict—a sudden suspension of action, in which victim and persecutor are poised beside one another—Bacon represents a fixed state of the individual. The restless, disturbing quality of his work results not from a mere manipulation of our emotions but from the fact that it presents the possibility of action, which by the very nature of pictorial representation is stilled. This seems to be the significance of Bacon's fascination for photography. The single photograph surely attracts his attention not because of its literary quality, but precisely because of its incredibility—its absurd isolation in the flux of events. Bacon's pictures deal with this same impossible moment between past and future. Helen Lessore is right in claiming that *'Arabs Walking'* (1957) and the succeeding Van Gogh series mark a great step forward. This is true in the most literal sense, since they are concerned with the seated figures—substantial only in head and hands—of his earlier works, but with wilful, purposeful movement. Since these pictures, Bacon has returned to supine, embryonic or sprawling forms. Now, and especially in this Triptych, he moves again into the realm of expectancy.

The two flanking figures may confront an unknown menace. The central figure is nonetheless orientated towards action and discovery.

This question of subject matter is integral to the understanding of Bacon's work. Even though it is always possible to record the search of an artist for self-discovery in the course of his works, it is quite a different matter for an artist to choose the direction of his work with virtually no distraction. Instead of working through a diversity of genres, Bacon now gives all his energies towards portraiture, and, as he has stressed, aims always for a single perfect picture that will subsume all his attempts. The position of a figurative artist who insulates himself completely from social requirements, and, like Bacon, is able to create a submissive market rather than working to please a demanding public, is one almost without parallel in contemporary art. Bacon appears to work in a vacuum, with no gravitational pulls from the society which exists around him. It is significant that an increasing number of his recent portraits have been concerned with two artists—Lucien Freud and Frank Auerbach—both of whom share his passionate devotion to figurative painting. An image of Bacon the artist has been built up which represents his work almost solely in terms of creative and destructive will—in terms of whole series of pictures being attempted at the same time, and

those which fail to show a certain quality being destroyed relentlessly. Like his Renaissance popes, Bacon proclaims his search for unity of expression—for a single work that will exemplify finally a single principle—in the midst of chaotic diversity. He exemplifies as much as any other European artist what Dore Ashton calls 'irony'—an element of dissemblance present in the public personalities of European as opposed to American artists. Even Rembrandt and Velazquez, he maintains, were actually recording events. Now, however, '... a really good artist ... would be forced to make a game of the same situation.' Bacon's public statements tend to give the impression of a disembodied will, gratuitously absorbed in an elaborate 'game,' for the sake of sensory excitement. He quotes with approval Valéry's remark: 'What we want nowadays is the sensation without the boredom of its conveyance.' He claims that 'the artist must really deepen the game to be any good at all, so that he can make life a bit more exciting.' Yet this concern with the elaboration of the game, and with the excitation of the senses, does not lead him away from the traditional subjects of artists who worked to 'record.' 'Man is haunted by the mystery of his own existence,' he said in *'Cambridge Opinion'*, and is therefore much more obsessed with the remaking and recording of his own image in his world than with the beautiful fun of even the best abstract art.' Although Bacon continually explains his adherence to the human image in terms of obsession and 'assault upon the nervous system,' this concern is ultimately inexplicable except in relation to the values which underlie human action.

In a recent note on the Italian painter, Morandi, Andrew Forge suggested that so apparently reactionary a painter was perceptibly modern in the sense that his work reflected an age in which the direct portrayal of objects involved a defiance of conventional standards of painting. In a similar way, Bacon's work becomes comprehensible only in the context of an age in which the function of the painter is being radically altered. To quote Bacon once again: 'Photography has covered so much: in a painting that's even worth looking at the image must be twisted ... if it is to make a renewed assault upon the nervous system ... and that is the peculiar difficulty of figurative painting today.' The availability of new mater-

ials & the existence of a tradition of non-figurative art have freed the artist from the scale of reference within which Bacon works — or made it possible for him to be free. The crucial question — one which will decide Bacon's importance to us — is whether this art is merely one of technique & representation, or whether the deepest values of humanity are inextricably bound up with the recording of man's own image in his world.

Figure 38.

Stephen Bann, "Francis Bacon", *Granta*, 69, no. 1238, 17 October 1964: 8.

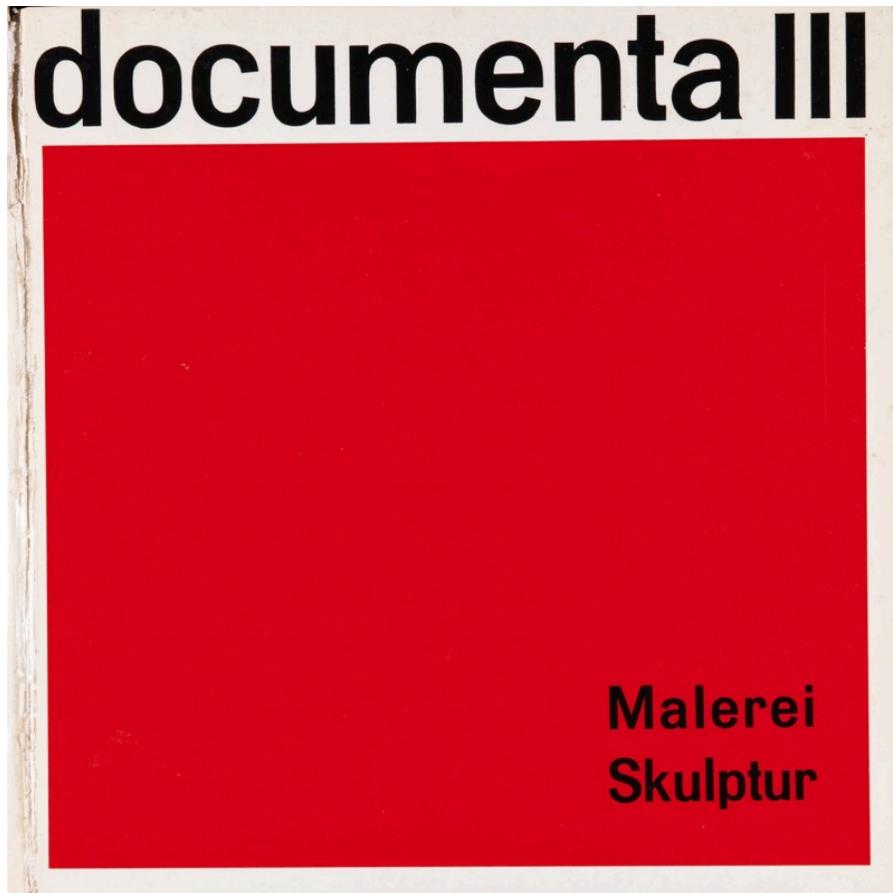


Figure 39.

Exhibition catalogue, documenta III, June–October 1964 (Kassel: Hessische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964), Vol. 1, Malerei Skulptur: front cover. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.



Figure 40.

Exhibition catalogue, documenta III, June–October 1964 (Kassel: Hessische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964), Vol. 1, Malerei Skulptur: back cover. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.



Figure 41.

Exhibition catalogue, documenta III, June–October 1964 (Kassel: Hessische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964), Vol. 2, Handzeichnungen: front cover. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

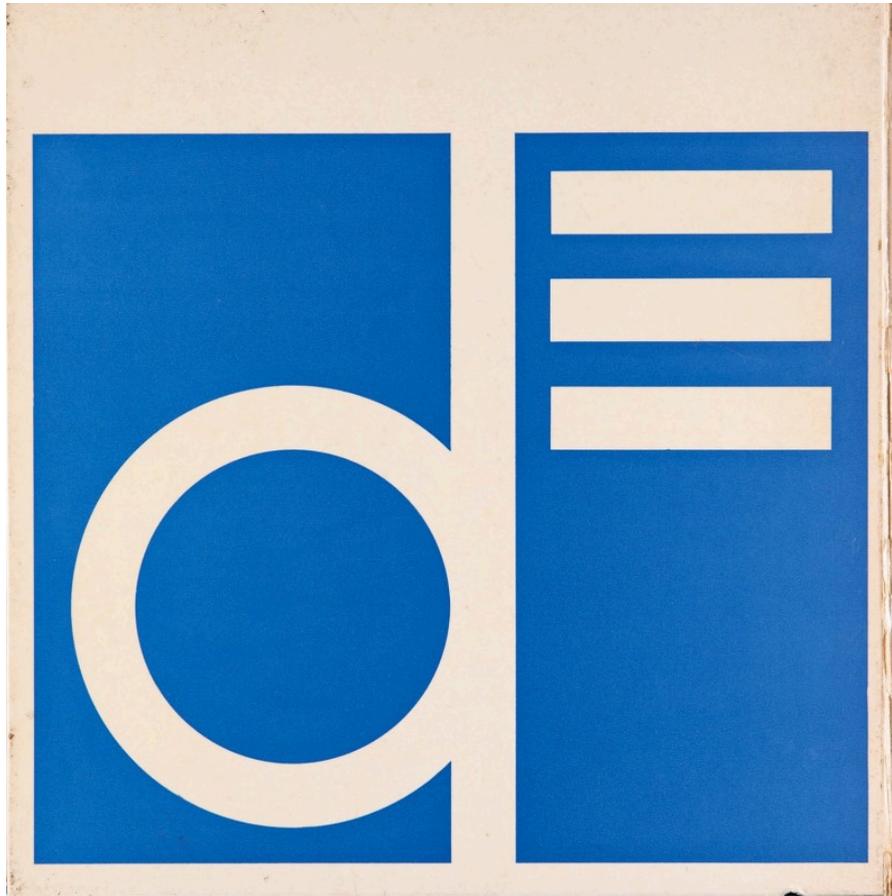


Figure 42.

Exhibition catalogue, documenta III, June–October 1964 (Kassel: Hessische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964), Vol. 2, Handzeichnungen: back cover. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

GROUPE DE RECHERCHE D'ART VISUEL DE PARIS

Le Parc

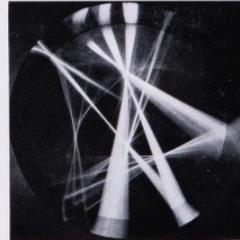
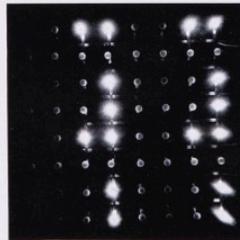
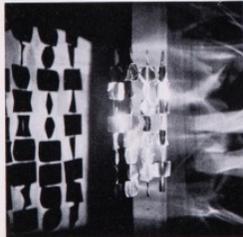
STRUCTURE MOBILE EN ALUMINIUM
POLI 1963/64
200×200×200 cm

Morellet

STRUCTURE LUMINEUSE NÉON 1963/64
Vier Tafeln, je 80×80×80 cm

Garcia Rossi

BOITE LUMINEUSE EN MOUVEMENT
1963/64
100×100×40 cm



410

Figure 43.

Exhibition catalogue, documenta III, June–October 1964 (Kassel: Hessische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964) (Vol. 2, Handzeichnungen): 410. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

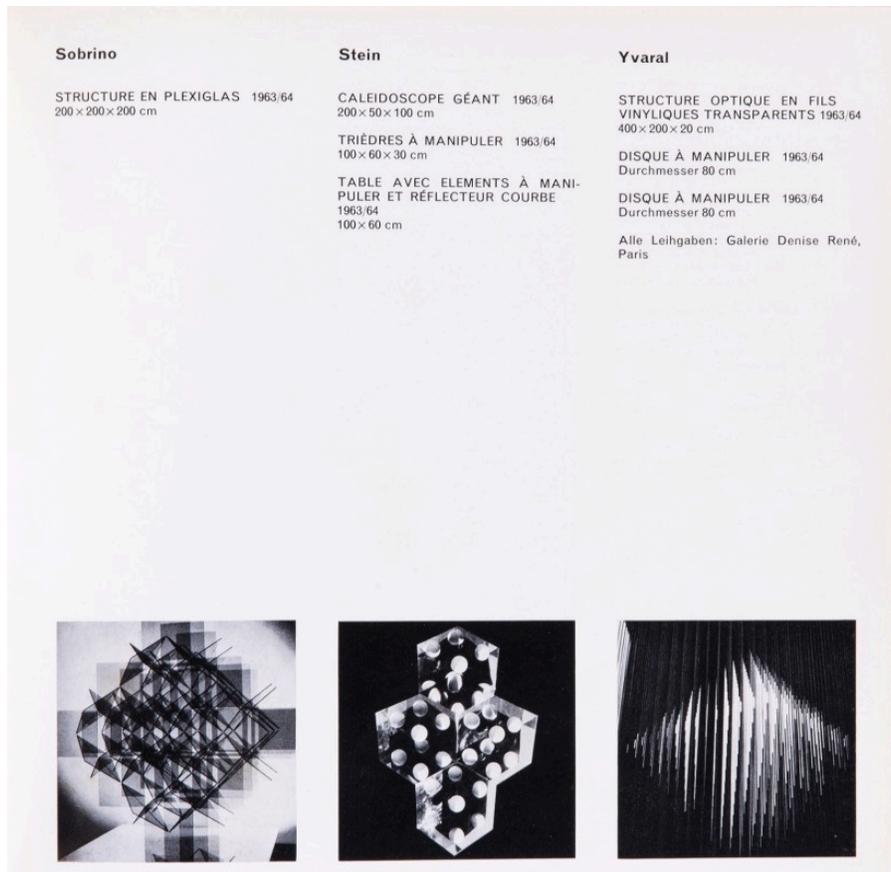


Figure 44.

Exhibition catalogue, documenta III, June–October 1964 (Kassel: Hessische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964) (Vol. 2, Handzeichnungen): 411. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

Kitaj

1932 in Ohio (USA) geboren,
lebt in London.



1 SITZENDER WEIBLICHER AKT
VOR EINEM SPIEGEL 1958
Bleistift 44,5x34,9 cm
Marlborough Fine Art Ltd., London

2 SITZENDER WEIBLICHER AKT
IM PROFIL 1958
Bleistift 48,3x34,3 cm
Marlborough Fine Art Ltd., London

Figure 45.

Exhibition catalogue, documenta III, June–October 1964 (Kassel: Hessische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964) (Vol. 2, Handzeichnungen): 102. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.



Figure 46.

Exhibition catalogue, documenta III, June–October 1964 (Kassel: Hessische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964) (Vol. 2, Handzeichnungen): 103. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

Larry Rivers

geb. 1929 in New York. Studium in New York bei Hans Hofmann, dann in Paris. Lebt in Southampton, Long Island.

1 AFRICA 1962/63
Öl auf Leinwand 286,5×338 cm
Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York



384

Figure 47.

Exhibition catalogue, documenta III, June–October 1964 (Kassel: Hessische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964) (Vol. 2, Handzeichnungen): 384. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

So far we have managed without notice boards, handbills, theatre companies, advertisements, notices, notices, and other signs of institutional life.

In April, 1962, we started our first eleven new Fellows, all on the same day, and since then we have elected several more to the Quorum. So far from diluting the spirit of the college, whatever that might mean, they have made themselves indistinguishably one with Lockington but to the college as a whole. Four of our five Tutors are drawn from the Eleven, and several of the 100 Fellows supervise undergraduates as help administered the college as well as contributing to life at Lockington.

This year we have eighty-five graduates compared with 100 undergraduates, of whom sixty are Imperial Research students. Of the eighty-five, forty-one will be living at Lockington twenty-four

in the George Thomson Building, together with four Fellows. Seventeen of the others are married, many of them living in college flats, and the rest are living in college accommodation or in lodgings. Graduates have showed our great preference in the allocation of rooms at Lockington. In obvious manner, those in need of rooms on their night or week during term, of which one is a leader. Night on which married graduate students and their wives are especially welcome. We have deliberately not insisted a High Table, but the water provides drinks before, during and after dinner. Lunch is not provided at Lockington, but Fellows, graduates and undergraduates can all meet at lunch in the college Hall. During vacations there are no dinners at Lockington, but all graduates may dine in Hall. The George Thomson Building itself

has been provided, not only by the profits of Cambridge New Architecture but also by the graduates who have just moved into it. It has twenty-four bedrooms, twenty for graduate residents, ten for the resident Fellows and four rooms to be shared by non-resident Fellows. The students will have the benefit of such modern amenities as hot-water, central heating, electric fields, a semi-annual staff society and such occasional student societies. Downstairs is a recreation room, meeting room for the graders, for games, cinema and meetings of societies, as well as desks, table tennis and other amusements. And upstairs, on the level, a library, student centre, provided by the Master, presides over the collection of the computer-players. It remains to be seen whether scholarship will flourish better in Lockington than in the gardens of Mill Road, or have decided to seek the mountains.

Correspondence Art

To the Editors of The Cambridge Review.

Dear Sirs,—How May you ever find enough to review favourably my book on Cambridge New Architecture. I am glad to say that the first edition of 4000 copies has now almost sold out, and we are therefore embarking on a second revised edition.

I am well aware that the book has many imperfections, and the purpose of this letter is to ask your readers if they will kindly tell me any errors and omissions they have spotted in my text. There must be many—already quite a number have been pointed out to me. We have to go to press again at the end of October, so I would be grateful if all information could be sent to me by then.

Yours faithfully,
NICHOLAS TAYLOR
104, Portman Road,
London, N.W.8.

To the Editors of The Cambridge Review.

Dear Sirs,—May I advise through your columns the reform of the History Research Club? The reform for research students in the History Faculty would mean support for many years, but, on the support from Cambridge of its most recent officers, the work of such reform will be settled. If anyone feels moved to end this state of affairs, by or the club, by contacting me, claim for society's funds.

Yours sincerely,
D. E. LECHEMAN
Churchill College,
Cambridge.

DOCUMENTA III AT KASSEL

The partly circumstantial elements of this remarkable exhibition are the fact to compel our attention. A group of private people, with no affiliation or social interests, have assembled a collection of modern painting, sculpture and drawing that is unique in range and quality. They have filled two museums and a vast outdoor area with these works. In order to do this, they have raised roughly 2250,000 from public, commercial and private sources.

It is therefore appropriate that the breadth and generosity of the response should be immediately apparent in the situation of the works. Only on very rare occasions, from the atmosphere of one workshop with the appointments of another. A section of the exhibition—consisting of works by sixty-five artists distributed throughout the available space—is in fact called "Bild und Skulptur im Raum". A section of the exhibition—consisting of works by sixty-five artists distributed throughout the available space—is in fact called "Bild und Skulptur im Raum". A section of the exhibition—consisting of works by sixty-five artists distributed throughout the available space—is in fact called "Bild und Skulptur im Raum".

Private has assembled for the Kunsthalle at Kassel arranged in a library, leaving a library area also left. Kassel movement, E.W. Wayland's collection which has of his private living from the village, a school which were entirely inappropriate to the actual works, but suggests new methods of installing the sections of the exhibition by the use of light and distance. The advantage of placing the works of artists which is forms of their own in essence. Louis Neuberger's steel work which profits from the absence of distance to compare a room as viewed as the interior of an unoccupied room. Richard Serra's lines, which present themselves as a sculpture, like an area of artistic forms in an occasion.

The excellent arrangement of pictures is by no means confined to this section of the exhibition. The top floor, devoted to "Eight and Mosaicist" includes especially Schapiro's "Christus II" and "Lax I" move gently and personally in a central, darkened room, while next door Tinguely's "Museum I" supplies a striking image of almost unrecognizable form. Indeed in the whole organization of the exhibition is a function of the nature that intensity of presentation can be imposed upon contemporary works. In a number of cases artists have been given the opportunity of creating a work to fit a particular context. In all cases, the Museum Friedlandshaus has been used not as a presenting area for the works, but as an area presenting a variety of special possibilities.

Although the presentation lends distinction to this way, it does not by any means isolate an individual artist. As Dr Werner Hofmann explains in his

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Figure 48. Stephen Bann, "Documenta III at Kassel", The Cambridge Review, 10 October 1964, 21. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

profile in the last catalogue when in a small one confined to drawings. The exhibition is dedicated to the artist, personally—to the notion that "Art . . . has the character not of a model to be followed or of a model, but of an experiment which, whenever, contingently fails." Yet the more often the exhibition lies in the fact that this situation of presentation does make it a united whole. To quote De Sitterman once again: "The only group that has not moved on at first indifference and temporary calm, which defines itself only through the valuation, repulsion, and interpretation of the single acts. The perfect usage of an intricately patterned organic form." This claim is integrally borne out in the actual organization of the exhibition. Collections of modern works tend to appear heterogeneously, either because too few works of each individual artist are shown, or because there are glaring gaps in the selection. The systematic collection of modern masters were designed to give an indication of what is happening since there is an understanding of the relationship between happenings. The recent Gullonek exhibition at the Tate, though it included works of the highest quality, gave an impression of cultural riches; the attempt to group artists according to loose stylistic categories was unconvincing, and the structure between works often took the form of sheer physical effort—the faded glass case by a man. Penelope's visit to the name of a Museum, or the air of confinement (induced by a gallery) within a space where Schiller's "Classical V" should have been directed. At Kassel, however, a method has been found between isolation and integration (presentation). Putting first a few devoted to Kassel has two advantages: the works of Hans Scharoun does not stand the scrutiny—each complete, and arrives the other. The overwhelming display of Vassarely takes place not far from the machine, supremely sound currents of Tappin. But the subjects of the overall planning permits the spectator to view his expectations and adjust himself to the new spectacle with the least difficulty. The "White Plane" exhibited at Kassel made it possible for the artist to make and adjust himself to the new spectacle with the least difficulty. The "White Plane" exhibited at Kassel made it possible for the artist to make and adjust himself to the new spectacle with the least difficulty.

Patric and King. In addition to the works by acknowledged masters, of whom Van Gogh, Klee, Matisse and Picasso are especially represented, there are many of almost equal quality which are unknown. Radio provides two superb abstract studies. Art and Matisse seem to have commented the names of their art into a few simple, some still like such. De Sitterman and Pollock emerge as Surrealist abstractions, whose sketches are intimately related to their finished paintings, while Matisse's delicately implied landscape possess a subtlety that is sometimes absent from his larger works. A collection of modern drawings on this scale has never been assembled before, and the artist represented almost without exception justify that inclusion. It is possible to select the drawings of artists like Rothschild, Matisse, and even Pollock and De Sitterman to their works in the "White Plane" series of the exhibition. While Karel, however, who is represented as a disintegration and also in the "Aspects" section, devoted to change artists, it is significant that there is only an indirect link. The artist in "Aspects" seem to be more concerned than their allies with the distinction of the work of art. The fact that Bernard Cohen, a notable British addition to this section, included a set of notes (recently published in *Creative Response*, "Notes on the photograph of the painting 'Gonzo'") seems to indicate that he regarded the photograph as something other than the painting as involving radical change. Recent pictures by Bernard Cohen also underline this point. These in "Aspects" give the impression of a series of brief and special projects which have been compressed into the area of the picture—as if the finished work were the sort of a number of related sketches. Bernard Cohen leaves no doubt of his intention, when he gives to a number of his pictures the most expressive of a series of juxtaposed sketches.

There is a more fundamental division between members of the two generations, of which this exhibition is merely one indication. Interest in modern painting is the distinction between the picture as a frame of activity and the picture as a final surface. This distinction is at least as old as the Nazis, and it occurs in the history of the works in the "White Plane". In pictures like Tappin, Alan Davy, or William Scott, there is an immediate richness of surface and at the same time the implication of an overall atmosphere in which forms occur. With the next generation a new abstract genre: the conscious reaction against conventions which are suggested by the representational function of the work. One painting is "Aspects" from the title, "Towers of the Lancers", and was indeed concerned with emphasizing and bringing to mind the involvement of a picture within line context.

The same treatment of a representational history indicates how younger painters are making explicit what had previously been regarded as the implicit continuities of the work of art. In one direction this remarkably historical picture by Van Klee, the notion of style as a medium for representing physical reality is limited to an amazing degree—the relationship of model, picture, pain and context is not taken for granted but probed in the context of the work. A small section by Hans Scharoun sums up many of the themes of his recent painting—the subtle perceptual cube indicating articulation of concrete-time space, the self-absorbed Klee-like form pointing to the self-history of the picture—and perhaps to an extent of criticism in the work of the artist. The subject matter of a picture is no longer treated directly. Perhaps the remark of Francis Bacon that photography has deprived the painter of his freedom as a recorder of events is relevant here. Curiously Larry Rost is strongly attracted to the French tradition of the early nineteenth century—Ingres and David especially—whose conventionalized function was united with a significant modernity. The story of his work may seem to be a struggle to give action, in which the photographic element in traditional painting has been systematically removed—chiefly by heightened emphasis on the texture of the paint itself. In the "Aspects" section, in which I have previously referred, the artist's manner at the exhibition only seems at first to emerge from a dedicated focus—and not others, and one friend to others, that she is simply struggling from a chain of images.

This struggle to probe not only the surface when but also the subtle implications of the work of art is characteristic of the American "Pop" artist. It has already led to a significant reaction—on one level, an artistic movement that resolves the same problems in a totally different way. The key question in Pop art seems to me to be one of history—the extent to which the system is indeed to suggest his disbelief in front of the picture. Hans Scharoun leaves us with a modified theme, by reproducing the configurations of data that go to make a photograph and yet preventing it from creating objects in an illusory spatial context. In the new movement, the question of history is shifted from the realm of conceptual activity to that of action. Space is again the critical point. Form and colour are used in such a way that the situation of decision within the picture is spatially ambiguous. It is because this movement makes use of the accepted notions of the picture that it is sometimes described as "realist painting." Bernard Cohen's pictures are a good example since in them the "function" of line tends to suggest situation in space but

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Figure 49.

Stephen Bann, "Documenta III at Kassel", *The Cambridge Review*, 10 October 1964, 22. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

the overall structure of the study can be seen.

"Recent" painting-theater associations with the society of works classed at Kassel under the title, "Light and Movement." The "Groupe de recherche d'art visuel" an association of artists in Paris—officially established with great ceremony in a text published in 1961—"We prefer to consider the artistic phenomenon in terms of actively visual experience, existing at the level of physiological responses and not cognitive reactions." The use of "active" synonymous with "visual" movement is defined in these terms: "The term, up to now considered as valid as itself, and utilized with its original characteristics, denotes an autonomous domain dependent upon the subject. In this way the relation between elements suggests a homogeneity and an essentially able to create sensitive structure, which are only perceived on the level of perceptual vision. The relationship of object, plastic surface and spectator is no longer constant. A visual movement is established." This action—and incidentally, the activity of the group—extends also to the use of real movement in the work of art. Just as the "Groupe de recherche d'art visuel" is more directly concerned with physiological response than Bernard Cohen—whose works must be set in the context of representational tradition and as freely as those of Larry Rivers—as there is a division in the field of real movement. While Taguchi sees the moving machine as a vibrating image of destructive force, Nicolas Schöffer guarantees a liberally tolerant of spatial movement directed by the play of light and shadow.

If I may return to the theme of the last section of this essay, it is possible to perceive strong lines of development in recent painting. The close contact between surface plasticity and represented object, as familiar to modern painting from the late Impression to Francis Bacon, has acquired an additional element. Painters like Rivers and Rauschenberg have heightened the tension by an exaggeration of the typical conventions of representation. They have infused this, yet sharpened it with elements of ambiguity. In this context, "visual" painting appears free of all past conventions of optical illusion and ambiguity in the use of space. But both virtual and

real movement are now being used "on the level of physiological perception and not cognitive response." Whereas the artist, his/visual/imagery, lives not independently, and the suspension of the spectator all found a place within the framework of his American Pop painting, there is now a substantial group which excludes artist and spectator from the work of art. This does not mean that there is no individual usage of works which are actual or virtual movement. Artists like Raus and Agnes have developed highly individual styles. Nor does it mean that the spectator cannot make contact with the work. A picture by Raus or Agnes requires simply an open eye, and the movement of the spectator. The new ambiguity is not an impoverishment, but rather a more complex order and discipline—on order for the artist that it is some extent autonomous and excludes the self while from surface and form; a discipline for the spectator, who is challenged to discover through his own situation and justify the subtle complexity of visual movement.

Documenta III involves such specifications, but, as I have indicated, makes no rigid classifications. The tension is left open to a sense of selection and presentation—and this is precisely what an exhibition of this kind should do.

STEVEN BANN

Calendar

FREE LECTURES

In MR Lane Lecture Room, unless otherwise stated.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 12

Dr M. A. C. Watson: "The Mosaicary Movement in Modern Britain," Trinity School, 3.

Professor Volzke: "Shakespeare and the Arts," Little Hall, Sidgwick Avenue, 2.

Professor G. Zornow: "Baroque and Neoclassical Sculpture," School of Architecture, 3.

Mr. K. Aron: "Renaissance Tardiness" (Second Year) (over 2 week course), Sidgwick Avenue, 3.

Dr G. J. Whitton: "Aspects of Time: The Nature of Physical Time," 3.

Dr B. Robinson: "Governance and Politics in New African States," 3.

Mr. K. Aron: "Introduction to Kantian" (over a week course), Sidgwick Avenue, 3.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13

Professor Pops-Hermann: "The Renaissance Period," No. 1 Lecture Theatre, Chemistry Laboratory, 3.

Mr. K. Aron: "Renaissance Translations" (Second Year) (over a week course), Sidgwick Avenue, 3.

Dr A. C. Ewing: "Problems of Philosophy," 3.

Mr. K. Aron: "Introduction to Kantian" (over a week course), Sidgwick Avenue, 3.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14

Mr. J. Bowker: "Introduction to the Old Testament" (Lectures for Teachers), 3.

Mr. K. Aron: "Renaissance Translations" (Second Year) (over 2 week course), Sidgwick Avenue, 3.

Dr C. B. DeLorain: "Medical Renaissance and Medical Art," 5.

Mr. K. Aron: "Introduction to Kantian" (over a week course), Sidgwick Avenue, 3.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15

Dr C. B. DeLorain: "Renaissance Sculpture and Aesthetic," 11.

Mr. D. S. Mitchell: "Introduction to German," 3.

Mr. S. Mitchell: "Advanced German Translation," 8.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16

Mr. A. M. Jahn: "The Origin and Formation of the Baroque Style," School of Architecture, 3.

Dr N. Pevsner: "Art and Architecture of the Renaissance," 3.

EXHIBITIONS

ARTS COUNCIL GALLERY: Young Contemporaries, 1964.

SOCIETIES

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11

CAMBRIDGE FILM SOCIETY: French Can Can (France, 1939), Opening Speech (Canada, 1961), Drawing the Wall and Fish (Britain, 1938), India Rubber Road (France, 1960).

CHURCH SERVICES WITH MUSIC

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10

Kings: 1.30. Evening: Women in E; Arthur: "Aria, Op 10 movements of Gaur" (Secrets).

ARTS — THEATRE — CINEMA

<p>TODAY at 5 and 8.15: Suzanne York is A SINGULAR MAN</p> <p>NEXT WEEK: Film Programme KATHARINE HEPBURN, RALPH RICHARDSON, in <i>ENIGMA</i> GRIFFITH</p> <p>LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT (A) Stewart Pollockover 2.30, 4.0, 8.30</p> <p>Box Office Tel. 3336, 3336</p>	<p>TODAY at 2.30 and 7.30: LAWRENCE OF ARABIA (A)</p> <p>SUNDAY at 3.0, 6.45, 8.30 BREATHTLESS (X)</p> <p>NEXT WEEK (Mon. - Sat.) daily 2.30 and 7.30 de SODÁ'S BANQUET AT ORGOSOLO (Italy) (U) Jean-Pierre Maudy-VIEUXES SEINE (France) (A)</p> <p>Box Office Tel. 3336, 3336 Box Office Tel. 3336, 3336</p>
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[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 50. Stephen Bann, "Documenta III at Kassel", The Cambridge Review, 10 October 1964, 23. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

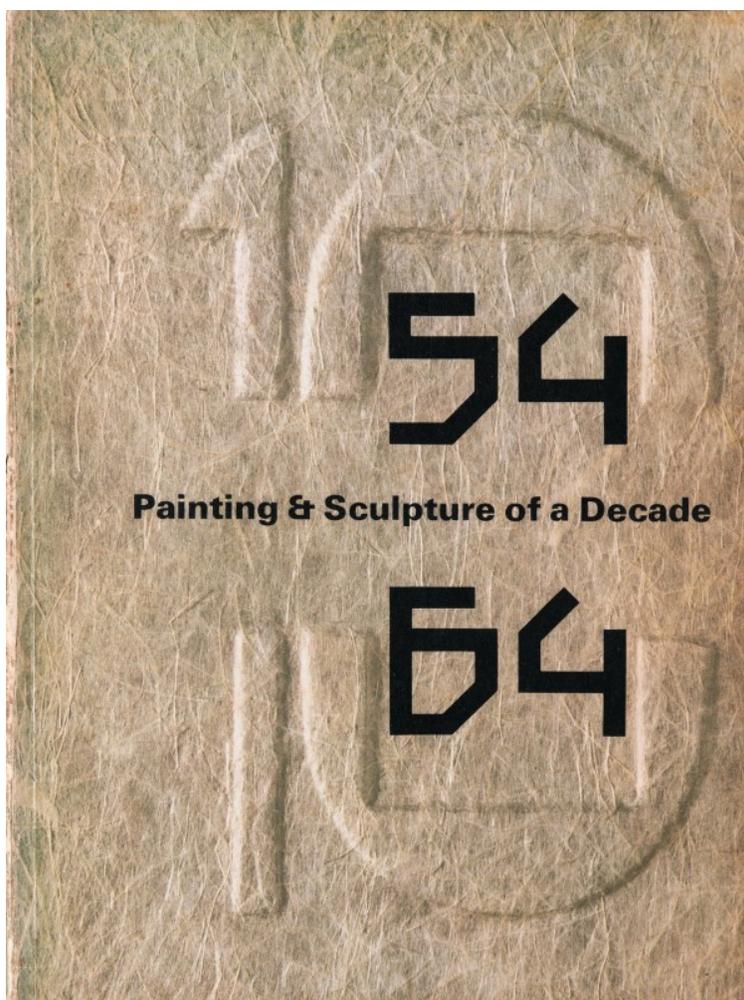


Figure 51.
Painting & Sculpture of a Decade 54/64, Tate Gallery,
April-June 1964 (London: Shenvall Press, 1964): jacket. Digital
image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

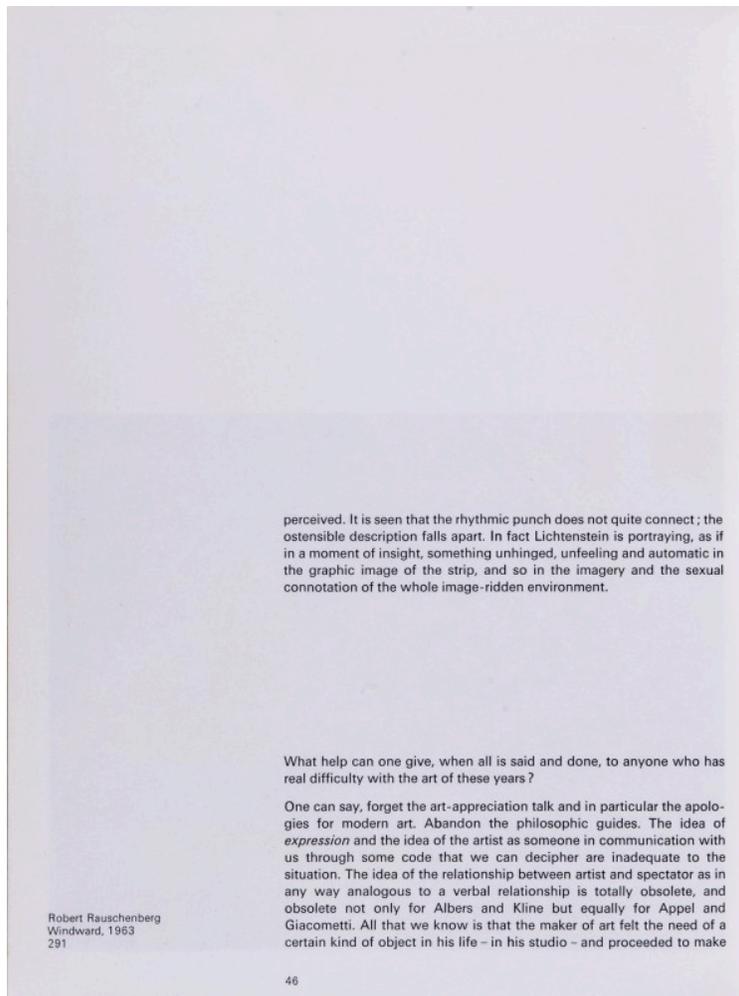


Figure 52.
Exhibition catalogue, *Painting & Sculpture of a Decade 54/64*,
Tate Gallery, April–June 1964 (London: Shenvall Press, 1964):
46. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

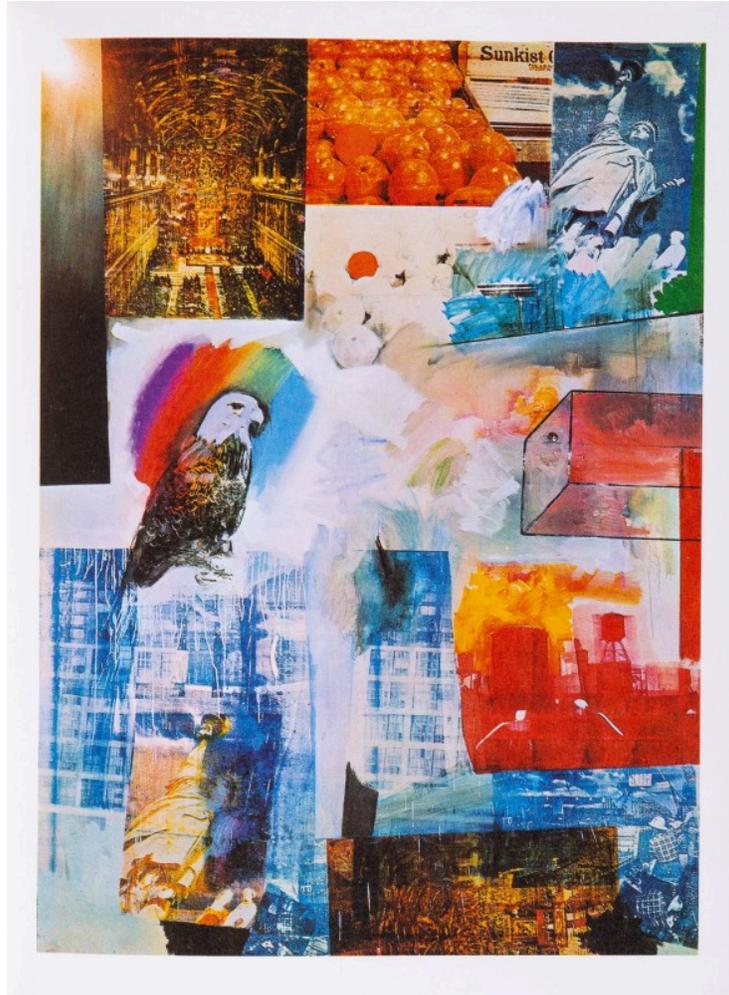


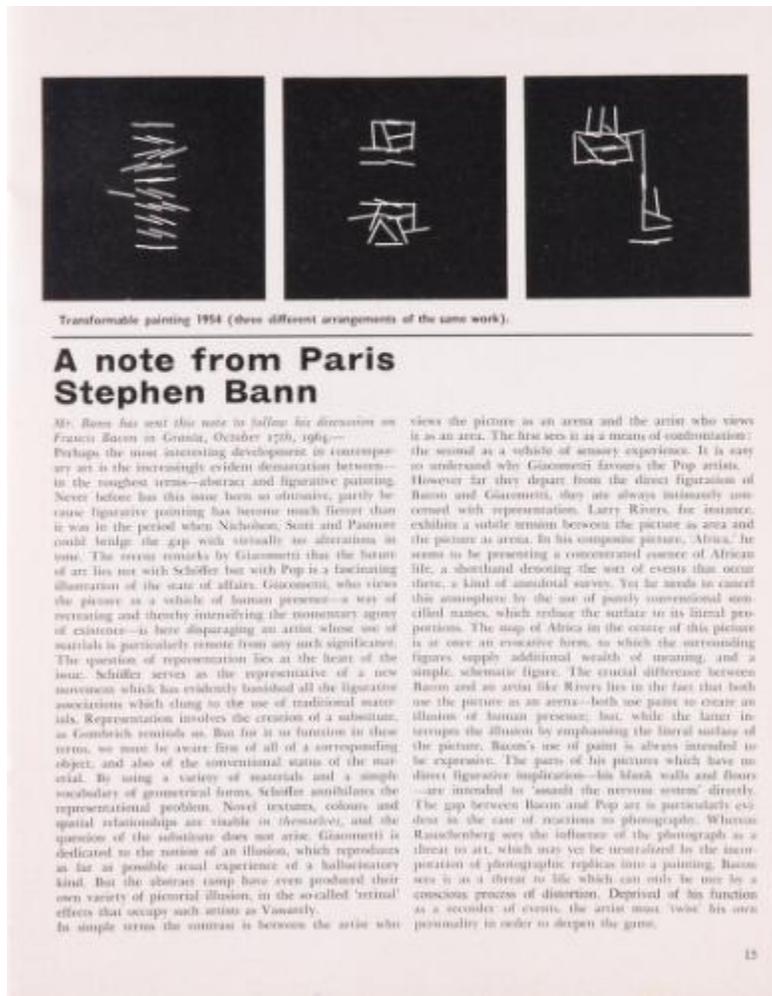
Figure 53.

Exhibition catalogue, *Painting & Sculpture of a Decade 54/64*, Tate Gallery, April-June 1964 (London: Shenvall Press, 1964): 47. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.



Figure 54.

Granta, 69, no. 1240, 28 November 1964: jacket.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 55.

Stephen Bann, "A Note from Paris", *Granta*, 69, no. 1240, 28 November 1964: 15.

Kinetic Art and Concrete Poetry

My "Note from Paris" in *Granta* (28 November 1964) was hardly more than a footnote to my earlier essay on Francis Bacon, which had been misprinted without its final sentences in the magazine the month before. But in citing the names of Vasarely and Schöffer in opposition to those of Bacon, Giacometti, and Rivers, I was reflecting a significant shift in my own critical focus which had begun to take place during the summer months. Reg Gadney, the editor of *Granta*, whose "note on Agam" (the Paris-based Israeli artist) occupied the remainder of the two-page spread, had introduced me to the milieu of Parisian kinetic art over the summer period. In company with Philip Steadman, we had visited Paris and enjoyed the hospitality of Gadney's friend, Frank Malina, an American rocket scientist who had

relocated to the city and was pursuing his own variety of kinetic painting. Our immediate mission that summer was to compose a special issue of *Image*. This was a new magazine published in London by Kingsland Prospect Press, with production values superior to *Granta*, for which Steadman was editor and art editor. Its planned focus was on kinetic art and concrete poetry. My own part in this project was, in the first instance, to compile two short articles on artists with South American connections: José María Cruxent, a noted Venezuelan archaeologist who spent part of each year in Paris developing his exquisite light boxes; and Gregorio Vardanega, an Italian-born sculptor in perspex whose artistic career had begun in Argentina before he took up residence in Paris in 1959.

I moved to Paris for a long period of residence in early October to pursue my historical research on Prosper de Barante. But I was also eager to continue furthering my interest in the contemporary area. My listing of appointments for October and November contains (in addition to a note of two tickets for the first Paris performance of the Rolling Stones²⁰) indications of meetings with Malina, Cruxent, and the historian of modern art who had already established himself as a leading critic of the kinetic movement, Frank Popper. There was, however, a second aspect to this new critical agenda. Paris was also home to the elderly poet, Pierre Albert-Birot, the publisher of some of Apollinaire's most famous *calligrammes* and who was still (as I discovered) at the centre of experimental activity. The special issue of *Image*, published at the end of November 1964, was billed under the dual title "Kinetic Art: Concrete Poetry". Mike Weaver, a Cambridge friend who was completing his doctorate on the poetry of William Carlos Williams, was responsible for the second emphasis. He had effectively drawn my attention to the burgeoning international phenomenon of concrete poetry, which (like the kinetic tendency) drew on deep roots in the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century.

Of particular importance to my critical writing, and my artistic life, at this time was the connection that I began to establish with the Scottish concrete poet, Ian Hamilton Finlay. Mike Weaver had invited me to travel with him and his wife on a visit to Edinburgh to meet Finlay in late August 1964. This meeting resulted in a correspondence which would endure almost to the end of Finlay's life in 2006.²¹ Weaver was by this stage well advanced in planning for a Cambridge venue the *First International Exhibition of Concrete, Phonic and Kinetic Poetry* (28 November–5 December 1964), whose catalogue formed an insert into the late November *Granta*. As I was resident in Paris for the autumn months, I was not able to assist in the mounting of the exhibition. However, I contributed an additional essay on concrete poetry to the special issue of *Image*, which was available by the time of its opening. I must have been dubious about the way in which the Introduction to the exhibition *Painting & Sculpture of a Decade*, held at Tate Gallery that spring,

had dismissed the “idea of *expression* and the idea of the artist as someone in communication with us through some code.” At any rate, my chosen guide in the interpretation of concrete poetry was indeed Gombrich’s essay on “Expression and Communication” (from *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*). I employed Gombrich’s analysis (and more particularly the notion of “semantic space” borrowed from the psychologist C.E. Osgood) as a means of exploring the manipulation of typography for semantic purposes that occurred in the poems of Finlay and other concrete practitioners.

The connection that I established with Finlay, and his consistently warm reception of my critical writing, encouraged me to write concrete poems of my own. The Cambridge show provided the first opportunity to display one of these works in public.²² A school friend, David Maclagan, was completing a postgraduate degree in the painting department of the Royal College of Art at the time. He resourcefully accessed the printing facilities of the college, and produced a small edition of screen prints of my *ORANGE* poem, one of which was duly exhibited in the show. Even when I was a resident in Paris, Finlay did not hesitate to keep me up to date with his own publications. In a letter of 17 November 1964, he professed himself “delighted” that *Telegrams from my Windmill*, his second compilation of concrete poetry, had arrived safely.



From left to right: anonymous lover, anonymous lover, Stephen Bann, Reg Gadney, Frank Popper, Phil Steadman and Citroen in Paris. Photo: Richard Hardwick.

Figure 56.

Anonymous lover, anonymous lover, Stephan Bann, Reg Gadney, Frank Popper, Phil Steadman and Citroen in Paris, 1964. Digital image courtesy of Richard Hardwick.

Communication and structure in concrete

The way in which concrete poetry makes use of the spatial possibilities of the printed page is direct and obvious. In the words of Pierre Garnier, it is a matter of allowing the word 'to take its own space'. Or it may be a case of separating the letters of an individual word in order to disclose new decorative and semantic possibilities. But what is more difficult to assess is the relation between this overt use of space on the page and the structure of the poem. This is the question which must be clarified, since a merely decorative use of letters would scarcely justify a new style of poetry.

My aim is therefore to present a brief account of the aesthetic underlying this new poetry, to clarify the types of structure which it involves and to examine it in terms of communication between author and reader. Professor Gombriich's brilliant essay 'Expression and Communication' has provided me with a convincing scheme for the analysis of concrete poetry and I have illustrated his concepts by quotations from the writings and works of several concrete poets.

Two features stand out immediately in any consideration of concrete poetry. It is concerned with a wide range of expressive techniques. Words are not simply arranged in lines and verses—they are fragmented, printed in varying colours and sizes of type, in short given an immense range of visual possibilities. But, on the other hand, it is essentially concerned with the conventional notation of the alphabet. It is entirely removed in origin from the indeterminate signs and forms that occur in abstract painting.

This may seem to some extent paradoxical. But it is appropriate to the view of expression which Gombriich puts forward in his essay. He attacks the traditional Romantic theory of communication in the arts, which depends upon a kind of 'emotional contagion' between the artist and his public. His complaint is that such a theory implies 'that expression is somehow rooted in the nature of our minds (that it therefore stands in no need of conventional signs)'. The defect of the theory is that it is totally unable to account for structure, and Gombriich's alternative thesis is that, although certain colours,

etc., correspond to certain states of feeling, this correspondence is by no means fixed and immutable. It is relative to our expectations, so, in the case of music, 'It is not the chord but the choice of a chord within an organised medium to which we respond'. From this Gombriich concludes that we must think of the artist's public 'less in terms of minds mysteriously attuned to one another than in terms of people ready to appreciate each other's choice of alternatives'.

Gombriich's theory therefore involves two positions—that a fixed vocabulary of conventional signs is necessary for communication in art and that the emotional weight of individual elements depends on their situation within a system of possibilities. Let us apply this test to the work of Pierre Garnier and especially to his poem *Janvier*. Unlike many concrete poets, Garnier tends to treat the single word, free from its enslavement to the sentence, as an indivisible unit. Each word inhabits 'its own space' and each must be in harmony with 'the atmosphere of the poem'. Every poem might therefore be said to have its particular climate; often it is the title, with its phonetic and semantic properties, that determines this climate. Garnier's poem *Janvier*, taken from a 'Calendrier' covering all twelve months, is a clear example of this feature. The words are arranged in vertical blocks of differing sizes which proceed across the page. One of the shorter blocks reads:

ACIER
MIROIR
SIFFLE
SIFFLE

Transitions from word to word and relationships between blocks are not based on decorative similarities but on imaginative leaps. Yet these leaps remain within our comprehension because they fill out the area roughly defined by the title (and additionally modified by each word in turn as we read it). In the case of this poem the register is chiefly confined to the sharp, the sibilant and the shiny.

The repetition of words in Garnier's *Janvier* raises the question of structure in concrete poetry. Garnier rejects 'flow'—

the unilinear momentum of traditional poetry—in favour of 'permanence'; that is to say, a unified structure depending on the reciprocal relationship of whole and parts. The reader does not begin at the top left-hand corner and work his way steadily to the bottom right-hand corner. He is first of all aware of the skeleton of the poem—its formal arrangement. Then he isolates groups of words in no special order. His appreciation of the poem is the enlivening of a skeletal form with flesh and blood. Parallel to the reader's exploration of the actual space of the poem is his discovery of the 'semantic space' of the poem.

For elucidation of this 'semantic space' we turn to Gombriich's article and particularly to his discussion of the work of C. E. Osgood. Semantic space is a graphic way of representing the relationships of words among themselves. Osgood used irrational questions like 'is black more sad than gay, more light than heavy', and constructed a simple model in which words were arranged according to their position in one or another of these alternative categories. This readiness with which we posit relationships between words that transcend their conventional meanings depends on our fundamental ability to assess information in terms of alternative categories. As Gombriich neatly puts it, 'all kinds of relationships or transitions can be equated in our half-dreaming mind within the transition from 'ping' to 'pong'. The following short poem by Eugen Gomringer appositely demonstrates the way in which this sort of antithesis underlies the semantic structure of this new poetry.

ping pong
ping pong ping
pong ping pong
ping pong

The poem shows the cumulative effect of even the most facile counterpoint between words. Each successive alternation acquires interest because of the precision with which it is inserted into the overall structure of the poem.

These examples from Garnier and Gomringer are simple illustrations of important aspects of concrete poetry—Garnier's extract of the way in which individual

Figure 57. Stephen Bann, "Communication and Structure in Concrete Poetry", *Image*, November 1964: 8. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

poetry

Ian Hamilton Finlay

words or blocks of words relate to and modify an established atmosphere, and Gombringer's poem of the function of alternation (a binary system) within the semantic strength of concrete poetry that it can utilise a more complex range of possibilities without overloading the expectations of the reader. Gombrich points out how the simple alternation of 'ping' and 'pong' is underlined if we write 'ping' in small type and 'PONG' in large, and it is complicated if we are writing 'PING' in large type and 'ᐅᐅᐅᐅ' in Gothic. The crucial point is that the reader of concrete poetry is aware of the scale of alternatives open to the poet—in choice of words, in size and colour of type and in positioning of letters. But, although he knows the materials and the format, he cannot in any way predict the combinations of certain effects and the relationships of precisely coloured, printed and positioned words within the structure of the work. Occasionally a poet will surprise us by discovering a new possibility. In a poem by Decio Pignatari, for example, the letters I, L, F and E in bold black type follow each other on successive pages. In each case the requisite strokes are added to form the next letter and the intensity of the black ink is such as to make each successive letter appear through the page above, emphasising the structural link between the letters by a method usually inconceivable in the form of the book.

The question of the complex balance between parallel systems of relationships in the concrete poem is well illustrated by Ian Hamilton Finlay's *Canal Stripe 3*, a poem presented on successive pages of a small pamphlet. The first double page shows to the left 'little fields' and to the right 'long horizons'. Although the relation of 'ping' to 'pong'—closed to open, small to large—is perceptible, a balance is maintained by the fact that both pairs of words are in identical type and at the same level. On the next double page 'little fields long' confronts a 'for' in a very small type and a 'horizons' printed as before. 'Horizons' here seems to have regained its rightful space. The small 'for' does not detract from this because it belongs to the verb on the other page.

Yet the 'for' itself vibrates with meaning because its presence along converts 'long' from adjective to verb, and thereby alters the complexion of the sentence.

It is this possibility of different systems—corresponding or diverging but always interacting—that makes the structures of concrete poetry so fresh and enticing. The poem is woven from as many strands as the poet chooses. Sometimes they diverge, for example, when a word important because of its position or its associations is minimised in size: sometimes they reinforce one another, as when a word of wide resonance and importance in the sequence is increased in size. This parallel development of different systems results in what Gombrich refers to as 'redundancies'. In other words, points where the different notations of these systems reinforce one another. It is relevant to conclude with Gombrich's judgment that: 'What we call form in art, symmetries and simplicities of structure, might well be connected with the ease and pleasure of apprehension that goes with well-placed redundancies'. All art makes use of these features, old poetry as well as new. But the unique feature of concrete poetry is that the sets of possibilities are sufficiently distinct in origin—though wedded in the final poem—for us to perceive the mysteries of structure at a conscious level.

Stephen Bann

We acknowledge, in gratitude, the permission of authors and editors for material from the following books and periodicals:

1. *Noigandres 4*.
2. *Antologia Noigandres 5* (Massao Ohno Editora, Rua Vergneiro 688, Sao Paulo, Brazil).
3. *the constellations*, by eugen gombringer (eugen gombringer press, frauenfeld, switzerland).
4. *Les Lettres*, edited by Pierre Garnier (Editions André Silvaire, 20 rue Domat, Paris 5e).
5. *Telegrams from my Windmill*, by Ian Hamilton Finlay (The Wild Hawthorn Press, 24 Fettes Row, Edinburgh).
6. *Poor Old Tired Horse (POTH)*, edited by Ian Hamilton Finlay at the Wild Hawthorn Press.



Mike Weaver

Letter from Finlay to Pierre Garnier, September 17th, 1963.

I feel that the main use of theory may well be that of concentrating the attention in a certain area—of providing a context which is favourable to the actual work. I like G. Vantongerloo's remark: 'Things must be approached through sensitivity rather than understanding . . .'; this being especially acceptable from Vantongerloo since he is far from being against understanding (it seems to me)—his 'must' I take to mean 'must' because the world is such and we are so. . . . An understanding (theoretical explanation) of concrete (in general) poetry is, for me, an attempt to find a non-concrete prose parallel to, or secular expression of, the kind of feeling, or even more basically, 'being', which says, if one listens carefully to the time, and if one is not sequestered in society, that such-and-such a mode of using words—this kind of syntax, this sort of construction—is 'honest' and 'true'. . . . One of the Cubists—I forgot who—said that it was after all difficult for THEM to make cubism because they did not have, as we have, the example of cubism to help them. I wonder if we are not all a little in the dark, still as to the real significance of 'concrete'. . . . For myself I cannot derive from the poems I have written any 'method' which can be applied to the writing of the next poem: it comes back, after each poem, to a level of 'being', to an almost physical intuition of the time, or of a form . . . to which I try, with huge uncertainty, to be 'true'. Just so, 'concrete' began for me with the extraordinary (since wholly unexpected) sense that the syntax I had been using, the movement of language in me, at a

Figure 58.

Stephen Bann, "Communication and Structure in Concrete Poetry", Image, November 1964: 9. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

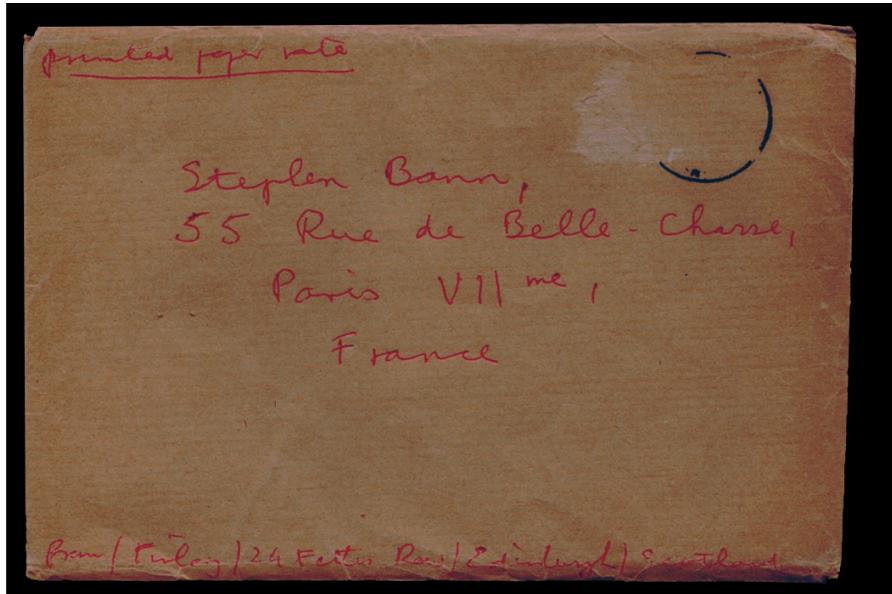


Figure 59.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, Telegram, 1964, envelope.

Counser No.		POST OFFICE		Serial No.	
Office Stamp		INLAND TELEGRAM		Chargeable words	Sent at/By
		24 3 24 † EH 0		Charge	Circulation
For conditions of acceptance, see over					
Prefix	Handed in	Service Instructions	Actual words		
If you wish to reply insert R/E					
EH L 14 4.5 PM OF 20TH EDINBURGH C 22=					
— TELEGRAMS FROM MY WINDMILL IAN HAMILTON FINLAY —					
— WILD HAWTHORN PRESS 24 FETTES ROW EDINBURGH —					
— SCOTLAND+ <i>Stephen, from Ian -</i>					
<i>October 64 -</i>					
The particulars on the back of this form should be completed.					

Figure 60.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, Telegram, 1964.



Figure 61.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, Telegram, 1964.



Figure 62.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, Telegram, 1964.

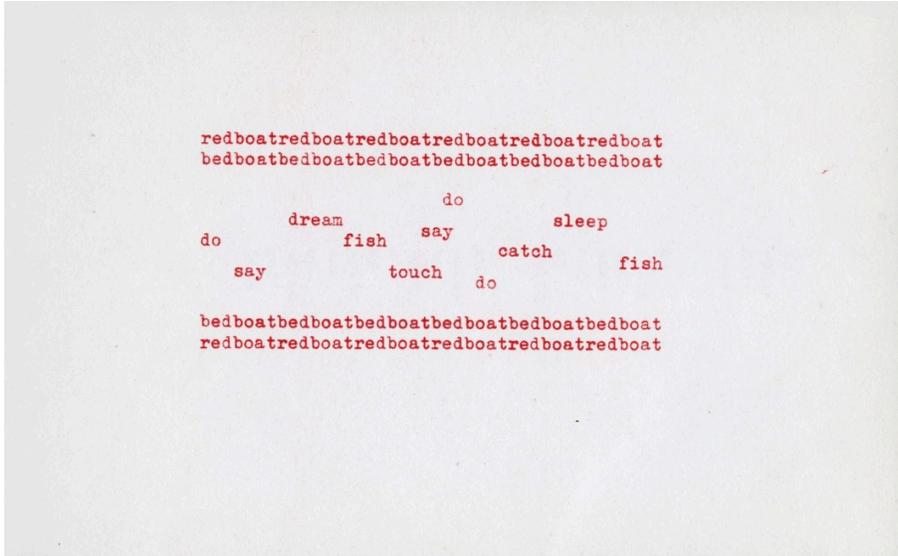


Figure 63.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, Telegram, 1964.

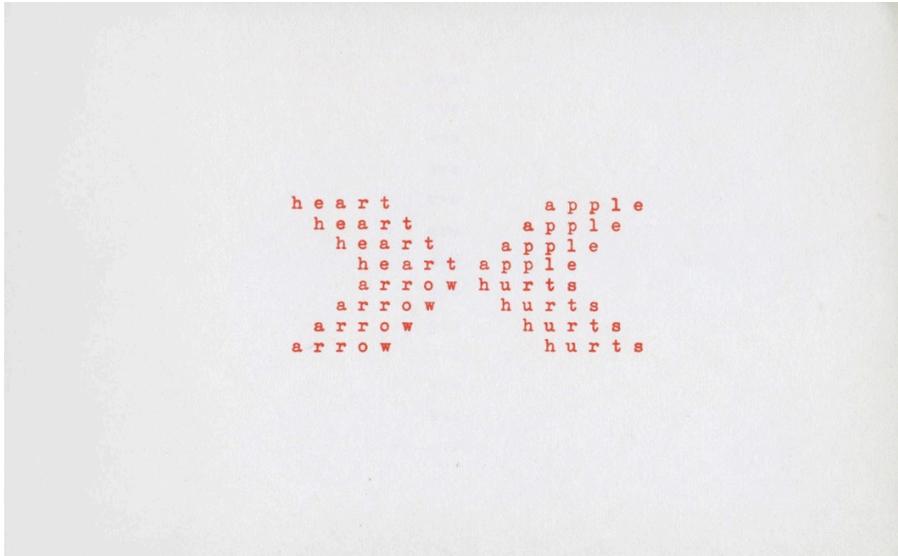


Figure 64.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, Telegram, 1964.



Figure 65.
Stephen Bann, ORANGE poster poem, exhibited
Cambridge, 28 November-5 December 1964. Digital
image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

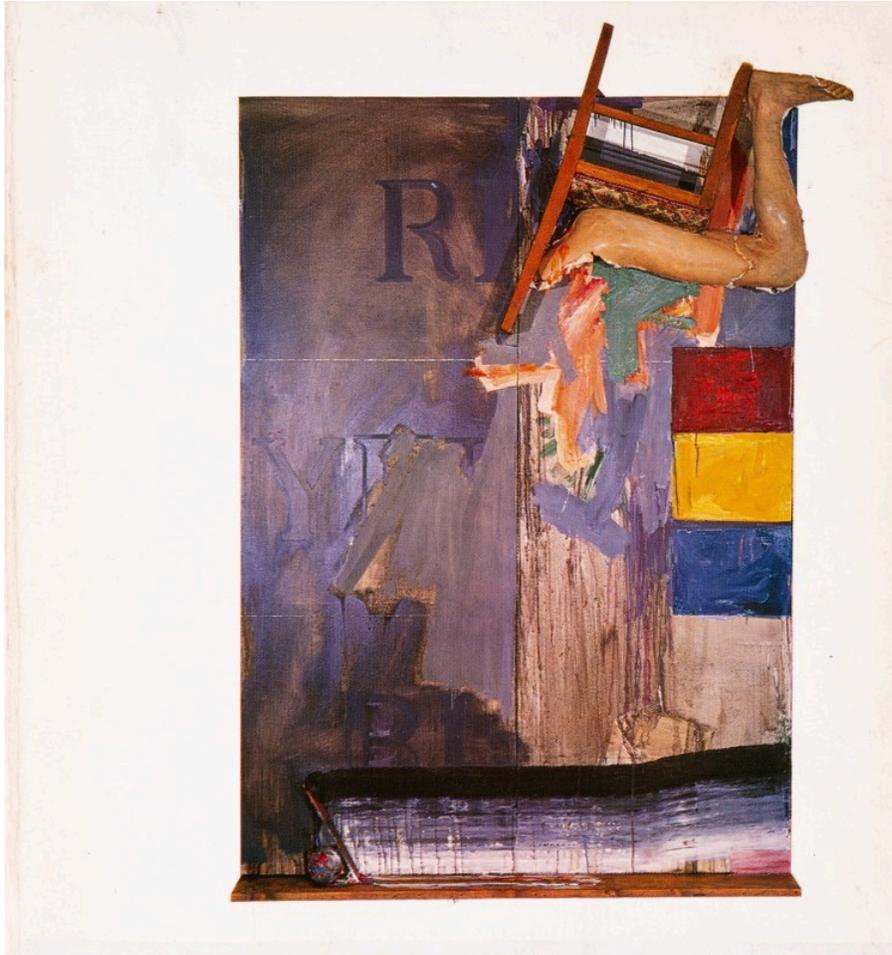


Figure 66.

Exhibition catalogue, Jasper Johns, Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture, 1954-1964, Whitechapel Gallery, December 1964 (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1964): jacket.

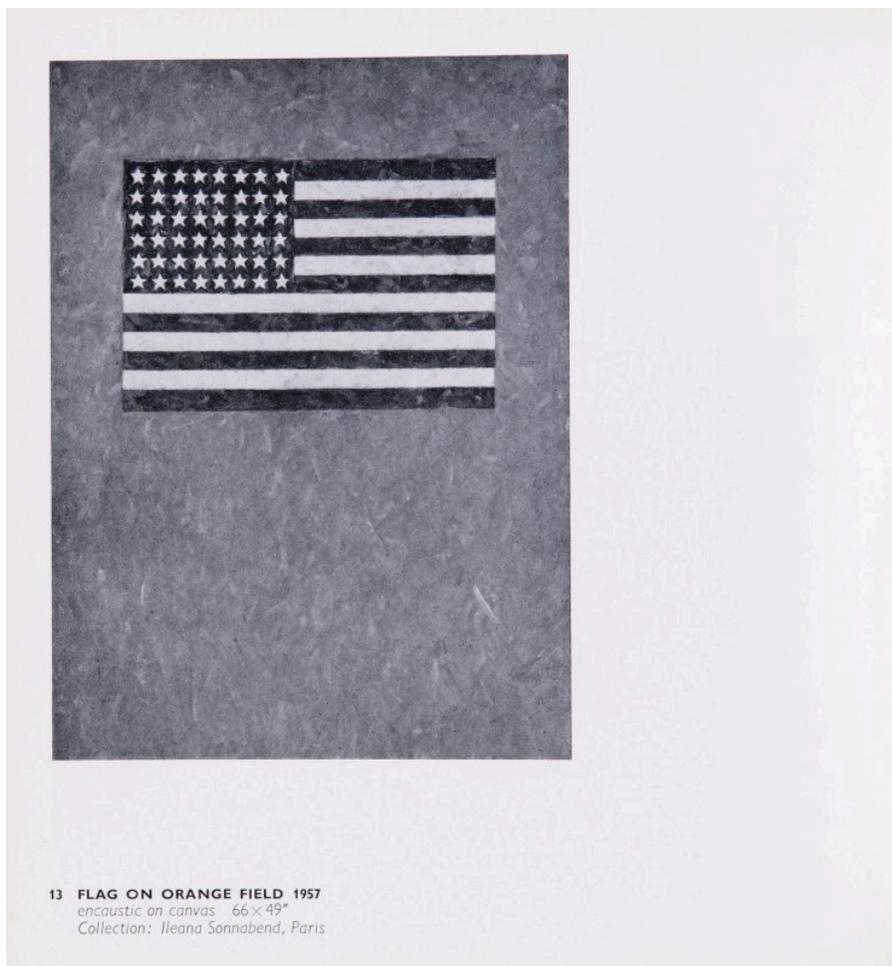


Figure 67.

Exhibition catalogue, Jasper Johns, Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture, 1954-1964, Whitechapel Gallery, December 1964 (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1964): plate 13. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.



14 GRAY NUMBERS 1958
encaustic and newsprint on canvas 67 × 49½"
Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Scull,
New York

Figure 68.

Exhibition catalogue, Jasper Johns, Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture, 1954-1964, Whitechapel Gallery, December 1964 (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1964): plate 14. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.



47 **MAP 1963**
encaustic and collage on canvas 60×93"
Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller,
New York

Figure 69.

Exhibition catalogue, Jasper Johns, Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture, 1954-1964, Whitechapel Gallery, December 1964 (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1964): plate 47. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

48 FIELD PAINTING 1963-64
oil on canvas with objects 36½ × 72"
Lent by the artist



Figure 70.

Exhibition catalogue, Jasper Johns, Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture, 1954-1964, Whitechapel Gallery, December 1964 (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1964): plate 48. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

Jasper Johns at Whitechapel

An inscription on the first inside page of my catalogue indicates that I saw the exhibition of Jasper Johns at the Whitechapel Gallery on 12 December 1964. I soon wrote enthusiastically about it to Ian Hamilton Finlay. I had returned from Paris to Cambridge at the beginning of the month, and was to spend Christmas at my parents' house in Yorkshire. It was over the holiday period that I wrote the first draft of my review of the exhibition in longhand. The revised and typed version was then produced, very probably with the aid of one of the Cambridge typists who specialised in theses and other academic copy. The text was then sent to Alan Ross, Editor of the *London Magazine*. He had published my essay on the novelist, Robert Pinget, in the issue of October 1964. I must have had some intimation that a review of the

Johns show would be welcomed, but it was not published. I returned to Paris in the New Year. The typed version must simply have been filed, until I discovered it by chance in the archive of the *London Magazine* in the Harry Ransom Library, University of Texas.

I suggest that the review may be worth rescuing from oblivion and publishing in this context for two reasons. Most obviously, it forms a counterpart to my earlier essay on the Rauschenberg exhibition, and extends my thinking about the issues of representation provoked by these two American artists at the time of their first extended showing in Britain. I begin by commenting on the fact that the work of Rauschenberg stands out, even when seen in such crowded circumstances as those of *documenta III* or *Painting & Sculpture of a Decade* at Tate Gallery. Johns had indeed been represented by three paintings at *documenta III* and by five at the Gulbenkian (including a Flag, a Map, and a Target). But I had passed them over without comment in my review of *documenta III*.

The second reason is more difficult to define, but I had not yet at this point learned to use a typewriter. My texts were handwritten, and incorporated numerous insertions and crossings out. This manuscript is fully legible, but it contains the traces of the odd phrase that has been modified in the process of writing, and of a further revision that has taken place after the text was completed. Several further revisions must have been attempted before the text was ready for the typist. The manuscript therefore reveals, from time to time, what I had decided not to say.

For instance, in the first paragraph I fall back on a well-known analogy to outline the radical difference between Johns and Rauschenberg. The Oxford don, Isaiah Berlin, had published (for the first time in 1953) a celebrated piece which was later much republished, under the title "The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History". This a comparison between Tolstoy (the hedgehog) and his fellow Russian Dostoevsky (the fox). Making a similar comparison enabled me to draw an initial distinction between the two American artists. Yet, I rightly resisted the temptation to make it inappropriately concrete (manuscript: "Johns is the hedgehog, making progress in quiet stages, yet mostly seen rolled into a ball"; typescript: "and consolidating every advance").

Given that critical judgements necessarily proceed by comparison, I then elucidate what I acknowledge to be Johns' achievement as a "master of the pictorial surface". The judgement first of all involves dismissing comparisons with other "adjustments between surface and material": namely those of Max Ernst and Francis Bacon. It was doubtless my recent stay in France that led me to invoke the name of Jean Fautrier, a painter whose work did not feature at all in *documenta III* or in the Gulbenkian show, but whose last mistress I met at a dinner party given by Parisian friends. In the draft, I pass

rather too quickly over the definition of the “ontologic” quality as suggested by Michel Conil Lacoste, stating simply “it is there because it is there”. In the typescript, I am rather more explicit, using the more careful definition of the term to prepare for the seeming paradox that Johns associates “vegetable fluency of pigment with the introduction of subject matter”.

There is one section of the manuscript where a slight reinforcement of the rhetoric clearly betrays another oblique reference to my own contemporary experience. A propos of Johns’ use of stencilled letters, I suggest in the handwritten text: “If a certain conjunction of signs goes to make up the word ORANGE, then the spectator is likely to transpose it into terms of colour.” This sentence gains a greater immediacy when it concludes: “then the spectator leaps at once to consideration of the colour”. As far as I can see, Johns had confined himself in the Whitechapel show to referencing (and painting in formal rectangles) only the primary colours, RED, YELLOW, and BLUE. But I must have been bearing in mind the very recent manifestation of my *ORANGE poster poem*.

conjuring model & picture, subject & representation subject,
 we are first of all astonished at the concealment
 or remoteness of the subject in Johns' work.
 Conspicuously, for instance, the ~~flag~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~
 'Friday permanent' ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~
 filled from each corner to create a central
 diamond, giving the ~~flag~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~
 image beneath the ~~flag~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~
 or in Johns' 1956, where the same grey
 film covers a frame in relief & suggests
 that we are looking at a reversed canvas.
 Remembrance in the magnificent play & thought
 series, where we are unable to place the 'subject'
 spatially. The flag ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~
 distant, to see beneath the surface ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~
 but this preliminary question cannot rest without
 an answer for long. It simply seems to demand
 our acquired reactions. For the diamond
 of folded canvas is the picture & the
 flag is the surface. ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~
 picture is an area which ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~flag~~ ~~is~~
 requires of imitation. In order to appreciate
 this, the spectator must first of all be ejected
 out of his habit of reading pictorial signs
 conceptually. If a certain conjunction of signs
 goes to make up the word OCEANIC, then the
 spectator is likely to hang on it like a piece of
 string. If the word occurs in a background
 of grey, black & white, he realizes the
 incongruity & returns to the signs.

Jasper Johns'
 sculpture is an even clearer example of the
 'where is it? But is it' formula. If presented
 with a reconstructed object from real life, the
 mind of the spectator immediately leaps to
 comparison & judges the work within these
 terms. For the artist there are two ways of
~~making~~ ~~his~~ ~~sculpture~~ ~~is~~ ~~exact~~ ~~that~~ ~~the~~ ~~spec-~~
 tator is impossible to refer to such things in
 his own experience - the sculpture is ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~sculpture~~ ~~is~~
 more vivid. Or he must make the sculpture
 so significantly different from the everyday
 object that the standard of comparison becomes,
 all again, inapplicable. The second
 of these methods are used by Johns. The second
 is illustrated by his silver sculptural casts
 of classic nymphs & herms, the first by

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Figure 72.

Stephen Bann, "Jasper Johns", unpublished
 manuscript, London Magazine archive, December
 1964: 2. Digital image courtesy of Harry Ransom
 Center, University of Texas, Austin.

-Painted Bottle (Refrain) 2 -

has fantastically accurate beer cans & paint
brushes, which, like Duchamp's marble sugar
lumps, ~~are~~ ^{are} losing their identity by their
excessive weight.

I started this account with
a mention of Robert Rauschenberg, & since he
& Johns, ~~are~~ ^{are} the two summits of American
art, it is desirable to see exactly where
they differ. In an article in Cambridge Review
for March 7, 1966, I pointed out the
difference between Duchamp's use of the
Ready-made & that Rauschenberg - between the
metaphysical purity of the plumbing 'fountain'
& the object rubbish which Rauschenberg
dumps into 'sculpture'. Rauschenberg works
with objects & fragments of objects to which
we would not immediately put a name, with
- which appear as fragments of the matter
of everyday existence immobilised in a
sculptural situation. In this respect Johns is
closer to Duchamp. His ~~objects~~ ^{objects} ~~which~~ ^{which} light
bulbs, cast-iron ~~objects~~ ^{objects} cast in
brass or sculptural, reflect not an individual
object but a whole class of objects. In the
same way, Rauschenberg uses particular
images, ^{as} his pictures, while Johns uses
single images, with strong symbolic associations.
Rauschenberg Both Rauschenberg & Johns reject
the ~~method~~ ^{method} notion of perspective, which, by its
implication that the spectator has a direct
spatial relationship not to the picture, but to
objects in the picture, destroys the autonomy
& unity of the work of art. Rauschenberg's
way of restoring this autonomy is to utilise
the techniques of photographic reproduction: the
photograph, ~~film~~ ^{film}, which serves mostly for the
recording of people & objects & has no surface
touch, is reproduced by silk-screen, &, by the
obvious use of paint, the element of
artistic ~~work~~ ^{work} is introduced. Johns
prints the same objective, but in an ~~unusually~~
different manner. The objects he chooses -
Flowers, Pugs, craps, targets, - are at the
same time ~~visually~~ ^{visually} ~~visual~~ ^{visual} & conceptual &
intensely visual. We are able to tolerate,
without any irritation, a rendering of the
American flag which reflects all incidental
effects of position & situation, because it

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Figure 73.

Stephen Bann, "Jasper Johns", unpublished
manuscript, London Magazine archive, December
1964: 3. Digital image courtesy of Harry Ransom
Center, University of Texas, Austin.

holds each thing symbol's meaning. The problem
 of relating to an object within the picture
 simply does not arise, because the picture
 extends to the viewers of the canvas. ~~It is~~
 Rauschenberg works by the juxtaposition of
 particular images. Thus by the presentation
 of unique visual symbols Rauschenberg
 makes use of our familiarity to images
 & situations — the wave breaking, the
 eagle at rest, the rocket blasting off —
 in order to exhaust from them a kind of
 grammar of symbols. Johns questions
 of familiarity, but does not reduce it or
 diminish it. It is no more than an
 initial stage in the awareness of the
 work of art. This relates to the point made
 by the Alan R. Solomon in *NY* "Excellent
 thing that accompanies the white chapel
 (allegory: the speaks of the 'inertness' of
 the objects in Johns' paintings, &
 relate it to his desire to 'disengage the
 painting from conceptual & behavioral
 considerations'. Here is the basic distinction
 from Rauschenberg. While Rauschenberg leans
 into the final aim, he feels it necessary
 to immerse the spectator in a world
 of ~~various~~ situations involving ~~things~~. The
 stability of the picture depends on the
 balance with which the various ~~things~~
 are ~~carefully~~ composed. With Johns there
 is no need for balance, because there is
 no diversity. The pieces are unitary. ~~Distances from~~
~~Johns large body~~ introduces reservations about loss
 the argument which I have called "Structural
 not subjects — if only that will make us pause
 long enough in our headstrong passage through
 history to realize that Pop Art, if deduced
 from his work, represents a misunderstanding, if
 embodied upon as the next step after Pop
 represents a non-sensibility. He is engaged in the
~~fundamental~~ ancient task: the imitation of nature
 (allegory) in her original operation. If
 Pop Art implies a certain type of subject matter,
~~then it is not in common with it.~~ Then it
 corresponds to no doctrine with which Johns can
 agree. Johns' progress as a painter has
 been concerned originally with the animation

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Figure 74.

Stephen Bann, "Jasper Johns", unpublished
 manuscript, London Magazine archive, December
 1964: 4. Digital image courtesy of Harry Ransom
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of structure. Here we find the realization of the
 subject/object distinction. There is no subject.
 The surface lends flesh to the structure, &
 because this vital influence is not a matter
 of manipulation, but a factor of the picture as
 it appears, ~~the~~ dismiss the notion of the subject,
 since that implies the introduction of a
 pre-existent entity. Instead there is ~~this~~
 continual fusion, interplay & ... ~~of~~
 means, as John Cage suggests, "this progress
 has led away from these structures." Finally,
 with nothing in it to grasp, the net is
 weather, an atmosphere that is heavy rather
 than light (something he means & refers to) is
 illuminated with it it we had removed our
 ultimate place: zero, grey distance.

This is the
 analogy that seems to me most fruitful with
 regard to the later notes to "The Day After
 Tomorrow No. 2", with its hinted yellow for
 the right horizon by stormy clouds of dark
 pigment, for the left heavily blurred
 against the grain of the canvas. Here is an
 almost overwhelming sensation of depth &
 emptiness. The ruler, with its scale of
 actual lengths, forms the lower edge of an arc
 of blurred paint. The wire-suspended spots
 create a grey shadow, acutely defined, upon the
 stained canvas, while the blurred red also
 reflected in one a blank left hand corner. The
 elements of exaltation are nullified in the
~~permanence~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~painting~~, the
 condition of ~~existence~~ ~~in~~ ~~space~~. In contrast
 to the earlier notes, these later paintings
 (with the exception of Miss 1963) give an
 impression of accidental origin. That is not
 to say that they suggest a haphazard
 involvement of the artist. The analogy
 of action painting is entirely inadmissible,
 for we are never aware of the picture as
 an arena for action. Instead we are
 reminded of the possibilities of painting, with
 its between established order & chaos,
 between vibrant colors & darkness, between
 fixed form & indeterminability. Each picture
 is a condition ^{of} ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~artist~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~viewer~~
 which makes us conscious of the abyss shaking

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Figure 75.

Stephen Bann, "Jasper Johns", unpublished
 manuscript, London Magazine archive, December
 1964: 5. Digital image courtesy of Harry Ransom
 Center, University of Texas, Austin.

contingent magnetic relation in "Field Pictures".
 in each dimension. ^{with fixed points} ^{shin field} According to what (1964)
 the letters of RED, YELLOW, BLUE (in order
 along a strip in the canvas, which separates
 them from the same sequence of letters
 arranged as if in reflection ^{along the strip}
~~with~~ a fixed ~~point~~ ^{relation} between them
 indicated by heavy dark letters - a fixed
 state between the use of words & "grey
 disintegrated" Reflection - a logical
 impossibility since if the picture itself
 reflects, then it will reflect ourselves: but
 this is a confused reflection, within the
 world of the picture. ^{Edouard Belloc}
~~colours~~, in the central column of squares
 & circles, is set in the middle of distance
 from the left hand within letters, a
 kind of free canvas projects, reaching to
 the ground. ~~From~~ ^{from} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~ground~~
 doubly atmosphere of this canvas conflicts
 with the reflective character of the projection
 Thus there is the inverted chair at the
 top left hand ^{with} ⁱⁿ ^{the} ^{original} ^{by}
 & Hugh ^{with} ⁱⁿ ^{the} ^{artist}, or of
 the speaker, in the context still adjusted
 to human dialogue? ^{Can} ^{quere} ^{from}
^{disappearance}: "A subject that tells of
 the loss, destruction, disappearance of objects.
 Does not speak of itself. Tells of others.
 Will it include them? Delays"

... I spoke earlier of the element of
 remoteness or concealment in Johns' earlier
 work. In these recent pictures it is not only
 the primary impression, but the dominant one.
 Contemporary aesthetic is returning to the
 demand of the self-sufficiency of the work of
 art, its freedom from the personality of the
 artist & the appearance of the object. Artists
 as far apart as Duchamp & Art ~~return~~
 stress this theme in their different manners.
 Johns is unique in ^{exactly} ^{his} ^{outstanding}
~~as a~~ ~~not~~ ~~only~~ ^{ambivalence} ^{towards}
 pointing but also towards ^{itself} The picture
 speaks of what it has lost, & registers its effects
 through a reflection of ~~with~~ ^{short} ^{cuts} ^{to} ^{communication}
^{the} ^{rejection} ^{of} ^{short} ^{cuts} ^{to} ^{communication}
^{the} ^{rejection} ^{of} ^{short} ^{cuts} ^{to} ^{communication}
^{the} ^{rejection} ^{of} ^{short} ^{cuts} ^{to} ^{communication}

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Figure 76.

Stephen Bann, "Jasper Johns", unpublished manuscript, London Magazine archive, December 1964: 6. Digital image courtesy of Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.

JASPER JOHNS

In the spring of 1964 the Whitechapel Gallery gave us a chance to see the work of Robert Rauschenberg. In December 1964 presented us with an exhibition of work by Jasper Johns. Although the first show attracted more attention, the second was perhaps even more veridical. Rauschenberg's talent is strong and assertive. Even in past exhibitions like Documenta III or the Guggenheim he seems an immediate impression. The pictures of Jasper Johns, on the other hand, do not layings so readily on the saturated attention of the spectator. Their logic becomes fully perceptible only when they are seen in sequence. If Rauschenberg is the fox of modern American painting, restlessly foraging in his own between art and life, Johns is the hedgehog, making progress in quiet stages and consolidating each advance.

To begin from the evidence of the work themselves - Johns is a master of the pictorial surface. The subtlety of his adjustments between surface and material is unexpressed in modern painting. Impassive on canvas, collage on canvas, oil on canvas, dramatic as canvas with enlaid metal and wood, plastic on canvas, pencil on stained paper, pencil and graphite wash, conte on paper, carbon pencil (relief drawing), India ink on nylon film - these combinations indicate the diversity of Johns' effects. His use of surface is entirely different from, say, the magical pattern-making of Paul Gauguin, or the expressive manipulation of pigment to be found in the work of Francis Bacon. Perhaps one could apply to him a judgment made on the late Jean Fautrier by Michel Lezotte, - that his material as it has been worked possesses an 'ontologic' quality, that the fact of its presence transcends the emotive or symbolic significances which it may bear. Yet nothing could be further than Johns' work from the permissiveness of such conventional 'abstract' painting, in which the vegetative fluxion of pigment is used to evoke an ill-defined materialistic effect. In fact, his method of retaining the evocative function of the picture, of stressing its 'ontologic' quality, has in the earlier work depended precisely upon the introduction of subject-matter.

I suggest that the clearest way of expressing the resultant tension between subject and surface is by referring to the reactions of the spectator. The picture first of all poses a question: 'Where is it?' Since we are accustomed to confusing model and picture, subject and represented subject, we are first of all disconcerted by our inability to 'place' the figurative subject in a spatial framework, by its unrecognition or apparent non-existence. Consequently, for instance, in 'Disappearance No. 2', where canvas has been folded from each corner to create a central diamond, suggesting a concealed image beneath the layer of canvas and grey stucco. Similarly in the magnificent flag

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Figure 77.

Stephen Bann, "Jasper Johns", unpublished typescript, London Magazine archive, December 1964: 1. Digital image courtesy of Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.

and target series, where our first impression convey an image that appears to float beneath the surface of the picture. Where is the object? This preliminary question hangs rest for long without an answer. It simply serves to disorient our acquired visualness. For the blurred of folded marks in the picture, and the flag in the surface. 'Where is it?' receives the answer 'This is it'. Another example of the way in which Johns separates what we infer from what we observe lies in his use of abraded letters. If a certain conjunction of signs goes to make up the word CHAIR, then the spectator leaps at once to consideration of the colour. If the word occurs against a background of grey, black and white, he realises the incongruity and returns to the signs.

Here it must be emphasized that Johns does not, and of course could not, nullify our habits of reading, any more than he could prevent us from identifying a certain combination of stars and stripes as the American flag. The point is that he should emphasize the irrelevance of our conceptual habits to the subconscious world of the picture, that he should establish it as an area free from the necessities of imitation. Johns' sculpture is also directed towards this end. If we are presented with a sculptural object based upon an object from everyday life, we instantly leap to comparison and view the work as these terms. For the artist there are two ways of modifying this reaction. Either he can make his sculpture so exact that the baffled spectator finds it unnecessary to refer to objects within his own experience - the sculpture itself is so vivid that it casts remembered objects into the shade. Or he must make the sculpture so significantly distinct from the everyday object that the standards of comparison become, once again, inapplicable. Both of these methods are used by Johns. The second is illustrated by his silver sculptural casts of electric light bulbs and torches, the first by his tactfully accurate 'Painted Bronze (Dear God)', which like Duchamp's marble sugar lumps finally betray their identity only by their excessive weight.

I started this account with a mention of Robert Rauschenberg, and since he and Johns represent the two extremes of the modern American painting and sculpture referred to as 'Pop', it is valuable to say exactly where they differ. In an article in the 'Cambridge Review' for March 7, 1964, I pointed out the difference between Johns' use of the Readymade and that of Rauschenberg - between the metaphysical purity of the glassing 'Pencil' and the object rubbish which Rauschenberg combines into a sculptural assemblage. Rauschenberg works with objects and fragments of objects to which we could not immediately

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Figure 78.

Stephen Bann, "Jasper Johns", unpublished typescript, London Magazine archive, December 1964: 2. Digital image courtesy of Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.

put a nose - which appear as fragments from the welter of everyday existence immobilized in a sculptural situation. In this respect Johns is closer to Duchamp. By casting a light bulb in bronze or enameled, he evokes not a particular object but a whole class of objects, grouped under the name 'light bulb'. In his pictures Baschenberg juxtaposes particular images while Johns chooses single subjects, with strong symbolic associations. Both Baschenberg and Johns reject the notion of perspective which, by the implication that the spectator has a direct spatial relationship not to the picture but to objects within the picture, destroys the uniqueness and unity of the work of art. Baschenberg's way of restoring this autonomy is to utilize the techniques of photographic reproduction. The photograph, in so far as it serves for the recognition of people and objects, has no surface unity. Baschenberg restores this unity in his reproductions of photographic images by a silk-screen technique which makes the use of point evident and thereby concentrates attention on the surface. Johns pursues the same objective in an entirely different way. The objects which he chooses - flags, maps, symbols, targets - are the at the same time conceptual and intensely visual. He selects, without consciousness, a rendering of the American flag which neglects all incidental effects of position because it exists in our minds as a visual scheme rather than as an individual object. Baschenberg solves one of our familiarity with images and situations - the wave breaking, the eagle at rest, the sunset blotting off - in order to extract from them a universal grammar of signification. Johns questions our familiarity but does not reduce it or transform it. It is no more than an initial step, in our awareness of the work of art, which is in essence unfamiliar. Here we come to a point made by Alan S. Dillman in an excellent essay that accompanies the Whitepaper catalogue. He speaks of the 'inertness' of the objects in Johns' painting and relates it to his desire to "disassociate the painting from temporal and behavioural considerations". This is a basic distinction. Baschenberg involves the spectator in a vector of situations implying external change and projective force. The stability of the picture depends on a balance of these forces, a reaffirmation of heterogeneity. In the earlier work of Johns, there is no need for such a balance of forces, because the images are for the most part inert and unitary.

A sentence from John Cage introduces some reservations about the argument which I have traced. 'Structures, not subjects - if only that will make us pause long enough in our headstrong passage through history to realize that they are, if deduced from his work, represents a misdirection, if selected upon as the next step after his, represents

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Figure 79.

Stephen Bann, "Jasper Johns", unpublished typescript, London Magazine archive, December 1964: 3. Digital image courtesy of Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.

4.

a non-segular. He is engaged in the endlessly stinging ancient task: the imitation of nature in her manner of operation'. If Pop art implies the choice of a certain type of subject matter, then it corresponds to an doctrine with which Johns can assent. Johns' progress as a painter was concerned originally with the animation of structures. Here we reach the resolution of the apparent dichotomy between subject and surface. Hence the notion of a subject alone that implies the introduction of an alien entity. The surface in the flesh of the structure, and the structure therefore ceases to live only in terms of the picture as it appears. Yet, as Gage suggests, Johns has moved away from the precise structures of the earlier works; 'Finally, with nothing in it to grasp, the work becomes, an atmosphere that is heavy rather than light (something he knows and regrets); in oscillation with it we tend toward our ultimate place: here, grey disinterest'.

I wrote earlier of the element of concealment in 'Disappearance No. 2' (1961). The atmosphere of withdrawal which pervades this strange picture has become the dominant feature of Johns' work. In 'Disappearance No. 2' there was still a strongly implied, unitary structure. In successive stages this element has disappeared. The spaces and forms which appear suspended in several works of this period seem, by their incongruity, to ridicule the notion of a central, commanding structure. In 'Out the Window' (1962) there is contained an overwhelming impression of depth and emptiness. Plans of the sterilized wood TULLOCH, on the right obscured by a store of dark pigment, appear on the left faintly outlined against the goals of the screen. The ruler, with its scale of literal measurements, forms the lower edge of an arc of blurred paint. The wire-suspended screen casts a grey shadow, exactly drawn, upon the stained canvas, while the blurred arc is also reflected in a black left hand bottom corner. All these elements of complexity are required in the storm-laden atmosphere of the painting. The ruler, a link with the exact measurements of the physical world, is at the same time presented as an agent of chaos, which, by scraping the surface according to a written direction, obliterates any vestige of structure. In contrast to Johns' earlier works, these later paintings (with the exception of 'Map 1963') give the impression of an almost accidental origin. This is not to say that they suggest a haphazard involvement of the artist. The analogy with action painting is entirely inapplicable, for the work is never presented as the arena of the artist's activity. On the contrary, we are reminded of the range of possibilities lying within the sphere of the painting, between control and chaos, between witless colour and darkness, between fixed form and vulnerability. Every picture appears as a stage between these extremes and makes an occasion of the signs which has best avoided.

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Figure 80.

Stephen Bann, "Jasper Johns", unpublished typescript, London Magazine archive, December 1964: 4. Digital image courtesy of Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.



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Figure 81.

Stephen Bann, "Jasper Johns", unpublished typescript, London Magazine archive, December 1964: 5. Digital image courtesy of Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.

Typography and Exhibition Catalogues

So many of the publications included in this feature are notable for their innovative and expressive uses of typography. I can date my own interest in typography and book design back to my schooldays in the late 1950s. A printing press was discovered in the Museum at Winchester College and my seniors industriously put it to good use in printing a *Book of Prayers* for Evening services in the Chapel. The book was printed in Eric Gill's Perpetua typeface, with Romulus Initials. My own achievement at the press was an excessively elaborate personal bookplate. I became more familiar with the mechanics of book production when editing the school's literary magazine, *Ariel*, in 1960. Here, there could be no question of influencing the layout or

typography to any great degree, since the process was controlled by the printer: “Warren & Son Ltd, General and Commercial Printing and Publishing”.²³ An original design for the cover allowed each issue to have a certain degree of visual impact. But, for the most part, visual interest was confined to the display of advertisements that appeared throughout the pages of the magazine, which were supplied in the form of ready-made blocks. For the issue of summer 1960, I managed to acquire full-page adverts from sources that ranged from the Royal Navy to Olivier Fine Virginia Tobacco and Madame Prunier’s Restaurants (London and Paris). Though graphically undistinguished in the main, these adverts enabled the school magazine to cover its costs more effectively than others with which I have been subsequently associated.

The exhibition catalogues reproduced here testify to a general shift in practice, beginning in the 1960s, which was starting to condition the processes of critical writing and publication. Writing a rough draft in manuscript, and perhaps producing or commissioning a type-written script, had been previously the prelude to typesetting undertaken by the printer, and was then followed in due course by the editor or author’s review of the proofs. But in the course of the mid-1960s, a significant change in practice was taking hold. New typefaces, technically known as “neo-grotesque sans-serif”, were beginning to achieve widespread penetration, the most prominent among them being the Swiss designer Adrian Frütiger’s “Univers” font. Conceived as an essentially neutral, visually unencumbered medium of communication, this typeface was originally released in 1957. Its rapid dissemination was partly due to the fact that it facilitated the use of a range of different weights and sizes of lettering. However, another decisive advantage was the fact that it subsequently became available for photo-setting (the so-called “photo-lithographic” process), and thus effectively bypassed the traditional route of text being set by the printer in “hot metal” type.

My selection of publications dating from 1964 (and a little before) illustrates this decisive shift, which transferred a major role to the graphic designer in conditioning the reception of critical texts, and indeed in framing the reproduction of the works of art themselves. A major exhibition catalogue like the Arts Council’s *Picasso* (held at the Tate Gallery in 1960) had employed sans-serif type sparingly, reversed in white on the front cover for the one-word title, and subsequently used for the titles of works and headings throughout the text. Continuous passages of writing were still set in traditional type, though the lining to the right margin of continuous prose did convey an overtly “modern” approach. By contrast, the great centenary exhibition of Delacroix, held at the Louvre in 1963, had a catalogue whose

cover still drew on a curious medley of different typefaces, resolutely centred, and ranging from “Display” capitals to a Gothic “Paris” redolent of the world of Victor Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris*!

A clear example of the use of the new Swiss typography to enshrine a total vision comes with the *documenta III* catalogue of 1964. This vision not only underwrites the utility of the catalogue as an educational document, but also contrives to promote a cultural and historical view of the significance of the exhibition as a whole. Arnold Bode (1900–1977), who had initiated the concept of the “documenta” in the West German city of Kassel, was an architect, painter, and designer as well a curator. Having himself been removed from his employment by the Nazis in the 1930s, he conceived this series of major exhibitions as a means of reconnecting his own country, and Western Europe as a whole, with a modernist tradition which had been rudely interrupted during the Second World War. The two-part catalogue for the 1964 *documenta* was designed in his own studio, and made use of the range of possibilities opened up by the new typefaces to achieve an exemplary clarity in the design both of general documentation and of continuous prose. The bold red and blue squares dominating the two covers differentiate the two major aspects of the exhibition, while endorsing a generic view of modernism as being clearly identified with geometric abstract art.

The British catalogue that probably comes closest to this total vision is the one which was designed for *Painting and Sculpture of a Decade*, held at the Tate Gallery under the auspices of the Gulbenkian Foundation in 1964. Credited with the design on the first page of text are Edward Wright (1912–1988), who then headed the Graphic Design department at Chelsea College of Arts, and his younger colleague Robin Fior (1935–2012). Both the design of the cover itself, with its hand-drawn numerals and embossed effect, and the provision of brown, slightly corrugated endpapers, anticipate a highly individual but disciplined approach, which is borne out by the rigorous distribution of text and images. The latter are placed invariably on right-hand pages facing the documentation, which itself ingeniously exploits the varying weights of the sans-serif type.

The Gulbenkian catalogue was produced by Shenval Press, a small printer mainly located in Harlow, Hertfordshire, which was advertising itself at the time as “specializing in typographic design and fine colour reproduction”.²⁴ Another regional printer, Tillotsons of Bolton, Lancashire, had already produced in 1963 what must surely have been the most sophisticated catalogue to date for any one-man exhibition at a London commercial gallery. Gordon House (1932–2004) was an artist and member of the London “Situation Group”, as well as working as a graphic designer. His design for the Kitaj one-man exhibition, *Pictures with Commentary*, shown at Marlborough Fine Art in February 1963, is an impeccable exercise in

deploying the new typography, which does not compete for attention with the excellent photographic illustrations of Kitaj's work (themselves produced from blocks made by Engravers Guild Limited).

It is however noteworthy that the four exhibition catalogues produced for shows at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1964 do not fit the prescription of having a named designer, who follows the protocols of the new typography. To judge from the byline that occurs only the last of the series (*Jasper Johns*), Bryan Robertson chose to employ the London-based printer, Foss & Cross Ltd, which had a long record of printing official posters and leaflets, such as the guide to the South Bank Exhibition of 1951. These Whitechapel catalogues remain traditional in their typography, but their individuality is expressed in the other features that they hold in common. For one thing, they all adopt an identical small square format, with a striking image on the cover, whether of a specific work (in colour for Rauschenberg and Johns) or of a featured artist portrayed by a professional photographer (Bert Stern for Kline, Lord Snowdon for Bridget Riley). Apart from the text on the slender spines, no exhibition title or artist's name appears on the outside of the catalogues. But Robertson was doubtlessly right in thinking that the Whitechapel "brand" would be highly recognisable in this distinctive format.

The broader field of art book design was also being influenced during this period by the intervention of major graphic artists. The Peregrine paperback edition of Nikolaus Pevsner's *The Englishness of English Art* that appeared in 1964 contained no significant revisions—as far as the visual arts were concerned—to the original text published in 1956. But the new edition benefited from a striking collage-style cover, including bold sans-serif titles, which was designed by Herbert Spencer (1924–2002). Editor of the magazine, *Typografica*, from 1949 onwards, Spencer had been foremost in facilitating the discussion, and so promoting the use, of the new typography in Britain. In *Typografica* 8 (1963), he was also responsible for publishing the first article to appear in Britain on the practice of concrete poetry (dom sylvester houédard's "Concrete Poetry and Ian Hamilton Finlay").²⁵ But the enduring legacy of book design in Britain over this period is also demonstrated by the wholly different approach of the German-born designer, Hans Tisdall (1910–1997), who progressed from textile art to designing book jackets for the publisher, Jonathan Cape. His striking cover for Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* (1964) is a demonstration of his distinctive "brushstroke style" of hand-drawn lettering. As late as 2001, the epigrapher and letter designer, Michael Harvey, who acted as one of Ian Hamilton Finlay's most successful collaborators for almost half a century, succeeded in adapting the "Tisdall script" to create a new typeface.

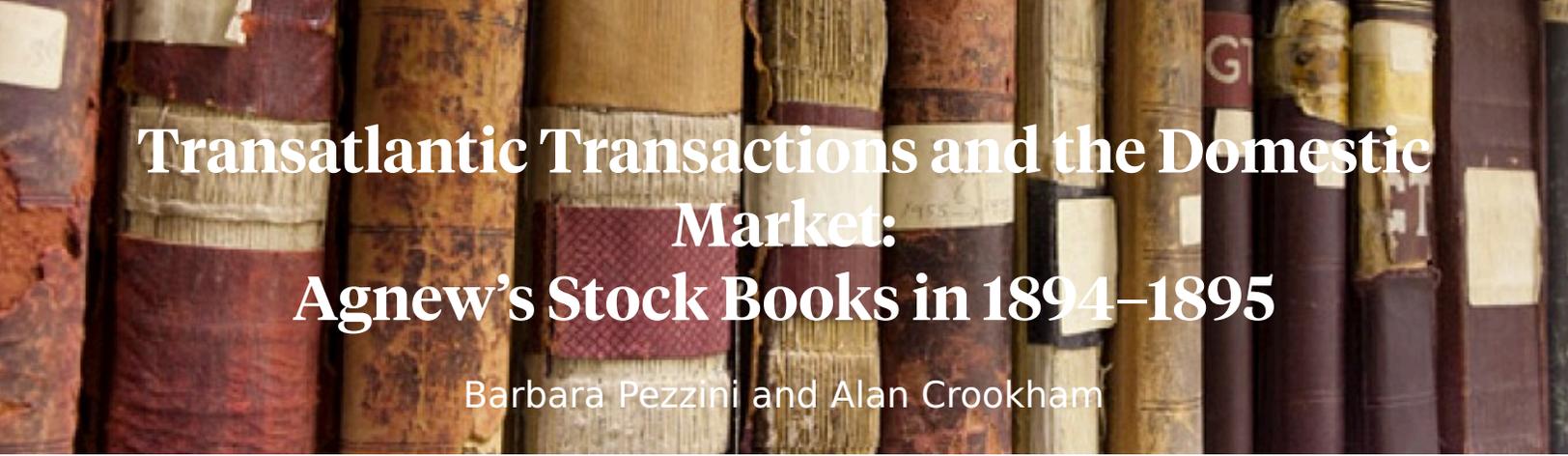
Footnotes

- 1 In his Introduction to the first volume of the series, Bryson commented: “all art history needs to do is [...] take from literary criticism everything of service to itself”, see Norman Bryson, *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- 2 See Neil McWilliam (ed.), *A Bibliography of Salon Criticism in Paris from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration 1699–1827* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Neil McWilliam (ed.), *A Bibliography of Salon Criticism in Paris from the July Monarchy to the Second Republic 1831–1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 3 Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism: From the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
- 4 Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism: Or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 5 *PMC NOTES*, no. 6 (May 2016), 5.
- 6 Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition* (London: Yale University Press, 2000).
- 7 Francis Haskell, “A Century Reassessed”, *Times Literary Supplement* 3811, 21 March 1975, 297.
- 8 See David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).
- 9 Mark Hallett, Sarah Victoria Turner, and Jessica Feather (eds), *The Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition: A Chronicle 1769–2018* (London: Paul Mellon Centre, 2018), <https://chronicle250.com/>.
- 10 See Stephen Bann, “Reading Back from *Experimental Painting*”, in Bronac Ferran and Elizabeth Fisher (eds), “The Experimental Generation”, *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 42, nos 1–2 (March–June 2017): 54–65.
- 11 See Cecilia Hurley Griener and Claire Barbillon (eds), *Le Catalogue dans tous ses états* (Paris: École du Louvre, 2015).
- 12 My source for this material was Marie-Antoinette Allévy, *La mise en scène en France dans la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle*, (Paris: E. Droz, 1938).
- 13 This book by the veteran Austrian Marxist Ernst Fischer had first appeared in an English edition in 1963, and attracted some criticism for its insistence on the “magical” antecedents of art. It was republished in a paperback edition in 2010, with an Introduction by John Berger.
- 14 Cf. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- 15 *Granta* 69, no. 1236, 14 May 1964, 1. Reg Gadney was one of three editors, but was concerned particularly with the coverage of matters relating to the visual arts. It was Gadney who commissioned Anthony Donaldson to design the series of covers which would notionally have added up to a complete nude figure.
- 16 *Cambridge Opinion* 27, a special number titled “Modern Art in Britain”, came out in 1963. It contained contributions from a remarkable range of artists, including the “Situation” group, the school of Bomberg associated with the Beaux Arts Gallery, David Hockney, and Anthony Caro. The critic Lawrence Alloway also provided an essay.
- 17 Patrick Reyntiens, *Blackfriars Review*, July 1964.
- 18 *Painting & Sculpture of a Decade 1954–64*, Tate Gallery, April–June 1964, 46.
- 19 I relied for my quotations from Dr Haftmann on an English translation of the Foreword to the catalogue which was provided by the Press Office.
- 20 The verdict of the press on the day following this uproarious occasion was “some seats broken, one attendant slightly wounded”.
- 21 See *Midway* (2014) and *Stonypath Days* (2016).
- 22 A proof of this edition was accepted as a gift to the national collection at the Tate in 2018. It joined a selection of my other ‘poem-prints’, produced with the aid of different collaborators, which date from the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.
- 23 This company, based in Winchester, did however advertise a connection to Taylor & Francis of London, which has over time become a printer and publisher of major international importance.
- 24 See the advertisement on the back cover of *The London Magazine* 4, no. 7, October 1964. This magazine was also printed by Sherval.
- 25 *Typografica* 8 (1963): 47–62.

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Transatlantic Transactions and the Domestic Market: Agnew's Stock Books in 1894–1895

Barbara Pezzini and Alan Crookham

Abstract

This article is part of the Objects in Motion series in *British Art Studies*, which is funded by the Terra Foundation for American Art. Projects in the series examine cross-cultural dialogues between Britain and the United States, and may focus on any aspect of visual and material culture produced before 1980. The aim of Objects in Motion is to explore the physical and material circumstances by which art is transmitted, displaced, and recontextualised, as well as the transatlantic processes that create new markets, audiences, and meanings.

This essay uses the case study of a prominent firm of art dealers, Thos. Agnew and Sons (Agnew's), to present a methodological discussion of how digital tools can be used to investigate circulation and transnational exchange in the historical art market, highlighting how these tools offer new ideas and opportunities for research, but also present tensions and contradictions. The essay focuses particularly on the dynamics of Agnew's transatlantic art trade, and seeks to present analysis of the firm's financial data within a nuanced and contextualised historical narrative about the cross-cultural movement of art between Britain and the United States. The principal data is drawn from Agnew's London Stock Books, and its interpretive framework builds upon a recent collaborative pilot project between the National Gallery and King's College London, which resulted in a database that records these transactions, investigates financial information, traces works of art, and identifies the biographical information and geographical locations of buyers and sellers. The essay, ultimately, aims to clarify how a top-tier, successful, and well-established dealership operated.

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Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information? —T.S. Eliot, *Choruses from 'The Rock'*, 1934

Introduction: The Project, its Context, and Methods

The digital realm is rapidly transforming the research resources available to scholars, an evolution in evidence across the field of art history. This change was, at first, operational: as the use of the Internet became more widespread from the late 1990s onwards, galleries, museums, libraries, and archives started to publish their catalogues online using the platform of their institutional websites.¹ Then, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, projects were developed to digitise selected items from library and archive collections.² Such projects enabled researchers to gain remote access to flat, digital surrogate images of archival material, and the scope of these digitisation projects has only increased in recent years, with more images being added to websites across the world; attention is now turning to the examination and extraction of the data contained in those flat images.³ Whilst the analysis of large quantities of data is a well-established phenomenon in the social sciences, scholars of disciplines that traditionally did not use data analysis methodologies have recently identified the research possibilities contained within flat digitised images. These new methods of investigation are contributing to fresh areas of research, often described under the umbrella term of the “digital humanities”. For example, these digitisation projects have brought great advances in the field of art market studies where, especially thanks to the pioneering work of Pamela Fletcher, Anne Helmreich, and the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, digital and statistical approaches have elucidated the cultural significance of the art market, namely, its complex connections with scholarship, public collecting, and the circulation of art.⁴ This article both draws upon and advances these studies by examining a recently digitised data set relating to an important British dealership, Thos. Agnew and Sons (Agnew’s), in the years 1894 and 1895. Beyond the obvious fact that a pilot project implies working with only a sample of data, the authors have focused on this time-frame because it illustrates a momentous time in the history of the firm, when it opened up their sales from the British to the American market.

The project is deeply rooted in archival evidence. In 2014, the National Gallery Research Centre acquired the Agnew’s archive. This was a significant acquisition: this dealer has a history dating back to 1817 and their archives date from the 1840s.⁵ The Agnew’s archive was catalogued between 2014 and 2016 using a CALM database, commonly used for cataloguing archival

material, and the resulting finding aid was placed online in April 2016. The National Gallery Research Centre then considered how to make the resources in the Agnew's archive more widely available in a digital format. Because of their importance, both historically to the business of the firm and currently as the main reference source for enquiries to the archive, the nine picture stock books that covered the years from 1853 to 1919 were the first portion of this archive to be digitised and placed as a free-to-consult, open access resource on the National Gallery's website.⁶ The stock books contain a wealth of information and each entry usually records some or all of the following information: stock number, date, artist, subject, from whom purchased, amount purchased for, sale estimate, to whom sold, date of sale, amount sold for, initials of seller, branch, or further references ([Fig. 1](#)).

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 1.

Thos. Agnew & Sons, Picture Stock Book, 1891-1898. Collection of The National Gallery, London (NGA27/1/1/8). Digital image courtesy of Digital facsimile courtesy of The National Gallery (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

Although published on the web, the data within these fields remained embedded within the flat images of the digitised stock books; therefore the experience of reading the stock books online merely mimicked the experience of accessing the material in the archive without any of the advantages, such as free searches and multiple points of entry, that digital platforms offer.⁷ To develop and enhance the digital possibilities offered by such data, the Research Centre then embarked on a collaboration with King's College London (KCL) in a pilot project with the objective of transforming the flat imagery depicting historical transactional data within the Agnew's stock books into a structured resource.⁸ This project had the potential to answer some initial research questions but also, moving forward, to inspire an array of qualitative and quantitative research questions in different fields. The project oversaw the construction of a pilot database by KCL Digital Lab, which was then populated by transcribing, and enriching, a sample set of data from the current manuscript form into a digital format in a prescribed set of data fields. The data was taken from Stock Book 6 and covered the purchases of 1894 and 1895 in their entirety. In constructing the framework, the project team was mindful of the principles set out in the CIDOC-CRM standard and chose transactions as the key element around which the other pieces of data were then organised.⁹

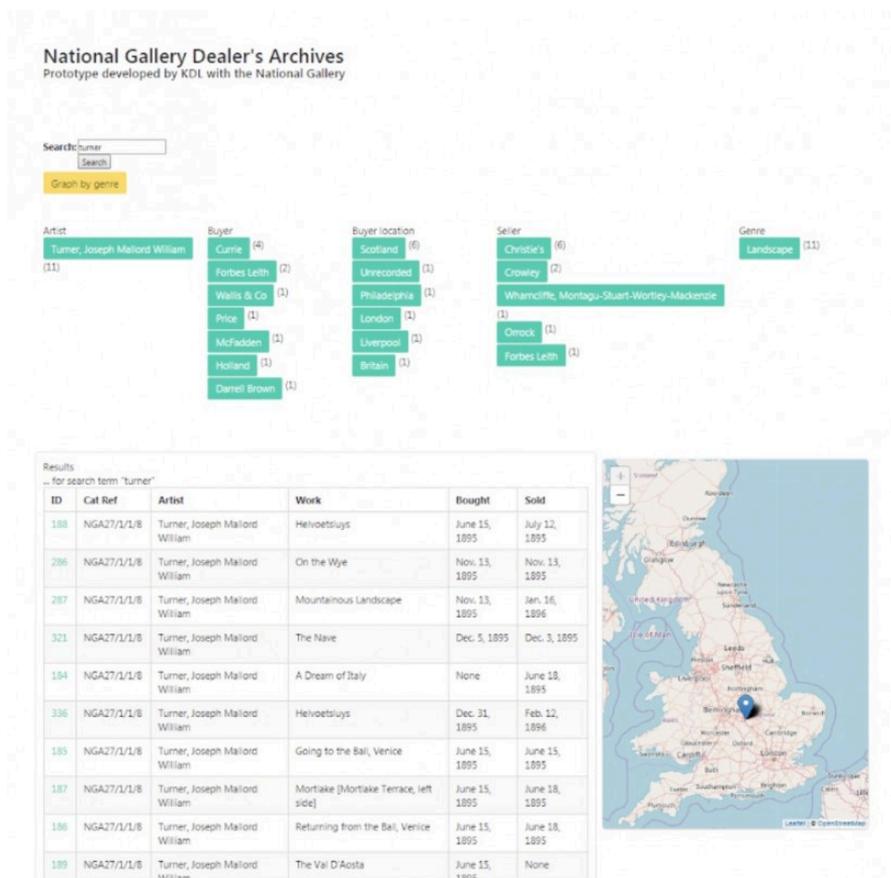


Figure 2.

Screen capture from the pilot database for transcription of Agnew's Stock Books, a collaboration between the National Gallery and King's College, London. Digital image courtesy of Barbara Pezzini.

The database's search function returns a number of hits that can be delved into to see the transaction data alongside details of the work of art (Fig. 2). The database also presents a map of historic geographical locations of the works, together with images of the relevant page of the stock book and, when possible, an image of the art work itself. Image-linking is a unique aspect of this project, which falls outside the scope, at least initially, of many projects of database creation from written source documents. This enhancement, although time-consuming and sometimes not possible to complete as works of art are currently lost or listed with not enough details to be identifiable, it has provided an unprecedented visual insight into a dealer's stock and, by extension, enables us to make larger arguments about patterns of buying and selling, as well as identifying visually the taste of the network associated with Agnew's in these years. This essay contains a bespoke visualisation that displays the works from the stockbooks identified so far, alongside those yet to be found, and their metadata (Fig. 3).

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 3.

Chart illustrating pictures purchased by Thos. Agnew and Sons in the years 1894 and 1895, Illustrations are shown for all works that have been traced.

Whereas the pilot database allows scholars to formulate many research questions from multiple entry points, this essay focuses on profiling Agnew's at a specific moment of the firm's historical development, exploring particularly the role that the firm played in the dissemination of British art in the United States and investigating its contribution to the transatlantic art trade, a phenomenon which saw the transfer of many major works of art. This is a well-known history and the object of much scholarly attention, but no study so far has measured systematically Agnew's contribution to it: earlier studies on the American market have taken a more general approach or focused on other dealers, most notably on the dominant role that Joseph Duveen and his firm Duveen Brothers played in this market during the early twentieth century.¹⁰

The methodology of this study draws upon a seminal—but also controversial—essay in art market studies: Thomas Bayer and John Page's investigation of Arthur Tooth & Sons, based on the firm's 1870 and 1871 stock books.¹¹ Bayer and Page used quantitative methodologies from the field of economics to interrogate Tooth's stock and shed new light on topics such as the firm's profit margins, the range of artists they represented, the popularity of different genres sold, and the relationships between these variables. This analysis allowed Bayer and Page to draw a number of conclusions about the roles that nineteenth-century dealers played in creating art markets and shaping artistic practice. Although Bayer and Page's essay was undoubtedly ground-breaking, concerns were voiced by other scholars, particularly Anne Helmreich and Robert Jensen, about its limited scope, the absence of context, and of other primary sources within which the data was analysed. They also noted that a relatively small sample of data (Tooth's records and Christie's auction sales) was used to speak for the entirety of a multifaceted, complex social phenomenon such as the nineteenth-century British art market.¹²

This article adopts the econometric methodological approach of Bayer and Page but also considers financial data within broader contexts to understand Agnew's business model during a specific time-frame. In doing so, it seeks to avoid the methodological shortcomings of Bayer and Page and bears witness to the impossibility of creating a picture of an art firm without consulting different archival sources and employing different methodologies.

Bayer and Page's useful econometric methods are adopted in this article to analyse the financial and geographical data from Agnew's stock books to address the following questions: what kind of stock did Agnew's hold in London in 1894 and 1895; which artists, and of which nationalities, did Agnew's purchase in the greatest numbers; to which nationalities did Agnew's sell? Furthermore, what volume of Agnew's stock—and at what profit margins—were sold to American clients; and how did these compare to the UK or the rest of the world; which nationalities, genres of painting, and artists were popular with clients originating from different geographical locations; and what were the geographical or cultural origins of buyers and sellers? Addressing these questions when analysing the data helps us to form a nuanced and contextualised historical narrative about the cross-cultural movement of art between Britain and the United States via Agnew's during 1894 and 1895. The data analysis relating to such an important dealership also clarifies how Agnew's operated as a business whilst elucidating the financial importance of American clients to the firm and the firm's influence in setting market trends. In addition, this article presents a reflection on the use of digital tools to investigate transcultural exchange and the circulation of objects in the art market, showing how digital investigations offer new opportunities for research, but also raise new tensions and challenges.

Alongside the figures supporting our analysis, this article includes a dashboard that allows readers to search our dataset, as an open resource, and create their own visualisations.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 4.

Interactive dashboard displaying pictures purchased by Thos. Agnew and Sons in the years 1894 and 1895, data collected in a collaborative pilot project between the National Gallery and King's College London.

Agnew's in 1894 and 1895

In 1894, Agnew's operated from three branches—London, Manchester, and Liverpool—and was approaching its sixtieth year as an independent firm. The company had a long history and an illustrious past. Agnew's founder, Thomas Agnew Senior, had moved from Liverpool to Manchester in the early 1810s, working first as an apprentice of general curiosity trader Vittore Zanetti, becoming his business partner in 1817, and taking sole control of the business in 1835.¹³ In 1851, when his sons William Agnew and Thomas Agnew Junior joined him in partnership, the firm took the name "Thos. Agnew and Sons", which was soon popularly shortened to Agnew's.¹⁴ The operations of Agnew's in the early years of the century have been associated with the formation of an entrepreneurial middle-class identity and

consumption habits. ¹⁵ From the 1850s to the 1870s, the firm operated within an ample but consistent circle of buyers, dealers, agents, and private and public collectors, and was active both in secondary resale as well as in the primary trade, that is, selling new art bought directly from artists. ¹⁶ At that time, Agnew's stock drew heavily from the Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions and it specialised almost exclusively in paintings by living British artists (such as Richard Ansdell, John Everett Millais and John Linnell) with a preference for modern-life subjects and British landscapes. In the early 1880s, Agnew's started to deal more consistently in "deceased British masters" - artists such as Thomas Gainsborough, Joshua Reynolds, George Romney and John Hoppner, as well as European old master paintings—the firm's connections with the Royal Academy Old Masters Winter exhibitions and with the National Gallery were instrumental to this new direction. ¹⁷



Figure 5.

Joshua Reynolds, George Capel, Viscount Malden and Lady Elizabeth Capel, 1768, oil on canvas, 181.6 × 145.4 cm. Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Henry S. Morgan, 1948 (48.181). Digital image courtesy of The Met (CC0 1.0).

By 1894, Agnew's was an established third-generation family business, with William Agnew still at its helm—he was to retire on 31 December 1895.¹⁸ William's senior business partner was his nephew Lockett, the elder son of Thomas Agnew Junior, who took second place in the firm when his father died in 1883.¹⁹ The two sons of William Agnew, George and Morland, were William and Lockett's junior partners. The third generation of male Agnews in the firm—George, Morland, and Lockett—was very different from the first: born with considerable wealth, they were educated at Cambridge University, and enjoyed the sports and hobbies of the landed gentry.²⁰ The Agnews were extremely well connected; as Joseph Duveen's biographer, Meryl Secrest, remarked, "[Agnew's] contacts with the British aristocracy were legendary".²¹ When William Agnew was granted a title in 1895, his oldest

son George became “issue” of a Baronet and would inherit the title himself at his father’s death.²² The accepted narrative of Agnew’s at the *fin-de-siècle* privileges such aristocratic connections, depicting them as high-end dealers in old masters and eighteenth-century British art, who facilitated the flow of costly masterpieces from the British aristocracy to the American art market. Undoubtedly, many of the works that left Britain for the United States in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century—such as *The Godsal Children* by Hoppner (Huntington Museum, California), *Frances Duncombe* by Gainsborough (Frick Collection, New York), and *Viscount Malden and Lady Capel* by Reynolds (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) (Fig. 5)—did so through Agnew’s books. And undoubtedly a cursory reading of the stock books shows that from the 1880s onwards, Agnew’s sold pictures to major American collectors and dealers, including New York’s Morgan family, Samuel Avery, and George A. Hearn; Philadelphia’s John G. Johnson and P.A.B. Widener; Pittsburgh’s Henry Clay Frick; and Memphis’s John H. McFadden. But how important was the American trade for Agnew’s—both qualitatively and quantitatively—and what role did the American market fulfil within Agnew’s business? An analysis of the data in the stock books is one route to answering these questions.

Data Analysis

Volume

Agnew’s was an active, growing firm during this period: in 1894, it purchased 297 pictures and in the following year the volume of purchases grew by nearly one-third (32 per cent) to 393. Its business was principally grounded in Britain. In both years, the artists purchased by Agnew’s were mostly British: 79 per cent both in 1894 and 1895 (Fig. 6). Dutch (10 per cent), Italian (7 per cent), and French (3 per cent) artists composed the remaining 21 per cent, whereas other nationalities totalled only 1 per cent. Over the two-year period, the artists most frequently sold were “deceased masters”: George Morland (32 pictures), Joshua Reynolds (32 pictures), George Romney (31 pictures), Thomas Gainsborough (26 pictures), and John Constable (26 pictures)—the only living artist sold with some frequency was Edward Burne-Jones (11 pictures). Other living artists such as Frederic Leighton (1830–1896), John Everett Millais (1829–1896), Nino Costa (1826–1903), and Charles Perugini (1839–1918) were sold by the firm; these modern sales, however, were occasional and the artists selected were well-established and aged in their late fifties and sixties, showing a firm that was moving away from the modern art market of emerging artists. This fact is also confirmed by the low number of pictures that Agnew’s purchased at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions: only one work in 1894, *The Head of the Loch* by Peter Graham (1836–1921), a negligible amount compared to the some fifty works

that the firm had bought there in 1870.²³ Agnew's sold a relatively small pool of genres—the paintings in their stock can be broadly classified into: landscape; portrait; genre; allegory and mythology; religious pictures; and animal painting.²⁴ Of these, the most popular category was, overwhelmingly, landscape, which represented 43 per cent of the stock in 1894 and 1895. It was followed by: 25 per cent portraits and 23 per cent genre; whereas allegory and mythology, religious pictures and animal painting lagged well behind at 3 per cent each. Finally, [Figure 7](#) illustrates the most lucrative genres—this graph places the dominance of landscapes in number into perspective by showing that portraits emerge as an important category for the business.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 6.

Waffle chart showing pictures purchased by Thos. Agnew and Sons in the years 1894 and 1895, *grouped by genre*.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 7.

Pie chart representing gross profit of sales from pictures purchased by Thos. Agnew and Sons in the years 1894 and 1895, *grouped by genre*.

In 1894 and 1895, like in earlier decades, the suppliers of Agnew's pictures—their sellers—were almost exclusively British: 92 per cent in 1894 and 93 per cent in 1895 ([Fig. 8](#)). Among these, the auctioneer Christie's was a principal source of stock, it provided Agnew's with 59 per cent of its purchases in 1894 and with 35 per cent in 1895; this decrease is likely due to the exceptional number of high-quality sales that occurred in 1894, such as the Hope and the Eastlake collection sales. In 1894 and 1895, Agnew's suppliers had the following composition: 54 per cent auctioneers, 23 per cent other art dealers, 16 per cent private clients, and 7 per cent artists; whereas the firm's clients were: 63 per cent private buyers, 32 per cent art dealers, 3 per cent auctioneers, and 2 per cent museums ([Fig. 9](#)). This distribution demonstrates that in these years Agnew's ran principally a retail operation, that is, the firm bought "wholesale" at auction and sold to private purchasers for their personal use rather than for resale, although they also supplied a significant amount of works to other dealers. Agnew's utilised auctions for resale of their stock only as a last resort, when the firm could not sell works in any other way. In fact, the few works sold at auction all incurred a loss. The firm's buyers were also principally British: they accounted for 79 per cent of purchases, followed by 11 per cent Americans and 9 per cent French, whereas buyers from the rest of Europe only totalled the remaining 1 per cent ([Fig. 10](#)). Because of its relatively low volume, it may appear that the

American market was of secondary importance for the firm, but when profit is taken into account, the significance of the American market becomes evident.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 8.

Waffle chart showing pictures purchased by Thos. Agnew's and Sons in the years 1894 and 1895, *grouped by seller nationality*.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 9.

Waffle chart showing pictures purchased by Thos. Agnew's and Sons in the years 1894 and 1895, *grouped by seller type*.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 10.

Waffle chart showing pictures sold by Thos. Agnew's and Sons in the years 1894 and 1895, *grouped by buyer nationality*.

Profit

Agnew's dealt with large quantities of capital for an art business of its day and had a high rate of inventory turnover. According to the stock books, in 1894, Agnew's spent a total of £160,163 on buying pictures and brought in £179,845 from revenues overall, even accounting for expenses and other sources of income, the margin of £19,682 allowed for a large profit from the trade in pictures (Fig. 11).²⁵ This was a very large amount at a time when £700 provided a very comfortable upper-middle-class annual salary.²⁶ Yet 1895 proved an even better year: the total profit for Agnew's then was £36,119 based on expenditure of £282,268 and income of £318,387.²⁷ These figures, however, must be considered as merely indicative, as some of the paintings sold in 1894 and 1895 are noted in the stock books as being acquired in earlier years, and, in addition, the sale of paintings was only one sector, albeit important, of the firm's business, which also included framing, conservation, and the sale of other types of art, as well as many curatorial services such as transport, storage, hanging, and re-hanging of pictures.²⁸

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 11.

Bar chart showing the gross profit from sales of pictures purchased by Thos. Agnew's and Sons in the years 1894 and 1895, *grouped by artist nationality*.

Were some genres more profitable than others? In absolute values, across 1894 and 1895, portraits were the most profitable genre, bringing an income of £222,156 against an expenditure of £184,237 and thus a profit of £37,919. Landscape fared less well, with £169,128 against £160,883, and a profit of £8,245; genre painting brought in £68,134 against £60,702, and a profit of £7,432; religious pictures £14,211 against £13,186, and a profit of £1,025; and animal painting £3,789 against £2,649, and a profit of £1,140. The genre of allegory and mythology brought in a loss during these years, with an income of £12,947 against an expenditure of £14,019, and a loss of £1,072. Considering the return on investment (the ratio between profit and cost), each category delivered the following profit margins: portraits performed above all, achieving 20.58 per cent; followed by genre at 12.24 per cent, and religious pictures at 7.77 per cent. Landscape painting, although the most sold genre by volume at the firm, provided a relatively low return on investment: only 5.12 per cent. Landscape paintings were probably purchased on commission (see below) and constituted the “bread and butter” of the firm, providing it with a steady and reliable source of income. By contrast, animal painting in 1894 and 1895 generated a very high return on investment of 43.03 per cent but represented such a small amount of the firm’s stock (3 per cent) that it is not possible to determine how reflective this percentage is of their general business, that is, whether this was a regular characteristic or an exceptional occurrence.

In absolute values, the sale of work by British artists generated the lion’s share of Agnew’s income, delivering a profit of £46,825 (84 per cent). This sum was followed, much lower down, by Dutch artists at £6,249 (11 per cent); French artists at £1,306 (2.5 per cent); and Italian artists at £874 (1.5 per cent). When considering return on investment, however, the differences were less pronounced: British artists generated a profit of 13.76 per cent; Dutch 10.94 per cent; French 9.15 per cent; and Italian 5.57 per cent. The relative ratio of return on investment offers a particularly sharp lens through which to analyse Agnew’s buyers: British clients spent £332,850 on purchases from Agnew’s, against the firm’s investment of £298,118, delivering a profit of £34,732 and a return on investment of 11.65 per cent. In comparison, sales to American buyers generated income of £101,926 against the firm’s expenditure of £77,940, producing a profit of £23,986. Here, the return on investment was 30.77 per cent; as a group, American buyers provided Agnew’s with by far the highest return on investment.

Americans, however, were only one part of Agnew’s network of buyers. Histories of the art market in these years, especially by Cynthia Salzman, have usually emphasised the American role via an “exodus” of European works of art to American collections. An often-cited illustration of the European art market at the turn of the twentieth century is a caricature from the magazine *Puck*, which shows the American millionaire J.P. Morgan gathering treasures from Europe with a dollar-shaped magnet (Fig. 12). In

fact, the analysis of Agnew's stock books shows that, although American buyers presented a considerable source of income for the firm, there still existed a very healthy number of British clients, and a domestic art market dense with sales, purchases, and opportunities; this trade still provided the backbone of Agnew's business. The firm's transactions were fuelled mainly by British industrialists, not only the well-known Irish Brewer Edward Guinness (Lord Iveagh), but also lesser-known figures such as the London wine merchant Charles Gassiot; the Liverpool ship magnate Thomas Henry Ismay, the Lincoln engineer Joseph Ruston, and the Scottish banker Alexander Henderson (Lord Faringdon). Even if American clients presented a better return on investment, in absolute terms, the transactions with British private buyers brought in a higher income, £36,812 versus £21,728 in 1894 and 1895. The American dollar, as shown in the *Puck* illustration, was an important magnet for works of art but it was not a lone player in this complex, lively, and thick market.



Figure 12. Joseph Keppler Jr., *The Magnet*, cartoon from *Puck* magazine, vol. 69, no. 1790, 21 June 1911. Collection of The Morgan Library and Museum, New York (ARC 2650). Digital image courtesy of The Morgan Library and Museum.

Methodological Questions

The financial data analysed shows clearly that Agnew's secured a much higher return on investment when dealing with American buyers but still maintained firm footing in the British market. The figures are both remarkable and reliable, but while they demonstrate the profitability of selling paintings to the American market, they do not explain Agnew's broader business model or operational dynamics. Likewise, the data about

the profitability of different categories, while capable of demonstrating—for example—that portraiture was a desirable asset, does not explain Agnew's position in relation to British and American clients. In order to examine such questions, we need to look into their context and delve deeper into the Agnew's archives.

In first instance, we should consider the data of the stock books within the broader context of the firm; Agnew's daybooks, which chronicle its day-to-day operation, are essential to this triangulation (Fig. 13). The daybooks demonstrate that Agnew's operated their business with a vertically integrated model, providing services to buyers at a number of stages during artistic production, such as framing, glazing, and restoring. The firm also offered curatorial services like insurance, specialised transport for works of art, interior decoration, picture hanging, and the printing of collections catalogues.²⁹ Agnew's even hired rooms at the Pantechmicon in Oxford Street, where their clients could store the works of art purchased.³⁰ Although the trade in paintings dominated Agnew's activities and provided the firm with the highest income, the daybooks show that the curatorial services were an important part of the business. These services ensured that Agnew's maintained and deepened client relationships that would serve them well in future dealings.

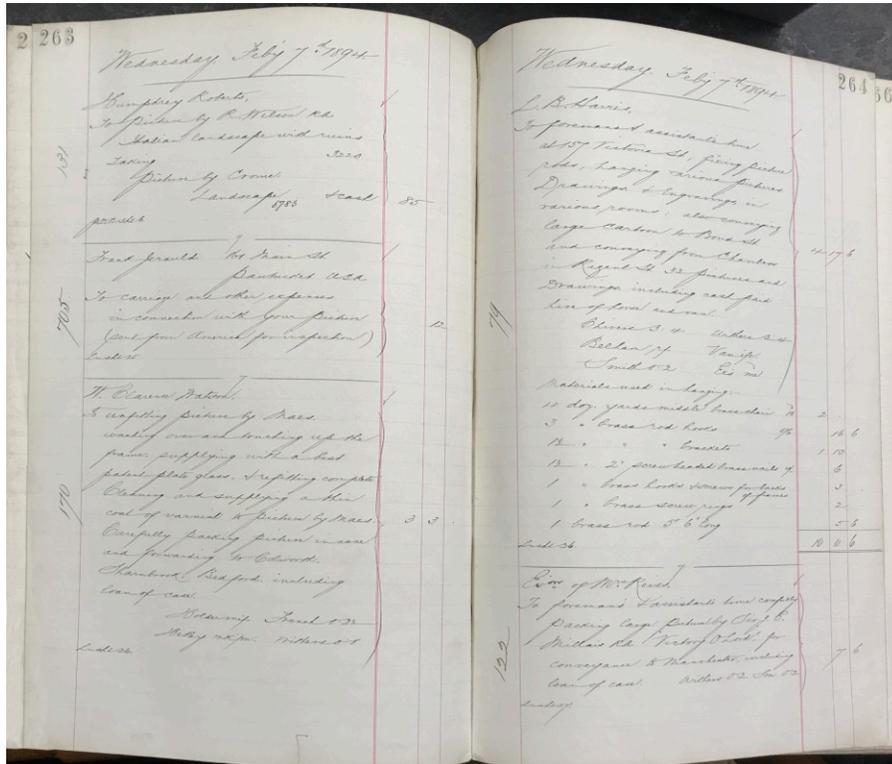


Figure 13.

Thos. Agnew's and Sons London Day Book 14, 1893-1895: pp.263-264.
Collection of the National Gallery Archive (NGA27/13/3/14). Digital image courtesy of Barbara Pezzini.

The daybooks also confirm the extent of the American trade for the firm. Apart from occasional transactions such as giving valuations, providing carriage for works of art between the United States and London, and clearing custom duties—and apart from the many services provided to American buyers, such as J.P. Morgan, who owned a home in London—curatorial service transactions were generated by British buyers. American buyers principally engaged with the firm for purchasing works of art, which included paintings but also drawings, watercolours, and, especially, prints.³¹ In this light, the trip made by Agnew's employee (and future partner) David Croal Thomson to the United States and Canada in 1898 can be read as the firm attempting to increase a sector of its business, which was profitable but still underdeveloped.³²

The study of the daybooks is also of great help in understanding some aspects of Agnew's operations and in particular clarifies some queries left open by Bayer and Page. For instance, the daybooks show clearly that Agnew's business purchased works at auction principally on a commission basis for specific clients, levying a charge of 5 per cent for acting on their behalf (Fig. 14); the purchase of these works of art was also noted in the firm's stock books, although the fact that they were acquired on commission

is not indicated there. Agnew's, as demonstrated by Bayer and Page's study of Christie's records, were the most frequent purchasers among all those bidding at auction. Their high-price purchases at Christie's, however, perplexed Bayer and Page, who wrote:

somewhat surprisingly, the data also showed that the average price dealers paid at auction for paintings was nearly 50% higher than the average amount spent by middle- and upper-class buyers, the very consumer group to whom the dealers ostensibly sold.³³

Yet when one realises the large extent to which dealers such as Agnew's purchased works *on behalf* of private buyers and operated on a percentage commission basis, this higher price data is no longer surprising. For instance, the purchase at Christie's of the *Portrait of a Woman* by Elisabeth-Louise Vigée Lebrun³⁴ can be read at one level in simple numerical terms: it was purchased on 9 May 1895 at auction by a dealer for a very high sum, £2,360, and sold a few days later to J.P. Morgan for £2,480 (Fig. 15).³⁵ This would seem *prima facie* a large and high-risk investment of capital for Agnew's considering the low profit margin of £118. When one realises, however, that this purchase was a commission bid (and it is clearly expressed as such in the daybooks), this transaction assumes a different significance; Agnew's were not here making their own investment but were merely providing a service to Morgan (Fig. 16). Understanding the importance, and extent, of commissioning shows how intertwined were the actions of art buyers and their dealers, and creates a new array of research questions: if works were purchased on behalf of buyers, can they still legitimately be considered part of Agnew's stock? And what was the role of the dealers in these selecting purchases: were they merely acquiring works as directed by buyers or were they also advising which works to choose? Only correspondence and other documentation, such as daybooks, buyers' invoices, and sales catalogues (when available) can provide an answer to these questions.

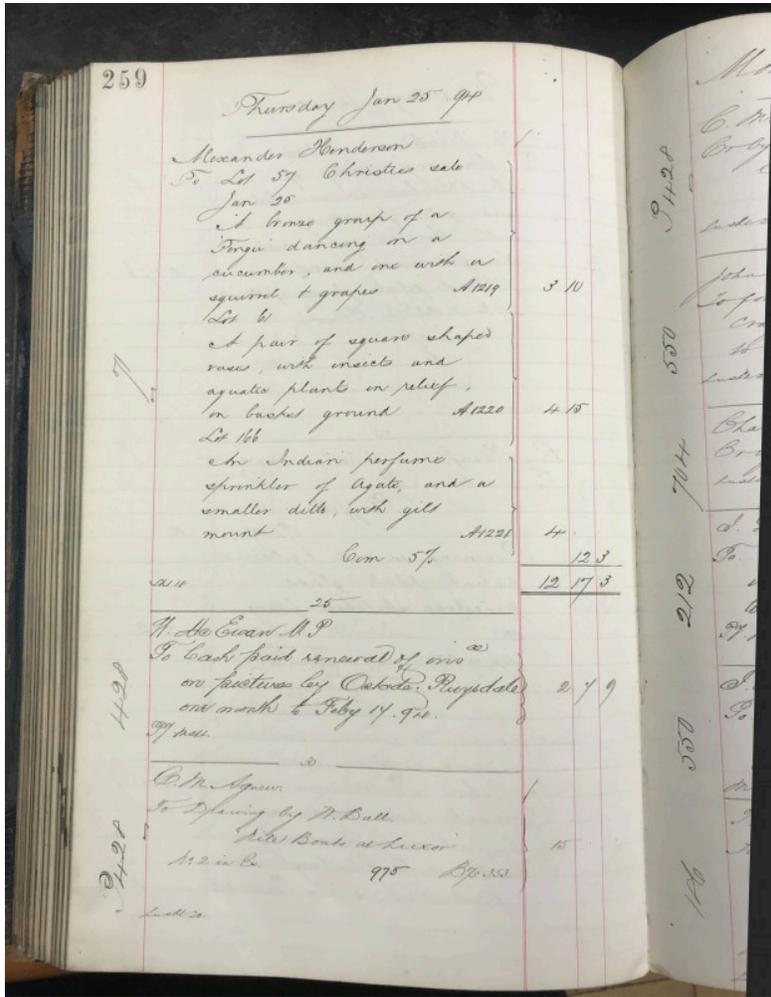


Figure 14.
 Thos. Agnew's and Sons London Day Book 14, 1893-1895:
 p.259. Collection of the National Gallery Archive (NGA27/13/3/
 14). Digital image courtesy of Barbara Pezzini.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 15.

Elisabeth-Louise Vigée Lebrun, Madame d'Aguesseau de Fresnes, 1789, oil on wood, 107 x 83.2 cm. Collection of National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection (1946.7.16). Digital image courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection (CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain).

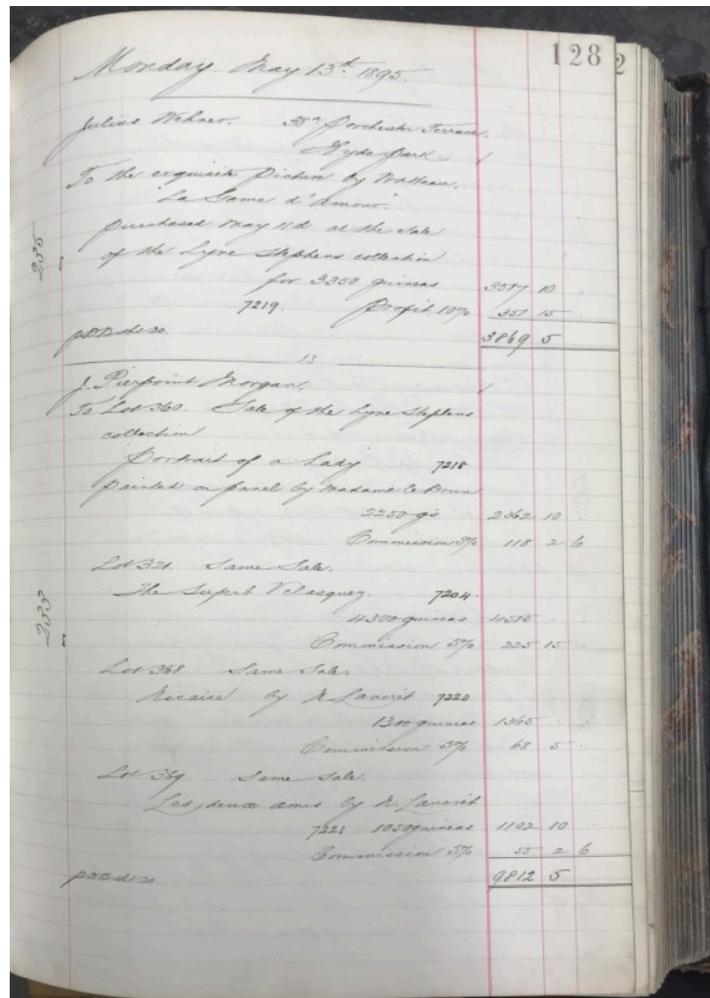


Figure 16.

Thos. Agnew's and Sons London Day Book, showing the transaction of Elisabeth-Louise Vigée Lebrun. Collection of the National Gallery Archive. Digital image courtesy of Barbara Pezzini.

Commissions also explain why, *pace* Beyer and Page, dealers paid more for some works of art at auction: because they were purchasing on behalf of private buyers. Private buyers tended to purchase on their own works that were less desirable and therefore cheaper due to less competition. Conversely, when purchasing highly desirable works of art, which sold for higher figures, they commissioned dealers, who were specialists of auction purchases, to bid on their behalf.³⁶ Agnew's near-monopoly at auction is also explained by the fact that the firm operated for the highest tier of collectors, who were aware that to obtain a very desirable work of art at auction one must be prepared to pay the highest price—a phenomenon known as the winner's curse.³⁷ In addition, if we examine this *modus operandi* cynically,

when dealers are commissioned to purchase at auction on a percentage basis, it makes good business sense to buy at a high price because the commission earned increases in direct proportion to the purchase price.

This explanation of Agnew's high volumes of purchases on commission is not a mere financial detail but has profound methodological implications. By dismissing other archival records as "anecdotal evidence" and relying only on financial data—and, moreover, on just one type of financial data without any additional triangulation, Bayer and Page did not grasp a fundamental aspect of the trade's auction purchases, an aspect which invalidates their challenge to the "assumptions on the function that dealers are traditionally thought to perform".³⁸ Yet there is much useful material to gather from Bayer and Page's methods: their introduction of measuring quantitatively "the make-up and sources of the gallery's inventory, its sales, the return on invested capital, profitability by artist, profitability by subject and size of the painting, velocity, and other aspects" still provide unparalleled insight in a dealer's business. It is for this reason that the stock books, which provide the high-volume financial data necessary for this kind of investigation, remain a fundamental and reliable source to analyse Agnew's.³⁹

Conclusion

Apart from the historical errors that can be generated by looking at financial data in isolation, the kind of taxonomical analysis presented in this essay holds its own set of challenges, which are well known to librarians and to anyone who assembles a relational database, namely, the imposition of a structural grid on a blurry subject requires arbitrary choices that will invariably carry some loss of meaning and nuance. In addition, discipline-specific challenges are also present. Thomas Skowronek, whose studies focus on the art market, has recently joined the chorus of scholars who criticise big data visualisations, highlighting, in particular, that their ways of representing complex cultural phenomena often merely reproduce the epistemological grounds and strategic alignments associated with the instrumentalisation of big data; namely, the belief that complexity can safely be reduced to discrete categories.⁴⁰

The simplifications of a complex reality were present in our project too. For instance, if the demarcation between portrait and landscape is generally transparent—except for the rare works that combine the two such as Thomas Gainsborough's *Mr and Mrs Andrews* at the London National Gallery—the categorisation of other genres, such as, for instance, landscape versus animal painting, landscape versus genre painting, or genre painting versus portraiture has been more difficult. Nationality presents its own set of blurred boundaries and problems: how to describe British collectors of European

origin such as Sam Mendel, the Rothschild family, or Marie Sophia Dalglisch-Bellasis? Even the American buyer *par excellence*, J.P. Morgan, was in fact a cosmopolitan figure: well travelled in Europe and the Middle East, Morgan lived in London and his purchasing habits were inspired by British collectors such as the Marquess of Hertford. The case of Morgan illustrates a market that was increasingly internationalised and demonstrates a historical reality that loses much of its nuance when forced into the rigid categories of a database.

Nevertheless, even when leaving room for some uncertainty, the figures and percentages presented in this essay are remarkable and present a clear body of evidence; they will be even more so when analysed as part of wider data sets. As growing quantities of data are released from archives, there will be more opportunities to assemble large sets for the purposes of historical analysis. In the case of the Agnew's archive, once data has been extracted from the Agnew's stock books across several decades, it will be possible to chart with greater accuracy the most profitable areas of the firm's business and their impact on the wider cultural field. This data can then be compared more broadly—as data sets from other dealers become increasingly available, it will be possible to analyse financial information across several dealerships and create even richer accounts of the trade in paintings.⁴¹ However, as this essay has demonstrated, art market analysis can never solely rely on numerical data alone. Other archival resources must be brought into consideration in order to provide the context in which the financial transactions were made. In very simple terms, this will help us answer the question: what do the numbers mean? An analysis of the Agnew's stock books gives us a wealth of figures about clients, income and expenditure, as well as the popularity and profitability of different genres, schools, and artists. However, understanding other aspects of Agnew's business shows that processes such as commission bidding can influence price, or that market cultivation might influence the range of clients. As we move forward towards analysing data across multiple dealerships, taking into account the overall business strategy of each firm will be essential in order to present an accurate understanding of the art trade and its significance for the cultural sector, nationally and internationally.

Footnotes

- 1 This seismic shift began with the development in computing in the 1980s, when museums and libraries started to create electronic catalogues of their digital collections; journals such as *Visual Resources* were founded in the course of the 1980s to respond to the change in the methods of art history that these new tools created.
- 2 For an example of this kind of project, see Rachel Bandhari and Alan Crookham, "Tate Archive Online", *Art Libraries Journal* 30, no. 1 (2005):10–14. doi:[10.1017/s0307472200013791](https://doi.org/10.1017/s0307472200013791).
- 3 See, for instance, the collections online of the archives of American Art at the Smithsonian in Washington DC, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections>.

- 4 For web resources, see Pamela Fletcher and David Israel's London Gallery Project, <https://learn.bowdoin.edu/fletcher/london-gallery/>; the Getty Provenance Index's dealers databases, <http://piprod.getty.edu/starweb/stockbooks/servlet.starweb?path=stockbooks/stockbooks.web>; and Beatrice Joyeux Prunel's *Artlas* project, <https://artlas.humanum.fr/en/>. For essays using these methodologies, see Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, "Local/Global: Mapping Nineteenth-Century London's Art Market", *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 2012), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn12/fletcher-helmreich-mapping-the-london-art-market>. Accessed 17 August 2018; Maximilian Schich, Christian Huemer, Piotr Adamczyk, and Yang-Yu Liu, "Network Dimensions in the Getty Provenance Index", *arXiv* (June 2017), http://manovich.net/content/04-projects/100-network-dimensions-in-the-getty-provenance-index/getty_provenance_index.pdf.
- 5 The company closed as a family firm in 1913 and shortly afterwards the archives were acquired by the National Gallery. The firm's name does continue under new ownership and now trades as Agnew's Gallery, which retains possession of the former company's records dating from 1833. Ultimately, custodianship of the archives dating from 1833 to 2013 will be transferred to the National Gallery Research Centre. The survival of dealers' archives from earlier in the nineteenth century is relatively rare, for example, Knoedler's stock books date from 1872 and Colnaghi's records from 1894.
- 6 For Agnew's Stock Books at the National Gallery Research Centre, see <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/research/research-centre/agnews-stock-books>.
- 7 This corresponds with observations made by Johanna Drucker about the difference between digitised and digital art history, see Johanna Drucker, "Is There a 'Digital' Art History?", *Visual Resources* 29, nos 1-2 (June 2013): 5-13, doi:10.1080/01973762.2013.761106.
- 8 The project was titled "Reframing Art: Opening Up Art Dealers' Archives to Multi-Disciplinary Research" and was part of the KCL Cultural Institute's scheme *Co-Researching for Innovation and Change*, which ran from summer 2017 to early 2018. The project team consisted of Alan Crookham (NG), Barbara Pezzini (NG/University of Manchester), Stuart Dunn (KCL Department of Digital Humanities), and Neil Jakeman (King's Digital Lab). For a first presentation of the project, see Alan Crookham and Stuart Dunn "Reframing Art: Opening Up Art Dealers' Archives to Multi-disciplinary Research", *Visual Resources* 35, nos 1-2 (2019): 180-183, doi:10.1080/01973762.2019.1553447.
- 9 The CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model (CRM) has been developed by the ICOM International Committee for Documentation. It seeks to "provide definitions and a formal structure for describing the implicit and explicit concepts and relationships used in cultural heritage documentation."
- 10 For example, Flaminia Gennari Santori, *The Melancholy of Masterpieces* (Milan: 5 Continenti, 2005); Inge Reist (ed.), *British Models of Art Collecting and the American Response: Reflections Across the Pond* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014); Cynthia Saltzman, *Old Masters, New World, America's Raid on Europe's Great Pictures* (London: Penguin, 2008).
- 11 Thomas M. Bayer and John Page, "Arthur Tooth: A London Art Dealer in the Spotlight, 1870-71", *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2010), <https://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring10/arthur-tooth>. Tooth's case study was later contextualised by the authors in Thomas M. Bayer and John R. Page, *The Development of the Art Market in England: Money as Muse 1730-1900* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011).
- 12 Anne Helmreich, "T.M. Bayer and J.R. Page, *The Development of the Art Market in England: Money as Muse 1730-1900*", *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide* 11, no.1 (Spring 2012), <https://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/spring12/the-development-of-the-art-market-in-england-money-as-muse-17301900-by-thomas-m-bayer-and-john-r-page>; Robert Jensen, "T.M. Bayer and J.R. Page, *The Development of the Art Market in England: Money as Muse 1730-1900*", *EH.net* (August 2011), https://eh.net/book_reviews/the-development-of-the-art-market-in-england-money-as-muse-1730-1900/.
- 13 Dongho Chun, "Art Dealing in Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of Thomas Agnew", *Horizons* 2 (2011): 255-277; Barbara Pezzini, "Making a Market for Art: Agnew's and the National Gallery 1855-1928", PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 2017.
- 14 Pezzini, "Making a Market for Art", 74-97.
- 15 Chun, "Art Dealing in Nineteenth-Century England", 255-257.
- 16 On Agnew's relationship with the Royal Academy, see Barbara Pezzini, "1870: William Agnew's Purchases at the Summer Exhibition", *The Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition: A Chronicle, 1769-2018*, edited by Mark Hallett, Sarah Victoria Turner, and Jessica Feather (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2018), <https://chronicle250.com/1870>.
- 17 Barbara Pezzini, "From Modern to Old Masters: Agnew's and the National Gallery", in Susanna Avery-Quash and Barbara Pezzini (eds), *Old Masters Worldwide: Museums, Markets and Movements* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), forthcoming. In 1894 and 1895, Agnew's sold five works to the National Gallery.
- 18 The retirement of William Agnew and the new partnership of the firm announced in "Partnerships Dissolved", *The Times* (29 January 1896), 12.
- 19 Pezzini, "Making a Market for Art", 179-191.
- 20 For the Agnews' education at Cambridge, see *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 18.
- 21 Meryl Secrest, *Duveen A Life in Art* (New York: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 175-177.
- 22 For George Agnew's title and familial pedigree, with crest, see *Debrett House of Commons and the Judicial Bench* (London: Dean & Son, 1916), 2.
- 23 Pezzini, "1870: William Agnew's Purchases at the Summer Exhibition".

- 24 We have followed historical definitions of artistic typologies such as *genre*, *landscape*, and *portrait*, as well as following categorisations of paintings which were used at the time, and as described in sales catalogues and art historical literature. The categorisations chosen are listed in the Getty AAT (Art and Architecture Thesaurus), see <http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/aat/about.html>.
- 25 It is important to add a caveat, explored further in the article, that this is not the only profit that Agnew's made as pictures bought in previous years could have also been sold in 1894 and 1895 but are not part of the examined stock book sample. Moreover, the firm also provided other services and had branches in different cities, so these figures ought to be put in a broader context, as we explain below.
- 26 Arthur L. Bowley, *Wages in the United Kingdom in the 19th Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900).
- 27 Across both years, Agnew's total expenditure was £442,431 and its income was £498,232, which delivered a profit of £55,801. The profit in 1894 and in 1895 adjusted for inflation of 2017: equates to, respectively, £2,431,971 and £4,514,875 according to the Bank of England Inflation Calculator, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>.
- 28 By the end of 1895, 84 works, equivalent to 12.2 per cent, were not sold. Of the unsold pictures, 55 per cent were landscapes, 26 per cent were portraits, and 13 per cent were genre pictures.
- 29 For examples of these, see Agnew's London Day Book 6, 535–536 [NGA27/13/1/6], National Gallery Archive.
- 30 Agnew's London Day Book 8, 68, 69, 246, 256, and 295 [NGA27/13/3/8], National Gallery Archive.
- 31 For some transactions with American buyers, see Agnew's London Day Book 14, 313 (14 March 1894 to General Whither of New York); and 372 (4 May 1894, Morris K. Jesup of New York) [NGA27/13/3/14], National Gallery Archive.
- 32 In 1898, David Croal Thomson travelled across the United States visiting private collectors on behalf of Lockett Agnew to find new clients for the firm, see "Report on a visit to Canada and U.S.A. by D.C. Thomson [NGA27/27/3]", National Gallery Archive.
- 33 Bayer and Page, "Arthur Tooth".
- 34 It is now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, identified with Madame d'Aguesseau de Fresnes.
- 35 See Agnew's Stock Book 6, no. 7218 [NGA27/1/1/8], National Gallery Archive.
- 36 The risks of bidding at auction was described a few years later by National Gallery Director Charles Holmes, *Pictures and Picture Collecting* (London: Treherne, 1903), 48–50; this is also discussed in Barbara Pezzini, "(Inter)National Art: The London Old Masters Market and Modern British Painting", in Jan Dirk Baetens and Dries Lyna (eds), *Art Crossing Borders: The Internationalisation of the Art Market in the Age of Nation States, 1750–1914* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 139.
- 37 On commission sales and auctions, see Christian Heath, *The Dynamics of Auctions, Social Interaction and the Sale of Fine Art and Antiques* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 68–69.
- 38 Bayer and Page, "Arthur Tooth".
- 39 Pezzini, "Making a Market for Art", 74–97.
- 40 Thomas Skowronek, "Anamorphosis of Unexpected Results: On the Epistemological Culture of Art Market Visualizations", *Journal for Art Market Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017), <https://www.fokum-jams.org/index.php/jams/article/view/12>. For a broader critique of digital art history, see Claire Bishop, "Against Digital Art History", *Humanities Future* (2015), <https://humanitiesfutures.org/papers/digital-art-history/>.
- 41 Knoedler and Goupil's stock books have been made available by the Getty Research Institute: Knoedler Gallery Archive, M. Knoedler & Co. records, circa 1848–1971, Goupil & Cie/Boussod, Valadon & Cie in Paris (1846–1919), <https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/search.html>.

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Letters from the Home Front: The Alternative War Art of Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde, 1940–1945

Sophie Hatchwell

Abstract

The Scottish artists Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde worked through the Second World War, but as they practised for the most part outside the patronage of the government's War Artists Advisory Committee, they are not typically situated amongst the pantheon of British war artists. However, a number of un-commissioned war paintings and the artists' personal correspondence from the early 1940s clearly position their practices as a direct response to the conflict. This article explores how MacBryde and Colquhoun's experience of life on the home front as non-combatants and erstwhile pacifists in Britain informed their work during the Second World War. It looks at the extent to which their pacifist stance impacted on their practice; how their personal experiences of war, as documented in their letters, may be brought to bear on an analysis of their painting; and, more broadly, what nuanced deviations in style and subject can be seen between commissioned and non-commissioned war art in Britain during the Second World War. It concludes by considering how their work that does not explicitly deal with conflict as subject matter may nevertheless be positioned within an inclusive canon of war art.

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The material thrown up by this war is amazing and in these new forms I can see the foundations for a Renaissance in European art. A world of new synthetic materials borne out of necessity has arisen and while we cannot say that we are happy in this state of affairs yet it is with us and so we must state what we feel about it. – Robert MacBryde, letter to the War Artists' Advisory Committee, 14 October 1940¹

This letter from the Scottish artist Robert MacBryde to the War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC), written at the height of the Second World War, is emblematic of the complex reaction that both he and his life partner, the artist Robert Colquhoun, had to the conflict. It signals not only their objection to the war but also their corresponding belief in the broader aesthetic opportunities it promised, and points towards a dichotomy between how these artists experienced and thought critically about war, and how this process of critique—and the effects of war more generally—engaged their aesthetic sensibilities. MacBryde wrote this letter while he sought a commission from the WAAC to work as an official war artist—a commission he never received. His partner Colquhoun had a similar experience and received only one commission in 1944 for *Weaving Army Cloth* (Fig. 1). For both artists, the majority of their work from 1940 to 1945 was made outside the state patronage system and, despite producing paintings that explicitly depict the conflict, they are rarely positioned within a historical canon of war art. MacBryde's statement, however, marks his practice, and by extension Colquhoun's, as a direct response to the conflict. This response, I argue, was predicated on a simultaneous objection to the war and a recognition of the opportunities it might afford for aesthetic inspiration—a “world of new synthetic materials”.



Figure 1.

Robert Colquhoun, *Weaving Army Cloth*, 1945, oil on canvas, 75.5 × 101.5 cm. Collection of the British Council (P149). Digital image courtesy of The British Council (All rights reserved).

MacBryde and Colquhoun's experiences on the home front as non-combatants and erstwhile pacifists influenced the art they made during the conflict. In light of their personal relationship and comparable professional practice, their work is typically considered in tandem; in this case, their shared experience of home-front life underpins the analogies that can be drawn between their work in the 1940s. This article is therefore concerned with the following lines of enquiry: to what extent do these artists' wartime practices indicate a pacifist stance; how might their personal experiences of war, as documented in their letters, be brought to bear on an analysis of their painting; and what nuanced deviations in style and subject can be seen between commissioned and non-commissioned Second World War art in Britain? Turning to Colquhoun's wartime landscape painting, the concluding section considers how art that does not explicitly reference conflict in its subject matter may be positioned within a broader canon of war art.

By shining a light on the practices and experiences of these two artists working outside the patronage of the WAAC, this article diverges from recent scholarship that focuses almost exclusively on art commissioned by the state during the Second World War in Britain, and beyond this, seeks to reconsider the boundaries and limitations of any canon constructed from this body of work.² In doing so, this article will chart how alternative narratives emerged beyond the official systems of patronage. By attending to these larger topical

and methodological issues, this text contributes to a broader field of scholarship that aims, in the first instance, to widen the canon of war art, but ultimately, to call into question the usefulness of any canon in understanding artistic responses to conflict.³ Two alternative narratives are traced throughout this article: first, the question of how art that does not explicitly depict conflict should be understood as a response to it, and thus recognised as war art; and second, how a moral conviction against war was registered in art not commissioned by the state that alternately depicted the devastation on the home front, and seemed to avoid reference to it entirely.

This article also offers a new analysis of Colquhoun and MacBryde's oeuvre by situating their early work within the context of war art aesthetics. Studies that cover the artists' early careers, notably those by Adrian Clark, Patrick Elliott, and Roger Bristow, have focused on their position within networks of private patronage in the wartime arts economy. More recent work has considered their sexual orientation in relation to their art practice.⁴ This scholarship is valuable, but a fresh approach to analysing their practice is much needed: despite Colquhoun and MacBryde's prominence and critical success in the British art world of the 1940s and 1950s, their work has, with the few exceptions named above, received little art-historical attention. Where they have been attended to, as Clark has shown, they have often been confined to the "artistic cul-de-sac" of Neo-Romanticism.⁵ In offering an alternative view of their work of the early 1940s, I do not propose to dislocate them from this context, but rather suggest a different perspective that de-prioritises their association with Neo-Romanticism and understands their work in relation to its particular moment of creation.

Wartime correspondence by MacBryde and Colquhoun, the majority of which has not yet been featured in published scholarship, is held in the archives of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.⁶ These letters provide an invaluable insight into the artists' immediate responses to their wartime situation. In addition to providing factual records of their activities, these letters also give a sense of their authors' fluctuating and complex personal reflections on the conflict—essential evidence that helps us understand the association between their experience and aesthetic responses to the war. Their correspondence, as the opening quotation indicates, provides a way to engage with their often introspective and disconnected wartime experiences as non-combatants and pacifists. Colquhoun was an unwilling conscript to the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), and was soon discharged; MacBryde was a conscientious objector who was rated unfit for service before a tribunal could be held. Their letters from this period frame a new reading of the art they made during the early 1940s, with reference to their joint critical outlook on the personal and cultural impacts of total war.

A Kind of Pacifism

In the midst of the war and then living in London, Colquhoun produced a small number of landscapes inspired by a trip to the Worcestershire countryside.⁷ In one of these works, *The Lock Gate*, two androgynous figures walk through a land of riotous foliage (Fig. 2). They face away from the viewer and move towards a distant, otherworldly horizon.⁸ This work seems at first glance an escapist retreat into nature, a rejection of, or a turning away from, the upheaval, danger, and uncertainty of the conflict. However, given the context of its production—finished in the artist’s studio in the middle of the war-torn city, and proximate to his completion of a number of war-themed paintings—the work raises a number of questions. What relationship exists between this artist’s personal view and experience of war, and the process of image making? How is this complicated by his non-combatant status? What sort of connections can be drawn between conventional wartime imagery and potentially more diverse visualisations of the effects of conflict?



Figure 2.

Robert Colquhoun, *The Lock Gate*, 1942, oil on canvas, 39.5 × 58.8 cm. Collection of Glasgow Museums (2936) Gifted by A.J. McNeill Reid, 1952. Digital image courtesy of the artist's estate, CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection, and Bridgeman Images (All rights reserved).

Throughout the early years of the conflict, both Colquhoun and MacBryde exchanged letters with their friend and former teacher Ian Fleming. These exchanges prior to and concurrent with the production of their early war paintings, including Colquhoun’s *Figures in an Air Raid Shelter* (Fig. 3) and MacBryde’s *Ave Maria Lane* (Fig. 4), provide a means to trace their early

views on the conflict, particularly the impact of conscription, epitomised by MacBryde's assertion about his conscientious objection: "my task is bristling with difficulties but I know I can see it through on all points ... I am advocating what is right and just for all and to what lengths I would go to prove it." ⁹ Bristow, in his biography of the artists, has been careful to acknowledge the effects of the war and conscription on the early stages of MacBryde and Colquhoun's careers, yet he deliberates about whether they should be considered pacifists. Instead, he tentatively suggests that they were only pacifists insofar as "the love of art that both ... passionately felt, was, in part an expression of a broader love of humanity. War for them was an awful and obscene rejection of this." ¹⁰ At the same time, he argues that no clear ethical or religious motivation dictated their beliefs. I contend that while neither MacBryde nor Colquhoun makes explicit reference to pacifism in their correspondence, their letters nevertheless indicate a link between this "love of humanity" and their disavowal of conflict. It is my contention that this should be considered a kind of pacifism underwritten by their non-combatant status that saw them explicitly reject any active part in the military side of the war effort.



Figure 3.

Robert Colquhoun, *Figures in an Air Raid Shelter*, 1941, oil on panel, 24.8 × 50.6 cm. Collection of the Imperial War Museum, London (Art.IWM ART 17211). Digital image courtesy of the artist's estate and Brigeman Images. Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, London (All rights reserved).



Figure 4.

Robert MacBryde, Ave Maria Lane, 1941, oil on canvas, 69 × 84.5 cm. Collection of Russell-Coats Art Gallery & Museum (BORG 01493). Digital image courtesy of Russell-Coats Art Gallery & Museum (All rights reserved).

The artists graduated from Glasgow School of Art in the years immediately preceding the war and Colquhoun received a travelling scholarship that took them both to Europe in 1938–1939.¹¹ This trip marks their earliest encounter with the coming conflict, as they witnessed troops amassing in Italy and Holland, and the construction of sea defences in The Hague.¹² Returning to Scotland in August 1939, their letters to Fleming turn to conscription and reveal MacBryde’s determination to avoid active combat. They show how he registered initially as a conscientious objector, not to escape war service per se, but from fervent objection to violent conflict on moral grounds:

[When] we are called for combat, then I shall get myself a tribunal to stand before. I cannot say I have any definite convictions and that I won’t do anything in the war but—I will not kill. I will do anything else that in their anger at my decision they will give me to do, such as stretcher-bearer in the front line, but I won’t kill.

This is quite final.¹³

In this period, MacBryde still imagined making some form of contribution to the war effort as a non-combatant, offering medical relief “help[ing] the wounded” on the front line with the army, or as a member of the Red Cross.
¹⁴

Their move to the Ayrshire countryside in the early months of the war is emblematic of their attempted rejection of the conflict. Letters from this early wartime period revolve around the idea of war as an intrusion into the artists’ way of life. When painting and drawing in the area around Maybole, MacBryde described their experience as a form of pastoral idyll, nevertheless punctuated with reminders of war. In August 1940, he wrote to Fleming, “our days are spent at the seaside watching convoys and bombers on the Firth, fishing, swimming, gifting drawings for the Red Cross ... along with other country pleasures.”¹⁵ Along with the imposition of the ubiquitous naval convoys, this idyll was inevitably disrupted by both bombing in Glasgow and Colquhoun’s conscription.

When MacBryde eventually withdrew his objection in order to join Colquhoun, who had already been conscripted, it was on the condition that he would be drafted into the RAMC with him, and would not be posted for combat. In the end, MacBryde was deemed unfit by the draft board due to health issues, but his correspondence roots his non-combatant status in a moral objection to violence, which can be understood as a kind of pacifism. It also reveals the extent to which even those opposed to the war were bound by the circumstances it dictated—MacBryde’s response to it was by necessity fluid and fluctuated as the war progressed and conditions changed rapidly.

To an extent, this particular viewpoint aligns with a “quasi-pacifist” stance. Martin Ceadel, in his study of pacifism in Britain between the two world wars, identifies variations of pacifism (denoted by the two terms pacificism and pacifism), that range from an absolute pacifism centred on a complete disavowal of conflict to pacificism, which is characterised as a desire to prevent war while accepting its occasional necessity.¹⁶ One such variation is “quasi-pacifism”, to which he ascribes a “claim for special treatment on account of [the conscientious objector’s] particular characteristics as an individual”.¹⁷ In the case of MacBryde, the definition of “pacifist” comes from his moral rejection of violence, and the “quasi” nature of this from the implication that, as an artist, he makes a claim for holding “particular characteristics”, that is, artistic sensibilities that are incompatible with active combat. At the same time, MacBryde’s willingness to participate in the war effort in some capacity complicates this rather critical definition of pacifist practice.

Colquhoun's letters reveal a similar yet more equivocal moral position on the conflict. While he never registered as a conscientious objector, his letters from 1941 detail the negative psychological and artistic impact it had on him: "the fear now of what seems almost inevitable defeat in [central Europe] has come down like a blight and I find it impossible to do any work."¹⁸ Despite being conscripted into the RAMC, Colquhoun never saw active duty. Having been posted to training barracks near Edinburgh and then Leeds, he was eventually decommissioned as unfit for service due to the debilitating effect camp life had on his health.¹⁹ His correspondence shows that, while he claimed a lack of political awareness, like MacBryde, his main objection to combat centred on a concern for the war's effect on people.²⁰ It was his own experience of unwilling conscription and the news of friends and relatives injured or killed that provoked him to lament "the utter wasteful curse of all this unnecessary warring".²¹

Art and War

Following Colquhoun's conscription, MacBryde spent time in Edinburgh and then in Leeds, in both locations petitioning for work as an official war artist, and in the latter witnessing Luftwaffe bombing. Rather than simply documenting an escapist ambition, MacBryde's correspondence here shows that his moral opposition to the destructive effects of war was linked to a political understanding of the role painting could play in society. He was convinced that the task of the artist was to "record the horrors of modern warfare" and his frequent requests for war work from the Scottish Board, and subsequently the WAAC in England, should be understood in this context.²²

Through his contact in Edinburgh with Alexander Reid of the Reid and Lefevre dealer-gallery, MacBryde was inducted into an influential circle of artists and patrons. By spring 1941, he had moved to London where he witnessed the last months of the Blitz. Colquhoun followed a few months later and during their time in London both artists became conversant with WAAC commissioned work. They met prominent artists like Graham Sutherland and Henry Moore through their involvement in the social circle of the patron Peter Watson, and also, as their letters document, they visited a number of WAAC exhibitions.²³

By the middle of the war, both artists were active participants in the commercial art world, and their engagement with the war effort was realized predominantly through inclusion in exhibitions organised by the government-sponsored Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA).²⁴ Although their ethical objections to the war were less forcefully expressed in letters sent during this later period, MacBryde's earlier, more explicit

confrontation with the moral issues of war as faced by artists—where he argued that painting was to be central to his contribution to the war effort, that it was “what I feel I can do best in this war”—should not be discounted.

²⁵ For MacBryde, art was an important part of the nation’s cultural life, and he argued for the crucial role art could play in rebuilding after the conflict and preserving culture while the conflict was in progress, defining himself to the WAAC’s secretary O’Rourke Dickey as an artist “who must contribute to a real culture after the storm has passed and as the storm is raging”. ²⁶

Colquhoun’s letters reveal a similarly politicised conception of art in a time of war. While he asserted that he had no ambition to contribute to the war effort directly, Colquhoun did state that he felt a duty to produce art and experienced what he called a “conscience about painting”. ²⁷ Problematized by his intermittently expressed belief that the conflict “gives the lie to almost everything the artist can do”, this “conscience about painting” can be read as motivation for his choice of subject matter in wartime work like *Figures in an Air Raid Shelter*, which centres on home-front life and critiques the impact of total war on society. This embrace of wartime subject matter, coupled with a rejection of war on a personal and political level, shows the duality inherent in Colquhoun and MacBryde’s belief in the aesthetic opportunities afforded by the conflict, epitomised by the quotation at the head of this article. Much of their work before 1943 contains explicit representations of wartime subjects and shows the artists struggling with the contradictory drive to include implicit critique of the human cost of war while at the same time committing to an aesthetic and stylistic development seemingly inspired and motivated by the experience of total war.

Colquhoun’s *Figures in an Air Raid Shelter* is an early example of his engagement with wartime subject matter and epitomises the duality I argue for in its blend of subject, critique, and aesthetic experimentation. This small painting depicts five figures in a compact, claustrophobic space. A woman reclines in a classical pose, while above and below her androgynous figures wrapped in blankets lie prone, and a man stands confrontationally to the left. The tight solidity of the composition, based on self-contained rectilinear planes, indicates the extent to which Colquhoun used this painting as a basis for compositional experimentation, with the formal arrangement and textured application of paint in grey-green-brown coarse planes evoking the physicality of stone and concrete, while nodding to contemporary modern abstraction, in work such as John Piper’s. At the same time, the image offers a subtle critique of the wartime experience of sheltering. This is conveyed in formal terms, as each figure is contained within its own rectangular plane, thereby indicating a sense of isolation as well as claustrophobia. The subject of the painting, an air-raid shelter, is anchored by its title. The claustrophobic

composition, and the incongruous collection of people in this low-ceilinged space, serves to emphasise the physical and social discomfort of the event and reflects Colquhoun's own experience of "the misery of shelters".²⁸

Correspondence by Colquhoun and MacBryde contemporary to the production of this painting shows that this intertwining of moral critique and aesthetic experiment corresponds to their experience of London during the Blitz. While expressing their disgust at its destructive nature, they also recognised the formal inspiration it afforded them as artists. Living in the city from 1941 onwards, they experienced the final period of bombardment, which spanned nine months from September 1940 to May 1941, including fifty-seven nights of consecutive bombing from 7 September.²⁹ MacBryde, writing to Fleming in about 1941, conveys his feelings of pessimism and despair occasioned by the bombing: "I could not describe the chaos—it is far too fantastic, and I find a sickness of my soul developing this past week ... Ideas are going with everything else. Nothing but [surging?] hatred for the war fills me."³⁰ This pessimism was fully realized with the bombing of their flat soon after:

All our windows (and they cover the whole length of our flat) are in with two land mines round the corner. I don't know how we escaped yet I had the back of my hand cut a little, that was all. We drank a bottle of whisky and remained lying on the floor.³¹

At the same time, their correspondence shows the extent to which the destruction inspired them too. Colquhoun, writing about seeing bomb damage shortly after his arrival in London in 1941, expressed his view of the scene in formal terms and revealed how the experience of the blitzed city stimulated his aesthetic interest:

The destruction in the West End is incredible. Whole tracts of streets flattened out into a mess of rubble and bent iron. There is a miniature pyramid in Hyde Park not far from us built up of masonry and wreckage taken from bombed buildings. These heaps are all over London.³²

This formal perception of flattened streets and repeated pyramids echoes MacBryde's statement about the "new forms" thrown up by the Blitz, a "world of synthetic materials", inspiring increasingly formal and stylised responses to the war, like those seen in *Figures in an Air Raid Shelter*. Their correspondence from the early years of war reveals at once a sense of

personal disgust and aesthetic inspiration, both of which I argue are drawn out and complicated in MacBryde and Colquhoun's depictions of the conflict. At the same time, their choice of subject matter at this stage begins to align with works commissioned by the government. Its degrees of similarity to or deviation from such works locate Colquhoun and MacBryde's paintings in relation to this established canon of war art, yet in a position that is still distinct from official work. This distinction, which will be explored below, ultimately centres on the artists' stylistic choices and their critical focus on the human cost of war.

Commissioned War Art and the War Artists' Advisory Committee

During the Second World War, the British government embraced the arts as something that "spoke to specifically British constituencies and by extension, promoted an inclusive national sensibility".³³ State support for the production of art aimed to promote a sense of national unity through creative visual representations of contemporary life that could be used to propagate the notion of a strong national identity in need of preservation, giving the public a clear sense of "what we are fighting for" as a means to boost morale.³⁴ Further, exhibitions of such work could provide a cultural activity for a public whose access to leisure and luxuries was greatly restricted by the war. Government support for the arts rested in the hands of the WAAC, headed by Kenneth Clark and formed of like-minded civil servants and influential figures operating under the stewardship of the Ministry of Information. The Committee worked to recruit artists to paint wartime subjects and acquire war art for public exhibition in partnership with CEMA, the forerunner to the Arts Council.

This government scheme resulted in the production of a vast array of works recording all aspects of the war effort. Yet, as Brian Foss has demonstrated, due to the logistical difficulty of embedding artists within active units, and as a response to the direct effects of total war to which Britain was exposed on home soil, the home front became the primary subject matter for these commissions.³⁵ Subjects commissioned by the WAAC ranged from portraits of everyday citizens taking part in the war effort, to views of factories involved in producing war materials or landscapes showing some sense of the fighting.³⁶ Nevertheless, images of the Blitz and its effect on the major cities dominated WAAC collections.³⁷ In this manner, the Committee reflected contemporary views about the centrality of the Blitz in the national consciousness during war time, so that by 1943 the writer Stephen Spender could claim that "by paintings of the war, we mean paintings of the Blitz".³⁸

Early war work by Colquhoun and MacBryde, such as Colquhoun's *Figures in an Air Raid Shelter*, and also MacBryde's *Ave Maria Lane* and *The Courtyard* or *Basement Kitchen* (Fig. 5), share the focus seen in commissioned works on the effects of the Blitz. Their motivations included the moral and aesthetic dimensions discussed above, as well as MacBryde's ongoing efforts to lobby for government war art commissions. The issue at stake is the extent to which their early work aligns with or deviates from such commissioned work, and therefore where, as non-commissioned art, it fits in relation to canonical accounts of war art.

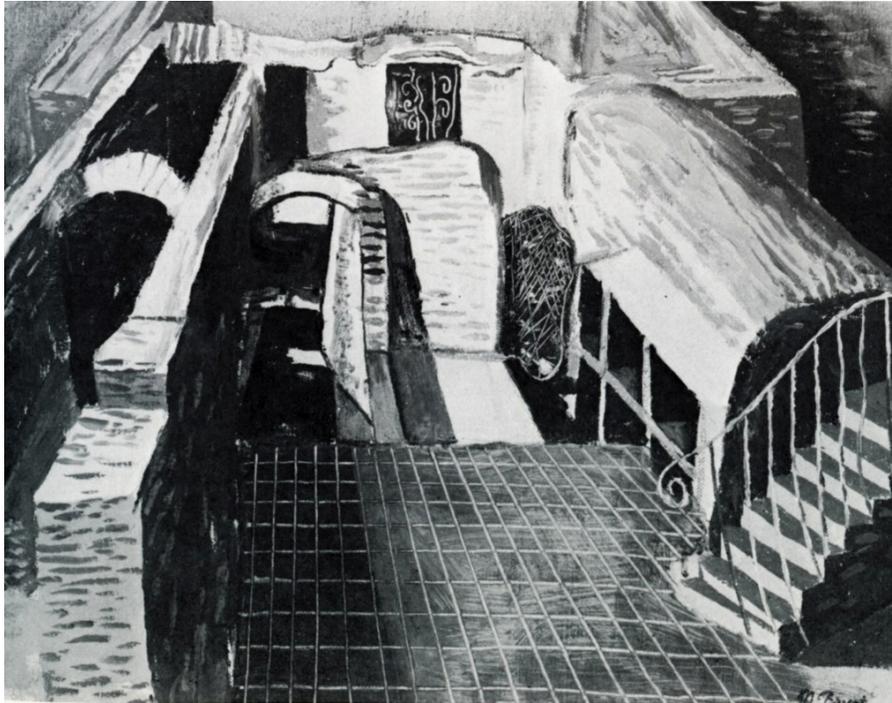


Figure 5.

Robert MacBryde, *The Courtyard or The Basement Kitchen*, circa 1940, oil on canvas, 30.4 × 40.6 cm.

In choosing a bomb shelter as his subject in *Figures in an Air Raid Shelter*, Colquhoun followed the approach established by commissioned artists such as Henry Moore and Edward Ardizzone, who each produced a major series of drawings on the same theme. In Elliott's estimation, it is Moore's tube shelter drawings that Colquhoun's most resembles.³⁹ Colquhoun's stylised depiction of human figures, with the torso of the standing male and the contrapposto recline of the women, hint at the classism that underpins Moore's figures in drawings such as *Shelterers in the Tube* (Fig. 6). Colquhoun's figures also seem to reference the sculptural quality of Moore's work—both in this quasi-classical forms and in terms of his limited colour palette and focus on surface texture. If this is the case, it is significant that Colquhoun was borrowing from

and experimenting with the stylistic practices of other contemporary artists—who, it must not be forgotten, were commissioned war artists—in order to find a visual lexicon that could effectively represent his own subject.



Figure 6.

Henry Moore, *Shelterers in the Tube*, 1941, graphite, ink, watercolour, and crayon on paper, 38 × 56.8 cm. Collection of Tate (N05712). Digital image courtesy of Tate (Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported)).

Yet Colquhoun's work does not conform fully to the aims and ideals of the WAAC, who, as David Mellor has demonstrated, orientated their commissions around "popular legibility".⁴⁰ In this manner, commissioned art was required to be "legible to the 'average man'" in light of the public function it was meant to serve.⁴¹ The stylistic choices in Colquhoun's work do not sit easily in this category of "popular legibility". As previously demonstrated, the formal experimentation and emphasis on wartime suffering both present in *Figures in an Air Raid Shelter* mean that the image itself conveys a complex web of intentions. This is in direct contrast to the clarity of Ardizzone's shelter drawings (Fig. 7), and is distinct from Moore's stylised interpretation of the tube shelter experience. Whereas Moore's drawings focus on organic softness and the fluid grouping and unification of figures, Colquhoun's abstraction of figures is angular, architectural, and tending towards formal isolation and alienation. While Moore's work has been described as monumental in a manner that indicates a unification of the individual with the group, an organic and sculptural homogenised whole, Colquhoun's figures are monumental in the opposite direction, with each figure monumental in its own right, compositionally detached and self-contained.⁴² His work therefore diverges from contemporary official treatments of the

Blitz, which fostered what Angus Calder has termed the “myth of the Blitz” by emphasising communality and stoicism and omitting social discord or disorder.⁴³ In his depictions of isolated and alienated figures, Colquhoun undermines this notion of an idealised cooperative experience and instead reflects his own views on the “misery of sheltering”, as part of the “unspeakable horror” he saw in the conflict.⁴⁴



Figure 7.

Edward Ardizzone, Shelter Scene, 1941, lithograph. British Council (M/CEMA 1). Digital image courtesy of The British Council (All rights reserved).

Ironically, this divergence from established WAAC tropes can also be seen in his one painting commissioned by them, *Weaving Army Cloth*. This work resulted from a commission to paint the weaving industry of Scotland and its contribution to the war effort, a topic suggested by Colquhoun himself.⁴⁵ In style and subject, the work is very different from typical WAAC paintings. It comprises a semi-abstract depiction of two women sitting at a small table-sized loom and the military connection is far from evident; the title alone identifies it as war art. Instead of clearly signalling the conflict or war effort, Colquhoun focuses on formal experimentation realized by playing with scale and space. Preparatory drawings in the collection of the Imperial War Museum shows that this work was developed from observations of a factory. They detail large machinery that dwarfs workers who appear to be trapped in the mechanisms of industrial-sized looms, dehumanised through figurative abstraction (Fig. 8). In the final painting, however, the machinery that loomed so large in the preparatory drawings has been reduced to a domestic scale and any clear reference to the war effort is removed. Instead, attention

is refocused on the women weaving, foregrounding the human relationships caught up in the machine of war. In his more radical aesthetic approach, and his implicit critique of the war effort effected through negation of social cohesion, Colquhoun's work edges towards uncomfortable territory, and exists in tension with commissioned war art.



Figure 8.

Robert Colquhoun, Sketch for Weaving Army Cloth: Three Women Operating Machinery,, 1945, wash and wax crayon, 42.8 × 50.7 cm. Collection of the Imperial War Museum, London (Art.IWM ART LD 6136). Digital image courtesy of Imperial War Museum, London (All rights reserved).

Strategies of Displacement

This tension between the expectations of the WAAC as it commissioned work and the sort of paintings produced by artists who worked predominantly outside these official systems is further exemplified by MacBryde's blitzed cityscapes, such as *Ave Maria Lane* and *The Courtyard*. As with Colquhoun's *Figures in an Air Raid Shelter*, these works share some qualities with work commissioned by the WAAC, in that they depict the aftermath of the Blitz and in particular the destruction of buildings. Comparable subject matter can be found in the work of war artists such as Muirhead Bone, Graham Sutherland, and John Piper—all of whom influenced Colquhoun and MacBryde.⁴⁶ Yet MacBryde's focus on ruined buildings goes beyond the simple emulation of a contemporary trend. As Foss has argued, the predominance of ruins in work produced at this time is also rooted in a joint

political and psychological imperative informing the visualisation of conflict, which he terms a “strategy of displacement”.⁴⁷ Noting the great anxiety surrounding civilian casualties during the Blitz, Foss documents the extent of the political unease over civilian morale and the resultant media censorship in the wake of Luftwaffe bombing. In terms of commissioning art, while the WAAC did not engage in outright censorship, in line with government policy, it certainly privileged images that hid the extent of the human cost of the Blitz.⁴⁸

At the same time, visualisations of the war’s destructive effects were conditioned by psychological responses to trauma. As historians Susannah Biernoff and Sue Malvern have argued in relation to the First World War, theories of trauma and disgust show how viewers are often unable to confront mortality and the abject nature of the corporeal body in injury and death.⁴⁹ In war art, injury and the loss of life are therefore frequently visualised metaphorically. In the case of the Blitz, this was achieved, as Foss argues, by painting ruins that could “act as a visual surrogate” for the human casualties, thus displacing bodily trauma onto architecture.⁵⁰ As he has shown, this displacement centres on public and religious buildings in particular, as in works such as Piper’s *All Saints Chapel, Bath* (1942) (Fig. 9). Ruins could symbolise the spiritual and cultural attacks that Britain experienced and so foster a sense of national outrage, yet at the same time were unlikely to be inhabited and were therefore less likely to draw attention to any civilian loss of life.⁵¹ Interestingly, this phenomenon was also evident in corresponding painting in Germany, which featured what John-Paul Stonard refers to as “martyred architecture”.⁵²



Figure 9.

John Piper, *All Saints Chapel, Bath*, 1942, ink, chalk, gouache, and watercolour on paper, 42.5 × 55.9 cm. Digital image courtesy of Tate (Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported)).

In both *Ave Maria Lane* and *The Courtyard*, MacBryde engaged with a more radical depiction of the Blitz by focusing on domestic devastation. As with Sutherland's 1941 series depicting blitzed buildings in the East End, MacBryde's scenes of domestic destruction could stand for and allude to the loss of civilian life in a more direct manner than depictions of the Blitz that avoided domestic imagery. *Ave Maria Lane* follows some of the stylistic conventions of commissioned WAAC work in the way it achieves this, in particular sharing aesthetic similarities with the work of Sutherland and Piper in the use of textured paint and its compositional focus on a centralised architectural form. Thus we might see MacBryde's engagement with the work of Sutherland and Piper, like Colquhoun's with the work of Moore, as a search for an appropriate visual vocabulary. Foss shows how Sutherland's commissioned images were read as evoking the human body ("twisted girders having in them something of twisted humanity"), and how Piper's work was suggestive of "the physical pain of inflicted wounds".⁵³ MacBryde's images work in a similar way, but stretch the anthropomorphic possibilities of architecture and go even further in their illusion to "inflicted wounds".

Ave Maria Lane presents a scene of domestic ruins and rubble. The title, which may indicate both the street adjacent to St Paul's—a site of extensive bombing in December 1940—and the Christian prayer for the intercession of

the Virgin Mary, hints in both cases at destruction and suffering. Following the principles of a “strategy of displacement”, the buildings, the broken walls, and twisted iron stand in for human limbs and broken bones. However, unlike work commissioned by the WAAC, this image alludes viscerally to the abject nature of the wounded human body, notably in its depiction of the ground. The architectural edifice forming the centre of the composition emerges from or sinks into a flesh-like, permeable mass that is undulating and organic in form and blood-red in hue. In this painting, the earth thus becomes a reference to corporeal form and particularly the wounded and permeable body. This element bears comparison to Paul Nash’s paintings from the First World War, in which churned earth was often seen by contemporary critics to represent literal bodies, in particular *We are Making a New World*, which features a similar undulating ground and comparable blood-red palette.⁵⁴

It is my contention that this stylistic link with landscapes of the First World War, which have likewise been read as suggestive of bodily injury and death, must inform our reading of the anthropomorphic qualities of MacBryde’s work. In this vein, Sue Malvern’s work on British representations of landscape in the wake of the First World War emphasises the extent to which this earlier conflict impacted on the representation of body, land, and their interrelation. She argues that through the war, landscape became associated with “anxiety about the fate” of fallen soldiers whose bodies were injured, dismembered, and “pulped and mingled with mud”, thus “making the land as body more than a metaphor”.⁵⁵ At the same time, she makes a claim for the ongoing impact of these new understandings of body and earth on British art in the inter-war period.⁵⁶ Similarly, in his analysis of depictions of heroism and the body in the Second World War, Foss makes a claim for the ongoing influence of systems of visual representation from the First World War into the Second World War.⁵⁷ Thus, it is possible to trace problems with visualising bodily destruction encountered during the Second World War back to traditions established in the First World War. Read through this lens, MacBryde’s *Ave Maria Lane* is transgressive in its corporeality. Moving beyond the avoidance of “excessively explicit views of domestic loss” in commissioned art, it instead foregrounds the human cost of war through stylistic allusion to the permeable, fleshy body.⁵⁸

An Alternative Canon of War Art

My contention that unofficial depictions of conflict such as *Figures in an Air Raid Shelter* and *Ave Maria Lane* are in dialogue—rather than synonymous—with official works, necessitates a rethinking of the canonical boundaries of war art. This line of enquiry is made more complicated by the need to account for the work Colquhoun and MacBryde produced which did

not attempt to visualise the conflict but was nevertheless concurrent with their work that did. The final section of this article therefore seeks to establish the relationship between Colquhoun's war painting and his parallel landscape practice in the early years of the war. My intention is to re-contextualise these landscapes within an appropriate historical context by bringing them into conversation with contemporaneous war art. The aim is twofold: to establish how art that does not explicitly depict conflict should be understood as a form of war art; and to consider how work that seems to avoid reference to conflict can register a sense of moral conviction against war.

The positioning of these landscapes in Colquhoun's oeuvre is problematic. They are tied closely to his war work in the context of their production—being contemporary with paintings such as MacBryde's *The Courtyard*—and sit alongside correspondence by the two artists that details the ongoing effect of the conflict on their practice. Yet in the absence of explicit wartime subject matter, their relationship to more overt war art is ambiguous. This is further complicated by their conventional art-historical categorisation as Neo-Romantic, a label that effectively severs these landscapes from the realities of the artists' wartime experiences by characterising them as “escapist”. ⁵⁹

This tendency to nullify the historical or political context of wartime work that does not explicitly visualise conflict is an issue that has hampered art-historical analyses of much modern British art produced during times of conflict and outside official systems of patronage. Similar issues are encountered, for example, in scholarship of art and pacifism in the First World War. ⁶⁰ The issue of voicing dissent occupied vastly different political territory in the Second World War, removed from the fervent nationalism and the perilous position of pacifism in the earlier conflict. ⁶¹ There was, however, still an expectation that depictions of the British Home Front in the Second World War would conform to and perpetuate certain acceptable socio-political paradigms. ⁶² Queries about the political and moral responsibility of the arts are echoed in correspondence by MacBryde and Colquhoun, which suggests that despite the twenty-year gap and differing political climates between the wars, art's capacity to critique conflict was still up for debate. ⁶³ Colquhoun and MacBryde's wartime practice bears witness to such debate by virtue of their non-combatant status, their quasi-pacifist beliefs, and their position outside official systems of employment.

So, how to interpret work made during war that does not explicitly depict wartime subject matter? In her analysis of the Bloomsbury artist Duncan Grant's work made during the First World War, Grace Brockington asserts that his very avoidance of visualising conflict allows his work to be read as an

act of dissent.⁶⁴ Far from perpetuating the characterisation of Bloomsbury aesthetics as detached and disinterested, she instead posits that Grant's depictions of domestic interiors can be read as an aesthetic assertion of the pacifist political values that underpinned the Bloomsbury group's politics, and that this re-affirmation acts as a rejection of the dominant wartime values of militancy and nationalism.⁶⁵ In this way, the absence of wartime imagery becomes a mechanism by which to convey dissent in a manner that is nuanced, personal, errs towards critique, and that, crucially, does not necessitate explicit depictions of the war effort. This model provides a way into rethinking Colquhoun and MacBryde's practice by reconsidering not simply the relationship between their war art and official commissioned work, but also the relationship between their wider artistic practice during the war and their personal response to the conflict. This is epitomised, as shown, by their moral conviction to paint, and accompanying concern over the human cost of war demonstrated in their correspondence. Their experience as non-combatants provides further grist to the mill for this reinterpretation.

Neo-Romantic Escapism?

Any attempt to reframe Colquhoun and MacBryde's painting of the early 1940s in the context of war is complicated by its conventional association with Neo-Romanticism. This association is further weighted by the professional links between Colquhoun and MacBryde and other artists whose work is often described as neo-romantic, such as John Piper and Graham Sutherland. In his survey of the movement, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and their Times*, Malcolm Yorke explored contemporary characterisations of the neo-romantic artists and concluded that they were conventionally seen as "escapists, fiddling in their studios while London burned around them".⁶⁶ His study of Colquhoun and MacBryde supports this characterisation, with Yorke arguing that once they failed to get a WAAC commission "these artists had turned their back on war".⁶⁷ Written before key archival material came to light (notably the artists' correspondence with Fleming), Yorke's analysis centres on their landscapes produced during the early 1940s, and demonstrates how works resulting from their 1941 trip to Worcestershire, such as *The Lock Gate* and Colquhoun's *Marrowfield, Worcester* (Fig. 10), conform to a contemporary neo-romantic style. The former work in particular deals with what David Mellor identifies as a central theme in neo-romantic art: the relationship between body and land.⁶⁸ He asserts that the pre-war landscape is synonymous with an idealised British past, an "idyllic space" akin to Eden "populated by transcendental, divine beings walking in a paradise Garden".⁶⁹ With the commencement of war, he identifies a shift in the treatment of landscape and the body towards "a tender body, bombed, conscripted and exposed to an incremental

technological violence” with landscape “expelled from the national fantasy of a Britain-as-Eden ... and displaced into a blitzed ruin”.⁷⁰ Bristow’s assessment of Colquhoun and MacBryde’s work broadly aligns with this characterisation, in which a neo-romantic “retreat into ruralism”—full of “typical” romantic subjects such as “war damaged building[s] and organic landscapes”—offered an “alternative view” to the “more realistic approach” of the WAAC.⁷¹



Figure 10.

Robert Colquhoun, Marrowfield, Worcester, 1941, oil on canvas, 35.6 × 45.7 cm. Collection of Glasgow Museums (2461) Gifted by the Contemporary Art Society, 1944. Digital image courtesy of the artist's estate, CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection, and Bridgeman Images (All rights reserved).

To some extent, the subject matter of *The Lock Gate* follows this neo-romantic preoccupation with body and land. Two figures—akin to Mellor’s “transcendental beings”—are embowered in the landscape, compositionally bound to it through their formal alignment with the surrounding plants. These share similarities with the figures in their colouring and in the presence of the linear threads that transverse both body and foliage. The desolate horizon, with the silver glow of the moon beyond the hills, hints at a dream-like state propagated by the landscape. This appeal to imaginative geography, along with the formal amalgamation of body and land, all make a case for this work’s inclusion in a neo-romantic canon. However, an exclusive alignment of their work with the imaginative and escapist qualities of Neo-Romanticism is problematic in the way it draws attention away from

MacBryde and Colquhoun's stated experiences of, and reflections on, the conflict, and effectively dislocates their paintings from the context of their production in the midst of war. It is also important to challenge the assumption that Colquhoun and MacBryde ignored the war after they failed to receive commissions, as both continued to draw on the war in their subject matter, and Colquhoun did eventually receive a commission in 1944 for *Weaving Army Cloth*. Neither does an exclusive neo-romantic characterisation account for the elements of their practice that do not conform to Mellor's assessment of romantic "blitzed ruins" or Bristow's "retreat into ruralism". Their work of the early 1940s therefore exists in relationship to, but is not fully aligned with, Neo-Romanticism, and in particular work by neo-romantic artists who received WAAC commissions. As such, their association with this movement may be read as an extension of their engagement with the stylistic lexicon of commissioned war art.

Allusions to Conflict

The Lock Gate, which was painted just after the end of the London Blitz, offers a compelling case study in how Colquhoun's landscapes of the early 1940s can be placed into conversation with war art. As previously discussed, the artists had direct experience of the bombings in London and witnessed the devastation it visited on the city.⁷² Their three-week trip to Worcestershire in 1941, from which this work derives, appears to have been intended as a brief creative respite from the war-torn city. Colquhoun wrote enthusiastically on his return about having the opportunity to "paint the greenness of things", in a letter that nevertheless went on to discuss Russia's role in the war, and lament the conscription of his friend Sam Black.⁷³ Even in the Worcestershire countryside, the war was never far away. Rather than evidence of a wholehearted "retreat into ruralism", brief forays into the country—facilitated by fellow artists and patrons—comprised part of the economic and social lifestyle of non-combatant artists working outside official systems of patronage. Resultant artworks, such as *The Lock Gate* and *Marrowfield, Worcester*, provide a means to chart the relative diversity of their activities under the challenging conditions of total war. Further, links between their war work and their landscape work are not only seen contextually, but are also evidenced in the materiality of the paintings themselves. The verso of *The Lock Gate* features a painting by MacBryde: a preparatory painting or alternative version of *The Courtyard*, the canvas presumably abandoned and reused by Colquhoun (Fig. 11). War art is thus literally inscribed into *The Lock Gate*, in a manner that highlights the practical and intimate connection between the artists' unofficial paintings of the conflict and their broader concurrent practice.



Figure 11.

Robert MacBryde, Preparatory Study for “The Courtyard”, circa 1941, oil on canvas, 39 × 58.4 cm. Painted on the verso to Robert Colquhoun, *The Lock Gate*, 1942, oil on canvas, 39.5 × 58.8 cm. Collection of Glasgow Museums (2936) Gifted by A.J. McNeill Reid, 1952. Digital image courtesy of the artist's estate, CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection, and Bridgeman Images (All rights reserved).

The Lock Gate is also in stylistic conversation with commissioned war art. Useful comparisons can be made in this instance with Colquhoun’s later commissioned piece, *Weaving Army Cloth*, and the work of Sutherland.⁷⁴ While Sutherland’s practice was ostensibly centred on landscape, during the war, he was employed by the WAAC to paint images of the devastation of the Blitz in London’s East End, resulting in paintings such as *Devastation 1941: An East End Street* (Fig. 12).⁷⁵ Many of Sutherland’s WAAC commissions were evidently informed by his landscape practice, and have since been read in varying ways as organic in their imagery. Depictions of natural forms in works such as *Green Tree Form: Interior of Woods* anthropomorphise objects in the landscape—in this case, a bipedal tree trunk, with humanoid limbs that “looks” up at us from the grass (Fig. 13). He adapted this approach in his paintings of the Blitz, which, as discussed, anthropomorphise architectural forms. In *Devastation 1941*, Sutherland also transferred the colour palette of greens, browns, greys, and bright yellow from his landscapes and imposed an organic quality onto the ruined architecture. This evidently influenced contemporary readings of his works as metaphors for the human casualty of war.⁷⁶



Figure 12.

Graham Sutherland, *Devastation, 1941: An East End Street, 1941*, crayon, gouache, ink, graphite, and watercolour on paper on hardboard, 64.8 × 110.4 cm. Digital image courtesy of Tate (Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported)).



Figure 13.

Graham Sutherland, *Green Tree Form: Interior of Woods, 1940*, oil on canvas, 78.7 × 107.9cm. Collection of Tate (N05139). Digital image courtesy of Tate (All rights reserved).

Comparisons with Colquhoun's painting are evident in the use of shocking yellow and in the presence of anthropomorphic natural forms, which recur in the *The Lock Gate*, whose foliage possesses organic corporeal qualities. The colour scheme in this painting likewise serves to ally the organic elements of

the landscape with the colour palette of the body—a reading supported by the deep-red colouring of the ground, which immediately invites comparison with the explicit corporeality of the flesh-like ground MacBryde imagined in *Ave Maria Lane*. This colour permeates the figures by tracing sinew-like across them; it may describe folds of fabric, yet at the same time might reference laceration. The foliage, following Sutherland's example, is depicted in an improbably bright nitrous or sulphurous yellow. This colour was later described by MacBryde as “a screaming yellow” and is reminiscent of iodine, used as antiseptic in bandages.⁷⁷ Given Colquhoun's work with the RAMC, there is a case to be made that such a yellow had a kind of unconscious resonance with human injury. The formal distortion of the landscape and figures, combined with the idiosyncratic colouring, likewise suggests a corporeal reading of this image. Angular objects protrude unnaturally from the foliage, reminiscent of sinew, bone, and emerging joints. On the right of the composition, the trunk of a dead tree is suggestive of vertebrae and ribs; it carries an abrasion or wound on its side, which is coloured red and white and evocative of flesh, blood, and exposed bone.

Through such a reading, the organic, anthropomorphised landscape is suffused with the violence of war and the wounded human body. The close affinity between Colquhoun's stylistic choices for landscapes—as seen here in *The Lock Gate*—and his war art encourages a comparison beyond aesthetic style towards the use of organic analogies for the body as part of a strategy of displacement. This work, as it references the stylistic conventions of commissioned war art, presents the possibility of a metaphorical, anthropomorphic message comparable to the orthodox anthropomorphism of architecture in images of the Blitz. Following this, it becomes possible to see *The Lock Gate* as an image of similarly displaced destruction. Working outside of the official systems of patronage, Colquhoun is able to draw on official conventions in his work while retaining the freedom to introduce the human figure as subject in a more complex way than his commissioned contemporaries. Playing with this idea of “displacement”, his work departs from this basic principle by explicitly including figures and allusions to corporeal destruction.

Conclusion

Through comparative analysis with commissioned work, both Colquhoun and MacBryde's work can be read as a comment on war that diverges from official conventions. This is realised through their attempted negotiation of two core concerns: first, an interest in aesthetic experimentation and their belief that conditions of war, or a critique of war, would provide new opportunities for aesthetic development; and second, an accompanying deeply held and genuine concern for the human cost of war. This interpretation is enriched and supported by their correspondence, which

reveals the artists' objection to the violence of war, epitomised by MacBryde's statement "I will not kill ... That is final", and Colquhoun's "conscience about painting". Through their letters, we get a sense of a fluctuating understanding of the political function of art in a time of war, which can be tied to their status as non-combatants. By contextualising their work within their belief that the artists' duty was to comment on the impact of conflict and to support artistic and cultural development, we might productively bring their practices into conversation with the aesthetic and political ambitions of commissioned war art. At the same time, such an approach paves the way for a fresh analysis of their broader contemporary practice, in which it is possible to chart the stylistic, practical, and ideological links between their war art and their wider practice. Further work remains to be done, particularly on the gendering of the body in the artists' wartime work, and on their identification with a distinct Scottish identity. Yet this analysis of their early paintings goes some way towards challenging inherited interpretations of their work. In broader terms, it also begins to question the boundaries of canonical accounts of Second World War art in Britain. It offers an opportunity to chart alternative narratives in war art, in two ways in particular: first, by analysing the manner in which Second World War art can register forms of pacifist dissent; and second, by exploring how art work that does not explicitly represent the conflict can still be understood as war art. The result is to test the limitations of the canon of Second World War art and explore the diversity of experiences and viewpoints represented therein.

Footnotes

- 1 Correspondence between MacBryde, Colquhoun, and the WAAC, held in the Imperial War Museum Second World War Artists' Archive. ART/WA2/03/125 GP/55/95.
- 2 Examples include Brian Foss, *War Paint: Art, War, State, and Identity in Britain, 1939-45* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Monica Bohm-Duchen, *Art and the Second World War* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2013). Foss does make brief reference to Colquhoun's commissioned work but not the two Roberts' broader practice; see Foss, *War Paint*, 84-85.
- 3 It is in conversation with recent texts such as Catherine Speck, *Beyond the Battle Field: Women Artists and the Two World Wars* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014); Lucy D. Curzon, "Visualising the Home Front: Evelyn Dunbar and Wartime Citizenship", *Oxford Art Journal* 41, no. 3 (2018): 341-360; Grace Brockington, *Above the Battlefield: Modernism and the Peace Movement in Britain, 1900-1918* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
- 4 See Adrian Clarke, "Two British Art Patrons of the 1940s and 1950s, Sir Colin Anderson and Peter Watson", *The British Art Journal* 5, no. 2 (Autumn 2004): 73-79; Roger Bristow, *The Last Bohemians: The Two Roberts, Colquhoun and MacBryde* (Bristol: Sansom Press, 2010), 201; Patrick Elliott, *The Two Roberts: Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2014); and Andrew Stephenson, "Arcadia and Soho", in Clare Barlow (ed.), *Queer British Art 1861-1967* (London: Tate, 2017), 133-137.
- 5 Adrian Clarke, "The Reputation and Achievement of Robert Colquhoun, a Reassessment", *The British Art Journal* 3, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 75-83. Neo-Romantic surveys include: Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and their Times* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1988); David Mellor, *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain 1935-55* (London: Barbican, 1987); and *A Different Light: British Neo-Romanticism*, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, 10 June-24 September 2017.
- 6 Short quotations from some letters appear in Elliott, *The Two Roberts* and Bristow, *The Last Bohemians*, but many of those quoted in this article do not.
- 7 See Elliott, *The Two Roberts*, 23.
- 8 Bristow, *The Last Bohemians*, 128.
- 9 Correspondence between MacBryde, Colquhoun, and Ian Fleming, held in the archives of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, GMA A21/4/25 MacBryde to Fleming, n.d.

- 10 Bristow, *The Last Bohemians*, 63.
- 11 Elliott, *The Two Roberts*, 10-13; and Bristow, *The Last Bohemians*, 29-50. The award committee gave the travelling scholarship to Colquhoun with the awareness that he would also take MacBryde.
- 12 Elliott, *The Two Roberts*, 13.
- 13 GMA A21/4/26 letter from MacBryde to Fleming, 9 September [1939]. By tribunal, he means army tribunal for conscientious objectors.
- 14 GMA A21/4/26 letter from MacBryde to Fleming, 9 September [1939]; and GMA A21/4/2 letter from MacBryde to Fleming, 14 June 1940.
- 15 GMA A21/4/6 MacBryde to Fleming, 6 August 1940. For Glasgow bombing, see GMA A21/4/3, 2 July 1940.
- 16 Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 4-5.
- 17 Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, 9-10.
- 18 GMA A21/4/29 Colquhoun to Fleming, n.d. [late 1941]. A useful comparison might be made with the rejection of war by artists on personal and aesthetic grounds in the First World War. See Grace Brockington's discussion of Mark Gertler's response to conflict in *Above the Battlefield*, 97-98.
- 19 See GMA A21/4/23, letter from MacBryde to Fleming, n.d., and IWM GP/55/95 letter from MacBryde to Dickie, 19 November 1940.
- 20 GMA A21/4/12 Letter from Colquhoun to Fleming, n.d. [ca. 1942].
- 21 GMA A21/4/12 Letter from Colquhoun to Fleming, n.d. [ca. 1942]. Colquhoun gets "muddled" with politics, laments the deployment of his friend Sam Black. See also GMA A21/4/3 MacBryde to Fleming, 2 July 1940, which details that Colquhoun's brother had been wounded on active service.
- 22 GMA A21/4/2, 14 June 1940. IWM, ART/WA2/03/125 GP/55/95, MacBryde to WAAC, 30 October 1940; GMA A21/4/4, MacBryde to Fleming, 24 October 1940.
- 23 See Clark, "Two British Art Patrons of the 1940s and 1950s, Sir Colin Anderson and Peter Watson", 73-79; and GMA A21/4/8, A21/4/10, A21/4/11.
- 24 Elliott, *The Two Roberts*, 27.
- 25 IWM, ART/WA2/03/125 GP/55/95, MacBryde to WAAC, 30 October 1940.
- 26 IWM, ART/WA2/03/125 GP/55/95, MacBryde to WAAC, 30 October 1940.
- 27 GMA A21/4/12, Colquhoun to Fleming, n.d. [1942?]. Colquhoun's moral obligation to paint was somewhat incongruously accompanied by his involvement with the Civil Defence Service, possibly driving ambulances, with whom he served following his move to London in 1941 until late in 1944, see IWM, GP/55/95 letter from Colquhoun to Kenneth Clark, 24 October 1944.
- 28 GMA A21/4/12, Colquhoun to Fleming, n.d. [1942?].
- 29 See Foss, *War Paint*, 33. For a popular socio-historical account of the Blitz, see Juliet Gardiner, *The Blitz: The British Under Attack* (London: Harper Press, 2010).
- 30 GMA A21/4/30 MacBryde to Fleming, 22 March [1942?].
- 31 GMA A21/4/30 MacBryde to Fleming, 22 March [1942?].
- 32 GMA A21/4/29 Colquhoun to Fleming, n.d. [late 1941].
- 33 Foss, *War Paint*, 3.
- 34 See Gardiner, *The Blitz*.
- 35 Foss, *War Paint*, 33.
- 36 For example, Laura Knight's depictions of women working in factories as in *Ruby Loftus Screwing a Breech Ring* (1943, Imperial War Museum), Paul Nash's *Battle of Britain* (1941, Imperial War Museum).
- 37 Foss, *War Paint*.
- 38 Spender, 1943 quoted in Foss, *War Paint*.
- 39 Elliott, *The Two Roberts*, 23.
- 40 David Mellor, "Second World War", in Chris Stephens and John-Paul Stonard (eds), *Kenneth Clark: Looking for Civilisation* (London: Tate, 2014), 101.
- 41 Mellor, "Second World War", 113.
- 42 For critical assessments of the monumentality and the homogenising quality of Moore's drawings, see Foss, *War Paint*, 76-77.
- 43 See Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1991). It is not my intention to suggest that Moore's depiction of sheltering was uncritical, rather that, once under the auspices of the WAAC, his works were presented in a particular way that emphasised themes of stoicism and pathos, and minimised any critical reflection on the condition of the shelterers.
- 44 GMA A21/4/12, Colquhoun to Fleming, n.d. [1942?].

- 45 He originally asked to paint the weaving industry on the Western Isles, but the WAAC deemed this too obscure and sent him to a textile factory in Peebles instead. See IWM GP/55/95 letter from Kenneth Clark to Colquhoun, 6 November 1944.
- 46 For the influence of these artists on Colquhoun and MacBryde, see Bristow, *The Last Bohemians*; and Elliott, *The Two Roberts*.
- 47 Foss, *War Paint*, 41.
- 48 On the Ministry of Information's "soft censorship", see Foss, *War Paint*, 43.
- 49 See Sue Malvern, "War Tourisms: Englishness, Art and the First World War", *Oxford Art Journal* 24, no. 1 (2001): 44–66 and Susanna Biernoff, "Shame, Disgust and the Historiography of War", in C. Pajaczkowska and I. Ward (eds), *Shame and Sexuality: Psychoanalysis and Visual Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 217–236.
- 50 Foss, *War Paint*, 41.
- 51 Foss, *War Paint*, 44.
- 52 John-Paul Stonard, *Fault Lines: Art in Germany 1945–1955* (London: Ridinghouse, 2007), 61.
- 53 Foss, *War Paint*, 42. Foss is here referencing Stephen Spender and David Fraser Jenkins.
- 54 Malvern, "War Tourisms", 56 and 65. Malvern cites C.E. Montague's assessment in 1916 of *We are Making a New World* as evidence for this.
- 55 Malvern, "War Tourisms", 47.
- 56 Malvern, "War Tourisms", 60–61.
- 57 This is evident in his discussion of WAAC portraits of "typical citizens", Foss, *War Paint*, 64–65.
- 58 Foss, *War Paint*, 43.
- 59 See Yorke, *The Spirit of Place*, 22.
- 60 Brockington, *Above the Battlefield*, 1. This argument also has some synergy with art-historical studies of modernism and autonomy, such as that by Sara Blair, who argues that claims for the autonomy of modern art and its apoliticism nevertheless constitute a political position. Sara Blair, "Modernism and the Politics of Culture", in M. Levenson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 155–177.
- 61 For a detailed survey of art in the Great War, see Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).
- 62 Curzon, "Visualising the Home Front", 350. She focuses on the concept of good citizenship.
- 63 In addition to Colquhoun and MacBryde's correspondence, see, for example, John Rothenstein, "C.E.M.A. and Art", *The Spectator*, 16 September 1943, 260.
- 64 She discusses this in relation to his painting *Interior* (1918, Ulster Museum), Brockington, *Above the Battlefield*, 25–29.
- 65 Brockington, *Above the Battlefield*, 28–29.
- 66 Yorke, *The Spirit of Place*, 22.
- 67 Yorke, *The Spirit of Place*, 232.
- 68 Mellor, *A Paradise Lost*, 16.
- 69 Mellor, *A Paradise Lost*, 16.
- 70 Mellor, *A Paradise Lost*, 16.
- 71 Bristow, *The Last Bohemians*, 118 and 136.
- 72 See IWM, ART/WA2/03/125 GP/55/95, MacBryde to WAAC, 30 October 1940; GMA A21/4/4, MacBryde to Fleming, 24 October 1940.
- 73 GMA A21/4/12 Letter from Colquhoun to Fleming, n.d. [ca.1942].
- 74 This is underlined by the professional association between the artists: Colquhoun and MacBryde met Sutherland in London in 1940–1941; they were able to see Sutherland's work at the house of their patron Peter Watson in the early 1940s; and, by 1942, MacBryde was exhibiting his work in group shows that also featured Sutherland.
- 75 And later, rural industry in the south west.
- 76 See Mellor, "Second World War".
- 77 MacBryde, interviewed in "Scottish Painters", *Monitor* (BBC, 1959, Dir. Ken Russell).

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Cumbrian Cosmopolitanisms: Li Yuan-chia and Friends

Hammad Nasar

Abstract

*The LYC Museum & Art Gallery (the LYC) in the Cumbrian village of Banks (astride Hadrian's Wall) was the single-minded effort of artist Li Yuan-chia (1929–1994). His initials gave the museum its name. It was sited in a set of converted farm buildings that Li had bought from his friend, the painter Winifred Nicholson. Between 1972 and 1983, the museum showcased the work of more than 320 artists—from local artists (Andy Christian, Susie Honour) to totemic national figures (Paul Nash, Barbara Hepworth), and contemporary artists, now of international renown (Lygia Clark, Andy Goldsworthy), but then barely known in Britain. A young David Nash designed the LYC's window. The programme reflected Li's circuitous cosmopolitanism, his commitment to art as experimentation, and his expansive range of interests: the LYC had a children's room, library, performance space, printing press, communal kitchen, and a garden. The networks and practices that the LYC enabled and enriched have yet to be studied widely, but it is an exemplary site from which to explore how friendships inform shared practices, generate work, and socialise narratives; and, how the LYC itself functioned as a kind of infrastructure. This article is anchored in the recent exhibition *Speech Acts: Reflection-Imagination-Repetition* (Manchester Art Gallery, 2018–2019) and its accompanying symposium *The LYC Museum & Art Gallery and the Museum as Practice* (2019). It explores the idea of "friendship", and to a lesser extent that of "infrastructure", through the lens of three works in the *Speech Acts* exhibition. It forms part of an ongoing collective effort towards inquiries that cross disciplinary and geographic borders, and test polyphonic, multi-authored, and speculative approaches that I have described elsewhere as "art histories of excess". It invites methodological reflections on the forms and possibilities for conducting and staging collaborative research, and on wider questions of how historic entanglements have the potential to expand existing histories of British art.*

Authors

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The Entangled Histories and Practices of Li Yuan-chia

In the last few years, the work of the Chinese-born artist Li Yuan-chia (1929–1994) has featured in two very different exhibitions on two continents—in two national institutions that could both claim him as their own. In Taiwan, the Taipei Fine Art Museum (TFAM) did just that with an expansive posthumous retrospective, *Viewpoint: A Retrospective of Li Yuan-chia* (2014), that positioned him as the “father of conceptual and abstract art in Taiwan” (Fig. 1).¹ It traced his practice over five decades and was accompanied by a luxurious, four-volume catalogue replete with commissioned essays, archival material, and even a replica of Li’s magnetised “toy” works. Li, however, remains largely unrecognised in Britain—his home from 1966 until his death in 1994.²



Figure 1.

Viewpoint: A Retrospective of Li Yuan-chia, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2014. Digital image courtesy of Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



Figure 2.

Migrations: Journeys into British Art, Li Yuan-chia, David Medalla, Frank Bowling, and Rasheed Araeen, Tate Britain, 2012. Digital image courtesy of Tate.

His was a small presence in Tate Britain's *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* (2012) exhibition (Fig. 2). Its accompanying catalogue carried no illustrations of Li's works, and framed his expansive artistic practice through the restrictive lenses of calligraphy and abstraction; and privileged biography and geography in positing his contribution to British art, alongside Kim Lim's, as "fusing far Eastern and Western philosophies and art practices".³ A recent display at Tate Modern (2015) was slightly more expansive and introduced a wider range of works (Figs 3, 4, and 5). But his work was entirely absent from Tate Britain's *Conceptual Art in Britain 1964-1979* (2016) and is unaccounted for in the generally circulating institutional and academic histories of art in Britain.



Figure 3.
Li Yuan-chia display, Tate Modern, 2015. Digital image courtesy of Tate.

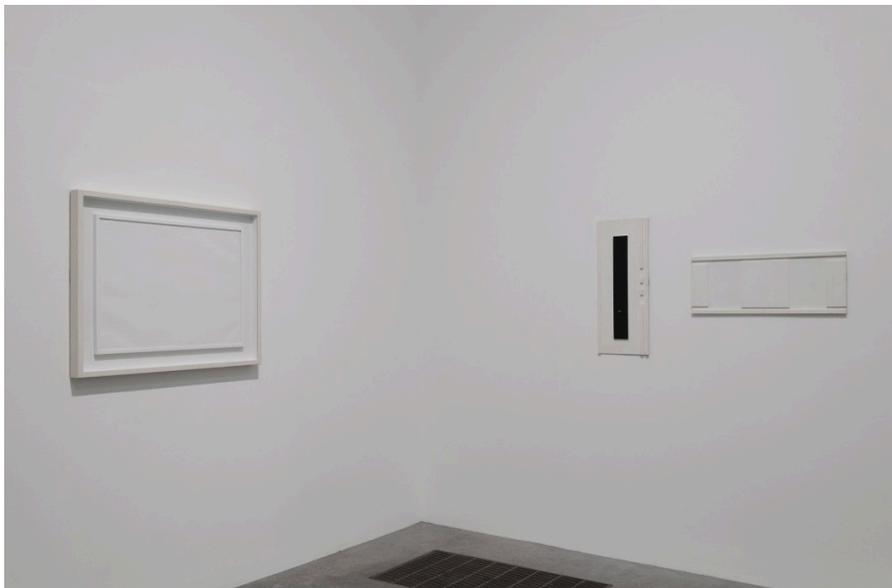


Figure 4.
Li Yuan-chia display, Tate Modern, 2015. Digital image courtesy of Tate.



Figure 5.

Li Yuan-chia display, Tate Modern, 2015. Digital image courtesy of Tate.

This is at least partly due to the distinctive genealogy of Li's work that resists attempts to categorise it with a singular label. He drew liberally from modernist, Zen Buddhist and Daoist practices to explore ideas of space, life, and time. The initial vehicle for his explorations was "the Point"—the "Origin and the End of Creation".⁴ Originally, a spot of colour or mark in monochromatic paintings and reliefs, it eventually took the form of magnetised objects that could be moved around on metallic discs. He called these magnetic works "toys", inviting active audience participation.

Li's interests and experiments with form were shaped by, and reflect, the zigzagged trajectories of his life. Born in Guangxi, China, Li moved to Taiwan in 1949, where he was part of the Ton-Fan Group of artists experimenting with abstraction. In 1962, he moved to Bologna, where he was associated with the Punto Group of artists. An invitation to show at Signals Gallery brought him to London in 1966. In London, between 1967 and 1970, Li had three solo exhibitions and participated in three group exhibitions at the Lisson Gallery. Artists he showed with included Ken Cox, Mira Schendel, Derek Jarman, and Ian Hamilton Finlay. But London's regard for Li was not wholly reciprocated; a trip to his friend Nick Sawyer's family house in Cumbria (Boothby) for Christmas in 1967, saw him settle in nearby Bankside.

The retrospective at the TFAM and a growing international engagement with artists associated with Signals Gallery has sparked renewed interest in Li's work, with a clutch of recent commercial exhibitions in London and Taipei.⁵ But despite this more recent attention, art history—in Britain as in Taiwan—is

yet to seriously engage with the remarkable art space he founded in the Cumbrian countryside, the LYC Museum & Art Gallery (the LYC), in 1972 as arguably his most important work. ⁶

The reasons for why this is so are not clear-cut. One can speculate that the voluminous Li Yuan-chia archives at the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester have yet to be catalogued, so research is time and resource intensive; or that its non-conformity with conventional models of institutional critique and practice present a hurdle requiring some effort and imagination; or more prosaically, that a focus on the LYC does little to advance the commercial attractiveness of Li's work. Even the exhibition at TFAM—which was broad in scope and ambitious in scale—was conventionally monographic in form and thus not geared towards dealing with the multifarious nature of the LYC, which also does not fit within a national (“father of conceptual and abstract art in Taiwan”) frame.

The LYC was located in the village of Banks, astride Hadrian's Wall. Li Yuan-chia's initials gave the museum its name—an act of self-naming that, in the context of the reading proposed by this article, can be interpreted as an artistic claim. Between 1972 and 1983, the museum showcased the work of more than 320 artists—from local artists (Andy Christian, Susie Honour) to totemic national figures (Paul Nash, Barbara Hepworth), and contemporary artists, now of international renown (Lygia Clark, Andy Goldsworthy), but then barely known in Britain. A young David Nash designed the LYC's window (Fig. 6). The networks and practices that the LYC enabled and enriched have yet to be studied widely. For example, his friendship with the concrete poet and Benedictine monk, dom sylvester houédard, or the pioneering sound artist, Delia Derbyshire—Li's assistant, and briefly partner, at the LYC (1976–1977) have only recently begun to be addressed in exhibitions and publications. ⁷



Figure 6.

Li Yuan-chia standing at the porch of the LYC Museum & Art Gallery, featuring window designed by David Nash. Digital image courtesy of LYC Foundation, Li Yuan-chia Archive, The University of Manchester Library.

Friendships, and the expanded notions of infrastructure they often become part of, are growing areas of recent scholarship that can productively illuminate any consideration of the LYC. In *Affective Communities*, Leela Gandhi charts a history of anti-colonialism through a series of “minor narratives of crosscultural collaboration between oppressors and oppressed” retrieved from colonial archives.⁸ She engages the intellectual legacies of an impressive range of earlier scholars (Kant, Hegel, Marx, Foucault, Said, and Nandy) to build on Derrida’s recognition that there exists in “the unscripted relation of ‘friendship’ an improvisational politics appropriate to communicative, sociable utopianism investing it with a vision of radical democracy.”⁹ Her proposition is for a liberatory politics in the heart of “empire” that she labels the “politics of friendship”. In her recent essay, *Infrastructure as Form*, Karin Zitzewitz considers the case of the workshops initiated by the Triangle Arts Trust and argues for the need “not to separate analysis of the works of art from the activities from which they emerge.”¹⁰ To do so, she contends, would attribute “artistic production exclusively to the artist [... and] ignore how ably a networked art infrastructure distributes agency among its elements.”¹¹

The LYC is an exemplary site from which to explore both these formulations: the question of how friendships inform shared practices, generate work, and socialise narratives; and of how the LYC itself functions as a kind of infrastructure. The LYC is also a singular site from which to consider historic entanglements with the potential to enrich and expand existing histories of British art. ¹² Undertaking such inquiries that cross disciplinary and geographic borders requires polyphonic, multi-authored, and speculative approaches that I have described elsewhere as “art histories of excess”. ¹³ The work of Li Yuan-chia is beginning to attract such collective effort. ¹⁴ This essay is anchored in two recent initiatives that bring the focus specifically to the LYC Museum & Art Gallery itself.

The first is the exhibition that I curated with Kate Jesson at Manchester Art Gallery—*Speech Acts: Reflection-Imagination-Repetition* (2018–2019). ¹⁵ At the heart of the exhibition, which contained work by more than forty artists, was a stylised reconstruction of the LYC (Fig. 7). *Speech Acts* posited the LYC as both an artwork and as a hub for nurturing art and community, and explored the role of museums in forging and circulating collective stories through the artworks they collect and the exhibitions they arrange (Fig. 8). It considered the case of the LYC as one example of how networks of people shape artistic practices and determine how artworks circulate. It suggested that affinities—between people and practices—help create the shared stories that forge meaning in art.



Figure 7.

Installation photograph, *Speech Acts*, 2018, Manchester Art Gallery. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery. Photo: Michael Pollard.



Figure 8.

Installation photograph, *Speech Acts*, 2018, Manchester Art Gallery, showing material from the Li Yuan-chia Archive. Digital image courtesy of LYC Foundation, Li Yuan-chia Archive, The University of Manchester Library, and the Manchester Art Gallery. Photo: Michael Pollard.

The second example is a symposium anchored in the *Speech Acts* exhibition—*The LYC Museum & Art Gallery and the Museum as Practice* (March 2019).¹⁶ It brought together scholars, artists, museum directors, and curators to consider ideas of place, friendship, exhibitions, publications, and the function of museums. This article forms part of this larger collective research project. It explores the idea of “friendship”, and to a lesser extent that of “infrastructure”, through the lens of three works in the *Speech Acts* exhibition. All three works are participatory, and have to different extents, collective authorship and a relationship with Li. Through them, I attempt to read the traces of “friendship” in objects and situations.

The principal artwork is the LYC itself—not in the conventionally understood sense of a building devoted to the acquisition, care, study, and display of culturally significant objects—but as a relational and participatory work of art. The focus in this article is on the formation of the LYC, how its ethos was informed by Li’s early experimentation with participatory art, and the friendships he formed during his stay at Boothby. The second, the video work *Point in Time* (1987) by Madelon Hooykaas and Elsa Stansfield, features Li as a participant, and encapsulates an exchange of ideas, aesthetics, and affective registers nurtured through years of discussions.

The third and final example is the newly commissioned film, *Space & Freedom* (2018), by artist-film-maker, Helen Petts. It mixes archival footage shot by Li and lost sound recordings, with new film footage shot by Petts and accompanied by improvised sound by Steve Beresford, to become a site for collaboration across time.

The LYC and the Museum as Practice



Figure 9.

Winifred Nicholson and Li Yuan-chia, Cumbria, 1975, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee.

The LYC has often been positioned as Li sacrificing his own practice, while he gave “his attention to others”.¹⁷ But I would like to place the LYC in an artistic trajectory that saw Li moving away from static objects and towards the production of work that invited participation from audiences to animate the work. The museum started life as a set of dilapidated farm buildings that Li bought from his friend and neighbour, the painter Winifred Nicholson (Fig. 9). Li showcased her work in four separate exhibitions at the LYC. Around this nucleus, he built an exhibition programme of prodigious range and eclecticism. The programme was indebted to Li’s cosmopolitanism and his commitment to art as a mode of experimentation. Apart from being a painter, sculptor, and photographer, Li was also a poet, designer-maker, and curator—of art and social interaction. For him, art was social interaction. And it was this expansive vision that Li brought to not just the programme but also to the construction and functioning of the LYC.

L.Y.C. Museum is me. L.Y.C. Museum is all of you. —Li Yuan-chia¹⁸

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 10.

The Making of the LYC Museum, Super 8 film, documented by Li Yuan-chia in the early 1970s, edited by Wei Yu and Keiwei Wang, 2018. Digital image courtesy of LYC Foundation, Li Yuan-chia Archive, The University of Manchester Library.

The LYC consumed Li. He built it himself—undertaking all construction, plumbing, and electrical work (Fig. 10). At its peak, it hosted four new exhibitions a month, each accompanied by a catalogue that he designed and printed (Figs. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). Apart from galleries, the LYC had a children’s room, library, performance space, printing press, communal kitchen, and garden (Fig 16). It hosted rug-making workshops. Children played in its courtyard (Fig. 17). It was an open space for the multiple possibilities of art. The artist Shelagh Wakely, who exhibited at the LYC in 1979, saw the museum as “a work of his [Li’s]”.¹⁹ Mei-ching Fang, who curated Li’s retrospective at TFAM, considered his establishing and running a museum as “an idealistic practice”.²⁰ It was an example of social practice before such a thing was named and tamed.²¹ And after its closure to the public in 1983, it became the site of Li’s experimentation with photography (Figs 18, 19, and 20).

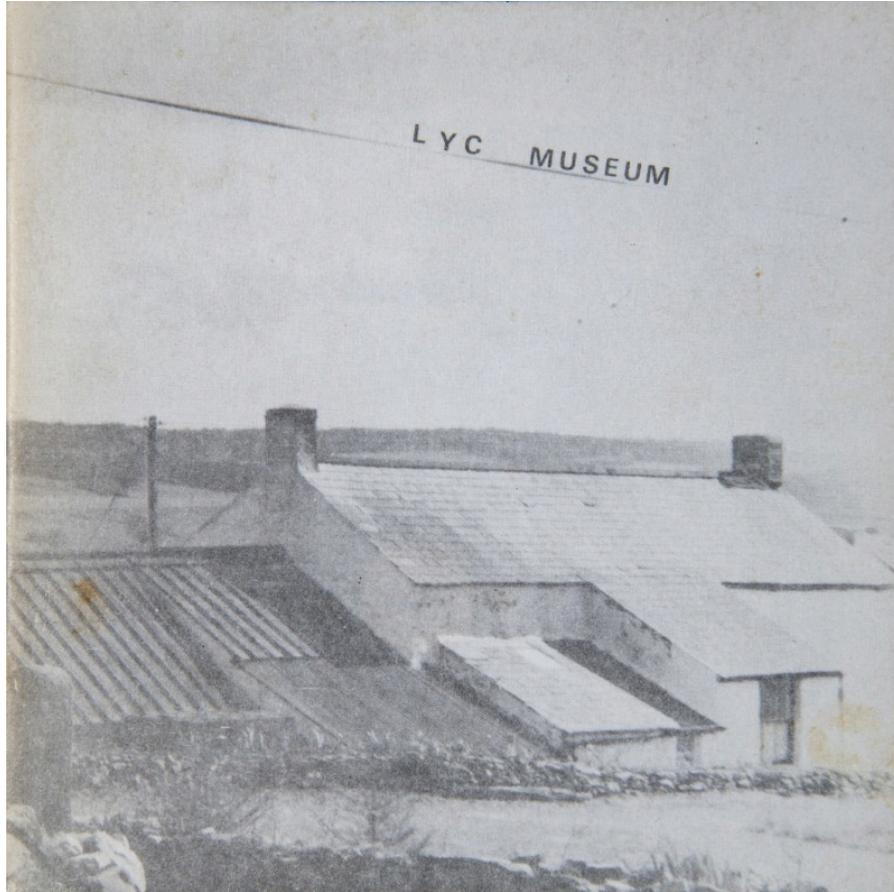


Figure 11.

Lyc Museum, (Cumbria: Lyc Press, 1972): jacket. Collection of Chelsea College of Arts Library, University of the Arts London. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.



Figure 13.

1980, (Cumbria: LYC Press, 1980): jacket. Collection of Chelsea College of Arts Library, University of the Arts London. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

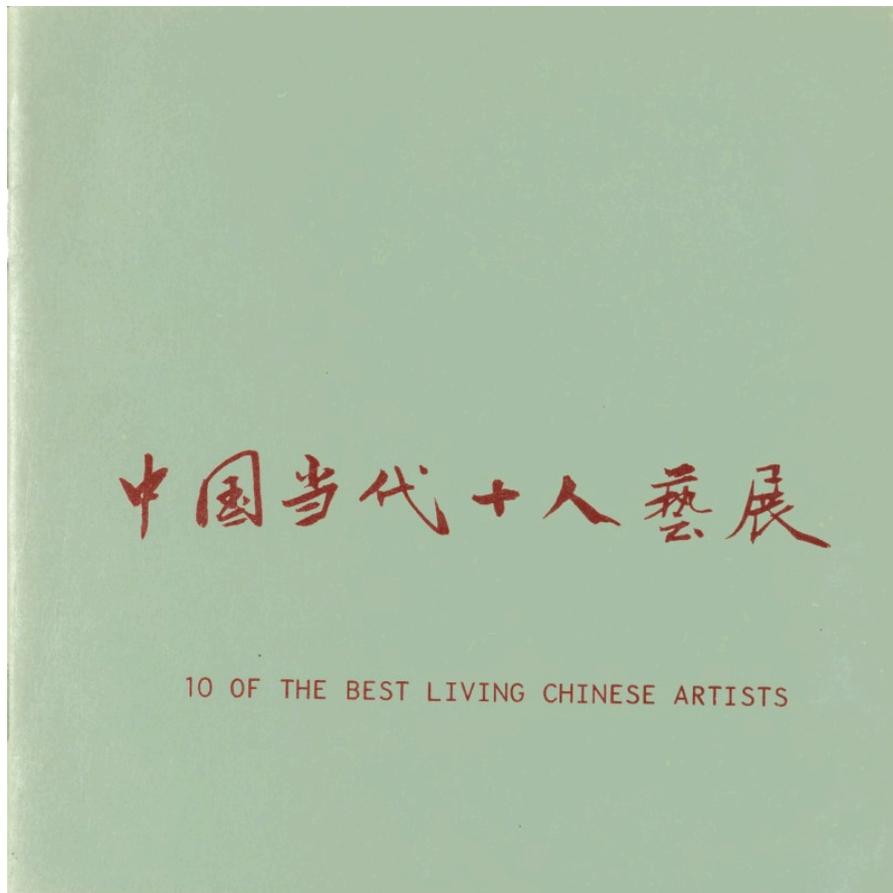


Figure 14.

10 of the Best Living Chinese Artists, (Cumbria: LYC Press, 1980): jacket. Collection of Chelsea College of Arts Library, University of the Arts London. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.

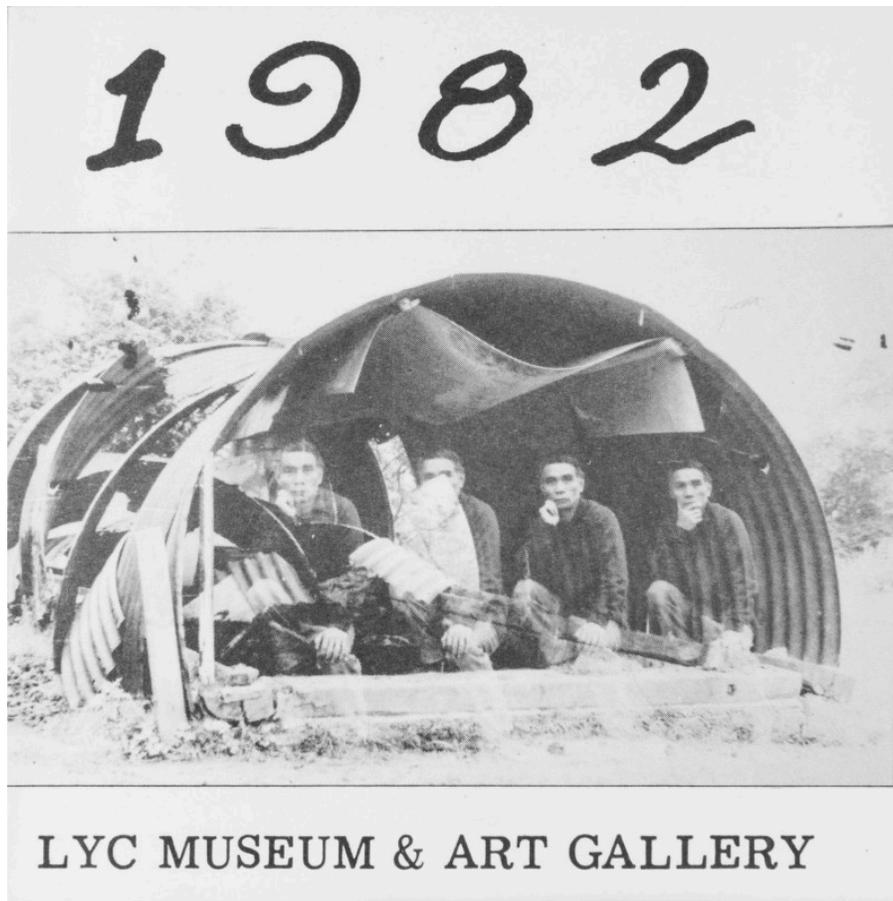


Figure 15.

1982: LYC Museum & Art Gallery, (Cumbria: LYC Press, 1980): jacket.
Courtesy of Chelsea College of Arts Library, University of the Arts London.
Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.



Figure 16.

Li Yuan-chia Library and Archive, photograph. Digital image courtesy of LYC Foundation, Li Yuan-chia Archive, The University of Manchester Library.



Figure 17.

LYC Museum & Art Gallery courtyard, photograph. Digital image courtesy of LYC Foundation, Li Yuan-chia Archive, The University of Manchester Library.

Li's establishment of the LYC in 1972 was considered an "impulsive, intuitive move".²² But I read the LYC's formulation as more of a progression of the experimentation that Li was engaged in during his time at Boothby (1967-1971). His friend Nick Sawyer invited Li to Boothby. Sawyer first met Li at the Signals Gallery, and went on to help produce Li's multiples for his subsequent exhibition at the Lisson Gallery.²³ Boothby was the family house of Sawyer's stepfather, Wilfrid Roberts. Roberts was a farmer turned radical Liberal politician, who Sawyer recounts as "playing chess with Wyndham Lewis, getting drunk with Dylan Thomas, and dining out with Stalin."²⁴ Wilfred Roberts' elder sister was Winifred Nicholson. Wilfrid and Winifred were the grandchildren of George Howard, the 9th Earl of Carlisle, a "painter of pre-Raphaelite tendencies and a younger member of the circle of William Morris and Burne-Jones".²⁵



Figure 18.

Li Yuan-chia, *Untitled*, 1994, hand-coloured black and white print. Digital image courtesy of LYC Foundation, Li Yuan-chia Archive, The University of Manchester Library. Photo: Vipul Sangoi.



Figure 19.

Li Yuan-chia, Untitled, 1994, hand-coloured black and white print. Digital image courtesy of LYC Foundation, Li Yuan-chia Archive, The University of Manchester Library. Photo: Vipul Sangoi.



Figure 20.

Li Yuan-chia, *Untitled*, 1994, hand-coloured black and white print. Digital image courtesy of LYC Foundation, Li Yuan-chia Archive, The University of Manchester Library. Photo: Vipul Sangoi.

Boothby was thus a repository of unusual artistic treasures. A Bomberg hung in Sawyer's bedroom (Tudor Room). Sawyer recounts thumbing through a hand-painted William Blake manuscript as a child, and being surrounded by art works by Moore, Rosetti, and of course Winifred Nicholson.²⁶ Early during the Second World War, Nicholson moved from Paris to Boothby and made it her Cumbrian base for the next twenty years, where she painted views from the house as well as its interiors (Fig. 21). Competing with the bountiful beauty of nature in the vicinity of Boothby was an eight-foot metal sculpture of Buddha—brought to Cumbria by her father Charles Roberts, who had served as Under-Secretary of State for India.



Figure 21.

Winifred Nicholson, *The Hunter's Moon*, 1955, oil on canvas, 111.8 × 137.2 cm, hand-coloured black and white print. Collection of Tate (T06678). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of Winifred Nicholson. Photo courtesy of Tate.

On arriving at Boothby for Christmas in 1967, Li struck a friendship with Wilfrid and Kate Roberts, and was offered a large studio room at Boothby at nominal rent—a room that offered Li the same vista as Winifred Nicholson's studio. Those views also inspired Li and found voice in his poetry (Fig. 22).

Li had come to Cumbria in search of “space” and “freedom”, and managed to establish a livelihood through gardening, painting, and decorating.²⁷ This allowed him to experiment in his studio at Boothby without the need to sell to survive. And the two self-organised exhibitions he held in Boothby evidence a growing interest in exhibiting environmental and participatory works. The first was held between in October 1968;²⁸ the second was in June 1969.²⁹ Both these exhibitions are likely to have informed Lisson Gallery's better-known exhibition, *Li Yuan-chia: Golden Moon Show* (16 October–29 November 1969) (Fig. 23).

I4-5-68

One word to x

Because

The sun pure out from east
For its one day beginning again

I saw it

The old birds very hard it found food
For its they are child in the house

Because

I like Brampton for its make me
to love this world again

Because

From mountains to hills
From vellege to cottage
From peaply to peaply
From moonlight line altogether
for its compare an great family

Because

She all remains happy and whistle
How is pittty stoped high art of heart
You well to know great-mother painter
I well hate the clouds that hidden the sun
kind heart as jewels worth
I well song
I well love

Figure 22.

Li Yuan-chia, One word to x, poem, 14 May 1968. Digital image courtesy of LYC Foundation, Li Yuan-chia Archive, The University of Manchester Library.



Figure 23.

Li Yuan-chia, *Golden Moon Show*, Lisson Gallery, October-November 1969. Digital image courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

The digital archive of artist and art promoter Richard Demarco, offers a set of installation photographs of the first Boothby exhibition (Figs [24](#), [25](#), [26](#), [27](#), and [28](#)).³⁰ The photos show elaborate arrangements of Li's circular discs, many with his movable magnetic points. Plastic sheets hung from the ceiling with circular holes cut in them, delineate micro-environments within the large space. Also visible are two large patterned wall hangings, and most curiously, an arrangement of Li's geometric points on a tufted circular rug. Several photographs show Li encouraging his visitors to interact directly with the work. One photograph shows a web-like installation with washing lines strung across the trees in the courtyard of Boothby. An important trace of the exhibitions at Boothby is a tablecloth that served as Li's visitor's book (Fig. [29](#)). The trajectories that any one of these names—Audrey Barker, Eejay Hooper, or Winifred Nicholson—open up, are vast; and beyond the scope of this paper.



Figure 24.

Li Yuan-chia in his studio at the LYC Museum & Art Gallery, Brampton, Cumbria, 1969. Digital image courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee (A.69.033).



Figure 25.

Li Yuan-chia with a group of unidentified visitors at Li Yuan-chia's studio at the LYC Museum & Art Gallery, Brampton, Cumbria, 1969, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee (A.69.033).



Figure 26.

Work by Li Yuan-chia at the LYC Museum & Art Gallery, Brampton, Cumbria, 1969, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee (A.69.044).



Figure 27.

Li Yuan-chia with a group of unidentified visitors at the LYC Museum & Art Gallery, Brampton, Cumbria, 1969, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee (A.69.033).



Figure 28.

Li Yuan-chia at the LYC Museum & Art Gallery, Brampton, Cumbria, 1969, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee (A.69.033).



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Figure 29.

LYC Foundation. Photo: Vipul Sangoi., Tablecloth / Visitors book for Li Yuan-chia's studio exhibition at Boothby, 1968.

By the time of Li's participation in the little known but important exhibition *Popa at Moma: Pioneers of Part-Art*, at Museum of Modern Art, Oxford in 1971, Li had already been exhibiting environmental and participatory works in his studio in Boothby, and subsequently at Lisson Gallery. *Popa at Moma* was curated by Mark Jones and Rupert Legge and is considered the first institutional attempt in the UK to frame participatory practices (or "Part-Art") as an artistic tendency. It featured Lygia Clark, John Dugger, David Medalla, Hélio Oiticica, Graham Stevens, and Li Yuan-chia. And it achieved notoriety for when a jolly young Oxford crowd took the Part-Art manifesto literally and as Hilary Floe quotes "Everything was Getting Smashed" (Fig. 30).³¹ Two of the artists who were there for the opening—Medalla and Dugger—withdrawed their work. Li was happy to let his work be. The show opened and closed on the same evening.



Figure 30.

Pioneers of Part-Art, Popa at Moma, Modern Art Oxford, February 1971, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Modern Art Oxford.

Li's openness to sharing agency, by not intervening to limit the terms on which the Oxford audience participated, was to be later channelled into the functioning of the children's art room at the LYC—where both Li's art works and art materials were available for children to "play" with. The LYC was Li showing us how Participatory Art could live in a museum setting; where the operational activity of running a museum—the openings, performances, the programming, and publishing activities—could themselves be considered as part of an art work. It suggests that Li's engagement with place, and a close circle of friends with distinct artistic visions, played an important role in shaping Li's imagination of what the LYC could be.

This is not to diminish Li's agency in its making. Instead, I suggest a reading of his practice that, during the time of his stay in Boothby, was moving away from reliefs, paintings, and static objects to kinetic sculptures, "toys", multiples, "environments"; situations that invited an activation of objects, materials, space, and human relations. This direction in his work was in conversation with the work of a number of artists associated with Signals Gallery. He had simply taken it further. In the LYC, Li had fashioned a machine capable of changing people's relationship with art, with each other, and hence with life.

The catalogue accompanying Li's last monographic exhibition in the UK has a section on the LYC Museum & Art Gallery.³² It carries reprints of reviews in the press (Paul Overy, *The Times*, 4 September 1974; and Kenneth Hudson, *The Illustrated London News*, October 1980) and personal reflections from a number of artists and friends who had played a part in the life of the LYC. With the addition of interviews with visitors to the LYC, it helps build a multi-vocal account of how the museum operated and its many distinctive features—from the tea that greeted visitors to its library of donated art books. Artists in particular were struck by what David Nash identified as Li's combination of "humble modesty with outrageous ambition".³³ Many picked out the unique experience of staying at the LYC while working with Li on the installation of the exhibition.

To show at LYC Museum was something special ... The windows were at floor level making the often misty landscape part of the installation ... It was very much his place: it was a work of his, imbued with his aesthetic ... I left with my belief in art revitalised.

—Shelagh Wakely³⁴

He also made a garden and created a small world that was a place of its own. He never tried to fit in, it was we who were expected to fit into Li's imaginative world. He was firmly determined to impose his vision, to make that world accessible to whoever would come within range of his remarkable presence.

—Kathleen Raine³⁵

Li made me question the purpose of art.

—Katerina El Haj³⁶

He created a space that had something for everybody, adult and child.

—David Nash³⁷

Point in Time and the Primacy of Encounter

There is a copy of *Zazen*—the artist Madelon Hooykaas' photo book documenting her 1970 stay in a Japanese monastery—in the LYC Archive (Fig. 8).³⁸ It carries a dedication to her friend, occasional collaborator, and Li's erstwhile partner, Delia Derbyshire. It is dated 1976—the year before Madelon Hooykaas and her long-term collaborator, Elsa Stansfield, exhibited at the LYC. On either side of the dedication are rubber stamps that suggest a sequential ownership. One simply reads "Delia Derbyshire". It is mirrored on

the inside cover by a competing claim: “LYC Museum Library”. This larger stamp also grounds this object in a place—Banks, Brampton, Cumbria. It reveals the web of friendships that underpin another collaborative work in the *Speech Acts* exhibition, *Point in Time* (1987) by Stansfield/Hooykaas (Fig. 31).

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 31.

Elsa Stansfield and Madelon Hooykaas, *Point in Time* (extract), 1987, video, 12 minutes and 54 seconds. Digital image courtesy of Film courtesy of Elsa Stansfield and Madelon Hooykaas.

Elsa Stansfield and Madelon Hooykaas are pioneering figures in the history of video art in Europe. Friends from their time together at the Ealing School of Art & Design in 1966, they started collaborating on films and what they called “video-environments” in the early 1970s. Hooykaas worked with Stansfield at her film and sound studio (8, 9, and 10 in Neal’s Yard, London) and were joined by Delia Derbyshire. They worked on two projects with Derbyshire. When Derbyshire moved to Cumbria, they visited their friend at the LYC and were introduced to Li. They showed at LYC in 1977 and became firm friends of Li’s—bonding over a common interest in Zen Buddhism and long walks. Their friendship continued despite Elsa’s move to Holland as Head of the Department for video/sound (Time Based Art) at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht. *Point in Time* dates from when Li visited them in Holland after the closure of the LYC. ³⁹

Point in Time suggests a journey—both physical and internal. The physical one is dominated by footage of a rocky terrain that seems to have been shot from a car and then slowed down. It is frequently abstracted. The film is punctuated by lingering images of fluttering flags—none of which seem to bear overt symbols of national affiliation. A modulated drone evokes and echoes highland winds. We are traversing time and place. Interspersed with footage of the physical journey(s) are views of Li’s hand preparing for and performing calligraphy. The preparation of the black ink conveys a luxuriant treatment of time. An ink stick is pressed against a stone mortar and then ground down through describing steady rhythmic circular movements. Minute amounts of water are mixed into the ink to modulate the thickness. Too thick and the writing will not be fluent. Too thin and the ink will flow too fast. This is a practiced ritual.

We follow Li’s hand dip a brush into the ink and describe Chinese characters on paper. The camera shifts to extreme close up. We see the pulse of the brush in the hand. The movement is not the dramatic flourish of a heroic Jackson Pollock drip painting, but more the careful listening of the divining stick or dowsing rod being manipulated over land to locate a source of water.

And as the brush touches the paper, we witness the small oceans of ink from which the calligrapher structures meaning. This is an internal journey. A search. This reading is lent support by the appearance of an enigmatic compass that frames the beginning and the end of the work; the movement of the needle—from true north to wild gyrations—suggesting circuitous routes.

Point in Time evidences an engagement with place, spirituality, and calligraphy—through practice. It encapsulates an exchange of ideas, aesthetics, and affective registers nurtured through years of discussions amongst friends in the multiple languages and practices of calligraphy, sound, and video. It also hints at a shared interest in Buddhism that inflects both practices: those of Li and Stansfield/Hooykaas. As Dorothea Franck points out, “Buddhists are not primarily believers but practitioners”.⁴⁰ A section of Franck’s text on Stansfield/Hooykaas bears the title, “Saying what cannot be said”, and is an uncanny echo of the title of the survey exhibition of Li’s work, *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said* (2000), curated by Guy Brett. Both titles emphasise the unknown, the unsaid, and the unsayable, suggesting the primacy of encounter and feeling as a way to experience the practice of Li and Stansfield/Hooykaas.

This interpretation of *Point in Time* also sheds light on how the LYC operated, where the primacy of encounter—between exhibiting artists and the landscape; visitors and art; and of all of the above with Li—was privileged. Where Li’s endless pots of tea and “strange mixture of peanut butter and mixed fruit” welcomed all with casual warmth, every day of the year until 7pm.⁴¹ Where the rug-making classes, the library, poetry readings, and children’s art room made every trip to the LYC also an encounter between art and life—a pit stop in life’s ongoing journey.

The Search for *Space & Freedom*

If Hooykaas/Stansfield were friends Li knew, Helen Petts was a friend he did not. Helen Petts’ film, *Space & Freedom* (2018), was newly commissioned for *Speech Acts* and takes its name from Li’s search for the same in Cumbria (Fig. 32). It begins in darkness. There are no titles, no images, and the black screen heightens our sense of hearing. Despite this preparation, we still have to strain to hear a heavily accented male voice whistling; seemingly communicating in birdsong. Later in the film, we hear him describing his vision for a place. The voice is Li Yuan-chia’s and the place—the LYC in Bankside.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 32.

Helen Petts, *Space and Freedom* (extract), 2018, digital film with 5.1 sound, 22 minutes and 43 seconds. Digital image courtesy of Film courtesy of Helen Petts.

These recordings of Li's voice were hiding in plain sight on reel-to-reel tapes in the still to be catalogued LYC archives at the Special Collections of the John Rylands Library. This is the first time this recording has been digitised and possibly the first time it has been heard since Li recorded it. It literally gives voice to Li's ideas for the LYC—a vision he obviously felt compelled to record for posterity. In the full cut of *Space & Freedom*, Li says:

Want happen a small theatre ... for perform music, and ... upstairs ... I would like have my office and a store room. But when I completely finish ... I feel upstairs could very beautifully, could be, make a lovely art gallery. So I change my mind. No longer will happen the office and a store room, open for a gallery. Ground floor ... could be used for the theatres, but we only use for one more play ... then no longer have second time. Well, give my new ideas, I will change from the small theatre, change it to the arts room. Arts room will be ... provide colours, pens, papers, let everybody, anyone wish coming in and enjoy yourself ... draw a pictures ... or writing a poetry ... writing a story ... sometimes picture with the story together. So ... so it will be give creative joy, to the children. So children, they have something to do. They are not running away all the buildings. (Inaudible) very peaceful, there, they enjoying it. So the parents can, walking around the gallery, enjoy works of art, or crafts ... or enjoy the library books.

42

The recording also provided Petts with a sonic clue to Li's interest in contemporary avant-garde classical music.⁴³ It was recorded over an episode of the BBC programme, *Music of Our Time*, which has not been completely erased by the over-recording—functioning, as Petts points out, “like pentimenti in painting”.⁴⁴ Petts makes a feature of the scratchy nature of this sound, inviting the musician Steve Beresford to “punctuate” her film with improvisations from prepared pieces for piano.

Petts uses Li's archival sound recording as one of the central pillars of *Space & Freedom*. She combines it with previously digitised video shot by Li on a 8mm camera; film she shot on location; and original music improvised by Steve Beresford. The film thus becomes a site for collaboration across

time—with Li and Beresford. A collective exploration of the rhythms, textures, sights, and sounds of the Cumbrian landscape that inspired Li. By toggling back and forth between archival and contemporary footage, with the archival film shown in black and white, Petts allows us to enter the space and place of the LYC at two different times more than four decades apart.

Space & Freedom's complex yet light soundscape anchors the LYC in nature. Birds chirp, tweet and sing; water burbles and gushes; the wind is an understated presence at the edge of perception; its southing accompanies us on rambles through the trees. Slow panning shots frame the quiet majesty of the LYC's physical location, underlining the central importance of its natural setting in the experience for exhibiting artists, visitors, and indeed Li himself.

David Nash called the LYC “an oasis of how life and art could be”, and likened it to “a growing plant” in being “vulnerable yet determined”.⁴⁵ *Space & Freedom* allows us a glimpse into this plant-like oasis, whose capacity to spark creative thought persisted for Li, even after the LYC's closure; when its garden became the stage for his experimentation with photography and, as shown in one segment of the archival clip above, animation. Li mined the performative possibilities offered by temporary arrangements of everyday objects (blocks of wood, a ball, an umbrella, and hedge shears) and his own body to produce a lyrical body of work tinged with a melancholic beauty (Fig. 33).



Figure 33.

Li Yuan-chia, Tomatoes balanced on wooden blocks in the gardens and grounds around the LYC Museum, photograph. Digital image courtesy of LYC Foundation, Li Yuan-chia Archive, The University of Manchester Library.

Petts' film may be structured as a collage but it slowly reveals the LYC and its setting with a painter's sensibility. It can be seen as a companion piece to *Throw Them Up & let Them Sing*, her poetic film on Kurt Schwitters' exile in Norway and then the Cumbrian countryside. Petts seems to share the historian Macaulay's liking for working on the dead. "With the dead there is no rivalry," he wrote. "In the dead there is no change. Plato is never sullen. Cervantes is never petulant. Demosthenes never comes unreasonably. Dante never stays too long." ⁴⁶ Petts' film clearly shows us that the dead do speak to us; but for that we have to be willing to listen.

The Necessity of Collaboration

There is in the discipline of art history an impulse to disentangle entangled histories—to reduce the complex and the messy to tidy pockets of monographic depth. Contained. Neat. Sharp-edged. This brief look at a handful of examples—the formation of a museum and two films—underlines the need for forms of art-historical research that allow sense to emerge from polyphony; forms that embody "undisciplined" approaches, not reducible to neat monographic accounts. ⁴⁷ It points to the need for "art histories of excess" that exceed nations, institutions, and singular art historians examining single objects or single subjects. ⁴⁸

There is in this call a recognition of the need for collaboration—for both conducting research and in its staging. The exhibition is one form capacious enough to do both, while maintaining the possibility for speculation—for resisting closure. Digital publishing—that allows open access not just to art-historical propositions, but also to methodologies and, where possible, to digital copies of underlying archival material—is another.

This issue of *British Art Studies* also carries an article by David Butler on Delia Derbyshire; and *BAS* editor Baillie Card's interview with the actor, writer, and director, Caroline Catz. Catz's recent short film, *Delia Derbyshire: The Myths and the Legendary Tapes* (2018), also touches on the time Derbyshire spent at the LYC. In dialogue with this article, the *Speech Acts* exhibition and the symposium on the LYC Museum & Art Gallery, these initiatives continue the journey towards a multi-authored, expansive, and entangled history of artistic practice that may help us understand the role of friendships in Li Yuan-chia's Cumbrian cosmopolitanism.

Footnotes

- 1 Wall text for the exhibition, *Viewpoint: A Retrospective of Li Yuan-chia* (2014), at the Taipei Fine Art Museum (TFAM). *Viewpoint* was a collaboration between TFAM and the LYC Foundation; with LYC Foundation Trustees Guy Brett and Nick Sawyer co-curating the exhibition with Mei-ching Fang, TFAM's Chief Curator.

- 2 Li's work was included in *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* (1989), curated by Rasheed Araeen at the Hayward Gallery, with subsequent touring venues including Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Manchester City Art Gallery and Cornerhouse, Manchester. A posthumous retrospective exhibition, *Li Yuan-Chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said* (2001), curated by Guy Brett, was organised by Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts) at the Camden Arts Centre, London; Abbot Hall Art Gallery and Museum, Kendal; and Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels.
- 3 Leyla Fakhr, "Artists in Pursuit of an International Language", in *Migrations: Journeys into British Art*, ed. Lizzie Carrey-Thomas (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 55.
- 4 Quoted in Rasheed Araeen, "Taking the Bull by the Horns", in R. Araeen (ed.), *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* (London: Southbank Centre, 1989), 57. Araeen's quotation is from Li's letter/statement to Andrew Dempsey (Assistant Director, Hayward Gallery), 3 July 1989.
- 5 Recent exhibitions on the Signals Gallery have been held by a number of London-based commercial galleries including: England & Co (2014), S|2 (2018), and Thomas Dane (2018). Solo exhibitions of works by a number of artists associated with Signals Gallery including dom sylvester houédard and Li Yuan-chia have also been held in the last few years by galleries including: Richard Saltoun (2016, 2017), Lisson Gallery (2018), and S|2 (2017), and Each Modern (2019), in London, New York, and Taipei. It is worth noting that this interest has, in the case of Li and others, been instigated through an international process of reclamation by institutions based in Asia. For an exploration of this topic, see Hammad Nasar: "Notes from the Field: Navigation the Afterlife of the *Other Story*", *Asia Art Archive*, 1 April 2015. <https://aaa.org.hk/en/ideas/ideas/notes-from-the-field-navigating-the-afterlife-of-the-other-story>.
- 6 While the catalogues accompanying both significant monographic exhibitions—*Viewpoint: A Retrospective of Li Yuan-Chia* (2014) and *Li Yuan-Chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said* (2001)—devoted considerable attention to the LYC as being more than simply another exhibiting institution, they did not advance a particular position in how it fit within Li's wider artistic practice.
- 7 The exhibition *Performing No Thingness* (2016) curated by Nicola Simpson at Norwich University of the Arts, explored the concept of "nothingness" in the work of artists Li Yuan-chia, dom sylvester houédard, and Ken Cox through staging an interplay of art works and correspondence. See also Andy Christian's *In the North Wind's Breath* (The Private Press at Penny Royal, 2018), 22-23, for a potted account of Delia Derbyshire and Li's life at the LYC. The slim booklet shares personal perspectives from Christian; who was an exhibiting artist at the LYC and lived nearby.
- 8 Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 6.
- 9 Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 19.
- 10 Karin Zitzewitz, "Infrastructure as Form: Cross-Border Networks and the Materialities of 'South Asia' in Contemporary Art", *Third Text* 31, nos 2-3 (2017): 341-358.
- 11 Zitzewitz, "Infrastructure as Form", 357.
- 12 Investigating the history of the LYC has been a key part of the ongoing research project, *London, Asia*, at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. For more on the *London, Asia* project, see <https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/projects/london-asia>.
- 13 Hammad Nasar and Karin Zitzewitz, "Art Histories of Excess: Hammad Nasar in Conversation with Karin Zitzewitz", *Art Journal* (Winter 2018): 106-112.
- 14 *Viewpoint: A Retrospective of Li Yuan-chia* (2014) at the Taipei Fine Art Museum (TFAM) was a collaboration between TFAM and the LYC Foundation (see Note 1). The Black Artists and Modernism (BAM) research project—funded by the AHRC and led by University of the Arts London (UAL) in collaboration with Middlesex University—organised a study day on Li's work with Iniva on 13 February 2017—which included presentations and discussions on different aspects of Li's work; see <https://www.iniva.org/programme/events/li-yuan-chia-study-day-2/>. For more on BAM, see <http://www.blackartistsmodernism.co.uk/about/>.
- 15 *Speech Acts: Reflection-Imagination-Repetition* (2018-2019), curated by Hammad Nasar with Kate Jesson, was presented by Manchester Art Gallery in partnership with the BAM project (see Note 11). A gallery guide to the *Speech Acts* exhibition is available to view and download from Manchester Art Gallery's website, <http://manchesterartgallery.org/exhibitions-and-events/exhibition/speech-acts/>. Selected texts from the guide accompanied by installation images of the exhibition were published by ArtUK, and are available at: <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/speech-acts-introduction-by-the-director-of-manchester-art-gallery-and-the-whitworth>; <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/speech-acts-an-introduction-by-sonia-boyce>; <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/speech-acts-a-curatorial-introduction>; <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/speech-acts-reflections-performing-the-self>; and <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/speech-acts-imagination-the-sum-of-all>.
- 16 *The LYC Museum & Art Gallery and the Museum as Practice*, 6-7 March 2019, Manchester Art Gallery. This symposium was organised by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art (PMC) and University of the Arts London (UAL), in collaboration with Manchester Art Gallery and the University of Manchester; it was convened by Hammad Nasar, Lucy Steeds, and Sarah Victoria Turner. For more details, see <https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/whats-on/forthcoming/the-lyc-museum-art-gallery-and-the-museum-as-practice>.
- 17 "Chronology", in *Li Yuan-Chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2000), 148.
- 18 Quoted in Mei-ching Fang, "More than a Museum: LYC Museum and Art Gallery", in *Viewpoint: A Retrospective of Li Yuan-chia*, Vol. I (Taipei: Taipei Fine Art Museum, 2012), 127.
- 19 Shelagh Wakely in *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said*, 135.
- 20 Mei-ching Fang, "More than a Museum", 117.

- 21 Socially engaged practice has been professionalised as a field of study and artistic practice in the twenty-first century, with numerous courses being taught in art schools and universities across the world, and its impact being studied and measured by museums and funding bodies, see <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1249262>.
- 22 Hammad Nasar, Interview with Nick Sawyer, 21 June 2018.
- 23 Sawyer later studied at the Courtauld Institute of Art and became part of “Exploding Galaxy”—an experimental dance drama group (founded by David Medalla) that lived as a community in Balls Pond Road, North London between 1967 and 1968.
- 24 Hammad Nasar, Interview with Nick Sawyer, 14 June 2018.
- 25 Obituary of Rosalind Lady Carlisle in *The Times*, 13 August 1921. http://ghgraham.org/text/rosalindhoward1845_obit.html. Accessed 24 June 2018.
- 26 Nasar, Interviews with Nick Sawyer, 14 and 21 June 2018.
- 27 Quoted in Diana Yeh, “Utopia Beyond Cosmopolitanism: A Translocal View of Li Yuan-chia”, in *Viewpoint: A Retrospective of Li Yuan-chia* (Taipei: Taipei Fine Art Museum, 2012), 21.
- 28 Li Yuan-chia, *Boothby Studio Exhibition* catalogue (Cumbria, 1968); see also “Chronology”, in *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said*, 147.
- 29 Invitation to a reception at Li’s Boothby Studio on 28 June 1969 reproduced in “Chronology”, in *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said*, 147.
- 30 For photographs of Li Yuan-chia in Cumbria on numerous occasions from 1969 to 1978, see the Richard Demarco archive, http://www.demarco-archive.ac.uk/people/149-li_yuan_chia. The group of photographs showing Li’s own exhibition in 1969, however, have been mislabelled and are not in his studio at the LYC, but at Boothby. The LYC was not established in 1969. I am grateful to Nick Sawyer for confirming this.
- 31 Hilary Floe, “‘Everything was Getting Smashed’: Three Case Studies of Play and Participation”, *Tate Papers* no. 22 (Autumn 2014). <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/22/everything-was-getting-smashed-three-case-studies-of-play-and-participation-1965-71>. Accessed on 8 February 2019.
- 32 *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2000), 148.
- 33 David Nash in *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said*, 139.
- 34 Shelagh Wakely in *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said*, 135.
- 35 Kathleen Raine in *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said*, 134.
- 36 Interview with the musician, artist and creative practitioner Katerina El Haj, 7 February 2018. El Haj is a member of the Nicholson family and visited LYC during the summer during her childhood holidays over several years.
- 37 David Nash in *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said*, 139.
- 38 Else Madelon Hooykaas and Bert Schierbeck, *Zazen* (Tucson, AZ: Omen Press, 1974).
- 39 Interview with Madelon Hooykaas, 2 March 2018.
- 40 Dorothea Franck, “Deep Looking: A Buddhist Look at the Work of Stansfield/Hooykaas”, in Madelon Hooykaas and Claire van Putten (eds), *Revealing the Invisible: The Art of Stansfield/Hooykaas from Different Perspectives* (Amsterdam: De Buitenkampt, 2010), 121.
- 41 Artist Lynne Curran in *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said*, 140.
- 42 Transcription by Helen Petts.
- 43 This is, as Petts acknowledges in email correspondence (21 May 2019), speculative. While Li’s access to a professional ¼ inch reel-to-reel tape recorder in the 1970s suggests more than a casual interest in music, it may have belonged to Delia Derbyshire (see Note 4) and requires further research.
- 44 Hammad Nasar, “Helen Petts in Conversation”, *Ocula*, 23 August 2018, <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/helen-petts/>. Accessed on 20 May 2019.
- 45 David Nash in *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What Is Not Yet Said*, 139.
- 46 Quoted in Catherine Hall, “Afterword” in Julian Henriques and David Morley with Vana Goblot (eds), *Stuart Hall: Conversations, Projects and Legacies* (London: Goldsmiths Press, 2017), 305. Hall’s quotation from Macaulay was originally published in the July 1837 (132) issue of the *Edinburgh Review*, 3, <https://archive.org/details/edinburghreview100coxgoog/page/n290>, accessed on 17 May 2019.
- 47 Irit Rogoff, “Hammad Nasar: Interview with Irit Rogoff”, in Iftikhar Dadi and Hammad Nasar (eds), *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space* (London: Green Cardamom and Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University, 2012), 108.
- 48 “Art Histories of Excess: Hammad Nasar in Conversation with Karin Zitzewitz”, *Art Journal* (Winter 2018): 106–112.

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Whatever Happened to Delia Derbyshire? Delia Derbyshire, Visual Art, and the Myth of her Post-BBC Activity

David Butler

Abstract

The composer and musician Delia Derbyshire (1937–2001) joined the BBC Radiophonic Workshop in 1962 and by the end of the decade had made a major contribution to the British public's awareness and understanding of electronic music. Much of that awareness was generated by Derbyshire's celebrated realisation, in 1963, of the original theme tune from *Doctor Who*. Over the next ten years, Derbyshire's creative activity as both a BBC employee and a freelance artist would see her providing music and 'special sound' for television, radio, film, theatre, and live events such as the first edition of the Brighton Festival in 1967. By 1973, however, Derbyshire had left the BBC, citing the fact that she was "fed up" with how her work was being treated by the Corporation because it was "too sophisticated" and that the BBC was "increasingly being run by committees and accountants". For many years, the standard account of Derbyshire's life has been that, following her departure from the BBC in 1973, she withdrew from creative activity until the final few years of her life when she began to collaborate with Peter Kember (Sonic Boom). These accounts have sometimes veered into sensationalist cliché—a 2008 article in *The Times* characterised Derbyshire as a tragic and self-destructive artist who abandoned music for "a series of unsuitable jobs" and became a "hopeless alcoholic".[fn]Russell Jenkins, "Delia Derbyshire, Producer of Doctor Who Theme Music, has Legacy Restored", *The Times*, 18 July 2008.[/fn] Recent discoveries and donations to the Delia Derbyshire Archive, however, have pointed to a more complex understanding of Derbyshire's activity after she left the BBC. Far from withdrawing completely from music, Derbyshire would collaborate on a number of short 'art' films in the mid- to late 1970s. This paper draws on this archival material to provide a clearer and more detailed account of Derbyshire's work in the 1970s, including an unreleased recording from an unfinished project in 1980. Without denying the complications that Derbyshire encountered during this often difficult phase of her life, the article demonstrates that Derbyshire remained creatively engaged and also active as an artist far longer than has often been reported or assumed. In particular, Derbyshire's creative activity during these years saw her working with visual artists, most prominently Madelon Hooykaas and Elsa Stansfield. In doing so, Derbyshire furthered her long-standing interest in the relationship between electronic music and the visual arts. The article thus

provides not only a revisionist account of Derbyshire's post-BBC activity but also enhances our understanding of the inter-relationship between electronic sound, music, and the visual arts in Britain as well as the nature and extent of Derbyshire's influence.

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YAMCO with Kaleidophon present a new creative service for British advertising, combining the best of music with the best of electronic sound. ... To keep up with your present requirements we must be several years ahead. With our new synthesisers the range of sounds is limitless and here are some of the sounds you're going to be hearing in the seventies. —Brian Hodgson ¹

As the 1970s began, the composer and musician Delia Derbyshire (1937–2001) appeared to be at the height of her creative activity. Based at the BBC Radiophonic Workshop since 1962, by the end of the decade, Derbyshire's distinctive electronic and tape-based music and sound design had earned her the respect and admiration of colleagues and collaborators both within the BBC and elsewhere, in theatre, film, and diverse live events and installations, through her burgeoning profile as a freelance artist. She was (and still is) most famous for her remarkable realisation of Ron Grainer's theme tune for *Doctor Who* (1963–1989, 1996, 2005–present). That piece alone had generated considerable public interest in the activity of the Radiophonic Workshop with substantial press coverage often emphasising Derbyshire's role, despite the fact that for much of the 1960s, she and her colleagues did not receive on-screen or printed credit for their work—in keeping with BBC policy at the time. The prominence of *Doctor Who* and range of her overall output resulted in Derbyshire making a major contribution to the British public's awareness and understanding of electronic music. ² In 1968, her work featured in two pioneering British concerts of electronic music at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London and Liverpool University's Mountford Hall respectively (the latter being the first concert of electronic music given in the north-west of England), but by this point in her career, she was already active in theatre and film, with productions including work for the Royal Shakespeare Company and the London Roundhouse. Having established the short-lived Unit Delta Plus (1966–1967) with the engineer and composer Peter Zinovieff, one of the key figures in the development of synthesiser systems such as the VCS3, and her close friend and fellow member of the Radiophonic Workshop, Brian Hodgson, in the late 1960s, Derbyshire co-founded Kaleidophon, a second independent organisation for the development of electronic music, with Hodgson and David Vorhaus in order to further this increasing freelance activity. Hodgson's ironic voice-over for Kaleidophon's demo tape, cited at the start of this article, looked ahead to the 1970s with playful optimism.

That optimism did not appear to be misplaced at the time. The early 1970s saw Derbyshire involved with innovative and rewarding projects both within and beyond the BBC. In July 1970, she collaborated with Edward Lucie-Smith on "Poets in Prison", a special event at City Temple Theatre as part of the City of London Festival, featuring "in semi-dramatised form the outcries of

the Muse in chains” alongside projections and Derbyshire’s music.³ Less than six months later, in January 1971, she provided music for a BBC Radio 4 schools broadcast of Ted Hughes’ *Orpheus*, billed in the *Radio Times* as a new verse play for lights, voices, dancers, and music with Derbyshire’s score evoking the voices of stones and trees. The production won an award at that year’s Japan Prize contest, an international competition for educational broadcasting, with Derbyshire receiving the trophy alongside Hughes and the producer, Dickon Reed, at a celebratory event organised by the BBC.

Yet, barely two years later, Derbyshire was gone from the BBC and Kaleidophon was no more. The reasons for Derbyshire’s departure in 1973 have been speculated on in various publications and dramatisations of Derbyshire’s life and it is beyond the scope of this article to address them in depth.⁴ Hodgson’s Kaleidophon demo voice-over anticipated at least three of the most often cited factors: an increased sense of commercialism and less artistically satisfying projects; a heightened workload; and the arrival of new technology in the form of various synthesisers.⁵

The working conditions at the BBC Radiophonic Workshop in the early 1970s were also on record as being difficult, in part due to a lack of adequate resources, resulting in the manager of the Radiophonic Workshop, Desmond Briscoe, expressing his concern about the well-being of his staff. To combat this pressure, the Radiophonic Workshop invested in several synthesisers but Derbyshire found them less satisfying than her more time-consuming tape-based and *musique concrète* approach, which placed the emphasis on generating and crafting her own distinctive sounds. Interviewed by John Cavanagh in 1999, Derbyshire commented how:

Something serious happened around ‘72, ‘73, ‘74: the world went out of tune with itself and the BBC went out of tune with itself... I think, probably, when they had an accountant as director general.
I didn’t like the music business.⁶

That view was reinforced in another interview, this time with Sonic Boom (Peter Kember) from December 1999, where she stated that:

I didn’t want to compromise my integrity any further. I was fed up with having my stuff turned down because it was too sophisticated, and yet it was lapped up when I played it to anyone outside the BBC. The BBC was very wary, increasingly being run by committees and accountants, and they seemed to be dead

scared of anything that was a bit unusual. And my passion is to make original, abstract electronic sounds and organise them in a very appealing, acceptable way, to any intelligent person.⁷

After she left the BBC in 1973, Brian Hodgson, who had also moved on from the Radiophonic Workshop the year before, encouraged Derbyshire to join him at his new studio, Electrophon. Although Derbyshire is credited on-screen, alongside Hodgson, with providing the music for the horror film, *The Legend of Hell House* (1973), her mental health at this point was such that, according to Hodgson, her contribution to the production was minimal and the majority of the music was created by Hodgson in tandem with the uncredited Dudley Simpson.⁸ With her employment at the BBC now over, *The Legend of Hell House* marked a strange reversal of Derbyshire's early career, where she tended not to be credited for her BBC projects—in this instance, she was receiving an on-screen credit when her work was apparently absent from the production.⁹

What happened to Delia Derbyshire? Where did she go next and what did she do? The answers to those questions and the fact that those answers have so often fallen back on a mixture of myths and uncontested assumptions about Derbyshire also point to a wider set of challenges for art and cultural history when dealing with such a multimedia artist, whose creativity included popular and commercial forms, as well as the historical tendency for the role of sound and music to receive less attention in accounts of audio-visual works. The standard narrative of Derbyshire's life is that her departure from the BBC in 1973 marked a complete withdrawal from creative activity in general and creating new music in particular, coupled with a decline into ill health until the last few years of her life, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when she began to collaborate with the musician Peter Kember. Variations on that narrative can be found in numerous journalistic pieces about Derbyshire, dramatic works, fan overviews, and academic discourses. Bob Stanley's 2003 item in *The Times* states that Derbyshire had "quit music in the early Seventies, but just before she died in 2001, she had started again, with Sonic Boom."¹⁰ Jo Hutton's initial 2008 entry on Derbyshire for the *Grove Music Online* encyclopaedia reported that: "she finally left the BBC in 1973 and put aside music composition for many years, until the late 1990s when she joined Peter Kember."¹¹ Similarly, H.J. Spencer's overview of Derbyshire for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* asserts that Derbyshire's passion for music was "in abeyance for some years", after she left the BBC and Electrophon.¹² Elsewhere, Martyn Wade's 2002 play for BBC Radio 4, *Blue Veils and Golden Sands*, portrays a Delia Derbyshire who lived alone throughout the last two decades of her life, with no mention of her enduring relationship with Clive Blackburn, her partner from 1980 until her death in

2001; instead, the play emphasises the revivifying impact of Peter Kember, who made contact with her in the 1990s. Nicola McCartney's 2004 play *Standing Wave*, written for Reeling & Writhing at the Tron Theatre in Glasgow, has a non-linear narrative, moving back and forth between different points in Derbyshire's life but all contained within a ten-year temporal pocket of 1963–1973, starting on New Year's Eve 1973 with Delia in Cumbria and concluding with the sounds of the *Doctor Who* theme being broadcast for the first time in 1963. Once again, the account of Derbyshire's life struggles to get far beyond 1973 and her departure from the BBC. Derbyshire's Wikipedia entry nudges the cut-off point forward slightly but states conclusively that in 1975 "she stopped producing music". ¹³

This general narrative has also been maintained by the scholarship on Derbyshire, which has begun to emerge in the last ten years. Louis Niebur, author of the first monograph on the Radiophonic Workshop, asserts that: "by the mid-1970s she had completely retired from music." ¹⁴ Teresa Winter's thorough 2015 doctoral thesis on Derbyshire's BBC work notes that: "after 11 years Derbyshire left her musical career in the early 1970s, emotionally and physically exhausted by the BBC's 'petty bureaucracy'" and that she only returned to music "during the last decade of her life." ¹⁵ Most recently, Frances Morgan's 2017 article, which calls into question some of the myths and assumptions perpetuated by much of the discourse on Derbyshire's life and work, summarises Derbyshire's latter years by commenting how "soon after leaving the BBC in 1973, Derbyshire retreated from music, composing only in private, if at all," despite offering a more nuanced summation of her post-BBC output elsewhere in the article. ¹⁶

This standard account was one that I subscribed to for several years and it is also one that was accepted by some of Derbyshire's closest friends and colleagues. Brian Hodgson, for example, assumed that Derbyshire had withdrawn from music after she left the BBC, despite remaining in contact with her throughout the remainder of her life. ¹⁷ At its crudest, it is all too easy to reduce this substantial period of Derbyshire's life—the best part of thirty years—to the well-worn stereotype of the tragic self-destructive artist. When the existence of Derbyshire's archive was first announced on the BBC in 2008, *The Times* ran an item by Russell Jenkins in which he summarised her life and career as follows:

Delia Derbyshire, who battled with depression and died, aged only 64, a hopeless alcoholic in 2001, was the godmother of modern electronic dance music. She carried out pioneering work for the BBC Radiophonic Workshop in the early 1960s, producing the familiar *Doctor Who* signature theme and collaborating with Brian

Jones and Jimi Hendrix among others. ... Ms Derbyshire was also a woman of her times, clad in Biba or Mary Quant, her hair in a Vidal Sassoon bob, a fixture at the parties of Swinging London where she was known for her chaotic but exuberant love life. She worked with ... Yoko Ono ... and met Paul McCartney to discuss an opportunity to work on *Yesterday*. She left the BBC a disillusioned woman. She struggled with drink and a series of unsuitable jobs, including radio operator. At one time, she married an out-of-work miner but eventually settled in the Midlands where she lived in relative obscurity and would rail, between drinks, against her lack of critical recognition. ¹⁸

There are various misnomers and generalisations in the piece (not least the erroneous claim that Derbyshire collaborated with Jimi Hendrix—one can only dream of what extraordinary music they might have created had they collaborated) but it is telling how Derbyshire's story is characterised not only through the familiar trope of the failed, self-destructive artist but also the emphasis on her lifestyle and the famous people, particularly men, that she knew rather than her own achievements as an artist. In the case of Paul McCartney, there is a curious overplaying of the project she *might* have done (the background to *Yesterday*) rather than the significant work that she did produce. This tendency to emphasise celebrity relationships, associations with "great men" and tragic decline is comparable to the "constant over-privileging of life over art", which is interrogated by Kate Dorney and Maggie Gale in their collection of essays on Vivien Leigh. ¹⁹ Informed by the Victoria and Albert Museum's 2013 acquisition of Leigh's personal archive, these essays move beyond the popular and journalistic accounts of Leigh that tend to address her primarily in the context of her relationship with Laurence Olivier. In a similar vein, this article draws on several years of extensive archival research and interviews with Derbyshire's friends, colleagues, and her partner to complicate the standard narrative of Delia Derbyshire's post-BBC career and reveals that, without denying the complications that she encountered during this often difficult phase of her life, Derbyshire remained both creatively engaged and active as an artist far longer than has often been reported or assumed. In particular, Derbyshire's creative activity during these years saw her collaborating with visual artists, most prominently Madelon Hooykaas and Elsa Stansfield, as well as a period assisting the Chinese-born artist Li Yuan-chia at his celebrated LYC Museum & Art Gallery in north-east Cumbria. In doing so, Derbyshire furthered her long-standing interest in the relationship between music and the visual arts. The article thus provides not only a revisionist account of Derbyshire's post-BBC activity

but also enhances our understanding of experimental work exploring the inter-relationship between visual art, electronic sound, and music in Britain and the nature and extent of Derbyshire's influence.

Delia Derbyshire and the Visual

Derbyshire's affinity for the visual arts and its influence on her approach to creating electronic sound and music can be traced back to her childhood. In 2011, the John Rylands Library acquired from Andi Wolf, the occupier of Derbyshire's childhood home in Coventry, a substantial collection of Derbyshire's schoolbooks, which provide a fascinating insight into her emerging artistic tastes and creative principles. The importance of music in her life is clear, with references to her favourite composers including Bach, Mozart and, especially, to Beethoven's piano sonatas as well as her admiration for dances by Shostakovich. There is little, however, which appears to point directly to her later enthusiasm for electronic sound and music.

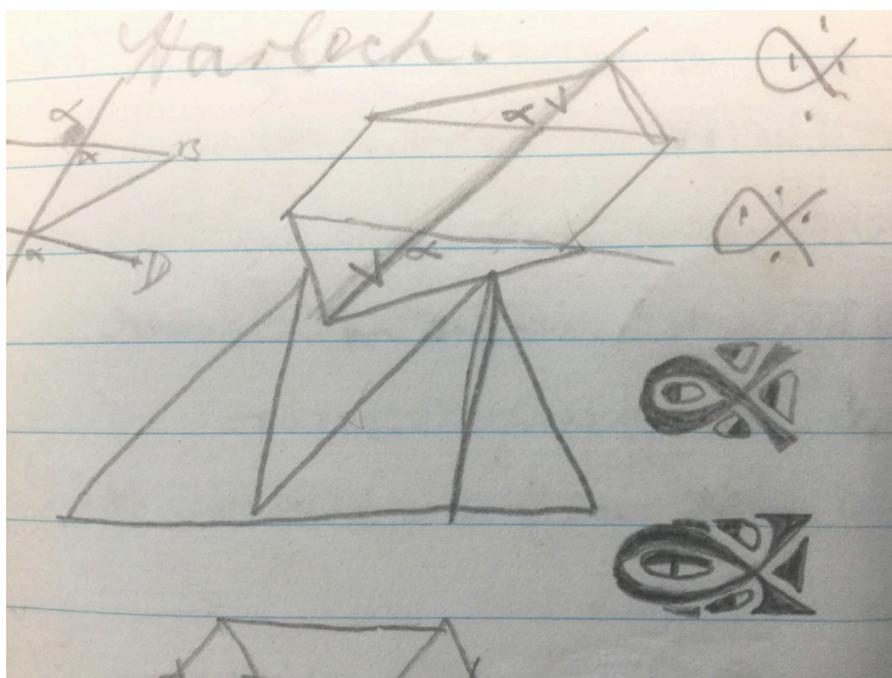


Figure 1.

Delia Derbyshire, Untitled doodle, in *Delia Derbyshire, Lower III Homework Note Book*, 1950, pen sketch. Collection of the Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester (BDD/1/4/3). Digital image courtesy of David Butler.

An interest in the potential of ordinary objects to make music and the transformation of everyday sound, which would be at the core of her adoption of *musique concrète* techniques in the 1960s, gathering and manipulating recordings of found sounds (her beloved metal lampshade

being perhaps the most prominent), can nevertheless be identified in some of her school exercises, where she often refers to the sounds made by everyday objects. ²⁰ That sensitivity to the musical potential of the sound of “non-musical” objects is evident in her later recollections of the sound of air raid sirens during the Blitz in Coventry or the percussive clip-clop rhythms of factory workers’ clogs hurrying to work on the cobbled streets of Preston, where she was evacuated to for several years—an influence that is audible in the underlying rhythms of pieces such as *Pot au Feu* (1968) and *Way Out* (1969). More revealing, however, are the numerous “doodles” which appear throughout her various schoolbooks and seem to anticipate some of the recurring ideas at work in her approach to sound design and music that she developed at the Radiophonic Workshop. These drawings are often abstract, geometric patterns and miniatures, sometimes taking a basic element and then repeating the design but augmenting it further with each iteration. One of the most interesting sketches in this respect comes in her Lower Third homework notebook from 1950 ([Fig. 1](#)).

It is not too fanciful to identify the origins of some of the core principles of Derbyshire’s later creative practice in these doodles: an interest in repetition and loops, taking a raw pattern or sound and embellishing it through gradual transformations, maybe augmenting the pitch or filtering the sound and adding further elements. Elsewhere there are variations and modulations of Derbyshire’s initials and doodles, which seem to echo her Catholic upbringing with suggestions of the sacred ([Fig. 2](#)). Her school paintings also reveal a fascination with repetition and looped patterns ([Fig. 3](#)).

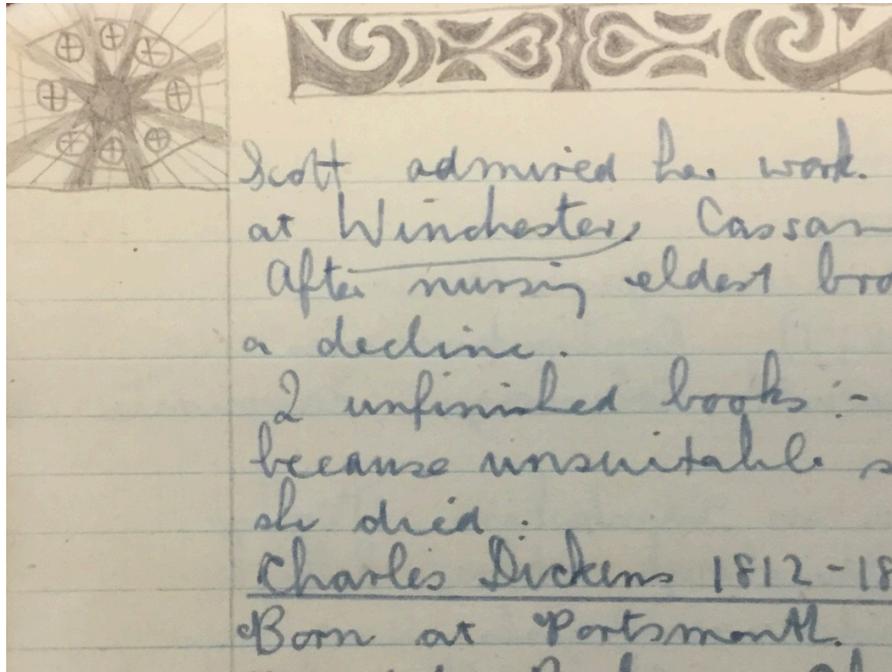


Figure 2.

Delia Derbyshire, Untitled doodle, in *Form V Note Book*, undated, pen sketch. Collection of the Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester (BDD/1/3/5). Digital image courtesy of David Butler.

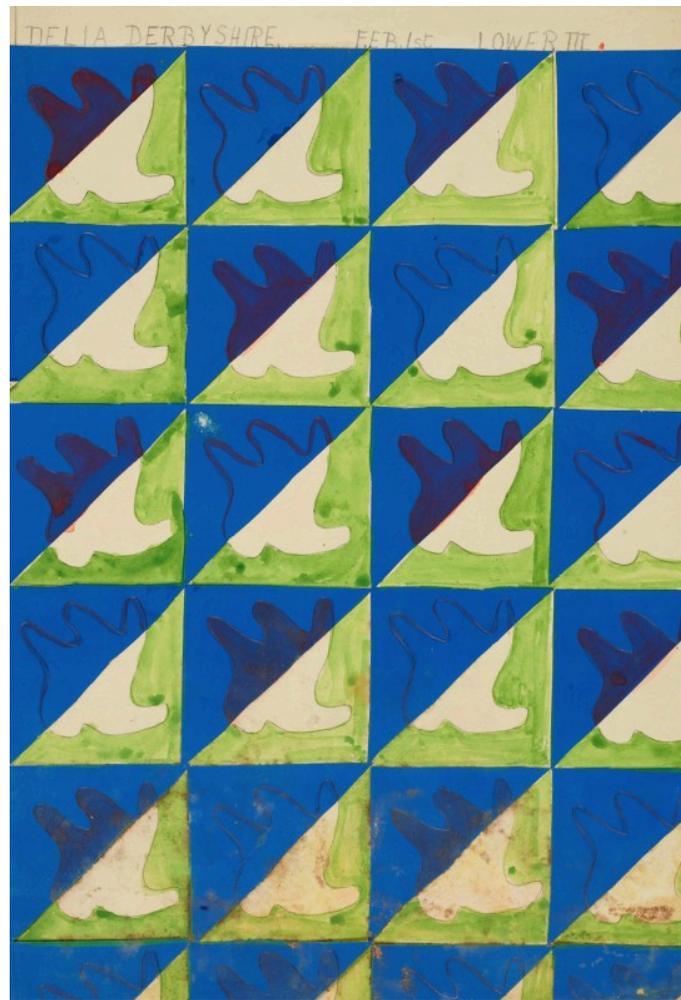


Figure 3.

Delia Derbyshire, Untitled painting, in *Lower III Schoolwork*, 1 February 1950. Collection of the Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester. Digital image courtesy of University of Manchester.

A much more obvious influence in terms of the integration of electronic music and visual art was her experience of attending Le Corbusier's Philips Pavilion, designed for the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. Derbyshire travelled to Expo '58 with her friend and fellow music student from Cambridge, the composer Jonathan Harvey. As they entered and left the Pavilion, they would hear Iannis Xenakis' *musique concrète* piece *Concret PH* (1958) and, within the Pavilion, Edgar Varèse's *Poème électronique* (1958) was synchronised to a film of black and white photographs in addition to shifting patterns of coloured light. The music was diffused via a complex sound projection system, which employed several hundred speakers that could be activated in varying combinations to transform the nature of the sonic presentation and the spatialisation of Varèse's composition. The experience had an undoubtedly profound impact on Derbyshire: within ten years, she was

contributing to, as well as co-organising, immersive environments and events that brought visual projections and electronic music together, and an enduring interest in the relationship between music and visual art was cemented.

Derbyshire's ability to "visualise" music impressed her first colleagues at the BBC, where she worked initially as a studio manager. She described her ability to pinpoint precisely where a requested extract on a record would begin by holding the LP up to the light so that she could "see the trombones" in the disc's grooves "and put the needle down exactly where it was" much to the amazement of her peers.²¹ That affinity for the visual was deepened when she transferred to the Radiophonic Workshop in 1962 and quickly established her creative practice. Although she often employed conventional notation, her archive includes numerous instances where she makes use of more graphic approaches ([Fig. 4](#)).

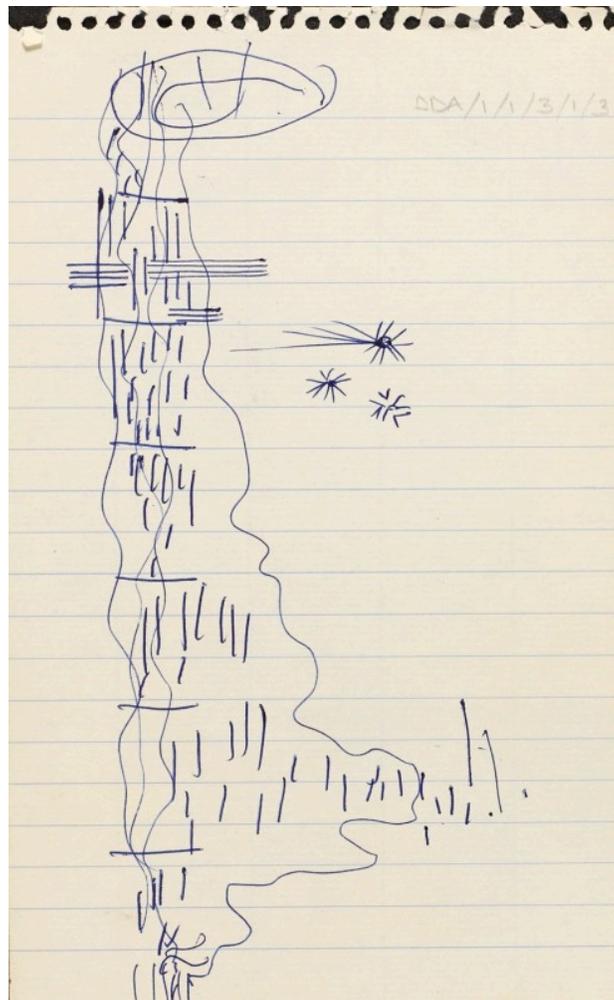


Figure 4.

Delia Derbyshire, Rough graphic score for untitled composition, in *The Tower* and unspecified project(s), circa 1964. Collection of the Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester (DDA/1/1/3/1). Digital image courtesy of University of Manchester.

At the Radiophonic Workshop, Derbyshire had multiple opportunities to work on projects about key figures and movements in art history, particularly through her contribution to the educational “For Schools” programming on Radio 4. These programmes included a BBC 2 documentary about Henry Moore (*I Think in Shapes*, 1968), and two “For Schools” features in the “Art and Design” strand from 1968 and 1971, respectively (Fig. 5). The first was on Cubism, written by Edward Lucie-Smith and featuring the poems of Apollinaire with an emphasis on Picasso and the parallels between Cubism and music; and the second on Eduardo Paolozzi. She also scored an edition of *Omnibus*, directed by Leslie Megahey, which focused on Goya—this was one of Derbyshire’s final works for the BBC, broadcast on 29 October 1972. The “Art and Design” radio programmes presented particular creative challenges

as Derbyshire was required, as Desmond Briscoe noted, “to act as a link between the transparencies”, which were made available to some schools as well as conveying a sense of Picasso’s painting and Paolozzi’s sculpture through sound and music in a non-visual medium.²²

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 5.

British Broadcasting Corporation, *I think in Shapes: Henry Moore (extract)*, first broadcast, 27 August 1968, 45 second extract from 35 minute film.

Lights—Sound—Installation! Collaborations with Hornsey College of Art

All of these projects came towards the end of Derbyshire’s time at the BBC but a far more important encounter at the Radiophonic Workshop took place much earlier, in 1965, and would have a significant impact on the nature of her freelance work outside the Corporation. The incident in question was a visit to the Workshop by the artists Clive Latimer and Michael Leonard and the result was a fruitful collaboration between Derbyshire and the Light/Sound Workshop (LSW) at Hornsey College of Art. The LSW was formed in 1963, in part by Latimer, and was part of the Advanced Studies Group at Hornsey under Latimer’s direction. The LSW was at the forefront of experiments in Britain to explore the relationship between sound and light projection. Their first professional performances took place in 1963, including a combination of lighting and image projection onto a cycloramic backdrop for the production *Ex-Africa* at that year’s Edinburgh Festival, which combined poetry, jazz, and dance with the LSW’s projections. The LSW’s own information sheet, compiled ahead of the 1965–1966 season, described its key objective as being:

To develop a technique of projection light in which moving abstract colour images are correlated with patterns of sound. The essence of the technique is the use of continuous sequences of black and white or colour projection material in motion in one or more light beams. By the use of a number of layers of projection material in the light beam together with one or more light beams, a complex permutation of images is seen on the screen. This is further developed by optical means, mirrors, lenses and interference patterns. Movement is the basis of the technique and the development of control has been a major problem. The initial order of movement was left/right and up/down together with enlarging and diminishing the images. Further development in movement has extended our control so forms can explode or

contract, move in spiral or wave motions, or fluid free movement. ... The relationship between the moving image and sound is the essence of our technique. Image sequences can be developed to existing music but the use of electronic music and music concrete allows greater freedom and closer integration of sound and image. The most obvious relation of sound to image is a direct parallel, sharing rhythm and mood. More difficult is to set sound in counterpoint to the image—for example, soft fluid sounds can be set in contract [sic] with sharp broken images. Experiments linking new patterns of sound with new operating techniques are continually being investigated by Michael Leonard.²³

The document identified the Light/Sound Workshop's future priorities as including the development of architectural lighting and kinetic sculptures, and both of these aims were furthered through collaborations with Delia Derbyshire across 1966 and 1967. It is not surprising that, given the document's identification of the benefits of electronic music and *musique concrète*, Latimer and Leonard would seek out the Radiophonic Workshop and establish a constructive dialogue with Derbyshire, which took root in 1965. They were not alone in seeking to collaborate with the Radiophonic Workshop to research the relationship between electronic music and image—since its establishment in 1958, the Radiophonic Workshop's reputation had increased substantially, and by the mid-1960s had an international reach. The Academy Award-winning animator, Derek Lamb, then a Lecturer in Light and Communications at Harvard University's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, wrote to Briscoe on 26 September 1966 stating that he had heard "a lot of complimentary things about your workshop's compositions and experiments in electronic music" and asked if it would be possible to have tapes of the Workshop's music to use as a soundtrack for visual experiments in film and animation at Harvard.²⁴ Later that year, Robert Hyde, Lecturer in Fine Arts at Wimbledon School of Art, also contacted the Radiophonic Workshop to discuss the incorporation of electronic sound in his environmental conjunctions of structures, coloured light, projections, and movement.

Leonard wrote to Desmond Briscoe on 19 May 1965 thanking him for the opportunity to visit the Radiophonic Workshop and discuss electronic music with Briscoe and his staff, offering, in return, a visit to the Light/Sound Workshop "to show you our own techniques of light projection".²⁵ The possibility of the two facilities collaborating, perhaps gathering on an evening to see how "visual material could be related to any existing tapes" or developing an improvisation around Radiophonic Workshop material, was suggested by Leonard and Derbyshire seems to have responded

enthusiastically.²⁶ She was the member of the Radiophonic Workshop who engaged most extensively with visual artists interested in working with electronic sound, and that was manifest most prominently in her freelance activity with Unit Delta Plus.

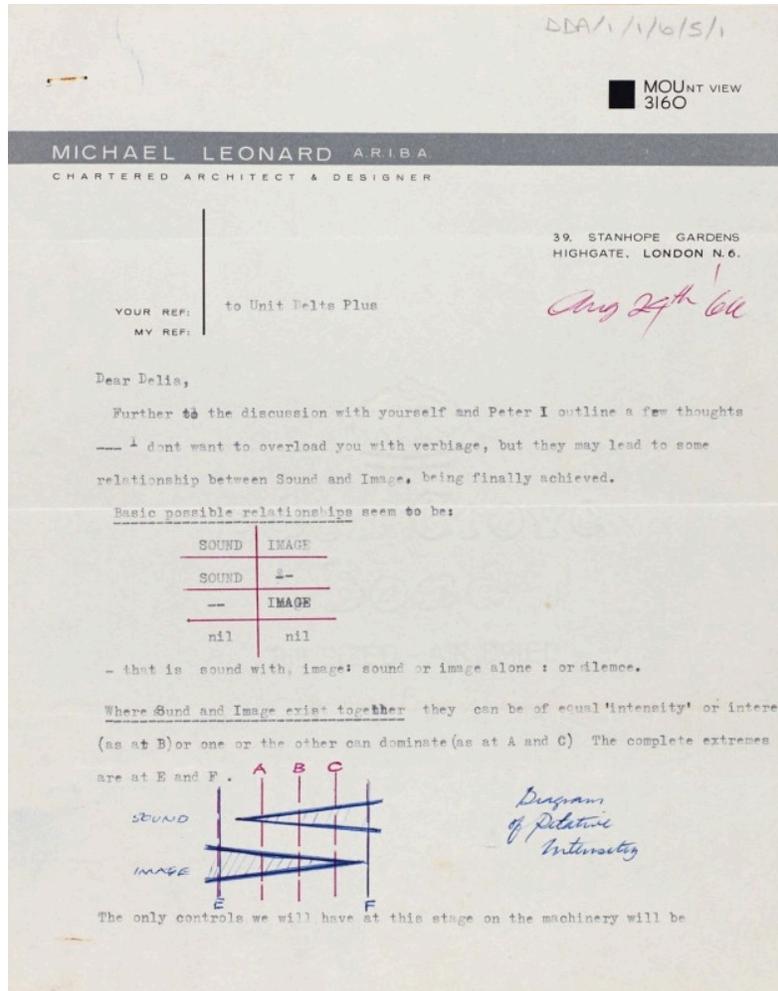


Figure 6.

Typescript letter with handwritten notes and sketches from Michael Leonard to Delia Derbyshire, in *Letters, Notes and Draft Programme Notes*, 24 August 1966. Collection of the Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester (DDA/1/1/6/5/1). Digital image courtesy of University of Manchester.

Although short-lived, Unit Delta Plus (Derbyshire, Brian Hodgson, and Peter Zinovieff) held or contributed to a number of innovative events that experimented with sound, light, and image projection. The first of these was a concert at the fledgling Watermill Theatre, Bagnor on 10 September 1966 (the Watermill had only just been converted and would not produce its first professional season of theatre until the following year, in 1967). Billed as “Unit Delta Plus Concert of Electronic Music”, the event was a genuine

collaboration between Derbyshire, Hodgson, and Zinovieff and the Light/Sound Workshop. Correspondence between Michael Leonard and Unit Delta Plus reveals that considerable thought was given to how the sound and images should interact, and Leonard met with Derbyshire to discuss possible approaches to the relationship between the sound and light projections at the event. This relationship was founded on variations of four basic patterns: sound with image; sound or image alone; no projected sound and image. Within those basic configurations, there was the scope for more nuanced and complex interactions, including visual and audio fading, the movement of images in relation to sound, and shifts in both audio-visual intensity and the location of the audio through the placement of speakers (Fig. 6).

Leonard suggested that the voices in the programmed 15-minute extract from *Amor Dei* (1964), Derbyshire's acclaimed 45-minute collaboration with the dramatist Barry Bermange, in which a poetic collage of the voices of everyday people discussing their feelings about God were set to Derbyshire's ambient transformations of a chorister singing, could come from all points around the audience with each voice from a different speaker. Although that proposal would be too difficult to achieve given the amount of voices in the piece and the way it was mixed and recorded, there are notes in Derbyshire's archive on when to fade up certain speakers with the most complex arrangements for *Amor Dei*, and simpler instructions for Zinovieff's *Tarantella* (1966) and her *Moogies Bloogies* (1966). Derbyshire was pivotal in the event's development, securing permission to use an extract from *Amor Dei* for "a non-profit-making concert of electronic music, to be given before an invited audience at a private theatre" that "I am organising."²⁷ In addition to featuring existing and solo works by Derbyshire (*Pot Pourri* from 1966, as well as *Amor Dei* and *Moogies Bloogies*), Zinovieff, and Hodgson, the concert also included a new three-part 20-minute piece, *Random Together 1*, by Zinovieff and Derbyshire. The first and last parts of the piece were "composed with light projection in mind", whereas the central section was played without visual accompaniment as it was "musically self-sufficient".²⁸ The projections were abstract in nature and, as Brian Hodgson recalls, took the form of slowly moving coloured oils, oozing around "like a flattened, multi-coloured lava lamp".²⁹ This was a significant event, pre-dating some of the more prominent concerts of electronic music held in Britain in 1968 and, according to Hodgson, it was very successful.³⁰ The distinctive addition here was the visual interaction. As well as the projections from Hornsey College's Light/Sound Workshop, the hour-long interval gave attendees the opportunity to explore an exhibition of paintings by Zinovieff's five-year-old daughter, Sofka, and a moving electro-magnetic sculpture by Takis, who had begun to develop his *sculptures musicales* in the previous year and had exhibited his electro-musical relief at the Indica Gallery in London, in the same year as the Bagnor concert—1966.

Unit Delta Plus followed the Bagnor concert with their participation in another event bringing together sound and light projections: the Million Volt Light and Sound Rave, held at the Roundhouse in London on two nights in late January and early February 1967. This particular happening has acquired legendary status through the involvement of the Beatles and their *Carnival of Light* piece, which has still to receive an official release, having been vetoed by surviving members of the group, despite Paul McCartney's wish to put the recording out. There is little documentation confirming the full extent of Derbyshire's involvement at the event and how the Unit Delta Plus material might have interacted with the visuals. For Brian Hodgson,

As usual in those days it was complete chaos no one really knowing what was going on lots of noise and people milling about we eventually found someone to take charge of [Paul McCartney's] tape and after a few minutes we left and went to the pub. I have no recollection of whatever, if anything, was played from Delia or Unit Delta Plus. ³¹

Far better documented is Derbyshire's contribution to the K4: Kinetic Four Dimensional immersive environments that were installed on the West Pier as part of the first edition of the Brighton Festival, across 14–30 April 1967. These "kinetic/audio/visual environments", incorporating the mechanical sculptures of Bruce Lacey and music of Pink Floyd, were instigated by the Light/Sound Workshop. Four distinct environments were outlined by Clive Latimer in November 1966: Kinetic Arena, Kinetic Labyrinth, The Dream Machine, and Balloon Structures (aerial structures of helium-filled balloons, which were to be tethered over the pier and floodlit at night). Kinetic Arena was designed to be a large-scale social space for dancing with thirty loudspeakers providing a sense of surround sound and continuously developing moving images projected onto a white elliptical cyclorama. Conversely, Kinetic Labyrinth was intended to be "a more enclosed and personal experience". ³² The Labyrinth was to showcase the work of British and international kinetic artists, with an emphasis on generating a contemplative mood through colours and images being projected onto Perspex walls with sonic accompaniment, shifting to pulses of light, strong colour, and a sense of "illusion and disorientation". ³³ The Dream Machine was intended to provide an even more intimate experience, aimed at the solitary individual with the emphasis on fantasies and creating in the subject a sense of being immersed within the image. Building on their earlier work together, Michael Leonard wrote to Derbyshire on 13 December 1966 to confirm that the project was going ahead and that the LSW would require at

least half an hour of electronic sound from Derbyshire with individual pieces structured to the requirements of the programme, ranging from 3 to 10 minutes in duration. ³⁴

Derbyshire's audio archive at the University of Manchester contains two tapes with labels referring to the Brighton Festival event: one is labelled "Extracts from Brighton Festival" and runs for just under 4 minutes and the second is labelled "2 Bands—Labyrynth, Beachcomber for Brighton Festival 1967" and contains two cues running for just under 8 minutes and 8 minutes 30 seconds, respectively. The majority of these cues for the K4 environments comprised collages, re-edits, and transformations of some of Derbyshire's existing work segueing into fresh configurations but there is original material as well. "Labyrynth" (which is spelled "Labyrinth" elsewhere in Derbyshire's archive) is an extended edit of the ambient backgrounds from the "underwater" movement of *The Dreams* (1964), the first of the four *Inventions for Radio* that Derbyshire collaborated on with Barry Bermange, in which members of the public discussed their dream experiences, including dreams of drowning or being submerged beneath the waves. This material would be re-edited again by Derbyshire into *The Delian Mode*, running at 5 minutes 38 seconds and released on record in 1968. The mood is sombre, spacious, and haunting, with slowly undulating drones interrupted by pools of metallic sound, evocative of muted depth charges, with sounds generated from the bell-like tones of a metal lampshade. It is not clear from Derbyshire's notes which of the K4 environments each cue was intended for but there are clear parallels (beyond the obvious shared name) between the contemplative mood described by Latimer in Kinetic Labyrinth and the sonic properties of Derbyshire's cue "Labyrynth".

If "Labyrynth" was a relatively uncomplicated extension of her existing material, "Beachcomber" is a far more dynamic reinvention of some of Derbyshire's earlier work, combined with new elements. The cue makes substantial use of familiar rhythmic passages that feature in *Pot au Feu* and *Way Out*, specifically the percussive, clicking "clip-clop" rhythms and bass pulse, but repeatedly alters their speed and pitch so that the familiar material is often difficult to discern: in some instances, the pitch and speed of the material has been changed so much that the clicking rhythms sound like a chorus of tropical frogs and cicadas giving the piece a throbbing, organic quality. After an opening sequence of the percussive material gradually increasing in pitch until it takes on its recognisable form, the melody from *Way Out*, sourced from a sine wave oscillator, is introduced before the piece seguees into further transformations of the percussive material, combined with waves of white noise that subside into a more spacious, floating sequence accompanied by rising and falling phrases of surf guitar and simulated waves. The final stages of the cue transition into material from *Moogies Bloogies* and *Way Out* segueing together in fresh

configurations. The cue as a whole is an excellent example of Derbyshire's ability to re-work her "back catalogue" of sound sources and isolated elements from her existing creations into distinctive new forms that relate to their context—in this instance, Derbyshire responds playfully to the seaside setting of the K4 environments on the West Pier with a coastal soundscape that takes the listener to a fantasy beach and electroacoustic Everglades beyond the immediate locale (Fig. 7).

[mul]

This re-purposing of existing material was true of Derbyshire's final collaboration with Leonard, *The Coloured Wall* at the Association of Electrical Engineers Exhibition at Earls Court, which opened in late March 1968 (and featured, again, elements from *Moogies Bloogies* and *Way Out* as well as her special sound for Ron Grainer's musical *On the Level* [1966] and the film *Work is a Four Letter Word* [1968]). By now, Unit Delta Plus had folded and Derbyshire's freelance activity was done through Kaleidophon. The Light/Sound Workshop would soon be at an end as well. Clive Latimer was expelled from his post at Hornsey College of Art after he supported the student uprisings of May 1968.³⁵ The 1960s closed with Derbyshire having generated considerable experience from collaborating with and advising visual artists interested in the possibilities of electronic sound and music. Although the following decade would bring major changes in the nature of her creative activity, her interest in and involvement with visual art would continue as a crucial and rewarding aspect of her life.

Free as a White Bird: Collaborations with Stansfield/Hooykaas

If the collaboration with Hornsey College of Art's Light/Sound Workshop was the most significant that Delia Derbyshire had with visual artists in the 1960s, then her most important collaboration in the 1970s was with Stansfield/Hooykaas. Working initially under the title "White Bird", Stansfield/Hooykaas was the collective name for the Scottish artist Elsa Stansfield and the Dutch artist Madelon Hooykaas. The two first met in London in 1966 but began their lengthy collaboration in 1972. Over the course of the following thirty years, Stansfield/Hooykaas would create a rich body of work that integrated aspects of art and science with a particular interest in time and memory. Training as visual artists (painting; and drawing and photography, respectively), their initial collaborative projects were in film but, in the mid-1970s, they transferred their attention to video and gallery installation pieces, being among the first European artists to have videos exhibited in gallery spaces. Starting with *What's it to You?*, exhibited at Glasgow's Third Eye Centre in 1975, Stansfield and Hooykaas helped, as Malcolm Dickson asserts, "to define the expanded area of video installation".³⁶ They collaborated with Derbyshire on two films, *Een van die dagen* (*One of These*

Days) in 1973 and *Overbruggen (About Bridges)* 1975, but Derbyshire's influence would remain a tangible presence in many of their video and installation works into the 1980s and beyond.

Derbyshire had already worked with Stansfield on the award-winning art film *Circle of Light* (1972). Directed by Anthony Roland, the film shimmers and drifts through the luminous and haunting photography of Pamela Bone: uncanny evocations of beaches, marshland, forests, and sunsets. With the exception of a brief introduction from Bone, the film is wordless, set to a slowly shifting soundscape of natural, elemental sounds and animal calls, blended with Derbyshire's music at its characteristic ambient best. Derbyshire re-purposes some of her favourite material (the resonances of her beloved metal lampshade, heard most famously in her piece *Blue Veils and Golden Sands* from an episode of the factual series *The World About Us* broadcast in 1968 on the Tuareg nomads in the Sahara) but integrates new elements as well into a sensitively crafted whole. The film won first prize at the Cork International Festival with subsequent screenings around the world. The sound is credited to both Stansfield and Derbyshire; Hooykaas has confirmed that Stansfield was responsible for the vast majority of the recordings of natural sound, but a precise account of who was responsible for what and how Stansfield and Derbyshire collaborated is impossible to determine from the available evidence.³⁷

That positive experience resulted in Derbyshire being commissioned by Stansfield and Hooykaas for their first full collaborative film, *One of These Days*. Stansfield was now established at her new studio facility—8, 9 and 10—named after its location in Neal's Yard, Covent Garden above the market. The space was converted and equipped for editing as well as animation and it was here that Brian Hodgson founded Electrophon, after he left the Radiophonic Workshop in 1972. Derbyshire completed the music for both *One of These Days* and *About Bridges* at the Electrophon facility, the second project being undertaken after she had left the BBC in 1973. *One of These Days* was shot in Amsterdam and Rotterdam during October 1972 and Derbyshire was involved from an early stage of the production. Hooykaas and Stansfield were keen to avoid the usual practice of handing a completed film over to the composer and invited Derbyshire to attend the shooting in Holland, so that she could become fully immersed in the aims of the project.

Of the two films, there is a more heightened sense of tension and dialogue between Derbyshire's music and the film's images and narrative content in *One of These Days*. The 30-minute film is a portrait of the artist Marte Röling. We follow Röling through her bohemian lifestyle with her friends, see her at work, planning to paint a ship with multiple images of mouths, contemplating her appearance, her life, how she will be in old age and adopting children as she travels around and between Amsterdam and Rotterdam, combined with

the voices of other people on different aspects of life and death. The film takes what Hooykaas describes as a “tongue in cheek” and somewhat critical approach to Röling and that comes across most potently in the contrast between what we see, Röling’s words and Derbyshire’s music.³⁸ Much of Derbyshire’s score is founded on the repetition and augmentation of specific words, underlining her fondness for the human voice as a sound source to be transformed: “mouth”, “dream”, and “beautiful” often appear to undermine Röling’s views or suggest a self-absorbed nature. Early in the film, we see Röling eating and drinking with friends after a party, as she discusses in voice-over her plans to paint and various relationships, but the sincerity of her plans and comments on her friendships are offset by Derbyshire’s incessant, hypnotic repetition of “dream.”

One of the most striking passages of the film, in terms of audio-visual tension, is a near 4-minute sequence of Röling travelling by train. As she reflects on how she is curious to know what she will be like in old age, Derbyshire’s rapid oscillations rise in pitch to create the impression of time running out, hurtling Röling towards oblivion (Fig. 8).

[mul]

About Bridges combines melancholic treated trumpet phrases with child-like nursery rhyme melodies played by a synthesiser. In both films, Derbyshire creates fresh material without revisiting sounds from earlier projects, almost certainly a result of being brought into each production at an early stage and, in the case of *About Bridges*, being free of any BBC commitments. For Derbyshire, the collaboration was especially rewarding and, as her partner Clive Blackburn acknowledged, she loved working with Hooykaas and Stansfield.³⁹

One of These Days and *About Bridges* were screened on Dutch television and at international festivals, in cities including Toronto, New York, Grenoble, and Rotterdam. But Stansfield and Hooykaas were frustrated at the limited exposure their work was receiving and the high cost of film-making. Instead, they “much preferred to see our work shown in a visual arts context. By making our own exhibitions and being present there, we hoped for a more immediate, personal response.”⁴⁰ In 1975, Stansfield/Hooykaas began making videos to be presented and installed in galleries and site-specific environments. The lower costs of video production meant that it was difficult to commission original scores, so Elsa Stansfield instead created the soundtrack for many of these video pieces. Nevertheless, Derbyshire’s presence is clearly audible in much of this work. In fact, *Labyrinth of Lines* (1978) uses direct samples from Derbyshire’s score for *One of These Days*, but on video works such as *See Through Lines* (1977), *Running Time* (1979), *Transitions* (1979), *Two Sides of the Story* (1981), *Vi Deo Volente* (1985), and

Point in Time (1987) there is a recognisable “Delian” aesthetic in play: sustained drones and rhythmic sequences or ambiances generated from looped and augmented everyday sound sources.

If Elsa Stansfield was responsible for the “natural” sound in the earlier films with Derbyshire, these later works often find her creating and manipulating found sound as Derbyshire did (e.g. electricity pylons in the case of *Point in Time* or a looped and treated heartbeat in *Running Time*).⁴¹ As Hooykaas acknowledged, “I’m sure they influenced each other—I learnt myself a lot from Elsa and probably also from Delia about sound because now I’m making my own soundtracks ... people like [John] Cage ... [and] Delia have influenced me enormously.”⁴² This exchange of ideas, knowledge, skills, and techniques—a dialogue furthered by Derbyshire and Stansfield working alongside each other in the same facility at 8, 9 and 10—is consistent with Freida Abtan’s observations about the importance of “community-building and skills-sharing practices to help women engage with electronic music culture,” which has otherwise privileged male inclusion and success.⁴³ Instead of emphasising the lone, exceptional genius, Derbyshire’s collaborations, taking in her work with the Light/Sound Workshop, are an example of Brian Eno’s concept of “scenius”, which places the emphasis instead on “the creative intelligence of a community” with the innovations of individuals dependent on an “active flourishing cultural scene”.⁴⁴ Hooykaas’ deep interest in Zen Buddhism (she spent time in a Japanese monastery prior to her partnership with Stansfield) finds parallels in Derbyshire’s predilection for meditative, trance-like ambient passages and rhythmic loops, often sculpted from the sound of everyday objects and elements. In doing so, Derbyshire’s approach to much of her music was a clear kindred spirit for the future video/work of Stansfield/Hooykaas. Janneke Wesseling identifies the commitment of Stansfield/Hooykaas to the principle that:

Being one with nature means being one with the wind, with the ebb and flow of the tide and with the changing seasons. But Stansfield/Hooykaas are also fascinated with other, invisible forces of nature such as magnetic fields, radio waves and electricity. In their work they show how everything that exists is intertwined. Everything, from a rock to a rose, is animated with movement and change.⁴⁵

That ethos is present in Derbyshire’s love of the music in the sounds around or within us, whether that was a knock on the door, a clap of thunder, a metal lampshade, or one’s own voice and breath.

Cumbria and Beyond the Radiophonic

By the time *About Bridges* was released in 1975, Derbyshire had long since left London and relocated to the north of England, near the border between Cumbria and Northumberland, but her contact and creative interaction with Elsa Stansfield and Madelon Hooykaas was far from over. She was employed initially as a radio operator for Laing's gas pipeline, liaising with French personnel in a major pipe laying operation, and it is generally from this point on that the standard accounts of her life tend to assert that she was no longer active as a musician. Her creative activity, however, would resume in a professional capacity when she assisted the Chinese artist Li Yuan-chia at his LYC Museum & Art Gallery. This was no conventional museum or gallery. The range and influence of Li Yuan-chia's visionary practice and philosophy has escaped the attention of many accounts of late twentieth-century art history. As Diana Yeh surmises, Li's "extraordinarily eclectic art practice", running across painting, sculpture, poetry, calligraphy, and videography, has proven difficult to place and categorise.⁴⁶ For Guy Brett, "the fact that Li Yuan-chia has been missed by the art establishments of so many countries suggests that they have no instruments fine enough to detect a journey [and influence]" that was otherwise known to many people and had a considerable and lasting influence.⁴⁷ The ultimate expression of Li's thought and practice was the LYC Museum & Art Gallery. Li founded the LYC in 1972, buying and renovating a run-down farmhouse from the artist Winifred Nicholson and transforming it into a remarkable community arts space complete with a children's room, print room, library, and space for visiting artists to stay and exhibit their work. All of this took place in the hamlet of Banks, right beside the line of Hadrian's Wall and the LYC remained open until 1982 (Figs. [9](#), [10](#), and [11](#)).



Figure 7.

The LYC Museum & Art Gallery, 11 August 2016, photograph. Digital image courtesy of David Butler.



Figure 8.

Li Yuan-chia at the entrance to the LYC Museum & Art Gallery meeting Edinburgh Arts participants, 17 July 1976, photograph. Collection of the Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee (A.6B.036). Digital image courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee.



Figure 9.

The LYC Museum & Art Gallery sign, 11 August 2016, photograph. Digital image courtesy of David Butler.

Derbyshire was living in the nearby village of Gilsland, where she had married David Hunter, a local labourer, in the hope of being accepted by the rural community, where she was conscious of her outsider status. The marriage was not a happy one. Instead, Derbyshire was drawn to the artistic vibrancy of the LYC, where she worked across 1976 and 1977 for little money but could stay for free.⁴⁸ *The Times* had printed a feature on the LYC in 1974 and observed that Li needed “help in running the museum, and he desperately needs an assistant to take some of the load off his own back.”⁴⁹ Staying at the LYC, Derbyshire gave Li crucial support in running the Museum and Gallery. According to her future partner, Clive Blackburn, “Delia loved [the LYC] because of all the visiting artists and sculptors ... she used to spend ages talking with them ... she loved mixing with any sort of creative people really not just in the music field.”⁵⁰ Her role was primarily to help arrange exhibitions, liaise with the artists, and entertain them during their stay. In this respect, Derbyshire was drawing on her existing organisational skills—she had managed the Radiophonic Workshop when Desmond Briscoe went on leave and had experience of organising complex artistic events as demonstrated by the Unit Delta Plus concert at the Watermill.

In the 1977 season overseen by Derbyshire, the LYC exhibited the work of Winifred Nicholson, Charlie Brown and Eddie O’Donnelly, Nanea Bell, Thetis Blacker, Alex Fraser, David Trubridge, Elizabeth Tate, Antoinette Wijnberg, Niek Welboren, Jim Gavin, Ralph Bell, David Johnstone, and Syl Macro, as well

as Li Yuan-chia himself and Derbyshire's friends and former collaborators Madelon Hooykaas and Elsa Stansfield, who visited Derbyshire on several occasions during her time in Cumbria. This was not exactly a remote, isolated existence. Banks is close to the main road—the A69—between the cities of Newcastle and Carlisle and the rural soundscape with the Pennines to the south and Lakeland fells to the south-west would be interrupted intermittently by the nearby train line or, as Guy Brett notes, “the terrifying scream of low-flying fighter jets, emanating from the RAF base at Leeming.”

⁵¹ Numerous visitors would pass through Banks on their way to and from Hadrian's Wall, whether or not the LYC was their planned destination—around 30,000 a year at the height of the LYC's success. Neither was Derbyshire's life devoid of music during her time in Cumbria. According to Clive Blackburn, she still possessed two pianos, her much-loved spinet (which provided what Blackburn describes as a form of therapy as Derbyshire delighted in playing the instrument loudly so that she could “drown” in its sound), an electric organ, and VCS3 synthesiser. ⁵²

At the LYC, Li Yuan-chia would have been another kindred spirit in his openness to the integration of different forms of expression and the music of everyday objects. Guy Brett, who had assisted Derbyshire and Zinovieff with borrowing work by Takis for the 1966 Watermill event, notes how Li “had a dream of how ‘painting, sculpture, architecture, environment, poetry, photography, embroidery, touch, sound, and so on’ might be combined in a kind of creative explosion participated in by everyone,” ⁵³ and this vivid description could be applied easily to Derbyshire's experiments with the Light/Sound Workshop. Given that shared interest, it is hard to imagine that Li and Derbyshire did not discuss the possibilities of bringing music, sound, and visual art together. There is no conclusive evidence, however, which points to any concrete results of creative dialogue between the two. Li's archive, also housed at the John Rylands library, includes a 45-minute cassette from the 1980s titled *Time Toy No. 1 Symphony*, which is an untreated recording of the clock mechanisms and chimes in several of Li's reliefs. Derbyshire had created cues for various projects using the sound of clocks and simulated mechanical workings (*The Tower* [1964], for example, uses the sound of the clock mechanism inside Big Ben and much of her work for *On the Level* simulates the sound of machine rhythms). There is no sonic manipulation at work in *Time Toy No. 1 Symphony* and it is difficult to hear any overt trace of Derbyshire's influence in the recording beyond a mutual interest in the potential of everyday objects to create music.

Derbyshire might not have been involved with any new projects as a musician during her time in Cumbria but she remained, as Brian Hodgson reflected, “fascinated by the act of creation” and her work at the LYC required her to be creatively and artistically engaged. ⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the years that

she lived and worked in Cumbria were not easy for her.⁵⁵ She clearly connected with the region—in 1977, she wrote to Desmond Briscoe congratulating him on his recent radio feature *A Wall Walks Slowly: The Sound of Cumbria*, which provided a portrait of Cumbria through the poems of Norman Nicholson and the words of the Cumbrian people with the result being, as she said “effortless and extremely evocative—curlews and rainbows and the music of local voices—perfect for early on a Sunday evening.”⁵⁶ Yet this was also a time of uncertainty for Derbyshire. The Li Yuan-chia Archive at the John Rylands Library contains a book, gifted to Derbyshire in December 1976 from Madelon Hooykaas, with Hooykaas providing an inscription that is revealing of some of Derbyshire’s prevailing concerns: “Freedom isn’t doing what you like, but liking what you do.” By 1978, Derbyshire had returned to London and, having met Clive Blackburn, she would move to Northampton with him in 1980, leaving her cat, “Horribles”, with Li Yuan-chia. Relocating to Northampton enabled her to be close enough to meet with friends in London and also make visits to her mother in Coventry. For Hodgson, Derbyshire’s relationship with Blackburn meant that “probably for the first time, she found happiness and settled into what, for her, was a normal existence.”⁵⁷

She continued to be interested in music and, contrary to the vast majority of reports about her post-BBC creative activity, still took on the occasional project. In the late 1970s, she collaborated with the Polish artist Elisabeth Kozmian on her “experimental documentary” *Two Houses* (1980), having been recommended and introduced to Kozmian by Madelon Hooykaas and Elsa Stansfield at their docklands studio in London. Kozmian was fascinated by Derbyshire: “a cheerful majestic figure”.⁵⁸ Following the creation of a trial draft theme at a recording studio in London, Kozmian commissioned Derbyshire. The result was a wholly original and lyrical score for piano. The film was funded by the Arts Council and consists of a series of re-photographed colour slides, seen variously in negative and colour, and the voice-overs of the owners of two houses in the process of renovating their respective new homes in Kentish Town, North London. There is, for Kozmian, an emphasis on decay and Jungian notions of the house as a symbol for the Self, with the process of renovation likened to the process of working on and renewing one’s own Self.⁵⁹ That sense of restoration from decay is conveyed in the ascending flourishes of Derbyshire’s opening cue, a sense of (re)awakening, furthered by the nature of the sound of the piano—this is not a pristine sound but something old and neglected returning to life ([Fig. 12](#)).

[mul]

It is tempting to consider connections between the film's subject matter, thematic concerns, and Derbyshire's own life at that time, having recently returned to London from Cumbria. Certainly there is a feeling of new beginnings in Derbyshire's score. Kozmian was delighted with the music and sense of "quiet continuous action" it gave to the film, although it is far from ever present.⁶⁰ *Two Houses* was screened at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London and at various other one-off events but Derbyshire's involvement was little known and unreported in accounts of her work until a remastered edition of the film, facilitated by the author and Mark Ayres, was screened at Manchester's HOME in 2016 and BFI Southbank in 2017 as part of events celebrating Derbyshire's film collaborations with visual artists.

[mul]*Two Houses* finds Derbyshire active as a composer and collaborating on a project over six years after her assumed withdrawal from creative activity. In 1980, Kozmian discussed with Derbyshire a second film project, *Clothes*, but this was never realised beyond a single 90-second demo cue. The two met in a London recording studio, where Kozmian sang an old Polish folk song that provided the inspiration for Derbyshire's cue: a gentle synthesised wordless lullaby with a sense of the sacred (not dissimilar to the tone of much of Derbyshire's score for *Amor Dei*). Kozmian recalled a man "recording and playing with that singing electronically", which suggests that Derbyshire might have employed a vocoder to create the finished effect.⁶¹ Whatever the instrument, the cue provides a tantalising glimpse of what might have been in the project with Derbyshire utilising a form of technology she had not used before (Fig. 13).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Derbyshire was approached to participate in various projects with her usual response being to say "no I'm not working anymore"—but there were exceptions.⁶² Clive Blackburn recalls her working at Adrian Wagner's studio, which gave her access to equipment she needed, where she created the title music for a factual programme about Stonehenge.⁶³ Privately, she and Blackburn worked on and recorded some songs for their own interest and pleasure but these were never released and that is, perhaps, the way they should remain, which might frustrate the completist impulse shared by many fans, collectors, and academics (this one included!).

It is all too easy, as we have seen, to characterise this lengthy period of Derbyshire's life as one of failure and defeat, unfulfilled potential and "hopeless" waste. To do so, however, is to deny Derbyshire any agency in her decisions to not release private material, turn down requests to compose or leave the BBC, and explore rewarding and meaningful alternatives in her life that do not correspond with assumptions about what a successful artist should be. None of this is to deny or diminish the difficulties that she faced at this time, including her dependency on alcohol and turbulent marriage to

David Hunter. There is a danger, though, which Frances Morgan articulates, in projecting, however well-intentioned, masculinist narratives onto Derbyshire, in this case as “a vulnerable figure lost to history, not least in the insistence that she has needed rescuing or rehabilitating from historical neglect ... and casts her as dependent on the heroic efforts of her rescuers.”

⁶⁴ Derbyshire’s departure from the BBC was an act of self-preservation and the years in Cumbria show her displaying her characteristic resourcefulness rather than needing rescue. Far from undertaking “a series of unsuitable jobs”, she was much admired among her colleagues for her work as a radio operator and her role at the LYC Museum & Art Gallery built directly from her love of and involvement with visual art, as well as her substantial experience in event and studio management. Derbyshire was part of a network of shared conversations and interests that ran through her activity as a BBC employee and freelance practitioner in the 1960s and early 1970s, and continued through her work with Madelon Hooykaas and Elsa Stansfield, as well as her time at the LYC. This way of thinking about Derbyshire complicates the “heroic pioneer” and “exceptional lone female narrative”, which has been critiqued by, among others, Tara Rodgers and Frances Morgan for presenting women as isolated points and sidelining “other networks, collaborations, grassroots feminist activities, and the presence of lesser known figures”. ⁶⁵ In Derbyshire’s case, it is a network that reaches across different forms of practice with Derbyshire’s creativity manifesting in unexpected ways.

Her life, career, output, and influence was complex and more diverse and significant than we have assumed, taking in experiments in the audio-visual relationship and ground-breaking figures in video art as well as her more familiar achievements in electronic music. Delia Derbyshire continues to surprise and confound easy categorisation but that is something to be celebrated, however problematic it might be for neat overviews and headlines about her body of work—her example is a reminder of the need for more nuanced narratives that are equal to the collage of challenges, the often sudden disruptions, delights, departures, and mysteries that form the cut and spliced nature of our lives.

Footnotes

- ¹ “ADS Demo (YAMCO)”, DD180, Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library.
- ² For a more extensive discussion of the impact and reception of Derbyshire’s work in the 1960s, see David Butler, “‘Way Out—Of This World!’ Delia Derbyshire, *Doctor Who* and the British Public’s Awareness of Electronic Music in the 1960s”, *Critical Studies in Television* 9, no. 1 (2014): 62–76.
- ³ Caroline Oakes (ed.), *Festival of the City of London: Festival Programme* (London: Westerham Press, 1970), 15.
- ⁴ The reasons for Derbyshire’s departure from the BBC have been addressed in works such as Martyn Wade’s 2002 BBC Radio 4 play *Blue Veils and Golden Sands* or Noctium Theatre’s 2017 stage play *Hymns for Robots*. For Clive Blackburn, Derbyshire’s partner from 1980 until her death in 2001, “I think she was burnt out and needed some time off ... I think she was doing too much—at the same time at the BBC she was working at Kaleidophon virtually not getting any sleep—working for the BBC during the day and at Kaleidophon all night—I think that’s how she got addicted to alcohol.” Clive Blackburn, interviewed by the author, 15 March 2018.

- 5 Brian Hodgson has identified the problematic production of *Tutankhamun's Egypt* as marking the real beginning of Derbyshire's "disintegration". This thirteen-part factual series was one of the last major projects that Derbyshire worked on at the BBC, with the first episode being broadcast in April 1972. According to Hodgson, Derbyshire began the project enthusiastically and had mapped out her concept for the full series but the production schedule was changed late in the day with the transmission order of the respective instalments being swapped, resulting in Derbyshire still working on rescheduled episodes as they were being dubbed—"that's when she really started withdrawing from everything" and that in general "the pressures of the deadlines were becoming more and more and she hated pressure." Brian Hodgson, interviewed by the author, 12 August 2015.
- 6 John Cavanagh, "Delia Derbyshire: On Our Wavelength", *Boazine* 7 (1998), http://www.delia-derbyshire.org/interview_boa.php.
- 7 Sonic Boom (Peter Kember), "Delia Derbyshire Interview", *Surface*, May 2000, http://delia-derbyshire.org/interview_surface.php
- 8 Hodgson interview, 12 August 2015.
- 9 According to Hodgson, Derbyshire's role on *The Legend of Hell House* was "confined to having dinner and standing around taking snuff". Hodgson interview, 12 August 2015.
- 10 Bob Stanley, "Hit & Myth", *The Times*, 28 November 2003.
- 11 Jo Hutton, "Derbyshire, Delia", *Grove Music Online* (2008), doi:10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.2061642.
- 12 H.J. Spencer, "Derbyshire, Delia Ann", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2005), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/76027.
- 13 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delia_Derbyshire.
- 14 Louis Niebur, *Special Sound: The Creation and Legacy of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 142.
- 15 Teresa Winter, "Delia Derbyshire Sound and Music for the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, 1962-1973" (PhD diss., University of York, 2015), 17.
- 16 Frances Morgan, "Delian Modes: Listening for Delia Derbyshire in Histories of Electronic Dance Music", *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture* 9, no. 1 (2017), 10.
- 17 Hodgson interview, 12 August 2015.
- 18 Jenkins, "Delia Derbyshire, Producer of Doctor Who Theme Music, has Legacy Restored".
- 19 Kate Dorney and Maggie B. Gale (eds), "Vivien Leigh, Actress and Icon: Introduction", in Kate Dorney and Maggie B. Gale (eds), *Vivien Leigh: Actress and Icon* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 4.
- 20 For a more detailed discussion of the techniques employed by Derbyshire in the creation of her music, see Niebur, *Special Sound*; James Percival, "Delia Derbyshire's Creative Process". MA dissertation, University of Manchester, 2013; and Winter, "Delia Derbyshire Sound and Music for the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, 1962-1973".
- 21 Sonic Boom, "Delia Derbyshire Interview".
- 22 Anonymous, "The Electronic Music Makers", *Ariel*, 21 January 1972, BBC Written Archives Centre, WAC R97/25/1, Radiophonic Workshop Scrapbooks.
- 23 Typescript information sheet from Hornsey College of Art's Advanced Studies Group, led by Clive Latimer and Michael Leonard, re Light/Sound Workshop techniques for moving image sequences, Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library, DDA/1/1/6/5/9.
- 24 Derek Lamb to Desmond Briscoe, 26 September 1966, BBC Written Archives Centre, WAC R97/29/1 Radiophonic Workshop External Correspondence.
- 25 Michael Leonard to Desmond Briscoe, 19 May 1965, BBC Written Archives Centre, WAC R97/29/1 Radiophonic Workshop External Correspondence.
- 26 Leonard to Briscoe, 19 May 1965.
- 27 Delia Derbyshire to A.H.C.P. Ops, 17 August 1966, Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library, DDA/1/1/6/5/4.
- 28 Programme notes for Concert of Electronic Music by Unit Delta Plus at Watermill Theatre, Bagnor, 10 September 1966, Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library, DDA/1/1/6/2.
- 29 Brian Hodgson, email correspondence with the author, 6 April 2018.
- 30 Hodgson email, 6 April 2018.
- 31 Hodgson email, 6 April 2018. Hodgson recalls that: "An unlabelled tape arrived at Maida Vale for Delia from Paul [McCartney] just before the event. It was unleaded with no indication of direction of play (BBC tapes were always front out but generally commercial studios were end out) quick listen proved inconclusive and we set off for the roundhouse."
- 32 Clive Latimer, "K.4 Kinetic Four Dimensional", typescript information sheet from Hornsey College of Art Advanced Studies Group, 10 November 1966, Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library, DDA/1/1/5/12/1.
- 33 Latimer, "K.4 Kinetic Four Dimensional".
- 34 Michael Leonard, letter to Delia Derbyshire, 13 December 1966, Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library, DDA/1/1/5/12/2.

- 35 See Anna Kontopoulou, "Young Contemporaries 1968: The Hornsey College Light/Sound Workshop", LUX (2011), <https://lux.org.uk/writing/young-contemporaries-1968-hornsey-light-sound-workshop>.
- 36 Malcolm Dickson, "Everything is Round: The Video Environments of Stansfield/Hooykaas", in Madelon Hooykaas and Claire van Putten (eds), *Revealing the Invisible: The Art of Stansfield/Hooykaas from Different Perspectives* (Amsterdam: De Buitenkant, 2010), 145.
- 37 Madelon Hooykaas, interviewed by the author, 6 March 2018.
- 38 Hooykaas interview, 6 March 2018.
- 39 Blackburn interview, 15 March 2018.
- 40 Madelon Hooykaas, "Chance Meeting: On my Collaboration with Elsa Stansfield", in Madelon Hooykaas and Claire van Putten (eds), *Revealing the Invisible: The Art of Stansfield/Hooykaas from Different Perspectives* (Amsterdam: De Buitenkant, 2010), 37.
- 41 Brief extracts of these two video pieces and their corresponding soundtracks by Elsa Stansfield are available at: <http://www.li-ma.nl/site/catalogue/art/stansfield-hooykaas/running-time/7148>; and <http://www.li-ma.nl/site/catalogue/art/stansfield-hooykaas/point-in-time/2095>.
- 42 Hooykaas interview, 6 March 2018.
- 43 Freida Abtan, "Where is She? Finding the Women in Electronic Music Culture", *Contemporary Music Review* 35, no. 1 (2016): 58.
- 44 Justin Kingsley, "Brian Eno Message—Don't Get a Job", Newiew Project (2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-53tzx69fM>.
- 45 Janneke Wesseling, "Re:vision: The Experience of Nature, Time and the Unforeseen", in Madelon Hooykaas and Claire van Putten (eds), *Revealing the Invisible: The Art of Stansfield/Hooykaas from Different Perspectives* (Amsterdam: De Buitenkant, 2010), 105.
- 46 Sarah Reeve, "Li Yuan-chia's Art Retrospective Comes to London", *Asia Times* (2016), <http://www.atimes.com/li-yuan-chia-retrospective-comes-london/>.
- 47 Guy Brett, "Space-Life-Time", in Guy Brett and Nick Sawyer (eds), *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What is Not Said Yet* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2000), 11.
- 48 The exact nature of Derbyshire's relationship with Li is unclear. Andy Christian's autobiographical account of his visits to the LYC in the 1970s states that "a relationship began" when Derbyshire moved in with Li in 1976 but other friends of the two, such as Joy Dee, have stated that although Li might have wanted a romantic relationship with Derbyshire, no such relationship developed. See Andy Christian, *In The North Wind's Breath* (The Private Press at Penny Royal, 2018), 22; Joy Dee, interview with the author, 6 March 2019.
- 49 Paul Overy, "Museum on Hadrian's Wall", in Guy Brett and Nick Sawyer (eds), *Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What is Not Said Yet* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2000), 131.
- 50 Blackburn interview, 15 March 2018.
- 51 Brett, "Space-Life-Time", 49.
- 52 Blackburn interview, 15 March 2018.
- 53 Brett, "Space-Life-Time", 43.
- 54 Brian Hodgson, "Delia Derbyshire: Pioneer of Electronic Music who Produced the Distinctive Sound of Dr Who", *The Guardian*, 7 July 2001.
- 55 One of the most affecting insights into Derbyshire's time in Cumbria is provided by the sound artist and oral historian Jenn Mattinson in her 2017 piece *Out of Place*, which was commissioned for the Delia Derbyshire Day events in 2017, marking what would have been Derbyshire's eightieth birthday. The piece makes use of interviews with two of Derbyshire's friends who knew her in Cumbria, Cath Foxtan and Joy Dee, the latter taking over from Derbyshire as Li Yuan-chia's assistant at the LYC Museum & Art Gallery. The full piece can be heard on SoundCloud at <https://soundcloud.com/user-788026861/out-of-place-delia-derbyshire-in-cumbria>.
- 56 Delia Derbyshire to Desmond Briscoe, Undated 1977, BBC Written Archives Centre, BBC WAC R97/25/2 Radiophonic Workshop Scrapbooks.
- 57 Hodgson, "Delia Derbyshire".
- 58 Elisabeth Kozmian, email correspondence with the author, 22 October 2015.
- 59 Elisabeth Kozmian, email correspondence with the author, 4 September 2013.
- 60 Kozmian email, 22 October 2015.
- 61 Elisabeth Kozmian, email correspondence with the author, 11 April 2016.
- 62 Blackburn interview, 15 March 2018.
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- 64 Morgan, "Delian Modes", 22–23.
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Delia Derbyshire: The Myths and the Legendary Tapes

Caroline Catz

Authors

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Caroline Catz is an actor, director, and writer. Her short film *Delia Derbyshire: The Myths and the Legendary Tapes* (2018) was selected for the BFI London Film Festival and the London Short Film Festival, and is now published here permanently in *British Art Studies*. In the interview that follows, she speaks with *BAS* editor Baillie Card about Derbyshire's groundbreaking electronic music compositions, the creative affinities between Derbyshire and Taiwanese-British artist Li Yuan-chia, and the ethics of biography. A discussion of Derbyshire's time at the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, and of the years after her departure in 1973, can be found in David Butler's article in this issue, "Whatever Happened to Delia Derbyshire?". For an exploration of Li Yuan-chia's LYC Museum & Art Gallery, read Hammad Nasar's article "Cumbrian Cosmopolitanisms", also in this issue.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 1.

Delia Derbyshire: The Myths and the Legendary Tapes, Digital image courtesy of Rook Films.

Interview

BAS: When did you first encounter Delia Derbyshire's work?

Caroline: The first time I encountered Delia was as a child in the 1970s, being terrified by her *Doctor Who* theme tune. I was always intrigued by the idea that so many people shared a similar memory; how could we all have known to take refuge behind the sofa after hearing the first few bars? Later on, as an adult, I imagined—was there a hidden frequency, something that tuned us into a very primal sound, terrifying perhaps, that Delia might have experienced herself?

BAS: When did you start to be aware of Derbyshire herself, as a composer and musician?

Caroline: The Dr Who soundtrack was credited to the Radiophonic Workshop, and I didn't know that Delia Derbyshire wrote the music until much later. It wasn't until the 1990s, when I heard another incredible composition by Delia from 1968 called *Blue Veils and Golden Sands*, that I became fascinated by her and wanted to discover more. Perhaps I heard it on somebody's bootleg tape or from a library record? It's a haunting piece, beautiful and melodic—a manifestation of something profound and unknowable. I was amazed when I learned about Delia's process, and that I was listening to a hand-crafted piece, like a tapestry of sound, created note by note on magnetic tape, cut and pasted together in segments. It seemed incredible that such a complex

and rich piece was made with the most basic technology. In that pre-synthesiser era, making electronic music was time-consuming and very precise. That's when I became a real fan of Delia's work.

BAS: The sense of her technical mastery has an almost mythic quality now, doesn't it? There are photos and film clips from the BBC's archives of her demonstrating the Workshop's intricate recording equipment.

Caroline: Absolutely. I'm fascinated by the mythology surrounding Delia, and there is something very romantic about those images. I have often wondered why they are so powerful. It's unusual to see photographs of women in that era absorbed in their work. It's also hard to describe without sounding critical, which I'm not, but in the years directly after her death in 2001, it seemed to me that the available information about Delia came predominantly from a male perspective. Those photographs are both wonderful images of a professional at work, and pictures of a glamorous woman using technology. I would love to know what Delia thought about them and who took the photographs.

BAS: Was an awareness of that gender disparity in perspectives on Derbyshire why you wanted to make a film about her?

Caroline: It was, but I was fascinated by her anyway—by the fact that she turned organic, everyday material into some of the earliest modern British electronic compositions. Her work plays in a majority of homes, and yet during her career she never became a household name. Around 2006, several years after she had died, I had already made two films that were music documentaries, and wanted to make something different, a fictionalisation but not a straightforward biopic. I found that the Screen Studies department at Manchester University had acquired Delia's archive, which had been given by Delia's colleague and friend Mark Ayres. It was really on visiting the archive that the idea for the film emerged.

BAS: What was your experience of doing research in the archive?

Caroline: I'd never been to an archive before. I'm not from an academic background, so I had no idea what to expect. I imagined something that was very formal, and was surprised when I was taken to a cupboard, inside of which were boxes: cereal boxes, baked bean boxes, really old tatty boxes ... basically, the contents of her attic.

And of course, what's inside are amazing amounts of personal effects and ephemera, including masses of quarter-inch tape, which David Butler had begun to digitise. There were make-up tapes for theme tunes and all her compositions for the BBC, amongst others that were private; things that no

one would have heard. Some tapes are the beginnings of pieces of music, and some are the elements. These tapestries of sound I mentioned were made by recording a single note, and then that single note would have been manipulated electronically using all kinds of mad, inventive techniques, war-time oscillators, and other improvised ways of twisting and forming new sounds. The whole ethos at the Workshop, and for Delia especially, was that they thought of a sound, and then found a way to make it.

BAS: A lot of this is recent enough history—were you able to interview Derbyshire’s colleagues from the Workshop?

Caroline: Yes, after David Butler, who was looking after Delia’s archives, I interviewed Mark Ayres, who was running the Workshop when it closed in the 1990s and had been a close friend of Delia’s. He had rescued and digitised the Workshop archives, which have massive cultural importance; now they are a part of the BBC archive, but initially they had decided to throw it all away. He’s now custodian of Delia’s estate, and is incredibly knowledgeable about her work. I also met Brian Hodgson, Delia’s close collaborator and friend at the Workshop as well as on many freelance projects. They made an avant-garde album in 1969 called *An Electric Storm* with David Vorhaus (under the collective name of White Noise), and Brian’s perspective shined a light on her many creative collaborations.

BAS: What sort of creative culture existed at the Workshop? Did they each have quite unique practices, or were things done more as a collective?

Caroline: They were basically staff at the BBC, on a payroll, and not credited for their individual work until the late 1960s. At that time, all over Europe—in Germany, France—there were state-funded places where people could compose and experiment with electronic music. Yet the only place that existed in Britain was the Radiophonic Workshop, which had been created and set up by a woman, Daphne Oran, back in 1958. There had initially been a great deal of resistance to her idea, and a sentiment that the BBC had enough musicians already, but she fought hard and they agreed to found a Workshop that would service drama, and experiment with providing soundtracks and avant-garde sound beds, initially for radio, and then television. But its employees were not allowed to refer to themselves as musicians.

Within that context, I think each member of the Workshop was very unique, and worked very individually. But Delia in particular, approached her work from the position of creating electronic compositions. There were also plenty of creative collaborations outside of their BBC work—Delia worked with other musicians on albums, and with visual artists, for example, on an installation at the first Brighton Festival in 1967 involving kinetic sculpture and light

shows. Delia, Brian Hodgson, and Peter Zinovieff had an electronic music collective called Unit Delta Plus. So, together they explored work difficult to do at the BBC.

BAS: Your film is closely focused on Derbyshire herself—she’s the only character on screen, and it really privileges her own perspective. How was her voice accessible to you, as the person playing her?

Caroline: Back in 2007/2008, when I started thinking about this project, it was difficult to find sound or video clips of Delia. Instead, I found her voice both in her written notes and in tape recordings played to me by David Butler at the archive. Delia’s notes about compositions are extensive, and you can imagine her having ten pieces of paper on a desk, doing calculations here, making notes there, using log books. You get a picture of each composition being alive and the paperwork being one stage of transmitting the sound out from her imagination.

David Butler very generously found me every bit of Delia’s voice that he could unearth on the leader tape. She’s usually just saying “this is the beginning of the tape, da da da da da” but now and again, she would say something when a recording didn’t go well and laugh. It was so endearing, and she felt present, as if she was in the room with me. I got to know her initially that way.

And then I found an interview from Radio Scotland by a brilliant journalist called John Cavanagh, done in 1997. It’s a very touching interview because they have such a rapport—you feel that she was relaxed in his company even though it was over the phone. Fragments of their interview are in the film.

BAS: You mentioned earlier not wanting to make a straightforward biopic, but there is still extensive research behind the film. Virginia Woolf described biography as “the perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow”—what relationship did you want to exist between your portrayal of Derbyshire and those archival records of her words and thoughts?

Caroline: Going through the archival material, I kept asking myself about the ethics of telling somebody else’s life story. For one thing, looking through the archive felt slightly like prying. Going through her notes, I still wonder “does she mind? Is this alright? Did she want people to know these details?” But Delia left behind so much sound—263 tapes for a start, with maybe over 200 compositions—many of which are unique, particular, beautiful pieces.

Hearing them, I realised that it was the music: that's what Delia wants us to know. That's her legacy. That became the starting point for me to approach her story in my own subjective way.

BAS: How does that subjectivity come through in the form of your film?

Caroline: The film is a hybrid, a portrait of Delia made through a mix of observation and imagination. It explores the idea that no single perspective would be sufficient to gain a true understanding of her. I like the idea of the film being a myth, adding to the myths already out there, and reflecting on who designs the myths and how much control you have once you're dead over how people interpret your artefacts and fragments. So, some of the dialogue in the film is taken from interviews with Delia, who had a very unique way of phrasing things, and some of it isn't.

And to be clear, when speaking about the research aspect of this project: it really wasn't supposed to be anything other than an experiment to see if a long-form film would work. Because I kept saying, I don't want it to be a docu-drama, or a biopic, but instead to bring together a vast array of resonant fragments and my feeling about the spaces between. The aim of this short was to begin a conversation with Delia, which is ongoing and I suspect will continue until we finish the long-form film! That's where it started to emerge—a fantasy of me meeting Delia somewhere between eras in an abandoned space. But we needed the short film as an experiment to see, would the imagery work? Will it sustain? For how long? Does it work in one space?

BAS: When you describe the film that way, I envision almost an architect's model. Something in smaller scale that articulates the form you imagine, partly to work through it and partly to bring other people on board and help them understand what it is you're trying to talk about concretely.

Caroline: Exactly, or a sketch book.

BAS: But I also love that the germ of the film was an imagined conversation between you and Derbyshire. The feeling I had overwhelmingly—watching as the film plays out within this single and relatively bare space—was that the set is a space of the mind. It's fascinating to think of that being the embodied space of your mind, and the space of hers too, within a subjective realm where her music and your film meet.

Caroline: Yes, exactly. I was trying to replace that solidity of biography with something that is perhaps a bit more lyrical. I also wanted to question how experience lives in the body, and how that experience impels a person to generate art or music which then offers that experience to the collective. There is something deep and primal about her sound, alongside its compositional complexity, and I wanted to bring a sense of that literal and figurative space where ideas play and emerge. Her own interest in psychoacoustics also pushed my thinking in this direction, towards a mental and physical space of creativity.

BAS: You've scored the film with Derbyshire's song Great Zoos of the World. Why that one?

Caroline: It connects to the film's mythic or legendary elements. The animal sounds in the piece are so authentic, and I read somewhere that Delia had brought real animals into the studio to record them. I can't imagine that she did; she definitely didn't, and I suppose she might have gone to a zoo and recorded something, but I loved the notion that people actually believed she got elephants and giraffes and exotic birds into the studio, because it certainly sounds like that's what happened, as if she were surrounded by them. It was that idea that I wanted to build into the film, because on some level they *would* have existed in the studio with her. I imagine they would have been in her mind all the time; she may have been analysing those sounds and finding ways to either record them live or to create them herself.

BAS: The narrative of the film follows Derbyshire as she joins the Workshop, and then leaves in 1973 to live and work at the LYC Museum in Cumbria. The shots of the open countryside, and its birdsong, are such a contrast to the closed interior sets used before. Why did you choose that particular narrative arc?

Caroline: I was fascinated by the mystery of why Delia left the Workshop. Partly, it connects to the history of electronic music—there was an uncomfortable but interesting two-year period when tape and synthesisers crossed over, and I think that is where difficulties arose for Delia. One of the reasons she had joined the workshop in 1962 was to experiment with tape and its manipulation, which was relatively new then. But soon after, sequencers and early synthesisers came along. Actually, it was her collaborator Peter Zinovieff, who had also been part of the Unit Delta Plus project, who created the first British synthesiser called the VCS3, which produced a lot of the otherworldly sounds used by Hawkwind, Pink Floyd, and Roxy Music. Delia loved those sounds, but would only use the VCS3 as a tool. She would generate a sound on it and record that onto magnetic tape. When those technologies progressed, synthesisers—some with keyboards attached and preset ranges of sounds—were brought into the Workshop to speed up the composing and recording process. As the laboratory environment of the

workshop gave way to becoming a service provider, Delia made a decision to eventually leave the BBC, a move which she described later in the 1990s as “self preservation”. To my mind, her time at the LYC was about seeking a sense of freedom and not wanting to sacrifice her process.

BAS: What do you think were some of the affinities between Derbyshire and Li Yuan-chia?

Caroline: Well, her work at his museum was as a kind of gallery assistant, helping when children came to visit and working the printing press that produced Li’s exhibition catalogues. But I think the spirit of the place was essential—it was exhibiting internationally renowned artists, whilst providing a community art space. It was a unique place opened up by this incredibly open-minded and brave, intrepid travelling artist who had come all the way from Taiwan. You sense the spirit of people wanting to create something, and then doing it because that’s what they needed to do—whether or not there’s a precedent for it. And that’s apparent in Delia’s work as well: there’s perhaps no precedent for it, but it was what she needed to do. Their projects make you look at the climate for creativity now, and wonder if it’s still possible to make something just for the sake of wanting it to happen, and experiment? I worry about that a lot.

Li was fascinated by the idea of exploring the beginning of all things and what he termed “the cosmic point”, which was expressed visually through symbolic images of the universe in his work. So, I ended the short film wondering if Delia left London in pursuit of her own particular version of the cosmic point.

BAS: There’s a strong sense of the mystical and philosophical around the LYC, through Li’s own use of that language and his interest in Zen Buddhism.

Caroline: Yes, and the longer film that I am making now about Delia, also with Rook Films, touches more on this aspect of her own practice. At the core of Delia’s creativity, I believe, was the idea of her sounds being the manifestation of invisible and unknowable things.

BAS: What else will the longer version include?

Caroline: It will start with events earlier in her life, then the Workshop, the LYC, and events that happened in the future. I also want to give more attention to her legacy. It will have more characters, the important people in Delia’s life, but aesthetically it will very much have the feel of the short.

BAS: In both films, it feels significant to frame her time at the LYC as a beginning of sorts, rather than an end, and to extend the narrative of her life's work into her legacy and longer influence. David Butler's essay in this issue challenges that prevailing myth, that Derbyshire's creative life stopped after she left the Workshop.

Caroline: Yes, that myth is a familiar story—that Delia fell into depression, she suffered with addictions and alcohol and created nothing, and was this tragic figure. It is far from the truth, and there is much more to Delia's time at the LYC and beyond, but with woman artists, those elements of personal difficulty are most often the headline, rather than their work. Whether or not her friendship/relationship with Li was successful—nobody really knows the extent of what it was, and it wasn't long lasting—I would argue that their creative affinities were in the same world, in the same place; both very rooted in the importance of freedom and potential, and perhaps both slightly out of time.

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- we make them accessible under an exception or limitation to UK copyright law, as outlined in the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended);
- we have permission to make them accessible;
- or, there are no known restrictions on use.

If you believe that we have made a mistake and wish for your material to be removed from our site, please contact us at copyright@paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk.

Please include the following information with your request:

- Name and contact information, including email address and phone number.
- Identification of the resource for consideration of removal. Providing URLs in your communication will help us locate content quickly.
- The reason for the request.

The Publishers respond promptly, normally within 21 business days. We may remove the resource from our site while we assess the validity of the request. Upon completion of the assessment, we will take appropriate action and communicate that action to you.