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Cover image: James Richards, *on the side of the disease and not the cure*, 2019.
Digital image courtesy of James Richards.

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on the side of the disease and not the cure

James Richards and Sarah Perks

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Cite as

James Richards and Sarah Perks, "*on the side of the disease and not the cure*", *British Art Studies*, Issue 14, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-14/cover>

Introduction

This Cover Collaboration displays new work by James Richards, and a short essay by curator Sarah Perks, commissioned by *British Art Studies* to coincide with the release of the landmark publication *Artists' Moving Image in Britain Since 1989* (edited by Erika Balsom, Lucy Reynolds, and Sarah Perks), and the exhibition *Migrating Worlds: The Art of the Moving Image in Britain* at the Yale Center for British Art (October–December 2019). The book, which was published by the Paul Mellon Centre, includes an artist's statement by James Richards, edited by Sarah Perks.

on the side of the disease and not the cure

The title is a description of the film *Safe* (1995) from an interview with the director Todd Haynes. In this new commission for the cover of *British Art Studies*, James Richards starts with scans of medical equipment available to purchase online for self-diagnosis. The equipment offers a bypass for professional analysis of sickness that willingly creates a confusion between symptom, cause, and cure. They are also an opportunity to disregard the societal and structural factors that might cause ill health in the first place, by forcing the solution to be procured or bought by the individual alone.

This piece continues the artist's investigation into the body and technology, found in his earlier works such as *Rushes Minotaur* (2016) and *Uncontrollable Universe* (2019), that dislocate found objects and images to create new meanings. Richards' describes his process: "It's through the enabler of digital technology that you can work with sound and the moving image at a really high level and with the same level of intimacy as the directness of painting and collage."¹ Here he uses the popular GIF format—a low-res animated file designed for the Internet—to take over the screen creating a vertical series of moving images.

Cheap medical equipment is joined by other paraphernalia (cotton buds, lube, selfies, keys); the clinical merges with the casual, the mundane and the memories collide randomly as they might in a bedside drawer. Together, they create a part-abstract, part-classical composition distanced completely from online sales techniques and the business of self-diagnosis. Via a flatbed scanner, they return a full circle to their Internet origin as a disorientated yet powerful digital artwork that explores the private desire to heal.

The dreamy GIF format of this work allows the objects to move, yet they feel also trapped, embodying a description of Internet space Richards' has called: "...like a pond—a flat surface when seen from above, but once you get close and jump inside you can swim up, down, and sideways."² The micro-choreography, looping, and an absence of sound within the GIFs, and their

scrolling structure when presented together, are like a mesmerising metaphor for our own state of online sickness. The Internet as a perpetual, endless, and irresistible oasis of self-help and self-diagnosis.

In the film *Safe*, the main character Carol battles an unnamed and undiagnosable illness, it is never clear how much is physical or psychological (“Now nobody out there made you sick, you know that, the only person who could make you get sick is you, right?”). Set in 1987, Carol sends herself into an institutional self-help, self-love, self-diagnosis retreat. The Wrenwood Centre in the film is like the Internet, by offering only what one can buy (or buy into) as the solution to sickness, it reveals itself as a place for the business of disease, not the cure.

Footnotes

- ¹ “James Richards”, in Erika Balsom, Lucy Reynolds, Sarah Perks (eds.), *Artists' Moving Image in Britain Since 1989* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2019), 436.
- ² “Questionnaire: James Richards”, in Omar Kholeif (ed.), *You Are Here: Art After the Internet* (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications and Space, 2014), 231.

“The Assemblage of Specimens”: The Magazine as Catalogue in 1970s Britain

Samuel Bibby

Abstract

In 1976, the Victoria and Albert Museum staged an exhibition dedicated to the history of art periodicals since their inception at the end of the eighteenth century. While a conventional catalogue was discussed in the early stages of the exhibition’s development, it never came to pass, seemingly due to financial limitations. Independently of the museum, however, the exhibition’s guest curators, Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot, published concurrently with the show a balanced collection of essays, modestly described as “background reading”. But the exhibition was also bracketed by the appearance that year of special issues of two British art magazines dedicated to its theme: The Connoisseur; and Studio International. The former, conceived at the suggestion of V&A director Roy Strong, proclaimed to be an “alternative catalogue”, providing somewhat simplistic, historiographical, illustrated surveys of titles such as Apollo and The Burlington Magazine. The latter, by contrast, comprised contributions in a number of different formats, both in terms of genre of writing as well as mode of visual expression. These included, for example, what was termed a “reprographic documentation”, an intervention through which, as its abstract stated, “the use of the exhibition catalogue and the art magazine as exhibition spaces emerges”. This essay examines these three publications alongside each other, and in the absence of an official catalogue, in order to consider the status of the magazine as a key site for art-historical innovation and experimentation in the wider context of the discipline and its exhibition practices in 1970s Britain.

Authors

Samuel Bibby is Managing Editor of the journal Art History

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Museum (January 2015). I am grateful to Lucy Bradnock and Christopher Griffin for their initial faith in this subject, to Elizabeth James and James Sutton at the V&A for their continued enthusiasm and assistance, to Clive Ashwin and Anthony Burton for their willingness to answer my many questions, to Charles Chadwyck-Healey and Hugh Pilkington for their generosity in supplying various materials, and, above all, to Clive Phillpot for his unfaltering support, encouragement, and openness to this project.

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The Magazine as Catalogue in 1970s Britain", *British Art Studies*, Issue 14,
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*Catalogues, posters, advertisements of all sorts. Believe me, they contain the poetry of our epoch.*¹
(Guillaume Apollinaire, 1912)

*Now people do not live by encyclopaedias but by newspapers, magazines, card catalogues, prospectuses, and dictionaries.*²
(Aleksandr Rodchenko, 1928)

*The magazine is a vitrine and a poster.*³
(Guillermo de Torre, 1928)

“A visual narrative in photographic form”

Early in 1976, the Victoria and Albert Museum issued a press release announcing their forthcoming exhibition, *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines* (Fig. 1). Having outlined the interest and importance of the show's subject matter, it closed with the following passage which gives some sense of how the exhibition was organised, in terms of both content and form: “The exhibition ... has as its main part a visual narrative in photographic form, to show the development of art magazines over the past two hundred years. It presents,” it went on, “a portrait gallery of the periodicals ... together with the personalities involved, and some glimpses of background atmosphere. There are three sections: a general history, a review of art historical scholarship in periodicals; and a survey of magazines of modern art movements. Some periodicals,” the statement ended, “will be displayed in showcases, and issues of current periodicals will be available for browsing in a reading area in the exhibition.”⁴ At the heart of this exhibition, as the press release had put it, was the “visual narrative in photographic form”, a series of fifty-one large screens replete with information, both visual and verbal, as can be seen from surviving installation photos, for example, the panels dedicated to Romanticism from the section “The Evolution of Art Magazines” covering periodicals such as *L'Artiste* and *Les Beaux-Arts* (Fig. 2); a series of panels addressing *The Burlington Magazine* complete with Roger Fry lounging in an armchair from the section “Scholarship in Art Magazines” (Fig. 3); and, from the section “Magazines of Modern Art Movements”, panels focusing on Dada and Surrealism—including well-known magazines such as *391* and *Minotaure*—alongside a vitrine containing a display of material relating to Dadaist publications (Fig. 4). “We imagined our visitor,” one of the curators would write some time later, “as a man standing in front of a

magazine stall, in front of a wall of magazines such as is seen in the first unit of the exhibition (Fig. 5).⁵ And we decided, consequently, that the exhibition should take the form of vertical panels”.⁶



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 1. The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines, 1976, press release. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive, London (MA/28/273, 1976). Digital image courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

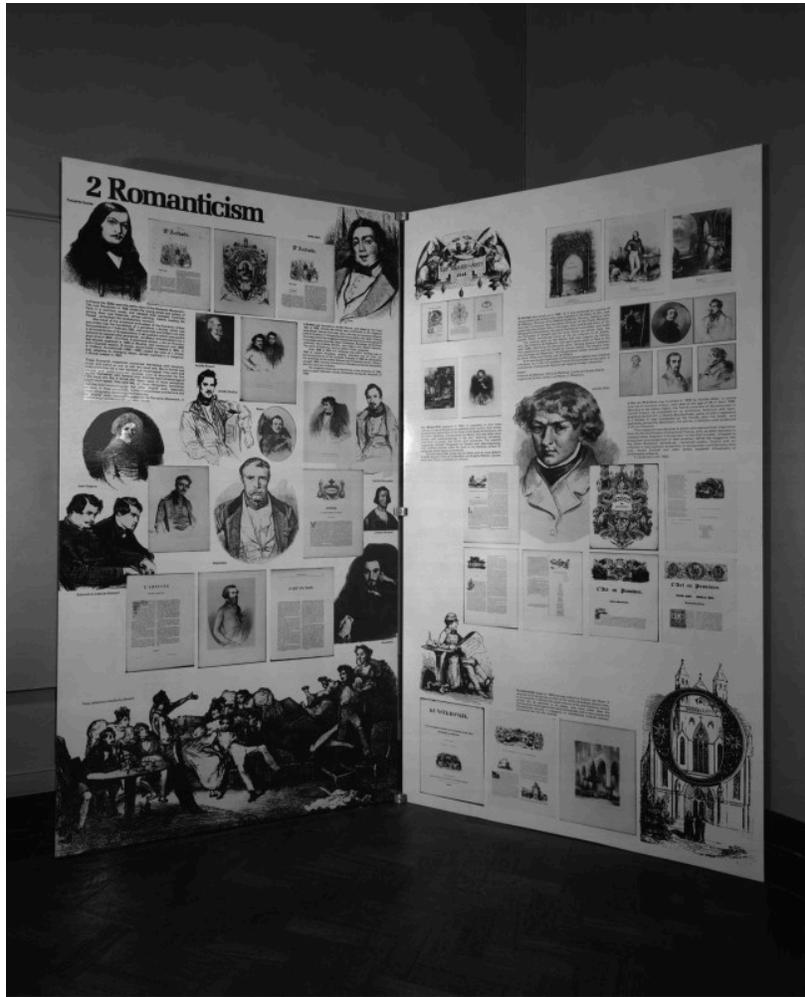


Figure 2.

The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines, 1976, installation photograph. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive, London (GF3115, 1976). Digital image courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 3.

The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines, 1976, installation photograph. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive, London (GF3117, 1976). Digital image courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 4.

The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines, 1976, installation photograph. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive, London (GF3112, 1976). Digital image courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 5.

Martina Margetts, "200 Years of The Art Press", *Arts Review*, 28, no. 9 (30 April 1976): 211.

Just as installation photographs record for posterity exhibitions, so too, of course, in their own way do exhibition catalogues. Yet given that the bulk of this particular exhibition was constituted of the texts and photographic reproductions of such page-like panels—exactly the kind of material that usually finds a place in an exhibition catalogue—it is only reasonable to wonder what form any such publication might have taken: mere facsimiles of these panels, or something altogether different? Indeed, just such a question had been the concern of the organisers of *The Art Press* from its very inception, and shall be my focus in this essay: exactly how were the “contents and intellectual thrust” of this show, as one definition of exhibition catalogues terms it, variously documented?⁷ I say variously for, as will become apparent, the show was catalogued in more ways than one, and I am interested more broadly in what these different “catalogues” might in turn suggest about the status and role of what they were recording, the art

magazine in Britain during the 1970s.⁸ Such questions are surely still just as pertinent, if not more, some forty years later in the era of digital publishing, when precisely how and of what a magazine is constituted remain subjects for both debate and development.

“A unique historiographical object and lens”

Two current strands of art-historical activity underpin my endeavour. The first is the dramatic growth in recent years of what might be termed “periodical studies”, an avenue of enquiry, in the words of Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, intent on no longer seeing “magazines merely as containers of discrete bits of information rather than autonomous objects of study.”⁹ The second is the parallel rise in focus on, and theorisation of, art, and in particular artists’, magazines. Writing in a recent anthology of such material, Gwen Allen has suggested that: “art historians and curators have begun to recognize the importance of the magazine as a unique historiographical object and lens, and a site for exhibition-making.”¹⁰ In both instances, what might be considered art-historical knowledge can be seen as not simply textual discourse but rather a set of objects that similarly demand attention in terms of their visual and material natures. Too many accounts of the discipline have let such qualities languish in subservience to written content, reinforcing hierarchies of meaning not just within art history, but also its historiography.¹¹ By privileging the visibility and materiality of publications, my intention is to emphasise them as active agents in the making of art-historical meaning, as opposed to functioning as mere documents of the past.

In addition to drawing upon such models, I am equally indebted to the framework of historical enquiry offered by Walter Benjamin’s metaphors of excavation and its relationship to memory. By approaching printed matter archaeologically, the art history that it constitutes—“the strata which yield their long-sought secrets only to the most meticulous investigation”—can be uncovered for the purposes of historiographical consideration.¹² Such an approach, appropriately enough, is all the more apposite given the specific physical nature of the historical material in question; seeing magazines as layered, serial accumulations, both of pages and issues, is a phenomenon adopted by many of the protagonists in the history that I chart here. Likewise, my own visualisation of magazines as strata is a concept that runs through this essay like something of a geological seam. Through an excavation of the various publications generated by *The Art Press*, I seek to unearth the discipline of art history as itself a site of enquiry warranting visual and material self-reflexivity.

“A thing in its own right”

Since its earliest days, publishing was evidently integral to the V&A's endeavours.¹³ “The museum will be like a book”, its first director, Henry Cole, would write in 1857, “with its pages always open”.¹⁴ Well over a century later, writing in his diary shortly after having taken the museum's helm in 1974, Roy Strong proclaimed: “I want provocative exhibitions ... happenings in the quadrangle ... huge catalogues to appear, publications to take off...”.¹⁵ Before turning to magazines and the detailed case study of *The Art Press*, the exhibition catalogue as a category of art-historical writing (not to mention object of enquiry) merits a little scrutiny. Despite their ubiquity, historiographical literature dedicated to this form of publication remains sparse.¹⁶ Typical treatments, such as that from 1985 by Peter Cannon-Brookes, present broad developmental narratives in which as a type they emerge in the form of simple, exclusively textual checklists in relation to the academies and salons of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western Europe, “easily carried around the exhibition and serving afterwards as only an aide-memoire.”¹⁷ Such accounts usually pinpoint the turn of the twentieth century as a watershed, with the appearance of lavishly illustrated commemorative volumes produced by the Burlington Fine Arts Club to record their exhibitions in printed form. As the practices (and economics) of exhibition-making evolved, so too did the catalogues associated with them; the sophistication of art-historical research to be mediated led, by the 1960s and 1970s, to “an increasing independence of the exhibition catalogue from the exhibition which it ostensibly served.” “The logical conclusion for this line of development,” Cannon-Brookes suggested, “has been the abandonment of the exhibition catalogue entirely and its replacement by a book devoted to the subject which can be sold in it and elsewhere.”¹⁸ Such a shift, aside from financial considerations, seems to have been precipitated by the changing nature of what was actually being displayed in the exhibitions, as well as how. *The Destruction of the Country House*, which opened at the V&A in 1974, for instance, was comprised almost entirely of photographic material. Writing in its accompanying publication, Roy Strong made clear that the design of the exhibition had “helped to shape” the book that went with it, as a photographic collage of furniture from the museum's collection perhaps attests, seemingly laid out on a double-page spread to resemble such items arranged within the display space of an exhibition gallery (Fig. 6).¹⁹



Figure 6.

Roy Strong, Marcus Binney, and John Harris, *The Destruction of the Country House, 1875–1975*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 152–153. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

This change of emphasis was indeed noted by Anthony Burton in his entry on exhibition catalogues for the 1977 *Art Library Manual: A Guide to Resources and Practice*, published by the Art Libraries Society (ARLIS). “When exhibitions consisted simply of a hodge-podge of things,” he explained, “the catalogue provided a record and commentary. Now that designers have a large hand in exhibitions, the things sometimes take a second place; exhibitions become their own commentary; and traditional catalogues become inappropriate. Some exhibitions,” Burton continued, “do without things at all and take the form of happenings or ideas. If any publications are produced to accompany such exhibitions, they escape from the normal category of exhibition catalogues. Sometimes,” he concluded, “an exhibition catalogue becomes a thing in its own right.”²⁰ The autonomy to which Burton gestures here is of particular importance, and his observation that exhibitions might take the form of ideas should prompt us to consider the implications that conceptual art was having on the exhibition catalogue. At the forefront of the picture was the figure of Seth Siegelau, self-styled dealer, publisher, and curator-at-large.

“Until 1967, the problems of exhibition of art were quite clear,” Siegelau would explain in an interview with Charles Harrison, published in the magazine *Studio International* in December 1969, “because at that time the ‘art’ of art and the ‘presentation’ of art were coincident.” Siegelau went on to outline the emergence of work, as he put it, “not visual in nature”, in other words conceptual art, and its ramifications for modes of display, both on the walls of galleries and the pages of publications. Having decried the inability

of photography and art criticism to convey painting and sculpture objectively, he observed that “when art concerns itself with things not germane to physical presence, its intrinsic (communicative) value is not altered by its presentation in printed media.”²¹ In a key statement, Siegelau then set out a distinction which can be seen among the publications to emerge from South Kensington the following decade:

The use of catalogues and books to communicate (and disseminate) art is the most neutral means to present the new art. The catalogue can now act as primary information for the exhibition, as opposed to secondary information *about* art in magazines, catalogues, etc., and in some cases the “exhibition” can be the “catalogue”.²²

Indeed, in the very same periodical the following year, Siegelau guest-edited an entire issue given over to just such primary information, a forty-eight-page exhibition which collapsed the spaces of art gallery and catalogue into a single object reproduced in the multiple format of the art magazine (Fig. 7).²³ As the critic Gregory Battcock, writing on the role of documentation in conceptual art, would pithily proclaim: “There are no more reproductions. There is no more criticism. No more aesthetics. Only art.”²⁴ The straightforward linear narrative of the development of exhibition catalogues had been disrupted; the effects of this realignment would be borne out, as we shall see, among the differing catalogues engendered by *The Art Press*. What is more, these various outcomes would surely have gone on to inform the subsequent picture seen above by Anthony Burton, whose own involvement with the V&A exhibition likely underpinned his account of this type of publication for fellow librarians the following year.

Studio International incorporating 'The Studio' Founded 1893	July/August 1970	Volume 180 Number 924	
Editor: Peter Townsend Assistant Editor: Charles Harrison Consultant Manager: Elizabeth Deighton Art Editor: Malcolm Lauder Advertisement Manager: Thelma Watt Contributing Editors: Dore Ashton (New York) Jean Clay (Paris) Frank Whitford Barbara Reiss Editorial Advisory Committee: J.P.Hodin (International relations) Alan Bowness Andrew Forge David Thompson International Advisory Panel: Argentina: Jorge Romero Brest Austria: Georg Eisler Belgium: Michael Scuphor Brazil: Mario Pedrosa Canada: David Silcox France: Jacques Lussaigne Germany: Dr Werner Schmalenbach Holland: Prof. A.M.Hammacher Israel: Haim Gamzu Italy: Prof. G.C.Argan Japan: Shuzo Takiguchi Scandinavia: Lef Othby Spain: Alejandro Cirici-Pellicer Switzerland: Dr Carola Gideon-Welcker USA: Thomas M. Messer J.J.Sweeney Yugoslavia: Aleksa Celebonovic	For a US emergency cultural government	Notes by Beth Coffelt	II
	A Soviet view of Charlotte Moorman and the avant garde	Mike Scammel	III
	Correspondence		IV
	News and Notes		V
	Technology and art 16	Jonathan Benthall	VII
	The content of the 48-page exhibition in this issue was organized by requesting six critics to each edit an 8-page section of the magazine, and in turn, to make available their section to the artist(s) that interest them. The Table of Contents lists the name of the artist(s) under the name of the critic who was responsible for their participation. Seth Siegelau	Le supplément spécial de 48 pages constitue une exposition réalisée avec le concours de six critiques qui ont chacun une section de huit pages de la revue en mettant leur section à la disposition du (des) ou artistes(s) qui les intéressent. Dans la table des matières, le nom des artistes est catalogué avec le nom du critique responsable de leur participation. Seth Siegelau	Der Inhalt der in dieser Ausgabe enthaltenen 48-seitigen Ausstellung wurde auf folgende Weise organisiert: 6 Kritiker wurden erbeten, jeweils einen 8-Seiten-Teil in der Zeitschrift herauszugeben und ebenso ihren Abschnitt dem Künstler (den Künstlern), der (die) sie interessiert (interessieren), verfügbar zu machen. Die Inhaltsangabe führt den Namen des Künstlers (der Künstler) unter dem Namen des Kritikers, der für ihre Mitwirkung verantwortlich war. Seth Siegelau
	David Antin	Charles Harrison	
	Dan Graham 1	Keith Arnatt 25	
	Harold Cohen 2	Terry Atkinson	
	John Baldessari 3	David Bainbridge	
	Richard Serra 4	Michael Baldwin	
	Eleanor Antin 5	Harold Hurrell 26	
	Fred Lonider 6	Victor Burgin 28	
	George Nicolaidis 7	Barry Flanagan 29	
	Keith Sonnier 8	Joseph Kosuth 30	
		John Latham 31	
	Germano Celant	Roelof Louw 32	
	Giovanni Anselmo 9		
	Alighiero Boetti 10	Lucy R. Lippard	
	Pier Paolo Calzolari 11	Robert Barry 33	
	Mario Merz 12	Stephen Kaltenbach 34	
	Giuseppe Penone 13	Lawrence Weiner 35	
	Emilio Prini 14	On Kawara 36	
	Pistoletto 15	Sol LeWitt 37	
	Gilberto Zorio 16	Douglas Huebler 38	
		N.E. Thing Co. 39	
	Michel Claura	Frederick Barthelme 40	
	Daniel Buren 17		
		Hans Strelow	
		Jan Dibbets 41	
		Hanne Darboven 45	
	Supplement: new and recent art books	Reviews by Andrew Forge, Tim Hilton, John Elderfield, Anthony Froshaug, George Melly, Norbert Lynton, Christopher Fox, Ronald Rees, Paul Oliver, Bernard Denvir, Frank Whitford and Jonathan Benthall	

Figure 7. Studio International, 180, no. 924 (July/August 1970): contents page, non-paginated. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

“The still scanty literature of art periodicals”

As the exhibition’s organisers put it, *The Art Press* represented “a first attempt to consider the art periodical as a genre and as a significant factor in the development of art and its understanding”; they could confidently refer, for example, to “the still scanty literature of art periodicals”.²⁵ To set the stage, it is worth a fleeting look at the historiographical landscape in the years immediately preceding the V&A exhibition and its associated publications, to gain some brief sense of how, if at all, people had gone about addressing such a topic. Perhaps the first to do so was Stanley T. Lewis, an assistant librarian at Queens College in New York. In an article titled “Periodicals in the Visual Arts”, published in 1962 in the journal *Library Trends*, Lewis approached the matter bibliographically, very much from the (quantitative) perspective of his own profession (Fig. 8). Accordingly, his

twenty-three-page essay—while offering a valuable overview, replete with information covering titles with varied focus, from a range of countries, and looking back as far as the beginning of the twentieth century—reproduces, for example, no images of periodicals whatsoever.²⁶ Just over a decade later, the American magazine *Artforum* would publish a handful of contributions in this same area. Here, however, the context was much more specific; Lawrence Alloway's pair of articles from 1974, "Artists as Writers", was intent on providing historical background for the contemporary linguistic practices of conceptual artists, so often inextricably linked to the medium of the magazine itself, as will be shown below, as well as to the related field of artists' books.²⁷ Later the same year, there appeared a survey of art magazines published outside New York since 1970, written by Alan Moore, titled "New Voices".²⁸ Indeed, the focus was less on the magazines themselves than on challenging the stronghold of New York within the sphere of contemporary art. Meanwhile, a handful of titles from the beginning of the century—*Jugend*, *Ver Sacrum*, *Der Sturm*, *Pan*, and *Lacerba*, for example—had variously been treated in a range of anthologies and facsimile editions, but all only individually. My overarching point here, perhaps not unsurprisingly, is that any attention that the topic of art periodicals had received was sporadic, often tangential, or highly specialised in focus.²⁹ Those organising the V&A exhibition had landed on fertile territory, and moreover had precious little precedent when it came to conceiving how the exhibition itself, not to mention its documentation, might take form.

The Art Press followed on the heels of a series of exhibitions put on by the V&A concentrating on Hector Berlioz, Charles Dickens, and Lord Byron—all of which presented challenges in terms of both display and documentation, principally owing to the predominance of textual material that needed to be included. The catalogue for the last of these, programmed to coincide with the 150th anniversary in 1974 of Byron's death, is indicative of the museum's approach. Substantial, totalling 184 pages of text and eighty-nine separately reproduced plates, the publication went into great detail, including, for example, a map of the exhibition, which culminated in a reading area—a feature to be duplicated by *The Art Press*—where visitors could consult copies of current literature on the poet. As the director's foreword explained, "The composition of the sections into which the exhibition is divided is succinctly described in the Short Guide to the Exhibition by Jonathan Mayne, which, issued separately, is reprinted as an Introduction to this catalogue."³⁰ Following this, each section of the exhibition was covered in an individual chapter, including an introductory text together with individual catalogue entries for every item on display (Fig. 9). The foreword's closing passage makes abundantly clear this publication's status: "The catalogue has been written by John Murdoch and Anthony Burton", it explained. "Through their labours the exhibition will leave a

permanent contribution to Byron Studies.”³¹ It can be discerned, then, that the V&A placed significant importance during the first half of the 1970s on different types of publication associated with exhibitions in their programme; this state of affairs, however, would not continue across the board.

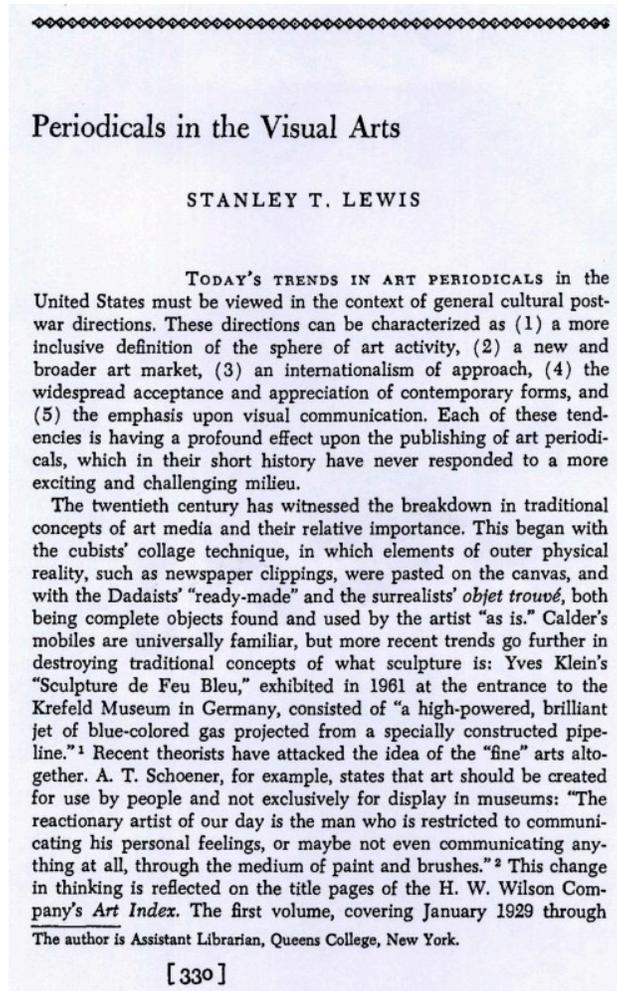


Figure 8. Stanley T. Lewis, "Periodicals in the Visual Arts", *Library Trends*, 10, no. 3 (Winter 1962): 330. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

I. Byron among Men; Dandies and Sportsmen. The Theatre

'I liked the Dandies; they were always very civil to me, though in general they disliked literary people. . . . The truth is, that, though I gave up the business early, I had a taste of dandyism in my minority, and probably retained enough of it, to constitute the great ones at five-and-twenty. I had general, and drank, and took my degree in most dissipation, and having no poetry, and not being over-leaving, we sat quietly together. I have since all more or less, and they made me a member of Walter's (a superb dandy at that time), being, I take it, the only literary man (except two others, both men of the world, Moore and Spenser) in it. (quoted from Moore, 1833, 205-6).

The headquarters of the dandies was at Walter's Club, 81 Piccadilly, where the management profits from gambling were so high that the dandies, of famous quality, were served without charge. The president of the club was George Brumell, backed by Lord Alvanley, Sir Harry Pierrepont and Sir Henry Mildmay. Despite the extravagance of the gambling, and the extremely heavy drinking that prevailed, the ideal of the dandies was in general a quiet and fastidious elegance, blue and buff tones with immaculate linen, reserved manners and a dry wit. The authority of their leaders was nearly absolute, and in matters of fashion at least the Court was not the only pinnacle of social prestige. As a hall at Walter's in 1813, after Brumell had quarrelled with the prince, the four officers of the Club were lined up to receive the guests. When the Prince arrived, he greeted Alvanley and Pierrepont warmly, but not Brumell and Mildmay. 'Alvanley', declared Brumell, 'who's your fat friend?' The habit of dandyism has an almost virginitas quality at times.

Byron was elected to Walter's in 1814, but he had, as his own testimony suggests, shown symptoms of dandyism since his Cambridge days. Scrope Davies was an acquaintance of Brumell's, and probably helped to introduce Byron to the mode and aspirations of his London set. Against this background it is easy to understand why Byron, constantly pressed for money, for a long time refused to pocket the proceeds of his literary work. Shortage of funds was endemic, and vast debts bearing huge interests were treated with fashionable indifference. To be paid for writing was to descend to the level of trade, and this was simply not acceptable in the circles to which Byron belonged. Such

dandy attitudes by about the heart of Romanticism. Although by the time he was writing *Don Juan* he had started to keep his literary earnings, he still shared this aesthetic hatred of commerce, and instinctive repugnance to the values of calculation. During his life in London, however, such reflections probably did not occur to him. He ran up tailor's bills, bought countess, gambled and drank with the other fops. He did not talk about poetry or politics in circles where fashion focused on those interests, and there is no record that the sharp tongues of Walter's or White's ridiculed his linguistic glib. His talent for friendship - with 'men of the world' as he called them - assured his popularity among people whose amity could be formidable. There was a need to conform, and since there was an evident hypocrisy other in the manners of this masculine society, nor in his own attitude to it, Byron conformed.

11

FRANCE EKAS
Life in London; or, the day and night scenes of Jerry Hanthorn, Esq. and his elegant friend Cornelius Tom, accompanied by Bob Eggle, the Quinon, in their rambles and sports through the metropolis.
London, Sherwood, Jones, and Co., 1823

The book is opened to show:
'Highest Life in London. Tom and Jerry sporting a toe among the Courtiers at Alvanley's in the West.'
James Robert Cruikshank (1780-1856) and George Cruikshank (1780-1856)
Aquatint with watercolour, 44 x 71 (11 x 18.4)

12

Another copy
Victoria and Albert Museum Library
The book is opened to show:
'The Art of Self Defence, Tom and Jerry receiving instructions from Mr Jackson at his rooms in Bond Street'

James Robert Cruikshank (1780-1856) and George Cruikshank (1780-1856)
Aquatint with watercolour, 41 x 71 (11 x 18.2)
J. G. Jackson (1769-1845) was Byron's boxing tutor and sparring partner. He was champion of England 1796-1803, having defeated Mordaunt at Horseburgh on 15 April 1796, in a fight lasting only 10 minutes. He retired in 1803, and was succeeded in his title by James Jackson. He established a boxing academy in Bond Street, which Byron attended, and was employed with eighteen other prize fighters to guard the entrance to Westminster Hall at the Coronation of George IV.

13

Going to White's. A caricature portrait of William Arden, 2nd Baron Alvanley (1789-1848)
Richard Dighton (1750-1809)
Engraving coloured by hand, 11 x 8 (30.2 x 20.3)
Lithographed with title and *James Esdaile and Pugh* by Richard Dighton, June, 1812
From *Dighton's Characters at the West End of Town* (1825)

Victoria and Albert Museum

14

Le Beau Monde, pt. 2, from *Moore's Madras Contes* (1823)
Henry Moore (1760-1819)
Engraving, 41 x 61 (18.5 x 15.2)
Victoria and Albert Museum

15

Snuff-Box
Gold and ivory, stained pink. Probably English, c.1810-20
Byron could certainly not compete with Lord Peterham either in the number of snuff-boxes that he owned, or in their quality. He did, however, by not considerable sums of money in equipping himself with this requisite of dandyism, and in 1813 he bought a set of London boxes which he planned to give as presents to his overseas acquaintances. One such box, paid for as snuff gold, from the jeweller Love in Bond Street, was discovered to be silver gilt when Byron wished to have a portrait of Matilda Begg set in the lid (letter to Murray, 25 February 1817; Moore II, 106).

16

Byron's Toothpick
Gold, in a silver gilt box, engraved, English, c.1820-30.
Byron's determined collection, by which he overcame the disadvantage of his lameness, was an absolutely essential part of his character, and helps incidentally to explain

Zanobelli's detailed accounts. Byron did buy a toothpick in a box from the Bond Street jeweller Love and Kelly in 1812. It cost him three guineas, a much larger sum of money than the example shown here could have cost.

17

Scrope Davies
Autograph manuscript of a prose account of the execution of Byron for the murder of Davies, with portrait-drawings of Byron. [1814]

Byron got to know Scrope Robinson Davies at Cambridge, where Davies was a Fellow of King's. He was chiefly renowned as a gambler and man-about-town, a friend of Brumell's and a dandy; and it was during Byron's years of celebrity in London that their intimacy developed. He and Byron helped each other out of debt, and were often convivial together. Davies's debts eventually drove him from the country, and he spent his last years in Paris.

18

'The "Byron Screen"'
Byron moved from his address in Bonnet Street to Albany Court on 28 March 1814. The screen, which includes a series of King's parts on the fourth panel, must therefore date from the summer of 1814 at the earliest, unless, as seems unlikely, it was made up in stages. The screen is thus a rather poignant relic of Byron's last few months of bachelorhood, recording on the one side his suddenly intense interest in the theatre, and on the other his rediscovered pleasure in boxing, or 'sparring'. The screen was moved to the house in Piccadilly after his marriage, and was included in the sale of furniture and books that took place after the separation in 1816 (see no. 182).

On the reverse of the fourth panel is a caricature portrait by Charles Turner after Ben Marshall, of the boxer John 'Cockshorn' Jackson, who was Byron's sparring-partner from 1806. While he was dividing his time between Newcastle and London before going abroad in the summer of 1809, Byron not only boxed himself (but certainly not in the prize ring, and certainly not for the price of his supper) but put up money for the prizes of professional champions in the epic battles of the pro-Quartermaster period on Byron Down in Hertfordshire (see Marshall I, 155). When he took up boxing again in 1814, however, it was mainly for the exercise. Throughout his life he had an obsession with physical fitness and felt a genuine fondness despite with his own tendency to corpulence. Sparring with Jackson, who had fought at over fifteen stons, must have been a punishing experience for Byron, but he was a strong man, with long arms and a hard punch.

Byron's determined collection, by which he overcame the disadvantage of his lameness, was an absolutely essential part of his character, and helps incidentally to explain

Figure 9. John Murdoch and Anthony Burton (eds.), *Byron: An Exhibition to Commemorate the 150th Anniversary of His Death in the Greek War of Liberation, 19 April 1824*, (London: HMSO, 1974), 52-53. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

“Rather like a single issue of an illustrated periodical”

The exhibition had been proposed by ARLIS and the idea of a catalogue for it was on the agenda from the fore. Its progress can be charted through the wealth of correspondence concerning *The Art Press* that the V&A retains in its archive, for much of it is particularly revealing. In his first letter to the museum about the project at the end of 1973, their chairman, the UEA Librarian Trevor Fawcett, stressed: “It would be particularly important to have a well-researched catalogue of permanent value. Virtually nothing has been written on the theme of the art periodical and its wider significance.”³² The V&A agreed to take on the idea and Anthony Burton, an assistant keeper in the National Art Library, was assigned to the project. Writing to Fawcett in the spring of 1974, Burton mirrored the desire for something of posterity: “the catalogue might most appropriately be made a commentary, rather than an annotated list of exhibits. It will then have value as a separate publication apart from the exhibition.”³³ And later that year, he explained in an internal memo to a colleague:

It is envisaged it will not be a catalogue of exhibits, but a commentary on the exhibition following up in greater detail points which will have to be put across very concisely in the display. It will probably take the form of a series of short articles by various hands. As yet we have no clear ideas about it.³⁴

By the beginning of 1975, however, ideas were certainly becoming clearer and the fate of the publication took a key turn as a letter from Burton to the recently arrived director of the museum, Roy Strong, makes clear. I quote this at some length for it is precisely the point at which the importance of just what form the catalogue might eventually take really begins to emerge.

We hope to produce a booklet to accompany the exhibition. This cannot be a catalogue, since the meaning of the exhibition will not lie in individual exhibits, but in the shape and message we impose on the subject. The message will be conveyed in punchy and compressed form on the screens, and we do not wish simply to reproduce their contents in the book. We should like to produce a gathering of illustrated essays, dealing in somewhat greater depth with some of the chief aspects of the subject. The result would, perhaps, be rather like a single issue of an illustrated periodical: and we might stress the resemblance if this seems appropriate. In physical bulk, I should envisage the *Magazine of the Exhibition* as not less substantial than an issue of (say) *History Today* (Fig. 10), not more substantial than an issue of (say) *The Connoisseur* (Fig. 11): preferably somewhere in between.³⁵

This marks the first moment that the catalogue was thought of as a magazine (rather than a book). As I have argued elsewhere, conceiving new periodicals specifically in relation to other existing titles in their field—situating them within the “periodical landscape”, as I have termed it—is just how they begin.³⁶ It is all the more apt too in this case for the emergence of both the exhibition catalogue and the art periodical had gone hand in hand with the appearance in the eighteenth century of printed pamphlets listing the contents of salon exhibitions—indeed, I even wonder if this had been at the back of Burton’s mind when making the suggestion. It is also worth recalling at this juncture that the amalgamation of catalogue and magazine would appear elsewhere in the period immediately running up to the V&A exhibition; to accompany their 1975 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, the collective Art & Language produced a publication consciously mirroring the exact form of their own periodical, *Art-Language*, itself a key site for their practice (Fig. 12).³⁷ The strategies of conceptual art

with which this group of artists, and this publication, engaged, however, were certainly not to underpin the outcome of Burton's proposition, although they do foresee the alternative efforts to which I will later turn.



Figure 10.

History Today, 25, no.1 (January 1975): front cover. Digital image courtesy of History Today.

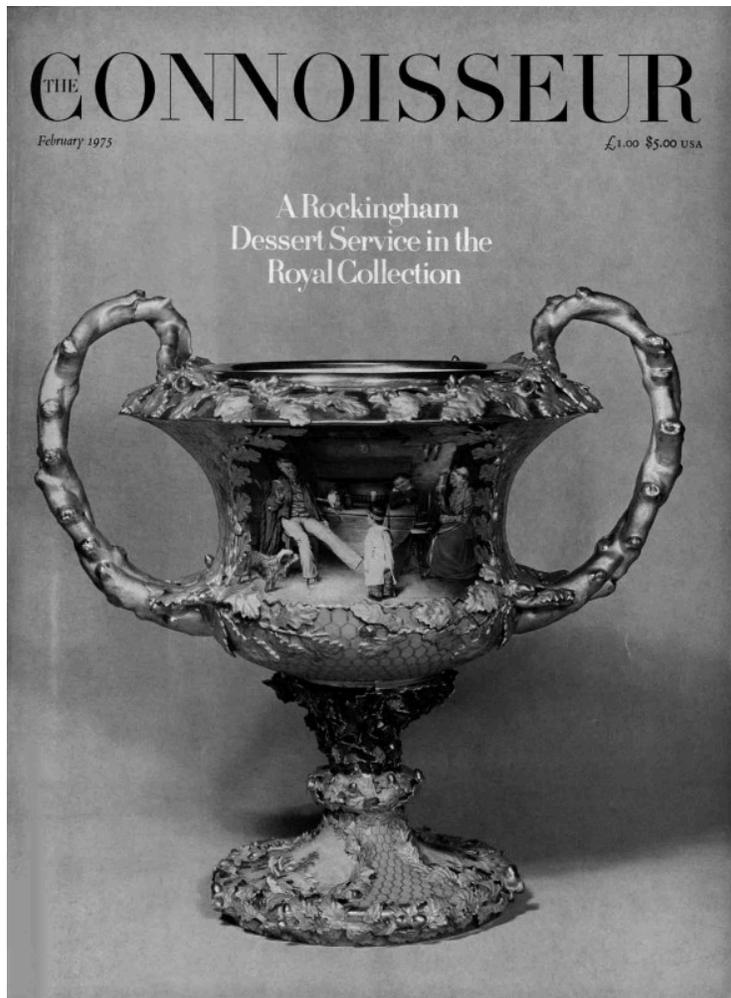


Figure 11.

The Connoisseur, 188, no. 756 (February 1975): front cover.
Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

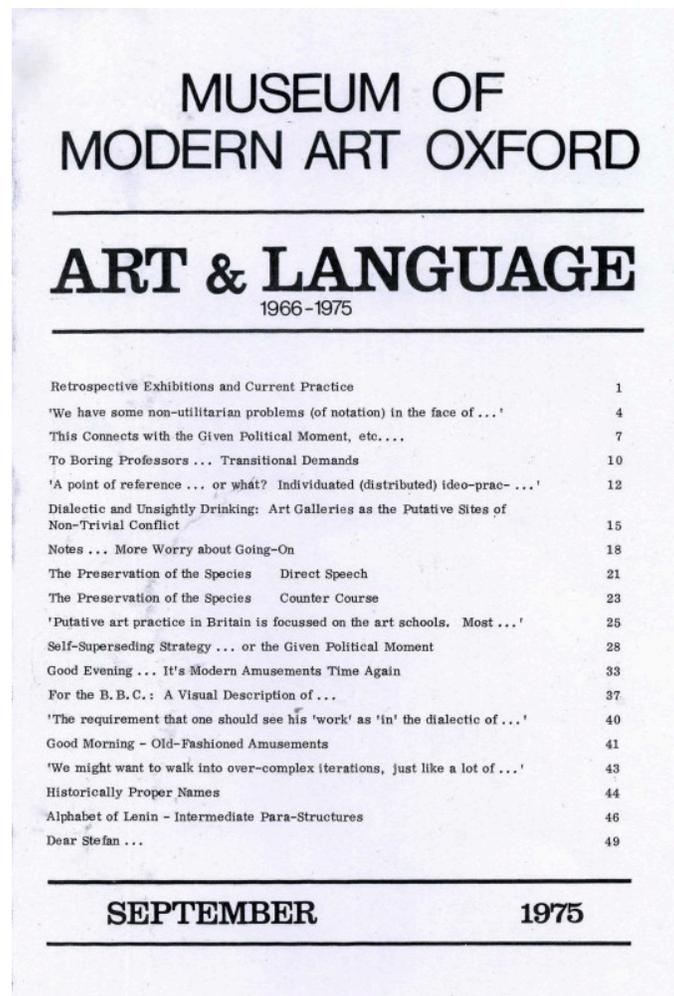


Figure 12. Art & Language, Art & Language, 1966-1975, (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1975), front cover. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

“Other ways of publishing the material”

Roy Strong was evidently very taken with such a conflation and wrote on the following day to none other than Bevis Hillier, editor of *The Connoisseur*, with whom he was already working on an exhibition to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Festival of Britain. “It occurred to me,” Strong mused, having outlined the premise of the ARLIS show, “that this was an ideal subject for an issue of *The Connoisseur* which could also act as a souvenir ‘catalogue’ of the exhibition.”³⁸ Burton, it should be underlined, had stressed merely similarity of format—“bulk” and “substance” as he had put it—rather than any wholesale dispatch from the realm of museum publication to the framework of an existing magazine, complete with its own identity—both of form and content—seized upon by Strong. Hillier clearly

jumped at the opportunity and enthusiastically accepted within a matter of days, noting for him the happy coincidence of the exhibition's opening with his magazine's seventy-fifth anniversary. ³⁹

Burton, meanwhile, was left to break the news to ARLIS. "It seems that as a result of economic difficulties, paper shortage, etc.," he wrote, "the Director is having to be stricter in the selection of catalogues to put forward to the Stationary Office. While he likes the idea of the Art Periodicals exhibition he does not think that the catalogue—or rather, background booklet—is likely to be a best-seller". "At this stage", he continued, "when we still have plenty of time for forward planning, the Director is anxious to investigate other ways of publishing the material which we would have used in the booklet. He suggests that since the exhibition is concerned with periodicals, it might be appropriate to publish the background essays in a special issue of an art periodical, if we could persuade a periodical to take this on. He mentioned several art and bibliographical periodicals to me, and it seemed that *The Connoisseur* might be the most suitable." ⁴⁰

This suggestion did not go down well with ARLIS, as Burton conveyed to Strong a few months later.

[They] have found a commercial publisher ... who will publish for them the kind of catalogue they think the exhibition ought to have, i.e. a survey of the whole subject with copious bibliographical information (35,000 words, modest illustrations, £2 or so). Mr Hillier's plans for *The Connoisseur* are different. He wants something racier. ⁴¹

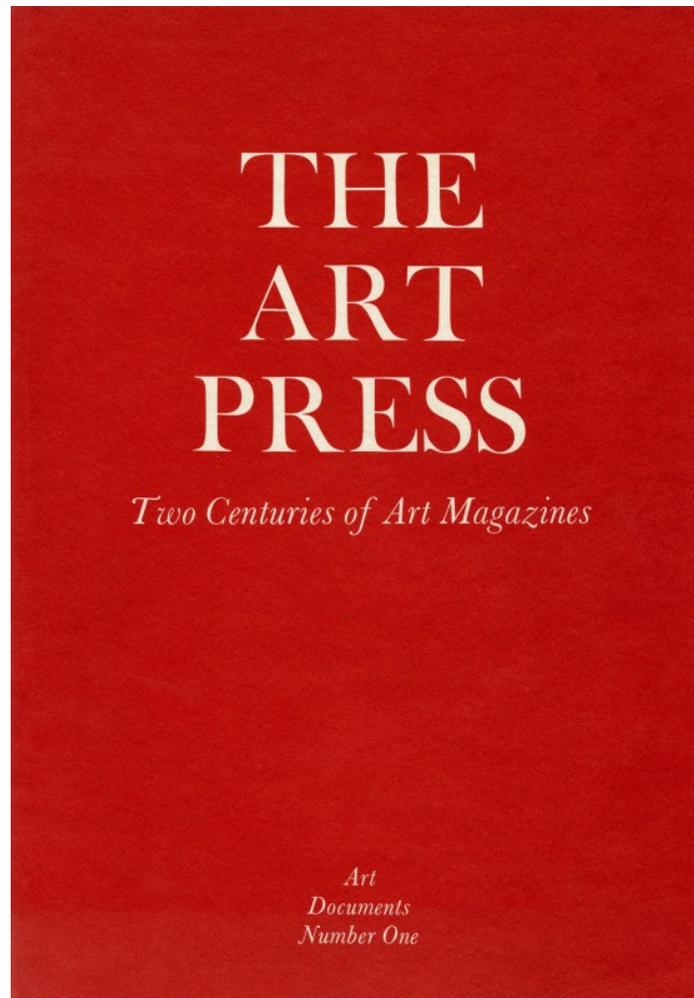


Figure 13.

Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot (eds.), *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines*, (London: The Art Book Company, 1976), front cover. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

And thus it was that ARLIS published independently their collection of essays, “background reading”, as its opening words described the volume (Fig. 13).

⁴² Meanwhile, Burton drafted a letter for Strong to send to Hillier, letting him know ARLIS’s plans. “The museum itself,” they added, “will probably produce a very modest pamphlet, as it is now our policy to produce a cheap ‘official’ utterance. The advantage of the present arrangement,” they went on, “is that you can go ahead and produce an issue of *The Connoisseur* exactly as you want it, without any of the inhibitions that affect an official statement.”

⁴³ And as it would transpire, no official statement—beyond the press release—was actually ever made: the “modest pamphlet” of which they wrote did not come to pass; and, tellingly, the ARLIS catalogue lacked the preface from the museum’s director that one would expect. Instead, both

iterations of the catalogue were sold side by side in the V&A shop, neither making reference to the other, but both vying for the attention—and investment—of visitors to the exhibition.

“The most exclusive sector of the magazine market”



Figure 14.

Retail Newsagent, Tobacconist and Confectioner, 87, no. 7 (14 February 1976): front cover. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

Given that *The Connoisseur* was then owned by commercial publishers The National Magazine Company, it is surely no surprise that additional emphasis was placed on sales of the title beyond the museum, but if an article heralding the special number in an issue of trade magazine *Retail Newsagent, Tobacconist and Confectioner* from the middle of February that year is anything to go by, they were clearly pulling out all of the stops (Fig. 14). And rather than foregrounding the visibility of the news-stand, as the exhibition panels sought to, focus was instead placed on the profits that it

could bring. In his regular column, “Looking Round Publishing Doors”, industry expert Howard Fox proclaimed: “There is a unique opportunity now for you to break into the most exclusive sector of the magazine market. If you manage it,” he went on, “a high rate of profit per copy will result—and nobody in the newsagency business can afford to let that slide by!”⁴⁴ Fox’s piece notes the magazine’s seventy-fifth anniversary and observes that it was first sold in 1901 for the price of a shilling, compared to £1.25 in 1976. “It is possible,” he suggested, “that centenarians here and there actually handed their bobs over the newsagents’ counters and have held on to what they got ever since. Possible, but not likely! The ‘number ones’ now in existence,” he continued, “were almost certainly ‘handed down’, and that process will go on. If you come across any of those early issues, hold on to them very tightly. They are better than money.”⁴⁵

572 THE NEWSAGENT AND BOOKSELLERS' REVIEW. Dec. 21, 1901.

SPECIAL NOTICE TO NEWSAGENTS.

ORDER AT ONCE. **No. 5,** The JANUARY Issue of

THE CONNOISSEUR.

1s. net, Monthly. 1s. net, Monthly.

The Illustrated Monthly Magazine for Collectors.

Sampson, Low, Marston & Company, Limited,
 ST. DUNSTAN'S HOUSE, FETTER LANE, LONDON, E.C.
 Editorial and Advertisement Offices of THE CONNOISSEUR: 37, King Street, Covent Garden, London, W.C.

Important. Ready Dec. 30. **“SALE PRICES”**

Being a Monthly Supplement to the CONNOISSEUR, giving most valuable information as to the Prices realised for ART OBJECTS of every description at Auction Sales throughout the United Kingdom and on the Continent. The List includes:—

Oil Paintings, Water Colour Drawings, Pastels, Miniatures, Coloured Prints, Sporting Prints, Mezzotints, Line Engravings, Works of Art in Bronze, Marble, Ivory, Wood, &c. Enamels, Antique Clocks and Watches, Antique Furniture of every description, Silver and Gold Plate, Sheffield Plate, Old Books (especially when illustrated), Manuscripts, Autographs, Coins, Medals, Old Musical Instruments, China (both Porcelain and Pottery), Armour and Weapons, Stamps, Antique Jewels, Old Wrought Iron Work, Sundials, Garden Figures in Stone or Wood, and Old Oak Pannelling, &c.

Monthly, 8d. Net. To be issued IN FUTURE simultaneously with the CONNOISSEUR. Monthly, 8d. Net.

For Trade Terms, &c., apply to

“Sale Prices” Publishing Office, 27, Chancery Lane, London, E.C.

Figure 15.
 The Newsagent and Booksellers’ Review, 25, no. 25 (21 December 1901): 572. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

The notion that the principal value of these early issues was financial rather than historical was one similarly put across by none other than Bevis Hillier in a number of pieces which had appeared in *The Times*, for which he wrote a regular column on collecting antiques. “A collector’s quarry which has not yet been fully exploited by dealers or latched on to by collectors, is old magazines,” he declared in February 1975. “The richest seam,” he went on, “is the sumptuous illustrated magazines of the 1890s and Edwardian period”.⁴⁶ Hillier’s geological metaphors here should be underlined, for they will prove markedly different, as shall be seen later, to those used by others writing about magazines. Returning to *Retail Newsagent*, a little digging has managed to unearth a series of advertisements which ran in the magazine—originally called *The Newsagent and Booksellers’ Review*—urging vendors to stock up on copies each month (Fig. 15). “Special notice to newsagents. Order at once.” The example from December 1901 even announces a monthly supplement “giving most valuable information as to the Prices realised for ART OBJECTS of every description at Auction Sales throughout the United Kingdom and on the Continent”, making the magazine’s *métier* clear from the word go.⁴⁷ Indeed, Richard M. Ohmann has emphasised the etymological relationship between the words “magazine” and “magasin”, in particular in relationship to advertising.⁴⁸ Commercial magazines during this period, he argued, might be thought of as akin to department stores; we might think then of such *art* magazines as functioning like auction houses, as repositories of lots for sale.

“Little to do with ‘mainstream’ art history”

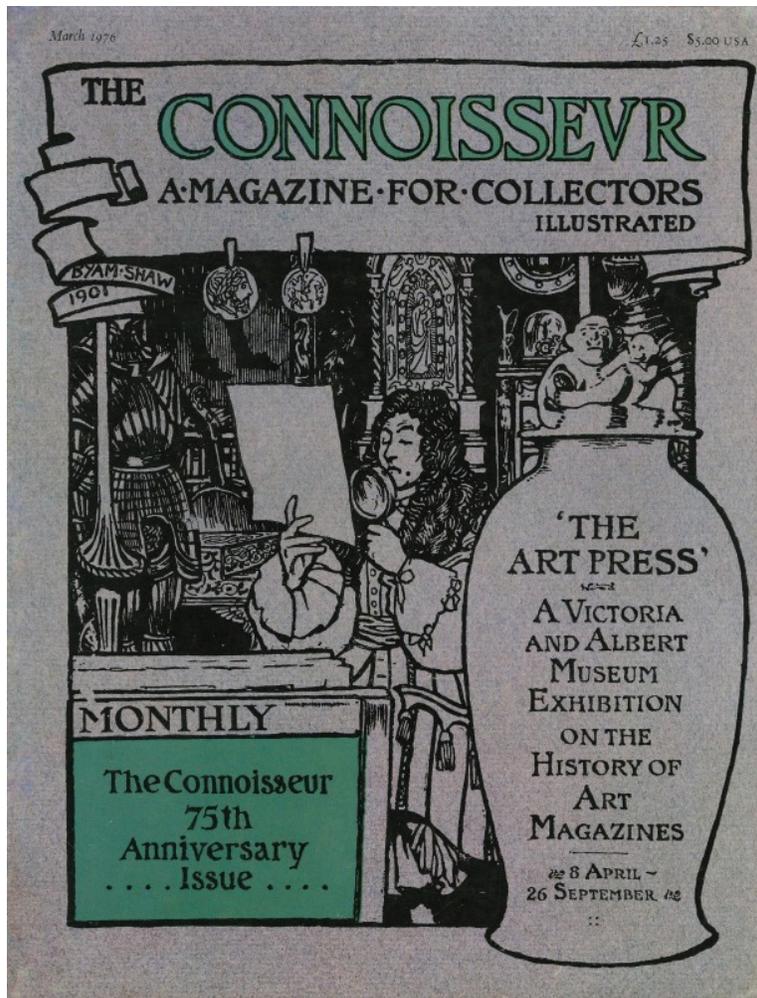


Figure 16.

The Connoisseur, 191, no. 769 (March 1976): front cover.
Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

For those not familiar with *The Connoisseur*, as good a hint as any is given about it by the title and March 1976 cover (Fig. 16). Itself an imitation of Byam Shaw's original design for the first issue in September 1901, it is graced by the bewigged and beauty-spotted eponymous cover boy, peering discerningly through a magnifying glass at we know not what, held facing away from the viewer, a sheet of paper, at the centre of the composition yet enigmatically left blank. Beyond this, now is a helpful moment to provide some brief background information. In an editorial for the magazine's inaugural issue, J.T. Herbert Baily set out their stall, couched, as is so often the case, in terms of a perceived lack of venues for the type of material to which they were devoted. "Our purpose," he declared, "is to give every sort of information that may be of use to collectors, whether as regards origin, history, current prices, or differentiation of specimens; and the various subjects," Baily continued, "will be dealt with by writers who know, who are experts in the subjects of which they treat."⁴⁹ Beyond the magazine's

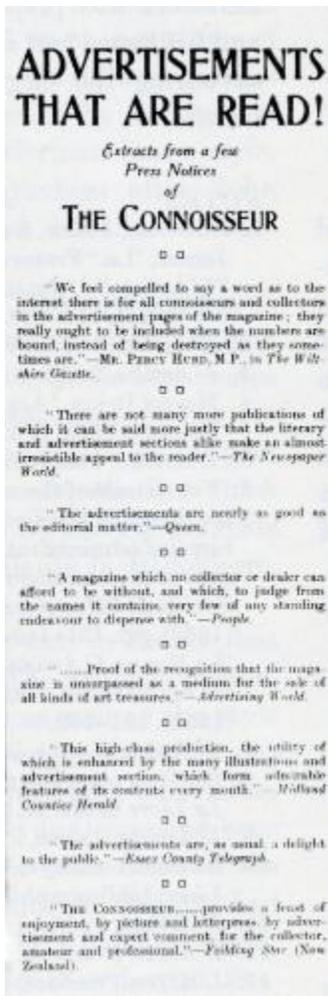
textual focus, attention was drawn to the visual mechanisms of the new title: “Illustrations naturally form no unimportant part of our scheme. They will be illustrations, and not pictures merely; but pictures nevertheless. The present number,” he concluded, “will, it is hoped, be accepted as an earnest of the care and thought that have been given to this part of the work no less than to the literary side.”⁵⁰ As Tom Gretton has argued, *The Connoisseur* was one among a handful of magazines to appear in Britain around the turn of the century “that aimed to make themselves luxurious by their progressive embrace of the new printing technologies ... meeting the needs of their rich and ‘discerning’ niche markets in different ways”,⁵¹ a set of priorities, as we shall see, with varying fortunes over the title’s next three-quarters of a century.

The 1976 special issue contained a seventeen-page article charting the magazine’s history. Largely unreferenced, its string of anecdotes amounts at times to nothing more than a hagiography of the genealogy of people and places with which the title had been associated over the years. Profiled, for example, was one Charles Relly Beard, “the antiquarian type of connoisseur who has little to do with ‘mainstream’ art history”. “[He] made a study of dog collars throughout history,” readers were told, “and the witty, discursive article he devoted to the subject ... remains the standard authority on that recondite subject.”⁵² Whether clerical or canine, it matters not. To get a less idiosyncratic point of view, however, there is no better way than by citing the magazine’s own self-aggrandising words which come from the editorial of their “alternative catalogue”, as it had termed itself, for the V&A show:

The Connoisseur was the first serious and authoritative magazine for collectors of art and antiques. Even today, it could hardly be claimed that it is a magazine for discriminating paupers; but through library copies and shelves of bound copies from the past, it has exercised an influence over a far wider audience than its well-to-do catchment might suggest. To it, perhaps more than any other single magazine, must be attributed the vastly increased sophistication of collecting over the past three-quarters of a century. This change for the better is as evident in the advertisement section as in the editorial matter—and *The Connoisseur* is one of the few magazines in the world in which the advertisements are both a pleasure and an education.⁵³

This specific passage is particularly pertinent because it paves the way to one of the contributions to the special issue to which I would like to draw attention, a seven-page “feature” presenting adverts from the magazine’s seventy-five-year history. “*The Connoisseur* has always tried to mirror the

pre-occupations and interests of the antiques trade," it professed, "recognising a mutual interest in promoting an intelligent concern for the arts." ⁵⁴ Its first page included a facsimile bearing the heading "Advertisements that are Read!", presumably from the magazine's early years (Fig. 17). Not an example of an art object but rather itself for sale, the original function was to generate more revenue through trumpeting endorsements by *Advertising World*, for example, which is quoted as having recognised "that the magazine is unsurpassed as a medium for the sale of all kinds of art treasures." A virtually identical iteration of this catalogue of praise appeared in the advertisement pages (where else?) of the 1922-1923 issue of *Art Prices Current*, an almanac whose title surely says it all (Fig. 18). ⁵⁵ As for the art treasures themselves, the special issue of *The Connoisseur* contained, for example, pages nostalgically subtitled "1914: The End of an Era" (Fig. 19), and "1931: World Depression Boosted the Antiques Trade" (Fig. 20). At most, however, all that the feature really amounts to is, in the magazine's own words, "a useful and unusual record of the finest works of art for sale, in good times and in bad." No attention is paid, for instance, to the typographic design or reproductive technology used to make any of the "catalogue" of advertisements presented there. Similarly, the way in which the feature is laid out, with advertisements insensitively positioned wherever they might fit, demonstrates a remarkable lack of self-reflexivity on the part of these supposed arbiters of sophistication and taste. Such flagrant physical incorporation, what is more, mirrors *The Connoisseur's* shameless efforts to insert themselves into the art-historical narrative of *The Art Press*, despite eschewing requisite scholarly analysis from the magazine's overall editorial approach.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 17.

"Advertisements that are read!", reprinted in "75 Years of Advertisements", *The Connoisseur*, 191, no. 769 (March 1976): 224. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

The Connoisseur

A MAGAZINE FOR COLLECTORS, ILLUSTRATED.

Edited by C. REGINALD GRUNDY.

Founded in 1901.

Published on the first of every month, 2s. net.

Annual Subscription, including Postage, Great Britain and
Abroad, 25s. ; except Canada, 26s.

THE CONNOISSEUR deals with every subject interesting to the collector and art lover, and in addition to being profusely illustrated in half-tone contains every month full page plates in colour of the great masters' and other works of art.

The advertisement pages are one of the interesting and valuable features of THE CONNOISSEUR, and the following notices give an idea of what they are thought of by the Press.

"We feel compelled to say a word as to the interest there is for all connoisseurs and collectors in the advertisement pages of the magazine; they really ought to be included when the numbers are bound, instead of being destroyed as they sometimes are."—Mr. FERRY HURD, J.P., in *The Edinburgh Gazette*.

"There are not many more publications of which it can be said more justly that the literary and advertisement sections alike make an almost irresistible appeal to the reader."—*The Newspaper World*.

"The advertisements are nearly as good as the editorial matter."—*Queen*.

"A magazine which no collector or dealer can afford to be without, and which, to judge from the names it contains, very few of any standing eschew to dispense with."—*People*.

"... Proof of the recognition that the magazine is unsurpassed as a medium for the sale of all kinds of art treasures."—*Advertising World*.

"This high-class production, the utility of which is enhanced by the many illustrations and advertisement sections, which form admirable features of its contents every month."—*Midland Counties Herald*.

"The advertisements are, as usual, a delight to the public."—*Lower County Telegraph*.

"THE CONNOISSEUR . . . provides a feast of enjoyment, by picture and literature, by advertisement and expert comment, for the collector, amateur and professional."—*Felding Star* (New Zealand).

Write for Advertisement Rates to the ADVERTISEMENT
MANAGER, THE CONNOISSEUR, 1, Duke Street, St. James's,
London, S.W. 1.

Tel. 7905 Gerrard. Telegrams: "Noredad, Piccy, London."

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 18.

"The Connoisseur: A Magazine for Collectors, Illustrate", Art Prices Current, 2, new series (1922-1923): ii. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 20.

“1931: World Depression Boosted the Antiques Trade”, in “75 Years of Advertisements”, *The Connoisseur*, 191, no. 769 (March 1976): 228. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

“An antique of the future, gaining value over the years”

A quick foray into the astonishing 100 pages of contemporary advertisements that ran in the issue, however, reveals that any regard to reproductive technology remained solely within the bounds of a system of patronage rather than in any objective historical context, as an ornately framed birthday message from suppliers Stevens Press, a firm “proud to be associated with its production on this special occasion” makes clear (Fig. 21).⁵⁶ In a similar vein, brief attention might be turned to an advertisement for Renaissance, “‘an exceptional wax polish’ sold in association with the *Connoisseur Magazine*”, “already used in many parts of the world by discriminating experts”, highlighting such complicity as reciprocal (Fig. 22).

⁵⁷ At this point, it is also worth remembering a regular feature of every single issue of the magazine, the index of advertisers which brought each number to a close: the final page from the March 1976 issue, for example, is itself a catalogue of *The Connoisseur's* reliance on a network of commercial enterprises embedded within the magazine's architecture (Fig. 23). ⁵⁸ What is more, directly above this index is to be found "The Connoisseur Register of Works of Art and Curios of every kind, now for sale or wanted." "This list," it explains, "is compiled for the purpose of bringing readers ... into direct communication with the owners of valuable articles for sale." Is it a coincidence, one must wonder, that of the five items listed as for sale, two lots consist of copies of the first several issues of the magazine itself? Such mechanisms of the trade had even been fed into the magazine's design at points at least in its recent past. Consider, for instance, one of the covers that had featured on the exhibition panel dedicated to *The Connoisseur*, that for the March 1959 issue, which, as Ruari McLean noted in his classic book *Magazine Design* of 1969, used "a photograph [that] was taken for advertising not editorial purposes" (Fig. 24). ⁵⁹ The caption beneath reliably informs the reader that they are looking at an "embroidered bed cover with the original passementerie by Philippe de la Salle", given, no less, by Marie Antoinette to her niece. The photo evidently shows the work on display in the salerooms of Frank Partridge Inc., of West 56th Street in New York, again shamelessly made clear by the accompanying legend. ⁶⁰

Most startling of all, however, is an advertisement in the March 1976 issue for a commemorative enamel box to celebrate the magazine's seventy-fifth anniversary (Fig. 25). ⁶¹ Pictured surrounded by the trappings of an archetypal connoisseur, all laid upon pages from early issues of the magazine—notice headings such as "Porcelain and Pottery" indicating the various categories of object upon which the title focused—the enamel box reproduces Byam Shaw's cover as its own lid. An unwitting—or better, failed—*mise-en-abyme*, the advert neglects, alas, to deliver to the viewer any of the self-reflexivity that such a device begs to provide. Rather, it offered, "at a price of only £65 ... plus postage and packing", one of a limited edition of 250. "The Box, or Boxes, that you buy will be individually numbered. After the Edition is subscribed the templates are then broken. This *objet d'art* will become," it brazenly promises, "an antique of the future, gaining value over the years. It comes to you," it goes on, "with a Certificate of Authentication in an especially designed buff coloured outer box." This incursion might head towards a close by recalling the truism that adverts in magazines set the rhythm for that which follows. Nonetheless, *The Connoisseur's* March 1976 editorial casually proclaimed its imperviousness: "No magazine, incidentally, has had a closer relationship with the antiques trade, though this has in no way imperilled the jealously guarded independence of editorial content." ⁶² Writing in the pages of *New Society*,

however, Peter Fuller pounced on this assertion, questioning its meaning and veracity. “Even while the champagne corks popped in the Reynolds’ Room of the Royal Academy for the magazine’s birthday celebrations,” he wrote, “major advertisers were threatening to withdraw their support unless more articles devoted to the study of those objects which they regularly sold were included.” ⁶³

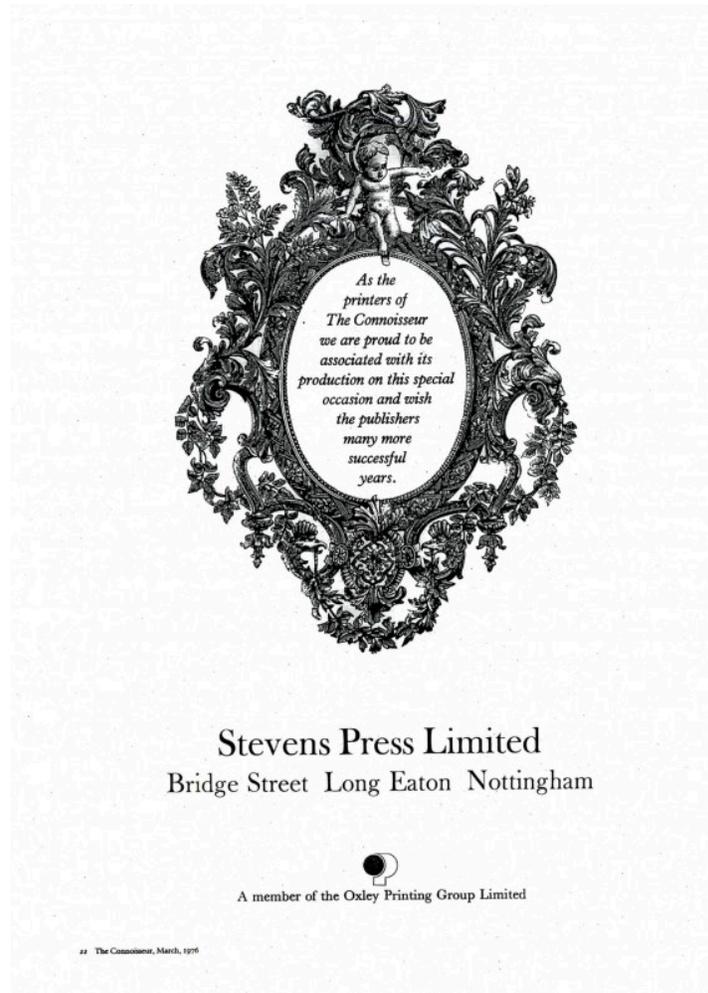


Figure 21.

The Connoisseur, 191, no. 769 (March 1976): advertising section, 22. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

RENAISSANCE

*'An exceptional wax polish' sold in association with
the Connoisseur Magazine*

Renaissance is a professional blend of refined fossil-origin waxes with unique cleaning and protective qualities. It is already used in many parts of the world by discriminating experts. This superlative wax polish revives and protects all surfaces, gently lifting the grime of antiquity and leaving a finish delightful to see and touch. The surface glows with repeated applications. With the consent of the British Museum, acknowledged leader in conservation research, the polish is now being made available to the public.

Price per can, including packing, postage and (in U.K. only) VAT	
U.S.A. - Air Mail:	\$7.50
- Surface Mail:	\$6.00
Canada - Air Mail:	\$8.40
- Surface Mail:	\$6.00
U.K. Only	£1.95
Europe	£2.50
Australia - Air Mail:	£4.60
Surface Mail:	£2.50

For quantities of six or more deduct 10% overall.

Order Form: To The Connoisseur, Chestergate House, Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, SW1V 1HF. (Reg. Office. Reg. No. 112955 England).

Please send me by airmail/surface mail:cans of Renaissance Wax Polish ateach, less 10% overall deduction on six or more cans. I enclose total payment of:

Mr/Mrs/Miss

Address



Cheques/money orders should be made payable to THE CONNOISSEUR

Figure 22.

The Connoisseur, 191, no. 769 (March 1976): advertising section, 70. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.



Figure 24.

Ruari McLean, *Magazine Design*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 68–69. Digital image courtesies of Samuel Bibby.

1901-1976 This Commemorative Enamel Box
to celebrate Connoisseur's 75th Anniversary

This elegant box is gilt, beige, black and white is a worthy addition to the collection of the first number of *Connoisseur Magazine* 75 years ago.

Hand engraved and enamelled on copper, with a century and a half of the 19th Century, this Box is considered by *Connoisseur* to be one of the most beautiful they have ever produced.

The Box—inspired with designs from that first copy of the magazine—has engravings on both sides, including the colour cover on its larger lid. It is 2 1/2 inches long by 2 inches wide and 1 inch deep.

This box is offered to readers of *Connoisseur* at a price of only £15 (plus postage and packing, each of a limited edition of 500. The Box, or Boxes, that you buy will be individually numbered. After the Edition is exhausted the recipients are then listed. This age of art will become an antique of the future, gaining in value over the years. It comes to you with a Certificate of Authenticity in an expertly designed fast-colour extra box.

The links between the home land of *Connoisseur* and the United States of America have always been very strong. What better commemorative gift to give to yourself (and to your friends in this particular year) than there are only 250. So with a cheque (made out to *The Connoisseur*) and fill in the coupon.

Shipped by air to the United States and all overseas with a certificate of receipt of value.

To: *Connoisseur Box Offer*,
 Gloucester House, Strand at Bridge Road, London WC2R 3NH
 Please send me (send money £/US \$/NZ \$/Aust \$/P. U. S. and Europe £) 1976, U.S.A. and elsewhere \$) cents.
 I enclose £/.....
 Name:
 Address:
 I enclose Cheque (1976) Pounds £/.....
 C.M.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 25.

The *Connoisseur*, 191, no. 769 (March 1976): advertising section, 18. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

“On a blatant quid pro quo basis”

Fuller was not the only one to highlight some of the broader issues that this “souvenir ‘catalogue’” failed to acknowledge, let alone address adequately. ⁶⁴ Another reviewer, Richard Cork, writing in the *Evening Standard* in mid-June—half way through the show’s run—opined of the exhibition that it “scarcely comes to terms with the intimate bond between the interests of dealers and the priorities of magazines which rely on advertising. It would have been a salutary gesture,” he went on, “if this exhibition had displayed ad pages alongside editorial content: in many cases the one could thereby be seen to have paid for the other on a blatant quid pro quo basis. By removing magazines from their normal position in the market-place to the virginal sanctuary of the museum,” he declared, “the organisers have failed

to drive home perhaps the most relevant warning they could issue to editors of the future.”⁶⁵ Cork was clearly intent on addressing such issues himself; as well as being critic for the *Evening Standard*, he had also been, since the previous year, editor of the magazine *Studio International*. No doubt prompted by the V&A exhibition, but also developing themes that he had begun to think about the year before in his inaugural *Studio International* editorial, “Pitfalls and Priorities”, Cork put together a themed issue of the title dedicated to the topic of the art magazine.⁶⁶ Appearing in autumn 1976, just as the V&A show was closing, it might be thought of as something of a counter-catalogue (Fig. 26).⁶⁷ To draw immediate comparison to *The Connoisseur’s* special issue, I offer the following from Cork’s editorial:

however many efforts are made to dissociate the magazine from the most destructive aspects of a profit and investment-oriented art market, the very fact that *Studio* is packaged within an albeit minimal amount of commodity advertising identifies all of its contents with capitalist ideology at its most overt.⁶⁸

For an example, one might turn to the verso of a two-page advert, clearly specially commissioned for the themed issue, promoting the services of Lund Humphries, “designers of fine art books and catalogues” who have, they claimed on the recto, “for many years stood high in the fraternity of the Art Press, as printers and publishers of the highest standards” (Fig. 27).⁶⁹

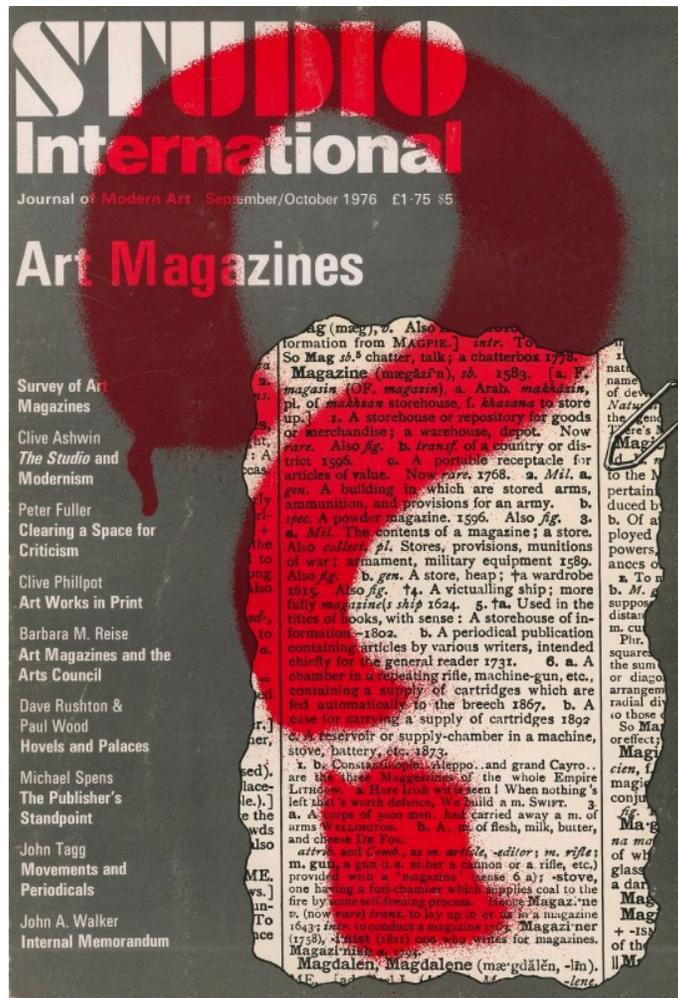


Figure 26.
Studio International, 192, no. 983 (September/October 1976): front cover. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

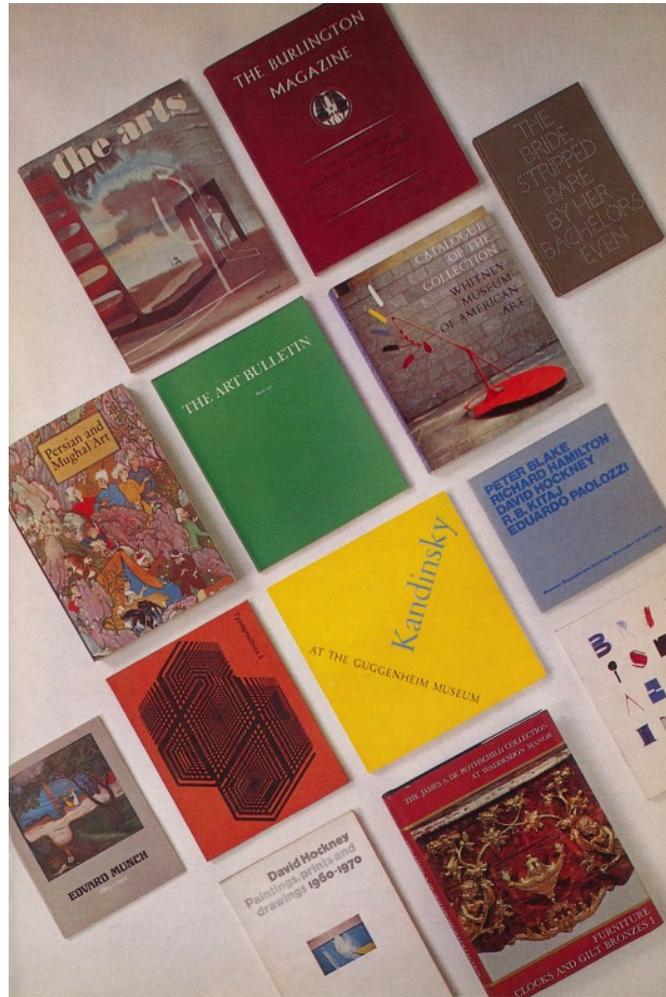


Figure 27.

Studio International, 192, no. 983 (September/October 1976): 230–xiii. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

Founded in 1893, unlike so many new magazines *The Studio* (as it was called until 1964) lacked an inaugural editorial or programmatic statement making explicit its agenda. Meanwhile, no archive—beyond the pages of the periodical itself—appears to have survived, making the excavation of its early years less straightforward, but the columns of other magazines can yield some sense of the path that *The Studio* was set to follow. A notice in the literary review *The Academy* reported to its readers that the new title was forthcoming, outlining the first issue’s various contents. Presumably on the basis of some form of promotional prospectus, it then went on to signal the magazine’s intention “in the future to publish critical signed notices of exhibitions, written by artists for artists and representing from many different standpoints, the opinions of those technically informed thereon. In reviews of books,” it continued, “special attention will be given to their artistic side—their printing, binding, and illustrations”, ⁷⁰ characteristics about which

they were themselves not immune from scrutiny. “The first number, which has been a long time in coming,” one review declared, “will repay those who have waited. The reading,” it went on, “is good from cover to cover. The illustrations excellent and varied, and the printing and paper—even in these days of good things, hardly to be surpassed.”⁷¹ By the early 1950s, a subscription advertisement even went as far as suggesting that “*The Studio* is more than an illustrated magazine. It is an ever-changing art gallery in print”, prescient of many people’s perception of this medium in later decades.⁷²

“The recognised international vehicle of modern art knowledge”



Figure 28.

The Studio, 1, no. 1 (April 1893): front cover. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

It is just such visual and material qualities which have formed the basis of much of the historiographical attention that *The Studio* would go on to receive. Clive Ashwin, for example, has dubbed it “the first visually modern magazine”, an accolade that extended beyond its recognised importance for the emergence of the Art Nouveau style in Britain (Fig. 28).⁷³ Indeed, the magazine’s formation “coincided with the perfection of photomechanical reproduction in line and half-tone, and,” he has also noted, “it was the first British periodical of art and design to make full use of the new media, with their potential for a strikingly ‘modern’ look and mass production at relatively low cost.”⁷⁴ Associated with the title from the fore was Aubrey Beardsley, responsible, for example, for the initial cover design. Beardsley capitalised on *The Studio*’s commitment to modern techniques of illustration, developing in its pages what Gerry Beegan has termed “a new photomechanical aesthetic”, specifically producing work “with the intention that it would be mass-produced in books or magazines.” Beardsley’s printed images, Beegan stresses, “were not lesser objects, but final pieces”, a distinction that we will see to be equally still valid of work reproduced in the magazine at the time of *The Art Press*.⁷⁵ What is more, from its very beginning *The Studio* took a keen interest in publishing written work which reflected on the nature of the reproductions included in its pages, as pieces such as “Drawing for Reproduction” from the second issue attest.⁷⁶

While devoid of any declaratory statement at its inception, by 1933, however, the magazine would confidently declare in a piece of paratext that it had been led from the fore by the consistent vision of presenting to its British readers art from abroad, and, vice versa, to its international readers British art. “Thus ‘The Studio’ has become,” it asserted, “the recognised international vehicle of modern art knowledge, serving the interests of artists and art lovers everywhere.”⁷⁷ Such confidence in its importance seems only to have increased over time; the fetishisation of one’s origins seen above in relation to *The Connoisseur* was evidently not exclusive. Advertised in the November/December 1975 issue of *Studio International*, the anthology *The Studio: The Early Years* was to be co-published with The Antique Collectors Club (Fig. 29). “The present selection, mainly taken from the first five years of the magazine’s existence,” it explains, “comprises a balanced and exciting presentation of the scope of ‘The Studio’, its interests, and its influence.” Having outlined notable content, the inclusion of an introductory essay by Professor D.J. Gordon, and drawn attention to the presence of illustrations throughout, the prospective purchaser is teased with a final feature: “Included is a small selection of contemporary advertisements—offers of studios, art academies, furniture designed by Heals’, Liberty’s and Maples, and artist’s materials.”⁷⁸ Curiously, however, the promise of this material, not to mention the potential that it offers, disappears as the publication evolves. By the September/October 1976 issue, it is clear that it had grown

to become two distinct publications. The original anthology now bore the new title *The Birth of the Studio*, and was accompanied by a facsimile reproduction of the very first issue from 1893.⁷⁹ Unlike the growing market for art magazines in reprint, recognition of them as repositories for historical focus, embodied by an advertisement a page later in the same issue (Fig. 30),⁸⁰ emphasis in this instance appears to be on collectability; “Also included,” it assures, “will be a 30 x 7 inch print from a drawing by Beardsley entitled ‘Joan of Arc’s Entry into Orleans’ first published as a supplement to the May 1893 issue of *The Studio*”, an offer not a million miles away from *The Connoisseur’s* enamel *objet d’art* (Fig. 31). Equally, just as Bevis Hillier had urged for the appeal of such magazines to collectors, so too did the Introduction to the companion anthology (Fig. 32). In the end written by Simon Houfe, and running to a mere page and a half, it amounted to little more than a paean to *The Studio’s* first editor, Gleeson White, and in particular his taste: “White’s individual choice of subjects was amply justified. His unflinching talent for picking a winner assembles all the right names”. “Eighty years on,” Houfe concluded, “no collector of early 20th century antiques can reasonably neglect the pages of *The Studio*.”⁸¹

Such efforts, however, were not the first by this magazine to have looked back at its past. In 1968, to coincide with its seventy-fifth anniversary, for example, the magazine published a number of features; “Reminiscences of *The Studio*” gathered together short recollections from leading figures including Herbert Read, Kenneth Clark, and John Rothenstein.⁸² Following these was an essay by the same D.J. Gordon mentioned above, “Dilemmas: *The Studio* in 1893–4”, which considered the magazine’s first years, placing particular emphasis on elements of its design, as well as the status of the reproductions that it contained; included, for instance, are images of some of the entries for a competition to design the title page, originally published in August 1893 (Fig. 33).⁸³ These commemorative contributions were coupled with the introduction of a new trimestrial supplement dedicated to graphic design, called *Studiographic*, edited by Colin Banks and John Miles. Surely following in the footsteps of the focus that D.J. Gordon had directed to this topic in relation to *The Studio* itself, the first iteration included, for example, a piece by Hilary Evans titled “Applied Art for Fine Art’s Sake”, while the subsequent (and in fact only) reappearance of the supplement in September 1968 included such material as Bernard Myers’ “The Bauhaus—Graphic Design” (Fig. 34).⁸⁴ The periodical appearance of such material in its pages clearly shows *The Studio* to have been perennially interested in its own place within a history of art magazines, and considered together these interventions might be thought of as sedimentary traces of a long-standing self-reflexive historiographical commitment.

ART MAGAZINES IN REPRINT

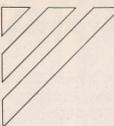
ABC, Number 1-6, Series 1, Zurich, 1924-1925, Volumes 1-6, Series 2, Basel, 1926-1928, £35.
Abstraction, Creation, Art Men Figschell, Number 1-6, Paris, 1932-1939, £35.
Alphabetical Image, Numbers 1-5, London, 1946-1950, £80.
The American Museum, Volumes 1-12, Philadelphia, 1787-1792, £225.
Aventyrer, Volume 1, Vienna, 1908-9, £25.
Apollin, Volume 1-2, London, 1935-1939, £7,000.
Argent, Volumes 1-2, Munkki, 1916-1921, £35.
Art Bulletin, Volumes 1-52, New York, 1913-1970, £1,000.
Art in America, Volumes 1-38, New York, 1913-1950, £1,350.
Art Abstractum, Volumes 1-6, Paris, 1924-1961, £220.
Art Education, Volumes 1-30, Washington, 1945-1960, £550.
Art Journal, Volumes 1-20, New York, 1941-1970, £150.
L'Architecture Moderne, Numbers 1-21, Paris, 1923-1925, £250.
Art Moderna, Volumes 1-10, Ann Arbor, 1939-1961, £400.
L'Art (D'Apprentissage), Volumes 1-6, Paris, 1924-1925, £120.
Art and Understanding, Numbers 1-2, Washington D.C., 1929-1930, £12.
The Arts, Number 1-2, London, 1942-1943, £10.
Asia, Number 1-8, London, 1935-1939, £25.
Blatt, Number 1-2, London, 1914-1916, £20.
The Blvd Mag, Number 1-2, New York, 1917, £5.
Boston Museum Bulletin of Fine Arts, Volumes 1-40, Boston, 1885-1912, Index, £175.
British Journal of Aesthetics, Volumes 1-8, London, 1961-1969, £150.
Blossa, Volumes 1-6, Home/Berlin, New York, 1925-1926, £120.
Burlington Magazine, Volumes 1-110, London, 1860-1930, £3,000.
Cabinet Voltaire, Number 1, Zurich, 1916, £2.
Cinema Works, Number 1-22, New York, 1932-1917, £40.
Concilio, Numbers 1-2, Paris, 1920, £5.
Club Dada, Number 1, Berlin, 1919, £5.
Le Coeur et l'Esprit, Number 1, Paris, 1922, £3.
The Cosmos, Volumes 1-4, New York, 1855-1857, £175.
Dada, Number 1-3, Zurich/Basel, 1917-1920, £20.
Dadaismus der Schenkerstr., Number 1, Cologne, 1920, £5.
Dadaism, Number 1, Monaco, 1920, £5.
Dance Index, Volumes 1-3, New York, 1942-1945, £140.
Der Dada, Number 1-5, Berlin, 1919, £15.
Dies, Number 1-3, London, 1950, £10.
L'Esprit Nouveau, Number 1-28, Paris, 1920-1923, £200.
Form, Number 1-10, Cambridge, 1965-1969, £20.
Formes, English Edition, Numbers 1-55, Paris, 1922-1925, £750.
Forum des Beaux-Arts, Series 1-8, 200 volumes, Paris, 1880-1900, £5,000.
The Gaze, Number 1-4, London, 1950, £75.
Image, Number 1-3, London, 1945-1962, £60.
Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Volumes 1-30, New York, 1941-1972, New/India, £250.
Journal of the Courtauld and the Warburg Institute, Volumes 1-30, London, 1907-1967, £750.
Labyrinth, Number 1-23, Geneva, 1944-1945, £70.
Lacerba, Number 1-22, Florence, 1912-1915, £40.
Leipziger, London Journal and the Printing Machine, Volumes 1-2, London, 1898-1920, £100.
London Bulletin, Number 1-10, London, 1958-1968, £70.
Mandarin, Number 1-6, New York, 1912-1919, £10.
Martian, Volumes 1-4, New York, 1941-1947, £100.
Metz, Number 1-24, Hanover, 1825-1902, £250.
Museograph Museum of Art Bulletin, Number 1-27, New York, 1886-1942, Index, £600.
Minnesota, Number 1-12, Paris, 1853-1858, £250.
Museen, Volumes 1-10, Paris, 1945-1957, £375.
Museum of Modern Art Bulletin, Volumes 1-30, New York, 1923-1963, £150.
Neue Blätter, Volumes 1-2, Dresden, 1919-1921, £90.
The New York Times, Theatre Reviews, New York, 1929-1910, 6 volumes, £550.
Orpheus, Number 1-4, Muenchen, 1929-1933, £30.
Parosmos, Volumes 1-18, New York, 1929-1941, £1,225.
Plunkett, Number 1-3, Paris/New York, 1922-1941, £10.
La Revue de l'Art, Number 1, St. Raphael, 1922, £5.
Print Collections Quarterly, Volumes 1-50, Raven, 1911-1961, Index, £275.
Propaganda, Number 1, Paris, 1920, £2.
Qu'Est-ce l'Art, Number 1-64, London, 1927-1940, Index, £700.
Qu'Est-ce, The Samaritan Number, Paris, 1922, £0.
Old Holland, Years 1-86, Year 1-22, Amsterdam, 1882-1907, £90.
Years 23-86 will be published 1977-8.
La Revolution Sennedien, Number 1-12, Paris, 1924-1931, £95.
The Ridgfield Gazette, Number 1, Ridgfield, New Jersey, 1916, £5.
Requiem, Number 1, New York, 1921, £2.
Stetko in Art Education, Volumes 1-10, Washington, 1959-1963, £140.
Der Sturm, Volumes 1-21, Berlin, 1910-1932, £900.
Le Symbolisme en Revue de la Revue de l'Art, Number 1-2, Paris, 1920-1923, £45.
Theatre Arts, Volumes 1-25, New York, 1912-1941, £225.
291, Number 1-12, New York, 1915-1916, £90.
Usser Plastik, Bonn, 1919-1921, £25.
Viva, Series 1-7, Volumes 1-27, New York, 1940-1947, £200.
La Voce, Florence, 1914-1916, 2 volumes, £25.
The Yellow Book, 13 volumes, London, 1894-1902, £140.
Zentralblatt für Kunstgeschichte, Volumes 1-26, Leipzig, 1922-1943, £950.
Der Zeitungs, Number 1, Zurich, 1919, £5.
Zi, Number 1, Paris, 1909, £5.

1. We can supply complete series, parts, runs or individual volumes if suitable permits.
 2. Customers will be involved in shipping costs above, unless they wish to be sent out in the company of their own country, which is the normal situation.
 3. Payment should be made in advance of goods.
 4. For further information on any of the magazines see our catalogue at The Art Press, Two Grosvenor Art Magazines, 6 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0EX.

Periodical Division: THE ART BOOK COMPANY, 11 Ezzell Street, Covent Garden, London WC2, England.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 30.
 Studio International, 192, no. 983 (September/October 1976): inside back cover. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.



THE STUDIO



The Birth of
**THE
STUDIO**

THE BIRTH OF THE STUDIO

In the 1890s the newly established *The Studio* magazine, the first of its kind, publicised the dramatic new Art Nouveau style which has since become so familiar. It represented a complete break away from fussy Victorian ornamentation which was welcomed by *The Studio's* 60,000 readers. The contributors included William Morris, Lazenby Liberty and Aubrey Beardsley. This selection provides the key articles in the development of the new style.

Published by the Antique collectors' Club, Church Street, Woodbridge, Suffolk

Pages: approx 200. Size 205 x 279mm. 300 black & white illustrations. Paperback £4.95. Available late October.



THE FIRST ISSUE OF THE STUDIO

This facsimile reproduction of issue number one of *The Studio*, first published in April 1893, is the first in a new series of Studio Special Numbers. The contents of the first issue include: 'A New Illustrator: Aubrey Beardsley' by Joseph Pennell; and 'Spitalfields Brocades' by Lazenby Liberty. Also included will be a 30 x 7 inch print from a drawing by Beardsley entitled 'Joan of Arc's Entry into Orleans' first published as a supplement to the May 1893 issue of *The Studio*.

Pages: 60. Size 210 x 297mm. With Slip Cover £2.95. Available November.

AVAILABLE FROM:
WAREHOUSE PUBLISHING 14 WEST CENTRAL STREET LONDON WC1A 1JH

Figure 31.

Studio International, 192, no. 983 (September/October 1976): xvii. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

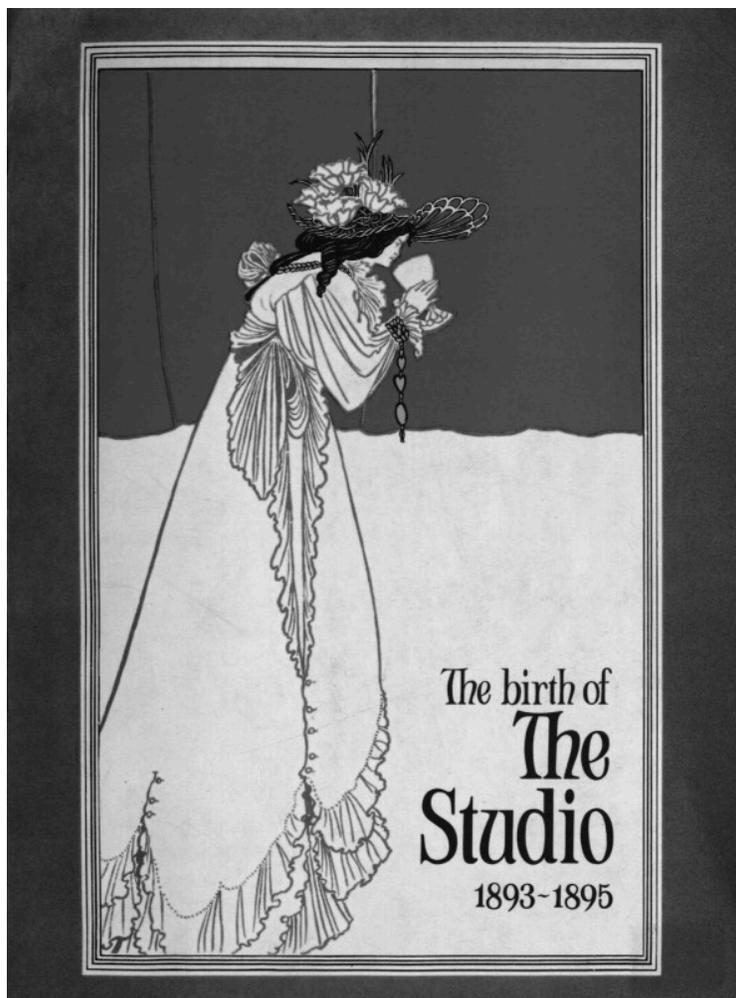


Figure 32.

The Birth of The Studio, 1893-1895, (Woodbridge: The Antique Collectors Club, 1976): front cover. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

Awards in the Title-Page Competition



Figure 33.

"Awards in the Title-Page Competition", *The Studio*, 5 (August 1893): 205. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.



Figure 34.

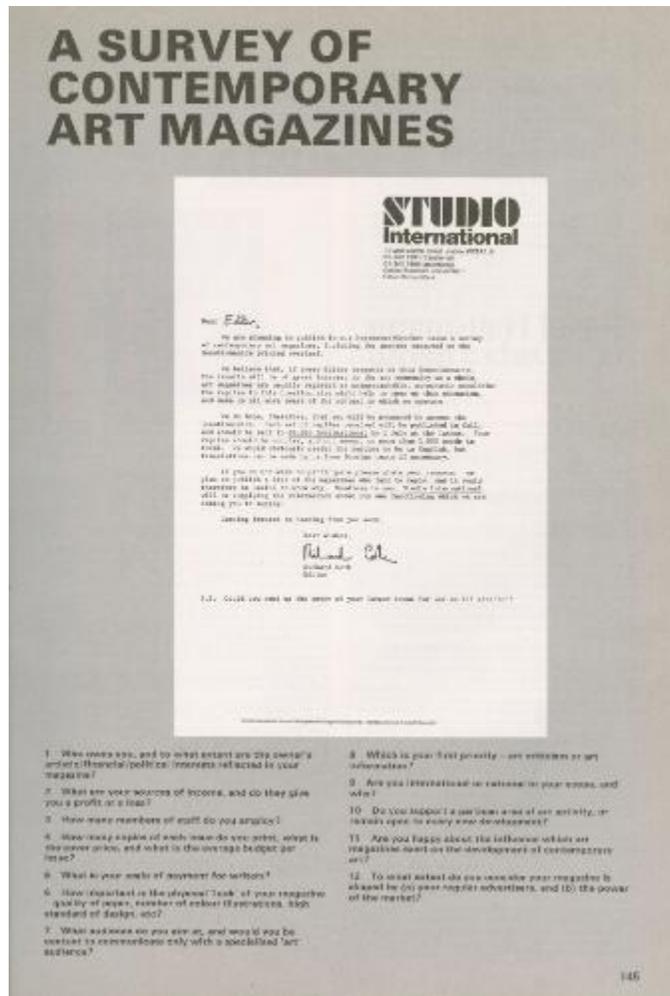
Bernard Myers, "The Bauhaus—Graphic Design", *Studiographic*, 2, Studio International 176, no. 903 (September 1968): 102–103. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

“The mechanisms which frame and disseminate artists’ work”

Returning to the September/October 1976 issue of *Studio International*, it is generally still best known for the results of a questionnaire that it published which had been sent to editors of art magazines both in Britain and abroad (Fig. 35).⁸⁵ As Lori Cole has argued, questionnaires appearing in periodicals function as “a kind of microcosm of the magazine wherein artists and writers are united, if only momentarily, by their shared interest in a magazine’s platform.”⁸⁶ In this instance, however, such a shared interest is not in the particular title in which the responses appeared, but rather in the medium more generally; “the questionnaire echoes the function and format of the magazine itself,” Cole explains, using an analogy to which I will later return, “as responses are juxtaposed to form a collage of disparate viewpoints, united by a shared commitment to a larger project or movement’, in this case that of the art magazine itself.⁸⁷ Central to this medium, one of the relationships that Cork was keen to explore should be widely explored in his questionnaire was indeed that between advertising and editorial content, and accordingly the final question of his survey asked: “To what extent do you consider your magazine is shaped by (a) your regular advertisers, and (b) the power of the market?” And *Studio International* itself was certainly not immune to such scrutiny, including among the published answers a set of its own.

It might, in theory, be possible to claim that *Studio* is shaped neither by its regular advertisers nor the art market. But in practice, however much *Studio* may consciously fight off such influence, it is subliminally open to them at every turn. The art market still controls most of the mechanisms which frame and disseminate artists' work; and *Studio*—which is prepared to publish advertisements and thereby bolster the power of the market—remains as dependent on those mechanisms as everyone else. Any magazine which thinks otherwise is guilty of the most dangerous complacency and self-delusion.⁸⁸

The failings of *The Connoisseur*, meanwhile, to be so self-reflexive had not gone unnoticed; elsewhere in the same issue, Peter Fuller, for example, took the title and its special issue to task for managing to “mystify itself to itself”—an accusation maybe all the more apt in light of its abysmal advertisement for the enamel box.⁸⁹ Furthermore, John Tagg sarcastically proposed that the “*Connoisseur* always believed that lavishness and academicism were not incompatible.”⁹⁰ Yet, rather than focus on any of these contributions, as interesting as they all are, I would like instead to linger on a different piece in the issue, compiled by Clive Phillpot, ARLIS co-curator of the V&A exhibition. Six pages that he titled “Art Works in Print”, visually they could not be more different from the pages of advertisements catalogued in *The Connoisseur*, and alongside his essay for the ARLIS catalogue, they present an approach to their subject matter that will allow an appreciation of the complexity of the magazine and its history as a medium to emerge.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 35.
 “Survey of Contemporary Art Magazines”, Studio International, 192, no. 983 (September-October 1976): 145. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

“Where the shape of the poem becomes a counterpart of its meaning”

Phillpot was at that time Librarian at Chelsea College of Art but would shortly leave to take up the same position at MoMA. His contribution to the ARLIS volume, “Movement Magazines: The Years of Style”, consisted of a conventional account of periodicals associated with, for example, Constructivism, Dada, and De Stijl, and in particular “the quality of the visual experience which they offered to the reader.”⁹¹ He put forward the argument that the collage works of Picasso and Braque from around 1911, works that incorporated words and letters, paved the way for subsequent typographic avant-gardes (Fig. 36). While I have labelled Phillpot’s catalogue essay conventional, it is certainly not worth dismissing, for plenty of what

concerned him there would be borne out by different means in his piece for *Studio International*. And it is precisely this difference that is of interest. As Phillipot himself put it, the Cubists were responsible for “the acknowledgement that the medium through which attitudes to these movements were disseminated was itself a visual medium”,⁹² a suggestion that will shortly be clear to see when considering his second piece.



Figure 36.

Pablo Picasso, *Bottle of Suze*, 1912, pasted paper, gouache and charcoal, 65.4 x 50.2 cm. Collection of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, St Louis (WU 3773). Digital image courtesy of Succession Picasso and DACS, London 2019.

“It is worth noting,” Phillipot wrote, “that ... a significant part of the energy of artists actively engaged in the development of modern art was cheerfully channelled into visual experiments in magazines.”⁹³ He was quick, however, to observe that “the victory of modern typography was not as speedy or as absolute as one might suppose”. “[The] bulk of a magazine such as *Lacerba*, even after it introduced its crushing masthead halfway through its life, is

substantially composed of relatively monotonous grey rectangles of justified text”,⁹⁴ as the front cover of this Futurist periodical from January 1914 demonstrates (Fig. 37). “Inherited attitudes towards the technology of printing,” he went on, “worked against experiment. The almost inevitable horizontality of letterpress was not easy to circumvent until the potential of the camera and the possibility of blockmaking from collaged letterpress effects was realised.”⁹⁵ Phillpot provides no specific example—visual or verbal—of his point, however. It is certainly worth bearing in mind though that the ARLIS publication—“background reading” as it referred to itself—was very lightly illustrated indeed, with only nine images in the entire sixty-four-page volume. His essay merely includes a reproduction of the cover of issue 6 of *Merz* (Fig. 38). On one level, this was, of course, because it was intended to accompany—and not duplicate—the “visual narrative in photographic form” of the exhibition screens. But by excavating Phillpot’s text a little, it is possible to discern what he was referring to more specifically.

LACERBA

Anno II, n. 1
Periodico quindicinale

Firenze, 1 gennaio 1914
Via Nazionale, 25

Il n. 4 soldi
L'anno 4 lire

OLGORE, Lirismo sintetico e sensazione fisica - **MARINETTI**, Ponte - **BENUZZI**, Bar express - **BUZZI**, Volo - **WITIGI**, Il soggetto nella pittura futurista - **SEDIA ELETTRICA** (Luigi Luzzatti) - **CARRA**, Disegno - **CANGIULLO**, motori II - **BOCCIONI**, Simultaneità Futurista - **CARRA**, Immobilità + ventre - **CAFFE**.

FOLGORE.

LIRISMO SINTETICO E SENSAZIONE FISICA

La nuova sensibilità futurista impone al genio lirico, veramente moderno, una più profonda e rapida espressione della vita nostra, poichè il periodo tradizionale (oltre gonfio di vento in cui rotta una mosca-pensiero) viene fatalmente urtato e sorpassato dalle veloci correnti della multipla esistenza quotidiana.

La poesia d'oggi, obesa com'è di volute, fregi, decorazioni sonore, stanca fino allo spasimo la

intelligenza con i massicci carichi di lucida ed inutile zavorra stilistica, e si limita per la sostanza a riprodurre sole apparenze (interne ed esterne) o ad esprimere pure astrazioni sentimentali e cerebrali.

Talvolta coglie una sensazione originale, ma vi giuoca sopra per pagine e pagine estendola da tutti i lati (come una donna bella) e costringendoci ad esaminare con ossessionante minuzia, le particolarità che afferrammo a prima vista, con la rapidità dell'intuizione.

L'opera d'arte è ancora troppo definita nei contorni (*assenza di spiragli*) e troppo esplicitiva (*abbondanza di commenti superflui*).

Le idee debbono balzare dal genio dello scrittore nella loro nudità essenziale, percuotere con

Figure 37.

Lacerba, 2, no. 1 (1 January 1914): front cover. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.



Figure 38.

Clive Phillpot, “Movement Magazines: The Years of Style”, in Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot (eds.), *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines*, (London: The Art Book Company, 1976), 40-41. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

Phillpot identifies in his essay three key protagonists in the development of movement magazines as sites of experimental typography: El Lissitzky, Kurt Schwitters, and Theo van Doesburg. He then closes the piece with the following passage: “[they] treated their magazines as objects for total design; for they realised that magazines could also communicate on a non-verbal level, rather as in visual poetry”—and here he uses a quotation—“‘where the shape of the poem becomes a counterpart of its meaning’.”⁹⁶ His unreferenced citation comes from the opening passage of the catalogue for the 1965 ICA exhibition *Between Poetry and Painting* curated by Jasia Reichardt, a show which had pioneered concrete poetry and its relationship with the visual arts. While Phillpot’s essay appeared, as I have mentioned, very under-illustrated, Reichardt’s text, “Type in Art”, was to the contrary. The passage that Phillpot invokes is accompanied by the Futurist Ardengo Soffici’s typogram from 1915 (Fig. 39), a work poignantly described recently as an “ode to typography”.⁹⁷ This is obviously the kind of work he had been referring to when writing of letterpress’s horizontality eventually being circumvented through collaged printing effects. And it is no coincidence that this exact work, and, by contrast, the page from *Lacerba* on which its new masthead first appears—its layout still “tediously traditional”—grace the very exhibition screen dedicated to Cubism, Futurism, and Vorticism (Fig. 40). As Christine Poggi has noted of works such as Soffici’s typogram, “most of these collage poems were intended to be

photographed and then published as leaflets or in journals rather than to exist as unique works”, and many of the text fragments came themselves from Futurist periodicals such as *La Voce*.⁹⁸ The large A which looms at top left is indeed one of those from *Lacerba*’s “crushing” masthead. This practice, much like that of Beardsley for the pages of *The Studio*, recalls the notion of “magazine art”, “art which is realized only when the magazine itself has been composed and printed”, in fact a term defined by Phillpot himself in *Artforum* in 1980.⁹⁹ It will also be worth keeping this idea of “collage poems” in mind in relation to his contribution to *Studio International*.

In addition to the ICA concrete poetry exhibition of 1965 though, there is another source key to Phillpot’s thinking, similarly referenced in his short essay for the ARLIS volume: *Form: A Quarterly Magazine of the Arts* (Fig. 41), and in particular a column which ran in each of its ten issues, published between 1966 and 1968, “Great Little Magazines”. The column, compiled by one of the editors, Mike Weaver, surveyed a range of movement magazines—*De Stijl*, *Mecano*, and *Lef*, for example—indeed many of which featured in Phillpot’s own essay. But the series in *Form* did more than merely bring to his attention such magazines, I suggest: it alerted Phillpot at an early stage to the possibilities of the magazine, as a medium, to catalogue its own history, and to do so in a form conscious of its own status as a material object. *Form*’s intention was “to publish and provoke discussion of the relations of form to structure in the work of art”, exemplified by its inclusion of, and approach to, artists’ magazines from earlier twentieth-century avant-garde movements.¹⁰⁰ “Great Little Magazines” presented such titles through physical descriptions, author indexes, selected excerpts in translation, as well as providing details of libraries that held copies. In the words of Gwen Allen, “*Form* clearly understood itself in relationship to this lineage, and the very act of publishing the magazine was a way to retrieve for current practice the significance of the periodical in the historical avant-garde.”¹⁰¹ And it is this very mantle that Phillpot would take on in the pages of *Studio International*, more than conscious of both its origins as a magazine as well as its place within a (visual and verbal) history of graphic reproduction.

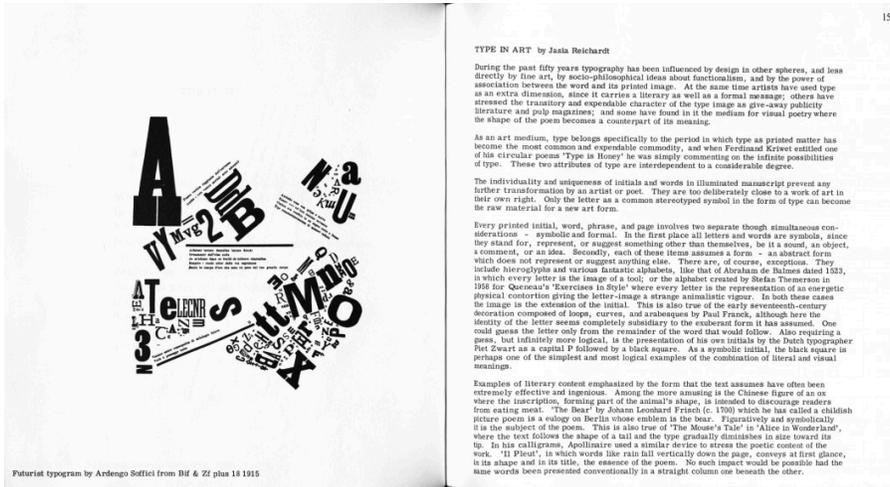


Figure 39.

Jasja Reichardt, "Type in Art", Between Poetry and Painting, (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1965), 14-15. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 40.

The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines, 1976, installation photograph. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive, London (GF3110, 1976). Digital image courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

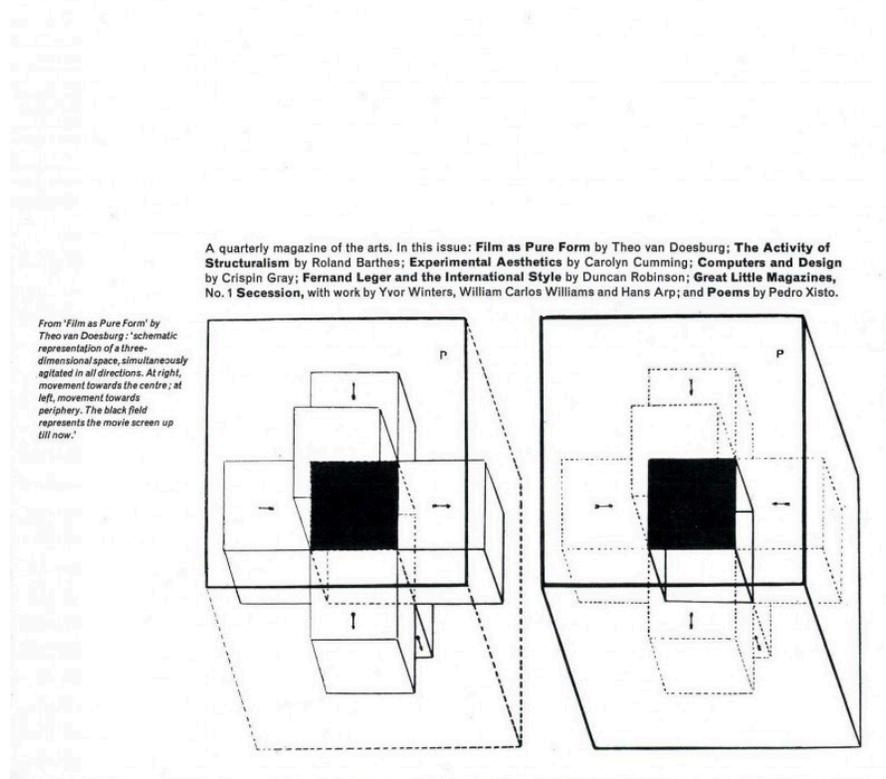


Figure 41.

Form: A Quarterly Magazine of the Arts, 1 (Summer 1966): front cover. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

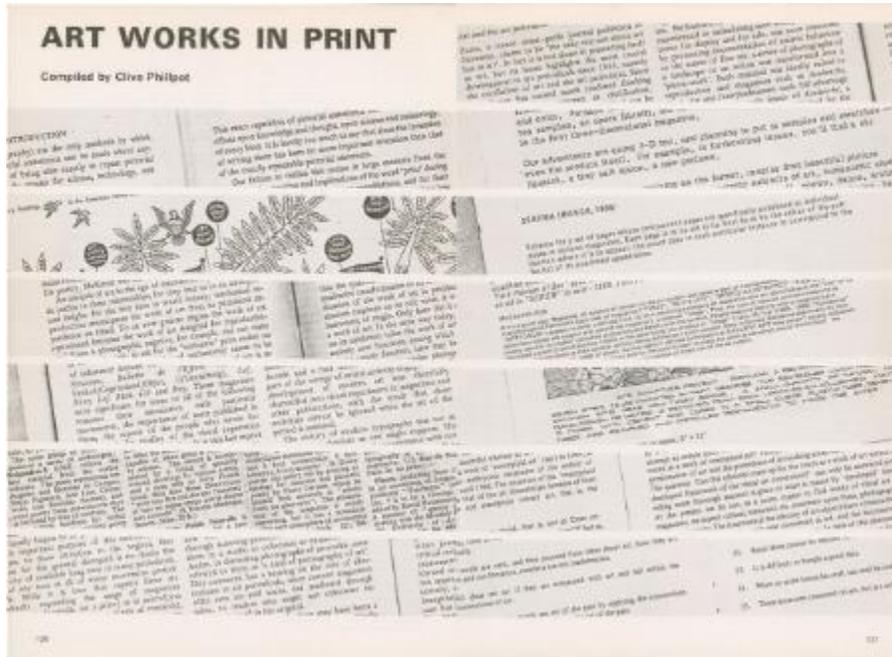
“Presented by means of a reprographic documentation”

“Art Works in Print” principally comprises a collage of thirty-four fragments of photocopied pages of text arranged in near-horizontal bands across each page, the texts themselves oriented the same amount away from the horizontal, but in the opposite direction to the fields containing them (Fig. 42). Phillipot makes no reference to this unorthodox layout—and I will return to this later—but does, in what is termed an “abstract”, offer the following rationale: “Ideas bearing on the use of printed matter—including newspapers and magazines—as a vehicle for artworks, together with examples of such works, are presented by means of a reprographic documentation showing images and phrases in context.”¹⁰² One such example includes the exact phrase from his own ARLIS essay cited earlier concerning the cheerful channelling of modern artists’ energies into magazines. On one level, his intention is not dissimilar to that of his essay for the ARLIS volume, as he further elaborates:

The body of the article is taken up with a chronological tracing of attitudes towards, and the emergence of artworks conceived for, mass-production; from the involvement of fine artists in graphic design in the 1920s, through concrete poetry, and even cartoons.

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His overall focus, however, is later in time, as he himself notes: “But with the main emphasis on the conscious phase of this process in the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s.” ¹⁰⁴ Thus, after beginning with excerpts from classics such as William M. Ivins’ 1953 *Prints and Visual Communication*, or the recently appeared English translation of Walter Benjamin’s celebrated essay of 1935, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, ¹⁰⁵ it soon arrives at a selection of texts that lie at the foundation of conceptual art, and in particular its reliance upon the magazine as a medium. Included, for example, are the opening text from *Art-Language*, which asked “Can this editorial come up for the count as a work of art within a developed framework of the visual art convention?”, Seth Siegelaub’s July/August 1970 issue of *Studio International*, Sol LeWitt’s “Sentences on Conceptual Art”, Gregory Battcock’s “Documentation in Conceptual Art”, and works specifically for the magazine medium—magazine art—by artists including Dan Graham, Joseph Kosuth, Douglas Huebler, and Daniel Buren. ¹⁰⁶ Phillipot’s incorporation of such material, I contend, serves to emphasise the position of conceptual art within a longer history of art magazines, subsequently deposited upon a bedrock of the earlier avant-gardes that were the focus of his ARLIS essay. ¹⁰⁷



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 42.

Clive Phillpot, "Art Works in Print", Studio International, 192, no. 983 (September-October 1976): 126-127. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

“Written about and reproduced in an art magazine”

9 adjectives
 1 adverb
 approx. 83.39% area not occupied by type
 approx. 16.61% area occupied by type
 1 column
 0 conjunctions
 .003 mms. depression of type into surface of page
 0 gerunds
 0 infinitives
 25 letters of alphabet
 6 lines
 60 mathematical symbols
 32 nouns
 20 numbers
 4 participles
 12" x 9½" page
 118 gsm paper sheet
 hunterblade paper stock
 .0035" thin paper stock
 6 prepositions
 0 pronouns
 18D size type
 univers 689 typeface
 53 words
 0 words capitalized
 0 words italicized

Figure 43.

Dan Graham, Schema, "Eight Pieces by Dan Graham", *Studio International*, 183, no. 944 (May 1972): 212. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

Briefly considering one of these works, Dan Graham's *Schema*, the rubric of which appears on the second page of Phillpot's piece, can help to lay out not only some of the complexities of the magazine as one of the key sites for conceptual art, but also to illustrate some of the themes touched upon in my subsequent reading of Phillpot's work. Graham's piece appeared in a number of different versions, both generic and specific, from 1966 well into the 1970s, including an iteration which appeared, of course, in *Studio International* in May 1972 (Fig. 43).¹⁰⁸ In each of its variants, the piece comprises a list which alphabetically catalogues, in the words of Alexander Alberro, "the internal grammatical structure and external physical appearance of the specific printed matter context in which it is placed." Thus, it shows, for example, a page which contains nine adjectives, one adverb, and so on, and which is printed on 118 grams per square metre, hunterblade paper. "The exhaustive self-reflexivity of each variant," Alberro

suggests, “fuses content and context, subject and object, and the work takes form both as and on the page on which it is printed.” ¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, as Gwen Allen has noted, “[to] come across *Schema* ... is to be momentarily distracted from the meaning of the words by the shapes of the letters and numbers”. “Our automatic reading habits are disrupted, we are reminded that reading is an activity that is not only conceptual but profoundly visual”. ¹¹⁰ Graham himself, reflecting in 1985 on his various works for magazine pages, recalled that while running a gallery in New York in the 1960s, he “learned that if a work of art wasn’t reproduced in a magazine it would have difficulty attaining the status of ‘art’. It seemed,” he went on, “that in order to be defined as having value, that is as ‘art’, a work had only to be exhibited in a gallery and then to be written about and reproduced in an art magazine. Then this record of the no longer extant installation, along with more accretions of information after the fact, became the basis for its fame, and to a large extent, its economic value.” ¹¹¹ This last observation might equally apply to the V&A exhibition and its screens, as a page from a review in *Studio International* bears out (Fig. 44). Accordingly, Graham began to produce works such as *Schema*, which circumvented this symbiosis, this blatant quid pro quo, and which subverted the market: in effect, the copy became the original, superseding it, and the magazine as a medium was foregrounded.

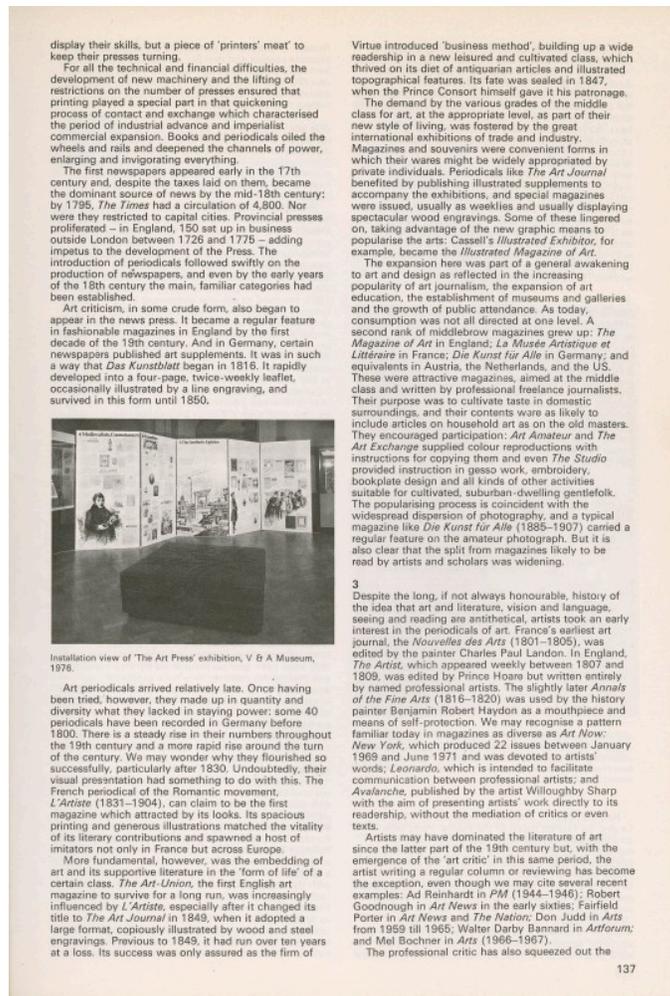


Figure 44.

John Tagg, "Movements and Periodicals: The Magazines of Art", *Studio International*, 192, no. 983 (September–October 1976): 137. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

Phillpot was certainly very tapped into the conceptual art scene, something that can be explicitly seen through his earlier involvement with *Studio International*. As the result of a piece that he had written for the ARLIS newsletter in 1972, reporting on a panel discussion about magazines which had taken place at the ICA, then editor Peter Townsend had invited Phillpot to contribute a regular column to the magazine. ¹¹² Titled "Feedback", its aim was "to draw attention to articles in other magazines, to new magazines, to exhibition catalogues"—note the proximity in Phillpot's words of these two categories—"and other publications that are not normally discussed or reviewed widely." ¹¹³ And it is Phillpot's close engagement with artists' magazines of this period that clearly underlies the visual form of his "reprographic documentation". Specifically, I would like to suggest one title in particular, and one individual artwork published in it, as instructive: in fact

the first magazine that Phillpot mentions in his column “Feedback”, *Aspen: The Magazine in a Box*. The New-York-based title was begun by Phyllis Johnson in 1965 as “the first three-dimensional magazine”.¹¹⁴ Drawing on the original meaning of the word “magazine” as a storehouse (one similarly emphasised by the cover of the special issue of *Studio International*, which had included the relevant page seemingly torn from a dictionary beneath a graffitied question mark), *Aspen* comprised unbound multimedia contributions—including pamphlets, posters, Super 8 films, sound recordings, and musical scores—by contemporary artists, writers, and composers, all contained within a box (Fig. 45). Issue 8, which appeared in 1970, was guest-edited by Dan Graham and included a work to which I would like to draw attention: Robert Smithson’s *Strata: A Geophotographic Fiction*.

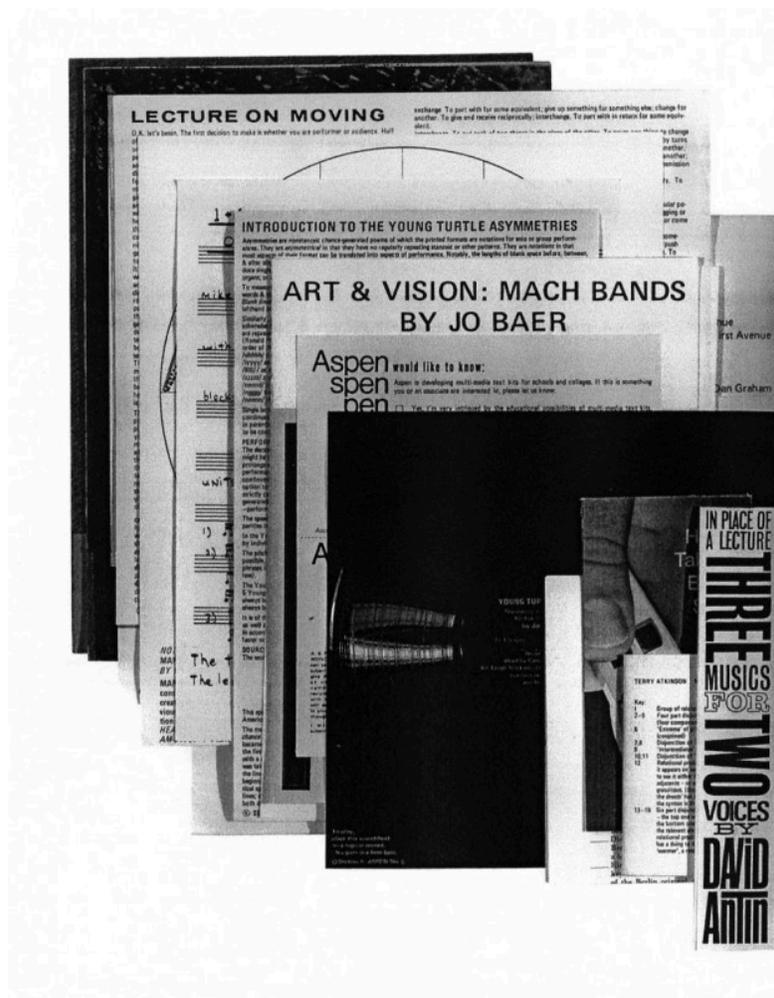


Figure 45. Dan Graham (ed.), *Aspen*, 8 (Fall-Winter 1970-1971). Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

“Like geological strata whose formation traces the evolution of art”

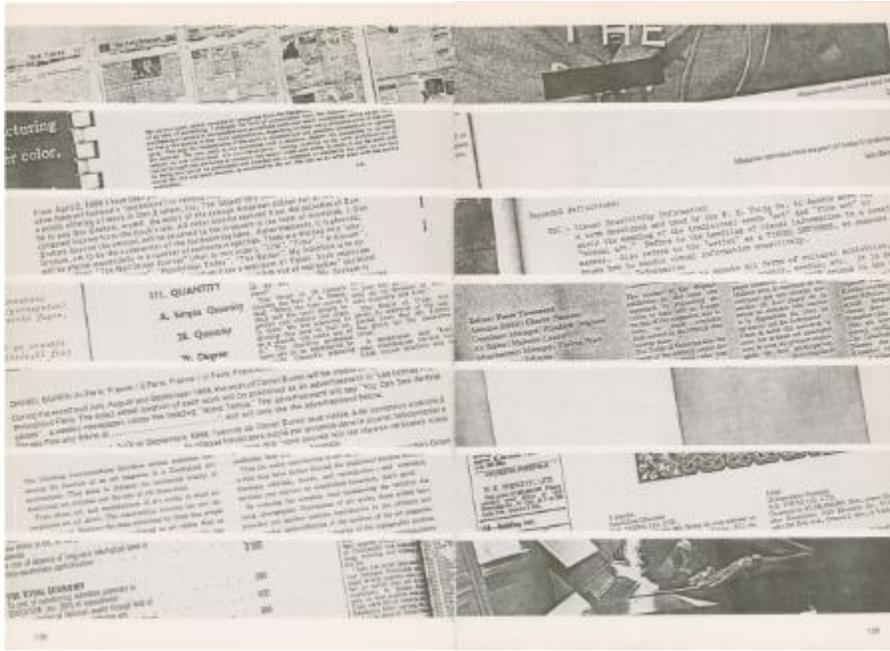
Strata comprises a collage of ten horizontal layers each of found text and photographs of fossils, and was originally folded into four contiguous leaves (Fig. 46).¹¹⁵ The work can, of course, be considered within the well-known context of Smithson’s interest in geology and geological matter,¹¹⁶ but it might additionally be understood as playing on the status and format of the magazine as a medium. As Gwen Allen has shown, Smithson very much thought of magazines geologically; he would write in one of his notebooks of “the Magazine as a quasi-object; if we consider a magazine in terms of space and form, we discover rectangular sheets composed of strata.”¹¹⁷ And of course precisely what Phillipot does in “Art Works in Print” is to build up layer upon layer of found texts (Fig. 47), stratifying them into a single narrative (he even included as one of his layers an extract from *Aspen*). Smithson and then Phillipot were not the only ones, however, to conceive of magazines in this way, and here it is worth recalling the prospecting that Bevis Hillier was seen to advocate earlier. Writing elsewhere in the same issue of *Studio International*, John A. Walker proposed: “A defining characteristic of magazines is periodicity; they appear regularly month after month and are deposited in public and private libraries and archives like geological strata whose formation traces the evolution of art.”¹¹⁸ This is certainly reminiscent of Phillipot’s stated intention to chart chronologically “attitudes towards, and the emergence of artworks conceived for, mass-production”, an archaeological endeavour in which the accumulation of cuttings facilitates the recovery of a printed past, just as Smithson leads us chronologically through geological eras: Cretaceous, Jurassic, Triassic, and so forth. While Phillipot also builds up geological layers of texts and images, he does so in a way ever so slightly different from Smithson. This distinction is important: Smithson’s layers are strictly horizontal, whereas Phillipot’s are not.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 46.

Robert Smithson, "Strata:
A Geophotographic
Fiction", Aspen, 8
(Fall-Winter 1970-1971):
section 12. Digital image
courtesy of Samuel Bibby.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 47.

Clive Phillpot, "Art Works in Print", *Studio International*, 192, no. 983 (September–October 1976): 128–129. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

Extending the geological metaphor, this phenomenon might be termed "cross-bedding", an analogy that I owe to Caroline Jones' work on Smithsonian: sedimentary structures of near-horizontal units that are internally composed of inclined layers (Fig. 48).¹¹⁹ Recollect Phillpot's admonition of letterpress's inherent horizontality in his essay for the ARLIS collection, and this becomes all the more germane. It might be recalled too that the process of letterpress printing, an assemblage of type, involves beds, the structures in which the individual letters are laid together to form words, sentences, paragraphs, pages of text, and so on, stacked upon each other, blurring a line between the acts of depositing and compositing. The texts in *Studio International* that come before and after Phillpot's piece sit squarely on the page, as do the layers either side of geological cross-bedding. One can imagine the awry *mise-en-page* of Phillpot's cross-bedded texts arresting a reader as they flick through the magazine, causing them to pause and reflect on the form and content of these pages. As Dan Graham wrote in relation to *Schema*, "a magazine page ... generates its meanings from the overall context in which it is published, particularly the pages immediately surrounding it", a suggestion equally applicable to "Art Works in Print" and its position within *Studio International*.¹²⁰



Figure 48.

Cross-Bedding, found photograph. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

Smithsonesque layering and the non-horizontality of movement magazines, however, are not all that is at play in Phillipot's piece. Again, recalling his statement about "inherited attitudes towards the technology of printing", as well as the liberation brought about by collage, he cites too "the potential of the camera". And in "Art Works in Print", in a manner arguably redolent of Beardsley's earlier achievements in the same magazine's pages, he realizes such a potential through the technology that he uses to make the piece: the photocopier—of course, a form of camera, and a means of reproduction that had played an important role in conceptual art. Pertinently too, xerography might also be thought of here in terms of its threat to authenticity, its challenges to authorship—both sacred to the cultures of connoisseurship and economies of value typified by the certificated enamel commemorative box considered above. There is certainly though a nod in Phillipot's piece to Smithson's. Subtitled "A Geophotographic Fiction", the term "fiction" foregrounds the extracts as neither authentic nor real, but rather as reproductions. Similarly, it is worth remembering that most types of fossil are themselves, of course, copies, and Smithson's piece further copies them. Craig Owens has indeed referred to Smithson's photos of fossils as "[disintegrating], due to over enlargement into the photomechanical 'language' of the half-tone screen."¹²¹ Phillipot's fragments are reproduced in *Studio International*, a magazine printed using offset lithography, but in a way which clearly leaves traces of their earlier life as photocopied extracts. Notice, for example, the shadow of the gutter visible in the extract from Benjamin's essay. Phillipot even includes an image from the 1970 exhibition

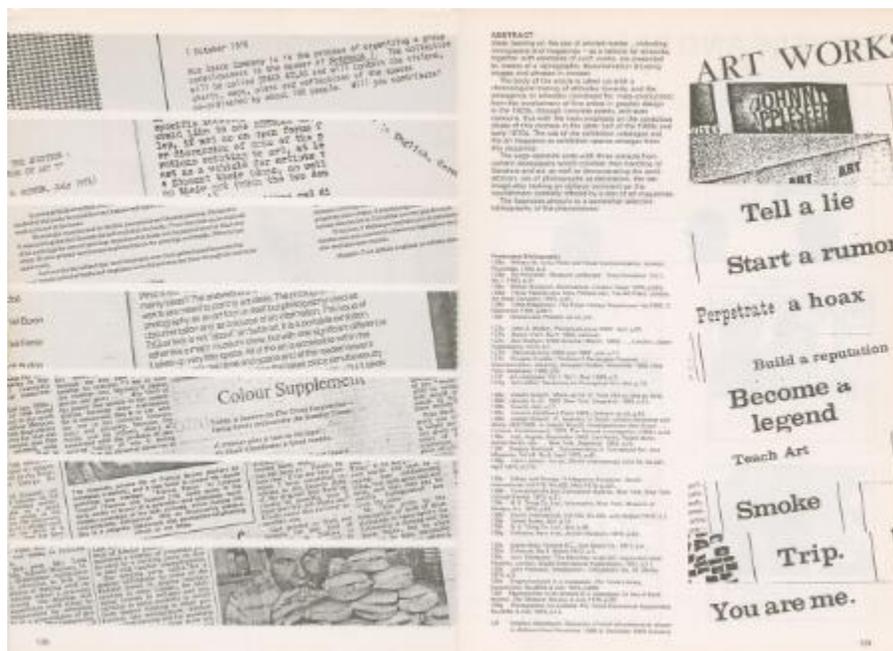
catalogue *Software* of what appears to be a woman laying her face on the glass of a photocopier.¹²² His description of the piece as a “reprographic documentation” becomes all the more clear, the technology of printing now working for, rather than against, experiment. Indeed, as Tim Ingold has recently observed, “in the very principle of its operation, the press is stratigraphic, in that it works by overlaying one surface [i.e. ink] upon another [i.e. paper].”¹²³ That the emergence of geology as a modern scientific discipline was aided, just like art history, by concurrent innovations in the processes of graphic reproduction renders Phillipot’s mode of visual expression (and Smithson’s before him) all the more effective.¹²⁴

“A consonance between content and form”

The most important distinction between Phillipot’s pieces for the ARLIS publication and *Studio International* lies, however, in the following sentence that he includes in his “abstract”: “The use of the exhibition catalogue and the art magazine as exhibition spaces emerges from this sequence.” On one level, this statement speaks to the blurring of the two genres brought about by conceptual art, and for that matter *Studio International*—recall, for example, Seth Siegelaub’s well-known July/August 1970 issue of the magazine which constituted an exhibition in itself, or John Perreault’s 1975 issue of *TriQuarterly*, “Anti-Object Art” (extracts of both are, needless to say, included in Phillipot’s piece).¹²⁵ But on another level, it points, I propose, to the limitations or restrictions that the conventional ARLIS publication imposed on Phillipot in distinction to a magazine like *Studio International*. It is a gesture too to the inadequacy of merely hijacking the magazine as straightforward alternative to the conventional museum-produced exhibition catalogue. For ultimately it was the medium itself, the magazine, and its history, which afforded Phillipot the opportunity to put across his message most successfully; just as the Cubists had realised that the medium whereby attitudes towards the avant-garde were disseminated was itself a visual one, just as concrete poetry explored the physical form of the letters used as well as the meaning of the language being conveyed, so too could magazine art explore the physical conditions of the medium as well as thematising magazines and their history. Phillipot assembled an ode to magazines, where the shape of the poem becomes a counterpart of its meaning, a collage poem which was “realized only when the magazine itself [had] been composed and printed.” As he would himself put it in his 1980 *Artforum* article, “many artists conceive works specifically in terms of the processes which are employed to multiply them, fully conscious of their advantages and limitations, and can thus achieve a consonance between content and form.”¹²⁶ Phillipot’s “Art Works in Print”, then, catalogues his history of art

magazines, one that is composed through its stratification—both verbal *and* visual—of avant-gardes, “consciously using the production of a magazine to question the nature of artworks”. ¹²⁷

By way of the briefest of comparisons, a couple of distinctions might be made explicit between Phillpot’s piece in *Studio International* and the pages of *The Connoisseur* considered earlier. The first is, of course, that each was published in a title aimed at quite a different audience than the other, something signalled by each periodical’s subtitle: on the one hand “Journal of Modern Art”; on the other “Magazine for Collectors, Illustrated”. But I would also like to return to advertising—so pervasive in the structures of *The Connoisseur*. The culmination of Phillpot’s piece is the inclusion of the complete series of twelve works that conceptual artist Stephen Kaltenbach had placed in the advertising section of *Artforum* between November 1968 and December 1969 (Fig. 49). I do even wonder whether the first of them—ART WORKS—provided Phillpot with the title for his own piece. Kaltenbach, like others, sought an alternative space in which to exhibit his work, yet one that would at the same time attempt to destabilise the structures of its new context; Phillpot’s “Art Works in Print” continues in this vein for he had realised that precisely where and how the V&A exhibition was catalogued was what mattered: cross-bedding.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 49.

Clive Phillpot, “Art Works in Print”, and Stephen Kaltenbach, “Sequence of small advertisements placed in *Artforum* from November 1969 to December 1969 inclusive”, *Studio International*, 192, no. 983 (September–October 1976): 130–131. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

“Incisive commentary and appropriate visual material”

Having dwelt on the various publications that were produced in print in association with the exhibition, I would like to return to where I began—the screens that constituted the main part of the display. Not only is how they were conceived and put together of note, but so too is how they were subsequently received, and briefly considering both can enrich an understanding of the medium that the V&A exhibition set out to champion, as well as the works cataloguing it that have already been considered in this essay. It had always been ARLIS’s hope that the exhibition would travel after its run in London and from the early stages of planning this underpinned the decision to adopt such a display strategy.¹²⁸ Notes from a curatorial meeting held in autumn 1974 set out proposals for the screens’ basic structure:

Each unit would deal with a single aspect or topic, and would contain a paragraph or two of incisive commentary and appropriate visual material. In the catalogue the aspects of the topics could be treated at greater length, and the subject could be handled more discursively since there would [be] no need to chop it up into little pieces.¹²⁹

By the middle of 1975, the method for determining the content and form of each screen had been established more precisely; members of the organising committee were to “prepare dossiers of photocopied material for each screen unit, with captions.” This material was then “discussed with the designer, and revisited and adapted as necessary.” Thereafter, “working from the photocopied material,” the designer “[prepared] the basic layout of the screen unit, and the captions.”¹³⁰

What I would like to draw out from these descriptions is the similarity that they bear to the practice of collage, a technique, as has already been seen, that had proved particularly influential elsewhere for Phillipot. Recall the suggestion that the length of the catalogue entries avoided the need for their subject to be chopped up into little pieces, from which it might be inferred to the contrary for the screens with their visual narrative in photographic form. And note the idea of a dossier of raw visual material from which the designer could take individual fragments, and also that they were to be photocopies (a fact that makes Phillipot’s work in *Studio International* all the more telling). We might situate the screens themselves, much like “Art Works in Print”, within a wider trend during the 1970s for experimentation in terms of display, be it in the spaces of museums and galleries, on the pages of magazines, or, for that matter, on television screens. Obvious parallels, for instance, can be drawn with John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* from earlier in the

decade; “the form of the book,” he explained in its Foreword, “is as much to do with our purpose as the arguments contained within it.”¹³¹ The principles of montage to which Berger’s work was indebted were likewise influential, I suggest, to a number of the outcomes of the V&A’s exhibition.

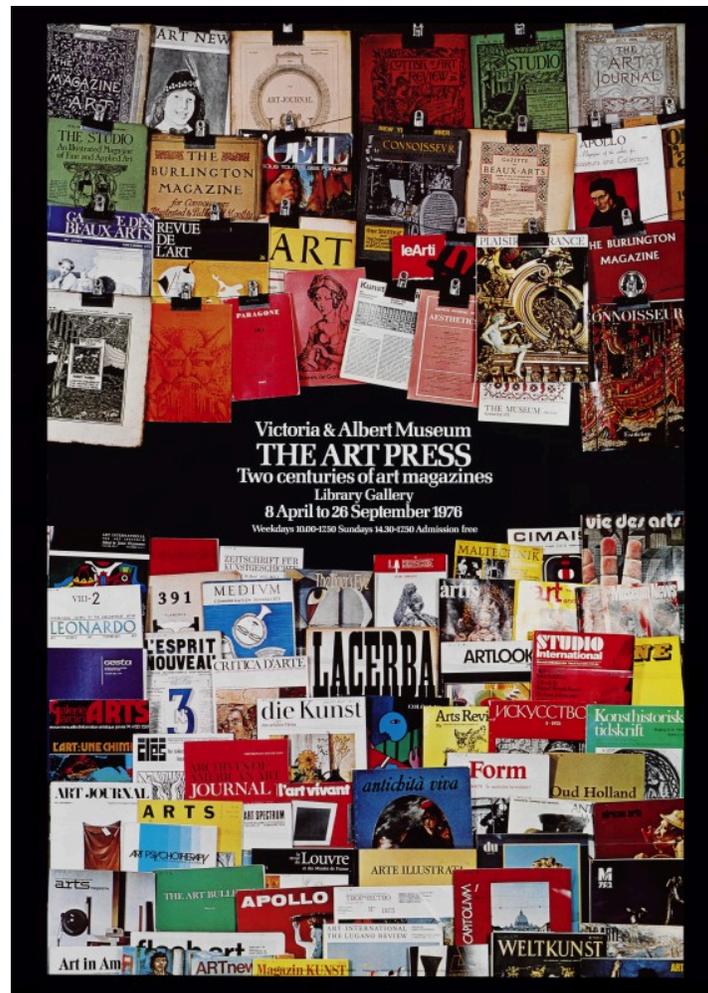


Figure 50.

The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines, 1976, poster. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive, London (MA/24/164, 1976). Digital image courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

In a 1961 article on exhibition design, Herbert Bayer had made explicit that the effectiveness for visual communication of photomontage in advertising could likewise be successfully harnessed in the production of material such as that for *The Art Press*.¹³² Indeed, I would like to extend the analogy with collage a little further by specifically drawing attention to the visual language of the V&A’s screens. Burton likened the exhibition visitor’s viewing experience to standing in front of a magazine stall; the first screen, which doubled as the exhibition’s promotional poster, makes this clear—seventy or

so magazines are to be seen assembled in a fashion unmistakably reminiscent of a news-stand (Fig. 50). Every cover is carefully positioned, each one overlapping others like pieces of paper used to create a collage. As a quick aside, it seems to me more than likely that the idea for this layout came from the frontispiece of Ruari McLean's classic book *Magazine Design* that I cited earlier (Fig. 51). A link might surely also be made here to the range of avant-garde periodicals whose covers included collages incorporating material from earlier magazines, for example, issue 3 of *Der Dada* (Fig. 52), and issue 5 of *La Révolution Surréaliste* (Fig. 53); and also to the visual strategies of historiographical approaches such as Howardena Pindell's article, "Alternative Space: Artists' Periodicals" (Fig. 54).¹³³ But it was not just a case of magazines themselves providing material for collage; the site of their display and sale, the news-stand, when seen as a whole can be thought of as a form of collage *par excellence*. Consider, for example, a photograph by British artist Nigel Henderson from London's East End in the early 1950s, in which magazines and advertisements are pictured together forming what might be thought of as an assemblage of typography, corresponding to the notion that the diverse and fragmented visual experience of urban life informed a modernist aesthetic from which the medium of collage emerged (Fig. 55).¹³⁴ And just as for the news-stand, so too might the medium of the magazine itself be understood as a form of collage—the considered juxtaposition of disparate fragments forming together a unified entity with a coherent meaning.¹³⁵



MAGAZINE DESIGN

Ruari McLean

The design of a magazine cover is a complex task, involving the selection of a headline, a photograph, and a layout that is both attractive and informative. The cover is the first point of contact between the magazine and its potential reader, and it must therefore be designed to catch the eye and encourage the reader to pick up the magazine. The design of a magazine cover is also a reflection of the magazine's content and style, and it must be designed to appeal to the magazine's target audience. The design of a magazine cover is a task that requires a combination of creativity, technical skill, and an understanding of the magazine's audience.

LONDON
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK TORONTO
1969

Figure 51.

Ruari McLean, Magazine Design, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 2-3. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.



Figure 52.
Der Dada, 3 (1920): front cover. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

LA RÉVOLUTION SURREALISTE



LE PASSÉ

SOMMAIRE	
Une lettre : E. Gengenbach.	Nouvelle lettre sur moi-même : Antonin Artaud.
TEXTES SURREALISTES : Pierre Brassac, Raymond Queneau, Paul Eluard, Dédé Siméon, Monny de Bouilly.	Ces animaux de la famille : Benjamin Péret.
POÈMES : Giorgio de Chirico, Michel Leiris, Paul Eluard, Robert Desnos, Marco Rostitch, Pierre Brassac.	CHRONIQUES : Au bout du quel les arts décoratifs : Louis Aragon.
RÊVES : Michel Leiris, Max Morise.	Le Paradis perdu : Robert Desnos, Léon Trotsky : Lénine ; André Breton.
Décadence de la Vie : Jacques Baron.	Pierre de Massot : Saint-Jaust ; Paul Eluard.
Le Vampire : F. N.	Revue de la Presse : P. Eluard et B. Péret.
Lettre aux voyantes : André Breton.	Correspondance, etc.
	ILLUSTRATIONS : Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst, André Masson, Joan Miró, Picasso, etc.

ADMINISTRATION : 42, Rue Fontaine, PARIS (IX^e)

ABONNEMENT.
les 15 Numéros :
France : 45 francs
Étranger : 55 francs

Dépositaire général : Librairie GALLIMARD
15, Boulevard Raspail, 15
PARIS (VII^e)

LE NUMÉRO :
France : 4 francs
Étranger : 5 francs

Figure 53.

La Révolution Surréaliste, 5 (15 October 1925): front cover. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.



Figure 55.

Nigel Henderson, J. Parker Newsagents, 216 Bethnal Green Road, London, circa 1949–circa 1956, black and white negative, 5.5 × 5.5 cm. Collection of Tate Archive (TGA 201011/3/1/128/8). Digital image courtesy of Tate and the Nigel Henderson Estate (CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported)).

“The assemblage of specimens”

The richness of the screens was immediately apparent. To coincide with the opening of the V&A exhibition, ARLIS staged a two-day international conference at the University of Sussex on the topic of art periodicals. In a report of the proceedings published in the summer 1976 issue of the society’s *Art Libraries Journal*, Anne Dallett wrote of the “wealth of visual and factual information to be found on the panels, which will travel after the exhibition closes in September. But,” she questioned, “can this valuable information as assembled”—another nod to collage—“be preserved in a permanent form? Some kind of visual reproduction,” she went on, “would be more than a souvenir”, a suggestion perhaps all the more meaningful given Roy Strong’s original conception of the special issue of *The Connoisseur*.¹³⁶ Dallett was not alone. The April 1976 newsletter of the North American chapter of ARLIS had included a similar plea, opining that it “would be a shame if the documentation of this exhibit” were lost. It urged its readers to

write to John Harthan, Keeper of the National Art Library, “asking him sincerely to have the exhibition microfiched so that all libraries can purchase the documentation and use it. There really isn’t a catalog to the exhibition,” it tellingly continued, “and it would be a great boon for these fiche to also be used in the presentation of the exhibition in some photographic form along with the collections of journals which could be gathered in specific libraries not only in England, but throughout the world.”¹³⁷ The museum evidently heeded to this lobby, engaging the firm of Chadwyck-Healey to carry out the task.

As a reproductive technology, microfiche had increased in popularity during the second half of the 1970s as a mode of document preservation, a means of widening information access, and as a solution to libraries’ increasing lack of space. The publisher Charles Chadwyck-Healey had already developed a list that included facsimiles of both art periodicals and exhibition catalogues, but the capture of an exhibition itself represented a new venture, no doubt precipitated by the particularities of *The Art Press*’s method of display, described in the microfiche’s Foreword as “a montage of text and illustration”, yet another allusion to collage.¹³⁸ Anthony Burton, in fact, went as far as claiming that it was “probably the first exhibition to be reproduced on microfiche”.¹³⁹ Each of the fifty-one screens was photographed and reproduced on microfiche together with a newly commissioned Introduction written by Burton, as well as copies of the labels which had accompanied the periodicals that had been displayed in vitrines—all contained on a total of twenty-one loose index-card-sized sheets, almost as if emulating a work of conceptual art.¹⁴⁰ The twentieth of these, for instance, reproduced three screens from the “Magazines of Modern Art Movements” section of the exhibition (Fig. 56).

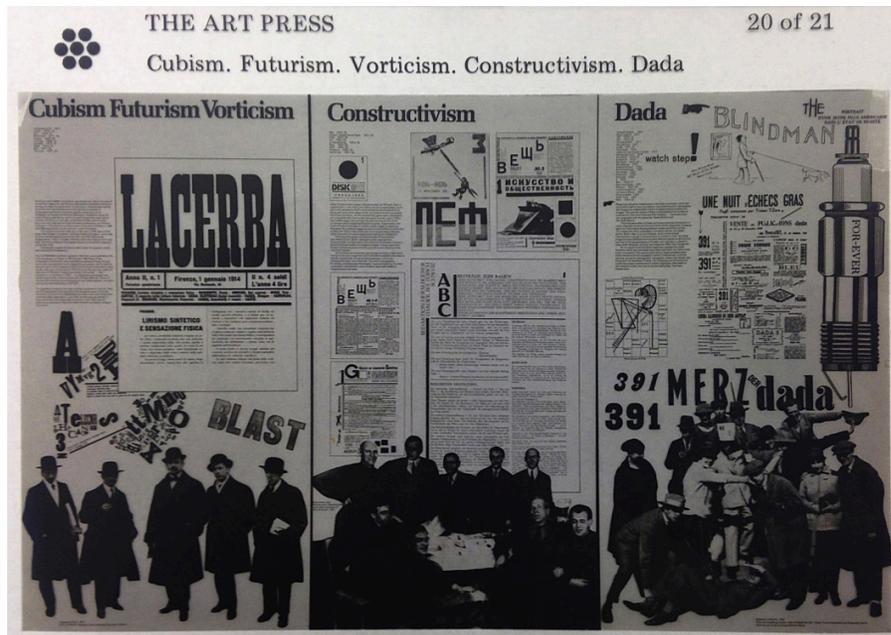


Figure 56.

The Art Press: Two Centuries of the Art Periodical, (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1977), microfiche 20. Digital image courtesy of Samuel Bibby.

Burton's Introduction provides further context for the rationale behind the screens and their intended effect, mapping onto this the unforeseen aptness of microfiche in recreating the viewing experience of the news-stand that the original exhibition had sought to create:

The rough grouping of the material of the panels could be seen at a distance. Coming closer, the visitor could focus upon whatever attracted his eye on the panel: the explanatory captions, and indeed the print on the magazine pages, became legible as he approached. The reader who studies these microfiche will find that he can experience them in a similar way. If he looks at them with the unaided eye, he can see the layout and headings; if he puts them in the fiche reader he can focus on small areas of the panels, which, magnified on the screen of the reader, appear the size they actually were in the exhibition. ¹⁴¹

I would like to suggest, however, that such a doubling is not the only one at play here. By being captured on a series of microfiche, the exhibition screens, about magazines, become a magazine themselves, a collection or storehouse of unbound leaves, leaves photographically reproducing and distributing an exhibition for consumption beyond the walls of the museum in which they were originally created and displayed. As both catalogue *and* magazine then, a further exhibition space emerges, and as the specific result

of particular practices of reproduction and viewing. The geological strata of magazine page, exhibition screen, and then microfiche are placed beneath a microscope as if for scientific scrutiny in a manner I hope redolent of an art history intent on subjecting its own practices to objective analysis. Resonant with this is one of the pieces of found text included in Robert Smithson's *Strata*, a statement made by the palaeontologist, Edwin H. Colbert: "Unless the information gained from the collecting and preparing of fossils is made available through the printed page, the assemblage of specimens is essentially a pile of meaningless junk." ¹⁴²

Footnotes

- ¹ Quoted in Herbert Spencer, *Pioneers of Modern Typography* (London: Lund Humphries, 1969), 13.
- ² Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Against the Synthetic Portrait, For the Snapshot", *Novyi Lef* 4 (April 1928): 14, reprinted in John E. Bowlit (ed.), *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2017), 251.
- ³ Guillermo de Torre, "Modelos de Estación", *Síntesis* 14 (July 1928): 231.
- ⁴ "The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines", press release (V&A Archive: MA/28/273, 1976).
- ⁵ As illustrated, for example, in Martina Margetts, "200 Years of The Art Press", *Arts Review* 28, no. 9 (30 April 1976): 211.
- ⁶ Anthony Burton, "Introductory Note", in *The Art Press: Two Centuries of the Art Periodical* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1977), microfiche 1, row 1, frame 3.
- ⁷ Alex Ross, "Catalogue", in *Grove Art Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), accessed 9 April 2014.
- ⁸ The only person to have considered them all already appears to be Helene E. Roberts, in a series of reviews. See Helene E. Roberts, "[Review of] *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines* and *The Connoisseur*", *Art Libraries Journal* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 48-51; Helene E. Roberts, "[Review of] *Studio International*", *Art Libraries Journal* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 44-48; and Helene E. Roberts, "[Review of] *The Art Press: Two Centuries of the Art Periodical*", *Art Libraries Journal* 3, no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 48-51.
- ⁹ Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, "The Rise of Periodical Studies", *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (March 2006): 517-518.
- ¹⁰ Gwen Allen (ed.), *Documents of Contemporary Art: The Magazine* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 14.
- ¹¹ See Samuel Bibby, "Hidden Trails in Art History", *Art History* 40, no. 1 (February 2017): 204-209.
- ¹² Walter Benjamin, "Excavation and Memory", in Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (eds.), *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005 [ca. 1932]), 576.
- ¹³ For the briefest of accounts of the museum's publishing enterprises, see Elizabeth James, *The Victoria and Albert Museum: A Bibliography and Exhibition Chronology, 1852-1996* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), xx-xxii.
- ¹⁴ Henry Cole, *The Functions of the Science and Art Department* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1857), 21.
- ¹⁵ Roy Strong, *The Roy Strong Diaries, 1967-1987* (London: Phoenix, 1998, 141 [entry for 9 February 1974]).
- ¹⁶ Where exhibition catalogues do get treated, it is usually in museological literature, and even then, only cursorily; see, for example, Richard N. Gregg, "Art Museum Publications—Their Nature and Design", *Curator* 2, no. 1 (January 1959): 49-67.
- ¹⁷ Peter Cannon-Brookes, "The Evolution of the Art Exhibition Catalogue and its Future", *Art & Artists* 220 (January 1985): 23.
- ¹⁸ Cannon-Brookes, "The Evolution of the Art Exhibition Catalogue and its Future", 25. This was indeed even attested to at the time by Roy Strong, who suggested that: "spiralling prices threaten in particular the production of exhibition catalogues, which increasingly have to take the form of books." See Roy Strong, "Director's Report", in Anthony Burton (ed.), *Victoria & Albert Museum: Review of the Years 1974-1978* (London: HMSO, 1981), 21.
- ¹⁹ Roy Strong, Marcus Binney, and John Harris, *The Destruction of the Country House, 1875-1975* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 6.
- ²⁰ Anthony Burton, "Exhibition Catalogues", in Philip Pacey (ed.), *Art Library Manual: A Guide to Resources and Practice* (London: Bowker, 1977), 73.
- ²¹ Seth Siegelaub and Charles Harrison, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large", *Studio International* 178, no. 917 (December 1969): 202.
- ²² Seth Siegelaub and Charles Harrison, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large", *Studio International* 178, no. 917 (December 1969): 202.

- 23 *Studio International* 180, no. 924 (July/August 1970). For a short account of Siegelau's larger involvement with this magazine, see Jo Melvin, "Seth Siegelau and *Studio International*: Conceptual Art and Production", in *Seth Siegelau: Beyond Conceptual Art* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2016), 466-476. See also Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, "Du catalogue comme oeuvre d'art et inversement", *Les cahiers de Musée national d'art moderne* 56-57 (Summer-Autumn 1996): 94-117.
- 24 Gregory Battcock, "Documentation in Conceptual Art", *Arts Magazine* 44, no. 6 (April 1970): 42. See also, more recently, Christian Berger and Jessica Santone, "Documentation as Art Practice in the 1960s", *Visual Resources* 32, nos 3-4 (2016): 201-209.
- 25 Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot, "Introduction", in Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot (eds.), *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines* (London: The Art Book Company, 1976), 1.
- 26 See Stanley T. Lewis, "Periodicals in the Visual Arts", *Library Trends* 10, no. 3 (Winter 1962): 330-352.
- 27 See Lawrence Alloway, "Artists as Writers, Part One: Inside Information", *Artforum* 12, no. 7 (March 1974): 30-35; and Lawrence Alloway, "Artists and Writers, Part Two: The Realm of Language", *Artforum* 12, no. 8 (April 1974): 30-35. For artists' books, see Germano Celant, *Book as Artwork, 1960/1972* (London: Nigel Greenwood, 1972).
- 28 See Alan Moore, "New Voices", *Artforum* 13, no. 4 (December 1974): 63-65.
- 29 For the most comprehensive of these, see Christian M. Nebehay, *Ver Sacrum, 1898-1903* (Vienna: Edition Tusch, 1975).
- 30 Roy Strong, "Foreword", in John Murdoch and Anthony Burton (eds.), *Byron: An Exhibition to Commemorate the 150th Anniversary of His Death in the Greek War of Liberation, 19 April 1824* (London: HMSO, 1974), v.
- 31 Strong, "Foreword", vi.
- 32 Trevor Fawcett, letter to Anthony Burton, 29 November 1973 (V&A Archive: MA/28/273).
- 33 Anthony Burton, letter to Trevor Fawcett, 19 April 1974 (V&A Archive: MA/28/273).
- 34 Anthony Burton, letter to Thomas MacRobert, 30 October 1974 (V&A Archive: MA/28/273).
- 35 Anthony Burton, letter to Roy Strong, 13 January 1975 (V&A Archive: MA/28/273).
- 36 See Samuel Bibby, "'The Pursuit of Understanding': *Art History* and the Periodical Landscape of Late-1970s Britain", *Art History* 40, no. 4 (September 2017): 808-837.
- 37 See Art & Language, *Art & Language, 1966-1975* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1975).
- 38 Roy Strong, letter to Bevis Hillier, 14 January 1975 (V&A Archive: MA/28/273).
- 39 Bevis Hillier, letter to Roy Strong, 18 January 1975 (V&A Archive: MA/28/273).
- 40 Anthony Burton, letter to Trevor Fawcett, 20 January 1975 (V&A Archive: MA/28/273).
- 41 Anthony Burton, letter to Roy Strong, 16 June 1975 (V&A Archive: MA/28/273).
- 42 Fawcett and Phillpot, "Introduction", 1.
- 43 Burton, letter to Strong, 16 June 1975.
- 44 Howard Fox, "Looking Round Publishing Doors: Important Year for Connoisseur", *Retail Newsagent, Tobacconist and Confectioner* 87, no. 7 (14 February 1976): 40-41.
- 45 Fox, "Looking Round Publishing Doors", 40-41.
- 46 Bevis Hillier, "Magazines of History", *The Times*, 15 February 1975, 11.
- 47 *The Newsagent and Booksellers' Review* 25, no. 25 (21 December 1901): 572.
- 48 See Richard M. Ohmann, *Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso Books, 1996), 223-230.
- 49 J.T. Herbert Baily, "A Word of Introduction", *The Connoisseur* 1, no. 1 (September 1901): 2.
- 50 Baily, "A Word of Introduction", 2. For a recent treatment of this magazine within the context of the art market, see Barbara Pezzini, "The Burlington Magazine, The Burlington Gazette, and The Connoisseur: The Art Periodical and the Market for Old Master Paintings in Edwardian London", *Visual Resources* 29, no. 3 (2013): 154-183.
- 51 Tom Gretton, "Signs for Labour-Value in Printed Pictures after the Photomechanical Revolution: Mainstream Changes and Extreme Cases around 1900", *Oxford Art Journal* 28, no. 3 (October 2005): 383.
- 52 Bevis Hillier, "75 Years of *The Connoisseur*", *The Connoisseur* 191, no. 769 (March 1976): 165.
- 53 Bevis Hillier, "The Art Press", *The Connoisseur* 191, no. 769 (March 1976): 159.
- 54 "75 Years of Advertisements", *The Connoisseur* 191, no. 769 (March 1976): 224.
- 55 See "The Connoisseur: A Magazine for Collectors, Illustrated", *Art Prices Current* 2, new series (1922-1923), ii.
- 56 See *The Connoisseur* 191, no. 769 (March 1976): advertising section, 22. *The Connoisseur* would itself take out similar congratulatory advertisement in what it termed "sister" titles; see, for example, *The Burlington Magazine* 120, no. 900 (March 1978): advertising section, lxxxii.
- 57 See *The Connoisseur* 191, no. 769 (March 1976): advertising section, 70.
- 58 See *The Connoisseur* 191, no. 769 (March 1976): advertising section, viii.

- 59 Ruari McLean, *Magazine Design* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 68.
- 60 See *The Connoisseur* 143, no. 576 (March 1959): front cover.
- 61 See *The Connoisseur* 191, no. 769 (March 1976): advertising section, 18.
- 62 Hillier, "The Art Press", 159.
- 63 Peter Fuller, "The Art Magazines", *New Society* 36, no. 709 (6 May 1976): 307.
- 64 See also, for example, Celina Fox, "Word and Image", *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 April 1976, 488.
- 65 Richard Cork, "Magazines by the Mile", *The Evening Standard*, 17 June 1976, 23, reprinted as "The Role of the Art Magazine", in Richard Cork, *Everything Seemed Possible: Art in the 1970s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 420.
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- 67 See Richard Cork, "Pitfalls and Priorities: An Editorial Dialectic", *Studio International* 190, no. 976 (July/August 1975): 2-3.
- 68 Richard Cork, "Editorial", *Studio International* 192, no. 983 (September/October 1976): 100.
- 69 *Studio International* 192, no. 983 (September/October 1976): [between 230 and xiii].
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- 71 "Our Book Shelf", *Willesden Chronicle and North-Western Press*, 21 April 1893, 6.
- 72 *Image: A Quarterly of the Visual Arts* 6 (Spring 1951): 82.
- 73 Clive Ashwin, "The Founding of *The Studio*", in Michael Spens (ed.), *High Art and Low Life: The Studio and the Fin de Siècle* (London: Studio International, 1993), 8.
- 74 Clive Ashwin, "The Early *Studio* and its Illustrations", *Studio International* 196, no. 1003 (November/December 1983): 22.
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- 76 See "Drawing for Reproduction", *The Studio* 1, no. 2 (May 1893): 65-72.
- 77 "A Competition for Art Teachers and Art Students", *The Studio* 105, no. 482 (May 1933): 332.
- 78 *Studio International* 190, no. 978 (November/December 1975): xiv.
- 79 *Studio International* 192, no. 983 (September/October 1976): xvii.
- 80 *Studio International* 192, no. 983 (September/October 1976): inside back cover.
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- 82 See "Reminiscences of *The Studio*", *Studio International* 175, no. 899 (April 1968): 170-172.
- 83 See D.J. Gordon, "Dilemmas: *The Studio* in 1893-4", *Studio International* 175, no. 899 (April 1968): 175-183. For the original material, see "Awards in the Title-Page Competition", *The Studio* 5 (August 1893): 204-207.
- 84 See Hilary Evans, "Applied Art for Fine Art's Sake", *Studiographic* 1, in *Studio International* 175, no. 899 (April 1968): 214-216; and Bernard Myers, "The Bauhaus—Graphic Design", *Studiographic* 2, in *Studio International* 176, no. 903 (September 1968): 100-107.
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- 86 Lori Cole, *Surveying the Avant-Garde: Questions on Modernism, Art, and the Americas in Transatlantic Magazines* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2018), 9.
- 87 Cole, *Surveying the Avant-Garde*, 19.
- 88 "Survey of Contemporary Art Magazines", *Studio International* 192, no. 983 (September/October 1976): 182.
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- 97 See *Tumultuous Assembly: Visual Poems of the Italian Futurists* (Los Angeles, CA: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006–2007), accessed 4 September 2014.
- 98 Christine Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism, and the Invention of Collage* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 195. Soffici's typogram originally appeared in the pages of *BIF & ZF + 18*.
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- 102 Clive Phillpot, "Art Works in Print", *Studio International* 192, no. 983 (September/October 1976): 131.
- 103 Phillpot, "Art Works in Print", 131.
- 104 Phillpot, "Art Works in Print", 131.
- 105 See William M. Ivins, *Prints and Visual Communications* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953); and Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", (1935), trans. Harry Zohn, in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 211–244.
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- 110 Allen, *Artists' Magazines*, 58.
- 111 Dan Graham, "My Works for Magazine Pages: 'A History of Conceptual Art'", in Gary Dufour (ed.), *Dan Graham* (Perth: The Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1985), 10, reprinted in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 421.
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- 114 Phyllis Johnson, "Editorial", *Aspen* 1 (1965): [non-paginated].
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- 116 See Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 30–33.
- 117 See Allen, *Artists' Magazines*, 315, n. 13.
- 118 John A. Walker, "Internal Memorandum", *Studio International* 192, no. 983 (September/October 1976): 114.
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- 121 Craig Owens, "Earthwords", *October* 10 (Fall 1979): 123.
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- 123 Tim Ingold, "Surface Textures: The Ground and the Page", *Philological Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 146.
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- 125 See *Studio International* 180, no. 924 (July/August 1970); and *TriQuarterly* 32 (Winter 1975).
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- 127 Phillpot, "Art Magazines and Magazine Art", 52.
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- 130 Anthony Burton, untitled document, 5 June 1975 (V&A Archive, MA/28/273).
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- 132 Herbert Bayer, "Aspects of Design of Exhibitions and Museums", *Curator* 4, no. 3 (July 1961): 267.

- 133 Howardena Pindell, "Alternative Space: Artists' Periodicals", *The Print Collectors Newsletter* 8, no. 4 (September/October 1977): 96-109, 120-121.
- 134 See, for example, Walter Benjamin, "Attested Auditor of Books", (1923-1926), trans. Edmund Jephcott, in Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (eds.), *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 171-172.
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- 137 Judith A. Hoffberg, "The Art Press: An Exhibition", *ARLIS/NA Newsletter* 4, no. 3 (April 1976): 81.
- 138 Charles Chadwyck-Healey, untitled Foreword, in *The Art Press: Two Centuries of the Art Periodical* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1977), microfiche 1, row 1, frame 1.
- 139 Burton, "Introductory Note", microfiche 1, row 1, frame 4.
- 140 An analogy could be drawn, for example, with the index cards that comprised the catalogues for Lucy Lippard's so-called "Numbers Shows"; see Lucy R. Lippard, "Curating by Numbers", *Tate Papers* 12 (Autumn 2009), accessed 20 June 2019.
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- 142 Edwin H. Colbert, *The Dinosaur Book: The Ruling Reptiles and Their Relatives* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951), 34.

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“Irrigated Neither by the Seine Nor by the Thames”: Jack B. Yeats’s Reception in London

Nathan O'Donnell

Abstract

This article investigates the history of the joint exhibition of Jack B. Yeats and William Nicholson at the National Gallery in 1942, an exhibition that has been described as the show that “made [Yeats’s] name in London”. The received narrative posits it as a “breakthrough” exhibition, an important British tribute to an Irish artist, precipitating Yeats’s acknowledgement at home and boosting the sale of his work internationally. What this account obscures are the decades Yeats had spent exhibiting and cultivating his reputation in London, the city where he had been born and educated, and where his career as an artist had started. This article examines the cross-currents of cultural diplomacy and wartime bureaucracy that led to the 1942 exhibition but also looks beyond them, at Yeats’s relationships within the London art world, including his connection to a network of artists and cultural figures who had supported him through the preceding decades: in particular, a dealer and gallerist whose name has not, to date, figured in the scholarship surrounding Yeats’s work, Lillian Browse. An examination of their relationship reveals Yeats as an engaged, responsive artist, attentive to developments in both British and European art, rather than a strictly “national” painter operating—as one critic put it—on the “periphery of the twentieth century”.

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The joint exhibition of Jack B. Yeats and William Nicholson's work at the National Gallery in London, which opened in January 1942, has been described by Bruce Arnold as the show that "made [Yeats's] name in London".¹ This attestation, from Arnold's 1998 biography of the artist, reflects the received narrative about the development of Yeats's career, his "breakthrough" National Gallery show representing an important British tribute to an Irish artist, precipitating his recognition at home, and boosting the sale of his work internationally. What is obscured in this account, however, is the extent to which Yeats had already, over many years, been cultivating his reputation in London, the city where he had been born and educated, and where his career as an artist had started. He began working as an illustrator and cartoonist in the 1890s, living first in London, then in Devon with his wife Cottie; at this time, he began providing illustrations for books and newspapers, including several for the *Manchester Guardian*, many of which drew from British city life. For many years, up until the 1940s, he also contributed cartoons to *Punch* under the pseudonym W. Bird. As a fine artist, he began by working in watercolours; from around 1900, he was also working in oils. He would go on to have a more-or-less continuous exhibiting history in Britain over many decades, even after he moved to Ireland permanently in 1912. This aspect of his professional life warrants further examination, revealing as it does his close, complex relationship to British art and, beyond Britain, to Europe.

The truth is that Yeats's career as a painter was as closely bound to England as it was to Ireland. He was cognisant from the outset of an English as well as an Irish audience and made the explicit decision to frame himself as an "Irish" artist exhibiting in London, with all the cultural connotations that came with it. He exhibited his work initially under the rubric of *Scenes from the West of Ireland*, although by the late 1920s he had shed this limiting national and illustrative framework. Yeats began to position himself, and to be acknowledged, as a "serious" painter of more international dimensions. Nevertheless, he remained committed to ordinary life in Ireland (and to the Irish landscape) as his subject, gradually earning the hard-won esteem of his peers, including eminent painters and critics in the English art world, for several decades before his purported "breakthrough". Particular approbation came from Walter Sickert, who wrote rather breathlessly to Yeats in 1924, stating that his work "fulfils my theory that there can be modern painting—Life above everything".² Sickert and Yeats would become close friends; Yeats called on Sickert whenever he visited London thereafter. In the two decades that followed, Sickert's admiration was shared by a circle of dedicated allies—painters and illustrators who knew his work—who continued to hold Yeats in high esteem, as did one particularly dedicated gallerist, who came to know Yeats's work in the early 1930s and would go on

to prove to be among his most dedicated supporters, the dealer later known affectionately within London art circles as “the Duchess of Cork Street”, Lillian Browse (Fig. 1).



Figure 1.

Ida Kar, Lillian Gertrude Browse, late 1950s, square film negative, 2 ¼ inch. Collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG x132102). Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery.

The narrative of Yeats’s 1942 “breakthrough” obscures the ongoing support of figures like Browse, whose name does not feature in any of the standard accounts of Yeats’s life and work. In accounts like Arnold’s, Yeats’s ascension to international repute is predicated upon a series of more-or-less chance encounters with British cultural officials, in particular John Betjeman and Kenneth Clark, both of whom were indeed involved in orchestrating—if not organising—the National Gallery exhibition, Clark as Director of the Gallery and Betjeman as a conduit between Irish culture and British officialdom during the war. The implication here is that the 1942 exhibition was the result of affiliative cultural politics, with more than a suggestion of privileged male establishment cronyism. This has several negative effects, devaluing the merit of Yeats’s work, excluding other key figures like Browse whose support of Yeats was more longstanding and sincere, and underestimating

the significance of his not inconsiderable exhibiting history in London earlier in the century, prior to his “breakthrough” at the hands of the British cultural elite.

“Aour Natuv Artusts Here in Oireland”

The English poet John Betjeman was stationed in Dublin as press attaché to the British diplomat Sir John Maffey from January 1941 to August 1943. Speculation has surrounded his activities while in Ireland; suggestions that he was engaged in espionage have been largely disputed though never entirely dismissed.³ Be that as it may, during his time in Ireland, he became a much-respected figure and was lauded for his efforts in the field of cultural diplomacy. As Alex Runchman has noted, the news of his return to England in 1943 was accompanied by much eulogising, including an *Irish Times* report praising his ability not only “to interpret England to the Irish, but also to interpret Ireland sympathetically to the English”.⁴ Certainly, during his time in Ireland, he did much to foster cultural exchange between the two countries, for instance, extending the invitation to Cyril Connolly to give a lecture for the Royal Irish Academy in summer 1941, following which Connolly was persuaded to publish an “Irish Number” of *Horizon* in January 1942. Such diplomatic overtures in the literary field were accompanied by an equal campaign for the promotion of Irish art. In May 1941, Kenneth Clark visited Ireland, on Betjeman’s invitation; while there, Betjeman arranged his meeting with Yeats at his home on Fitzwilliam Square. Early the following year, the joint exhibition of Yeats and Nicholson took place at the National Gallery. An illustrated essay on Yeats’s work, written by Clark, also appeared in *Horizon’s* “Irish Number”.

This was one of several temporary exhibitions held at the National Gallery during the war, while the permanent collection was being housed in emergency storage in Wales. Already, by 1942, solo exhibitions of Walter Sickert and Augustus John, as well as a major group exhibition, *British Painting since Whistler*, had taken place, to considerable public acclaim. This was an august roster of artists, and Yeats’s inclusion gained him serious attention from some of the most prominent figures in the contemporary British art establishment, including Herbert Read and John Rothenstein.⁵ It was also the first such exhibition of Yeats’s work in a national institution in either the UK or Ireland. In the following year, Victor Waddington was persuaded—after initial disinclination—to take Yeats into his stable of living artists, among more conservative academic Irish artists like Seán Keating and Maurice MacGonigal.⁶ In June 1945, the National Loan Exhibition took place in Dublin, and in 1948, a solo exhibition of his work, organised by the Arts Council of Great Britain, toured from Temple Newsam House in Leeds to the Tate. Thus, though Yeats may have been regularly reviewed in the British

press for more than a decade beforehand, the National Gallery exhibition undeniably raised his profile. As a result, Clark has been credited with an instrumental role in Yeats's reputational fortunes. The National Gallery exhibition was referred to, by Flann O'Brien, for instance, as "London's Clark-sponsored Yeats-Nicholson National Gallery show".⁷ In a telling lapse, however, Clark on at least one occasion deflected public criticism of the exhibitions by claiming that he had not necessarily "selected" the work himself. He did not specify who was responsible for the selection; this failure to acknowledge the work of those under Clark's command was repeated by commentators until relatively recently.

It was customary at this time to credit the work of the National Gallery to its Director; this organisational diktat was compounded, for later scholars and critics, by the shortage of surviving records relating to the wartime period of the National Gallery's operations. Specific documentation of the Yeats/Nicholson exhibition, for instance, has not survived. As a result, accounts of Yeats's inclusion have long been dominated by the well-documented exchange between two powerful men, Betjeman and Clark. In May 1941, upon Betjeman's invitation, Clark visited Ireland to give a lecture to the National Art Collections Fund, a trip that was also from the outset conceived as a diplomatic exercise; items of relating correspondence from both men were marked by the header "Art Liason in Eire". At Betjeman's request, Clark also assisted in arranging an exhibition in London of

the work of a girl (twenty seven, red haired [sic] and awkward and not cognisant of any modern artists) called Miss Nano Reid. Her water colour landscapes are, if you will take my word for it, really beautiful and something both Irish and un-dirivative [sic].⁸

This exhibition took place at the Redfern Gallery, though it received no notices in the press, and nothing sold. Likewise, at Betjeman's prompting, Clark visited Yeats, viewed his work, and proceeded to include it in the joint exhibition at the National Gallery in the following year.

Clark seems to have been a little ambivalent about Yeats's work. Following his visit to Ireland, Clark proposed to the board of the National Gallery on 10 June 1941 that they should hold a solo exhibition of Yeats's work that winter, Yeats being "much admired in Ireland" and thus offering the opportunity to organise a show that would be "of interest" and would also "strengthen good feelings with Ireland".⁹ The board gave their approval, yet Clark remained uncertain. On 16 September 1941, he wrote regretfully to Betjeman, stating that the exhibition was, at that point,

hanging fire, because to tell the truth I had one or two of his pictures to look at here, and I am sorry to say that they did not look nearly as well as they did in Dublin. It is a great risk ... and on the whole I am inclined to think that the risk is not worth taking. ¹⁰

To judge by these items of the correspondence, and to their references to Reid's work, Clark and Betjeman's attitude to Irish art seems both ill-informed and patronising, viewing Irish artists as provincial and ignorant, even if occasionally, at the same time, original or "underivative".

This attitude is crystallised in a spiteful letter from Betjeman to Clark, which survives in the archives of the National Gallery in London, and concludes with a paragraph in mock Hiberno-English:

and naow Sir Kenneth so hwat do you think of aour natuv artusts here in Oireland? Oi ventur to thank that there is no artust to-day workun in Europe—unless maybe in Germany—who can howled a candle to Miss Manie Jellet for modernism or to Mr Jack Yeats for the mystic or to Miss Laetitia Hamilton or Mr Paul Henry for the purely pictorial. Oi would add that thanks to Holy Oireland's constant intercessions to the Sacred Hyart, our stained glass is as fouin as—nay fouinur—than Chartres. ¹¹

Such sneering references to Yeats and his contemporaries are indicative of a condescending, hypocritical attitude to the work of those very Irish artists both Clark and Betjeman were engaged in promoting. The same tone of imperial (and imperious) condescension has been noted by Tricia Cusack, who has critiqued the "colonial paternalism" of Clark's *Horizon* essay, in which he "praised" Yeats's use of colour: "colour is [his] element, in which he dives and splashes with the shameless abandon of a porpoise". ¹² Clark's suggestion of an unregulated, lawless element in Yeats's work chimes with an attitude to Irish "ungovernability"; at one point in the essay, he remarks that Yeats's figures seem indifferent both to "law and order" and to the "Russian ballet". Yeats's Irish figures are civilised in neither a civic nor a cultural sense. Unsurprisingly, Yeats himself detested the essay. At the very least, it suggests that Clark's dedication to Yeats may have been less than wholehearted (Figs. 2-5).

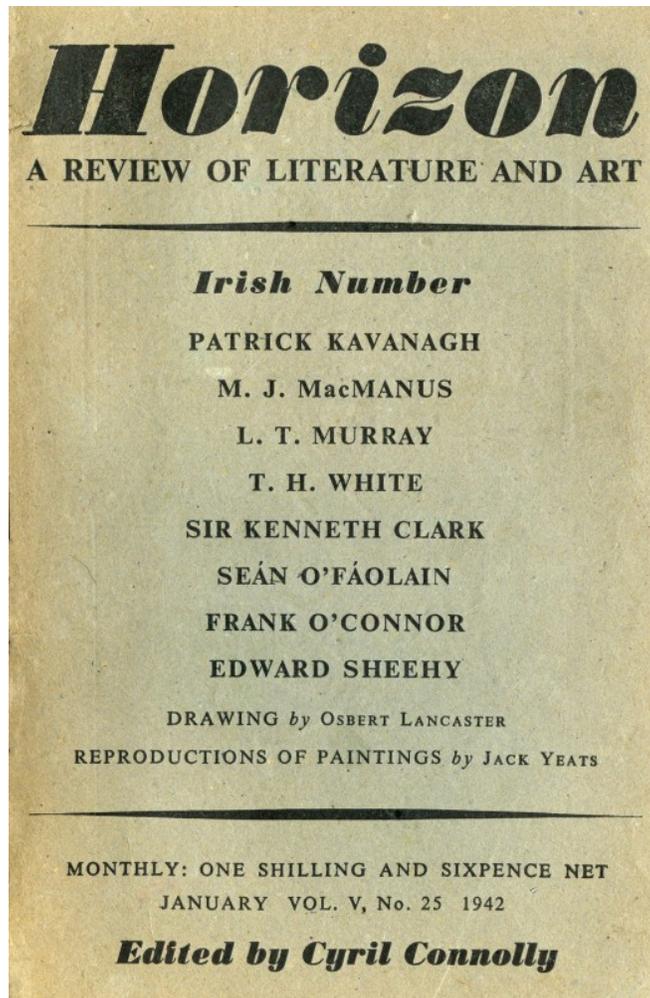


Figure 2.

Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art, Vol. V, No. 25, January 1942 (London: Horizon Publishing, 1942), cover page.

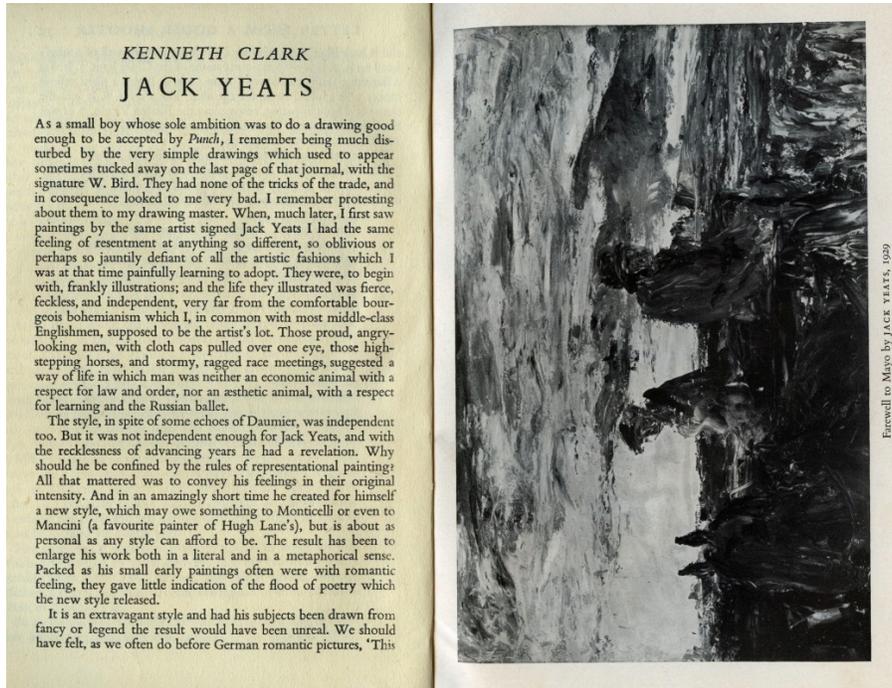


Figure 3.
"Jack Yeats" by Kenneth Clark, *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art*, Vol. V, No. 25, January 1942 (London: Horizon Publishing, 1942), 38-39.

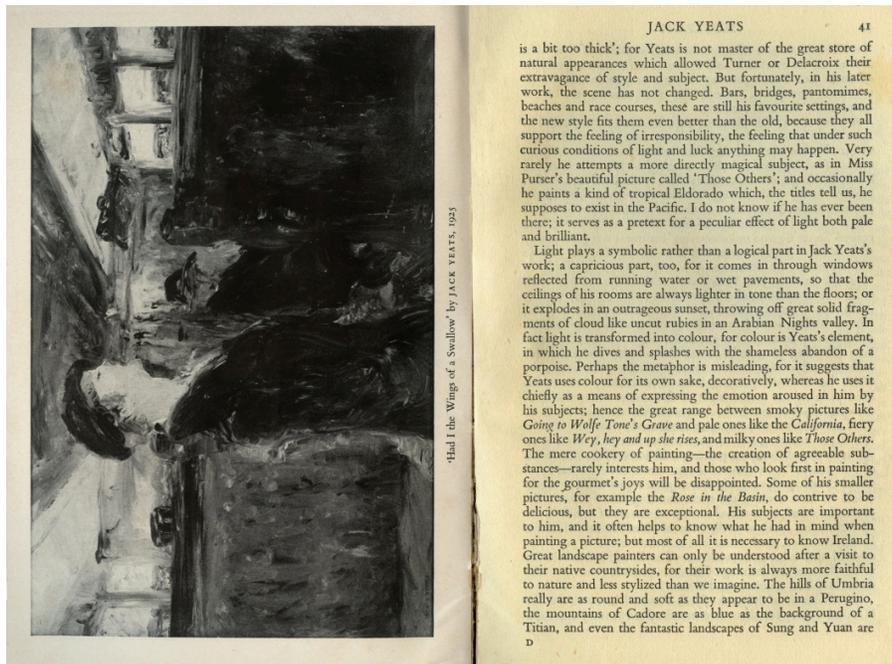


Figure 4.
"Jack Yeats" by Kenneth Clark, *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art*, Vol. V, No. 25, January 1942 (London: Horizon Publishing, 1942), 40-41.

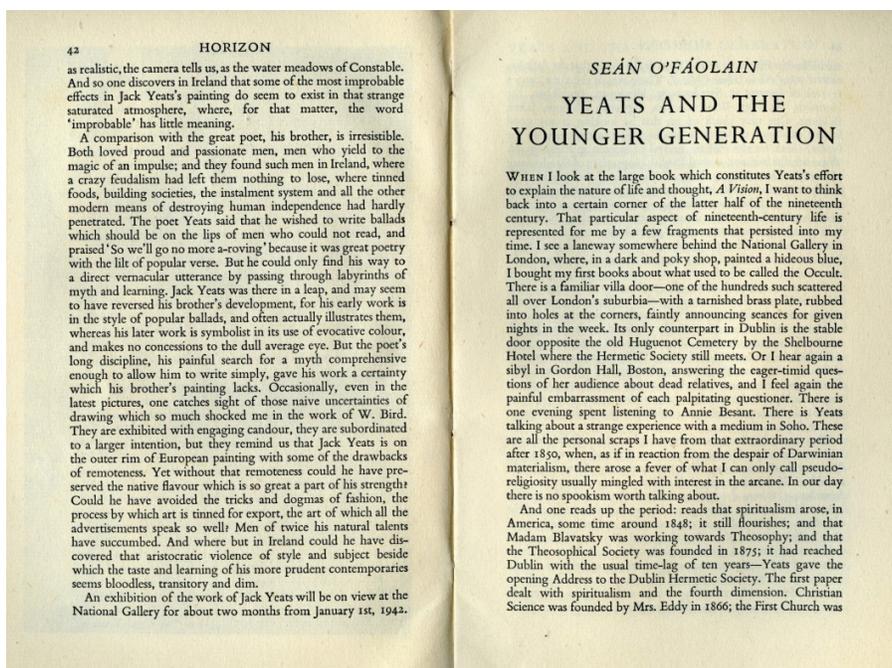


Figure 5.

"Jack Yeats" by Kenneth Clark, *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art*, Vol. V, No. 25, January 1942 (London: Horizon Publishing, 1942), 42-43.

Close scrutiny of the surviving records at the National Gallery does suggest some alternative motivating factors. Clark was, at this time, serving on a number of official government committees and undertaking work of various kinds for the Ministry of Information. The Committee on the Employment of Artists in Wartime (CEAW) was one of several official committees set up to administer the arts in wartime Britain. Founded by the Ministry of Labour in 1939, it was in some senses a precursor for the War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC), which was established by the Ministry of Information later that year, absorbing certain of the CEAW's proposed functions, thanks to Clark's success in persuading the authorities to reclassify the wartime work of visual artists as "publicity" rather than a labour affair per se. Much has been written about the WAAC, including most notably Brian Foss's extensive 2007 study of British war art, which focused almost exclusively on the organisation.¹³ The CEAW has received less focused attention. This is not unnatural, given the shortage of surviving records. Nevertheless, the CEAW did continue to operate, serving as the official organisational basis for Clark's *Recording Britain*, through which—with the support of a grant from the Pilgrim Trust—artists were commissioned to paint landscapes of the embattled "home front", exhibited at the National Gallery and elsewhere during the war. The CEAW is not mentioned in the Pilgrim Trust ledgers. Minutes survive for meetings in 1939; but none for the meeting on 4 January 1940, or

thereafter. Records for their exhibitions at the National Gallery are not held in the Gallery's archives. As such, the activities of the CEAW remain somewhat shadowy.

A note appended to the National Gallery's archive catalogue suggests that this may also account for the absence of records relating to the Yeats/Nicholson exhibition.¹⁴ The implication here, that the CEAW may have been the organisers of the 1942 exhibition, represents a tantalising proposition, though it has so far been impossible to verify. Be that as it may, the terms of the committee's agenda, as outlined in the paperwork that does survive, shed light on what may have been Clark's motives in visiting Ireland. In the committee chairman's initial memorandum, the remit of the CEAW is defined in the following terms: "to consider and report what action can be taken to utilise the services of artists and designers whose ordinary means of livelihood have been cut off or seriously diminished by the war".¹⁵ Yeats's work may have been included in several exhibitions of "British" art, and he was in fact born and lived for many years in England, but still the question of his "Britishness" would have seemed to most observers rather murky; certainly, the matter of his "employment", or otherwise, would not have been considered relevant to such an organisation.¹⁶ However, as an artist of a neutral nation, such semi-official British patronage might be considered an outcome of an international diplomatic strategy, an exercise in the cultivation of better British-Irish relations; and in fact, one of the stated subsidiary objectives of the CEAW was to consider cultural interventions in "neutral countries".¹⁷

This objective is fully in evidence in the correspondence between Clark and Betjeman, both of course affiliated with the Ministry of Information.¹⁸ The very first letter of invitation presents the visit in these terms, as "satisfying the craving for attention that there is in artistic and literary circles in Dublin. At present the German Minister has rather a monopoly of art and gave a dinner to old Jack Yeats recently." Similarly, the exhibition of Nano Reid's work is conceived explicitly as an exercise in cultural propaganda, with Betjeman claiming that "[i]t would be a great thing in this city of gossip, if you could get for me a London gallery to consider" such a prospect.¹⁹ In his letter to Rex Nan Kivell, Director of the Redfern Gallery, Clark reiterated this point:

A friend of mine who is our Representative in Ireland has sent over for me to see a selection of work by a lady called Miss Nano Reid, some of which is rather inconclusive, but the best renders more truthfully and sensitively than anything I have seen the atmosphere of the West of Ireland. I wonder if you would care to

exhibit some of the best? I think they would be liked, and it would be an excellent thing from the propaganda point of view if it is said that a young Irish artist is being exhibited in a prominent London gallery. *This is the only sort of propaganda we can do in Eire, and it is much more effective than one would think.*²⁰

When, in September 1941, Clark ventured to suggest cancelling the Yeats exhibition, he did so on the grounds of the risks to international diplomacy: “A successful exhibition of Jack Yeats would not greatly improve Anglo-Irish relations, whereas a few uncomplimentary notices would have a really bad effect.”²¹ Betjeman responded with an itemised handwritten set of diplomatic objectives—under the headline “STRENGTHENING EXISTING BONDS WITH EIRE”—that explicitly called for the Yeats exhibition to proceed. What is most notable about this exchange is that the only aesthetic comment passed upon Yeats’s work—either ignored or overruled by Betjeman—is in fact negative.

At a moment of such strained relationships between Ireland and Britain, this kind of pragmatism makes diplomatic sense. Cyril Connolly, in his editorial “Comment” for the Irish number of *Horizon*, went so far as to suggest that the “tact” and “gentility” of Britain towards a neutral Ireland are “proof of the fundamental democracy of the empire, a spirit utterly different and superior to that of Fascism”.²² Official British patronage of Yeats’s work—an artist who was openly committed to the cause of Irish nationalism—could be read as a shrewd gesture of cultural propaganda, demonstrating the tolerance of the British to dissident traditions, as opposed to the intolerant authoritarianism of the Axis powers. In any case, it was aimed at an elite Irish audience, demonstrating respect for Irish art and an affiliation (through the pairing of Yeats and Nicholson) between certain visual traditions shared by Britain and Ireland. The exhibition made explicit the shared background of Yeats and Nicholson in commercial art, produced for private presses, Beggerstaffs and Cuala Press; early work by both artists (woodcuts by Yeats, lithographic posters by Nicholson) were shown alongside their oil paintings. Such mass-reproducible visual formats were being championed at this time at official levels for their democratic potential. The CEAW’s minutes make clear the importance of these traditions in propaganda terms; for instance, exhibitions of poster art were common during the war, including the propaganda posters being produced by the Ministry of Information, again with Clark’s involvement.

Evidence for the CEAW’s direct involvement in the 1942 exhibition remains circumstantial, due to the absence of records, but given Betjeman’s involvement, Clark’s (and the National Gallery’s) involvement with the CEAW,

and the role of the CEAW as one of the National Gallery's funding sources, there is strong reason to believe that certain considerations were interpenetrating. Clark's decision to include Yeats's work in the 1942 exhibition seems hence to have been informed, not by his appreciation of the artist's work, but by the overlapping considerations of cultural diplomacy, international relations, and an exercise in propaganda aimed at a neighbouring "neutral country".²³ Interestingly, however, there was another keen supporter of Yeats in the National Gallery. For many years prior to the 1942 exhibition, the contemporary art dealer Lillian Browse had demonstrated her long-standing appreciation for and commitment to Yeats's work. Her involvement in the organisation of the Yeats/Nicholson exhibition was the culmination of a decade of support. It also demonstrated how the groundwork for Yeats's "breakthrough" had been laid well in advance by figures other than Betjeman or Clark. Certainly, the 1942 National Gallery exhibition was one of a series of important milestones for the painter over the course of the decade. Yet, it formed part of a longer sequence, building upon his professional activities in England as well as the network of institutional, critical, and curatorial support that had developed around him.

"That painting is to be looked at without comment"

Yeats was unable to attend the opening of the exhibition at the National Gallery on 1 January 1942 when audiences were regaled by a stage-Irish performance by Ireland's High Commissioner in London, John Dulanty, who was reported to have been in rambunctious form, entertaining the audience with hearty stage-Irishisms. The following day, a telegram was sent to Yeats: "EXHIBITION HUGE SUCCESS DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR HELP VERY SORRY YOU COULD NOT ATTEND OPENING—KENNETH CLARK BROWSE".²⁴ The inclusion of Browse's surname on this telegraph, alongside that of the National Gallery's director, is significant. Under Clark's reign, all official correspondence with artists was strictly the preserve of the Director. Browse has described the inclusion of her name on the telegraph as a conciliatory gesture on Clark's part—following a snub the previous evening—but it seems likely her work on the exhibition, and her friendship with Yeats, would also have been factors. Browse had been heavily involved in the Gallery's wartime exhibitions to date; in fact, it was her suggestion to hold them in the first place, though for many years Clark took the credit for this idea, as well as for the specific exhibitions that Browse organised, in some cases alone.²⁵ Browse and Clark had a thorny relationship while she was at the National Gallery, though ultimately Clark seems to have maintained a grudging respect for her tenacious, fearless approach to the job of the gallerist. More to the point, however, when she joined the National Gallery in 1940, Browse had already been an advocate and promoter of Yeats's work for almost a decade, and went on to play a significant—if largely uncredited and since

overlooked—part in the organisation of the 1942 exhibition. Browse's role in the organisation of the National Gallery's wartime exhibitions has been acknowledged since at least the late 1990s—when she published her account of the period in *Apollo*, which later became part of her memoir—but to date her name has not figured in the scholarship on Yeats. ²⁶

By her own account, Browse joined the Leger almost by accident. She was born in London but grew up in Johannesburg, before returning to train as a ballet dancer under Margaret Craske. She decided, however, against pursuing a career on the stage and sought work elsewhere. While she was seeking a career, she undertook some ballet teaching, through which she was introduced to a cultural and artistic set, as well as beginning to learn about painting; she mentions an early interest in Degas in particular. At the same time, she was looking for a respectable secretarial job. She was introduced to a tapestry dealer, who couldn't himself offer her a position, but mentioned a Mr Leger, whose fine-art gallery was then expanding (from Duke Street to Old Bond Street and Brussels). She enquired and was given an interview, after which Harold Leger offered her an unpaid job in the gallery, which, in light of her lack of expertise or experience, she accepted. "And so in the vaguest possible way I entered the world of the visual arts." ²⁷

Browse was provided with an office on the second floor where for six months she was responsible for filing press notices, sale catalogues, and other paperwork. At the same time, she was attending a school of Adult Education, and reading at lunchtime to develop her knowledge of the Old Masters, which were Leger's stock in trade. In order to be able to read the *Klassiker der Kunst* books in Harold Leger's library, she undertook to learn German, under the tutelage of two recently arrived German art dealers, Heinrich Rosenbaum (later Henry Roland) and Gustav Delbanco, who had just gone into partnership, as dealers in Old Masters, with premises in Piccadilly. Browse also attended occasional auctions on the Leger Gallery's behalf. After a few months, the acting secretary departed and Leger offered Browse the vacant position, with a salary. Shortly thereafter, following the retirement of the gallery manager, she was again promoted. Her memoir is candid about her feelings of fraudulence in her new role, unaided of course by the amused courtesy with which she was met by other male dealers and gallerists, particularly during the first few years, before other women dealers began to arrive in London, in flight from Nazi Germany; she was, she writes, "something of a novelty, a woman in a world particular to men". ²⁸

She also documents her introduction to a circle of practising painters, whose knowledge and conversation helped inform her about the kinds of work being produced by her contemporaries:

After a couple of years in Bond Street, I got to meet a small number of artists, who were then quite well known but who, with the exception of [Charles] Ginner and [C.R.W.] Nevinson, and to a lesser degree James Pryde, have almost disappeared from the artistic scene. ²⁹

The other artists Browse names include William Gaunt, “Jos” [possibly Charles Walter] Simpson, John Flanagan, Rowley Smart, and Anton Lock, a frustrated painter and jobbing cartoonist whose advice she cites as having been particularly beneficial and instructive. It was at this point, with Leger’s acquiescence, she decided to reopen a large gallery on the second floor of the building, which had been lying vacant, for use as the site of a programme of contemporary exhibitions, featuring work by some of the artists whose acquaintance she had made, but also others they recommended. It was from conversation with this nexus of painters that she heard about Jack B. Yeats, who they regarded as the foremost painter “outside their own circle”.

In fact, Browse was not herself immediately enthusiastic: “Yeats’s early painting were easy. I knew that I liked them, but the more recent were something quite different; their wildness was confusing to my eye, then so raw.” ³⁰ Nevertheless, she decided to stage an exhibition of his work in the newly acquired space adjoining what had been the Leger Gallery, initiating a contemporary exhibiting programme which would continue through the 1930s. Under her oversight, the Leger would exhibit work by many of the circle of painters she came to know: Stanley Spencer, Charles Ginner, William Scott, and Edward Ardizzone. The solo exhibition of Yeats’s work, mounted by Browse in 1932, was succeeded by continuing inclusion of Yeats’s work in group exhibitions throughout the 1930s: paintings were included in the Leger summer exhibitions in 1935, 1937, and 1939, as well as Browse’s very popular 1936 group exhibition, *The Circus*, in which Yeats’s *The Double Jockey Act* (1916) was included (Fig. 6). Browse was not the only gallerist to have shown interest in Yeats, of course. Two solo exhibitions of his work were staged at Tooth & Son in 1927 and 1928, but the second was not a success; his work did not sell, and in the following year, the gallery’s director Dudley Tooth politely refused Yeats’s request for a third, on the grounds that his work was not sufficiently “advanced”. ³¹ Yeats also had solo exhibitions at the Alpine Club Gallery in 1929 and 1930—these were, at the time, the biggest exhibitions of his work to date—and another at the Dunthorpe Gallery in 1936. But during the 1930s, the Leger was the London gallery that provided Yeats with the most consistent, continuous support. ³²

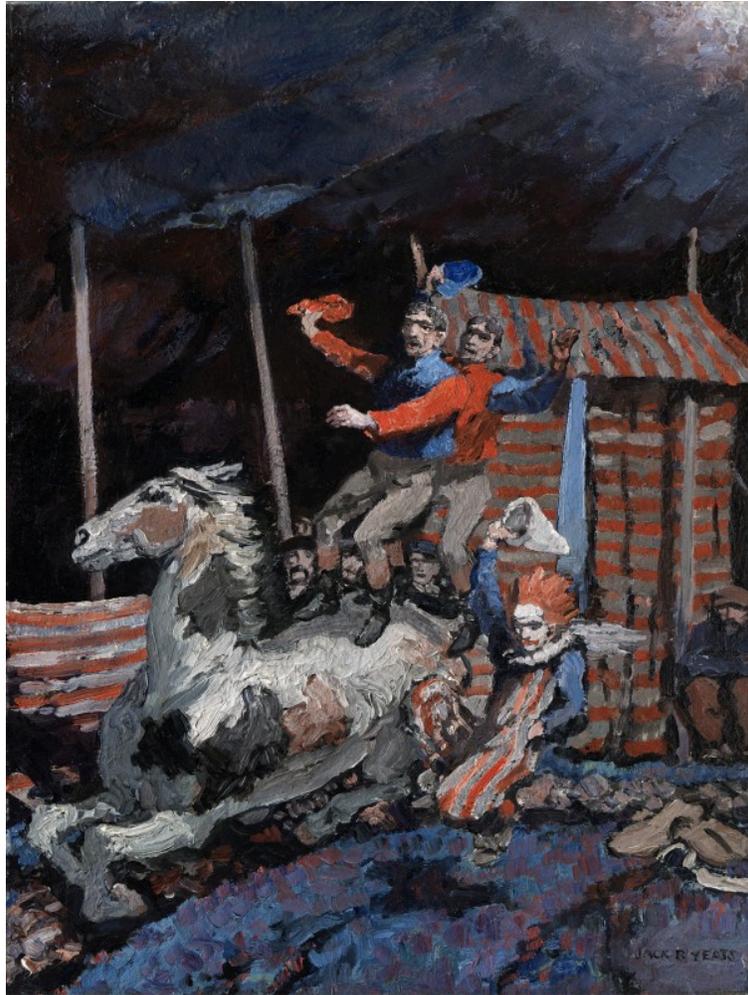


Figure 6.

Jack B. Yeats, *The Double Jockey Act*, 1916, oil on canvas, 61.3 × 45.8 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Ireland (NGI.1737). Digital image courtesy of National Gallery of Ireland and the Estate of Jack B Yeats. All rights reserved, DACS 2019.

This relationship was never formalised, however. Yeats had no official gallery representation, in England or Ireland, before Waddington took him on in 1943. Prior to this, he maintained a certain professional aloofness as an artist, perhaps a result of the careful reputational equilibrium he sought to maintain, an “Irish” artist operating as much in England as Ireland, and in fact better-received in the former than the latter, at least until the 1940s. This aloofness found its way into his social as well as his professional life. In person, Browse seems to have found Yeats difficult company, at least at first. Yeats and his brother, W.B., both attended the opening of the 1932 exhibition; she noted that the artist, “though very Irish, was on the whole silent”. She describes asking him to “explain” one particular painting that she could not understand, to which he replied haughtily: “That painting is to be looked at without comment”. According to Browse, he was further

disgruntled by her lack of knowledge about the pieces of Irish mythology after which many of his paintings were named. Nevertheless, they became friendly; she would meet him for lunch on his rare trips to London, including on his last visit in 1947, when he noted with bemused approval “the new friendliness of the English” since the war. ³³

He had reason to feel warmly towards Browse, of course. His exhibitions at the Leger had ensured regular (and importantly, sustained) commentary from the British art press throughout the 1930s. This was, interestingly, a moment at which he was least prolific as a painter, focusing for much of the decade on writing, with several of his prose books—themselves a strange hybrid form of meandering colloquial first-person narrative, blurring fiction and non-fiction—being published in London. These prose works were, like his paintings, set in (often unspecified) places in the west of Ireland, but stylistically they were innovative and experimental, partaking in the exploratory spirit of contemporary modernism. It is known that he was reading Joyce; in turn, an influence upon Beckett has been suggested. ³⁴ It is also noteworthy that he maintained personal connections to other literary figures in London, including Osbert and Edith Sitwell, who occupied the centre of a cultural set interested in crossing boundaries between literature and the visual arts; Osbert Sitwell’s evolving style of perambulatory first-person prose provides an interesting parallel to Yeats’s work. Yeats’s first book, *Sligo*, was published by Wishart & Co., a publishing house closely connected to the important *Calendar of Modern Letters*; later books were published by major British publishing houses, including Heinemann and Routledge. Yeats was thus situating his work within the framework of contemporary (modernist) British literature. He was also staying abreast of artistic developments in the British capital, attending exhibitions including those at the Leicester Galleries, who hosted a series of seminal shows of international work, including the first solo exhibitions of Cézanne and Van Gogh in England. ³⁵ In the immediate post-war period, too, he was reading key contemporary critical texts about literature and the visual arts by Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, debating their ideas about professionalism and amateurism in the arts with his patron John Quinn. He was also attending lectures on contemporary art activities—including, in 1919, one on the Italian Futurists, about whom he expressed scepticism. ³⁶

The traces of these engagements can surely be discerned in the development of his work during the 1920s and 1930s, when his work underwent a notable stylistic shift, the early signs of his later, more gestural approach becoming apparent. In reviews at this time, British critics endeavoured to take account of this development. In the process, certain art-historical references were outlined and repeated, becoming critical commonplaces about his work. Earlier critics had made reference to predecessors such as Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, while others had spoken of

impressionist legacies in Yeats's paintings. Responses to the 1932 exhibition at the Leger retained traces of this view of his work; commentators noted the “romantic” aspects of his work, referring to it as “impressionistic” and “lyrical”, and invoking Monticelli’s work as a parallel.³⁷ T.W. Earp, in the *New Statesman and Nation*, described Yeats’s paintings as “vivid scraps of life brimmed with emotion and loaded to the fullest capacity of movement and colour”.³⁸ By the later 1930s, it was customary to speak of the “expressionist” vein in Yeats's work. Writing about the National Society’s 1939 group show, the art critic of the *Manchester Guardian*, Eric Newton, described the artist’s “fine frenzy”, likening his work to that of the German Expressionists.³⁹ Also that year, Yeats's work was included in another group show at the Leger, leading to comparisons of his work to Watteau: “a radiant symphony of form and colour, at once true to nature and unerringly personal”.⁴⁰

A noteworthy and persistent tendency among commentators was to place Yeats in a specifically European tradition, as an artist working in the lineage of Toulouse-Lautrec, Kokoschka, Monticelli, and latterly Van Gogh, Watteau, and Cézanne. Writing again for the *New Statesman and Nation*, Earp (a long-standing critical supporter of Yeats’s work), mentioned Daumier, Rouault, Kokoschka, Ensor, “even Chagall”, as his contemporaries—but in fact fitted him within an art-historical genealogy that included “Rembrandt, Rubens, Watteau, Goya”.⁴¹ In terms of British contemporaries, Earp bracketed Yeats with certain artists then being exhibited at Tooth & Sons—presumably those “Modern Advanced British and Foreign” artists from which group Dudley Tooth had specifically excluded Yeats—including Duncan Grant, Spencer Gore, Walter Sickert, and Paul Nash, whose greatly lauded *Wood on the Downs* (1929) is explicitly mentioned.⁴² Thus, Yeats was being viewed as the inheritor of a specifically European tradition, sharing certain antecedents with the British Post-Impressionists, but pursuing an expressionist direction that differentiated him from most British artists (a notable exception, with whom he was sometimes associated, was the Fauvist-influenced Matthew Smith). This reading of Yeats’s work was often combined with a romanticised view of his individuation and a sense that there was something uniquely Irish about his work. What is interesting here is the extent to which a view of Yeats as distinctly Irish was not incompatible with a sense of his Europeanness, at least for some British critics. For others, of course, Yeats’s Irishness was a problem. His work was critiqued on grounds of its nationality, in terms that were encoded with suggestions of backwardness, unsophistication, and provincialism. In 1936, for example, the English writer Hugh Gordon Porteus claimed, with reference to Yeats’s work, that:

[t]he Irish genius is essentially literary, impressionistic and romantic ... Why has the Irishman so seldom any plastic sense when it comes to the plastic arts? He uses paint as a poetic-dramatic medium, and the result is not very interesting.⁴³

Such generalisations were to dog Yeats's work intermittently throughout his career.

Browse continued to support Yeats after the outbreak of the Second World War, when she had to leave the Leger to undertake war work, initially as an ambulance driver. By chance, Browse met Kenneth Clark on a train to Coventry in summer 1939. Not long thereafter, she attended Myra Hess' free concerts in the National Gallery and had the idea that the galleries might be used for temporary exhibitions. She approached Clark with her proposal but he rejected it summarily; in fact, by her account, she had to approach him five more times before he agreed to hear her out, either "impressed by such tenacity or merely bored by this tiresome female who would not take no for an answer".⁴⁴ She suggested an exhibition centred upon the influence of Whistler on British art. Clark invited her to draw up a list of potential works held in private collections. Once her proposal—and her list of works, coming to more than 300 titles—had been approved, Clarke asked Browse to assist him with the exhibition's organisation, an invitation she said was both unexpected and unsolicited. Almost immediately afterwards, he was seconded by the Ministry of Information and Browse found herself in charge of the scheme, with the support of William Gibson, the Keeper of the Gallery, and a small weekly allowance. To start with, she sought—and was granted—a loan of two works by the Queen, a bold (and shrewd) step. She then travelled around the country viewing and requesting works from various private owners' collections. With what amounted to a royal stamp of approval for the exhibition, few declined.

British Painting Since Whistler opened in February 1940. In a survey of contemporary British art that included work by a wide range of painters (from Wyndham Lewis to Dame Laura Knight), Yeats was well represented, with three paintings included. The exhibition situated him in the context of a particular canon of modern "British" art, though his work was of course unavoidably "Irish" in terms of subject matter and titles. It is noteworthy—and at first sight surprising—that Yeats did not seem to find this framing uncomfortable. In any case, his work received favourable notice, for instance, from artist and critic John Piper, who noted the "pleasure" of these "small intense paintings".⁴⁵ Others were less effusive, in particular Clive Bell, writing for the *New Statesman and Nation*, complaining with some sourness of Yeats's over-representation:

[F]or some strange reason Jack Yeats, whose work is neither Post-Impressionist, nor Pre-Raphaelite, nor anything in particular, but is on a par with that of most of the young, or old, ladies who exhibit annually at Burlington House, has no less than three. That is as much as we are allowed to see of Duncan Grant. ⁴⁶

The terms of this critique are noteworthy, in that they demonstrate the zeal for categorisation that underpinned much of Bell's then widely read art criticism. Here, as well as being described as "on a par" with the "ladies"—presumably even more contemptible than the "men"—attached to the Royal Academy (an institution much reviled at the time by those who considered themselves "advanced"), Yeats was also essentially being critiqued for Bell's inability to *categorise* him. Bell was, of course, an advocate of a particularly narrow canon of British (Post-Impressionist) art; hence his anger at the inclusion of three works by Yeats, while other more "worthy" (British) artists like Wyndham Lewis, Edward Wadsworth, and (the critic's own wife) Vanessa Bell were represented by only a single work apiece. ⁴⁷

This grumble was minor compared to the controversy which was to follow—a fracas in which institutional misogyny undoubtedly played a role. A reporter for the *Daily Telegraph* gave a somewhat overheated account of Browse's role in organising the exhibition. Other journalists took umbrage at what seemed a diminution of Clark's role, and were critical of the absence of an exhibition committee. On 23 February 1940, the *Daily Mail* ran a front-page story on it: "ONE WOMAN TO OPEN NATIONAL GALLERY—BROWSE'S ACADEMY". The story was taken up elsewhere, though the *Daily Mail* led the attack, repeating the story in the following month under the headline: "WOMAN HANGS 360 PICTURES IN HER 'ACADEMY'". At this point, a number of Royal Academicians entered the fray. Julius Olsson and A.J. Munnings attacked Clark for what they saw as his dereliction of duty. Clark was, thereafter, more involved in the exhibitions at the National Gallery, and a committee system was implemented to oversee future wartime shows. Further tensions seem to have carried over, however, into subsequent exhibitions—of Sickert's work in 1941, and of Yeats and Nicholson in 1942—hence the conciliatory telegraph. There seems to have been continuing contestation over duties and responsibilities, and Browse was not inclined to be obliging and deferent in the way Clark perhaps expected of a woman under his employment. According to Browse, he was overheard complaining that "she is quite intolerable". ⁴⁸

Her account does not make entirely clear the extent of her involvement in the 1942 exhibition, and the absence of records at the National Gallery makes precise reconstruction impossible. While her name is mentioned in the minutes of the Gallery's board meetings, the extent of her contributions go unacknowledged; for instance, when the Sickert exhibition was first proposed, the idea was attributed to the Keeper of the Gallery's collection, William Gibson, rather than Browse.⁴⁹ Browse's hand is evident in an exhibition featuring both Yeats—with whom she had such a long-standing relationship, compared to Clark—and Sir William Nicholson, another great favourite of hers, whose catalogue raisonné she produced in 1956. (It is noteworthy that Clark's most recent biographer, James Stourton, in fact credits the Yeats/Nicholson exhibition entirely to Browse.) Clark's worries about the exhibition's potential threat to Anglo-Irish relations proved in any case unfounded. On the whole, the reviews were favourable, if not entirely enthusiastic. Two influential critics, Herbert Read and John Piper, writing for the *Listener* and the *Spectator* respectively, reviewed the show in glowing terms, both mentioning Sickert's work as a precursor to Yeats', with Read quoting Sickert's 1924 commentary on Yeats at length, and reiterating the now-familiar comparison with Kokoschka.⁵⁰ What is evident here is the extent to which the critical parameters for Yeats's work had already been established by a continuous exhibiting history, and a developing discursive exchange among reviewers. An editorial for the *Burlington* was similarly positive, mentioning Monticelli, Mancini, and "a young Cézanne" as precursors. "There is something extraordinarily stimulating in the performance of this turbulent restive genius, whose Art tends more and more to assume the character of a series of daring adventures in oil paint."⁵¹ Certain key works were singled out by reviewers; *An Evening in Spring* (1937) received particularly favourable comment (Fig. 7). Another important painting, *(A) Farewell to Mayo* (1929), was noticed by the actress Vivienne Leigh, for whom Clark arranged a night viewing of the exhibition.⁵² She said the scene—a departing emigrant, regarding the place of their birth—brought to mind the story of her Kerry-born mother's emigration to America; subsequently her husband, the actor and director Sir Laurence Olivier bought the painting for her as a gift (Fig. 8).



Figure 7.

Jack B. Yeats, (An) Evening in Spring (Dinner), 1937, 61 × 91.5 cm, oil on canvas. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of Estate of Jack B Yeats. All rights reserved, DACS 2019 | Photo: Denis Mortell Photography.



Figure 8.

Jack B. Yeats, A Farewell to Mayo, 1929, oil on panel, 23 × 35.5 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of Sotheby's, London and the Estate of Jack B Yeats. All rights reserved, DACS 2019.

Others were less enthusiastic, however. Maurice Collis was scathing about Yeats's recent, more pictorially diffuse oils, which "are alleged to reflect the artistic frenzy which overtook him in his middle age";⁵³ while the art critic of the *Connoisseur* echoed the anti-Irish sentiment of Hugh Gordon Porteus,

referring to Yeats as “an Irishman through and through, whose impulsiveness seems to us often to result in incoherence ... constantly at screaming pitch ... The paint seems to have run amok”.⁵⁴ Raymond Mortimer, writing for the *New Statesman and Nation*, described Yeats’s “startling virtuosity” and made a comparison to Joyce’s writing; neither comment was intended as praise.⁵⁵ These two poles of opinion would continue to dominate the terms of Yeats’s reception in Britain, some praising his work (often allying it with European traditions), others deriding its excessiveness, its “pitch”, its “ungovernability”, and its tasteless colouration, criticisms often delivered with reference to Yeats’s Irishness. What unites these two sets of critical parameters, this view of him as both Irish and European, is that in either case his work is coded as “not-English”.

Responding to his work in the inaugural exhibition of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), *40 Years of Modern Art*, in 1948, E.M. Gombrich noted that: “Yeats fitted amazingly into the continental tradition: temperamentally as well as technically he was in harmony with the Rouault and the Kokoschka in his neighbourhood.” Gombrich approved of the inclusion of work like Yeats’s from outside the conventional London and Paris circles, using this as an example of a role to which the nascent ICA might aspire, “to show that art grows even where it is irrigated neither by the Seine nor by the Thames”.⁵⁶ This show took place in the same year as the major Tate (and Temple Newsam House) retrospective of Yeats’s work, following a successful and well-received solo exhibition at Wildenstein in 1946.⁵⁷ However, Yeats continued to be the subject of ongoing opposition from the pugnacious artist and critic Patrick Heron, who criticised what he saw as Yeats’s lack of a sense of design or colour, his use of “raw meaningless pigment”.⁵⁸ Browse herself continued to exhibit Yeats’s work after the National Gallery exhibition. Works of his—including *No Man’s Dust* (1937; [Fig. 9](#))—were included in an exhibition at the Leger in April that year; Browse also included his paintings in the two annual exhibitions she organised, in 1942 and 1943, as part of CEMA’s “Art and the People” programme, a series of touring exhibitions, funded by the Pilgrim Trust and coordinated by the British Institute of Adult Education, which circulated art around the United Kingdom during the war. Her introductory note to the 1943 catalogue might be understood to reveal something of the basis of her sympathy for Yeats’s work: “these travelling exhibitions are organised with the idea of bringing the pictorial arts nearer to the people ... to establish this form of art as part of our daily lives”.⁵⁹



Figure 9.

Jack B. Yeats, *No Man's Dust*, 1937, oil on board, 22.5 × 35.5 cm.
Collection of IMMA Collection: On Loan, Private Collection (EX.2019.4.4).
Digital image courtesy of Christie's and the Estate of Jack B Yeats. All rights reserved, DACS 2019.

Yeats was, in the latter half of the 1940s, at the height of his reputation in London, but he still occupied a peculiar, complicated position in relation to British art. He was generally considered a solitary, even renegade figure, operating outside the main currents of the art world, pursuing his own ends in isolation from other artists. His geographical remove—living in an Ireland cut off from Europe after a war in which it had not participated—only strengthened this general romanticised impression. In 1947, he agreed to fly to London—the only flight he took in his life, and his last trip to London, which he had not visited since before the war—to be interviewed by Thomas MacGreevey for the BBC, believing it sufficiently important that he reach the British public in this way. This was the occasion on which he had his final meeting with Browse, who was an ongoing supporter; his work continued being bought, exhibited, and sold by the gallery Browse joined after the war, Roland, Browse, and Delbanco. His *Early Morning* (1944) was included in their 1947 exhibition, *Colour, Pure and Atmospheric* (Fig. 10); and there are records of further purchases and sales in subsequent decades, even after the market for Yeats's work (as for figurative art in general) had begun to decline. ⁶⁰



Figure 10.

Jack B. Yeats, *Early Morning*, 1944, oil on board, 22.5 × 35.5 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of James Adam & Sons and the Estate of Jack B Yeats. All rights reserved, DACS 2019.

This decline was certainly in evidence by the 1960s. Keith Roberts, writing for the *Burlington* in 1963, called him “a disappointing painter”: “In Yeats’s mind the visions must have been slow, serene, and timeless but once he got the brush into his hand he would insist on painting nineteen to the dozen.”⁶¹ At the same time, the national dimensions of his work began to be reasserted. Eric Newton, writing for *The Times* in 1961, commented on the “Irishness of Jack B. Yeats”, comparing his work to a stereotype of the Irish national temperament; Newton described Yeats as painting “garrulously, humorously, charmingly, poetically”.⁶² This reiteration of his national status was indicative of what James Hyman has described as a widespread retrenchment of national canons and parameters in English-language art criticism, which he ascribes to the influence of Cold War politics in Britain.⁶³ In Yeats’s case, the connotations of “national” parameters—the implications of Irishness—are suggestive of peripheral status: remoteness, backwardness, stasis, the qualities projected onto the former colony. These qualities enter the discourse even among those who admired Yeats. John Berger, who visited Yeats in 1956, the year before he died, called him “one of the last living romantics”, a painter whose work had been produced “[o]n the periphery of the twentieth century”.⁶⁴ Denys Sutton was one British critic who continued to write appreciatively in the 1960s when Yeats was falling out of favour in London. But ultimately, the view of Yeats’s work within a European tradition was superseded, particularly after his death in 1957, by a narrower view of his status as a “national” Irish painter.

Nevertheless, as in the period prior to his “breakthrough”, a small number of admirers in London, many of them artists, continued to be interested in Yeats. Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach were two particular devotees; those close to Freud maintain that he viewed Yeats, in line with the critics of the 1930s, within a specifically European tradition, rather than a narrowly Irish or British one.⁶⁵ Readings such as Berger’s of Yeats as an “outsider”, as someone on the “periphery of the twentieth century”, arguably do a disservice to his work.⁶⁶ To view him instead as an artist who was engaged with art beyond Ireland, and cognisant of the currents and developments of modernism, allows a more complex, rounded view of his work to emerge: an artist who was both Irish and European, professionally situated and supported by an international network of friends and gallerists, engaging with contemporary currents in British and European art, even while he generated a body of work no less singular for having partaken of the twentieth century.

Footnotes

- 1 Bruce Arnold, *Jack Yeats* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 331.
- 2 Letter from Walter Sickert to Jack B. Yeats, undated (ca. January 1924). Yeats Archive, National Gallery of Ireland (IE/NGI/Y1/JY/5/2/74).
- 3 Robert Fisk contested the popular rumours about Betjeman’s espionage in his 1983 book, *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster and the Price of Neutrality, 1939–1945* (London: André Deutsch, 1983). Bevis Hillier disputed Fisk’s reading, arguing for a more complex reading of Betjeman’s position and activities while in Ireland: “‘Good Relations’: Irish Neutrality and the Propaganda of John Betjeman, 1941–1943”, *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 33–46; also Bevis Hillier, *John Betjeman: New Fame, New Love* (London: John Murray, 2002), 230–236. More recently, Eunan O’Halpin has uncovered the various agendas under which Betjeman was operating: *Spying on Ireland: British Intelligence and Irish Neutrality During the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 138. Alex Runchman has also recently revisited the question, noting the ‘sincerity’ of Betjeman’s advocacy on behalf of Irish artists and writers in Britain. Alex Runchman, “English Perceptions of Irish Culture, 1941–3: John Betjeman, *Horizon* and *The Bell*”, in Dorothea Depner and Guy Woodward (eds.), *Irish Culture and Wartime Europe* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015), 87–98. See also Guy Woodward’s recent account of Betjeman’s involvement in a wartime whisper network, spreading “sibs” in Ireland and elsewhere. Guy Woodward, “John Betjeman’s Dublin Whispers”, *The Political Warfare Executive, Covert Propaganda, and British Culture*, Durham University Leverhulme Trust Project, blog post, 23 November 2018, <https://sites.durham.ac.uk/writersandpropaganda/2018/11/23/betjeman-in-dublin/>, accessed 28 January 2019.
- 4 Anon, “Mr John Betjeman Leaving”, *Irish Times*, 14 June 1943.
- 5 Hilary Pyle, *Jack B. Yeats* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 163.
- 6 For an account of Waddington’s introduction to Irish modernism, see Riann Coulter, “‘The Transmutation of Art into Bread and Butter’: Victor Waddington and Irish Art, 1943–57”, in Yvonne Scott (ed.), *Jack B. Yeats: Old and New Departures* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), 120–137.
- 7 Arnold, *Jack Yeats*, 303.
- 8 Nano Reid was a significant Irish artist who had studied in Paris in the 1920s and was influenced by European art. She would go on to exhibit regularly with the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, and later with the Independent Artists. She represented Ireland with Norah McGuinness at the Venice Biennale in 1950.
- 9 Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 10 June 1941. National Gallery Archive (NG1/12).
- 10 Letter from Kenneth Clark to John Betjeman, 16 September 1941, Tate Gallery Archive (TGA/8812/1/3/308).
- 11 Letter from John Betjeman to Kenneth Clark, 4 September 1942, National Gallery Archive.
- 12 Tricia Cusack, “‘A Living Art’: Jack Yeats, Travelling West and the Critique of Modernity”, in Yvonne Scott (ed.), *Jack B. Yeats: Old and New Departures* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), 76–77.
- 13 Brian Foss, *War Paint: Art, War, State and Identity in Britain 1939–1945* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 2007).
- 14 This confusion was made apparent in correspondence with the National Gallery archive team in 2018.

- 15 The surviving records of the CEAW are to be found in the National Gallery's archives, where they sit alongside related files on the formation of the Central Institute of Art and Design, established in 1939 to survey working artists' availability for wartime work. These include a file, produced by the Institute, on the Employment of Artists, 1939, the "preliminary memorandum" of the CEAW, two "interim reports", a set of recommendations from other artists' membership institutions, several pieces of correspondence between Clark and ad agency director J.R.M. Brumwell (seeking to get involved in the production of wartime propaganda posters with the Ministry of Information), as well as minutes of a number of meetings of the committee held at the Gallery. In practice, issues such as the decoration of military huts and canteens seem to have dominated the committee's proceedings, as well as discussions about the closure of art schools, and the planning of international design exhibitions which were eventually subsumed within the activities of the British Council. Most prominently, the committee became the vehicle for Clark's ongoing commissioning and exhibition series, *Recording Britain*; the works commissioned as part of this project are now held in a dedicated collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum.
- 16 Yeats may have been a member of a prominent Anglo-Irish family who were well-established in both Ireland and Britain, but he was a professed supporter of the nationalist cause in Ireland. What is more, his dedication to the life of the country marked him out as "Irish" from the outset of his exhibiting career in Britain. This national categorisation certainly coloured his critical reception in England; nevertheless, his work was consistently shown in mixed exhibitions among British artists, and he was generally treated as an equal (if perhaps slightly exotic) contributor, alongside his British peers, to the fabric of the London art world.
- 17 The records that survive make reference to a number of discrete objectives. Committee members discussed potential exhibitions of design to stimulate demand, particularly export, meaning exhibitions internationally, orchestrated however with the input of the Ministry of Information, as "no such scheme of circulating Exhibitions overseas will fully achieve its purpose unless accompanied by skilful and sustained propaganda". "Second Interim Report of the Committee on the Employment of Artists in Wartime", 21 December 1939.
- 18 The two men had long been friends, introduced through a mutual acquaintance, John Piper (of the three, Piper is the one who in fact demonstrated the most interest and appreciation of Yeats's work as art critic for the *Spectator*). Betjeman was writing to Clark in some desperation in early 1940, enquiring about a position; and Clark indicated his intention to get Betjeman appointed to "Home Publicity" at the Ministry of Information, where he went on to be stationed before his posting to Ireland.
- 19 Letter from John Betjeman to Kenneth Clark, 14 March 1941, Tate Gallery Archive (TGA/8812/1/3/302).
- 20 Letter from Kenneth Clark to Rex Nan Kivell, 2 April 1941, Tate Gallery Archive (TGA/8812/1/3/303). Emphasis added.
- 21 Letter from Kenneth Clark to John Betjeman, 16 September 1941, Tate Gallery Archive (TGA/8812/1/3/308).
- 22 Cyril Connolly, "Comment", *Horizon* 5, no. 25 (January 1942), 3.
- 23 John W. Purser undertakes a reading of Yeats's 1942 play, *La La Noo*, as a meditation on Irish neutrality, with the distant violence of the play's finale a symbolic analogy for the reneging of Irish moral duties during the Second World War; see John W. Purser, *The Literary Works of Jack B. Yeats* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), 89–93. Purser is one of very few critics who have seriously attempted to reckon with Yeats's writing.
- 24 Yeats Archive, National Gallery of Ireland.
- 25 According to his biographer, Meryle Secrest, it was Clark who "organised an exhibition to fill the empty rooms of the gallery. The idea of showing contemporary art seemed an effortless way to promote worthy British artists and fill the Gallery, if not with masterpieces, at least with some lively paintings." This was the received narrative regarding the wartime National Gallery exhibitions for many years. Secrest proceeds to recount his evasiveness about the "selection" of the works, in response to accusations that he was behaving as "a dictator of the arts". Like Clark, Secrest fails to specify who was in fact responsible for the selection; see Meryle Secrest, *Kenneth Clark: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1984), 151. The oversight has been corrected in the more recent biography by James Stourton, which acknowledges Browse's instrumental role in organising the wartime exhibitions at the National Gallery; see James Stourton, *Kenneth Clark: Life, Art and Civilisation* (London: William Collins, 2016), 172–173.
- 26 Lillian Browse, "The National Gallery in Wartime, and Other Memories", *Apollo* (February 1997): 3–14. Following publication of her memoir, Browse's role in the National Gallery's wartime exhibitions came to be officially acknowledged. Details of her involvement feature, for instance, in a 2008 publication produced by the gallery itself: Suzanne Bosman, *The National Gallery in Wartime* (London: National Gallery, 2008).
- 27 Lillian Browse, *Duchess of Cork Street: The Autobiography of an Art Dealer* (London: Giles de la Mare, 1999), 53–54.
- 28 Browse, *Duchess of Cork Street*, 54–60.
- 29 Browse, *Duchess of Cork Street*, 60.
- 30 Browse, *Duchess of Cork Street*, 62.
- 31 "I very much regret that I have not any Exhibition dates during 1929 to offer you. As you know, I have handed over full management of my exhibitions to Mr Keane and we are under a sort of contract with another firm to hold nothing but Modern Advanced British and Foreign Exhibitions for some time." Dudley Tooth to Jack B. Yeats, 4 October 1928. Records of Arthur Tooth & Sons, Tate Gallery Archive (TGA/20106/1/1/130).
- 32 Yeats was attentive, in turn, to his reputation in Britain, and internationally. He carefully collected any notices of his exhibitions—or reviews of group shows in which his work was mentioned—in Britain, the USA, or Europe. These have been pasted carefully and systematically in the ledgers in which he studiously collected all records of his work.

- 33 In her memoir, Browse recounts this last meeting with Yeats, without specifying the year; see Lillian Browse, *Duchess of Cork Street*, 62. Given that Yeats took only one trip to London after the war, to record an interview with Thomas MacGreevey for the BBC, this meeting has to have taken place in November 1947. For a transcript of that interview, see John Purser, "Voices of the Past: Jack Yeats and Thomas MacGreevey in Conversation", *Yeats Annual* 11, edited by Warwick Gould (1995): 87–103.
- 34 See Purser, *The Literary Works of Jack B. Yeats*, 114–126.
- 35 There is a copy of the catalogue for the Leicester Galleries' 1925 exhibition of Cézanne's work in the Yeats Archive at the National Gallery of Ireland. Yeats's ongoing engagement with European art has recently been noted by Christina Kennedy, 'Introduction', Christina Kennedy and Nathan O'Donnell (eds), *Life Above Everything: Lucian Freud and Jack B. Yeats*, exhibition catalogue (Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2019), 26.
- 36 See correspondence between Yeats and John Quinn, 15 September 1918, 5 December 1918, and 10 December 1919. John Quinn Papers, New York Public Library (NYPL 49/3-7). In these letters, Yeats can be seen engaging with the same questions about the professionalisation of the arts being addressed by Pound and Lewis in London. Quinn, as well as collecting manuscripts and artworks relating to the Celtic Revival (and the Yeats family in particular), was also the foremost collector of the art of the British avant-garde movement (with which Lewis and Pound were affiliated)—Vorticism.
- 37 Yeats's work was described as "romantic" by the critic for *The Scotsman*, 8 October 1932; "lyrical" by the critic for *The Morning Post*, 5 October 1932; and "impressionistic" by the critic for the *Spectator*, 15 October 1932, respectively. Yeats Archive, National Gallery of Ireland (IE/NGI/Y1/JY/4/2/2).
- 38 T.W. Earp, "A Group and Some Artists", *New Statesman and Nation*, 15 October 1932, 448.
- 39 "N." [Eric Newton], "Art in London: The National Society Show", *Manchester Guardian*, 16 February 1939, 5. The *Spectator's* critic, John Piper, was positive about Yeats's work in the following year's National Society exhibition, noting his four "vivid" paintings as being "so daring and genuine that they would stand out anywhere"; John Piper, "Art", *Spectator*, 1 March 1940, 285.
- 40 Thomas MacGreevey, "London Art Notes", *Studio* 118 (July–December 1939), 254.
- 41 These newspaper extracts are pasted into Yeats's scrapbooks where he kept meticulous records of all press coverage of his work at home and internationally.
- 42 Earp was unstinting and consistent in his praise of Yeats. Writing for the *Daily Telegraph* in 1936, he praised the rough texture of his paint, and the violence of colour in the artist's work. "There is an explosive quality in the art of Jack B. Yeats ... Jack Yeats views the world with a vision of his own, and the result compels attention"; T.W. Earp, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 March 1936. Yeats Archive, National Gallery of Ireland (IE/NGI/Y1/JY/4/2/3).
- 43 Hugh Gordon Porteus, "Art", *New English Weekly*, 9 April 1936, 516.
- 44 Browse, *Duchess of Cork Street*, 83.
- 45 John Piper, "Art", *Spectator*, 5 April 1940, 482.
- 46 Clive Bell, "British Painting at the National Gallery", *New Statesman and Nation*, 13 April 1940, 492.
- 47 Bell's inclusion of Wyndham Lewis' name here, as an artist deserving of further representation in the exhibition, is interesting, given the long-standing enmity between Bell and Lewis; Lewis was the foremost critic of the work of what he saw as the privileged mediocrity of the artists and writers of the Bloomsbury Group, of which Bell (as well as his wife Vanessa and her partner Duncan Grant) was a prominent member.
- 48 Browse gives a full account of this period in her memoir, see Browse, *Duchess of Cork Street*, 88–96.
- 49 "Minutes of the National Gallery Board Meeting", 10 June 1941. In a letter written a few days previously, Clark made clear that it was Browse who had in fact suggested the Sickert exhibition, in a telephone conversation on 5 June 1941. See letter from Clark to Gibson, National Gallery Archive.
- 50 Herbert Read, "Nicholson and Yeats at the National Gallery", *Listener*, 8 January 1942, 50; John Piper, "Art", *Spectator*, 9 January 1942, 35. Bruce Arnold suggests that Piper's review was "no doubt encouraged" by his friends Betjeman and Clark; see Arnold, *Jack Yeats*, 304. However, Piper's favourable notice of Yeats's paintings in his coverage of Browse's 1940 exhibition demonstrates his disinterested appreciation of Yeats's work prior to any diplomatic involvement of his friends in the artist's reputation.
- 51 Anon, "Editorial: Royal Academy and National Gallery", *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 80, no. 467, Reynolds Number (February 1942), 29.
- 52 Leigh was, at this time, starring in a production of George Bernard Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma* at the Theatre Royal Haymarket, not far from the National Gallery.
- 53 Maurice Collis, "London Exhibitions", *Time and Tide*, 10 January 1942. Yeats Archive, National Gallery of Ireland (IE/NGI/Y1/JY/4/2/4). Collis was far more sympathetic to Yeats's 1946 exhibition at the Wildenstein Gallery, which he reviewed favourably for *The Observer*, where he claimed that Yeats had "succeeded in pushing farther than any artist equal to him as a handler of the brush ... [achieving] a synthesis between the great tradition and modern experiments"; Maurice Collis, "Art", *The Observer*, 24 February 1946, 2.
- 54 H. Granville Fell, "The Connoisseur Divan", *Connoisseur*, 59 (January–July 1942): 79.
- 55 Raymond Mortimer, "London Exhibitions", *New Statesman and Nation*, 10 January 1942, 24.
- 56 E.M. Gombrich, "Forty Years of Modern Art", *Burlington Magazine* 90, no. 540 (March 1948): 82–83.

- 57 As well as Collis' high praise of the exhibition in *The Observer*, the 1946 Wildenstein show was favourably noticed by Michael Ayrton in the *Spectator* and Eric Newton in the *Sunday Times*. His work was also mentioned favourably by Wyndham Lewis that same year in an essay, "Towards an Earth Culture: The Eclectic Culture of the Transition", in Myfanwy Evans (ed.), *The Pavilion: A Contemporary Collection of British Art and Architecture* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1946).
- 58 Patrick Heron, "Jack B Yeats", *New Statesman and Nation*, 21 August 1948, 154.
- 59 Lillian Browse, "Introduction", *Forty Painters*, exhibition catalogue (London: CEMA, British Institute of Adult Education, 1943).
- 60 There are records of at least twelve oil paintings, watercolours, and drawings, having been sold through Roland, Browse, and Delbanco, between November 1949 and October 1971. The Leger Galleries also continued to buy and sell Yeats's work occasionally, including—on one occasion, in 1955—purchasing a work, *The Beggar Man in the Shop* (1924), on half-share with Roland, Browse, and Delbanco. The records of the Leger Galleries are held by Christie's archives in London; those of Roland, Browse, and Delbanco are held at the Tate Gallery Archive (TGA 975).
- 61 Keith Roberts, "Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions", *Burlington Magazine* 105, no. 722 (May 1963): 228.
- 62 "Anon." (Eric Newton), "A Raconteur in Drawing: The Irishness of Jack Yeats", *The Times*, 10 April 1961, 3. As if that were not enough, the first line of the article states baldly that "Jack Yeats is Irish". Newton had maintained a consistently ambivalent attitude towards Yeats's work since the early 1930s. Responding to his 1948 exhibition at Temple Newsam House and the Tate, Newton praised him as an illustrator, "[b]ut in many of his later and larger pictures he has assaulted his subject with such an avalanche of paint, such a welter of strong colour (red, orange, yellow, and blue are the favourites), that the story-telling quality, in which the artist's personality appears most strongly, is almost submerged and lost in it, and he seems in danger of becoming just one more slapdash colourist." "Anon." (Eric Newton, "Mr J.B. Yeats's Art: Exhibition at the Tate Gallery", *The Times*, 14 August 1948, 6. In the early 1950s, he voiced probably his harshest criticisms, claiming that for the viewer of Yeats's work, "so much passion and so little restraint in picture after picture produces, in the end a kind of malaise". Quoted in Brian O'Doherty, "Irish Painter: Jack B. Yeats", *The Irish Monthly* 80, no. 947 (May 1952): 203.
- 63 James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain During the Cold War 1945–1960* (New Haven, CT: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 2001). Interestingly, perhaps tellingly, Hyman makes no reference to Yeats's work whatsoever in this otherwise extensive survey of figurative artists of the period.
- 64 John Berger, "Jack Yeats", *New Statesman and Nation* 52, no. 1343 (8 December 1956), 741.
- 65 The connection with Freud has been explored in an exhibition (for which this author undertook a programme of curatorial research) at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, *Life Above Everything: Lucian Freud and Jack B. Yeats*, 28 June 2019–20 January 2020. This course of research partially informs this essay. For Auerbach's comments on Yeats, see Mark Haworth Booth, "Jack B. Yeats Until Now", *Jack B. Yeats: Late Paintings*, exhibition catalogue, Arnolfini, Bristol, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, 1991, 32.
- 66 This view of Yeats's peripherality was shared, albeit in slightly different terms, by critics of his work in Ireland also. In 1972, in the opening manifesto-style editorial of his journal of art and literature, *Structure*, Michael Kane mounted a significant attack on Yeats's work, arguing that it had spectacularly failed to reflect the lived reality of urban modernity. According to Kane, "[Yeats'] spectral horses and sequestered squires were being evoked by a man in Fitzwilliam Square at times when jet planes had begun to roar across the sky and Joyce and Freud had long departed". Michael Kane, "The Light at the End of the Old Bog Road", *Structure* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1972), 2. For Kane, Yeats's continuing pre-eminence in Irish art was a problem for a younger generation committed to reflecting urbanised Irish life. This is a specific generational grievance, exacerbated by the fact that the conventional correlations between urbanisation, progress, and modernity do not map easily onto the Irish experience; what is more, the 1970s was a period of rapid industrial expansion and social change. Be that as it may, such critiques of Yeats's work have contributed to a false but nonetheless lasting impression of his having worked in some way "outside" of the main currents of international modernism.

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The Texture of Capitalism: Industrial Oil Colours and the Politics of Paint in the Work of G.F. Watts

Kirsty Sinclair Dootson

Abstract

This article considers how the industrial production of artists' colours, or oil paint, in the second half of the nineteenth century affected artistic practice. The transformation of paint-making from an artisanal craft into an industrial process did not change the hue or saturation of colours, but radically altered their texture. It was through the materiality of their paints that artists became aware of the impact industrialisation had upon their practice; texture itself became a flashpoint for debates about the effect of capitalist modernity on painting in particular and society more broadly. This article examines how the painter George Frederic Watts mobilised the texture of his paints to articulate an anti-capitalist, moral aesthetic at a time when mass production made oil colours homogeneously buttery and smooth, as well as fugitive and unstable.

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An Artists' Colourman's Workshop (ca. 1807), an unfinished painting by J.M.W. Turner, offers a rare glimpse into the craft of colour-making in the early nineteenth century (Fig. 1).¹ At the centre of this tenebrous interior, a figure stoops over a slab as he grinds dry pigments and oil to make paint. His head is tilted upwards in conversation with the figure seated beside his workbench, but his hunched posture and firm grip on the muller make clear his physical engagement with the demanding task at hand. Although these pigments have already been ground by the donkey-drawn mill seen in the rear of the workshop, he must refine them even further to transform them into paint. He keeps a cask of oil nearby should he need to add more vehicle to his mixture, as he requires precisely the right amount to ensure the paint is neither too viscid nor too fluid. Jars, bottles, flasks, and cauldrons litter the floor and counters, containing myriad nostrums to add to his paint, perhaps to make it dry more quickly, brush more smoothly, or shine more seductively. A book labelled "Old Masters", perched on the shelf above the door, is close at hand for reference on such material matters. Amid the smoky, golden yellows and the murky, earthy browns that permeate the scene, the vivid red paint streaked across the grinding table makes clear the fruit of the colourman's labours, as its dazzling colour leaps out at the viewer from the centre of the work, imbuing the scene with a sense of alchemical magic, of something precious emerging from the gloom.



Figure 1.

J.M.W. Turner, *An Artists' Colourman's Workshop*, circa 1807, oil on wood, 62.2 × 91.4 cm. Collection of Tate (N05503). Digital image courtesy of Tate.

While Turner's painting should not be treated as a documentary record of the colourman's trade in the early nineteenth century, the scene is largely consistent with textual accounts of how colours were made and sold during

this period.² Some artists certainly continued to make their oil colours fresh in the studio at this time, but many purchased them premixed from their colourman, stored in small animal bladders to keep them moist.³ It is possible that Turner based this scene on the workshop of James Newman, a London-based colourman supplying the artist with materials at this time, who was known for the high quality of his red lake and Indian red paints.⁴

However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the scene Turner depicts would have been exceptionally rare, as few colourmen still made paints this way.⁵ The continued use of the singular term “colourman” elides the fact that many of these colour-makers were no longer small firms run by individuals but were industrial-scale businesses operating factories for mass producing colours. Even within Turner’s lifetime, new technologies transformed colour-making from an artisanal craft into an industrial process, and by the time of the artist’s death in 1851, this transition was well advanced. From the 1840s, steam-powered mills enabled colourmen to grind pigments and paints on a massive scale, storing them in collapsible metal tubes, while scientific advances from the middle of the century also provided the trade with a host of new synthetic pigments, transforming the colourman’s identity from herbalist to industrial chemist. By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, colour-making was largely automated, mechanised, and industrialised, and the range of colours that were commercially available to painters had nearly doubled.⁶

The impact these new machine-made, chemically synthesised, and industrially manufactured colours had on nineteenth century painting is by now a well-rehearsed narrative. In the words of Pierre-August Renoir: “without paint in tubes there would have been no Cézanne, no Monet, no Sisley or Pissarro, nothing of what the journalists were later to call Impressionism.”⁷ The increased portability of ready-mixed colours available to buy in tubes enabled artists to work more freely *en plein air*, and a host of new chemical shades meant they were able to enliven their canvases with the brilliant effects of natural daylight, producing the kind of dazzling chromatic effects that became synonymous with the Impressionist movement.⁸ Art-historical narratives of this period remain largely obedient to Renoir’s assessment—that by ushering in a new era of convenient, chromatic brilliance, these modern paints helped produce modernist painting.⁹

Yet, to suggest that the heightened luminosity of the Impressionist palette was the logical or necessary outcome of these new commercially available colours is to overlook the plurality of responses evidenced by painters at this time. While many remained indifferent or ambivalent towards industrially made colours, some, particularly in Britain, were vocal in their rejection of

these modern paints. This was not because artists disliked the look of these new chemical hues—they did not find these synthetic colours too saturated, vivid, or gaudy. As evidenced in painters' manuals of this period, artists did not believe it was the appearance of colour that had changed with the industrialisation of its manufacture, but rather its texture. These new techniques of manufacturing, processing, and packaging colour radically affected the haptic properties of colour far more than its optical ones, and questions of consistency, fluidity, and viscosity dominated debates about industrial colour at this time.

The changed texture of industrially manufactured paints meant that some painters continued to prefer artisan-made, hand-ground, and organically derived materials; a choice it would be easy to read as a conservative backlash against the onslaught of technological modernity. But what I suggest here is that this disavowal of industrial colours marked a conscious and explicit engagement with the conditions of contemporary life, which had potent ethical and political dimensions at this time, particularly in Britain. As it was through the materiality of their paints that artists became aware of the impact industrialisation had upon their practice, texture itself became a flashpoint for debates about the effect of capitalist modernity on painting in particular and on society more broadly.

To explore how the materiality of colour became a site of critical reflection in Victorian painting, this article focuses on the work of George Frederic Watts, who spurned industrially manufactured paints in his practice. Watts is best remembered as “England’s Michelangelo”, a title that indicates both his esteemed position in Victorian society and his explicit identification with the art of the past.¹⁰ As a painter of allegorical, symbolic, and mythological subjects, who based his style and technique upon that of Italian High Renaissance models, it is unsurprising that Watts disliked modern, mass-produced colours. However, for Watts, who self-consciously fashioned himself as a living old master painter, the effects of industrial modernity were most acutely experienced through the materiality of his paints. When systems of mass production altered the texture and purity of the colours with which he worked, it was through his materials that he chose to contest the pernicious effects of industrialisation most vociferously. However, Watts also tackled these issues of industrialised colour-making allegorically through the subject matter of his paintings. Therefore, although the subject matter, style, and technique of Watts’ work were far from modernist, through the materiality of his colours themselves, Watts critically engaged with some of the most pressing and urgent concerns of contemporary British society.

The larger ambition of this article then, is to demonstrate how questions of materiality could help us re-characterise the connections between British painting and modernity. Bringing together two crucial methodological

interventions, I draw upon new materialist approaches to art history, exemplified in the work of Jennifer Roberts, Pamela Smith, and Sarah Gould, that have revived the technical study of art, and use them to engage with the ongoing reassessment of the radical nature of Victorian painting led by scholars such as Elizabeth Prettejohn and Tim Barringer.¹¹ Acknowledging modernism as only one response among many to the major technological, social, and political upheavals that shaped the Victorian era, such scholarship has demonstrated how historical painting techniques could present a pointedly oppositional critique of the present. I, therefore, suggest that it was not only the iconography of urban life, or formal innovations intended to capture the perceptual ruptures of this accelerated century, but the materiality of paint itself, that offered a platform for artists to negotiate, interrogate, and protest the adverse effects of modernity *qua* industrial capitalism on society at large. By focusing on questions of texture, I propose a different, *haptic* paradigm through which British painters encountered and communicated the experience of modernity.¹²

I begin by examining the technical reasons the mass production of oil paint transformed the texture and purity of colour in the late nineteenth century. I focus on the manufacturing techniques of the firm that supplied paints to Watts; Winsor & Newton, one of the largest industrial colour-makers in Victorian Britain, placing their practices within the larger context of paint-making at this time. I then explore how Watts rejected the greasy texture of industrially made paints and mobilised especially dry, coarse colours to enact the anti-capitalist, anti-industrial politics of his paintings.¹³ I focus on *Mammon, Dedicated to His Worshippers* (ca. 1885), which I read as an allegorical attack on industrial colour-makers through its damning indictment of capitalist greed.

The Texture of Capitalism

The intimate still life *Mound of Butter* (1875–1885), painted by the French realist Antoine Vollon, may seem an unlikely place to begin assessing the impact that the mass production of oil paint had upon painting in Britain (Fig. 2). Yet *Mound of Butter* perfectly encapsulates what was felt by many artists (both British and French) to be the most significant new characteristic of mass-produced oil colours in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ It was not so much that industrially made colours had a distinctive appearance, but rather that they had a very specific material consistency—a new texture, frequently characterised as that of fresh butter.¹⁵ This new texture of industrially manufactured oil colours was produced through a nexus of related technological advances necessary to make paint on a large scale, from how the paint was ground and stored, to the kind of additives used in its manufacture.



Figure 2.

Antoine Vollon, *Mound of Butter*, 1875–1885, oil on canvas, 50.2 × 61 cm. Collection of National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (1992.95.1). Digital image courtesy of National Gallery of Art.

The conflation in Vollon's work between paint and butter makes clear the smoothness of this mass-produced substance.¹⁶ The lively diagonal smears of paint created with both paintbrush and knife show the effects possible with this slick new paint. The fluidity of industrially produced paint meant it was pliable enough to work easily under the brush (evidenced here by the brush marks that remain in the surface of the paint, most visibly in the lower left corner of the muslin), but it was also more full-bodied than hand-ground paint and could be applied just as well with a palette knife (which Vollon used liberally to manipulate his paint here, particularly the flat areas of colour on the butter mound itself).¹⁷ We find this painter's tool echoed in Vollon's painting with a butter paddle that scoops up gobs of butter in the same way we imagine the artist did with his paints, spreading colour on the canvas in the way he might butter bread.

Yet while Vollon revelled in the new possibilities of buttery, mass-produced paint, other painters disliked this new texture, finding it too homogenous, oily, and slick compared to artisan-manufactured colours. For instance, Frederic Leighton, the president of the Royal Academy in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, complained about the "greasiness and slipperiness" of his paints.¹⁸ This was a problem because many painters

understood this greasiness to be injurious to the long-term stability and permanence of their colours, as this excess oil could yellow, crack, or darken, resulting in dramatic changes to a work's appearance and longevity.¹⁹ The additives used to give paint its pliable, buttery texture were also damaging to the permanence of colour.²⁰ Furthermore, industrially made colours were frequently less pure than those made by hand, as they were more prone to so-called sophistication, that is, adulteration by the addition of impure and fraudulent substances that would further erode the quality of the colours.²¹ The new texture of industrially manufactured paint therefore came to represent some of the other more insidious ways in which the mass production of colour detrimentally affected painting at this time. This homogeneous, oily, buttery consistency, what I call here, the texture of capitalism, was a physical manifestation of the effect of industrialisation upon painting.

Concerns about the purity and stability of colour were particularly acute in nineteenth-century Britain. After the establishment of the National Gallery in 1824 and the expansion of its collection in the 1840s, visitors could directly compare paintings executed by the previous generation of British academicians with those by Old Masters, as well as paintings by Italian and Netherlandish artists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²² It was widely noted that the colours of early Netherlandish oils and Italian temperas seen in the National Gallery were much fresher, brighter, and altogether more sound than more recent works by Joshua Reynolds and Turner, perhaps the nation's most famed colourist.²³ In particular, Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434), acquired by the National Gallery in 1842, was considered the paragon of durable, vivid colour, and his technique was much discussed in technical manuals at the time.²⁴

If we look again at the warm patina on Turner's *Artists' Colourman's Workshop*, we might suspect that this was not an intentional evocation of the Golden Age of Dutch painting, but rather the results of an unintentional darkening and yellowing of the painting's surface. Although Turner was famed for the stunning brilliance of his works, like many painters of his generation, he experimented widely with the contents of his colours, adding unstable substances such as beeswax, megilp, and bitumen to improve the handling qualities of his paints.²⁵ By the mid-nineteenth century then, faults were already emerging in paintings by the most celebrated artists of the previous century.²⁶ These paintings began to wrinkle, darken, yellow, crack, fade, and flake, precisely because of these material experimentations with colour.

Perhaps, rather than reading Turner's small painting as a nostalgic reverie for the lost craft of colour-making, we should understand it as an illustration of the material experimentations that produced such catastrophic effects in subsequent centuries. After all, it was in imitation of the Old Masters that painters like Turner experimented with their colours, in attempts to replicate the chromatic effects of painters like Titian.²⁷ Although Turner was considered one of the most original and inventive colourists of his age, his material craft was shaped by these historical precedents.²⁸ Perhaps the book we see on the colourman's shelf contains such misguided advice regarding old master technique, and the vessels scattered about the room are filled with volatile additives that would result in the overall gloominess of the picture. To put it another way, perhaps the painting records the means of its own demise.

The demonstrable material decline of academic paintings from the previous century and the enduring brilliance of medieval and early Renaissance works seen in the National Gallery, provoked Victorian painters to think more seriously about the quality of their own colours, a particularly acute problem at a time when painters had less and less control over their materials. The rise in academic training for painters and the decline of the apprenticeship system meant that by the mid-nineteenth century, artists knew little about colour grinding or mixing, and increasingly relied upon commercially available, ready-made paints.²⁹ This combination of new technologies for making colour, with unease regarding the permanence and purity of colour, and a lack of technical knowledge among painters, produced a unique set of cultural circumstances into which modern, industrial colours emerged in Britain. These various anxieties, about purity, stability, and control, all converged on the question of texture.

It was Watts' colourman, Winsor & Newton, that helped transform the texture of paint in Britain at this time. Established in 1832, the firm owned industrial-scale factory premises for manufacturing and processing many of the raw pigments used in their paints and were responsible for two major technological shifts in colour-making in the 1840s: they introduced mechanical pigment and paint grinding and, although they did not invent collapsible metal tubes, were responsible for commercialising this invention and enabling its widespread adoption.³⁰

Grinding was necessary to reduce pigments to a powdery consistency and to combine that powder with oil to make paint (although rarely did paints solely comprise oil and pigment). As evidenced in *An Artists' Colourman's Workshop*, pigments were traditionally ground by hand using a slab and muller of stone or glass, although a horse or donkey mill might suffice, if fine grinding was not required.³¹ This laborious activity of grinding pigments

required a sound knowledge of every colour's material properties, because each required a different degree of grinding: dense pigments needed extensive grinding, while others were inherently soft; some could be ground endlessly fine, while others dulled through overgrinding; some were extremely absorbent, mixing well with oil to produce a glossy sheen, while others were gritty and non-absorbent, producing more matte colours.³² The resulting texture, finish, and hue of the colour depended to a large extent upon how it was ground.

Ideally, artists wanted paints that were the correct consistency for sitting on a palette—fluid enough to apply with a brush but not so thin they would run. When made by hand, each paint would have a different consistency depending upon the grinding requirements of its pigments.³³ But this individuated treatment became difficult when manufacturers began grinding pigments and paints on an industrial scale. The steam-powered grinding equipment introduced to Britain by Winsor & Newton in 1844 economised on the cost of skilled labour and enabled manufacturers to grind much larger volumes of pigments into much, much finer particles.³⁴

One problem was that the intensity of certain colours could be severely compromised by overgrinding. Therefore some firms, like Charles Roberson & Co., the primary colour supplier to the Pre-Raphaelite painters, continued to hand-grind their pigments and paints well into the twentieth century.³⁵ A catalogue for the firm published around 1907 noted that colours “ground by hand under the muller give superior results over those ground by machinery; [we] therefore continue to retain the old and more costly system, and are thus able to give direct attention to the requirements of each colour.”³⁶ This continued artisanal approach to grinding colours therefore produced numerous distinct textures in contrast to the homogenised smoothness of mass-produced paints all ground to the same, fine consistency.

Once paints were no longer made fresh in the studio immediately before use but were ground in large volumes at commercial factories, it became vital to increase their shelf life so they did not dry prematurely.³⁷ Bladders were of limited use as the paint frequently dried, separated, and hardened inside, especially once pierced with a tack to release the paint.³⁸ Although glass syringes were briefly used by Winsor & Newton, they were costly and prone to breaking.³⁹ The invention of collapsible metal tubes in London in 1841 by the American painter John Goffe Rand significantly retarded premature drying, and Winsor & Newton purchased this patent from the artist, selling their own paint in tubes and licensing the technology to other colourmen.⁴⁰ But tube storage further homogenised the texture of paint and threatened its purity.

While some pigments naturally produced colours that were dense, gummy, or thick, this storage system demanded a standardised consistency that was easily squeezable from the tube but not so fluid that it would drip from the palette. Although mechanical grinding helped make the paint smooth, it could also make some paints too liquid, so colourmen restored body to the paint using additives like wax, tallow, and petroleum jelly, as well as adding extra oil to enhance brushability.⁴¹ These additives and extra oil gave industrially made colours the necessary standardised texture and prolonged shelf life that were demanded by tube storage, but also made it more greasy and slick.

The smeary, oily homogeneity of these paints frustrated many artists, who habitually squeezed their colours onto blotting paper before use to absorb excess oil.⁴² One painters' manual from 1892 complained that industrially manufactured colours were "overloaded with oil", speculating that because oil was cheaper than pigment, manufacturers used an unfavourably high oil-to-pigment ratio to cut costs.⁴³ He mockingly suggested that manufacturers might push this economising logic to its limit and eliminate the pigment altogether, simply using synthetic dyes to "tint a kilogramme of gluten made from wax and oil and have superbly tinted colours of a very consistent paste."⁴⁴

The use of additives to give the paint body and prevent drying severely eroded the purity and permanence of these colours.⁴⁵ For instance, Winsor & Newton's scientific director, John Scott Taylor was puzzled to discover other colourmen used additives in their white lead paint to prevent it from hardening in the tubes, but would also inherently darken the colour over time. He suggested that "if an artist finds his white lead go hard in the tubes, let him by all means treasure the brand; it will be the best, perhaps, he can get in these degenerate days."⁴⁶

"Viley Sophisticated"

Manufacturers did not only use additives to improve the shelf life of paint. The increasing separation of labour involved in colour-making in the nineteenth century, combined with artists' growing ignorance about their paints, created possibilities for manufacturers at any point in the long supply chain to tamper with materials without painters realising.⁴⁷ This was a problem for a small firm like Roberson. The company prided themselves on their artisanal approach—not only hand-grinding their colours but also using traditional recipes from the esteemed British herbalist and colour-maker George Field.⁴⁸ However, as a small-scale firm without the resources to manufacture their

own raw ingredients, they relied upon wholesale suppliers for many of their materials (not just pigments, but varnishes and oils), only grinding and mixing colours in-house. ⁴⁹

Roberson's reliance on wholesalers made them vulnerable to the widespread culture of adulteration and substitution that thrived upon lengthening supply chains, as dispersed responsibility for the purity of materials made it hard to pinpoint precisely where adulteration had occurred. ⁵⁰ Manufacturers might use "extenders" to dilute the purity of colours and economise on production costs (for instance, brick dust was added to madders for this purpose), or colour-makers could bulk out the weight of paint using cheap materials like sand and chalk. ⁵¹ One of the most serious problems was the substitution of genuine, expensive pigments with cheaper, less stable alternatives. ⁵²

The increased availability of synthetic pigments (both organic and inorganic) in this period exacerbated this problem. ⁵³ The Victorian era was certainly not the first time painters could access synthetic or artificial pigments, as methods for manipulating colours were known since antiquity, and new chemical colours such as Prussian blue had been available since the eighteenth century. ⁵⁴ But a combination of developments in inorganic chemistry with the industrial infrastructure to manufacture and distribute these substances made it appear as though the market was flooded with new chemical colours in the nineteenth century. ⁵⁵ As Arthur Church—the first professor of chemistry appointed to the Royal Academy—noted in his 1901 artists' manual:

during the nineteenth century the progress of synthetical [*sic*] chemistry placed at the disposal of the picture-maker a long series of pigments—good, bad and indifferent—so that the chances of introducing dangerous and fugitive colours have been enormously increased. It is to this increase in the number of pigments, and to their greatly extended range of composition ... that one should attribute in great part the frequent deterioration of modern paintings. ⁵⁶

Paint-making was also significantly affected by concurrent technological advances in the dye industry in the nineteenth century. ⁵⁷ The development of synthetic alizarin, the dyeing agent in madder roots, quickly replaced organic madder in a huge range of artists' colours after its discovery in 1868, decimating the European madder-farming tradition. ⁵⁸ Similarly, the synthetic aniline dyes derived from coal tar, an industrial waste-material in abundant supply, revolutionised the textile dyeing industry after their

discovery by British scientist William Henry Perkin in 1856.⁵⁹ These dyes soon migrated from the textile industry into the colourman's trade and were incorporated into artists' oil colours.⁶⁰ These brilliant dyes fostered a new era of dazzling artists' colours but were extremely prone to fading.⁶¹ One painters' manual from the late nineteenth century described how these aniline colours "are merely stains, and although very bright and fascinating, are totally unfit for the painting of pictures, and soon fade away altogether."⁶² Although some colourmen explicitly advertised their colours as aniline-derived, others would illicitly lace their paints with coal-tar dyes to (temporarily) enhance their saturation but leaving them prone to deterioration over time.⁶³

Although the burgeoning use of synthetic colour is often characterised as a brightening of the artist's palette because some of these dyes were notoriously garish, in many cases, it was difficult to distinguish organic and synthetic colours by sight alone.⁶⁴ This proved problematic when unscrupulous colourmen either replaced stable, costly pigments with less permanent and untrustworthy colourants or used aniline dyes in place of organic materials, with catastrophic effects for the longevity of painted colour.⁶⁵

This practice of tampering with the contents of paint, the so-called sophistication of colour, was not necessarily new in the nineteenth century but was understood by artists to be the result of surrendering control of their colours to a commercial trade invested in profiteering rather than quality.⁶⁶ From the moment oil colours could be purchased in bladders, painters worried that manufacturers might adulterate their paints to save costs, or in the words of one painters' manual from 1795, that commercial colours "are either not genuine, or are vilely sophisticated".⁶⁷

An aversion to industrially manufactured oil paints was therefore far from a simplistic rejection of technological modernity but demonstrated a deep awareness of how the increased scale of paint manufacture had wide-reaching effects upon both the purity and texture of paint. Watts was particularly concerned about these links between the commodification of paint manufacture and the resulting damage caused to the longevity, stability, and consistency of colour—concerns that intersected with his political and moral objections to industrialisation more broadly. For Watts, it was the new texture of industrially made colours that offered the most palpable evidence that processes of mass production negatively affected the art of painting, and it was through texture that Watts chose to tackle this issue most explicitly, cultivating a distinct consistency to his paints in order to enact a moral objection to the texture of capitalism.

“The *slimy* qualities I so much hate”

The unusual texture of Watts’s paints puzzled and fascinated contemporary viewers. Critics variously described his strange surfaces as “rocky, dry, and crumbled”, “heavily forged”, and “corrugated”.⁶⁸ Repeatedly, critics noted that the physical qualities of Watts’ paints were atypical for the period, a departure from the “smooth consistency of ordinary oil-paint”, as the *Pall Mall Gazette* put it.⁶⁹ Some struggled to find a suitable vocabulary to describe the odd materiality of Watts’ painting. George Moore found himself unable to capture its effects in words, claiming, “I can think of nothing else but the rind of Stilton cheese,” and wondering “why should so beautiful a material as oil paint be transformed into a crumbly material substance?”⁷⁰

In part, it is the great variety of surface textures in Watts’ paintings that makes it difficult to characterise their effects. Comparing enlarged details of Watts’ paintings, the complexity and diversity of these textures becomes apparent.⁷¹ Some, like *Psyche* (1880) are gritty and rough like sandpaper or cement (Figs. 3 and 4). Others, like *Hope* (1891) are powdery and dry, almost resembling pastel or chalk (Figs. 5 and 6), while others have surfaces coated in solid, thick, and hard paint that sits proud of the canvas, piled up in clotted mounds, as we find in *Progress* (1888–1904; Figs. 7 and 8) and *She Shall be Called Woman* (ca. 1875–1892; Figs. 9 and 10).



Figure 3.

George Frederic Watts, *Psyche* (detail), 1880, oil on canvas, 59 × 18 cm. Collection of Tate (N01585). Digital image courtesy of Tate.



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Figure 4.

George Frederic Watts,
Psyche, 1880, oil on
canvas, 59 x 18 cm.
Collection of Tate
(N01585). Digital image
courtesy of Tate.

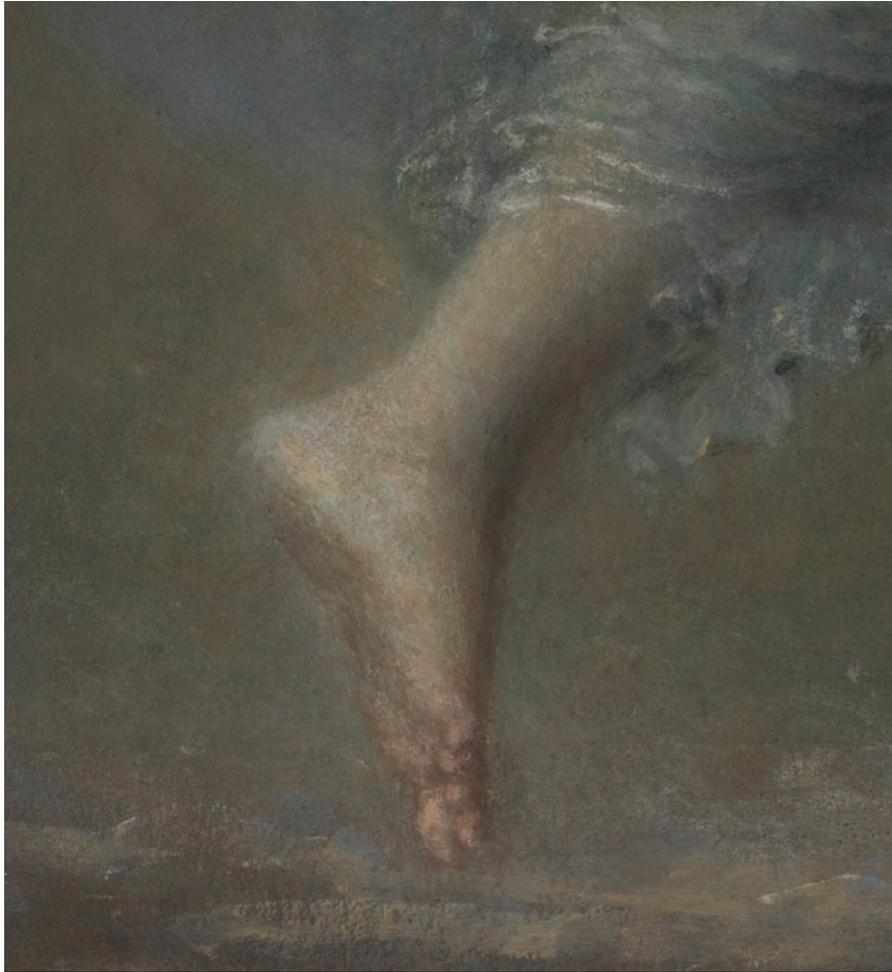
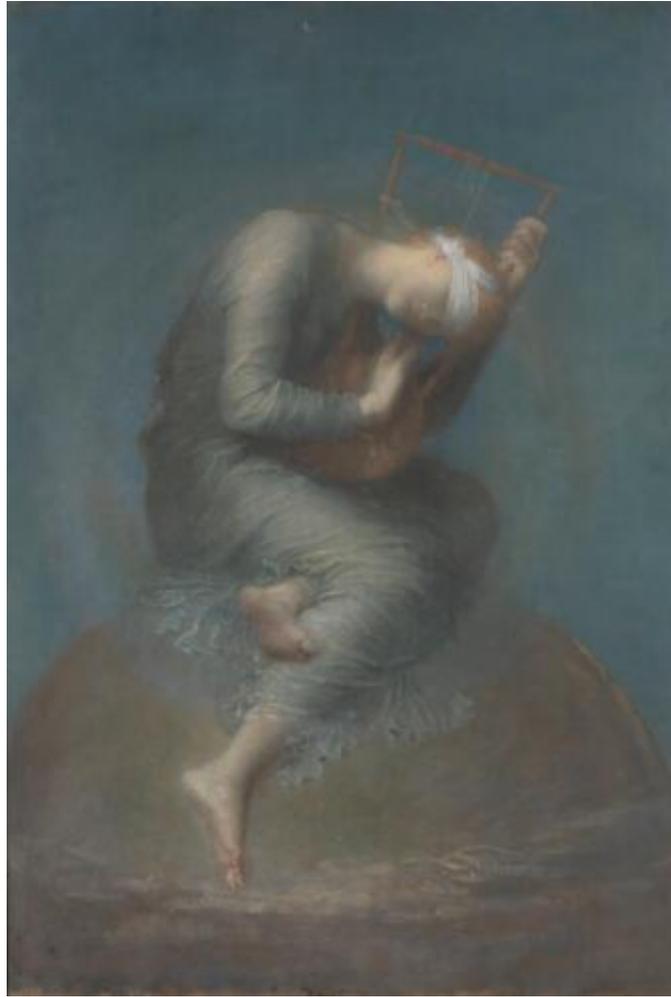


Figure 5.

George Frederic Watts, *Hope* (detail), 1891, oil on panel, 66 × 48.3 cm. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Gift of Claire and Albert J. Zuckerman (B2011.32). Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art.



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Figure 6.

George Frederic Watts, Hope, 1891, oil on panel, 66 x 48.3 cm. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Gift of Claire and Albert J. Zuckerman ((B2011.32). Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art.



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Figure 7.

George Frederic Watts, *Progress* (detail), 1888-1904, oil on canvas, 218.9 x 142.2 cm. Collection of the Watts Gallery—Artists' Village (COMWG 139). Digital image courtesy of Watts Gallery—Artists' Village | Photo: Christopher Chard.



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Figure 8.

George Frederic Watts, Progress, 1888-1904, oil on canvas, 218.9 x 142.2 cm. Collection of the Watts Gallery—Artists' Village (COMWG 139). Digital image courtesy of Watts Gallery—Artists' Village | Photo: Christopher Chard.



Figure 9.

George Frederic Watts, *She Shall Be Called Woman* (detail), circa 1875–1892, oil on canvas, 257.8 × 116.8 cm. Collection of Tate (N01642). Digital image courtesy of Tate.



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Figure 10.

George Frederic Watts, *She Shall Be Called Woman*, ca. 1875–1892, oil on canvas, 257.8 x 116.8 cm. Collection of Tate (N01642). Digital image courtesy of Tate.

This overall coarseness and dryness of surface was the result of Watts' idiosyncratic painting technique—an attempt to eradicate oil almost entirely from his practice.⁷² He applied very absorbent grounds to his canvases to suck oil from the paints applied on top and would use especially lean paints (that is, pigments bound in very little oil), to avoid excess grease.⁷³ Sometimes he applied these paints thinned down with benzene, allowing the weave of the canvas to permeate the surface of the painting, but elsewhere he worked up dense layers of thick impasto.⁷⁴ Insisting on each layer drying completely, he left paintings to dry in direct sunlight for weeks in a purpose-built greenhouse in his garden.⁷⁵ Once dry, he would rub each layer with

potato or onion to eradicate remaining oiliness, and burnish the paint with a rhinoceros-horn palette knife to make it hard, before beginning his work again.⁷⁶

Watts arrived at this unusual system through a combination of historical revivalism and technical prudence. He had not received rigorous academic training but worked as an assistant in a sculptor's studio from an early age and attended the Royal Academy Schools sporadically before an extended stay in Italy in his 20s, a period he considered his true artistic education.⁷⁷ This time between 1843 and 1847, spent principally in Florence, sparked his lifelong engagement with the Italian Renaissance, enabling him to study Italian painting and sculpture first hand.⁷⁸ Historical frescoes fascinated Watts and he studied the technique intensely, but the Venetian school of oil painting also entranced him.⁷⁹ His own methods were principally derived from his studies of Renaissance painting and painting technique, facilitated by a newly available body of technical information on historical painting methods.⁸⁰

Watts' travels in Italy in the 1840s confirmed for him that the most enduring works of art were those displaying little gloss or sheen: monumental frescoes with their matte surfaces and sixteenth-century Venetian painting, particularly the late work of Titian, with its dry, open brushwork.⁸¹ His close friend and biographer Emilie Isabel Barrington described how the painter intentionally modelled his practice on Titian's late style, which he studied through a translated account of the painter's technique.⁸² Many elements of Watts' practice are indeed attributable to his reverence for Titian: his slow pace, allowing the weave of the canvas to enliven the surface, the dryness of the paints skimmed across the canvas, and the ambiguous degree of finish.⁸³ But as conservator Carol Willoughby describes, his method was also a kind of fresco executed in oil paint, as he (mistakenly) believed his absorbent grounds would operate like the wet plaster in fresco, binding the colours permanently to the support.⁸⁴

It would, therefore, be easy to resolve the material idiosyncrasy of Watts' paintings by suggesting these surfaces are symptomatic of his nostalgic, historicising style, evidence of his desire to emulate the works of the Italian Renaissance he most admired.⁸⁵ However, the appearance of Watts' paintings cannot simply be understood as historical revivalism, and scholars primarily understand his use of especially coarse, dry colours as an attempt to ensure the material safety of his painting.⁸⁶ Watts regarded oil as the enemy of stable painting because it was often responsible for both the physical deterioration of paintings (evidenced in the cracking of the paint surface) or the discolouration of artworks through the yellowing or darkening

of the oil.⁸⁷ Watts had direct experience of these problems when his early works suffered extensive craquelure due to paint drying insufficiently between layers (Figs. 11 and 12).⁸⁸



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Figure 11.

George Frederic Watts, *A Wounded Heron* (detail), 1837, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 71.1 cm. Collection of the Watts Gallery—Artists' Village (COMWG 64). Digital image courtesy of Watts Gallery—Artists' Village | Photo: Christopher Chard.



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Figure 12.

George Frederic Watts, *A Wounded Heron*, 1837, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 71.1 cm. Collection of the Watts Gallery—Artists' Village (COMWG 64). Digital image courtesy of Watts Gallery—Artists' Village | Photo: Christopher Chard.

Through these early technical problems and his failed attempts at durable frescoes, Watts became particularly attentive to the durability of his materials.⁸⁹ He would only use colours he believed were absolutely stable, frequently enquiring about the suitability of certain pigments with his supplier Winsor & Newton. He corresponded regularly with Henry Newton, the artist who co-founded the firm, and subsequently with Scott Taylor, their scientific director.⁹⁰ Watts requested that Winsor & Newton should only offer him colours that were “quite pure and permanent” noting “if I ask for any that are not in this category never send them”.⁹¹

Watts was not alone in such concerns however, as this cautious approach was partially informed by his friendship with the Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt.⁹² After discovering that colours supplied to him by Roberson had been laced with synthetic dyes, or in Hunt's words "adulterated with 10 per cent of villainy", Hunt launched a public campaign to raise awareness about the deleterious effects of industrialisation upon the materials of art, which resonated strongly with Watts.⁹³ Through a series of letters to *The Times* and a lecture delivered at the Society of Arts, Hunt spread the word about the "pestilential aniline dye" and the need "to found a society for looking after the material interests of painting".⁹⁴

Watts was deeply aware of the culture of substitution and adulteration rife in the colour trade, and explicitly avoided colours prone to fading or tampering.⁹⁵ In one instance, Scott Taylor had to convince Watts about a sample of rose madder, noting that "it is so pure and vivid that had I not made it myself from Pure Madder Root I should have felt convinced that it had been doctored up with an aniline dye."⁹⁶ However, Watts was most concerned about the oily character of industrially manufactured paints. From 1871, he began to request colours of "a stiffer or at least more solid nature" than those he typically received from the firm, insisting that the "colour should be ... as dry as may be convenient".⁹⁷ He hoped for colours "free from the slimy qualities I so much hate", qualities that were the direct result of machine-grinding and tube storage.⁹⁸ Newton tried to highlight the benefits of more moist, pliable paints to Watts, explaining that when

pigments are very, very finely ground in oil till they assume the smoothness of butter, the oil is not so likely to leave the pigments and float ... which was the case before the powerful grinding machinery used by Winsor & Newton was invented.⁹⁹

Yet Watts insisted his pigments must be ground to an especially coarse consistency, with very little oil.

These hand-ground paints became known as Watts' "Special" or "Stiff" colours, which helped the painter produce the rough surfaces contemporary viewers found so noteworthy.¹⁰⁰ Scott Taylor described how he prepared these colours by hand with "a small model-mill" in his laboratory, writing to Watts to endorse this technique:

I quite agree with what you say about grinding colours too finely ... modern colours, in many cases, have all the life taken out of them by being ground perfectly smooth and buttery and that in this way the most precious qualities of pigments are now lost; but I can never get anybody to listen to me! I feel quite sure that the Venetians knew the value of rough colour in giving richness and glow by the play of light round small particles of pigments not crushed out of existence beneath an Artists' colourman's juggernaut car! ¹⁰¹

He further agreed with Watts about the “monotony and insipidity” of mechanical grinding that did not account for the “certain grain” of each colour, which he noted “varies of course immensely with different pigments”. ¹⁰²

Watts' demands that his colours be ground ever more coarsely and with decreasing amounts of oil meant they eventually became so intractable he could not work them on the canvas, admitting in a letter that “we have a little over shot the mark”. ¹⁰³ He found conventional paintbrushes ineffectual when faced with these recalcitrant paints, and was forced to deploy alternative instruments (palette knives, paper knives, toothbrush handles, and his fingers) or use brushes worn down to rigid stumps, writing to Winsor & Newton asking for brushes “as stiff as if made of wire”. ¹⁰⁴ According to Barrington, Watts even claimed that, of all the tools for applying paint, he believed “the best of all ... was the finger”, and his habit of applying these stiff paints with his hands betrays his dual identity as a painter-sculptor. ¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Watts explained to Scott Taylor that he wanted to use his colours “almost like modeling clay”. ¹⁰⁶

Watts' painting *The Sower of the Systems* (ca. 1902) renders visible his painting practice, whereby artistic creation is presented as physical work done with the hands (Fig. 13). Through this dynamic figure, draped in robes not unlike the artist's own painting smock, Watts parallels God's fabrication of the universe with his own act of pushing paint manually around the canvas. Watts uses the muscular stance of the body, whose torso twists dramatically in an exaggerated lunge that spans almost the entire width of the canvas, to highlight the bodily effort required to marshal his materials into a semblance of order and meaning. ¹⁰⁷ With fingers outspread and taut, and arms at full extension, the figure summons every ounce of strength to drag and push the stuff of creation in looping orbits through the air with his

hands. Paint is treated here as a physical substance, a raw material that must be manipulated and modelled with the hands in much the same way as Watts worked with clay in his sculptural practice. ¹⁰⁸

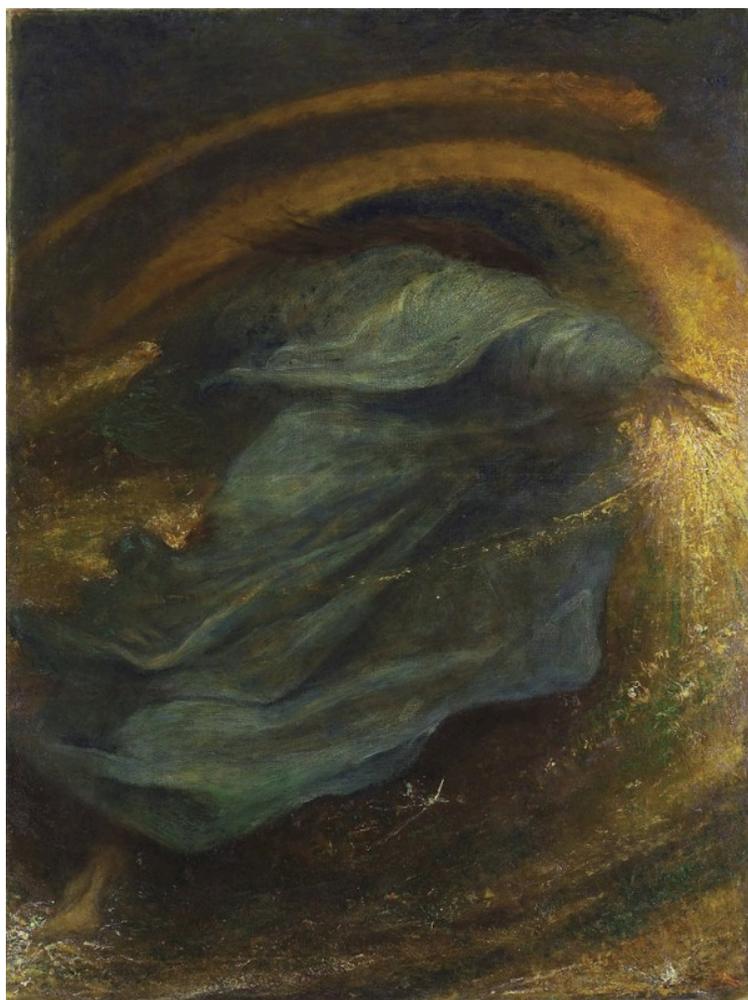


Figure 13.

George Frederic Watts, *The Sower of the Systems*, 1902, oil on canvas, 122.6 × 91.4 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (L70.7). Digital image courtesy of Art Gallery of Ontario.

G.K. Chesterton saw this link between the density of Watts' paints, his sculptural practice, and the act of godly creation, perspicaciously noting that "one could guess at something about Watts from the mess on his palette ... like forces in chaos before the first day of creation," paralleling the myth of Adam's fabrication from clay with Watts' deployment of his paints. Like God "the Eternal Potter", Chesterton imagines Watts conjuring life through the manipulation of his thick, clay-like paints. ¹⁰⁹ But Chesterton saw in this metaphorical association between, clay, paint, and divine creation a larger

moral and spiritual meaning, claiming “there is nothing in the world that is really so thoroughly characteristic of Watts’ technique as the fact that it does almost startlingly correspond to the structure of his spiritual sense.” ¹¹⁰

Indeed, the fabrication of this work from heavy impasto and dry scumbled paint does not simply literalise the act of physical creation, but speaks to a wider ethics and politics of materiality in the late nineteenth century. These dry paints, harder to produce and apply than industrially made colours, put Watts’ practice into dialogue with broader concerns about the relationship between art, labour, and morality in Britain at this time.

The Moral Aesthetics of *Mammon*

At the moment Watts began requesting his stiff colours in the 1870s, John Ruskin was involved in a very public dispute about the liquidity of paint. Of course Ruskin’s notorious accusation, that Whistler’s painting *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875) was akin to charging “two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face”, is not typically understood as a tirade against thin paints in themselves (Fig. 14). This comment, which provoked the infamous libel trial of 1878, was an invective aimed at a market-driven culture in which artists minimised effort and maximised profits, earning sums disproportionate to the labour expended on their paintings. ¹¹¹ However, the liquidity of the paint in Ruskin’s metaphor—so runny it must be stored in pots not tubes, so thin it can be thrown like water—is vital to his argument. ¹¹² For Ruskin, the ease with which Whistler’s paints could be manipulated spoke to the debasement of painting, as to Ruskin, a work of art which involved no “work” could never truly be art at all. ¹¹³ This link between texture and the morality of labour is vital for understanding Watts’ use of coarse paints. For Watts, the greater labour his colourman invested in grinding his colours was replicated in the extra effort required to work them on the canvas, endowing his materials with a moral potency he leveraged to reinforce the political messages of his paintings.

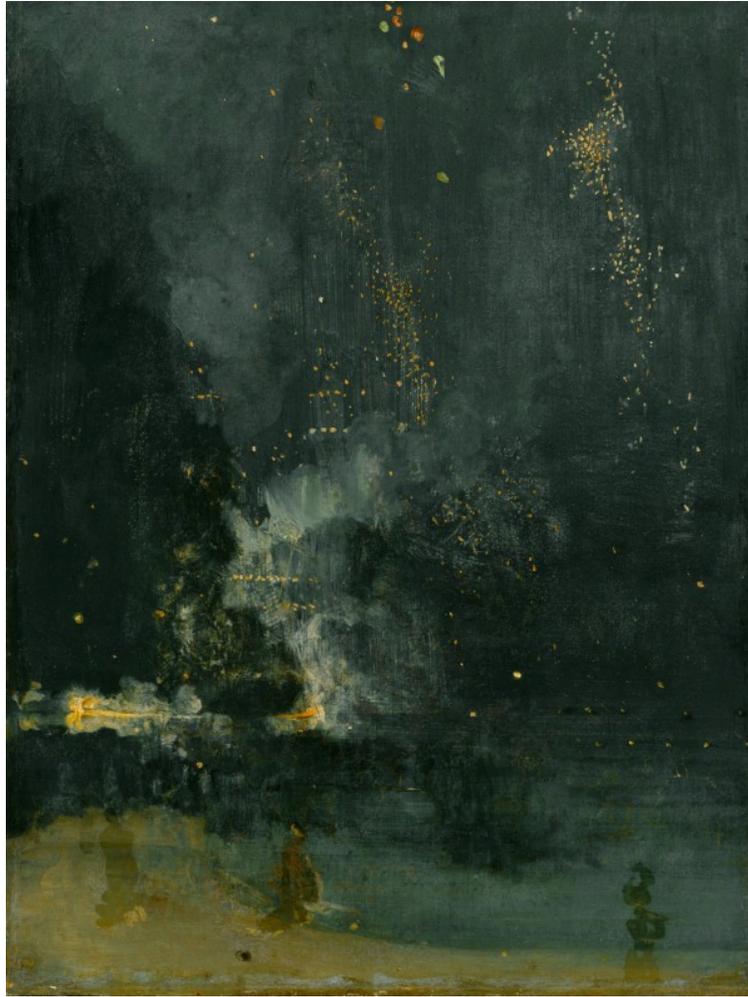


Figure 14.

James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket, 1875, oil on panel, 60.3 × 46.7 cm. Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts (46.309). Digital image courtesy of Detroit Institute of Arts.

Watts' understanding of artistic labour as a moral and ethical issue was profoundly informed by his social and intellectual circle. Although he claimed "I am not a socialist by any means", he counted leftist political activists, social reformers, and socialists proper among his friends and sitters, including William Morris, Walter Crane, Thomas Carlyle, and Ruskin himself. ¹¹⁴ The impact of these thinkers upon Watts was noted by contemporary critics who described how "echoes of Carlyle ... of Ruskin, seem to haunt all his work". ¹¹⁵ Watts was deeply committed to their shared belief in the dignity of labour and its potential for spiritual nourishment, and was similarly troubled by the danger posed to these values by the dehumanising culture of work under industrial modernity. Watts, like these contemporaries, was particularly concerned about the industrialisation of manufacturing, believing that purely in the name of profit, mechanisation, and automation both

eroded the quality of the resulting products, as well as the workers' pleasure and pride in their work. Watts expounded these views through a series of essays he published in the 1880s, making explicit his belief that artisanal labour served the spiritual well-being of workers, while mechanisation, in the service of financial gain, eroded their humanity. ¹¹⁶

In particular, his 1889 essay "The National Position of Art" demonstrates Watts' indebtedness to Ruskin's values, where he decries the fact that beauty and human decency are consistently sacrificed to convenience and profit. He protests against the displacement "of the skilled workman's eye and hand" by "mechanical aid", claiming that "machinery is the most deadly foe to art and beauty". ¹¹⁷ His insistence that "heart and conscience, is never absent from hand-work, however rude, and is never found in machine-work, however perfect" begins to illuminate the political and moral significance of his insistence upon stiffly hand-ground paints that were so arduous to apply. ¹¹⁸

Undoubtedly, *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853) tied together the ethics of labour and the aesthetics of colour for Watts, as Ruskin's volumes both expounded the beauty of Venetian colouring through ekphrastic prose, but also exalted the nobility of the labour that produced them, contrasting the dignity of the gothic Venetian craftsman with the "signs of slavery" found in industrial England. ¹¹⁹ For Watts, Ruskin politicised his existing love of Venetian colour, moving his appreciation of Titian out of the purely aesthetic sphere and into a moral and ethical realm.

Watts' conviction in Ruskin's principles of ethical labour encouraged him to support the establishment of The Guild of St George, a school Ruskin founded to teach traditional craftsmanship in opposition to the onslaught of mass-produced, factory-made goods. Offering Ruskin one-tenth of his annual income for the project, Watts described his support as a "protest against Mammon worship". ¹²⁰ Mammon, a personification of wealth and greed described in the New Testament, appeared frequently in Watts' writing, as he saw Mammon as the new god of a contemporary, wealth-obsessed nation. ¹²¹ Indeed, in "The Position of Art", Watts laments that under the present conditions of industrialisation in Britain, "material prosperity has become our real god". ¹²² His wife recalled that Watts once joked he should sculpt a statue of Mammon in Hyde Park, where "he hoped his worshippers would be at least honest enough to bow the knee publicly to him." ¹²³

Watts' description of Ruskin's project as a protest against Mammonism, underscores his belief that the moral production of art and the accumulation of material wealth were mutually exclusive. Watts maintained that:

while Mammon, the deity of the age ... cold and unlovely, without dignity or magnificence, the meanest of the powers to whom incense has ever been offered, sits supreme, [then] great art, as a child of the nation, cannot find a place; the seat is not wide enough for both. ¹²⁴

Watts' *Mammon, Dedicated to his Worshippers* (1884–1885), held in the collection of the Tate Gallery (Fig. 15), and the smaller work by the same name (Fig. 16) at the Watts Gallery in Compton (ca. 1885), literalise this sentiment through their subject matter, but the smaller canvas also enacts a potent critique of Mammonism through the very coarseness of its colours.



Figure 15.

George Frederic Watts, *Mammon, Dedicated to His Worshippers*, 1884–1885, oil on canvas, 183 × 106 cm. Collection of Tate (N01630). Digital image courtesy of Tate.



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Figure 16.

George Frederic Watts, *Mammon, Dedicated to His Worshippers*, ca. 1885, oil on canvas, 53.3 x 30.5 cm. Collection of the Watts Gallery—Artists' Village (COMWG 49). Digital image courtesy of Watts Gallery—Artists' Village | Photo: Christopher Chard.

Modelled on Renaissance papal portraits, the painting depicts Mammon seated in glory upon his skull-topped throne.¹²⁵ Cradling money purses in his lap, a common attribute found in allegories of avarice, he crushes humanity beneath his hefty feet and monstrous hands.¹²⁶ With a meaty neck, heavy brow, and indifferent frown, his gargantuan proportions give him a demonic presence. Mammon wears a golden crown decorated with coins and sprouts ass' ears like those of King Midas, whose wish to transform everything he touched into gold rapidly became a curse. Apollo punished Midas with these unsightly ears because the king preferred the sound of

Pan's pipe to the music of the god's lyre, and was therefore evidently deaf to the true beauty of art, preferring the earthly and coarse to the heavenly and transcendent. ¹²⁷

This unusual conflation of Mammon and Midas undoubtedly alludes to Thomas Carlyle's 1843 tract *Past and Present*, where the author rails against "Midas-eared Mammonism", comparing the present condition of industrial England to that of the cursed, avaricious king: "full of wealth in every kind, yet dying of inanition". ¹²⁸ He calls for "giant LABOUR ... noble LABOUR" to take its rightful place as "King of this Earth" upon "the highest throne" thereby "leaving Mammonism ... on the lower steps". ¹²⁹ Watts inverts this hierarchy to reflect his dismal view of contemporary British society, showing Mammon triumphant, while the bodies of innocent humanity litter the steps below. Although the location of the painting is indistinct, a theatrical, red curtain lifts to reveal the fires of hell burning in the distance, further imbuing the work with a religious didacticism. ¹³⁰

The smaller painting initially appears to be a preparatory sketch for the larger canvas due to its loose handling, unfinished quality, and the small difference in composition: the bound foot. This detail reveals Mammon suffers from gout, an ailment precipitated by gluttonous over-indulgence, often represented as a bloated man with bandaged feet recumbent in an armchair. ¹³¹ However, the smaller work has frequently been exhibited as an autonomous painting, and art historians have recently suggested it delivers a more biting critique than the larger Tate version. ¹³²

Watts worked on several versions of the same painting simultaneously, selecting one for exhibition but continuing to work on the others endlessly, considering each a different experimental solution to the same formal and conceptual problems. ¹³³ The pamphlet accompanying the painter's 1884 exhibition in New York advised viewers that "among these [paintings] are some which are far from being finished ... which, in all probability, he will continue to retouch and endeavor to improve as long as he is able to work." ¹³⁴ Indeed, Watts' wife recorded in her diary that the artist was still "piling up the hideousness of *Mammon*" a year after he first exhibited the larger work. ¹³⁵ The distinctive handling of paint in the Compton *Mammon* is therefore not as a sign of its preparatory status but is integral to its meaning.

In comparison to the Tate canvas, the plasticity of the Compton painting is remarkable, as Watts pushes the expressive potential of his stiff colours to the limit. Mammon's gold brocade convulses with dense brush marks where the paint is raised into blunt ridges, replicating the effect of folds in the fabric through its weightiness (Fig. 17). The knee of Mammon's outstretched leg is

a maelstrom of thick, uneven colour, piled up in heavy clots ([Fig. 18](#)). Watts creates the impression of swirling drapery at Mammon's feet by skimming a brush loaded with dry colour across the canvas, leaving behind broken dashes of green paint ([Fig. 19](#)). The highlights of the crown are picked out in scumbled areas of white, like beads resting on the canvas' surface ([Fig. 20](#)). The female figure's skin is rough and caked, evidently the uppermost application of many layers of paint beneath ([Fig. 21](#)).



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Figure 17.

George Frederic Watts, Mammon, Dedicated to His Worshipers (detail), ca. 1885, oil on canvas, 53.3 x 30.5 cm. Collection of the Watts Gallery—Artists' Village (COMWG 49). Digital image courtesy of Watts Gallery—Artists' Village | Photo: Christopher Chard.



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Figure 18.

George Frederic Watts, *Mammon, Dedicated to His Worshipers* (detail), ca. 1885, oil on canvas, 53.3 x 30.5 cm. Collection of the Watts Gallery—Artists' Village (COMWG 49). Digital image courtesy of Watts Gallery—Artists' Village | Photo: Christopher Chard.



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Figure 19.

George Frederic Watts, *Mammon, Dedicated to His Worshipers* (detail), ca. 1885, oil on canvas, 53.3 x 30.5 cm. Collection of the Watts Gallery—Artists' Village (COMWG 49). Digital image courtesy of Watts Gallery—Artists' Village | Photo: Christopher Chard.



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Figure 20.

George Frederic Watts, Mammon, Dedicated to His Worshipers (detail), ca. 1885, oil on canvas, 53.3 x 30.5 cm. Collection of the Watts Gallery—Artists' Village (COMWG 49). Digital image courtesy of Watts Gallery—Artists' Village | Photo: Christopher Chard.



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Figure 21.

George Frederic Watts, Mammon, Dedicated to His Worshipers (detail), ca. 1885, oil on canvas, 53.3 x 30.5 cm. Collection of the Watts Gallery—Artists' Village (COMWG 49). Digital image courtesy of Watts Gallery—Artists' Village | Photo: Christopher Chard.

Varnishing has unfortunately lent the painting precisely the glossy finish Watts wanted to avoid, a common trait across his works.¹³⁶ Watts was ambivalent about varnish, valuing its protective capacity but loathing its sheen, and he experimented with additives to reduce its reflective qualities.¹³⁷ It is therefore difficult to ascertain if Watts planned the varnishing of the Compton Mammon, yet unlike many of his other paintings, which are coated in thick homogenising layers of varnish by subsequent collectors and restorers, by no means does the varnish here detract from the painting's overall crustiness, an almost unpleasantly haptic quality.¹³⁸ The cragginess and crumbliness of these paints, which so perplexed contemporary viewers, seem to find their true meaning here, as the crude, unrefined surface of the painting heightens the grotesqueness of the subject. The texture of these paints imparts an affective power to the work, as Mammon seems all the more repugnant for his rough handling, offering a true rebuke to the idealised, beautiful effects possible with glossy, slick, commercial oils.¹³⁹ While Watts certainly exploited the decidedly unappealing consistency of his paints to convey Mammon's "unloveliness", he also enabled his materials to enact the anti-capitalist argument of the painting.

By showcasing the very stiffness of his artisan-made paints in a work that critiques the evils of industrial capitalism, Watts made clear the link between his aesthetics and his ideology. Here, the coarseness, dryness, and density of these colours render visible the labour involved both in their manufacture and their application. They manifest both the demanding, time-consuming technique of hand-grinding the pigments and the taxing work of applying them to the canvas. Some painters squeezed their colours directly from the tube or exploited their paints' pliability to work in a quick, spontaneous manner, producing a lively impasto (as demonstrated in Vollon's *Mound of Butter*), but the plasticity of Watts' work imparts a very different temporality to his painting.¹⁴⁰ These colours evidence the dignified labour of applying colour slowly, carefully, and arduously, thereby activating the political agenda of the painting's subject.

We might understand the painting both as a damning indictment of the corrupting effects of capitalism upon society in general, and of the malignant effects of industrial modernity upon painting more specifically. To do so makes a more nuanced and historically precise reading of its iconography possible. The double valence of Mammon as Midas is a particularly fitting critique of the contemporary colour trade, as it pointedly highlights the perils of alchemical desire. Watts parallels Midas' ruinous cupidity with that of unscrupulous colourmen, who also wished to transform base materials into more expensive substances. Watts suggests that just as Midas starved from lack of food or drink as he turned everything he touched into gold, colourmen too would bring about similarly disastrous effects in their attempts to turn

coal tar into ultramarine, brick dust into madders, and sand into pure white paint. The fate of Midas operates as a warning here to those who similarly seek wealth through a debased form of transubstantiation. The fact that the painting is dedicated to Mammon's worshippers makes clear its mode of address as a cautionary tale to those who do not heed its message.

The moneybags in Mammon's lap, as previously noted, are a long-standing feature of allegories of avarice found throughout the history of Christian art, typically signalling the bearer's miserly spirit as well as the immorality of materialism (Fig. 22). The purses here, of course, demonstrate Mammon's sinful accumulation of wealth through the sacrifice of virtue and innocence. Yet, these plump purses also bear a striking resemblance to bladders of paint, which were similarly tied with string at the neck (Fig. 23). This visual slippage between paint and money invites us to imagine further ways in which the painting could reflect upon the corrupting influence of capitalism upon art. Because bladders marked the first moment when painters surrendered control of their materials to a commercial industry, the money-purse-as-paint-bladder suggests a damning equivalence between colour and capital. We are reminded of the avaricious colour-makers, who treated paint as a means to riches, rather than improving its production for the benefit of art, which Watts understood as a crucial tool for social progress. This richly suggestive parallel evocatively counsels against the conflation of paint and profit, upon which Mammon's kingdom is based.



Figure 22.

Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, of uytbeeldingen des verstands*, (Amsterdam: Pers, 1644), 169. Collection of the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Library. Digital image courtesy of Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Library.

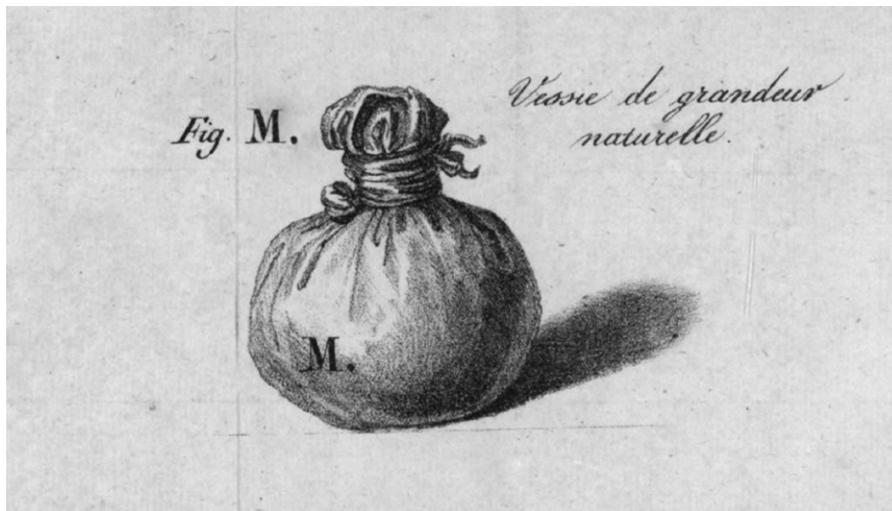


Figure 23.

Illustration of a paint bladder from Pierre Louis Bouvier, *Manuel des jeunes artistes et amateurs en peinture*, 2nd edn (Paris: F.G. Levrault, 1832), Plate III, Figure M. Collection of the Getty Research Institute. Digital image courtesy of Getty Research Institute.

The physicality of the painting, its grotesque plasticity worked as much with the fingers as the brush, invites us to wonder whether Watts considered the work as a kind of sculpture made in paint. Perhaps Watts viewed this smaller canvas, which is much more corporeal than the larger work of the same name, as the public monument to Mammon he quipped he would erect, a physical testament to Mammon's growing cult in modern Britain. If modern oil paints embodied the texture of capitalism, then Watts' painting here embodied something altogether different, a moral aesthetics, rendered visible and physical through the very materiality of his paints. ¹⁴¹

Conclusion

As critical as Watts is to our understanding of the relationship between materiality and modernity in Victorian painting, he should not be read as symptomatic of British approaches to industrial colour. Indeed, it was his very fascination with materials and techniques that betrayed his position as an eccentric outsider. But idiosyncratic as his practice was, anachronistic it was not. Just as the Pre-Raphaelites had weaponised the art of the past as a means of critiquing the ills of the present, Watts also found in historical painting techniques a means of negotiating some of the most urgent and pressing social issues of his day. What this case study of Watts' practice has enabled then, is a different means of assessing the ways in which nineteenth century painters responded to and addressed the experience of modernity in their work. As my reading of *Mammon* demonstrates, the radical social and

technological upheavals that characterised the nineteenth century did not simply transform the subject matter and style of painting during this period, but its effects were also registered tactically, texturally, and haptically.

Footnotes

- 1 This title was retrospectively given to the work, which was previously known as *The Faker's Studio*. See Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll, *The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner*, Studies in British Art (New Haven, CT: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and the Tate Gallery by Yale University Press, 1984), 115.
- 2 The conservator Leslie Carlyle has amassed an indispensable survey of information on colour-making from nineteenth-century artists' manuals, colourmen's handbooks, and other technical sources. On grinding and storage materials in particular, see Leslie Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant: Oil Painting Instruction Manuals and Handbooks in Britain 1800-1900 with Reference to Selected Eighteenth-Century Sources* (London: Archetype, 2001), 147-162.
- 3 Carlyle notes that information on grinding colours no longer appeared in artists' manuals from the 1850s, suggesting this task had been almost entirely relinquished to the colourman by this time; see Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 148. The use of pig, sheep, or oxen bladders for storing paint was first commercialised in England in 1794 by the colourman George Blackman. On bladders, see James Ayres, *Art, Artisans and Apprentices: Apprentice Painters & Sculptors in the Early Modern British Tradition* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 115-117.
- 4 This thesis is proposed by James Hamilton in *Turner and the Scientists* (London: Tate, 1998), 51. On Newman's reputation, see the entry in Jacob Simon's online encyclopaedia of artists' suppliers hosted by London's National Gallery, *British Artists' Suppliers, 1650-1950*, 3rd edn, 2011, last updated September 2017, <https://www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/directory-of-suppliers/n>.
- 5 Newman was one exception. Simon notes that the firm maintained artisanal approaches to colour-making well into the twentieth century, citing an article of 1934 that described how at Newman's firm "every process necessary to the preparing of artists' colours was being done by hand", "Grinding Colours by Hand", *Times* (London), 24 August 1934. See Newman's entry in Simon, *British Artists' Suppliers, 1650-1950*.
- 6 Carlyle notes that although the number of colours for sale doubled between 1800 and 1900, this may have resulted from a lack of standardised nomenclature, rather than an actual expansion of choice; Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 159.
- 7 Jean Renoir, *Renoir My Father* (London: William Collins, 1962), 73.
- 8 On the relationship between the Impressionist palette and a host of new chromatic technologies in nineteenth-century France, see Laura Anne Kalba, *Color in the Age of Impressionism: Commerce, Technology, and Art*, Refiguring Modernism 22 (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017).
- 9 This conventional link between modern paints and modernist painting is summarised in David Bomford, "The History of Colour in Art", in Trevor Lamb and Janine Bourriau (eds.), *Colour: Art & Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23. Anthea Callen's work remains a crucial exception. For her nuanced rebuttal to the simplistic link between modern paints and Impressionism, see Anthea Callen, *The Art of Impressionism: Painting Technique & the Making of Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 98-111.
- 10 Frederic Leighton, a close friend of Watts, dubbed him with this moniker. See Chloë Ward, "England's Michelangelo in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: The G.F. Watts Exhibition, 1884-1885", *Comparative American Studies and International Journal* 14, no. 1 (2 January 2016): 64
- 11 In particular, see Jennifer L. Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014); Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Sarah Gould, "Making Texture Matter: The Materiality of British Paintings, 1788-1914" (PhD diss., Université Paris Diderot, Sorbonne, 2016). For a critical re-evaluation of Victorian painting's radical intent, see, for instance, Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld, and Alison Smith, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant Garde* (London: Tate, 2012); and Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters: The Art of Imitation from the Pre-Raphaelites to the First World War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).
- 12 Such an approach is by no means limited to art history. See, for instance, Lucy Fife Donaldson, *Texture in Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- 13 I borrow this notion of paints "enacting" the meaning of their works from Christopher J. Nygren, whose work on Titian's use of slate to animate theological concerns has profoundly shaped my understanding of the link between materials and meaning in nineteenth-century painting, see Christopher J. Nygren, "Titian's *Ecce Homo* on Slate: Stone, Oil, and the Transubstantiation of Painting", *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 36-66.
- 14 Anthea Callen offers a close reading of the painting in relation to contemporary paint technologies in *The Work of Art: Plein Air Painting and Artistic Identity in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Reaktion, 2015), 117.
- 15 "Buttery" is the term uniformly used in current technical scholarship to describe the consistency of modern, tubed oil paints. For instance, see Tom Learner, "Modern Paints", in Joyce Hill Stoner and Rebecca Anne Rushfield (eds.), *The Conservation of Easel Paintings* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 248.

- 16 Although little is known about Vollon's materials, and conservators at the National Gallery in Washington, DC, have not analysed the paints used in *Mound of Butter*, the homogenous consistency of the paint and its extremely fluid handling give no reason to suspect these are not mass-produced, tubed paints. Furthermore, canvas stamps on the reverse of other Vollon paintings, for instance, *Eggs in a Pan* (1885-1890), held at the National Gallery of Victoria in Australia, reveal the painter bought his canvases from the French colourman Hardy-Alan, where he possibly also sourced his paints. The firm owned a small factory in the suburbs of Paris, manufacturing both pre-prepared canvases and oil paints. See the entry for Hardy-Alan in *British Artists' Suppliers, 1650-1950*. My thanks to Jessica David, Associate Conservator of Paintings at the Yale Center for British Art, and Ann Hoenigswald, Senior Conservator of Paintings at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, for their observations on Vollon's paint.
- 17 Callen describes how frequently brush and knife work are conflated, noting that Vollon's painting is an ideal demonstration of the different effects possible with these tools; see Callen, *The Work of Art*, 118-119.
- 18 Leighton to Professor Arthur Church, 16 October 1894, cited in Mrs Russell Barrington, *The Life, Letters and Work of Frederic Leighton*, Vol. 3 (London: G. Allen, 1906), 297.
- 19 Carlyle notes that the yellowing and darkening of oil was one of the key concerns of nineteenth-century technical manuals in Britain and was often cited as the source of colour degradation in paintings; Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 258.
- 20 On the additives used in oil paint manufacture and their effects on the durability of colour, see Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 154.
- 21 Leslie Carlyle, "Authenticity and Adulteration: What Materials Were 19th Century Artists Really Using?", *Conservator* 17, no. 1 (1 January 1993): 56-60; Joyce H. Townsend, Leslie Carlyle, Narayan Khandekar, and Sally Woodcock, "Later Nineteenth Century Pigments: Evidence for Additions and Substitutions", *Conservator* 19, no. 1 (1995): 65-78.
- 22 The National Gallery opened in 1824 but expanded to the larger Trafalgar Square site in 1838. The collection initially contained no works by so-called Italian "primitives" and when Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) entered the collection in 1842, it was a century older than any other work in the collection. It was only from 1848 that the National Gallery began acquiring Italian paintings executed before 1500. Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters*, 100-101.
- 23 As Hackney, Townsend, and Ridge note, the cleaning and restoration of old master works at the National Gallery in the 1840s dramatically altered understandings of colour in these paintings, as they now appeared brighter than ever before, further exaggerating the difference between the dark and faded works of the eighteenth century and those painted centuries earlier; see Stephen Hackney, Joyce Townsend, and Jacqueline Ridge, "Background, Training and Influences", in Joyce H. Townsend, Jacqueline Ridge, and Stephen Hackney (eds.), *Pre-Raphaelite Painting Techniques* (London: Tate, 2004), 21-25.
- 24 Of particular importance was the technical volume published by Charles Eastlake. Eastlake was the keeper of the National Gallery from 1843 to 1847, and his influential *Materials for a History of Oil Painting*, published in 1847 (with a second volume published posthumously in 1869), treated the question of van Eyck's technique at length. On the impact of Eastlake's publication, see Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 15. On Eastlake's influence on Pre-Raphaelite practice, see Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters*, 69-73. For a broader discussion of Victorian attitudes to van Eyck, see Jenny Graham, *Inventing van Eyck: The Remaking of an Artist for the Modern Age* (New York: Berg, 2007).
- 25 Joyce Townsend, "Painting Techniques and Materials of Turner and other British Artists 1775-1875", in Arie Wallert, Erma Hermens, and Marja Peek (eds.), *Historical Painting Techniques, Materials, and Studio Practice: Preprints of a Symposium* (Marina Del Rey, CA: Getty Conservation Institute, 1995), 176-186.
- 26 For details of these material experimentations in the eighteenth century and the technical faults that began appearing in these works in the nineteenth century, see Anne Southall, "Some Materials and Practices in British Painting, 1750-1850", in Sue-Anne Wallace, Jacqueline Macnaughtan, and Jodi Parvey (eds.), *The Articulate Surface: Dialogues on Paintings between Conservators, Curators and Art Historians* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1996), 117-136; Joyce Townsend, Stephen Hackney, and Rica Jones (eds.), *Paint and Purpose: A Study of Technique in British Art* (London: Tate, 1999), 12-13; Erma Hermens and Joyce Townsend, "Pigments in Western Easel Painting", in Joyce Hill Stoner and Rebecca Anne Rushfield (eds.), *The Conservation of Easel Paintings* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 212-213.
- 27 This desire among painters to learn the material "secrets" of the Old Masters, particularly Titian, culminated in the infamous hoax instigated by Thomas and Anne Provis. In 1797, the pair rented out a fake manuscript to painters in London that proclaimed to divulge the material mysteries behind Titian's colour and handling of paint. For details on the "Venetian Secret" hoax and its impact on contemporary British painting, see Angus Trumble, Mark Aronson, and Helen Cooper (eds.), *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 2008), and J.B. Bullen, "Whoring after Colour: Venetian Painting in England", in *Continental Crosscurrents: British Criticism and European Art 1810-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 120-143.
- 28 For an extended discussion of Turner's chromatic practice, see John Gage, *Colour in Turner: Poetry and Truth* (New York: Praeger, 1969).
- 29 On changes in artistic training at this time, see Leslie Carlyle, "Design, Technique and Execution: The Dichotomy between Theory and Craft in Nineteenth Century British Instruction Manuals on Oil Painting", in Erma Hermens (ed.), *Looking through Paintings: The Study of Painting Techniques and Materials in Support of Art Historical Research* (Baarn: de Pron, 1998), 19-28. The emergence of amateur painting also had a significant impact on the increased demand for ready-made materials at this time. See Pete Staples, "The Manufacture of Artists' Colour", in *Paint & Painting: An Exhibition and Working Studio Sponsored by Winsor & Newton to Celebrate Their 150th Anniversary* (London: Tate, 1982), 36-42.

- 30 On the foundation and development of the firm, see Don Pavey and Peter J. Staples (eds.), *The Artists' Colourmen's Story* (Wealdstone: Reckitt & Colman Leisure, 1984), 18-19. The intricacies of patenting and licensing tube storage are traced in Margarita San Andrés and Silvia García Fernández-Villa, "Patents as a Source of Documentation for Studying Art Technology", in Stefanos Kroustallis (ed.), *Art Technology: Sources and Methods: Proceedings of the Second Symposium of the Art Technological Source Research Working Group* (London: Archetype, 2008), 64-74.
- 31 On the various materials used in slabs and mullers, see Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 149. Horse-operated colour mills are shown on trade cards from the eighteenth century (for instance, the British Museum holds trade cards for Emerton & Manby, Oil & Colourmen, dating from 1760 and showing horse-drawn mills). However, these animal-operated mills were more likely to have been used for grinding decorators' paint rather than artists' colours, as they could not grind pigments to a fine enough consistency. The first patent for a hand-operated mill in Britain is 1804. Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 150.
- 32 My thanks to Jessica David, for assisting me with information on the grinding properties of various pigments.
- 33 On tailoring grinding to the requirements of specific pigments, see Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 148-151.
- 34 Various trade catalogues for Winsor & Newton claim that "grinding artists' colours by machinery was first commenced by Winsor & Newton in 1844, special apparatus being invented by them for this purpose." For example, see *Winsor & Newton's Catalogue of Colours and Materials for Oil Colour Painting* (London: Winsor & Newton, 1884), 61, and *Winsor & Newton's Catalogue of Colours and Materials for Oil Painting &c.* (London: Winsor & Newton, 1894), 3.
- 35 Roberson did not install powered grinding machines until 1919, and they continued to sell hand-ground colours until 1926; see Sally Woodcock, "The Roberson Archive: Content and Significance", in Arie Wallert, Erma Hermens, and Marja Peek (eds.), *Historical Painting Techniques, Materials, and Studio Practice: Preprints of a Symposium* (Marina Del Rey, CA: Getty Conservation Institute, 1995), 34.
- 36 Roberson Retail Catalogue, ca. 1907, Roberson Archive, Hamilton Kerr Institute, HKI. MS.867-1993, cited in Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 150.
- 37 Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 151-153.
- 38 Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 148.
- 39 William Newton patented glass syringes in 1840; see San Andrés and García Fernández-Villa, "Patents as a Source of Documentation for Studying Art Technology", 72.
- 40 San Andrés and García Fernández-Villa, "Patents as a Source of Documentation for Studying Art Technology", 72-74.
- 41 Carlyle, "Authenticity and Adulteration", 56-60; Townsend *et al.*, "Later Nineteenth Century Pigments", 65-78.
- 42 Carlyle notes this was common advice in artists' manuals at the time, see Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 155.
- 43 Jehan Georges Vibert, *La science de la peinture* (Paris: Paul Ollendorf, 1893), 116-118. Vibert's influential manual was translated into English a year after its publication in France as *The Science of Painting* (London: Percy Young, 1891) and was one of the few texts that discussed the contents of industrially manufactured paints in depth. Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 11.
- 44 Vibert, *La science de la peinture*, 118.
- 45 Townsend *et al.*, "Later Nineteenth Century Pigments", 58-59.
- 46 John Scott Taylor, *Modes of Painting Described and Classified* (London: Winsor & Newton, 1890), 40.
- 47 On the lengthening supply chain and the use of wholesale suppliers, see Townsend *et al.*, "Later Nineteenth Century Pigments", 71, and Carlyle, "Authenticity and Adulteration", 55-60.
- 48 On Field's reputation as a colour-maker, see Ruth E. Bubb, "The Life and Work of George Field Colourmaker (1777-1854)", in Heinz Althöfer (ed.), *Das 19. Jahrhundert und die Restaurierung: Beiträge zur Malerei, Maltechnik und Konservierung* (Munich: Callwey, 1987), 238-247, and John Gage, *George Field and His Circle: From Romanticism to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (London: Christie's, 1989), 35.
- 49 Woodcock, "The Roberson Archive", 31.
- 50 Carlyle, "Authenticity and Adulteration", 57.
- 51 Carlyle, "Authenticity and Adulteration", 57.
- 52 Townsend *et al.*, "Later Nineteenth Century Pigments", 68.
- 53 It should be emphasised that "inorganic" is not a term synonymous with "synthetic". Broadly speaking, organic pigments are those derived from living substances (plants, animals, insects, etc.), while inorganic pigments derive from minerals and metals. My thanks to Jessica David for her insights on these distinctions. In the nineteenth century, it became possible to chemically synthesise both organic and inorganic pigments. On the relationship between developments in industrial chemistry and pigment technology, see Hermens and Townsend, "Pigments in Western Easel Painting", 202-206.
- 54 Hermens and Townsend, "Pigments in Western Easel Painting", 205. On synthetic colours in the eighteenth century, see Sarah Lowengard, *The Creation of Colour in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
- 55 On developments in inorganic chemistry in the nineteenth century, see David Bomford, Jo Kirby, and Ashok Roy (eds.), *Impressionism* (London: National Gallery in association with Yale University Press, 1990), 51.
- 56 Arthur Church, *The Chemistry of Paints and Painting* (London: Seeley, 1901), 296.

- 57 Among the large body of literature dedicated to the emerging industrial synthetic dye trade in the nineteenth century, see especially Agustí Nieto-Galan, *Colouring Textiles* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2001); and Anthony Travis, *The Rainbow Makers: The Origins of the Synthetic Dyestuffs Industry in Western Europe* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1993), 92-96.
- 58 Natural alizarin was used to make colours including permanent violet, purple lake, burnt lake, crimson lake, burnt carmine, and Indian lake. Madder was also used for madder carmine, scarlet madder, pink madder, rose madder, crimson madder, and madder lake. The most detailed account of alizarin's synthesis is found in Travis, *The Rainbow Makers*, 163-205.
- 59 Perkin did not discover aniline, but was the first chemist to successfully extract the substance from coal tar and mass produce it as a dye for commercial exploitation. Perkin's research rested upon previous experiments done by German chemists Otto Unverdorben (who had first isolated aniline from indigo plants in 1826), Friedlieb Runge (who had extracted blue aniline from coal tar but had been unable to successfully transform the substance into a dye in 1833), and August Hoffman (Perkin's tutor at the Royal College, who had been working on aniline-based research himself for some years). W.H. Perkin, "Cantor Lectures: The Aniline or Coal-Tar Colours", *Journal of the Society of Arts* 17, no. 841 (January 1869): 97-108.
- 60 It is difficult to pinpoint precisely when coal-tar colours were incorporated into artists' paints. Broadly speaking, by the 1880s, there were several colours in colourmen's catalogues that we can confidently identify as coal-tar derived. For instance, in 1892, we find "Geranium lake (aniline)" among the colours sold by the firm Reeves & Sons, while by 1896 Winsor & Newton confirmed that their colour "Magenta" was indeed an "Aniline Lake". Carlyle, *The Artist's Assistant*, 159, 506.
- 61 As one dye manual from 1874 described, new fashion colours did not need to be permanent as: "dyers have much less inducement to study fastness than was formerly the case, as the rapid changes of fashion leave consumers no time to discover the fugitive character of the shades", William Crookes, *A Practical Handbook of Dyeing and Calico-Printing* (London: Longmans, Green, 1874), 349.
- 62 William Muckley, *A Handbook for Painters and Art Students on the Character and Use of Colour* (London: Bailliere, Tindall and Cox, 1893), 124.
- 63 For examples of aniline-based colours advertised as such, see note 74. On the use of aniline dyes to lace paints, see Carlyle, "Authenticity and Adulteration", 58.
- 64 As the various patent disputes between dye makers in the 1860s demonstrate, it was hard to tell how a colour was made simply by its appearance. As chemical analysis wasn't developed to the stage where courts could test dyes to distinguish between different processes of manufacture, it was very difficult to ascertain (by sight alone) whether dyes were synthetic. See Travis, *The Rainbow Makers*, 104-138.
- 65 Carlyle, "Authenticity and Adulteration", 56-60; and Townsend *et al.*, "Later Nineteenth Century Pigments", 65-78.
- 66 Marjolin Bol notes that nineteenth-century German treatises cite Pliny's complaints that contemporary colours were less reliable and pure than those of the ancients; see Marjolin Bol, "Technique and the Art of Immortality, 1800-1900", *History of Humanities* 2, no. 1 (March 2017): 192.
- 67 Anon., *A Practical Treatise on Landscape Painting in Oil Colours* (London: B. and J. White, 1795), 26.
- 68 Roger Fry described Watts's work as "rocky, dry, and crumbled" in "Watts and Whistler", *Quarterly Review* 202 (1905): 607-623, while the description of his paintings as "heavily forged" and "corrugated" comes from Rose Esther Dorothea Sketchley, *Watts* (London: Methuen, 1904), 178.
- 69 See *Pall Mall Gazette* "Extra", 1886, included as an Appendix in Jacqueline Ridge and Joyce Townsend, "G.F. Watts in Context: His Choice of Materials and Techniques", in Ashok Roy and Perry Smith (eds.), *Painting Techniques: History, Materials and Studio Practice: Contributions to the Dublin Congress, 7-11 September 1998* (London: International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 1998), 223-28.
- 70 George Moore, *Modern Painting* (London: W. Scott, 1893), 113.
- 71 The inconsistent approach to varnishing across Watts' paintings also lend further complexity and diversity to these surfaces. As discussed earlier, Watts was deeply ambivalent towards varnish, understanding its importance in protecting paintings and saturating his colours but also loathing its gloss. Even his varnished canvases can appear inconsistent in appearance however, as the varnish would sink unevenly into his paintings because of his use of extremely dry paints that would absorb the varnish at different rates. See Carol Willoughby, "The Search for Permanence: The Materials and Methods of G.F. Watts" (MA diss., Courtauld Institute of Art, 1983), 52, held in the collection of the Courtauld Institute Conservation Library (CICL).
- 72 A first-hand account of Watts' technique is found in the biography of the painter written by his wife, Mary Seaton Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, 3 vols, (London: Macmillan, 1912), Vol. 3, 56-79. Subsequent assessments of Watts' technique by conservators, who have assessed his claims against the physical evidence of his works, can be found in Jacqueline Ridge, "G.F. Watts: *Sic Transit*", in Joyce Townsend, Stephen Hackney, and Rica Jones (eds.), *Paint and Purpose: A Study of Technique in British Art* (London: Tate, 1999), 94; Ridge and Townsend, "G.F. Watts in Context", 223-228; and Carol Willoughby, "The Search for Permanence: Materials and Methods of G.F. Watts (1817-1904)", in Heinz Althöfer, *Das 19. Jahrhundert und die Restaurierung: Beiträge zur Malerei, Maltechnik und Konservierung* (Munich: Callwey, 1987), 203-216.
- 73 On Watts' absorbent grounds, see Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 3, 60; Ridge and Townsend, "G.F. Watts in Context", 223-224; and Willoughby, "The Search for Permanence", (Althöfer), 205-206.
- 74 Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 3, 58.
- 75 Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 3, 57.

- 76 Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 3, 62.
- 77 Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 1, 6–36.
- 78 Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 1, 44–84.
- 79 Although Watts had worked in fresco proper, his various attempts in this medium proved unsuccessful. Watts' wife recalled that "his first attempts in this medium [at the Casa Feroni] have quite disappeared from the walls"; Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 1, 52. The frescoes he completed at Lincoln's Inn in 1859 had deteriorated rapidly by 1890 and needed intense restoration within his own lifetime; see Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 2, 188–189.
- 80 A growing number of technical manuals on historical painting methods published in the nineteenth century gave painters unprecedented access to information on the materials and techniques of the past. In addition to Eastlake's volume, perhaps the most significant was Mary Merrified's translation of Cennino Cennini's fifteenth-century handbook *Il libro dell'arte* (published as *A Treatise on Painting* in 1844). For an overview of the kind of technical literature available to painters in the nineteenth century, see Bol, "Technique and the Art of Immortality", 179–199. Watts owned a copy of Cennini and amassed a large collection of technical information, including traditional recipes for paints and vehicles; see Willoughby, "The Search for Permanence", (Althöfer), 203.
- 81 Watts' first impressions of Venetian art are recoded in a letter to Ruskin, where he describes how "Titian, Giorgione, and all the most glowing and gorgeous translations of the Venetian School have rendered Nature as I feel her." This letter is reproduced in Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 1, 144.
- 82 It was Mrs Barrington who translated for Watts Marco Boschini's famous account of Titian's technique from 1674, *Le ricche minere della pittura veneziana*. Mrs Russell Barrington, *G.F. Watts: Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan; G. Allen, 1905), 98.
- 83 On the characteristics of Titian's late style, see Jill Dunkerton and Marika Spring, "Titian after 1540: Technique and Style in His Later Works", *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 36 (2016): 6–39. On Watts' application of these tropes, see Mrs Russel Barrington, *Catalogue of Paintings, by G.F. Watts, R.A., of London, on Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1884), 8–9.
- 84 Willoughby describes how Watts' attempt to reproduce the effects of fresco using oil paint was predicated on a fundamental misunderstanding of how fresco worked, which perhaps also contributed to the many technical faults in his work in fresco proper; see Willoughby, "The Search for Permanence", (CICL), 75–77.
- 85 For instance, Tate conservator Jacqueline Ridge contextualises Watts' working method within the painter's broadly historicising lifestyle, from his nickname "signor" to his explicit imitation of Titian through self-portraiture, to which we might add his sartorial habits of dressing in Renaissance clothing; see Ridge, "G.F. Watts: *Sic Transit*", 90.
- 86 Most recently, Nicholas Tromans, *The Art of G.F. Watts* (London: Paul Holberton, 2017), 64. Tromans largely follows Willoughby, Ridge, and Townsend in reading Watts' unusual technique as a kind of insurance against material change and damage.
- 87 Watts primarily used linseed oil but preferred poppy oil as it yellowed less over time. On Watts's choice of oils, see Ridge and Townsend, "G.F. Watts in Context", 225.
- 88 Willoughby, "The Search for Permanence", (Althöfer), 204.
- 89 On the technical faults with Watts's frescoes, see Willoughby, "The Search for Permanence", (Althöfer), 203.
- 90 A transcription of this correspondence is reproduced as an unpaginated Appendix in Willoughby, "The Search for Permanence" (CICL). All subsequent references to letters, unless otherwise stated, are to that Appendix. Copies of Watts' letters are also held in the archives of the National Portrait Gallery in London and The Watts Gallery in Surrey.
- 91 Watts to Scott Taylor, 28 November 1893. Emphasis in original.
- 92 Watts and Hunt first met in 1856 and they shared a mutual admiration for one another's work and a lifelong friendship. Hunt describes their first meeting in his autobiography, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (London: Macmillan, 1905), Vol. 2, 92.
- 93 William Holman Hunt, "The Present System of Obtaining Materials in Use by Artist Painters, as Compared with that of the Old Masters", *Journal of the Society of Arts* 28, no. 1431 (1880): 495.
- 94 Hunt's letters to *The Times* were published on 28 April 1880, 4 May 1880, and 2 June 1880. His lecture was reprinted as "The Present System of Obtaining Materials in Use by Artist Painters, as Compared with that of the Old Masters", *Journal of the Society of Arts* 28, no. 1431 (1880): 491–492. For a broader account of how this affected Hunt's practice, see Joyce Townsend and Jennifer Poulin, "Painting: Materials and Methods", in Katharine Jordan Lochnan and Carol Jacobi (eds.), *Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 2008), 161–168.
- 95 For instance, Watts wrote to Winsor & Newton in 1903 proclaiming: "I have heard a doubt thrown on the trustworthiness of Verona Brown! I should be sorry to find it the case for it is a colour I find very useful. Is there any way of preparing Van Dyke Brown to make it safe to use?" Watts to Scott Taylor, 27 January 1903.
- 96 Scott Taylor to Watts, 14 June 1901.
- 97 Watts to Winsor & Newton, 6 July 1871, and 5 August 1878.
- 98 Watts to Scott Taylor, 16 June 1901. Emphasis in original.
- 99 Newton to Watts, 21 August 1878.

- 100 Remarkably, the firm later marketed these colours as a special range of paints available for sale at three times the price of their regular colours, sold in specially designed wide-mouth tubes that enabled them to be forced from their casing. Advertisements for these paints appeared in the 1901 Winsor & Newton Retail Catalogue, included as an Appendix in Willoughby, "The Search for Permanence", (CICL).
- 101 The description of the mill comes from Scott Taylor to Watts, 26 July 1898; the discussion of industrial grinding comes from Scott Taylor to Watts, 10 June 1901.
- 102 Scott Taylor to Watts, 10 June 1901.
- 103 Watts to Scott Taylor, 17 October 1901.
- 104 Barrington, *G.F. Watts: Reminiscences*, 66; Watts to Scott Taylor, 29 October 1898.
- 105 Barrington, *G.F. Watts: Reminiscences*, 66.
- 106 Watts to Scott Taylor, 9 November 1900. Tromans uses the term "paint-sculpture" to describe the extreme plasticity of Watts' works; Tromans, *The Art of G.F. Watts*, 64.
- 107 On the spiritual connotations of this work and the links between physical and metaphysical meaning in the painting, see Matthew Potter, "Materialism and the Mark of Modernity in the Work of G.F. Watts", *British Art Journal* 7, no. 3 (2006): 70-78.
- 108 On Watts' sculptural materials, see Veronica Franklin Gould, "Watts, Pioneer Sculptor", in Veronica Franklin Gould (ed.), *The Vision of G.F. Watts, 1817-1904* (Guildford: Watts Gallery, 2004), 42-44.
- 109 G.K. Chesterton, *G.F. Watts* (London: Duckworth, 1904), 58-59.
- 110 Chesterton, *G.F. Watts*, 58.
- 111 The place of this trial in debates over the role of labour in Victorian art and culture can be found in Tim Barringer, *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 314-321.
- 112 On Whistler's practice of thinning down his paints, see Steven Hackney, "Art for Art's Sake: The Materials and Techniques of James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)", in Arie Wallert, Erma Hermens, and Marja Peek (eds.), *Historical Painting Techniques, Historical Painting Techniques, Materials, and Studio Practice: Preprints of a Symposium* (Marina Del Rey, CA: Getty Conservation Institute, 1995), 186-190; and David Peters Corbett, *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1848-1914* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 112-114.
- 113 On Ruskin's central role in Victorian debates regarding art and labour, see Barringer, *Men at Work*, 2.
- 114 Watts' comment on his socialism comes from Hulda Friederichs, "An Interview with Mr. G.F. Watts, R.A.", *The Young Woman: A Monthly Journal and Review* 39 (1895): 73-82; quoted in Wilfred Brunt, *England's Michelangelo: A Biography of George Frederic Watts* (London: Hamilton, 1975), 213. Watts painted Carlyle in 1868—see Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 1, 249-250; Morris in 1870—see Veronica Franklin Gould, *G.F. Watts: The Last Great Victorian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 98-99; and Crane in 1891—see Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 2, 200. For a close study of Watts' relationship to Carlyle in particular, see David A. Stewart, "Reality, Artifice, and the Politics of Evolution: Watts and Carlyle in the Earnest Age", *Victorian Poetry* 33, nos 3-4 (1995): 476-498.
- 115 Julia Mary Cartwright, "G.F. Watts, Royal Academician, His Life & Work", *The Art Journal*, Extra Number: Easter Art Annual (London: Virtue & Co., 1896), 8
- 116 Chief among these is the 1880 essay "The Present Conditions of Art", reprinted in Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 3, 147-190, and his 1888 essay "Aims of Art", reprinted in Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 3, 228-234.
- 117 Watts, "The National Position of Art", reprinted in Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 3, 257-272.
- 118 Watts, "The National Position of Art", reprinted in Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 3, 264.
- 119 The discussion of industrial labour as "slavery" comes from John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Vol. II, in E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (eds.), *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. 9 (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), 193. In the most famous passage of *The Stones of Venice*, titled "The Nature of the Gothic", where Ruskin potently expounds his belief on the ethics of labour, he explicitly mentions colour-making, noting that "the painter should grind his own colours; the architect work in the mason's yard with his men; the master-manufacturer be himself a more skillful operative than any man in his mills", Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. 9, 201.
- 120 Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 1, 263.
- 121 Matthew (6:24) and Luke (16:3) both proclaim "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." For a detailed etymology of Mammon and his appearance in various other poetic and literary works, see Mark Bills and Barbara Bryant, *G.F. Watts: Victorian Visionary: Highlights from the Watts Gallery Collection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with Watts Gallery Compton, 2008), 232.
- 122 Watts, "Present Conditions of Art", in Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 3, 166.
- 123 Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 2, 149. Mary Watts recalls that her husband initially made this remark to the artist Briton Riviere upon a visit to Watts' studio.
- 124 Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 3, 268.
- 125 Watts had already used this format in his portrait *Henry Edward Manning* (1882). While the most obvious model for this painting would be Raphael's *Portrait of Pope Julius II* (1511), which Watts could have seen frequently at the National Gallery in London, Watts claimed there to be a "coldness in the line" in Raphael that he disliked; Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 2, 80. It seems more likely that Watts would have modelled the work on Titian's *Portrait of Pope Paul III* (1543).

- 126 Watts described these figures as general “types of humanity”, M.H. Spielman, *The Works of Mr G. F. Watts RA* (London: Pall Mall Gazette Office, 1886), 15. My thanks to Paul Taylor, Curator at the Warburg Institute Photographic Collection in London, for his assistance locating allegories of avarice for comparison with Watts’ *Mammon*.
- 127 On the various interpretations of Midas’ ass’ ears, see Maya Vassileva, “King Midas’ Ass’s Ears Revisited”, *Ancient West and East* 7 (2008): 237-247.
- 128 Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, The Norman and Charlotte Strouse Edition of the Writings of Thomas Carlyle (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 295. This link between Carlyle’s text and Watts’ painting is commonly acknowledged in scholarship on the painting. For instance, see Bills and Bryant, *G.F. Watts*, 232.
- 129 Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 163-164. Emphasis in original.
- 130 The smoke has alternatively been understood as an allusion to the description of Mammon’s cave in Edmund Spenser’s sixteenth-century poetic work *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser describes how Mammon’s “face with smoke was tand”. See Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone (eds.), *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones & Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860-1910* (London: Tate, 1997), 169-170.
- 131 This motif recurs throughout eighteenth- and nineteenth-century images of gout held catalogued by the Wellcome Collection, London. See, for instance, James Gillray, “Punch Cures the Gout, -the Colic, -and the ‘Tisick”, 1799, hand-coloured etching, 25.8 x 34 cm, British Museum.
- 132 Gould describes how the Compton Mammon is “more grotesque than the Tate version” and “illustrates Watts’ point even more strongly” (Gould, *Vision of G.F. Watts*, 74), while Bills and Bryant note that in the smaller work “Mammon is perhaps even more brutal in conception” (*G.F. Watts: Victorian Visionary*, 232). The smaller canvas was exhibited in *George Frederic Watts, 1817-1904*, Tate Gallery, London (9 December 1954-16 January 1955), cat. no. 69; *G.F. Watts: A Nineteenth Century Phenomenon*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (22 January-3 March 1974); *The Vision of G.F. Watts, 1817-1904*, Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey (2 July-31 October 2004), cat. no.70.
- 133 On Watts’ practice of working on different versions of the same subject, see Potter, “Materialism and the Mark of Modernity”, 72. Watts would also execute large-scale drawings of the same subjects he painted, which were similarly mistaken for preparatory works rather than experiments in different media. See Chloë Ward, *The Drawings of G.F. Watts* (London: Watts Gallery in association with Philip Wilson, 2016), 85.
- 134 Barrington, *Catalogue of Paintings, by G.F. Watts*, 3.
- 135 The larger version was first exhibited in Birmingham in 1885. Mary Seaton Watts, *The Diary of Mary Watts 1887-1904: Victorian Progressive and Artistic Visionary*, edited by Desna Greenhow (London: Lund Humphries, in association with Watts Gallery, 2016), 167. Although Mary Watts does not specify which canvas he continued to labour over, her language here suggests he was working on the smaller canvas as the larger Tate version entirely lacks the impasto seen in the Compton version and is far more wash-like in terms of its surface.
- 136 My sincerest thanks to Sally Marriott, the de Laszlo Conservation Fellow at the Watts Gallery, for her detailed observations on the varnishing of this painting and in Watts’ varnishing practice in general. Varnishing was clearly a fraught issue for Watts. Varnishing provided crucial protection from environmental damage and exposure to oxygen, which would dull his colours and damage his surfaces, but he also despised its sheen, noting that: “Titian abhorred varnishes with his very soul”, Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, Vol. 3, 304. Watts’ practice of continually reworking his paintings also meant he was reluctant to varnish his works (and thereby admit they were completed).
- 137 Marriott informed me that adding wax to varnish to reduce gloss was a practice common among painters at this time.
- 138 Ridge and Townsend note that Watts certainly advocated collectors should varnish his paintings in order to protect them, but many have often been over-varnished, resulting in a “uniform gloss” unintended by the painter; Ridge and Townsend, “G.F. Watts in Context”, 227. Marriott similarly notes that, although Watts may have advocated protective varnishing, it is extremely difficult to ascertain how glossy or matt these surfaces would have been, especially if the works have been re-varnished or had varnish removed.
- 139 On Watts’ handling as a repudiation of academic idealisation, see David Stewart, “Of Angst and Escapism: George Frederic Watts and Frederic, Lord Leighton”, *Victorian Institute Journal* 12 (1994): 33-53.
- 140 Although impressionist painters certainly used paint squeezed straight from the tube, often their works were less spontaneous than has previously been supposed; see Bomford *et al.*, *Impressionism*, 91-98; and Callen, *The Art of Impressionism*, 156-176. On the use of this technique by Vincent Van Gogh, see Paolo Cadorin, “Colour Fading in Van Gogh and Gauguin”, in Cornelia Peres, Louis van Tilborgh, and Mette Marie Bang (eds.), *A Closer Look: Technical and Art-Historical Studies on Works by Van Gogh and Gauguin* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1991), 26-31.
- 141 My thanks to Edward Cooke for suggesting the term “moral aesthetics” in relation to Watts’ work.

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The Ecosystem of Exhibitions: Venues, Artists, and Audiences in Early Nineteenth- Century London

Catherine Roach

Abstract

Early nineteenth-century London boasted a robust selection of displays, of art and otherwise, which made up a larger ecosystem of exhibitions. Participants in this ecosystem, including exhibition organizers, practitioners, and viewers, were at once mutually supporting and fiercely competitive. Artists banded together in group exhibitions, where many of them hoped to steal the show. Exhibition societies clustered together, benefiting from proximity even as they contended for visitors. Exhibitions and their objects were not consumed in isolation; rather, both the crowded walls of these displays and the busy itineraries of their viewers encouraged comparative viewing. Considering the display history of works by Benjamin Robert Haydon, John Constable, William Hilton, William Etty, John Martin, and Margaret Carpenter, this essay demonstrates how exhibition histories can shed fresh light on nineteenth-century art: first, by providing a new model for interactions among elements of the art world; and second, by uncovering works and artists who are rarely studied today but were vital participants in the ecosystem of exhibitions in their own day.

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When Jacques-Louis David charged Parisian audiences for a view of his painting *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* in 1799, a contemporary noted that it was an exhibition in the style of “les Anglais”.¹ Over five decades later, a one-man show by Gustave Courbet was similarly described as an exhibition “in the English manner”.² As these comments indicate, London was the epicentre of innovative exhibition models in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many modes of display developed there subsequently became common practice, including the one-artist exhibition and the one-work exhibition.³ These ground-breaking British exhibitions have often been figured as precursors to later French displays, notably the Impressionist shows of the 1870s.⁴ But not every exhibition fits Impressionism’s glass slipper. This article examines early nineteenth-century displays in London from a new perspective. In doing so, I build on an important body of scholarship that emphasizes the diversity and interconnectedness of urban displays, of “fine art” or otherwise.⁵ Despite important interventions, discussion of such displays is still shaped by the discourse of the avant-garde, in which the academy faces off with outsiders, rivals, or independents.⁶ But this approach captures only one part of a much larger story.

I propose instead that we consider displays of all types as parts of an *ecosystem of exhibitions*. The term *ecosystem* was coined in the early twentieth century by a scientist who sought a single term that could refer to living creatures and “the whole complex of physical factors forming what we call [their] environment”.⁷ Since then, this suggestive word has been widely applied, and “its uses continue to proliferate”.⁸ In applying the concept of the ecosystem to exhibitions, however, I am invoking in some ways its original intent, which was to create a framework in which interactions among individuals, groups, and resources could be assessed collectively.⁹ Thinking of exhibitions as an ecosystem allows for consideration of both the broader conditions of display and the actions of individual figures who navigated these conditions. As in a biological ecosystem, nineteenth-century exhibits and exhibitors both relied upon and competed with other actors in their environment.

Here, a word of caution is in order: ideas about the natural world, when applied to human societies, have been used to reinforce existing cultural hierarchies, including those of race, sex, and class. It is emphatically not my intent here to invoke the later nineteenth-century theories of liberal political economy or social Darwinism, in which some types of people were seen as “naturally” fitted to succeed. This project has the opposite intent: to destabilize the hierarchies of art history, by emphasizing London’s central role in generating exhibition practices, by rethinking the relationship

between the Royal Academy and other exhibition venues, and by using the study of exhibitions as a means to uncover the careers of non-canonical artists.

In his foundational survey of urban entertainments, *The Shows of London*, Richard Altick described that city's varied attractions as enjoying a "healthy symbiotic relationship".¹⁰ But while they were deeply intertwined, exhibitions during this period were not always mutually supporting. Herein lies the usefulness of the concept of the ecosystem, which conveys both intimacy and conflict. By suggesting both fierce competition and mutual dependence, the term *ecosystem* both encompasses and moves beyond the model of conflict embodied by the prevalent Academy/outsider binary. The modernist narrative—which, despite the revisions of postmodernism, still saturates art history—posits a contest among individuals and assumes, in the words of Linda Nochlin, that "Genius or Talent ... like murder, must always out".¹¹ This narrative has also structured our approach to institutions, positing exhibition venues as rivals duelling for primacy. As far as it goes, this narrative is not wrong: competition was essential to the early nineteenth-century art world—but so were coexistence and collaboration. In other words, these competitors could not do without one another.

Perhaps the clearest example of this dynamic in ecosystem models of nature is the interdependent yet violent relationship between predator and prey. Both are necessary to the ecosystem. Remove prey and the predators will perish. Remove predators and the prey will first proliferate and then starve. On the individual level, these interactions can be harsh indeed. For the entities destroyed in these processes—for the mouse eaten by a fox, or the artist whose work is upstaged by another exhibit—the fact that these events are part of a larger, mutually sustaining system is cold comfort. But in the broader view, the system enables the development of distinct, specialized types that thrive in connection with each other. Such was the case with nineteenth-century exhibitions, academic and non-academic alike. Of course, except in the most extreme cases, the stakes in the ecosystem of exhibitions were not life or death. For one set of participants, artists, what was at stake was professional success in the moment and enduring reputation in the future.

The ecosystem model has several advantages over previous ways of understanding nineteenth-century exhibitions. Tony Bennett's influential account of the "exhibitionary complex", identifies the solidification around 1850 of display as a form of social control, "a set of cultural technologies concerned to organize a voluntarily self-regulating citizenry", in which the exhibition serves as an alluring environment of visual knowledge and power, "a site of sight accessible to all".¹² One crucial insight of this approach is that art exhibitions are but one part of a larger phenomenon of display;

another is the insistence on the central role of the audience. But, as will be explored in more detail below, display spaces in early nineteenth-century London were not “accessible to all”: they reinforced social hierarchy not through the seductive inclusion of all citizens, but through the emphatic exclusion of the working classes. Moreover, these spaces of display and their audiences were not as orderly or self-regulated as Bennett’s account suggests.¹³ As subsequent scholarship has shown, both before 1850 and after, exhibition-goers often declined to conform to official scripts, instead using spaces of display to their own ends.¹⁴ Unlike the “exhibitionary complex”, the ecosystem is not a top-down model; in an ecosystem, important contributions are made by participants at every level, from the fungi to the charismatic megafauna. Exhibition-goers (and their admission fees) were both a resource for which artists and venues competed and active agents who moved among displays and chose how to interact with them. Recently, it has been suggested that “the concept of an ‘exhibitionary complex’ should be replaced with that of ‘exhibitionary networks’”.¹⁵ The term *network* evokes connections among displays, but it does not suggest the nature of those connections, which could be at once harmful and nurturing.

The ecosystem model allows for a new understanding of art world dynamics, one that encompasses both the interactions of multiple venues and the specifics of individual installations. Art exhibitions were but one element of a well-established round of urban entertainments that were seen and evaluated comparatively, including theatrical performances, concerts, and social events. Within that round, each display venue provided a dynamic environment in which objects interacted with each other. The first part of this article provides a broad overview of the ecosystem of exhibitions in 1820s London. This period saw the culmination of a distinctive phase in the ecosystem of exhibitions in the British capital: the urban display culture initiated during the Seven Years’ War had by this time produced a flourishing and diverse set of attractions, with established customs and procedures; later in the century, these conditions would be altered by the rise of both regular international expositions and powerful art dealers. This first section charts interactions among three sets of actors: organizers of exhibition venues, artists, and audiences.¹⁶ It examines how exhibition administrators both rivalled and supported one another, learning from each other’s tactics and poaching each other’s contributors; how artists utilized these multiple venues, deploying works among them strategically; and how viewers chose to consume these diverse offerings.

The next section considers how a single object fared within this ecosystem, tracing the transit of a well-known work, John Constable’s *The Hay Wain*, through several galleries in both London and Paris, starting with its public debut at the Royal Academy in 1821, under its original title of *Landscape*:

Noon (Fig. 1). The display history of this picture illuminates the conditions that affected the reception of individual works within the ecosystem of exhibitions. It also reveals the diversity of the art exhibited at this moment. At each stop in its journey, *The Hay Wain* hung alongside compelling objects that are little studied today, although they attracted more audience attention at the time. Many of these works by non-canonical figures such as John Martin and Margaret Carpenter prove equally vivid and worthy of study as the better-known works with which they once shared a gallery. ¹⁷



Figure 1.

John Constable, *The Hay Wain*, 1821, oil on canvas, 130 × 185 cm. Collection of The National Gallery, London (NG1207). Digital image courtesy of National Gallery, London.

In examining works displayed together, this article takes its cue from period viewing practices. Early nineteenth-century exhibitions promoted a distinctive mode of vision that took in a range of objects now classified separately. The proximity of multiple attractions and the brisk pace of their consumption encouraged comparative viewing. ¹⁸ Moving from venue to venue and from exhibit to exhibit, viewers in nineteenth-century London practised a voracious and emphatically cross-referential approach to the consumption of art. “Comparison is the great test of excellence”, proclaimed the critic Robert Hunt in 1821, voicing a widely held belief. ¹⁹ Both within a single show and moving among several shows, viewers assessed displays against one another, relying on their memories of sights just seen as well as of previous years’ exhibitions. ²⁰ These comparisons might take place across a room, across town, or across the great span of history. Most broadly, commentators frequently assessed the productions of the current day

against exemplars of the past, asking if individual artists or the national school as a whole could measure up to their illustrious predecessors.²¹ Attractions were also judged in tandem, with journalists frequently comparing the charms of one venue's offerings to those of another.²² This approach offers lessons for our own practice of art history today. The ecosystem of exhibitions in early nineteenth-century London had room for—and need for—many different kinds of actors. Considering it as a system with multiple, diverse participants provides a way of thinking beyond the canon, beyond established metrics of quality and assumptions of importance, to reveal a richer, stranger world of early nineteenth-century art.

The Ecosystem of a City: 1820s London

London in the 1820s boasted a robust selection of displays, the product of more than half a century of steady proliferation and specialization. "London, at present, teems with shows of art", wrote a critic for the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1821, citing as evidence group exhibitions at the Royal Academy, the British Institution, and the Society of Painters in Water Colours; the single-artist exhibitions of Benjamin Robert Haydon, John Glover, Thomas Christopher Hofland, Benjamin West, and James Ward; and the domestic galleries of John Leicester, the Marquess of Stafford, Thomas Hope, and the Earl Grosvenor.²³ This list is by no means comprehensive, as it leaves out many displays of historic art and archaeology, such as models of a newly discovered pharaonic tomb.²⁴ Some of these forms of display were of more recent vintage than others. While artists' exhibitions had been around since the 1770s, the opening of domestic galleries to a limited public was a more novel phenomenon, dating from 1806.²⁵ In addition, the first two decades of the nineteenth century saw the foundation of multiple exhibition societies.²⁶ While the Academy remained the premiere venue, it was by the 1820s the first among many.

Governance of these display venues varied widely. Later in the century, dealers would take a leading role in staging exhibitions, but this was not yet the case in the 1820s.²⁷ Most organizations were administered by artist-members; the British Institution was unusual in that it was run by a group of wealthy patrons.²⁸ Some artists handled the arrangements for displays of their own work or mounted their own thematic shows. In other cases, artists collaborated with businessmen such as William Bullock, who staged the exhibition of Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* at the Egyptian Hall in 1821.²⁹ Whether undertaken by the artist or a representative, stand-alone displays and their associated publicity efforts could prove crucial in shaping both the initial reception and the lasting reputation of an object.³⁰

All of these venues competed with each other for admissions fees and critical notice. At the same time, they also contributed to a mutually sustaining environment. Exhibitions were frequently located in close proximity, creating constantly evolving artistic districts, just as they do today.³¹ Exhibitions held concurrently with that of the Academy, during the months of London's political and social season, benefited from a wider audience. The Academy, in turn, benefited from the existence of other displays. The British Institution has been described as "not so much a rival to the Academy as a supplement";³² this statement applies to many exhibition societies of the day. Non-academic organizations could provide "a stepping-stone" to the Royal Academy;³³ for example, the marine painter Clarkson Stanfield was elected as an Associate of the Royal Academy soon after resigning his membership in the Society of British Artists, where he had formerly served as President.³⁴ In addition to co-opting the most successful exhibitors from other venues, Academy administrators also adopted their innovations if they proved popular: in 1811, they experimented with the provision of a price list, after this was introduced at the British Institution and the Society of Painters in Water Colours; in 1816, they followed the example of the British Institution by opening a school of painting.³⁵

On occasion, the leaders of these organizations also shared resources and information. In 1813, Royal Academy administrators overcame the initial reluctance of some members and lent to the pioneering loan show of works by Sir Joshua Reynolds held at the British Institution.³⁶ When the Society of British Artists decided, two decades later, to stage their own loan exhibition, they consulted the Directors of the British Institution on the matter of insurance.³⁷ Of course, relations were not always so harmonious. Royal Academicians often viewed the advent of new contemporary art exhibitions with suspicion; for example, in 1824, Thomas Phillips expressed disdain for the artists who chose to participate in the inaugural show of the Society of British Artists rather than send to the Academy. At the same time—and perhaps protesting too much—he also claimed that "their departure [from] our corner" benefited the Academicians, as it "enabled us to put into execution a long desired object, viz to have no pictures above the whole lengths & it is a great improvement".³⁸ But competition could clearly also be destructive. As Greg Smith has shown, competition from the newly formed Associated Artists in Watercolour led to an immediate downturn in sales at the Society of Painters in Water Colours, and the Society eventually foundered and split into factions.³⁹ As this example demonstrates, the proliferation of exhibition societies could also stunt the growth of individual organizations.



Figure 2.

George Scharf, The Royal Academy Exhibition of 1828, 1828, watercolour, 18.4 × 26 cm. Collection of the Museum of London, London. Digital image courtesy of Museum of London.

Yet another important set of actors in the ecosystem—artists—benefited enormously from the diversity of exhibition venues. Practitioners did not need to limit themselves to one type of exhibition; indeed, a chief advantage of this system was the ability to exhibit simultaneously at several venues within a single season. Each of these sites had its own character, which came with certain advantages and drawbacks. For example, the Academy exhibitions were prestigious but also increasingly voluminous, making it more challenging for an object to attract attention in a crowded field. Non-Academic venues helped artists, particularly younger artists or those recently arrived in the capital, to build a reputation and find buyers, while preparing for a run at the Academy and its honours. After noting the difficulties of viewing art in the “crowded rooms of Somerset-house”, one journalist claimed that “many a painting, whose merits have escaped notice [at the Academy], has a chance at the British [Institution] of being duly appreciated”.⁴⁰ Smaller than the Academy and with no places reserved ahead of time for Academicians (who were automatically entitled to show up to eight works at the Academy), the British Institution was an ideal venue for works by emerging artists, as well as for works that had not found a buyer at the previous season’s Academy exhibition (Figs 2 and 3).⁴¹ As explored in the next section, Constable was one of the many artists who took advantage of this opportunity. Matching work to venue and employing multiple venues were both vital to success in the nineteenth-century ecosystem of exhibitions.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 3.

Alfred Joseph Woolmer, *Interior of the British Institution (Old Master Exhibition, Summer 1832)*, 1833, oil on canvas, 71.8 x 92.1 cm. Collection of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1981.25.694). Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art.

Nor were group shows the only option. In the eighteenth century, artists such as John Singleton Copley had pioneered new display models, including the one-artist and the one-work show. These shows were not necessarily oppositional in nature. Certainly, an exhibition that has been identified as the first retrospective, Nathaniel Hone's show of 1775, was explicitly anti-Academic.⁴² But once established, the retrospective was immediately seized upon as an effective new form of display that could be deployed for a variety of ideological purposes. At both the Salon de Correspondence in Paris and at the British Institution in London, retrospectives served nationalist agendas.⁴³ These exhibitions did not critique their respective academies but rather lionized members of those academies in explicitly patriotic celebrations of their national schools. Similarly, for individual artists, exhibiting outside of the Academy did not necessarily mean exhibiting against it. For example, in 1781, Copley angered his fellow Academicians by staging the first one-work exhibition, featuring the *Death of the Earl of Chatham* (Figs 4 and 5). The issue was not clashing artistic philosophies or academic gatekeeping. Instead, Copley's offense was withholding an object of acknowledged merit from the Royal Academy in order to exhibit it in his own name, for his own profit.⁴⁴ The decision to go it alone offered both more risk and more reward than submitting works to an exhibition society. Renting a venue, printing a catalogue, and advertising a show required an artist to assume the costs personally or to take on a partner. But such exhibitions also offered more individual attention from viewers and the press, as well as the chance to reap financial rewards, should the exhibition prove popular.



Figure 4.

John Singleton Copley, *The Death of the Earl of Chatham*, 1779–1781, oil on canvas, 230 × 300 cm. Collection of Tate (N00100). Digital image courtesy of Tate.



Figure 5.

W. Angus after Daniel Dodd, *The Death of Lord Chatham in the House of Peers*, 1781, engraving, 12 × 17.7 cm. Collection of the British Museum (1882,0311.1100). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

By the early nineteenth century, artists' entrepreneurial exhibitions had become standard practice in London. In contrast, in Paris the regulations of the Académie royale put in place before the French Revolution expressly forbade outside exhibitions due to their commercial associations, and this suspicion of non-academic shows persisted well into the nineteenth century.

⁴⁵ In the British capital, however, being an Academician was no bar to exhibiting outside the Academy. In 1812, the year after he had been elected a full Royal Academician, David Wilkie staged a one-artist show, while also sending a work to the Academy; two years later, another Academician, Richard Westall, complemented his monographic display with an exhibit at the British Institution. ⁴⁶ In 1815, the President of the Royal Academy, Benjamin West, promoted his most recent work through two simultaneous exhibitions. He showed his massive Biblical scene *Christ Rejected* in a one-artist exhibition, while sending a sketch of this composition to the Academy. ⁴⁷ One journalist helpfully advertised West's show by noting that his Academy contribution was "the original sketch from which the great picture was painted now exhibiting in Pall Mall". ⁴⁸ By the 1810s, exhibiting outside the Academy was a tactic employed even by its President.

The possibilities and perils of this system are illustrated by the career of Benjamin Robert Haydon. Famously, Haydon committed suicide in 1846 after an exhibition of his history paintings at the Egyptian Hall was upstaged by a rival attraction, the little person Charles Stratton, better known as General Tom Thumb. ⁴⁹ Yet for many decades prior, London's ecosystem of exhibitions had sustained Haydon's career. Although scholars tend to emphasize his one-man shows, Haydon, like most artists of the period, exhibited at a variety of venues. ⁵⁰ True, due to grievances with both the Royal Academy and the British Institution, he ceased to exhibit with these organizations for much of the 1810s and 1820s. ⁵¹ But the ecosystem provided other opportunities. Haydon enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with several venues: they gave him access to potential buyers and critical attention, while his participation added to their attractions and their reputations. For instance, Haydon's first major critical triumph occurred in 1814 with the exhibition of his *The Judgement of Solomon* at the recently founded Society of Painters in Oil and Water Colours. ⁵² When the Society of British Artists was established a decade later, Haydon was quick to take advantage of this new venue, as well. ⁵³ He also continued to stage his own one-artist exhibitions, which were no bar to patronage at the highest levels: his *Mock Election* went directly from the Egyptian Hall to the Royal Collection.

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The chronically indebted Haydon, however, was not able to hold onto the profits of such triumphs, and the end of his career illustrates the vicious side of the ecosystem of exhibitions. In this extreme case, success or failure within this ecosystem was literally a matter of life or death. As financial pressures grew in the 1820s, Haydon took advantage of every possible venue, returning to exhibiting at the Institution and, with less frequency, at the Academy. His exploitation of multiple venues (along with the generosity of his friends and the patience of his creditors) kept him afloat for two full decades. But he also continued to take the entrepreneurial risk of staging his own exhibitions, and the failure of his display in 1846 undoubtedly contributed to his decision to take his own life. Here one can see the more destructive workings of an ecosystem, with two side-by-side attractions competing to the detriment of one. In the struggle to attract a limited resource—audience members—the human performer had prevailed over history paintings. The ecosystem could nurture and sustain artistic careers, but it could also destroy them.

As Haydon's example demonstrates, both exhibition organizers and artists relied on another, equally vital, set of participants in the ecosystem of exhibitions: viewers. The nature of nineteenth-century art audiences represents one of the most exciting and most opaque topics in the study of past exhibitions. Audience numbers can be gauged from the stream of anonymous coins that viewers paid for admission to many nineteenth-century exhibitions. But these numbers say little about the respective social identities or the complex individual experiences of those viewers. Recent scholarship has moved beyond examining the hopes or preconceptions of exhibition planners about their audiences to studying how those audiences actually exploited a space, ignoring or refashioning the dictates of catalogue and exhibition layout.⁵⁵ But much more remains to be done in this area.

Despite important work on the topic, the social make-up of early nineteenth-century audiences is frequently mischaracterized, in part because of scholars' tendency to impose present-day cultural hierarchies onto the displays of the past. For example, one author recently advocated for the importance of an early nineteenth-century display by asserting that it was "not a plebeian exhibition or commercial show", but rather one with "a clear educational focus".⁵⁶ But displays in this period habitually combined commerce and education; it was, in fact, a key to their success. Similarly, in his discussion of the impetus behind the foundation of the National Gallery, London, in 1824, Brandon Taylor draws a firm line between displays of art and other attractions such as panoramas, asserting:

It was precisely the gap between the two available forms of public pleasure—the traditional aristocratic pleasure of beholding valuable paintings, and the delights of marvelling at the painted commercial illusions and street exotica—that must have been striking in late Hanoverian and early Victorian London.⁵⁷

But this is a false binary: at the time, no strict distinction between “forms of public pleasure” existed. Rather, these cultural hierarchies were still emerging, and their boundaries had not yet hardened.⁵⁸ Nor were the audiences for paintings and panoramas substantially different.⁵⁹ The very fact that some commentators urged the organizers of art exhibitions to distinguish their events from other fashionable entertainments eloquently confirms that they were, in fact, entertainments.⁶⁰

More recently, scholars have begun to study in concert “categories of representation traditionally separated into spectacle and art”.⁶¹ As Jonathan Crary has shown, “paintings were produced and assumed meaning not in terms of some cloistered aesthetic and institutional domain, but as one of the many consumable and fleeting elements within the expanded field of images, commodities, and attractions.”⁶² The audience for these attractions was certainly stratified, but not by elite consumption of so-called fine art and lower-class consumption of other visual entertainments. Instead, participation in all of London’s public entertainments was strictly limited by their cost. In Paris, admission to the Salon was free, but at English exhibitions, a standard one-shilling fee excluded most members of the working classes, as it had originally been designed to do.⁶³ Although the one-shilling charge has been described as “rather inconsequential”,⁶⁴ it was in fact deeply consequential to those whose weekly wages were measured in shillings. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, even the best-paid members of the working classes, including skilled artisans such as carpenters working in London, made an estimated 25–40 shillings a week.⁶⁵ In this period, radical publishers seeking a broad working-class audience priced their publications at one or two pence; a single admission to an exhibition cost six to twelve times that amount.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, some journalists in the first decades of the nineteenth century continued to voice anxiety that the financial barriers to entry were not high enough.⁶⁷ Some commentators also complained about less tutored (if relatively affluent) visitors to the regular exhibition days, accusing them of appreciating art for the wrong reasons, such as a simple-minded love of realistic detail.⁶⁸

Exhibition audiences were therefore limited by purchasing power, creating a restricted but still heterogeneous audience.⁶⁹ Among those who could afford entry, a wide range of ranks were represented, from canal-owning dukes to prosperous cloth merchants. Nor should audience members be viewed in terms of their class status alone; also at work were affiliations of religion, gender, politics, economic interests, and aesthetic preferences.⁷⁰ In 1845, John Scandrett Harford, an untitled but wealthy member of a Bristol banking family, wrote a letter to his wife about a Royal Academy dinner that reveals the subtle interplay of multiple social factors.⁷¹ The invitation-only event marked the opening of the Annual Exhibition and included a chance to view the display before dining.⁷² According to Harford, close examination of artworks was interspersed with socializing with people of various ranks and persuasions:

I gave up between two and three hours to a view of the pictures, and was much assisted in discovering the *gems* among them, by Lord M[*illeg*] who had been I believe to the Private View the day before The Bishop of London came up to me very cordially ... he showed, while disavowing all pretences to Connoisseurship that he was a discriminating judge. Baily took me to look at a statue of his, a nymph from the Bath, the subject very delicately treated, and the figure on all its parts so beautiful, elegant, and finely finished that I should class it, without hesitation, among the most successful works of modern art ... then dear Acland joined me, introduced me to the Turner, a reddish-faced, rather short, [*illeg*]-looking man, with whom I had a long chat, and whom I treated with the deference due to highest genius—though some wld. say he has gone mad. [emphasis in the original].⁷³

Harford's account reveals the exhibition audience as diverse and subtly socially differentiated, even at this exclusive viewing. He encountered several acquaintances who outranked him on the social scale, including his close friend the baronet Sir Thomas Dyke Acland and an unidentified peer.⁷⁴ A devoted Evangelical, Harford nonetheless found common interest in art with a High Church clergyman, the Bishop of London.⁷⁵ Harford was also approached by an artist whom his family had patronized, Edward Hodges Baily, who successfully used the occasion to promote his sculpture. But for Harford, the most interesting social event was his introduction to J.M.W. Turner, by then an elder Academician known for his controversial formal innovations. Here the social calculations are complex indeed: Harford registers the artist's working-class origins in his description of his rubicund complexion, only to claim to have inverted the usual social order by

according to Turner “the deference due to highest genius”.⁷⁶ Yet Harford’s tone also suggests that he felt himself to be both acting with gracious condescension and demonstrating his own aesthetic acuity. Although hardly diverse by today’s standards, early nineteenth-century exhibitions were nonetheless complex social experiences in which visitors of different ranks, religious views, and professions could both encounter each other and distinguish themselves from each other.⁷⁷

Much more research remains to be done about the specific character of the audiences at each of London’s exhibition venues. But what is clear at this point is that those who could afford such entertainments visited many of them, moving among the various displays that made up the ecosystem of exhibitions. Artists did not limit themselves to one venue, nor did their audiences. Exhibitions were not consumed in isolation. Rather, they were part of a round of seasonal urban entertainments. Sometimes several displays were seen in the same day, interspersed with social calls, shopping, and performances. On a visit to London in 1811, in a single day, Jane Austen saw both an exhibition of contemporary art at the British Institution and a display of “curiosities”, including a taxidermy giraffe, at the Liverpool Museum.⁷⁸ The contents of these two displays were more similar than might appear at first glance: the British Institution show included monumental works by artists such as West, but also numerous landscapes, genre scenes, and animal subjects, including Thomas Christopher Hofland’s *Portrait of a Trout*.⁷⁹ Austen’s exhibition-going habits were typical for the time. In one month in summer 1812, the journalist Henry Crabb Robinson visited the Royal Academy, where he found Turner’s *Hannibal Crossing the Alps* “the most marvellous landscape I have ever seen”; he attended a lecture by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and a dramatic performance by Sarah Siddons; and went to see the radical publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton placed in the pillory. Tellingly, Robinson used the term *exhibition* to describe both the offerings at the Academy and public corporeal punishment.⁸⁰

This, then, was the ecosystem of exhibitions in 1820s London: a city filled with art exhibitions and other visual entertainments, whose organizers competed for attention, scrambled for places in desirable neighbourhoods, and synchronized their calendars in order to maximize their audience. Viewers from a range of social backgrounds, all of whom could afford the entry fees, chose among these offerings, often taking in multiple attractions within a day or within a season. Meanwhile, artists sought to find the best outlet for their works, tailoring their submissions to the available venues, mounting their own exhibitions, and manoeuvring for the best places within a show. Successfully navigating this ecosystem required talent, connections,

training, wit, and no small amount of luck. Turning from a broad overview to a specific example, the next section examines the transit of a now-iconic work, John Constable's *The Hay Wain*, through the ecosystem of exhibitions.

The Ecosystem of the Gallery: John Constable, John Martin, and Margaret Carpenter

In the context of a city, groups of exhibitions attracted viewers to certain districts through their collective presence, only then to compete for those viewers' attention and resources. In the context of a single gallery, a similar dynamic took place among the objects exhibited. Each exhibition space functioned as an ecosystem within an ecosystem, like tidal pools within a larger coastal zone. The specific display conditions at each of these smaller, structurally distinct units of the ecosystem had important consequences for the reception of individual works. The perils of juxtaposition for artists of this period are well known. A brightly coloured or dramatically composed work could overshadow, or "kill", its neighbours, and many commentators worried that the visually competitive settings of group exhibitions were driving artists to ever more extreme effects.⁸¹ But in addition to fuelling competition, the tightly packed walls could also have a generative effect. The dense hanging aesthetic of exhibitions in this period encouraged viewers to read the contents of displays in concert, savouring visual harmonies and contrasts, perceiving meaningful juxtapositions created by exhibition organizers, and generating vivid new narratives of their own.⁸² But for some artworks, it took several years and several different venues to find a favourable display environment.

From today's art-historical perspective, the most important event in London in 1821 was the exhibition at the Royal Academy of John Constable's *Landscape: Noon*, now known as *The Hay Wain* (Fig. 1). This bucolic scene is today considered a quintessential work of the artist and of Romantic art. But at its public debut in 1821, *The Hay Wain* was overshadowed twice over: first, by a painting that captured the public imagination before the Academy even opened; and second, by other exhibits at the Academy. Identifying the works that shared the walls with this canonical painting sheds new light on nineteenth-century art, revealing works that competed for audience attention with Constable's painting, and won. These include John Martin's *Belshazzar's Feast*, whose significance has recently been reassessed by scholars, and several works by Margaret Carpenter, whose paintings have yet to be seriously studied.⁸³

The failure of *The Hay Wain* to immediately capture the British public's attention in 1821 has been used as evidence of that public's lack of taste. For Andrew Hemingway, a survey of published criticism revealed a deficiency in nineteenth-century viewers. The public's preference for works by John Martin and David Wilkie over *The Hay Wain* confirmed for this author that:

the impact of paintings on the cognitive faculties of the original exhibition audiences was in most instances a small one—that the aesthetic judgement of that audience was not sophisticated and that it did not look for subtle or difficult meanings in works.⁸⁴

In this reading, the relative unpopularity of *The Hay Wain* indicates its original audience's lack of sophistication; by contrast, the popularity of works by Martin and Wilkie suggests that they are straightforward and easily consumed. The terms of judgement being imposed here are those of a mid-twentieth-century art theory, that of avant-garde and kitsch.⁸⁵ Recently, however, scholars have reassessed the work of both of these artists, exploring the nuanced social valences of Wilkie's genre paintings and of Martin's historical landscapes.⁸⁶ I argue that the popularity of these works suggests not that their audiences were incapable of discernment, but that they valued a particular kind of looking, one fostered by the nineteenth-century ecosystem of exhibitions. This system encouraged modes of engagement that were different than, but not inherently inferior to, the modernist ideal of isolated aesthetic contemplation; instead, they were richly comparative, viewing works in concert with their companions.

Such was the case with Martin's *Belshazzar's Feast*, exhibited at the British Institution's annual sale exhibition of 1821, which opened in early spring (Fig. 6). By the time *The Hay Wain* went on view at the Royal Academy later that season, *Belshazzar's Feast* had already been declared the picture of the year.⁸⁷ To understand why this painting was so popular, when Constable's was not, we need to look both at its display context and at its visual qualities, according it the detailed formal analysis more usually reserved for canonical works.



Figure 6.

John Martin, *Belshazzar's Feast*, 1821, oil on canvas, 160 × 249 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of Christie's Images and Bridgeman Images.

Martin's painting shows a party gone horribly wrong. In a vast outdoor courtyard, the Babylonian monarch Belshazzar and his court have been enjoying an impious feast served in sacred vessels looted from Jerusalem. Now all is consternation. A divine proclamation of doom, written in light, has appeared on the wall at left. The prophet Daniel, the man in black who presides at the centre of the picture, has just interpreted this portent: the king will die and his kingdom will fall. The myriad figures who respond to these events present an intricate catalogue of terror, pleading, and denial. Beyond them rise the legendary splendours of Babylon, including its hanging gardens. Throughout, the painting glistens, burns, and shimmers. The sharp yellow rays of the divine warning contrast with both the cool moonlight and the smouldering red glare of bonfires and torches. These variegated hues play across a richly ornamented scene, highlighting spiky diadems, sinuous silver vessels, and an outstretched serpent's tongue. Martin's composition invites the viewer both to savour this plenitude and to imagine its erasure: Babylon is resurrected only to fall once more.

Demand to see Martin's work was so high that the British Institution sale exhibition was held open for several extra weeks. More than 33,000 visitors are known to have paid a shilling to see it, and the press of crowds necessitated a protective barrier.⁸⁸ Why did this work capture the public imagination, while *The Hay Wain* did not? Recent attempts to rehabilitate Martin's reputation have been grounded in his cultural significance, rather than in the aesthetic quality of his works.⁸⁹ But it is worth asking what visual qualities in Martin's compositions so appealed to London audiences. Part of

the answer lies in the way in which this image was consumed. Its visual density and complexity reward sustained examination, carried out in conversation with the catalogue and with companions. Like earlier displays pioneered by Copley, this installation relied on “the interactions between image, text, and viewer”, with each viewer supplying his or her own cultural knowledge, in this case of the Biblical text and its possible interpretations in light of current events.⁹⁰ The Biblical narrative, which would have been familiar to a large portion of the audience, is spread out over the surface of the composition, so that the viewer must survey the many figures in order to pick out the interpreting prophet and the disbelieving king.⁹¹ This painting rewards extended looking, and viewers spent considerable time in front of the painting, leading to complaints by reviewers that they could not even see the work they were meant to evaluate.⁹² One critic also claimed to have developed a personalized route through the exhibition, “first sitting before Mr. Martin’s ‘Belshazzar’s Feast’ whenever we visit the Gallery” and then proceeding to a nearby animal painting.⁹³ In other words, viewing Martin’s canvas in its first exhibition setting could be a complex, interactive experience.

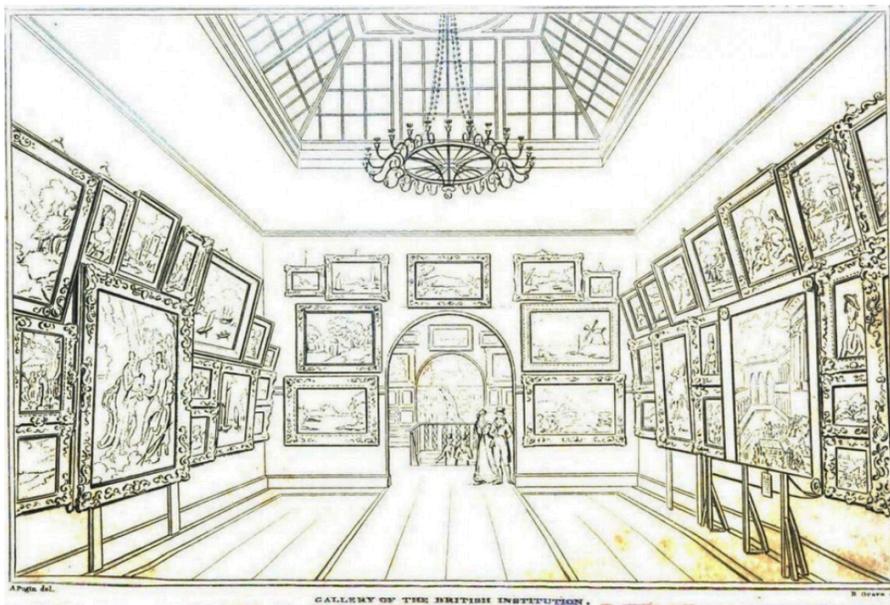


Figure 7.

R. Grave, after A. Pugin, Gallery of the British Institution, published in *Magazine of Fine Arts*, 1821, illustration following page 240. Digital image courtesy of University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, MI



Figure 8.

John James Halls after Charles Turner, Meerza Jiâfer Tabeeb, 1820, mezzotint , 35.5 x 25.2 cm. Collection of the British Museum (11950,0520.255). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

Information about this hang can be gleaned from the engraving published by the *Magazine of the Fine Arts* (Fig. 7). Many images of exhibitions from this period adjust or even rearrange their contents, but the hang depicted here accords closely with the catalogue number order.⁹⁴ *Belshazzar's Feast* hung in the centre of a wall in the North Room, which was considered the principal gallery of the Institution.⁹⁵ Martin's painting served as the centrepiece of an intricately symmetrical hang—a type of installation commonly used in this era.⁹⁶ This placement visually identified Martin's painting as an important work. As the central object on the wall, it formed the anchor for a dense matrix of exhibits that contained numerous landscapes, including scenes of Italy, Spain, and the English countryside, as well as animal paintings, such as Thomas Christmas's *A Hunted Lion*, which hung directly above it.⁹⁷ This

image would have complemented the exoticism of Martin's canvas, as would a highly charged set of pendants that flanked it. On the left hung John J. Halls' *Meerza Jiâfer Tabeeb*, a portrait of a Persian medical student (Fig. 8);⁹⁸ on the right, Margaret Carpenter's *A Native of Calcutta*. Although little known today, Carpenter was a frequent exhibitor in London. Her *Native of Calcutta* has yet to be located, but its visual symmetry with its temporary pendant can be seen in the engraving: both present tightly framed three-quarter views of single figures wearing elaborate headgear. It seems unlikely that these two images of foreigners ended up to either side of Martin's canvas by chance, especially given how few such images there were in the exhibition as a whole. One of the sites invoked through these temporary pendants, Calcutta, was a long-established nexus of imperial expansion. The other, Persia, was a country in which the British had only recently established a diplomatic presence, in the hope of countering Russian influence in the region. By juxtaposing these likenesses with Martin's image of ancient Babylon, the British Institution administrators performed a classic Orientalist manoeuvre, conflating distance in space with distance in time. The presence of these two additional foreign faces would have highlighted Martin's emphasis on the exotic setting, which the writer for the *Literary Chronicle* described as an "appalling and super-human amplitude of Eastern gorgeousness".⁹⁹ Combined with images of men from colonial territories, both actual and desired, Martin's painting may also have invoked a sense of imperial destiny.



Figure 9.

William Hilton, *Nature Blowing Bubbles for Her Children*, 1821, oil on canvas, 172.7 × 232.4 cm. Collection of Tate (N01499). Digital image courtesy of Tate.

Prominent placement within a group show helped Martin's canvas thrive within the ecosystem of exhibitions. Display circumstances in this year were less beneficial for Constable's *The Hay Wain*, which faced stiff competition from both within and without the Academy Exhibition. Even after the sale exhibition at the British Institution had closed, *Belshazzar's Feast* continued to compete with the Academy's exhibits, because the picture's new owner put it on display as a paying attraction, first on the Strand and later on Pall Mall.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, *The Hay Wain* was not among the most favourably reviewed works at the Academy, although it did attract positive notice in both the *Observer* and the *Examiner*.¹⁰¹ The critical favourites in 1821 tended to be figure paintings, such as William Hilton's *Nature Blowing Bubbles*, which garnered considerable praise (Fig. 9). A rare dissenting voice in the *London Magazine* complained: "I don't see why a fine plump young woman, lying under the shade of ardent sunflowers ... and idly busied in bubbling water through a reed, should be dignified with the abstract title of Nature".¹⁰² But the vast majority of critics agreed with Robert Hunt, who declared in the *Examiner* that "this noble picture unites the simplicity of Nature with Allegory, the seriousness of moral instruction and satire with the charms of female and infantine beauty It will equally delight the mother, the artist, and the philosopher".¹⁰³ Hilton's picture no doubt benefited from its location within the exhibition, hung above the fireplace in the Great Room.

¹⁰⁴ Location may likewise have contributed to the lacklustre reception of *The Hay Wain*: it was placed in the much smaller, adjoining School Room. ¹⁰⁵ But a spot in the School Room did not necessarily spell doom: another work hanging there, William Etty's *Cleopatra's Arrival in Cilicia*, managed to attract considerable critical attention (Fig. 10). This brightly toned, action-packed composition made Etty's reputation; "I awoke famous", he later recalled. ¹⁰⁶ Among the critics, Etty's *Cleopatra* was received as an elevated work of art, due to its attention to the body, classical subject matter, and visual references to continental masters such as Veronese and Rubens. One reviewer described Etty's painting as a "splendid achievement" in "the highest class", while simply noting in passing that in the same room "there are many good landscapes". ¹⁰⁷ At the British Institution earlier that season, the installation had promoted the importance of Martin's painting, awarding it a central place and surrounding it with companions that encouraged an imperialist reading of the work. For *The Hay Wain* at the Academy, however, the presentation was not as advantageous, nor were the companions as congenial.

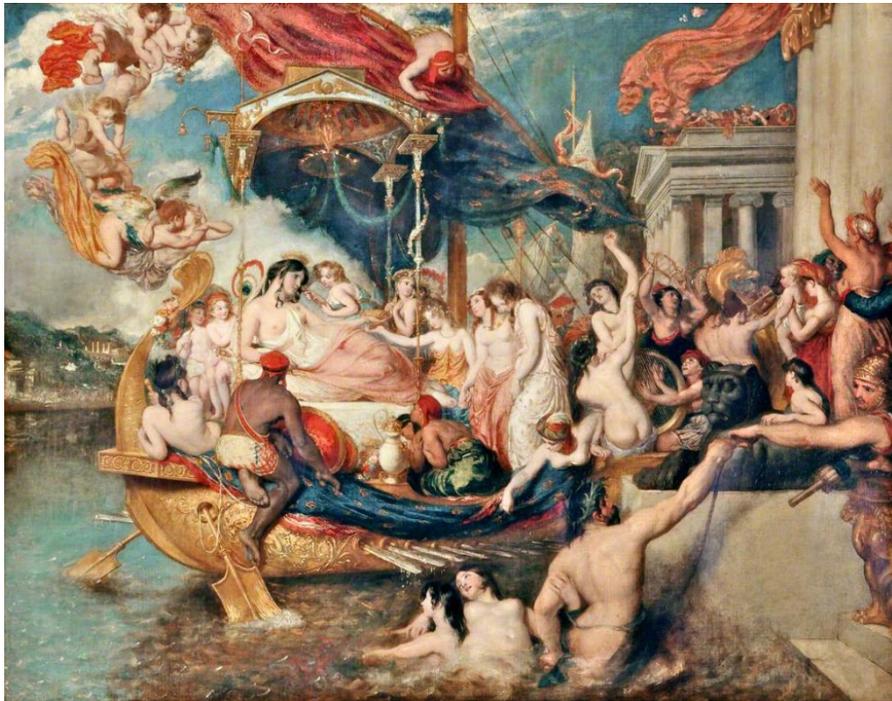


Figure 10.

William Etty, *Cleopatra's Arrival in Cilicia*, 1821, oil on canvas, 106.5 × 132.5 cm. Collection of Lady Lever Art Gallery (LL 3589). Digital image courtesy of Lady Lever Art Gallery.

At the end of the Academy Exhibition of 1821, Constable was left without a purchaser for *The Hay Wain*. Fortunately for the artist, the early nineteenth-century ecosystem of exhibitions provided a multiplicity of venues. In 1822,

when he sent it to the British Institution sale exhibition, the critical reception was much the same: reviewers devoted more column space to landscapes by artists little known today, such as Thomas Christopher Hofland and William Linton. The circumstances of its display may once again partially explain this neglect. *The Hay Wain* was shown on the west side of the Middle Room, where viewers entered through a central stair.¹⁰⁸ Although it was one of the larger paintings hanging on this wall, it was in boisterous company. Remarkably, its companion from the School Room at the Academy in the previous year, Etty's *Cleopatra*, appeared beside it once more.¹⁰⁹ Etty's *Cleopatra* hung to the right of a large work that must have dominated the wall, Mary Anne Ansley's 7 x 9.5 foot Miltonic subject, *Satan Bourne Back to His Chariot after Having Been Wounded by the Arch Angel Michael* (currently unlocated).¹¹⁰ *The Hay Wain* was hung to the left of this massive work, physically and likely visually dwarfed by it. At roughly 4 x 6 feet, Constable's canvas was large for a landscape of this period, but Ansley's history painting was even larger.



Figure 11.

Sarah Margaret Carpenter, *Devotion*, 1821, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 63.5 cm. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (FA.17[O]). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

On the same wall, also to the left of Ansley's monumental canvas, hung a smaller work, *Devotion*, painted by Margaret Carpenter, whose portrait of an Indian man had hung next to Martin's *Belshazzar's Feast* in the same space the year before (Fig. 11). Carpenter's career is emblematic of the myriad artists who operated in the ecosystem of exhibitions without the benefit of academic training, but with the help of multiple exhibition venues.¹¹¹ The daughter of an army officer, she grew up in Salisbury, where her interest in art was encouraged by the second Earl of Radnor, who gave her access to his important collection of Old Master paintings at Longford Castle.¹¹² Once established in London, she built a substantial career as a painter of portraits and subject pictures. She showed regularly at the British Institution and the Royal Academy, as well as contributing to the Paris Salon of 1827, where her exhibit won praise from Delacroix.¹¹³ As the prevalence of her work in

exhibitions of the 1820s suggests, she was a fixture of the early nineteenth-century art world, and it was said that she “would certainly have been a Royal Academician but for her sex.” ¹¹⁴ Although well known to critics and to her fellow artists at the time, Margaret Carpenter remains almost invisible to art history today, in part because she was neither a member of the Academy nor one of its vocal opponents.



Figure 12.

Sarah Margaret Carpenter, *Devotion* (detail), 1821, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 63.5 cm. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (FA.17[O]). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Her exhibit at the British Institution in 1822, *Devotion*, is at first glance an inexplicable and untimely work, one that defies the standard developmental models of art history. It is an intense study of a single figure looking heavenward, in the mode of Counter-Reformation depictions of saints. ¹¹⁵ The lush, varied brushwork attests to Carpenter's technical mastery: the contours of the saint's face are firmly handled, while his collar is merely indicated by two emphatic white streaks of paint (Fig. 12). Carpenter's

picture is striking both as a frankly admiring image of an attractive man by a female artist and as an example of traditionally Catholic iconography produced in a Protestant nation. Just a year earlier a Catholic relief bill, which would have eased restrictions on Catholic male citizens' participation in government, had passed the House of Commons only to be rejected by the Lords.

Within the context of the British Institution, however, Carpenter's apparently anachronistic subject matter made perfect sense: many of the patrons of the British Institution believed that study of continental models was essential for the improvement of British art. Reviewers of the exhibition remained silent about the religious implications of Carpenter's *Devotion*, while praising its formal qualities; one critic went so far as to declare that it "wants nothing but the touch of time to rank it with some of the best specimens of the Italian Masters".¹¹⁶ This accolade exemplifies the comparative mode of viewing enabled by the ecosystem of exhibitions, whose simultaneous displays had the effect, in the words of one critic, of "bringing the works of the ancient and modern Artists into immediate comparison".¹¹⁷ Seen in this light, Carpenter's picture represents not an object out of step with its art-historical moment, but one successfully matched with its original exhibition venue by an artist skilled at navigating the ecosystem of exhibitions.

Carpenter's *Devotion* soon found a buyer and eventually entered the collection of John Sheepshanks, who, in 1857, included it in his important gift of British paintings to the nation.¹¹⁸ Its companion, *The Hay Wain*, had also attracted some critical notice, but at the end of the exhibition, Constable had yet to find a buyer who would meet his asking price. But the display of the work at the British Institution nonetheless enabled its future fame, because it had been seen there by a French art dealer of English extraction, John Arrowsmith, who wanted the picture "to form part of an exhibition in Paris—to show them the nature of the English art".¹¹⁹ Although Constable found his initial offer insultingly low, negotiations continued, as the artist was also sensible of the possibilities: "I hardly know what to do—it may promote my fame & procure commissions but it may not."¹²⁰ He also had to overcome his jingoistic prejudices, less than a decade after Waterloo, declaring at one point that "It is too bad to allow myself to be knocked down by a French man." Eventually, however, a deal was reached, and Arrowsmith arranged for three of Constable's works to be shown at the Paris Salon of 1824. This time, they were not overlooked, thanks in no small part to the efforts of their new owner. Arrowsmith drummed up enthusiasm for Constable's works prior to the opening of the Salon by making them available in his rooms. There, they could be studied up close, at length, and with fewer competitors—an opportunity taken by Delacroix, among others.¹²¹ This promotion in a smaller display venue set the stage for the works'

acknowledgement at the official exhibition. Although Constable's canvases were not originally well placed at the Salon, interest was such that *The Hay Wain* and one other work were moved, after the exhibition opened, to what Constable described as "a post of honour ... two prime places near the line in the principal room". ¹²² Clearly, Arrowsmith's advocacy had a beneficial effect. The result is well known: fame and influence for Constable in France and an elevated reputation at home. ¹²³ *The Hay Wain* was sought for the French national collections, but sold elsewhere, and eventually was accessioned by the National Gallery, London, where it has become an icon of national identity.

In 1848, a young woman from Manchester named Mary Joanna Hutchinson wrote to her brother, a cotton mill owner, describing a visit to London. Her itinerary was typically crowded: she walked on Hampstead Heath with her uncle on one day and on another, she wrote, "I went with him to the British Institution, there are some very fine pictures in it this year. Then Mary & I went to see a Panorama of Vienna, that too is very beautiful. ... I have also been gratified by a sight of the Duke of Wellington". ¹²⁴ At the end of the period under consideration here, art exhibitions, panoramas, and celebrities could still be treated as comparable urban attractions. For Hutchinson, both a gathering of hundreds of contemporary artworks and a single massive, illusionistic painting of foreign city were urban display experiences to be judged in concert—and she found both to be "very beautiful". This type of viewing is typical of the ecosystem of exhibitions in nineteenth-century London. As this article has sought to demonstrate, our approach to writing the history of this period should be similarly expansive.

The ecosystem of exhibitions challenges scholars to consider many participants at a particular moment of visual production, not just the traditionally prestigious or immediately charismatic. Starting with an installation rather than with a particular artist or set of artists provides a fresh perspective on nineteenth-century art. This model does not dispense with hierarchy altogether—as in a biological ecosystem, there are more and less successful actors. But it encourages a broader scope for research. Constable's importance to the history of art is unquestioned. But, as the objects discussed above demonstrate, his was not the only work of significant interest or merit to be shown in London in these years. Nineteenth-century exhibitions and exhibits should be studied as they were consumed, in combination with one another. It is insights such as this that the history of exhibitions has to offer the history of art.

Footnotes

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- 6 For a corrective approach, see Paul Barlow, "Fear and Loathing of the Academic, or Just What is it that Makes the Avant-Garde so Different, so Appealing?", in Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd (eds.), *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 15–32; for the persistence of this model see, for example, Andrew Graciano (ed.), *Exhibiting Outside the Academy, Salon and Biennial, 1775–1999: Alternative Venues for Display* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 4. In addition, a recent publication that rejects this binary for artists nonetheless describes other exhibition societies as "alternatives" or "rivals"; see Sarah Monks, "Life Study: Living with the Royal Academy, 1768–1848", in Sarah Monks, John Barrell, and Mark Hallett (eds.), *Living with the Royal Academy: Artistic Ideals and Experiences, 1768–1848* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 1–3.
- 7 Arthur George Tansley, "The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts and Terms", *Ecology* 16, no. 3 (July 1935), 299.
- 8 Laura Cameron and Sinead Early, "The Ecosystem—Movements, Connections, Tensions and Translations", *Geoforum* 65 (October 2015), 473. A recent article deploys a related term, ecology (in this case borrowed from psychology rather than biology) to characterize the relationship between art exhibitions and their urban environment, but does not consider relationships among exhibitions. See Dell Upton, "The Urban Ecology of Art in Antebellum New York", in Andrew Hemingway and Alan Wallach (eds.), *Transatlantic Romanticism: British and American Art and Literature, 1790–1860* (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 49–66.
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- 11 Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", in *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 153.
- 12 Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex", *New Formations*, no. 4 (Spring 1988), 76, 82.
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- 15 Alexander Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

- 16 A full survey would also include groups such as journalists, editors, publishers, auctioneers, art dealers, artists' suppliers, frame-makers, and porters and other working-class individuals hired to police exhibitions. On auction houses' interactions with each other and with exhibition societies, see Matthew Lincoln and Abram Fox, "The Temporal Dimensions of the London Art Auction, 1780-1835", *British Art Studies* 4 (Autumn 2016): doi:[10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-04/afox-mlincoln](https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-04/afox-mlincoln).
- 17 For a recent example of such an approach, see Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Still Thinking about Olympia's Maid", *Art Bulletin* 97, no. 4 (2015): 430-451.
- 18 On the development of comparative viewing in the eighteenth century, see Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3; Holger Hoock, "'Struggling against a Vulgar Prejudice': Patriotism and the Collecting of British Art at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 3 (July 2010): 585-588; Carole Paul (ed.), *The First Modern Museums of Art: The Birth of an Institution in 18th- and Early-19th-Century Europe* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty, 2012), xiv.
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- 22 See, for example, "Fine Arts", *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 July 1821, 334.
- 23 "Fine Arts", *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 June 1821, 282.
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- 25 Altick, *The Shows of London*, 99-116, 408-415; Oskar Bätschmann, *The Artist in the Modern World: The Conflict Between Market and Self-Expression* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1997), 29-52; Giles Waterfield, "The Town House as Gallery of Art", *London Journal* 20, no. 1 (1995): 47-66; Anne Nellis Richter, "Improving Public Taste in the Private Interior: Gentlemen's Galleries in Post-Napoleonic London", in Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin (eds.), *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors* (London: Routledge, 2010), 169-186.
- 26 These include the Society of Painters in Water Colours (1804), the British Institution (1805), the Associated Artists in Watercolour (1808), Society of Painters in Oil and Water Colours (1814), and the Society of British Artists (1823). See, also, Peter Funnell, "The London Art World and its Institutions", in Celina Fox (ed.), *London: World City, 1800-1840* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 155-166.
- 27 Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 35; Pamela Fletcher, "Shopping for Art: The Rise of the Commercial Art Gallery, 1850s-90s", in Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich (eds.), *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 47-64.
- 28 On the British Institution, see Peter Fullerton, "Patronage and Pedagogy: The British Institution in the Early Nineteenth Century", *Art History* 5, no. 1 (March 1982): 59-72; Ann Pullan, "Public Goods or Private Interests? The British Institution in the Early Nineteenth Century", in Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan (eds.), *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 27-44; Nicholas Tromans, "Museum or Market? The British Institution", in Paul Barlow and Colin Trodd (eds.), *Governing Cultures: Art Institutions in Victorian London* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 44-55; and Roach, *Pictures-Within-Pictures in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 24-63.
- 29 Susan Pearce, "William Bullock: Collections and Exhibitions at the Egyptian Hall, London, 1816-25", *Journal of the History of Collections* 20, no. 1 (2008): 17-35.
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- 33 Anne Koval, "The 'Artists' Have Come out and the 'British' Remain: The Whistler Faction at the Society of British Artists", in Elizabeth Prettejohn (ed.), *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 90.
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- 47 For these works, see Helmut von Effra and Allen Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 358–360. West may have been emulating David Wilkie, who in 1812 showed the sketch of the *Village Holiday* at the Academy, and the full-scale oil in his own exhibition. Tromans, *David Wilkie, 1785–1841*, 19.
- 48 "Fine Arts: Royal Exhibition, Somerset House", *Belle Assemblée*, August 1815, 39.
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- 59 Riding, "Staging *The Raft of the Medusa*", 3–5.
- 60 Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 5.
- 61 Hughes, "Sanguinary Engagements", 93.
- 62 Crary, "Géricault, the Panorama, and Sites of Reality in the Early Nineteenth Century", 13.

- 63 Giles Waterfield (ed.), *Palaces of Art: Art Galleries in Britain, 1790-1990* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1991), 131; C.S. Matheson, "'A Shilling Well Laid Out': The Royal Academy's Early Public", in David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on The Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 40; for a provocative theory of how publicity efforts enabled "consumption without attendance", see Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 47.
- 64 Holger Hoock, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Art and the Politics of British Culture, 1760-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 207.
- 65 Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain, 1700-1914* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 219.
- 66 Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 266; in the 1830s, the Mechanics' Institute exhibitions charged a lower admission fee of half a shilling, which made them accessible to "artisans and mechanics", but not to most "ordinary factory workers or labourers", see Toshio Kusamitsu, "Great Exhibitions Before 1851", *History Workshop* 9 (Spring 1980), 74.
- 67 Neff, "The History Theatre", 74.
- 68 Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 5; David H. Solkin, "Crowds and Connoisseurs: Looking at Genre Painting at Somerset House", in David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on The Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 169-171.
- 69 Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 4.
- 70 Marjorie Morgan, *Manners, Morals and Class in England, 1774-1858* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 5-6.
- 71 G.C. Boase, "Harford, John Scandrett (1787-1866)", rev. Charles Brayne, in H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/12311.
- 72 Hoock, *The King's Artists*, 216.
- 73 John Scandrett Harford to Louisa Harford, 3 May [1845], Harford Family Papers, 28048, C80/11, Bristol Record Office. The year can be identified as 1845 from the description of Edward Hodges Baily's *Statue, Nymph Preparing for the Bath*, no. 1372. Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts*, Vol. 1, 95.
- 74 Alice Harford, *Annals of the Harford Family* (London: Westminster Press, 1909), 67.
- 75 Arthur Burns, "Blomfield, Charles James (1786-1857)", in H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/2668.
- 76 The contrast between Turner's prosaic physical appearance and his visionary artistic productions was often noted. Andrew Wilton, *Turner in his Time* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987), 6.
- 77 This characterization of the audiences at art exhibitions is indebted to Hannah Greig's insights about the social function of eighteenth-century gardens, see "'All Together and All Distinct': Public Sociability and Social Exclusivity in London's Pleasure Gardens, ca. 1740-1800", *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 1 (January 2012): 50-75.
- 78 Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, edited by Deirdre le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 179; on the Liverpool Museum, see Altick, *The Shows of London*, 235. For similar itineraries, see Gillespie, "Richard Du Bourg's 'Classical Exhibition', 1775-1819", 265.
- 79 British Institution, *Catalogue of the Works of British Artists Placed in the Gallery of the British Institution, Pall Mall, for Exhibition and Sale* (London: W. Bulmer, 1811), 15, 26.
- 80 Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, edited by Thomas Sadler (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1869), Vol. 1, 245-248. On the connections between art and the criminal body during this period, see Meredith Gamer, "Criminal and Martyr: The Case of James Legg's Anatomical Crucifixion", in Sally Promey (ed.), *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 495-513.
- 81 Kay Dian Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter: Genius as Alibi in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 38-39.
- 82 Hallett, "Reading the Walls"; Hughes, "Ships of the 'line'"; Roach, "Rehanging Reynolds at the British Institution".
- 83 Myrone, *John Martin*, 13-20, 99-112.
- 84 Andrew Hemingway, "Art Exhibitions as Leisure-Class Rituals in Early Nineteenth-Century London", in Brian Allen (ed.), *Towards a Modern Art World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 105.
- 85 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (1939): 34-49.
- 86 Nicholas Tromans, *David Wilkie: The People's Painter* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); David H. Solkin, *Painting Out of the Ordinary: Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2008); and Myrone, *John Martin*.
- 87 See, for example, "British Gallery: Mr. Martin's Picture", *Observer*, 18 February 1821, 3; "Fine Arts: British Institution Gallery", *New Monthly Magazine*, March 1821, 108-109.
- 88 Robin Hamlyn, *Belshazzar's Feast, 1820* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1989), 6. The actual attendance numbers were even higher: the exhibition was also visited by an unrecorded number of British Institution members and their guests, who were not charged for individual entry.
- 89 Myrone, *John Martin*, 12.

- 90 John Bonehill, "Exhibiting War: John Singleton Copley's 'The Siege of Gibraltar' and the Staging of History", in John Bonehill and Geoff Quilley (eds.), *Conflicting Visions: War and Visual Culture in Britain and France, c. 1700-1830* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 151.
- 91 As Martin Myrone observes, this quality would have been emphasized at the work's next venue, where a numbered diagram designed by the artist encouraged a complex circuit of viewing. See Myrone, *John Martin*, 100.
- 92 W.H. Parry, "Fine Arts: British Gallery.—No. II", *Literary Chronicle*, 24 February 1821, 125; "The British Institution", *London Magazine*, April 1821, 437.
- 93 Robert Hunt, "Fine Arts: British Institution", *Examiner*, 4 March 1821, 141.
- 94 Catherine Roach, "Images as Evidence? Morse and the Genre of Gallery Painting", in Peter John Brownlee (ed.), *Samuel F.B. Morse's Gallery of the Louvre and the Art of Invention* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 46-59.
- 95 "Monthly View", *Belle Assemblée*, March 1828, 133.
- 96 Waterfield, *Palaces of Art*, 51; John Sunderland and David H. Solkin, "Staging the Spectacle", in David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on The Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 24.
- 97 British Institution, *Catalogue of the Works of British Artists Placed in the Gallery of the British Institution for Exhibition and Sale* (London: William Nicol, 1821), 14-15.
- 98 On his London career, see Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 43.
- 99 Parry, "Fine Arts: British Gallery", 126. See, also Andrew Hemingway, "The Politics of Style: Allston's and Martin's Belshazzars Compared", in Andrew Hemingway and Alan Wallach (eds.), *Transatlantic Romanticism: British and American Art and Literature, 1790-1860* (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 122.
- 100 Myrone, *John Martin*, 101.
- 101 Graham Reynolds, *The Later Paintings and Drawings of John Constable* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), Vol. 1, 69.
- 102 Cornelius Van Vinkbooms, "Exhibition of the Royal Academy", *London Magazine*, July 1821, 73.
- 103 Robert Hunt, "Fine Arts: Royal Academy Exhibition", *Examiner*, 13 May 1821, 301.
- 104 "Fine Arts: Royal Academy", *Literary Gazette*, 12 May 1821, 296.
- 105 Anne Lyles, "Soliciting Attention: Constable, the Royal Academy and the Critics", in Anne Lyles (ed.) *Constable: The Great Landscapes* (London: Tate, 2006), 37.
- 106 Sarah Burnage, Mark Hallett, and Laura Turner, (eds.), *William Etty: Art and Controversy* (York: York Museums Trust, 2011), 22, 31.
- 107 "Fine Arts: Royal Academy", *Literary Gazette*, 12 May 1821, 296.
- 108 British Institution, *Catalogue of the Works of British Artists Placed in the Gallery of the British Institution for Exhibition and Sale* (London: William Nicol, 1822), 21.
- 109 Exhibited under the title *Cleopatra, in the Character of Venus, Sailing Down the River Cydnus. Catalogue of the Works of British Artists*, 21.
- 110 On Ansley, see Ellen C. Clayton, *English Female Artists* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1876), 410.
- 111 On the crucial role of exhibitions in the careers of women artists, see Paris Amanda Spies-Gans, "Exceptional, but not Exceptions: Public Exhibitions and the Rise of the Woman Artist in London and Paris, 1760-1830", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 51, no. 4 (2018): 393-416.
- 112 Richard J. Smith, *Margaret Sarah Carpenter (1793-1872): A Brief Biography* (Salisbury: Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, 1991), 2.
- 113 Smith, *Margaret Sarah Carpenter*, 2; Eugène Delacroix, *Correspondance générale d'Eugène Delacroix*, edited by André Joubin (Paris: Plon, 1935), 1:205-6.
- 114 "Wm. Hookham Carpenter, Esq., F.S.A.", *Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1866, 410.
- 115 Ronald Parkinson, *Catalogue of British Oil Paintings, 1820-1860* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1990), 22.
- 116 "Fine Arts", *Literary Gazette*, 16 February 1822, 104. See, also, "British Institution", *Morning Chronicle*, 29 January 1822, 3; Robert Hunt, "Fine Arts: British Institution Gallery", *Examiner*, 17 February 1822, 108.
- 117 A Connoisseur, "The British Gallery", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, June 1821, 340-341.
- 118 Parkinson, *Catalogue of British Oil Paintings, 1820-1860*, 22.
- 119 For this and the following two quotations, see John Constable, *John Constable's Correspondence*, edited by R.B. Beckett (Suffolk: Suffolk Records Society, 1968), Vol. 6, 86-91.
- 120 Arrowsmith initially offered £70, less than half of the artist's asking price; by way of contrast, Carpenter's *Devotion* sold for £36. Constable, *John Constable's Correspondence*, Vol. 6, 87; Parkinson, *Catalogue of British Oil Paintings, 1820-1860*, 22.

- 121 Michel Florisoone, "Constable and the 'Massacres De Scio' by Delacroix", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 20, no. 1/2 (1957): 180–185.
- 122 Constable, *John Constable's Correspondence*, Vol. 6, 185; see, also: H. Isherwood Kay, "The Hay Wain", *Burlington Magazine* 62, no. 363 (June 1933), 282.
- 123 Patrick Noon, "Colour and Effect: Anglo-French Painting in London and Paris", in Patrick Noon (ed.), *Constable to Delacroix: British Art and the French Romantics* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), 21–25.
- 124 Mary Joanna Hutchinson to John Hutchinson, 22 March 1848, FHU/2/4/2/8, Hutchinson Family and Estate Papers, Bury Museum and Archives.

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“The Sense of Nearness”: Harriet Hosmer’s *Clasped Hands* and the Materials and Bodies of Nineteenth-Century Life Casting

Katherine Fein

Abstract

*In 1853, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning sat for a plaster life cast of their intertwined right hands. Previous accounts of this sculpture have interpreted it as a sentimental testament to the poets’ famous romance, neglecting the complexity of the casting process. This article looks anew at Hosmer’s *Clasped Hands* by combining close examination of the plaster and bronze versions with historical records of life casting and recent theoretical approaches to the body. This analysis draws attention to the multifaceted negotiations among artistic materials and human hands that conspired to produce this sculpture. In doing so, it troubles widely held assumptions about the indexicality of life casts, proposing instead a dynamic set of relationships better described as nearness.*

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning encountered daguerreotypes shortly after they debuted in 1839. In an 1843 letter, she described her fascination with the new photographic medium:

It is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases—but the association, and the sense of nearness involved in the thing, the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed for ever! It is the very sanctification of portraits I think ... that I would rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest Artist's work ever produced. ¹

Ten years after writing this letter, during which time she met and married Robert Browning, Barrett Browning posed with her husband for a related form of portraiture: a plaster life cast of their right hands by sculptor Harriet Goodhue Hosmer (Figs. [1](#) and [2](#)). Barrett Browning's description of daguerreotypes could also apply to life casts, which similarly capture likeness, act as memorials to loved ones, and bridge spatial and temporal distance through direct physical relationships. Although her articulation of "nearness" might be dismissed as Victorian sentimentality, it also suggests a framework for describing the complex interactions among individuals and materials that conspire to produce both daguerreotypes and life casts.



Figure 1.

Harriet Hosmer, Clasped Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1853, plaster, 8.3 × 21 × 10.8 cm. Collection of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Digital image courtesy of Harvard University | Photo: Kevin Grady.



Figure 2.

Harriet Hosmer, *Clasped Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 1853, plaster, 8.3 x 21 x 10.8 cm. Collection of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Digital image courtesy of Harvard University | Photo: Kevin Grady.

What Barrett Browning deemed *nearness* has been theorized as *indexicality* since the turn of the twentieth century, when semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce identified indexes as signs that bear physical connections to their referents.² Artists, critics, and scholars have extensively explored this commonality of photography and cast sculpture. Susan Sontag, for example, wrote that a photograph is “not only an image” or “an interpretation of the real” but also “a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask”.³ Rosalind Krauss connected photography and body casts in an influential 1977 essay, elaborating a notion of indexicality premised on contingency: “The indexical presence of either the photograph or the body-cast demands that the work be viewed as a deliberate short-circuiting of issues of style. Countermanding the artist’s possible formal intervention in creating the work is the overwhelming physical presence of the original object”.⁴ Krauss privileged the object at the expense of the artist, the latter asserting herself only to emphasize her absence. Understanding cast sculpture through the lens of indexicality thus results in a sense of unity: the conjunction of the cast and the object. Where Barrett Browning marveled at how daguerreotypes bring someone or something near, Krauss argued for the continued “physical presence” of that body or thing within a photograph or cast. Krauss’ commitment to the object’s presence precludes artistic or material intervention. In contrast, Barrett

Browning's notion of nearness—which recognizes the intimacy between object and representation while preserving their distinction—makes room for negotiation among multiple agents, including the artist.

To expand the investigation into these ontological issues, or to circumvent them entirely, many historians of photography have moved “beyond the index” (to quote a recent compilation of essays).⁵ Generative theoretical literature has also emerged around death masks, probing the liminality of these objects and the relationship between figural sculpture and mortality.⁶ Furthermore, scholars have researched life casting in specific historical eras, using archival sources to recover lost techniques, but the practice of life casting in the United States and Europe during the nineteenth century remains comparatively understudied.⁷ Inspired by this innovative work as well as recent ecocritical, feminist, and new materialist scholarship, this article attends to the individuals, materials, and processes involved in the making of one particular life cast: Hosmer's *Clasped Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. In doing so, it questions indexicality as the dominant interpretive frame for life casts, proposing instead a dynamic, vital, and complex set of relationships better described as *nearness*.

Ten versions of Hosmer's sculpture are known to exist: the original plaster cast, which she produced in Rome in 1853, an undated second plaster version, and eight versions in bronze, likely cast before 1896.⁸ *Clasped Hands* stands out among nineteenth-century sculptures, because it numbers among the few life casts conceived as finished works of art, rather than preparatory studies or personal mementos. Within this small category, even fewer present the body parts of two individuals in a single sculptural form. Moreover, most nineteenth-century sculptural casting was performed by studio and foundry employees whose names have long been forgotten; in contrast, *Clasped Hands* carries a celebrated byline. Born in Massachusetts in 1830, Hosmer was a prominent member of a transatlantic cultural community of artists and writers centered in Rome, including the Brownings.⁹ *Clasped Hands* occupies a singular position in her oeuvre: she produced the cast at the outset of her artistic career and, like many Anglo-American and British sculptors working in Italy, went on to work primarily in marble and carve large-scale neoclassical figures, many on public commission.¹⁰ Two versions of *Clasped Hands* are the only extant plaster sculptures by Hosmer, and only two other bronze sculptures by her survive. No other life or death casts created by Hosmer have been identified.¹¹

Despite its uniqueness, *Clasped Hands* has largely escaped scholars' attention, and in several institutional collections, it remains in storage or displayed as a work of ephemera. Where it has been addressed, observers have dwelled upon its tender evocation of the Brownings' famous romance.

Nathaniel Hawthorne inaugurated this tradition in his 1860 romance *The Marble Faun*: upon seeing a carved marble sculpture of a hand, one character remarks, “It is as good in its way ... as Harriet Hosmer’s clasped hands of Browning and his wife, symbolizing the individuality and heroic union of two high, poetic lives!”¹² More recently, scholars have invoked a similar symbolism. Melissa Dabakis, for example, has described *Clasped Hands* as a “sentimental sculpture” that “serves as a testament to the famous love between the two poets”.¹³ Nicholas Penny has discussed *Clasped Hands* as “the inimitable impress of the mortal flesh of these immortal poets, eternally united”.¹⁴ Introducing a critical perspective, Marcia Pointon concludes an article about death casts with a brief consideration of *Clasped Hands*, basing her analysis on a bronze version. She places it in dialogue with the Brownings’ writings and many other body casts in an effort to describe “some of the creative anachronisms inspired by these difficult-to-categorize, and yet fascinating, things”.¹⁵ Although she gestures to the “extensive process and agency” of cast sculpture that this article will take up, she does not attend to the distinct materialities of plaster and bronze, nor does she probe the particularities of casting living, rather than deceased, bodies.¹⁶

This article looks anew at *Clasped Hands* and nineteenth-century life casting by first examining the materials and processes involved in the sculpture’s making before turning to the specific individuals and bodies it represents. Accounts of cast sculpture that focus on indexicality typically discredit material and artistic agencies in favor of foregrounding the persistent presence of the original body within the resulting cast; departing from this precedent, this article initially neglects the specific human hands that, in 1853, came into contact with the first plaster mold. The first two sections examine the plaster and bronze casts alongside nineteenth-century sculpture manuals and instructional texts, many of which have not previously been studied, to understand the entanglement of material and human actors involved in the casts’ making. The third and fourth sections take up the embodied experience of life casting for both sitters and artists. Ultimately, this article argues that the Brownings’ hands endure not within but near Hosmer’s casts, mediated by the interactions among plaster, bronze, and bodies.

Plaster

All ten versions of *Clasped Hands* feature two right hands holding each other. The smaller hand, bony, with pronounced veins and knuckles, nestles within the larger—large enough that the thumb and three fingers curl around the smaller. The larger hand has pronounced veins, too, particularly one along the back of the hand. All ten fingernails are neatly trimmed, neither long nor

short. Neither hand bears any jewelry or rings. Both hands end abruptly as if their forearms were sliced cleanly just above the cuffs of their sleeves. The sleeve cuff of the smaller hand is scalloped, while the sleeve cuff of the larger hand is smooth and split on the inner wrist, suggesting a button closure out of view.

The 1853 cast is rendered here in three dimensions, and readers of this digital article can manipulate it just as in-person viewers can rotate, flip, lift, and scrutinize the physical object (Fig. 3). When it rests on a flat surface, *Clasped Hands* lies steadily with the larger hand below, its palm and wrist facing up. Inverting the position results in one or both wrists hovering above the surface. Dull white in color, with yellow and brown undertones, the cast shows signs of aging, and some original marks are obscured by later damage. In other places, intricate details are clearly visible, including on the knuckles and nails of the smaller hand, which display precisely demarcated cuticles. Hatch marks scatter across the surface of both hands, alongside wrinkles, hairs, and pores. The flat portions on each of the wrists—the only surfaces not captured by the life casting process—feature tangled markings. On the wrist of the larger hand, the name “Robert” is legible amid indecipherable inscriptions (Fig. 4). On each end, a thin wire protrudes in a loop.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 3.

3D model of Harriet Goodhue Hosmer, *Clasped hands of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning*, 1853. Scanned from plaster cast in the collection of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Papers of Harriet Goodhue Hosmer, 1834-1959, A-162, card file box. Digital image courtesy of Digital model produced by Jeremy Guillette, courtesy of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2019.



Figure 4.

Harriet Hosmer, *Clasped Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (inscription “Robert”), 1853, plaster, 8.3 × 21 × 10.8 cm. Collection of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Digital image courtesy of Harvard University | Photo: Kevin Grady.

Harriet Hosmer cast this first version of *Clasped Hands* in plaster. In the United States and Europe during the nineteenth century, sculptors purchased dehydrated gypsum as powder then mixed it with water just before use, aiming for “the consistency of cream”, as one 1838 article advised, or, according to a later guide, a viscosity “like thick milk”.¹⁷ Édouard Joseph Dantan’s 1887 painting *Casting from Life* demonstrates this preparation: a bag of dehydrated gypsum sits on one side, a bucket of water sits on the other, and within the artists’ reach are two bowls of wet plaster (Fig. 5). As an 1895 article asserted, “Everything depends upon quickness and upon the thorough mixture of the plaster. Plenty of it should be in readiness, and it should be mixed as thick as the water will hold”.¹⁸ In the course of the chemical recombination of gypsum and water, the material sets, first warming and then cooling in the process. Upon setting, the plaster becomes hard and, unless exposed to extreme conditions, does not shrink or crack, though it remains vulnerable to abrasions and surface damage. An 1885 article warned that plaster is “easily disfigured, harboring with greedy hospitality every particle of dust”.¹⁹



Figure 5.

Édouard Joseph Dantan, *Casting from Life*, 1887, oil on canvas, 165.1 × 131.5 cm. Collection of the Gothenburg Museum of Art, Gothenberg, Sweden (F 21). Digital image courtesy of Gothenburg Museum of Art.

Hosmer claimed that her familiarity with plaster enabled her to produce *Clasped Hands*—at least the first version—herself, as opposed to relying on studio staff. She seems to have experimented with plaster casting, including of hands, in her youth: an 1868 biographical sketch traced her “passion for sculpture” to her late teens, when she made “plaster casts of the hands of her mates”.²⁰ Once she had established her practice, her studio, like those of her fellow sculptors, certainly abounded in plaster, wielded by Hosmer and her employees for various purposes associated with the preparation of marble figures.²¹ In an 1896 speech Hosmer delivered in Chicago, she emphasized her involvement in the cast’s making. Recalling her first winter in Rome, she said,

I then conceived the idea of casting their hands and asked Mrs. Browning if she would consent. “Yes” she said “provided you will cast them yourself but I will not sit for the *Formatore*”. Consequently I did the casting myself and therefore can guarantee their genuineness. ²²

Neither this speech nor any other source documents the particular method she employed to create the intricate form of *Clasped Hands*. It would have posed myriad challenges to even a skillful caster: many undercuts, narrow shapes, the necessity of removing two hands from the mold, and, above all, the need to accommodate the comfort of both sitters.

In the absence of explicit documentation about the process of casting *Clasped Hands*, instructions published in the nineteenth century and examples of life casts by Hosmer’s peers record the process that she must have undertaken. Contrary to claims of contingency in accounts of indexical portraiture, the complexity of the historical life casting process—from making a mold of living bodies to producing a plaster cast from that mold—speaks to both material and artistic agency in determining the resulting sculpture. Historical sources reveal how human hands and artistic materials came together in tension, constraining, resisting, and threatening one another. Indicative of broader assumptions about body casts, Nicholas Penny has suggested that the “documentary value” of *Clasped Hands* would have been “diminished by the assertion of artistic mediation”. ²³ In contrast, these understudied texts suggest a historical conception of life casting distinct from later interpretations, one which recognized an artist’s skill and choices without diminishing the significance of the resulting sculpture.

Before Hosmer applied plaster to the Brownings’ bodies, she must have prepared their skin for prolonged contact with the setting mold. Like the first cast, the original mold was almost certainly produced in plaster, the only material available to Hosmer that would not harm the Brownings’ hands. Nineteenth-century sculpture manuals prescribed various materials that could protect skin and hair from painful exposure to hardening plaster without depriving the resulting mold of detail. One author suggested “a slight coating of salad oil”, and later accounts encouraged the use of “vaseline or lard”, if oil did not prove substantial enough, or “butter or oleomargarine” for particularly hairy bodies. ²⁴ Instructors also provided helpful tips for ensuring proper preparation, such as: “Hold the hand between the eye and the light and if hair can be seen it must be made to lie flat upon the skin, as it would otherwise be pulled out when the mold is removed—a sensation which is said to be unpleasant”. ²⁵ Another unpleasant sensation threatened if a sculptor applied too much plaster. Manuals suggested aiming for a thickness between

1/8 and 1/4 inch, or else, as one writer warned, “the fingers in the cast are very likely to be broken by the weight of the plaster forming the mold”. This author further cautioned against pouring plaster onto the human body, opting instead for layering it gently with a spoon.²⁶ On a smaller scale, these warnings recall a more well-known incident, in which British artist Benjamin Robert Haydon nearly suffocated a man to death in an attempt to create a cast of his torso in 1810.²⁷

Indeed, Hosmer numbered among many artists who produced life casts, often as studies for sculpture in marble, bronze, or other durable materials. As with other sculptural processes, plaster casting, both of human bodies and other sculptures, might have been undertaken by well-known sculptors themselves or by the assistants they employed in their workshops. While relatively few nineteenth-century plaster life casts have endured, even fewer nineteenth-century plaster molds survive. Sculptors intentionally destroyed many plaster molds, known as waste molds, in the process of producing casts, and many others were surely discarded over time. A few extant examples, roughly contemporary to *Clasped Hands*, hail from the studio of Hiram Powers, including this mold of a child’s hand (Fig. 6). It demonstrates that Powers and his workshop created piece molds, or molds divided into sections to accommodate undercuts and complex forms. Technical analysis has revealed that Powers’ studio crafted an eight-piece mold to cast this single, splayed hand.²⁸ Hosmer, too, must have created a multiple-piece mold to capture the Brownings’ intertwined hands.²⁹



Figure 6.

Studio of Hiram Powers, *Mold of a Child's Hand*, 1840–1850, plaster. Collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC (1968.155.173A-F). Digital image courtesy of Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.

Making a piece mold constituted a critical step in Hosmer's process and epitomizes how her choices and the materiality of plaster influenced the resulting cast. As an 1838 article explained, creating a piece mold required "great tact and judgment" on the part of the sculptor, "since attention must be paid to all the depressions and hollows of the figure, and the divisions cut in such directions as to facilitate the removal of the pieces".³⁰ An 1895 article intended for amateurs advised the use of a "waxed silk thread" for cutting the pieces, but qualified that "since the shell cannot be made very thick, breakages frequently occur, and much skill is necessary in putting together the pieces of the mould in order to get a cast from them".³¹ Specifically with regard to plaster casts of hands, one manual noted how the position of hands and fingers would determine the number of pieces: "If the hand is partly closed, or is holding something, two or more threads may be necessary to so divide the mould that the hand can be taken out".³² Often, plaster casts display evidence of their molds, in the form of raised lines at the places where the pieces of the mold intersected. Despite its poor condition, the 1853 cast features a faint trace of a piece mold process along the larger pinky down to the wrist. According to one 1885 writer, "the raised lines, which always show the union of the different pieces of a mold, are never removed for fear of injury to the surface, but are kept as fine as possible, so that, in most cases, only close inspection will reveal the gossamer-like threads".³³ This passage indicates how artistic intervention

might actually enhance the reference of a cast sculpture to the represented object, rather than diminish it. The raised lines that remain evince the casting process and the artist's choices, indirectly revealing the object's former presence.

Once the plaster mold had been successfully removed from the Brownings' hands, Hosmer produced the first plaster cast. As she did with the Brownings' hands at the outset of the casting process, she had to coat the surface of the mold with a viscous barrier, probably shellac, to prevent the mold and the cast from adhering to each other. The mold was likely tinted with "bluing or other color" so that the mold and the cast, both made of plaster, "could be easily distinguished".³⁴ Due to the fragility of plaster, artists often hurried to produce the first cast and thus maintain "the delicate texture of the skin" captured by the casting process.³⁵ Many nineteenth-century manuals emphasized the importance of the texture of life casts. For one author, "the fine outlines and characteristic surfaces" constituted "the very soul of the work of art".³⁶ Another insisted that "the special beauty of a cast from life is in its natural surface".³⁷

Despite such emphasis on the plaster surface, the cast could have been marked or refined after removal from the multiple-piece mold and before the plaster set completely. Hosmer may have chosen to obscure traces of the piece-mold process by smoothing the places where the pieces intersected, as discussed above. At this stage, too, the text on each of the wrists was probably added. Although now difficult to read, these inscriptions seem to have featured the sitters' names on their corresponding wrists. In 1891, a visitor to Hosmer's studio remarked, "One of the interesting things in Miss Hosmer's studio is a plaster cast of the clasped hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Upon the wrists at either end are the autographs of the poets, with the date".³⁸ The use of the term "autograph"—reiterated in subsequent publications of the 1890s—raises the enticing possibility that the Brownings' names were manually inscribed by the poets themselves, their hands reflexively marking their own representation and attesting to the authenticity of the likeness.³⁹ Whether the inscriptions were added by Hosmer or the Brownings, and whether or not they displayed signatures indicative of unique handwriting, the wrists interrupted the accurate and precisely rendered surface, and offered an opportunity to enhance and describe the sculpture.

When the first cast hardened completely, it could then serve as a model for additional versions, especially if the original mold was destroyed in the first casting process. Making new molds from the first cast might account for the metal wires protruding from the Brownings' wrists, as they would support the easy maneuvering of the object during further casting processes. No longer

obliged to cater to the comfort of her sitters, Hosmer could employ other mold-making and casting techniques, as she would go on to do in producing bronze versions. For the later plaster version, however, the piece-mold process was likely repeated, evident in the raised lines contouring the surface (Fig. 7).



Figure 7.

Harriet Hosmer, *Clasped Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 1853, plaster, 8.25 × 20.95 × 11.43 cm. Collection of National Museum of Women in the Arts, gift of Molly F. Sheppard. Digital image courtesy of National Museum of Women in the Arts.

Viewing the plaster versions of *Clasped Hands* in dialogue with historical documentation of life casting processes uncovers a set of complex negotiations, from oily barriers between skin and plaster, and between plaster and plaster, to the susceptibility of plaster to dust and abrasions. At every step, individuals and materials acted upon one another and collectively mediated the relationship of the cast to the original object. These interactions define *Clasped Hands*: they attest not to the continued presence of the Brownings' hands within the sculpture, but to their carefully cultivated nearness to it. Similarly confirming the multiple agencies at play, the nineteenth-century manuals and instructions quoted above do not place in opposition the intervention of an artist and a cast's claim to accurate representation. In fact, the artist's skillful actions, from the speed with which she moved to the way in which she cut the mold, determined the success of the resulting object. Affirming the compatibility of an artist's actions and a cast's accuracy, one author praised plaster casting because "the mold from which the cast is formed being taken directly on the original itself, every

beauty or defect must be reflected exactly". In the same paragraph, she stated, "Great importance is well attached to the faultlessness of the execution of all these casts". ⁴⁰

Bronze

In her 1896 speech about *Clasped Hands*, Hosmer noted that she was hesitant to produce bronze casts until compelled to do so by a friend: "I have more often than once been asked to have these Hands cast in more durable substance than plaster and I have invariably refused—but I could not say nay to a certain dear friend of mine to whom I owe so much." ⁴¹ Hosmer did not specify the rationale behind her refusal in this speech, but in an 1858 letter, she described bronze as "at best but a cold and harsh material", which may account for her reluctance to use it to render human hands. ⁴² Robert Browning seems to have agreed with her: mulling over other sculptures he saw in Italy, he wrote to Hosmer in 1854, the year after she cast his hand in plaster, that "bronze is such inadequate stuff for the expression of flesh". ⁴³

When Hosmer finally agreed to comply with her unnamed friend's wishes, she produced several bronze versions of *Clasped Hands* (Figs. 8-10), likely with the intention of selling them to eager patrons. Although more durable, the bronze versions are heavier and shinier than those in plaster, and the darker color and sheen of the surface prevents viewers from seeing the intricate details of pores, hairs, and wrinkles. Furthermore, the pale tone of plaster more closely matches the white skin of the Brownings, whereas the eight bronze versions feature varying patinas, ranging from deep brown with hints of blue and green to nearly gold. ⁴⁴ They all read, on Robert Browning's wrist, "Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, cast by Harriet Hosmer, Rome 1853", and on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's wrist, "Copyright" (Figs. 11-12). On all versions, the words correspond to the same unusual and distinctive pattern, but they exhibit minute discrepancies in their layout, suggesting that the inscriptions were added to each cast individually. The text thus illustrates the challenge of creating exact copies, just as it affirms the desire to do so. Together with the material qualities of the bronze surfaces, these inconsistencies distance the bronze sculptures from the hands they represent.



Figure 8.

Harriet Hosmer, Clasped Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, cast after 1853, bronze, 8.3 × 21 × 10.8 cm. Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1986.52). Digital image courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 9.

Harriet Hosmer, *Clasped Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, cast after 1853, bronze, 8.3 × 21 × 10.8 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (2005.41.1). Digital image courtesy of National Gallery of Art.



Figure 10.

Harriet Hosmer, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Robert Browning*, cast after 1853, bronze, 21 cm long. Collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 3165). Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery.



Figure 11.

Harriet Hosmer, Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Robert Browning (inscription "Hands of Robert / and / Elizabeth Barrett Browning / cast by / Harriet Hosmer / Rome 1853"), cast after 1853, bronze, 19.6 × 45 × 17.7 cm. Collection of the Newark Museum of Art (76.8). Digital image courtesy of Katherine Fein.



Figure 12.

Harriet Hosmer, Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Robert Browning (inscription "Copyright"), cast after 1853, bronze, 19.6 × 45 × 17.7 cm. Collection of the Newark Museum of Art (76.8). Digital image courtesy of Katherine Fein.

Like plaster, bronze contributed to and constrained the making of *Clasped Hands*. Bronze is a metal alloy, typically composed of copper and tin. Similar to other alloys in comparison to pure metals, bronze is harder and stronger than copper and has a lower melting point, features which enable casting and shaping. Altering the tin content yields bronze with different qualities (such as sonorousness for bells), and bronze used for sculpture usually has a low tin content. Small quantities of lead and zinc were commonly added to bronze in the nineteenth century prior to casting, to smooth the melted substance.⁴⁵ Although less porous and fragile than those of plaster, bronze surfaces similarly manifest their interactions with the environment. After shaping, nineteenth-century sculptors altered the color and sheen of bronze through chemical processes, and new discoveries during this era brought patination increasingly under human control.⁴⁶ For small-scale work, sculptors could submerge bronze objects in chemical baths or apply

chemicals with brushes.⁴⁷ Manual labor itself also impacted patina, as oil and sweat produced by sculptors' hands came into contact with bronze surfaces.

Due to the surge in production of bronze sculpture in the nineteenth century, historical methods of bronze casting are well documented in archival sources.⁴⁸ Moreover, few artists maintained the equipment needed to create bronze sculpture in their studios; instead, they commissioned foundries to cast their plaster, marble, or clay sculptures or models into bronze. Bronze foundries were first established in the United States during this era, although some sculptors remained loyal to European, primarily German and Italian, foundries.⁴⁹ In the 1860s, Hosmer seems to have relied on the Royal Foundry in Munich to cast her monument to Thomas Hart Benton, but due to the expense and her limited travel later in life, Hosmer likely turned to a foundry in the United States to cast *Clasped Hands* in bronze.⁵⁰ Before the final years of the nineteenth century, bronze foundries in the United States primarily used sand casting, especially for small-scale sculpture. This method resembled plaster casting, but instead of applying wet plaster to a model, sculptors immersed a model in a tray of wet sand. Upon removing the cast from the hardened sand mold, sculptors typically refined the surface, using carving tools and applying chemical solutions and polishes.⁵¹

Nineteenth-century writers lamented the lack of public knowledge about the process of bronze casting. In 1895, despite the ubiquity of bronze sculptures, one author wrote, "Few have any idea of the difficulty of casting a large bronze statue. The popular idea is that molten bronze is poured into a mold and then when the metal has cooled, the mold is knocked off and the statue is complete".⁵² Even with regard to small bronzes, which occupied both public and private spaces, observers and collectors may have remained ignorant of specific techniques and materials. A London newspaper noted, "Most persons in easy circumstances are owners of certain small bronze figures. ... Few persons, however, have any but the vaguest ideas as to the processes by which these are made. They would probably tell you that they were cast, but that would be the extent of their information".⁵³ In bemoaning public ignorance about the casting process, these authors highlight its complexity and the necessity of artistic skill.

Such texts also reflect the lower status afforded to the people who usually performed sculptural casting. With plaster, and to an even greater extent with bronze, most casting in the nineteenth century would have been executed by individuals with sophisticated skills but who did not often participate in the conception and design of sculpture. In Britain and the United States, many men employed in sculpture studios and foundries were Italian immigrants, and Hosmer, like her fellow sculptors, employed Italian

assistants in her studio in Rome.⁵⁴ Among British and Anglo-American art patrons, the social invisibility of these men, known as *formatori*, contributed to the perception of casting as a mechanical, rather than artistic, process; reciprocally, belatedly acknowledging the degree of artistry recuperates their creative labor. A few nineteenth-century articles complicated the distinction between sculptor and assistant by condemning artists who did not themselves have experience in casting. Recognizing the complexity of the casting process and the many choices made by the individuals involved, one critic writing in 1885 regretted that “in the various art educational establishments in this country, the student of sculpture is merely taught drawing and modeling, but is unable to learn the other processes whereby alone his modeled work can be rendered permanent”. For him, casts made by other hands could not be deemed original works of art:

Unless these are really produced by the artist himself, and bear the palpable impress of his own mind and hand, unimpaired by foreign touch, and perfect throughout in character and individuality, I am really unable to see what value they can possess beyond that of a skillfully executed copy.⁵⁵

Even as this and other historical texts reveal tension around the perception of artistic agency in the casting process because of social status, they insist on the importance of an artist’s skill and choices in determining the final form of the sculpture.

As a woman supervising a workshop of men, Hosmer had to defend herself against doubts of her authorship and reiterated the importance of her oversight of all aspects of sculptural production. She faced allegations that her mentor, British sculptor John Gibson, deserved credit for sculptures she claimed as her own, and that she relied too heavily on the Italian men who staffed her studio.⁵⁶ In response, she wrote an article titled “The Process of Sculpture” to “raise the veil upon the mysteries of the studio”, in which she asserted her role as an artist, outlining in detail the process of creating marble sculpture and specifying which tasks were performed by the sculptor and which by the assistants.⁵⁷ While insisting upon hierarchy in a studio, she gestured toward praising the skill of casters and carvers, acknowledging that “much depends upon the workmen to whom this operation is intrusted [sic]”.⁵⁸ She also assured readers that the division of labor in her studio mirrored that of her fellow sculptors, including well-known men: “We women-artists have no objection to its being known that we employ assistants; we merely object to its being supposed that it is a system peculiar to *ourselves*”.⁵⁹ An 1861 photograph (Fig. 13) makes visible how she stood out from her male employees with a presence that belied her small stature. In her *Boston Globe*

obituary, the author recalled how, in a studio full of men, Hosmer “superintended her work herself” and “wielded the chisel more adroitly than any practiced workman”. ⁶⁰



Figure 13.

Unknown photographer, Harriet Hosmer with Her Italian Workmen, 1861, albumen print, 25.4 × 20.32 cm. Collection of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (A162-74-1). Digital image courtesy of Harvard University.

As a woman artist, she also contended with accusations of impropriety, particularly around her use of nude models. Women artists were denied access to nude models, an essential element of men’s artistic training, throughout the nineteenth century, but Hosmer defied this prohibition. In fact, Barrett Browning wrote of visiting Hosmer’s studio to find her “tete a tete or rather corps a corps with a model”, though Barrett Browning reflected that “an artist like Hatty is justified by her art”. ⁶¹ Less generous, sculptor Thomas Crawford bemoaned Hosmer’s “want of modesty”, describing how she “had casts for the *entire female* model made and exhibited in a shockingly indecent manner to all the young artists who called upon her”. ⁶² Unfortunately, none of these life casts—presumably made of plaster—survive, reducing any further analysis to speculation. Yet like the scandal around the authenticity of her sculptures, this episode confirms

Hosmer's hands-on approach to sculpture, just as it makes clear that, within a nineteenth-century patriarchal society, Hosmer consistently needed to perform a public identity and reaffirm her professional status.⁶³

Despite her usual commitment to defending her artistic skill, however, Hosmer insisted that in the process of casting *Clasped Hands* in bronze, she manipulated the result as minimally as possible—or, perhaps, that she instructed others to do so. Describing the bronze versions in her 1896 speech, Hosmer stated, “These Hands are exactly as they came from the mold as I have wished to preserve at the expense of finish all their characteristics of texture”.⁶⁴ This claim indicates Hosmer's interest in how the sculpture refers, through a series of molds and casts, back to the physical presence of the Brownings' hands, and seems to suggest that, in Hosmer's opinion, creative intervention might diminish this reference. The passivity of this statement also aligns with the notion that Hosmer did not execute the bronze casts herself, and that other hands—those of unnamed foundry assistants—also left their mark on these objects. Earlier in the speech, however, Hosmer had emphasized that Barrett Browning requested that Hosmer, specifically, execute the first plaster mold, and the inscription “Copyright” further declares Hosmer's ownership of the sculpture.⁶⁵ Torn between competing rationales for the sculpture's uniqueness in its different forms, Hosmer seems to have alternately overstated and understated her role in its creation. In comparison to her ambiguous descriptions of the bronze versions, her desire to associate the original plaster version with her artistry may also reflect the difference between casting sculptural objects and living bodies.

Bodies

Where typical accounts of life casts discredit artistic and material agencies in favor of foregrounding physical contingency and the presence of the living body, this essay has so far neglected the human hands that, in 1853, came into contact with the first plaster mold. Attending to the bodies of the famous sitters reveals how they too participated in the multifaceted material negotiations of the casting process. Moreover, recognizing the complexity of these bodies further troubles the assertion of the Brownings' enduring presence.

With their fingers pointing in opposite directions, the Brownings must have posed across from each other, the open space between them bridged by their intertwined right hands. As each faced their spouse, while Hosmer worked to apply plaster, and while they waited for it to dry, they had to maintain their position or else damage the mold. With regard to creating life masks, an 1899 manual instructed: “The subject must hold his features

quietly during the operation, for even a smile would break the thin film of plaster from the face". Maintaining one's position would be uncomfortable, and this author cautioned that, "If the mask is left on too long it becomes warm and causes the perspiration to flow freely. But the subject always has the alternative of laughing until the mask lies in small pieces at his feet". ⁶⁶

In life casts as well as photographs, the permanent fixture of an ephemeral presence comes first through the temporary fixture of the body in motion. As Harvey Young has explored through his work on daguerreotype portraits of enslaved African Americans, maintaining stillness is neither passive nor motionless. ⁶⁷ The Brownings had to actively enact motionlessness—at least in their extremities—while they waited for Hosmer's wet plaster to set. As they each performed stillness, they also had to rely on the other to do the same. The presence of two hands encased together in wet plaster would only increase heat and discomfort. Of course, the human body is never truly still: blood continued to run through the Brownings' veins, their hands produced oil and sweat, and involuntary motions could not be avoided. One set of nineteenth-century casting instructions warned that "the special difficulty of the work is due to involuntary movements of the muscles trying to adjust themselves to this weight, which causes the plaster to slip", encouraging the caster to move quickly to decrease the impact of such motion. ⁶⁸ The flesh-on-flesh contact in combination with the uncontrollable and unending movement of the body thus renders motionlessness even more active, resisting the discomfort of prolonged confinement. The Brownings probably had to hold their position for between 10 and 20 minutes, depending on temperature, humidity, and the thickness of the plaster.

Those tense, sweating hands belonged to two specific individuals. In late 1853, when the 23-year-old Harriet Hosmer created *Clasped Hands*, Robert Browning was 41 years old, Elizabeth Barrett Browning was 47, and they were both established poets. Painted portraits (Figs. 14 and 15) demonstrate how the Brownings' public personas hinged on the perception of their bodies: on Robert Browning's vigor and, more acutely, on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's chronic infirmity. In these paintings, commissioned by a friend of the Brownings a few years after Hosmer produced *Clasped Hands*, Robert Browning leans forward, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning rests against an upright chair, which constrains her and emphasizes her small stature. Beginning in her teens and persisting until her death at the age of 56, she experienced weakness and pain centered on her chest and spine. During her lifetime, doctors were unable to diagnose her illness, and she received varied treatments including leeches, prolonged bed rest, and opium. ⁶⁹



Figure 14.

Michele Gordigiani, Robert Browning, 1858, oil on canvas, 72.4 x 58.7 cm. Collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 1898). Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery.



Figure 15.

Michele Gordigiani, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1858, oil on canvas, 73.7 × 58.4 cm. Collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 1899). Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery.

As feminist and ecocritical scholars have recently elaborated, human bodies can be understood as simultaneously material and social, produced through unceasing interaction. Nancy Tuana's notion of viscous porosity recognizes that living and non-living entities can be understood as bounded, but that such boundaries are porous and malleable. Her investigation reveals how bodies "are neither fixed nor inert, but fluid and emergent".⁷⁰ Barrett Browning's body exemplifies this concept. Both her illness and the treatments she experienced acted upon her flesh, as did substances in her physical environment. Clean air attracted the Brownings to Italy, where Hosmer met them and executed the cast. Furthermore, the vitality of Barrett Browning's public persona contrasts with—and depends upon—the frailty of her body. Scholars have even gone so far as to suggest that her poor health was a precondition of her literary production, exempting her from the social

commitments demanded of her peers. One recent biography summarizes that her “frail, disease-stricken, almost corpse-like body is central to her mythologisation”.⁷¹

Observers of *Clasped Hands* have claimed to witness Barrett Browning’s frailty—and Robert Browning’s strength—in the cast. For example, on the occasion of acquiring a bronze version in the 1920s, the Baylor University *Bulletin* described the sculpture as capturing “the thin, emaciated hand of Mrs. Browning, clasped by the strong sinewy hand of the poet”.⁷² In a recent biography of Hosmer, Kate Culkin recounts how “Robert’s palm closes protectively around his wife’s small, passive hand; delicate embroidery surrounds her tiny wrist”.⁷³ In fact, Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s hand is the same size if not slightly larger than that of this author, and her veins protrude no more than Robert Browning’s do. The tendency to overestimate her frailty and his strength, and to privilege the presence of her body over his, illustrates the long-standing tradition of pathologizing women’s bodies. The bronze casts actually attest to the equal status of the Brownings as subjects of this cast: the inscriptions on each of their wrists match the orientation of their hands, so that in order to read one after the other, a viewer must turn the cast over. Moreover, the possibility of reversing the position of the hands, of variously featuring one poet over the other, has accommodated their changing reputations. In the nineteenth century, Robert Browning’s fame greatly exceeded that of his wife, but the twentieth century witnessed Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s popularity soar, and several versions of *Clasped Hands* were collected specifically as portraits of her.⁷⁴

The Brownings’ bodies were constitutive of their literary and social identities, just as they were constituted by both internal and external forces. The hands that the Brownings presented for casting were not sealed entities belonging only to themselves, but amalgams of flesh, interaction, and experience. In the making of *Clasped Hands*, further exchanges took place. The mold-making process transferred heat and material across the porous boundaries of the Brownings’ skin, just as the Brownings’ hands acted upon the plaster. In addition to the exchange between the sculptural materials and their bodies, *Clasped Hands* captures the phenomenon of two bodies in contact with one another. Hosmer’s body, too, participated in this network, applying oil and plaster, manipulating the mold and cast, and making additional copies. The casts continue to carry physical traces of these exchanges in substance as well as in form. Furthermore, the bodies of all other individuals who have come into contact with *Clasped Hands*—including that of this author—left physical marks, most clearly visible in the damaged surface of the original plaster cast but also present in the varying patinas of the bronze versions.

Hands

In representing the Brownings' hands, Hosmer participated in a tradition of synecdochic portraiture that privileged hands for their association with human creativity and the sense of touch. In the nineteenth century, a rising celebrity culture and the Victorian passion for collecting converged on the hands of famous individuals, evident in the production of life and death casts as well as the zeal for amassing autographs.⁷⁵ The hands of writers, in particular, garnered attention as the body parts responsible for literary production, and sculptures and autographs evoked for collectors the gesture of holding pen to paper. That viewers in the 1890s observed the Brownings' autographs on the first version of *Clasped Hands* suggests that, whether or not the poets actually inscribed their names into the plaster, such associations circulated around this sculpture.⁷⁶ Hosmer herself affirmed the connection between *Clasped Hands* and handwriting in her 1896 speech, offering to donate letters she had received from the Brownings to accompany the sculpture.⁷⁷ Yet in the act of clasping each other's hands, neither of the writers can pursue the act of writing, as Marcia Pointon has noted.⁷⁸ Instead, they grip each other, the intimate space of their palms hidden from view.

Clasped Hands, then, represents not just two body parts but the experience of touch. Rose Marie San Juan has outlined how "hands stand in for the sense of touch not as exclusive site nor point of origin" and "serve as a substitute for the body as a whole and for embodied experience itself".⁷⁹ Because *Clasped Hands* lacks a single privileged position and demands to be seen in different orientations, it enacts what San Juan has called "the duality of touch": neither Elizabeth Barrett Browning nor Robert Browning exclusively bestows touch, just as neither exclusively receives it.⁸⁰ As with all physical encounters, both parties touch and are touched in equal measure, each experience dependent on the other. This phenomenon extends beyond the Brownings' contact with one another to their interactions with Hosmer and the setting plaster. Just as subjects, artists, and materials acted upon one another, they all received each other's actions in turn. Reassigning agency across the network of participants thus demands a similar reassignment of passivity: to touch is to be touched. This mutual exchange defines the process of creating a life cast.

Two hands holding each other materialize a social experience of identity, otherness, and intimacy. Feminist theorist and scholar of science studies Karen Barad describes the moment experienced by the Brownings and captured by Hosmer: "When two hands touch, there is a sensuality of the flesh, an exchange of warmth, a feeling of pressure, of presence, a proximity of otherness that brings the other nearly as close as oneself. Perhaps closer". For Barad, two hands touching causes each individual to recognize "an

infinity of others” and even “the otherness of the self”, to others but also to oneself.⁸¹ In this description, boundaries are real but not sealed, and one’s own body can be revealed to be not only one’s own. The intertwining of the Brownings’ hands projects the sensual meaning invoked by Barad, especially in light of the Brownings’ romantic relationship. Absent this context, however, such a gesture might also be interpreted as transactional, as in two hands shaking upon achieving professional agreement. In both instances, the gesture embodies social experiences. *Clasped Hands* plays with this phenomenon, as the mold-making process eliminates any distinction between the two hands and unites them in a single negative space.

Barad’s account of the proximity involved in two hands touching recalls Barrett Browning’s interest in “the sense of nearness involved” in daguerreotypes. Where the act of clasping hands brings near another individual, another body, and even the experience of otherness, both photographs and life casts bring near absent individuals through the material processes of their creation. Hosmer’s *Clasped Hands*, then, simultaneously displays nearness in the position of the Browning’s hands and performs nearness through the casting process, making it an exemplary object through which to understand the complex relationships among bodies and materials involved in life casting. In both the 1853 interaction between the Brownings and the ongoing exchanges between *Clasped Hands* and its viewers, bringing near was not and is not a straightforward act but a multifaceted negotiation. The Brownings’ bodies, themselves porous entities, came together not harmoniously but in a state of tension and pressure. The Brownings’ interlocked hands are not simply present within the plaster cast; rather, they are brought near by the interactions among many human and material agents, including flesh, oil, plaster, sand, bronze, and chemicals. Although artistic choices are typically downplayed in discussions around cast sculpture, the sculptor, too, played a critical role in this cast’s creation and success. Recognizing these exchanges replaces an illusion of presence—of contingency and conjunction—with a sense of nearness.

These issues culminate in the edges of *Clasped Hands*: the cuffs of the Brownings’ sleeves. The scalloped cuff on Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s wrist and the barrel cuff on Robert Browning’s must have been modeled rather than cast, because casting clothing would have damaged it, and the carefully articulated cuffs are more iconographic than realistic. The sleeves are too thick, too unwrinkled, and too regular to represent actual garments. Instead, the cuffs are Hosmer’s most obvious intervention in the casting process, products of an artistic choice that makes a critical contribution to the resulting sculpture. The cuffs act as a limit to the Brownings’ exposed skin, almost in a gesture of propriety, insisting that the Brownings are fully clothed out of view. They also help identify the hands according to gender. The cuffs further communicate that *Clasped Hands* is a complete, independent work of

art, as opposed to a preparatory study for a larger sculpture. Ultimately, the cuffs frame the representational part of the sculpture, providing a boundary between the direct rendering of skin and the artificial flat surface of the severed wrist, on which the inscriptions were added. Indeed, the casting process could not achieve a closed entity: the sections of the wrists correspond to openings in the mold, through which the Brownings' arms extended beyond the setting plaster. The flat surfaces make no claim to display the tendons, blood vessels, and bones within the Brownings' arms, but instead make visible the complex process of casting and the hand of the artist.

Footnotes

- 1 Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, 7 December 1843, Browning Collection, Margaret Clapp Library, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA.
- 2 See James Joopes (ed.), *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
- 3 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973), 154.
- 4 Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America", *October* 3 (1977), 80.
- 5 Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson (eds.), *The Meaning of Photography* (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008), 3-56. See also Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs", *Nordicom Review* 25, nos 1-2 (2004): 39-49; and Martin Lefebvre, "The Art of Pointing: On Peirce, Indexicality, and Photographic Images", in James Elkins (ed.), *Photography Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2007): 220-244.
- 6 See Patrick Crowley, "Roman Death Masks and the Metaphorics of the Negative", *Grey Room* 64 (2016): 64-103; Louis Kaplan, "Photograph/Death Mask: Jean-Luc Nancy's Recasting of the Photographic Image", *Journal of Visual Culture* 9, no. 1 (2010): 45-62; and Rebecca Wade, *Domenico Brucciani and the Formatori of Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), particularly 75-93 and 118-124.
- 7 See Jean-François Corpataux, "Life Body Moulding and Maternal Devotion in Marcello's Studio", in Rune Fredericksen and Eckart Marchand (eds.), *Plaster Casts: Making, Collecting, and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 307-318; Hanna Rose Shell, "Casting Life, Recasting Experience: Bernard Palissy's Occupation between Maker and Nature", *Configurations* 12, no. 1 (2004): 1-40; and Pamela H. Smith and Tonny Beentjes, "Nature and Art, Making and Knowing: Reconstructing Sixteenth-Century Life-Casting Techniques", *Renaissance Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 128-179.
- 8 The original plaster cast resides at the Schlesinger Library of the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University. The second plaster version is in the collection of the National Museum of Women in the Arts. The bronze versions belong to the Armstrong-Browning Library at Baylor University, the Boston Public Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC), the National Portrait Gallery (London), the Newark Museum, the Saint Louis Art Museum, and Wellesley College.
- 9 See Melissa Dabakis, *A Sisterhood of Sculptors: American Artists in Nineteenth-Century Rome* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014); Martina Droth, Jason Edwards, and Michael Hatt (eds.), *Sculpture Victorious: Art in an Age of Invention, 1837-1901* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 2014); and Patricia Pulham, "Marmoreal Sisterhoods: Classical Statuary in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing", *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 22 (2016).
- 10 See Margo Lois Beggs, "Harriet Hosmer (1830-1908): Fame, Photography, and the American 'Sculptress'" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2013); Cornelia Crow Carr (ed.), *Harriet Hosmer: Letters and Memories* (London: John Lane, 1913); Patricia Cronin, *Harriet Hosmer: Lost and Found* (New York: Charta, 2009); Kate Culklin, *Harriet Hosmer: A Cultural Biography* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010); Melissa Dabakis, "'The Eccentric Life of a Perfectly Emancipated Female': Harriet Hosmer's Early Years in Rome", in Thayer Tolles (ed.), *Perspectives on American Sculpture Before 1925* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), 24-43; Vivien Green Fryd, "The 'Ghosting' of Incest and Female Relations in Harriet Hosmer's *Beatrice Cenci*", *Art Bulletin* 88, no. 2 (2006): 292-309; Gabrielle Gopinath, "Harriet Hosmer and the Feminine Sublime", *Oxford Art Journal* 28, no. 1 (2005): 63-81; Joseph Leach, "Harriet Hosmer: Feminist in Bronze and Marble", *Feminist Art Journal* 5, no. 2 (1976): 9-13, 44-45; Gail Marshall, "Harriet Hosmer and the Classical Inheritance", *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 39, no. 2 (2003): 202-213; Dolly Sherwood, *Harriet Hosmer: American Sculptor, 1830-1908* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991); and Lilian Whiting, "Harriet Goodhue Hosmer", in *Women Who Have Ennobled Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Union Press, 1915), 209-234.
- 11 The two bronze sculptures are *The Mermaid's Castle*, 1893, Larchmont Manor Park Society, and *Thomas Hart Benton*, 1860s, City of St. Louis, Department of Parks, Recreation, and Forestry.
- 12 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun or, The Romance of Monte Beni* (Boston, MA: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 154.
- 13 Dabakis, "'The Eccentric Life of a Perfectly Emancipated Female'", 30.

- 14 Nicolas Penny, "Sculpture and Privacy", in Peter Parshall (ed.), *The Darker Side of Life: Arts of Privacy, 1850–1900* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 138.
- 15 Marcia Pointon, "Casts, Imprints, and the Deathliness of Things: Artifacts at the Edge", *Art Bulletin* 96, no. 2 (2014), 170.
- 16 Pointon, "Casts, Imprints, and the Deathliness of Things", 188.
- 17 Charles Knight, "On Plaster Figures and Casts", *Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* 7, no. 419 (13 October 1838), 394; William Ordway Partridge, *Techniques of Sculpture* (Boston, MA: Ginn and Company, 1895), 79.
- 18 "How to Make Plaster Casts from Life", *Art Amateur* (New York) 32, no. 5 (April 1895), 143.
- 19 Lucy M. Mitchell, "Plaster in Sculpture: Its Value as a Medium for Copying the Old Masters", *New York Times*, 20 April 1885.
- 20 R.B. Thurston, "Harriet G. Hosmer", in James Parton, et al. (eds.), *Eminent Women of the Age: Being Narratives of the Lives and Deeds of the Most Prominent Women of the Present Generation* (Hartford, CT: S. M. Betts & Co., 1868), 570.
- 21 For a detailed account of plaster in nineteenth-century, particularly French, sculpture studios, see Catherine Chevillot, "Nineteenth-Century *Sculpteurs* and *Mouleurs*: Developments in Theory and Practice", in Sébastien Clerbois and Martina Droth (eds.), *Revival and Invention: Sculpture through its Material Histories* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 201–230.
- 22 Harriet Hosmer, "Notes on the Casting of the Clasped Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning", 1896, Harriet Goodhue Hosmer Papers, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.
- 23 Penny, "Sculpture and Privacy", 138.
- 24 Knight, "On Plaster Figures and Casts", 394; Frank Forrest Frederick, *Plaster Casts and How They Are Made* (New York: W.T. Comstock, 1899), 73; "How to Make Plaster Casts from Life", *Art Amateur*, 143. Vaseline, an American brand of petroleum jelly, was not patented until 1872.
- 25 Frederick, *Plaster Casts and How They Are Made*, 74.
- 26 Frederick, *Plaster Casts and How They Are Made*, 75.
- 27 Benjamin Robert Haydon, *Life of Benjamin Robert Haydon, Historical Painter, from His Autobiography and Journals*, edited by Tom Taylor (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853), 148–150.
- 28 Melvin J. Wachowiak, Basiliki Vicky Karas, and Robert E. Baltrusch, "Reconstruction of a 19th Century Plaster Piece Mold and Recreation of a Casting", *Quality Digest* (23 May 2010): <https://www.qualitydigest.com/inside/cmssc-article/reconstruction-19th-century-plaster-piece-mold-and-recreation-casting.html>. See also Karen Lemmey, "From Skeleton to Skin: The Making of the *Greek Slave(s)*", *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 15, no. 2 (2016), 50.
- 29 Both Nicholas Penny and Marcia Pointon assume that Robert Browning's hand and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's hand would have been cast separately. This author has found no indication that this would be the case, and close examination of the plaster supports the view that their hands were cast together. Penny, "Sculpture and Privacy", 131; Pointon, "Casts, Imprints, and the Deathliness of Things", 188.
- 30 Knight, "On Plaster Figures and Casts", 394–395.
- 31 "How to Make Plaster Casts from Life", *Art Amateur*, 143.
- 32 Frederick, *Plaster Casts and How They Are Made*, 75.
- 33 Mitchell, "Plaster in Sculpture".
- 34 "How to Make a Life-Mask", *Literary Digest* 18, no. 6 (1899): 173.
- 35 Frederick, *Plaster Casts and How They Are Made*, 74.
- 36 Mitchell, "Plaster in Sculpture".
- 37 "How to Make Plaster Casts from Life", *Art Amateur*, 143.
- 38 "Pertaining to Women", *Boston Sunday Herald*, 30 August 1891.
- 39 In 1894, a flurry of newspaper articles documented the artist giving a version of *Clasped Hands*—purportedly the original—to the Art Institute of Chicago, something Hosmer stated she intended to do in her 1896 speech. Although the museum has no record of this gift and no version remains in its collection, these articles reference the wrist inscriptions: "The Art Institute of Chicago has received a gift from Harriet Hosmer of the cast she made in 1853 of the clasped hands of Robert Browning and his wife. ... The autograph of 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Rome, May 1853', is on the wrist of one; 'Robert Browning, Rome' on the wrist of the other. Miss Hosmer refused in England an offer of £5000 for this unique cast". "Personal", *New York Tribune*, 29 June 1894. See also Joseph L. Curran, Jr., correspondence, Harriet Goodhue Hosmer Papers, Watertown Free Public Library.
- 40 Mitchell, "Plaster in Sculpture".
- 41 Hosmer, "Notes on the Clasped Hands", Hosmer Papers, Schlesinger Library.
- 42 Harriet Hosmer to Wayman Crow, 14 June 1858, in Carr, *Letters and Memories*, 124.
- 43 Robert Browning to Harriet Hosmer, 16 November 1854, in Carr, *Letters and Memories*, 46.

- 44 For more on color, race, and sculptural materials in the nineteenth century, see Charmaine Nelson, *Color of Stone: Sculpting the Black Female Subject in Nineteenth-Century America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), and Luke Syson et al., *Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).
- 45 See Partridge, *Techniques of Sculpture*, 86.
- 46 See "How to Obtain a Fine Patina on Bronze Statues", *Scientific American* 22, no. 7 (12 February 1870), 104.
- 47 See "Greenish-Brown Patina for Brass and Bronze", *Scientific American* 58, no. 4 (28 January 1888), 57.
- 48 See Nicholas Penny, *The Materials of Sculpture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 219–256; and Marjorie Trusted (ed.), *The Making of Sculpture: The Materials and Techniques of European Sculpture* (London: V&A Publications, 2007).
- 49 See Michael Edward Shapiro, *Bronze Casting and American Sculpture* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 15–59, 165–176.
- 50 Theodore Finkelston, "'Old Bullion' Bronzed: Business's Monument to Western Opportunity", *Gateway Heritage* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1990), 53.
- 51 See Partridge, *Techniques of Sculpture*, 88–90.
- 52 "Casting Bronze Statues", *Stone* 10, no. 4 (1 March 1895), 355.
- 53 George Simonds, "Artistic Bronze Casting", *Journal of the Society of Arts* (London) 34 (20 November 1885), 246.
- 54 For a popular account of Italian sculptural casters in London, see Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons", *Strand Magazine* (London) 27, no. 161 (May 1904): 483–495.
- 55 Simonds, "Artistic Bronze Casting", 258.
- 56 See Sherwood, *Harriet Hosmer*, 218–223.
- 57 Harriet Hosmer, "The Process of Sculpture", *Atlantic Monthly* 14, no. 86 (December 1864), 734.
- 58 Hosmer, "The Process of Sculpture", 735.
- 59 Hosmer, "The Process of Sculpture", 736.
- 60 "Most Famous of American Women Sculptors: Miss Harriet Hosmer of Watertown", *Boston Daily Globe*, 1 March 1908.
- 61 Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Isa Blagden, 4–8 May 1854, quoted in Philip Kelley and Sandra Donaldson (eds.), *Florentine Friends: The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning to Isa Blagden, 1850–1861* (Waco, TX: Wedgestone Press, 2009), 51.
- 62 Thomas Crawford to Louisa Crawford, 5 July 1854, Thomas Crawford Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
- 63 See Dabakis, "'The Eccentric Life of a Perfectly Emancipated Female'". Some of Hosmer's sculpting tools survive in the Harriet Goodhue Hosmer Papers at the Watertown Free Public Library.
- 64 Hosmer, "Notes on the Clasped Hands", Hosmer Papers, Schlesinger Library.
- 65 For a discussion of art, reproduction, and intellectual property, including body casts and the emergence of copyright, see Katie Scott, *Becoming Property: Art, Theory, and Law in Early Modern France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), especially 211–239.
- 66 "How to Make a Life-Mask", 173.
- 67 Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010).
- 68 "How to Make Plaster Casts from Life", *Art Amateur*, 143.
- 69 Scholars and physicians are still engaged in diagnosing her illness. For an account of her symptoms and treatments, as well as modern medical analyses, see D.A.B. Young, "The Illnesses of Elizabeth Barrett Browning", *British Medical Journal* 298 (1989): 439–443.
- 70 Nancy Tuana, "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina", in Stacey Alaimo and Susan Hekman (eds.), *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 189.
- 71 Simon Avery and Rebecca Stott, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Routledge, 2014), 40.
- 72 A.J. Armstrong (ed.), "Baylor University's Browning Collection and Other Browning Interests", *Baylor Bulletin* 30, no. 4 (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 1927), 15–16.
- 73 Culkin, *Hosmer*, 38.
- 74 See Hannah French, "The Browning Collection of the Wellesley College Library", *Browning Newsletter* 6 (January 1971): 28–37. I am grateful to Anne Higonnet for bringing this history to my attention.
- 75 See Josh Lauer, "Traces of the Real: Autographomania and the Cult of the Signers in Nineteenth-Century America", *Text and Performance Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2007): 143–163; Pamela Corpron Parker, "Woman of Letters: Elizabeth Gaskell's Autograph Collection and Victorian Celebrity", in Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (eds.), *Material Women, 1750–1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices*, 265–278 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); and Penny, "Sculpture and Privacy", 137–147.
- 76 "Pertaining to Women", *Boston Sunday Herald*.

- 77 Hosmer, "Notes on the Clasped Hands", Hosmer Papers, Schlesinger Library.
- 78 Pointon, "Casts, Imprints, and the Deathliness of Things", 188.
- 79 Rose Marie San Juan, "The Horror of Touch: Anna Morandi's Wax Models of Hands", *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no. 3 (2011), 439.
- 80 San Juan, "Horror of Touch", 446.
- 81 Karen Barad, "On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am", *differences* 23, no. 3 (2012), 206.

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